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# A Single Case Study of Speaking Anxiety in an Indonesian EFL Student: A Narrative Inquiry

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**ABSTRACT**

*Speaking anxiety is one of the most common affective factors influencing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' oral communication. This study aims to explore the lived experience of speaking anxiety in an Indonesian EFL student and to identify the factors shaping this experience. Employing a qualitative research design, this study adopted a single case study with a narrative inquiry approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's personal story. The participant was an Indonesian EFL university student who experienced persistent anxiety when speaking English. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings within the participant's narrative. The findings showed that the participant's teacher initially perceived her as lacking confidence during speaking activities. Further exploration revealed that her speaking anxiety was closely connected to repeated bullying experiences during junior high school, which damaged her self-confidence and led to a persistent fear of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated by others. These experiences continued to affect her willingness to communicate in English. The study emphasizes the importance of recognizing learners' personal histories and creating psychologically safe, empathetic classroom environments to reduce speaking anxiety and promote confidence in EFL learning.*

**ABSTRAK**

*Kecemasan berbicara merupakan salah satu faktor afektif yang paling umum memengaruhi kemampuan komunikasi lisan mahasiswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi pengalaman hidup (lived experience) terkait kecemasan berbicara pada seorang mahasiswa EFL Indonesia serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang membentuk pengalaman tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain penelitian kualitatif dengan mengadopsi studi kasus tunggal melalui pendekatan inkuiri naratif untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang mendalam mengenai kisah personal partisipan. Partisipan penelitian adalah seorang mahasiswa EFL Indonesia yang mengalami kecemasan berkelanjutan ketika berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur secara mendalam dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik untuk mengidentifikasi pola-pola serta makna yang muncul dari narasi partisipan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dosen pada awalnya memandang partisipan sebagai mahasiswa yang kurang percaya diri dalam kegiatan berbicara di kelas. Eksplorasi lebih lanjut mengungkapkan bahwa kecemasan berbicaranya berkaitan erat dengan pengalaman perundungan yang berulang selama masa sekolah menengah pertama, yang berdampak pada menurunnya rasa percaya diri serta munculnya ketakutan yang berkelanjutan terhadap kesalahan dan penilaian negatif dari orang lain. Pengalaman tersebut terus memengaruhi kesediaannya untuk berkomunikasi dalam bahasa Inggris. Penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya memahami latar belakang pengalaman pribadi pembelajar serta menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang aman*


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*secara psikologis dan penuh empati guna mengurangi kecemasan berbicara serta meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dalam pembelajaran EFL.*

## 1. *INTRODUCTION*/PENDAHULUAN

Speaking english is often considered the most demanding because learners must express their ideas spontaneously while simultaneously managing grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and interaction with others. As a result, many Indonesian EFL learners experience difficulties when they are required to speak English in classroom settings.

One of the major challenges affecting learners' oral communication is speaking anxiety. Speaking anxiety refers to feelings of nervousness, fear, worry, or tension experienced when learners are expected to communicate in English. These feelings may cause learners to avoid speaking opportunities, remain silent during classroom discussions, or perform below their actual language ability. Previous studies have shown that speaking anxiety negatively influences learners' confidence, classroom participation, willingness to communicate, and speaking performance (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Since speaking is a crucial component of language learning, understanding speaking anxiety has become an important concern in English language education.

In the Indonesian EFL context, speaking anxiety remains a common phenomenon despite years of English instruction. Many university students report feeling afraid of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes, being negatively evaluated by teachers, or being judged by classmates. These concerns are often intensified by limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom and by learning environments that emphasize accuracy over communication. Consequently, learners may struggle to develop confidence in speaking English even after years of formal education.

Numerous studies have investigated speaking anxiety among EFL learners. Most of these studies have employed quantitative methods, using standardized questionnaires such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure learners' anxiety levels and identify contributing factors. These studies have successfully identified common sources of speaking anxiety, including communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Other research has examined the relationship between speaking anxiety and variables such as speaking achievement, motivation, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate. While these studies have contributed significantly to the understanding of speaking anxiety, they often focus on general patterns across large groups of learners.

However, speaking anxiety is a personal and dynamic experience that cannot always be fully explained through numerical data alone. Learners may experience anxiety differently depending on their previous learning experiences, classroom interactions, relationships with teachers and peers, personal beliefs, and individual coping strategies. Two learners with similar anxiety scores may have entirely different stories about why they feel anxious and how they respond to challenging speaking situations. Therefore, a deeper understanding of speaking anxiety requires exploring learners' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to those experiences.

Qualitative research provides an opportunity to understand speaking anxiety from the learner's perspective. In particular, a single case study allows researchers to investigate one participant in depth, revealing the complexity of emotional experiences that may be overlooked in large-scale studies (Yin, 2018). Rather than seeking statistical generalization, a single case study aims to provide a rich and contextualized understanding of a phenomenon within its real-life setting. When combined with narrative inquiry, this approach enables researchers to examine how learners construct meaning from their experiences and how speaking anxiety develops across time, social relationships, and classroom contexts.

Despite the growing body of research on speaking anxiety in Indonesia, relatively few studies have adopted a qualitative single case study to explore one learner's lived experience in depth. Existing studies have primarily focused on identifying the causes or levels of anxiety rather than understanding how anxiety evolves throughout a learner's educational journey. Consequently, little is known about how an Indonesian EFL learner interprets significant classroom experiences, interacts with teachers and peers, and develops strategies to cope with speaking anxiety over time. Addressing this gap is important because

detailed accounts of learners' experiences can provide insights that may not emerge from questionnaire-based research.

Therefore, this study aims to explore the lived experience of speaking anxiety in an Indonesian EFL university student through a qualitative single case study with a narrative inquiry approach. By focusing on one learner's personal story, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how speaking anxiety is experienced, what factors shape its development, and how the learner navigates emotional challenges in English-speaking situations. The findings are expected to enrich the literature on speaking anxiety from a qualitative perspective and provide practical implications for English teachers in creating more supportive and anxiety-reducing classroom environments.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD/ METODE PENELITIAN

This study employed a qualitative research design using a **single case study** with a **narrative inquiry** approach. A qualitative approach was chosen because the purpose of the study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant's lived experience of speaking anxiety rather than to measure the level of anxiety quantitatively. A single case study enabled the researcher to explore the phenomenon within its real-life context and to provide a rich description of the participant's experiences (Yin, 2018). Meanwhile, narrative inquiry was used to understand how the participant interpreted and gave meaning to experiences of speaking anxiety throughout their English learning journey (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The participant was one Indonesian university student majoring in English Education who had experienced persistent speaking anxiety in English-speaking class.

The primary data were collected through **semi-structured narrative interviews**. This interview format allowed the participant to tell personal stories freely while enabling the researcher to explore issues relevant to the research objectives. The interview questions focused on the participant's experiences of speaking English, situations that triggered anxiety, interactions with teachers and classmates, emotional responses, coping strategies, and reflections on significant learning experiences.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION/ HASIL DAN DISKUSI

The findings revealed that the participant experienced persistent speaking anxiety throughout their English learning journey. The participant described speaking English in front of others as one of the most stressful classroom activities. Feelings of nervousness, fear, and self-doubt frequently emerged before presentations or when asked to speak spontaneously in class. These emotions often affected the participant's confidence and willingness to communicate in English.

As a result, the participant gradually developed a fear of making mistakes when speaking English. Every speaking activity became associated with the possibility of being laughed at, criticized, or rejected by others. I have seen she cried when she had to perform role play with her group. Even in situations where classmates were not hostile, the participant continued to anticipate negative evaluation because of these previous experiences. Consequently, speaking anxiety persisted despite improvements in English proficiency.

These findings support the argument that speaking anxiety is not merely a linguistic problem but also a psychological and social experience shaped by learners' past interactions. Previous studies have identified fear of negative evaluation as one of the major sources of foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). In this study, however, the participant's fear was rooted in concrete experiences of bullying rather than imagined criticism. The findings therefore illustrate how adverse social experiences may have long-term effects on learners' confidence and willingness to communicate.

### 3.1 Bullying as a Source of Speaking Anxiety

A major theme emerging from the participant's narrative was the influence of bullying on the development of speaking anxiety. The participant consistently referred to experiences of being ridiculed by classmates whenever mistakes occurred during classroom speaking activities. Rather than viewing mistakes as opportunities for learning, the participant came to perceive them as events that would invite humiliation.

The participant also reported experiencing physical bullying during school years. Although the physical bullying was not directly related to English learning, it contributed to a broader sense of insecurity in social interactions. Consequently, speaking in front of classmates became emotionally threatening because the participant feared further rejection or embarrassment.

These experiences demonstrate that speaking anxiety can be influenced by learners' broader educational and social histories. While previous quantitative studies have frequently identified fear of negative evaluation as a significant predictor of language anxiety, the present case provides a deeper explanation of how such fear develops over time. The participant's narrative suggests that repeated bullying experiences shaped expectations of failure and rejection, which continued to influence classroom participation long after the bullying had ended.

This finding is consistent with qualitative perspectives in applied linguistics, which emphasize that emotions are socially constructed and influenced by interpersonal relationships. Learners' emotional responses cannot be understood solely by examining language proficiency but must also consider the social contexts in which language learning occurs.

### 3.2 Strategies for Managing Speaking Anxiety

Despite experiencing persistent anxiety, the participant gradually developed several coping strategies that helped reduce nervousness during speaking activities. I observed her since first semester until sixth semester. One practical strategy was preparing a written script or notes before presentations. Bringing prepared texts allowed the participant to organize ideas, reduce fear of forgetting important points, and increase confidence while speaking.

The participant also emphasized the importance of careful preparation before presentations. Rehearsing presentation materials repeatedly enabled the participant to become more familiar with the content and anticipate possible questions. This preparation reduced uncertainty, which in turn lowered anxiety during classroom presentations.

Another important strategy involved discussing presentation topics with classmates and consulting lecturers before presenting. Informal conversations with peers provided opportunities to clarify ideas, practice English, and receive encouragement. Similarly, discussing the presentation with lecturers helped the participant feel more confident because expectations became clearer and misunderstandings could be addressed before the presentation.

These findings suggest that coping with speaking anxiety involved both cognitive and social strategies. While preparation reduced uncertainty, supportive interactions with

peers and lecturers increased the participant's sense of psychological safety. This finding aligns with previous studies showing that preparation, rehearsal, and supportive classroom environments can improve learners' speaking confidence and willingness to communicate.

### 3.3 The Role of Social Support in Reducing Speaking Anxiety

One of the most significant findings of this study concerns the transformative role of social support. The participant explained that speaking anxiety gradually decreased after entering university. Unlike previous educational experiences, the university environment was perceived as more mature, respectful, and supportive.

The participant described classmates as encouraging rather than judgmental. Instead of laughing at mistakes, friends provided motivation, constructive feedback, and emotional support. This positive atmosphere helped the participant rebuild confidence that had been damaged by earlier bullying experiences. The participant also perceived lecturers as approachable and willing to provide guidance before presentations, further strengthening feelings of security during speaking activities.

As supportive relationships developed, the participant became increasingly willing to participate in classroom discussions and presentations. Although feelings of anxiety did not disappear completely, they became more manageable and no longer prevented active participation in speaking activities.

This finding highlights the important role of classroom climate in language learning. Positive peer relationships and supportive teacher practices can help learners reinterpret speaking activities as opportunities for learning rather than situations of potential humiliation. The participant's experience illustrates that speaking anxiety is dynamic rather than permanent; emotional experiences can change when learners encounter safe and supportive learning environments.

## Discussion

This study demonstrates that speaking anxiety is a complex phenomenon influenced by both individual and social factors. The participant's anxiety was closely linked to previous experiences of verbal and physical bullying, which created persistent fear of negative evaluation during English-speaking activities. Unlike many quantitative studies that identify general predictors of anxiety, this narrative reveals how specific life experiences shape learners' emotional responses over time.

The findings also show that speaking anxiety is not fixed. Through consistent preparation, the use of written notes, discussions with peers and lecturers, and exposure to a supportive university environment, the participant gradually developed greater confidence in speaking English. These experiences suggest that emotional recovery is possible when learners receive acceptance, encouragement, and constructive feedback from those around them.

## 3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of creating psychologically safe English classrooms where mistakes are treated as natural parts of learning rather than reasons for ridicule. Teachers should foster respectful peer interactions, encourage collaborative learning, and provide constructive feedback that strengthens learners' confidence. Such practices may help students who have experienced negative social interactions rebuild their willingness to communicate in English and participate more actively in classroom.

This study explored the lived experience of speaking anxiety in an Indonesian EFL learner through a qualitative single case study with a narrative inquiry approach. The findings revealed that the participant's speaking anxiety was strongly influenced by previous experiences of verbal and physical bullying during earlier stages of education. These negative experiences led to a persistent fear of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated, which reduced the participant's confidence and willingness to speak English in classroom settings. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety is not solely associated with limited language proficiency but is also shaped by learners' emotional and social experiences.

The study also found that the participant gradually managed speaking anxiety by adopting several coping strategies, including preparing presentation scripts, rehearsing before presentations, and discussing presentation materials with classmates and lecturers. These strategies helped reduce uncertainty and increased the participant's confidence during speaking activities. More importantly, the participant's anxiety decreased after entering university, where classmates and lecturers created a more supportive, respectful, and encouraging learning environment. Positive social support enabled the participant to rebuild confidence and participate more actively in English-speaking activities.

These findings highlight the importance of fostering psychologically safe classrooms in which learners feel accepted, respected, and encouraged to make mistakes as part of the learning process. English language teachers should promote supportive peer interactions, provide constructive feedback, and create opportunities for learners to prepare collaboratively before speaking tasks. Such practices may help reduce speaking anxiety and improve learners' willingness to communicate.

## 4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

*This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the study focused on a single Indonesian EFL learner; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all Indonesian EFL students. The purpose of this single case study was not to produce statistically generalizable findings but to provide a rich and in-depth understanding of one learner's lived experience of speaking anxiety.*

*Second, the study relied primarily on narrative interviews as the main source of data. Although this approach allowed the participant to share detailed personal experiences, the findings were based on the participant's recollections and interpretations, which may have been influenced by memory, personal reflection, or subjective perceptions. Additional data sources, such as classroom observations, reflective journals, or interviews with teachers and peers, could have provided further triangulation and a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.*

*Third, the study was conducted within one higher education context in Indonesia. The participant's experiences were shaped by a specific educational environment and social relationships that may differ from those of learners in other institutions or educational levels. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within the context of this particular case.*

*Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into how previous experiences of verbal and physical bullying contributed to the development of speaking anxiety and how supportive relationships with classmates and lecturers facilitated the participant's emotional recovery and increased confidence. Future studies are encouraged to include multiple participants from diverse educational contexts, employ longitudinal designs to examine changes in speaking anxiety over time, and incorporate multiple data collection methods to enrich the understanding of learners' lived experiences.*

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***Conflicts of Interest***

*The author declares no conflict of interest.*

***Author Contributions***

*The author solely contributed to all stages of this research, including conceiving and designing the study, collecting the data, developing the research instruments, analyzing and interpreting the data, and writing and revising the manuscript.*

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