

## THE FACTORS OF STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN SPEAKING ENGLISH: CASE STUDY OF EIGHT GRADE SMP NEGERI 3 PELEPAT ILIR

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### ABSTRAK

Kecemasan berbicara merupakan masalah umum yang sering dialami oleh siswa SMP dan dapat menghambat kemampuan mereka dalam berkomunikasi menggunakan bahasa Inggris. Memahami faktor-faktor penyebab kecemasan tersebut penting untuk mendukung hasil belajar yang lebih baik. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan kecemasan siswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris di SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain studi kasus kualitatif dengan partisipan siswa kelas VIII sebanyak 20 orang. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas dan wawancara semi-terstruktur menggunakan lembar observasi, pedoman wawancara, serta perekam suara. Analisis data dilakukan dengan model interaktif Miles dan Huberman yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa terdapat lima faktor utama yang memengaruhi kecemasan siswa dalam berbicara, yaitu rasa takut membuat kesalahan (15 siswa), kurangnya kosakata (13 siswa), rendahnya rasa percaya diri (12 siswa), keterbatasan penguasaan tata bahasa (10 siswa), dan tekanan dari teman sebaya atau takut mendapat penilaian negatif (9 siswa). Dari kelima faktor tersebut, rasa takut membuat kesalahan merupakan faktor yang paling dominan. Dengan demikian, dapat disimpulkan bahwa kecemasan siswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris dipengaruhi oleh faktor linguistik dan psikologis, dengan rasa takut membuat kesalahan sebagai penyebab utama. Implikasi dari penelitian ini adalah guru sebaiknya menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung, memberikan umpan balik yang positif, serta merancang aktivitas komunikatif yang dapat membantu mengurangi kecemasan sekaligus meningkatkan kepercayaan diri siswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris.

Kata kunci: *Kecemasan, berbicara Bahasa Inggris, faktor*

### ABSTRACT

*Speaking anxiety is a common problem among junior high school students, which can hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English. Understanding the factors that cause this anxiety is important to support better learning outcomes. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the factors that caused students' anxiety in speaking English at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir. This research employed a qualitative case study design with participants from the eighth grade (n = 20). Data*

were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews using observation sheets, interview guides, and voice recorders. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed five main factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety, namely fear of making mistakes (15 students), lack of vocabulary (13 students), low self-confidence (12 students), limited grammar mastery (10 students), and peer pressure or fear of negative evaluation (9 students). Among these, fear of making mistakes was found to be the most dominant factor. In conclusion, students' anxiety in speaking English is influenced by both linguistic and psychological factors, with fear of making mistakes being the strongest cause. These findings imply that teachers should create a supportive learning environment, encourage positive feedback, and design communicative activities that help reduce anxiety and build students' confidence in speaking English.

**Keywords :** *anxiety, English speaking, factors.*

## INTRODUCTION

The ability to speak English is an important skill that junior high school students in Indonesia need to master, especially in the context of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes practical communication. However, the reality is that many students have difficulty speaking English because they are affected by anxiety. Speech anxiety can reduce motivation, inhibit participation, and even decrease learning outcomes (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), *foreign language classroom anxiety* includes three aspects, namely *communication apprehension*, *test anxiety*, and *fear of negative evaluation*. In the context of speaking, anxiety is mainly related to *communication apprehension* (fear/nervousness when communicating) and *fear of negative evaluation* (fear of being judged badly by others). These two aspects are very relevant to the condition of junior high school students who are still in the stage of social-emotional development. The results of pre-observation in grade VIII of SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir show that many students are reluctant to speak English because they are afraid of being wrong, embarrassed to be laughed at, nervous, or feeling insecure. This condition indicates the presence of internal and external factors that affect speech anxiety. Therefore, this research is important to identify the factors that cause anxiety so that teachers can design more appropriate learning strategies.

Based on the background of this research, the question arises of this research study is formulated as follows:

1. "What factors underlie eighth graders' speaking anxiety in learning English?"

This study aims to analyze the factors that cause anxiety to speak English in grade VIII students of SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir, as well as determine the dominant factors that have the most influence.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design because it focuses on an in-depth exploration of the factors that cause anxiety of speaking English in

junior high school students (Creswell, 2019). The research was carried out at SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir, Bungo, Jambi, in the even semester of the 2024/2025 school year. Participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques based on the following criteria: (1) grade VIII students with low academic achievement, (2) lack of confidence, and (3) aged 13–14 years. A total of four students (4 girls) from grades VIII.1-VIII.4 became research participants. The research instruments include semi-structured interview guidelines and class observation sheets. Interviews were used to explore students' experiences related to speech anxiety, while observations were used to record students' behavior when speaking English in class. To maintain its validity, the instrument is reviewed by an expert lecturer (validity of the content) before use. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews (approximately 60 minutes per student) and classroom observations. The researcher used sound recording devices and field notes for documentation. Research ethics are fulfilled by obtaining approval from the principal, consent from the student's parents, and ensuring the confidentiality of the participant's identity. Informed consent is given prior to the interview. The validity of the data is maintained through: (1) interviews and observations, (2) confirmation of interview results to participants, (3) storage of transcripts, field notes, and documents, (4) peer debriefing with supervisors. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the interactive model of Miles & Huberman (1994) was used to complete the analysis process through three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. For example, student quotes stating "fear of being laughed at" are coded as fear of negative evaluation and then grouped into low self-confidence themes.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data analysis produced four main themes that cause anxiety to speak English in grade VIII students of SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir, namely: (1) *fear of making mistakes*, (2) *low self-confidence*, (3) *nervousness*, and (4) *low motivation*.

### 1. Fear of making mistake

Three out of five participants (3/5) stated that they were afraid of making mistakes when speaking. They are worried that mistakes in grammar or pronunciation will make teachers and friends laugh. One of the students said:

"I'm afraid that if I say the wrong thing, my friends will laugh." (P2)

Observations show that some students are reluctant to respond to teachers' questions even when asked directly. This finding is in line with Horwitz et al. (1986) who stated that fear of negative evaluation is the main source of foreign language anxiety.

### 2. Low Self-Confidence

All participants (5/5) experienced confidence problems when speaking English. Feelings of insecurity arise due to lack of vocabulary mastery, fear of being the center of attention, and feelings of inadequacy. One student said:

"I'm embarrassed to be told to go forward, because I'm not confident." (P4)

Observations show that students tend to lower their heads or avoid eye contact when asked to answer. This factor becomes dominant as it affects their active participation. Research by Liu & Jackson (2008) also found that low self-confidence was the most significant factor in English speaking anxiety.

### 3. Nervousness

As many as four out of five students (4/5) admitted that they were nervous when they had to speak in front of the class. They show physical symptoms such as sweating, trembling hands, or stuttering speech. One of the students said:

"If I was told to speak in front of the class, my body immediately trembled."  
(P1)

This symptom reinforces the view of MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) that language anxiety is not only cognitive, but also physiological.

### 4. Low Motivation

Three students (3/5) expressed low motivation to speak because they felt that English was difficult and less relevant to daily life. One student says:

"Learning English is hard, so it's hard to speak English." (P5)

The results of observations support this statement, as can be seen from the low participation of students in oral exercises. This is in line with Dornyei's (2001) motivation theory which emphasizes that motivation plays an important role in the success of language learning.

Factors	No	Theme	Causes of anxiety
Internal	1.	Fear of making mistake	Past trauma
			Presumption of perfection in speaking English
	2.	Less Confident	Lack of understanding of the material
			Fear of Student centered attention in the classroom
External	3.	Nervous	Pressure in the form of Gazes from friends and teachers
	4.	Lack of motivation	Less relevant material

			Lack of appreciation from teachers
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**Table 1. Summary of Themes and Sub-causes**

The findings of this study show that students' speaking anxiety is influenced by internal factors (low self-confidence, nervousness, motivation) and external factors (fear of making mistakes related to evaluation from others). The dominant factor is low self-confidence. This can be explained through the concept of communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation from Horwitz et al. (1986), where students are reluctant to speak for fear of negative evaluation. The dominance of the low self-confidence factor is also influenced by the classroom climate that emphasizes correct answers, so students are afraid of being wrong. In fact, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes student-centered learning and provides space for language exploration without fear of making mistakes. Teachers can help reduce anxiety by: providing low-risk speaking practice opportunities (e.g. small group discussions), providing constructive formative feedback, and using scaffolding to strengthen students' confidence. Thus, the results of this study support previous findings (Horwitz et al., 1986; Liu & Jackson, 2008) and emphasizes the need for more supportive teaching strategies in the context of junior high school.

This research has obtained official permission from the Bungo Regency Education Office (No. 422.6/73) as well as a permit reply letter from SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir which gave approval for the implementation of the research. Because the participants were junior high school students (ages 13–14), the researcher also requested written consent from parents/guardians before data collection. To maintain confidentiality, researchers use initials/pseudonyms for all students and omit details that could identify individuals on transcripts and research reports. The name of the school is listed because it has obtained written permission from the school; Otherwise, the researcher will anonymize. All data (interviews, recordings, observation sheets) are stored securely and only accessed by researchers, so that the confidentiality of participants is maintained.

The findings of the study show that students' speaking anxiety can be reduced if teachers implement learning strategies in the classroom that are in line with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. First, teachers need to provide scaffolded speaking activities, starting with pairs or small group exercises before moving to full class presentations. Second, provide opportunities for low-stakes rehearsals, such as role-playing, reading aloud, or practicing dialogue, so that students dare to try without fear of formal assessment. Third, implement constructive formative feedback, in the form of praise, encouragement, and correction of mistakes in a supportive manner so that student confidence increases. Fourth, it is important for teachers to present relevance and choice in speaking assignments, such as connecting topics to students' daily lives and giving them space to choose themes that interest them. These strategies not only help students reduce speech anxiety, but also reflect the student-centred approach to the Merdeka Curriculum, creating a safe, supportive learning environment that encourages students to be more courageous and motivated to communicate in English.

## CONCLUSION

This study found four main factors that cause anxiety to speak English in grade VIII students of SMP Negeri 3 Pelepat Ilir, namely fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, nervousness, and low motivation. The most influential dominant factor is low self-confidence, which is manifested through shyness, fear of being the center of attention, and lack of confidence in one's abilities. The results of this study confirm that speech anxiety comes not only from linguistic factors, but also from psychological and social factors. By understanding these factors, teachers can design learning that is more friendly, supportive, and student-oriented.

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