Exploring Vocational High School Students Speaking Anxiety: Causes and Proposed Strategies

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Abstract *This study aims to provide an in-depth exploration of the causes of speaking anxiety and the strategies employed to overcome it among 11th grade students in a hospitality major. This research was conducted using qualitative design with 34 students from a vocational high school in Mojokerto as participants. The data were collected using open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to gather rich, detailed perspectives. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety is a multifactorial phenomenon. The primary causes identified include low English proficiency, lack of familiarity with tasks, lack of self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes. This study concludes that speaking is a complex challenge.*
Keywords: speaking anxiety, causes of speaking anxiety, vocational high school student.

Abstrak Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk melakukan eksplorasi mendalam mengenai penyebab kecemasan berbicara dan strategi yang digunakan untuk mengatasinya di kalangan siswa kelas 11 jurusan perhotelan. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan desain kualitatif yang melibatkan 34 siswa dari sekolah menengah kejuruan di Mojokerto sebagai peserta. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner terbuka dan wawancara semi-struktur untuk mendapatkan perspektif yang kaya dan detail. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan berbicara merupakan fenomena multifaktorial. Penyebab utama yang diidentifikasi meliputi rendahnya kemampuan berbahasa inggris, kurangnya familiaritas dengan tugas, kurangnya kepercayaan diri, dan takut membuat kesalahan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kecemasan berbicara merupakan hambatan yang kompleks.
Kata Kunci: kecemasan berbicara, penyebab kecemasan berbicara, siswa SMK.

INTRODUCTION

English is an important language in life because English is called a foreign language used for social interaction in the world. For this reason, mastering English is an important thing to learn to get a better life. According to Irmayani et al. (2022), The status of English as a global language, evidenced by its widespread use in diverse fields such as business, technology, and communication, underscores the necessity of acquiring proficiency in the language for effective intercultural communication. The societal function of English tends to be minimal in countries where its use is confined to the role of a formal subject within the school curriculum, rather than being a language for daily interaction (Sari, 2016). As a result, many students are not used to using English when interacting in class, especially in English subjects. It is not surprising that students experience anxiety when speaking English in class. Speaking is a foundational necessity for establishing communication, making it one of the most crucial skills an individual must develop for effective interpersonal engagement. Speaking can be defined as an interactive process of constructing meaning, which encompasses three fundamental stages: production, processing, and reception of information (Nafiul Faqih, 2023). According to Siagian & Adam (2017), speaking is a way of using language to communicate with each other. Therefore, the willingness

to speak English is still difficult for students to implement. Speaking is a difficult skill to learn. As interaction is a fundamental human activity, the skill of speaking is consequently regarded as being of paramount importance. According to Leong & Ahmadi (2017), verbal interaction constitutes a significantly larger portion of human communication than its written counterpart. They are still reluctant to speak English because they often feel anxious and afraid of spelling mistakes when speaking English. Speaking is one of the skills that is often thought to cause anxiety among students. Many students will experience nervousness, panic, fear when asked to speak so that they stutter and often refuse the teacher or someone who asks them to speak English (Ikhsaniyah, 2022). Anxiety in speaking is the most common concern among students. This can be negative energy that affects their performance and ability to process information in English. As a manifestation of an individual's fear of speaking, anxiety provokes a state of apprehension and can cause considerable disarray in an individual's thought processes (Noviyanti, 2022). Anxiety is one of the most emotional encounters that a person can experience. Anxiety that has been experienced by someone can have a negative impact on them. In general, anxiety is a state of restlessness or excessive fear in humans (Oflaz, 2019). Because anxiety can make students have difficulty understanding and interacting using spoken language. Excessive anxiety sometimes makes the sufferer unable to do anything (Yusuf et al., 2023). Researchers in the field have typically categorized anxiety into three distinct forms: trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety (Ikhsaniyah, 2022). Speaking anxiety greatly affects students' performance in studying English more broadly, especially at the senior high school level. As one of the most significant factors affecting a student's speaking ability, anxiety regarding public speaking can hinder the classroom learning process and inhibit learners from fully applying their English skills (Martiningsih et al., 2024). Anxiety in speaking English is a challenge for most students. The demand to be able to speak English in front of the class can also trigger anxiety for students. Students also endeavor to refine their pronunciation through collaborative speaking practice with their friends (Martiningsih et al., 2024). According to Liu 2006:23 cited by Siagian & Adam (2017), Several primary causes for reticence (defined as anxiety in speaking English) have been identified, which are as follows: low English proficiency, lack of familiarity with tasks, lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, incomprehensible inputs.

The frequent problem of speaking anxiety is one of the factors that can hinder students' learning process. This was raised as the background for this research. The following is previous research conducted by Rajitha & Alamelu (2020); This research focuses on finding factors that cause students to feel anxious about speaking English. In the second research by Sari (2016), Researchers explored students' strategies for reducing anxiety about speaking English as well as the causes of speaking anxiety. The two previous studies had the same context as this research; the research focused on the causes in speaking English. The results highlighted challenges such as anxiety, lack of self-confidence, lack of practice and vocabulary. Previous research focused on college students and nine students in senior high school with the highest anxiety ranking in the class. Because no similar research has been found that focuses on vocational high schools. Therefore, researcher conducted a study entitled "Exploring Vocational High School Students Speaking Anxiety: Causes and Proposed Strategy" because speaking skills have an important role for students majoring in hospitality, making the issue of anxiety particularly relevant to their future careers. So, this research focuses on vocational high school students majoring in hospitality in 11th grade. This research also focusses on the causes speaking anxiety students.

METHODS

This research uses qualitative to collect and analyze data. The researcher used qualitative type basic interpretative studies for this research. Basic interpretative studies research is the simplest and most common qualitative study. This research focuses on the experiences and views of individuals or groups rather than statistical measurements. This research uses convenience sampling. Participants consisted of 1 class hospitality major at 11th grade vocational high school students at one of the schools in Mojokerto, students aged 16-17 years and the major is Hospitality. In conducting this research, the researcher shared a 2 open-ended questionnaire to 34 students regarding the causes of speaking anxiety. The researcher conducted a semi-structured interview on participants whose answers are considered unclear, the interview is conducted with the aim of clarifying information so that the data obtained is not ambiguous and clear. Then, the researcher codes the data, coding and represent and report qualitative findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings of this study present the students' perspectives on the causes of speaking anxiety. The researcher observed one vocational high school class in the hospitality major, consisting of 34 students in Mojokerto. According to students who experience difficulties with their English-speaking skills, speaking anxiety was identified as a primary and frequently experienced factor. The results of the questionnaires and interviews indicate that out of the 34 participants, 31 students stated they have experienced anxiety when required to speak in English. This can serve as a hindrance to learning English speaking skills.

Based on the analysis of the questionnaires and interviews, the causes of speaking anxiety can be categorized into 4 causes such as: low English proficiency, lack of familiarity with tasks, lack of self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes Liu 2006:23 cited by (Siagian & Adam, 2017). 1) Low english proficiency, 2) Lack of familiarity with tasks, 3) lack of self-confidence, 4) Fear of making mistakes.

According to Noviyanti (2022), Speaking anxiety is essentially a reaction rooted in a person's apprehension about engaging in oral communication. Anxiety is an emotion that can lead to a decrease in the level and effectiveness of learning among high school students (Hidayati et al., 2023). Low English proficiency, such as difficulties in translating ideas directly or are not fluent in speaking English. This aligns with another of Liu's (2006) cited by Siagian & Adam (2017), categories and creates a powerful negative feedback loop: the belief in low ability triggers anxiety, which in turn hinders the very participation and practice needed to improve their skills.

Participants reported other causes of anxiety, such as the internalized belief that they "cannot speak English" and the perception that English is not their primary language. These two factors contribute to a diminished sense of familiarity with tasks conducted in English. This is consistent with the theory from Liu (2006), as cited by Siagian & Adam (2017), which states that when learners are not accustomed to performing specific tasks, they are likely to feel unprepared, leading to nervousness and hesitation that can ultimately cause anxiety.

The most foundational reason identified is a lack of confidence, The lack of self-confidence reported by many students serves as a foundation for anxiety, creating an internal doubt that hinders the initiation of communication. This is supported with the theory from Liu 2006 cited by Siagian & Adam (2017), which stated lack of confidence is a state of self-doubt and insecurity in one's abilities, leading to hesitation and fear of failure, thus making students reluctant to speak.

The last cause is fear of making mistakes. Students' fear of errors in pronunciation and grammar is not abstract; it is tied to a social fear of being judged, criticized, or ridiculed by peers, a concept well-established in literature as "losing face". This social dimension underscores that for students; the English classroom is not just a learning space but a performance arena where mistakes have social consequences. Those causes supported by the study from Liu (2006) cited by Siagian & Adam (2017), who stated fear of making mistakes is the anxiety or apprehension individuals feel about making errors, especially in front of others.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the causes of speaking anxiety are rooted in the interaction between internal psychological factors, worries about social evaluation, and perceived linguistic limitations. The most dominant fundamental factor is a low English proficiency, lack of familiarity with tasks, lack of self-confidence, and fear of making mistakes which serves as the foundation for the emergence of other fears. It is concluded that students are not passive victims, but active agents who apply a two-pronged approach to manage their anxiety. Overall, the conclusion of this research is that speaking anxiety among the vocational high school students studied is a significant psychological and pedagogical reality. This phenomenon is driven by a complex cycle of negative self-perception and fear of social failure, yet it is faced by students with a set of strategies that show a noteworthy level of awareness and resilience.

Based on the findings of this research, the researcher would like to give suggestions to students, English teachers, and recommendation for future researcher. First, students are advised to understand that feeling anxious when speaking English is a very common experience and not something they are going through alone. Second, English teachers are advised to provide motivation and understanding to students that making mistakes is a normal part of the learning process. Third, future researchers are advised to broaden the scope of their research by involving a larger and more diverse sample.

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