

EXPLORING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS OF SPEAKING ANXIETY IN ACADEMIC PRESENTATIONS AMONG EFL STUDENTS AT JAMBI UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Many EFL students face difficulties when delivering academic presentations in English due to feelings of anxiety and a lack of confidence. In fact, presentations are an essential part of the learning process that require strong speaking skills. This problem becomes more complex because English is not their first language, and their limited language proficiency often hinders the fluency and effectiveness of their delivery. This study aims to explore the internal and external factors that contribute to speaking anxiety in academic presentation contexts. A qualitative approach with a case study design was used, involving six eighth-semester students from the English Education Study Program at Jambi University, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed four internal factors: lack of grammar mastery, Vocabulary Limitations, incorrect pronunciation, and Lack of Self-Confidence. In addition, three external factors were identified: fear of negative evaluation, Lack of Opportunities to Practice Speaking in English, and Speaking Anxiety Triggered by Specific Lecturers. These findings indicate that speaking anxiety is a complex issue that should be addressed through more supportive teaching approaches, including increasing speaking practice and creating a more positive classroom environment.

Keywords: *Speaking anxiety, Internal factors, External factors, EFL students, Academic presentation*

INTRODUCTION

The ability to speak in public, particularly in English, is a critical skill for students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In higher education, classroom presentations are commonly used not only as an assessment method but also as a way to build students' confidence and communication skills. Despite its importance, many EFL students continue to face challenges when delivering presentations, often struggling with speaking anxiety. This anxiety significantly

affects their ability to express ideas clearly, respond to questions accurately, and maintain composure while speaking.

Research on speaking anxiety has identified both internal and external factors that influence students' performance during presentations. Internal factors such as poor grammar knowledge, limited vocabulary, mispronunciation, and lack of self-confidence have been consistently linked to higher levels of anxiety. Zambak and Çetinkaya (2023) emphasized that speaking is the most anxiety-inducing skill among language learners, and even well-prepared students may experience nervousness due to internal linguistic limitations. In addition, external factors such as the presence of critical audiences, unsupportive environments, and lecturers with intimidating attitudes further contribute to students' discomfort. Grieve et al. (2021) highlighted that fear of being judged and classroom tension often disrupt students' fluency during presentations.

Although previous studies have examined either internal or external causes of speaking anxiety, few have provided a comprehensive exploration that considers both dimensions in the same context. Moreover, studies that focus specifically on EFL students at regional Indonesian universities, such as Jambi University, remain limited. Given the recurring anxiety reported by students during classroom presentations, a deeper investigation is needed to understand the actual contributing factors.

This study aims to explore both internal and external factors that influence speaking anxiety among EFL students during English presentations at Jambi University. The results are expected to offer valuable insights for educators in designing more supportive learning environments and effective strategies to help students overcome anxiety and perform better in academic presentations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon in foreign language learning and is considered one of the main obstacles faced by EFL students. Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the concept of foreign language anxiety, categorizing it into

three components: communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Among these, communication anxiety is often the most dominant, particularly in speaking situations.

Students who already struggle with public speaking may find it even more difficult when using a language in which they have limited proficiency. This includes challenges related to pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency, all of which can lead to a fear of making mistakes and being misunderstood. These issues increase students' anxiety levels and create significant barriers to learning and performance.

Academic Presentation

Academic presentations are an essential component of higher education, as they help students develop critical thinking, public speaking, and English communication skills. However, delivering a presentation in a foreign language can be intimidating, especially for students with limited language proficiency. Presentations require not only content knowledge but also the ability to communicate ideas clearly, confidently, and fluently.

Imaniah (2018) found that students often struggle with setting the purpose of their presentations, planning effectively, and building engagement with the audience. Furthermore, inadequate preparation and lack of experience in using English as the medium of delivery often worsen the speaking anxiety experienced by students.

Internal Factors

Internal factors are personal challenges that arise from within the students themselves. Based on previous studies, four major internal factors have been identified: lack of grammar mastery, limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and low self-confidence. Hermawan et al. (2024) emphasized that these internal issues contribute to communication anxiety, especially when students are afraid of making mistakes or feel unsure about their language abilities.

Riadil (2020) also found that internal elements such as self-doubt and

linguistic limitations play a significant role in increasing anxiety during oral presentations. Students often feel overwhelmed when they cannot find the right words, mispronounce terms, or struggle to construct grammatically correct sentences in real-time. These conditions prevent them from speaking comfortably and effectively in front of others.

External Factors

External factors refer to environmental or situational elements that influence students' anxiety levels during academic presentations. Several studies have highlighted the role of peer and lecturer evaluations, the lack of English-speaking practice opportunities, and the classroom atmosphere. Almira et al. (2018) found that fear of being judged, especially by lecturers and classmates, is a common cause of anxiety. Female students were found to be more vulnerable to this pressure.

Thaksanan (2024) revealed that a lack of regular English-speaking practice increases students' anxiety due to unpreparedness and unfamiliarity with the language. Additionally, Rabbiani (2024) observed that harsh or overly critical lecturers can trigger fear and nervousness, leading students to avoid eye contact, rely heavily on notes, and show physical signs of discomfort. These findings suggest that a supportive and positive academic environment, along with constructive feedback from lecturers, can help reduce speaking anxiety in students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences with speaking anxiety in academic presentations. The case study method was considered suitable for exploring real-life experiences in detail. The research was conducted at Jambi University and involved six eighth-semester students from the English Education Study Program, selected through purposive sampling based on their academic experience and frequent involvement in classroom presentations.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to express their experiences openly while being guided by key questions. This method enabled the researcher to obtain rich and relevant information, as supported by Gill et al. (2008). The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved coding and identifying key themes. To ensure data credibility, member checking was applied by asking participants to review the transcripts and confirm the accuracy of their statements.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified both internal and external factors that contribute to speaking anxiety during academic presentations among EFL students at Jambi University. Data obtained from semi-structured interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, which revealed seven key sub-themes grouped into two main categories: internal and external factors.

Internal Factors

Lack of Grammar Mastery

Many students expressed anxiety when they were unsure about the grammatical structure of their sentences. They often hesitated or paused during presentations due to fear of making grammatical mistakes. This uncertainty disrupted their sentence flow and made them feel uncomfortable speaking in front of others. One participant shared:

“.... Mostly it's like grammar. If for example I'm worried, I'm afraid that I'll put it in the wrong order, or suddenly the sentence will end up ungrammatical...” (P2)

This indicates that concerns over grammatical accuracy can interfere with students' fluency and confidence.

Vocabulary Limitations

Students also reported difficulties in finding the right words to express their thoughts. When they forgot a specific word, they were unable to continue or substitute it with another expression, which caused anxiety and silence during the presentation. A participant stated:

"I should be able to explain it using different vocabulary, different words, but it still has the same meaning as what I want to say. But, because of the limited vocabulary, I can't convey what I should convey." (P1)

This limitation made them feel blocked in their communication and led to an overall lack of fluency.

Incorrect Pronunciation

Pronunciation was another internal factor that caused stress among participants. Students feared pronouncing words incorrectly, especially in front of peers. They felt that mistakes in pronunciation drew negative attention and made them lose focus. As described by one participant:

".... Mispronounced like for example, child /tfauld/ right? Then I said, child /tfauld/. Then they were like, child /tfauld/. Eh, child /tfauld/. Not child /tfauld/. So, I was immediately like, oh, pressure. Immediately like, distract." (P4)

Such moments made students feel embarrassed and more cautious, reducing their natural flow of speaking.

Lack of Self-Confidence

Some students experienced self-doubt and insecurity even when they had prepared well for their presentations. They frequently questioned whether what they were saying was correct and worried about how others perceived them. This led them to constantly seek reassurance from the audience. One participant shared:

"..., Yes, often. Yes, like that, I don't feel confident... Did I say something wrong? Do they understand me? That's why every time I talk, I often ask people..." (P4)

This lack of confidence often disrupted their focus and made them rely heavily on external validation.

External Factors

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Participants felt anxious when presenting in front of others because they feared being judged or evaluated negatively. They were concerned about the audience's reactions and whether they were delivering the information

effectively. One participant explained:

“The most important thing is actually the fear of being judged. The main factor that makes me anxious is how the audience or listeners respond to my presentation. Is it enough or not enough? Was I able to convey the information clearly? I'm afraid of making mistakes that could reduce their understanding, especially my friends who are listening.” (P6)

This fear often made students overthink their performance and lose concentration.

Lack of Opportunities to Practice Speaking in English

Students stated that they rarely used English in daily communication, which made them feel unprepared for speaking tasks. The lack of practice led to hesitation and fear of making mistakes in front of an audience. As one participant expressed:

“...Because we rarely talk in English, that's why when we are in public, we are afraid of being wrong...” (P3)

This absence of speaking practice limited their fluency and confidence in academic settings.

Speaking Anxiety Triggered by Specific Lecturers

Some participants admitted that their anxiety increased when presenting in front of certain lecturers. They felt uncomfortable and pressured due to the lecturer's presence or personality. This discomfort often made them more nervous and less focused. As one participant said:

“...For some of the lecturer characters we know, I still feel uncomfortable to doing presentations.” (P6)

This shows that the classroom atmosphere and lecturer-student relationship can significantly influence students' level of speaking anxiety.

Table 1. The Causes of Presentation Speaking Anxiety

Themes	Sub-Themes	Participants	
Internal Factors	Lack of Grammar Mastery	(P1, P2, P4, P6)	4/6
	Vocabulary Limitations	(P1, P4, P6)	3/6
	Incorrect Pronunciation	(P1, P2, P4, P5, P6)	5/6
	Lack of Self-Confidence	(P1, P4)	2/6

External Factors	Fear of Negative Evaluation	(P2, P3, P5, P6)	4/6
	Lack of Opportunities to Practice Speaking in English	(P3)	1/6
	Speaking Anxiety Triggered by Specific Lecturers	(P5, P6)	2/6

The findings of this study revealed that speaking anxiety among EFL students during academic presentations is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of how linguistic ability and environmental context shape students' experiences when speaking English in public academic settings. The internal factors mainly reflect students' individual limitations in language proficiency and psychological readiness. The first issue identified is a lack of grammar mastery. Students often struggle to form grammatically correct sentences, which disrupts their fluency and leads to anxiety during presentations. This aligns with Riadil (2020), who emphasized that poor grammar knowledge contributes significantly to speaking difficulties among language learners.

Another internal issue is limited vocabulary. Students admitted that a narrow range of vocabulary restricted their ability to express ideas effectively, especially when trying to paraphrase forgotten terms. This is consistent with Hermawan et al. (2024), who highlighted vocabulary limitations as a major cause of communication breakdown in oral presentations. Pronunciation errors were also found to heighten speaking anxiety. Mispronounced words made students feel self-conscious and fearful of being misunderstood. These findings support Hermawan et al. (2024), who reported that pronunciation difficulties interfere with both confidence and delivery.

Lastly, low self-confidence was identified as a major psychological barrier. Even when students had sufficient preparation, they often doubted their abilities, particularly under pressure. This reflects Horwitz et al.'s (1986) concept of communication apprehension, where fear or shyness impedes performance in public speaking situations.

In addition to internal challenges, the study uncovered three external factors contributing to students' anxiety. The most prominent is fear of negative evaluation. Students feared being judged by lecturers and peers, which made them overly cautious and increased cognitive pressure. This is in line with Almira et al. (2018) and Horwitz et al. (1986), who identified fear of evaluation as a key source of language anxiety in classroom settings. The second factor is the lack of opportunities to practice speaking English. Infrequent use of English in both academic and social contexts hindered students' ability to speak fluently and confidently during formal presentations. Thaksanan (2024) similarly noted that limited speaking practice contributes significantly to anxiety in EFL learners.

The final external factor, and a new finding in this study, is the anxiety triggered by specific lecturers. Participants expressed heightened fear when presenting to lecturers perceived as overly strict or critical. Unlike general fear of evaluation, this sub-theme reflects a more personal and situational form of anxiety influenced by classroom power dynamics. This supports Horwitz et al.'s (1986) theory that anxiety is strongly linked to evaluative contexts, and highlights the need for constructive and supportive feedback practices in language classrooms. Overall, the findings of this study not only confirm existing theories and research but also offer a new perspective on how interpersonal interactions with lecturers can intensify students' speaking anxiety. Future research is encouraged to explore how pedagogical strategies and lecturer behaviour impact language learners' confidence and performance in oral communication tasks.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights how both internal and external factors contribute significantly to speaking anxiety among EFL students during academic presentations. Internally, limited grammar knowledge, inadequate vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, and low self-confidence impair students' ability to speak fluently and clearly. Externally, fear of negative evaluation, lack of speaking practice, and anxiety triggered by certain lecturers further exacerbate their discomfort.

These findings are important for educators, particularly in EFL contexts, as they reveal the complex interplay between personal language challenges and the academic environment. By understanding these factors, educators can create more supportive and non-threatening classroom settings that encourage students to speak more confidently in English.

Moreover, the identification of lecturer-specific anxiety as a distinct theme suggests the need for further research on the influence of teacher behavior and feedback methods on student anxiety. Future studies may also explore intervention strategies or classroom practices that can effectively reduce speaking anxiety and promote better oral performance among language learners. In the end, addressing both personal and environmental sources of anxiety is essential for improving students' academic speaking competence and fostering a more inclusive learning atmosphere.

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