

## Speaking Anxiety in Oral Presentation-based Assessment: Factors and Strategies

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate factors contributing to speaking anxiety in oral presentation-based assessments among English Language Teaching (ELT) students and their strategies to overcome it. Speaking is a crucial skill, yet it is often the most challenging for ELT students. While previous research has identified causes of general speaking anxiety, there is a gap in understanding how students specifically manage this anxiety in the context of oral presentation-based assessments, particularly for students learning to be future English teachers. To address this, descriptive qualitative research was conducted with thirty-one fourth-semester ELT undergraduate students at a state university in Indonesia. Data were gathered through a questionnaire adapted from the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) and semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed three main domains of speaking anxiety: discomfort in speaking English, communication anxiety, and test anxiety. Discomfort in speaking English was primarily attributed to the fear of spontaneous speaking and lack of self-confidence due to peer comparison. Communication anxiety was mainly caused by nervousness while waiting to present and the fear of being judged for mistakes. Test anxiety was influenced by the awareness of presentations being graded and the pressure to meet teacher expectations. To manage these anxieties, students employed strategies such as practicing the presentation multiple times, using breathing or relaxation techniques, preparing cue cards, thinking positively, and practicing in front of a mirror or recording themselves. These results provide practical insights for educators to create supportive learning environments and provide students with effective coping mechanisms.

**Keywords:** speaking anxiety; oral presentation; english language teaching; coping strategies

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### INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are important for students as they contribute to classroom discussions, group projects, and academic presentations (Leonita et al., 2023). According to Brown (2001), among the four language skills, which include listening, speaking, reading, and writing, speaking is considered crucial for effective communication. However, for many English Language Teaching (ELT) students, mastering speaking skills becomes the most difficult challenge (Paneerselvam and Mohamad, 2019). Unlike reading or writing, speaking requires immediate response and fluency which make it a terrifying task for students. One major obstacle is speaking anxiety, which can make students feel nervous and self-conscious when speaking in front of others. According to Pan and Lou (2023), speaking anxiety often influenced by factors such as anxiety, low self-confidence, and the fear of making mistakes.

Anxiety is defined as a distressing emotional experience characterized by feelings of discomfort, worry, and an urge to avoid situations that trigger such feelings (Silverman and Schalkwyk, 2019). Habiburrahim et al., (2020) found that students felt anxious during English-speaking tasks, which affected their participation and performance. Speaking anxiety not only affects students' speaking performance but also their overall academic engagement and success. Students who experience high speaking anxiety may avoid participating in class discussions, struggle with pronunciation and fluency, and start to think negatively about learning English.

The issue of speaking anxiety is particularly concerning in presentation-based assessments. Oral presentations are a structured form of spoken communication where a speaker conveys information, ideas, or arguments to an audience (Suardika et al., 2023). This type of extensive speaking involves longer and more structured performances. The repeated use of presentation-based assessments in class can further intensify students' anxiety, as they may feel overwhelmed by the frequency of the tasks without having enough time to

build confidence in their speaking abilities. The pressure to meet expectations of structured speech and clear articulation can significantly contribute to students' speaking anxiety.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is commonly used to measure anxiety levels among students (Horwitz et al., 1986). A recent study by Moafa (2024) used FLCAS and revealed that high level of students experienced anxiety when speaking English, with test anxiety as the most dominant factor. Internal factors that contribute to speaking anxiety include lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and past negative experiences (Hanake, 2024). External factors involve fear of being judged by the audience, peer pressure, strict teachers, and cultural expectations (Rajitha and Alamelu, 2020).

Besides FLCAS, other scales such as the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) have been used to measure anxiety-related specifically to public speaking (Yaikhong and Usaha, 2012). Naser and Isa (2021) used PSCAS to study speaking anxiety and found that even students with good academic performance often struggle due to speaking anxiety in presentation. It has been emphasized that students who experience speaking anxiety often avoid interacting in class, which limit their opportunities to practice and improve (Archbell and Coplan, 2022).

Despite extensive research on the causes of speaking anxiety, many previous studies have not specifically addressed how students overcome their speaking anxiety in the context of oral presentations. Most research has focused on identifying the causes of speaking anxiety, but few studies have explored the strategies students use to manage their speaking anxiety. While there has been some attention to techniques for reducing speaking anxiety, there is a gap in understanding how these strategies are specifically applied in the context of oral presentation-based assessments. Additionally, many previous studies focused on general EFL students or students from different backgrounds. In contrast, this study specifically looks at English Language Teaching (ELT) students. This makes the study more specific, as it focuses on students who are preparing to be future English teachers, making their confidence and ability to teach effectively particularly relevant.

Therefore, this study aims to fill those gaps by investigates the factors contributing to speaking anxiety in oral presentation-based assessments and identifies the strategies used by students to overcome it. This study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors contributing to speaking anxiety in oral presentation-based assessments for ELT students?
2. What strategies do ELT students use to overcome speaking anxiety in oral presentation-based assessments?

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the factors and strategies contributing to speaking anxiety during presentation-based assessments. A qualitative case study design is suitable for providing a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of a phenomenon within its specific context (Yin, 2014). This approach is effective when the research aims to gather detailed information directly from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Kim, Sefcik, & Bradway, 2017).

The research was conducted in an English education study program at a state university in Indonesia. This program was chosen because its students are regularly required to complete oral presentations as part of their assignments to improve their speaking skills, which are essential for their future careers as teachers. The participants were thirty-one undergraduate students from the fourth semester of the English Language Teaching (ELT) program during the 2024/2025 academic year. This group was selected because they had prior experience with presentation-based assessments from a previous course and were familiar with the tasks, yet they were not at the final stage of their studies, making them an ideal group to study speaking anxiety.

The questionnaire used in this research was adapted from the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) developed by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) and theory from Kondo & Ying (2004) to analyze strategies to overcome students' English-speaking anxiety. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-five statements with a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) and included ten multiple-choice answers to explore students' strategies to overcome their speaking anxiety.

The semi-structured interviews then provided a more in-depth exploration of the factors and strategies in speaking anxiety during presentation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Participants were ten students which randomly selected from among those who had completed the questionnaire. Random sampling means that every person has the same chance of being selected, which helps make sure the sample is fair and includes different types of students (Etikan & Bala, 2017). The interviews were conducted individually and were audio-recorded for accurate transcription.

For data analysis, the researcher used thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method involves

identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within qualitative data. The analysis followed a three-stage process: data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). In the data condensation stage, the researcher selected, simplified, and summarized the data from the empirical data. The results from both questionnaires and interviews were then used to identify the research problems related to factors and strategies of speaking anxiety, which was named the data display process. Finally, in the drawing conclusions stage, the researcher interpreted the patterns found in the data. The themes were developed directly from the data, ensuring that the findings were reflected from the participants' experiences.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study on factors contributing to speaking anxiety in oral presentation-based assessments and the strategies students use to manage it. These findings are then discussed in relation to relevant literature.

### Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety in Oral Presentation-based Assessment

This section explains the factors contributing to speaking anxiety among students in oral presentation-based assessment. The types of speaking anxiety were grouped into three domains, which are discomfort in speaking English, communication anxiety, and test anxiety.

Table 1. Analysis of Students' Factors

No	Domain	Statement	Mean
1.	Discomfort in Speaking English	I never feel quite sure of myself while I am doing a presentation in English.	2.48
2.		I can get so nervous that I forget things I already know when I am doing a presentation in English.	3.13
3.		I have no fear of doing a presentation in English.	2.77
4.		I find it easier to express my ideas once I start talking in front of the class.	2.65
5.		I feel confident expressing my opinions in English during a presentation.	2.52
6.		I often feel insecure because I compare my English skills with others in the class.	3.13
7.		I start to panic when I have to do presentation without a preparation in advance.	3.23
8.		Even if I am very well prepared, I feel anxious about doing a presentation in English.	2.84
9.		I lack confidence in dealing with unexpected questions during an English presentation.	2.74
10.	Communication Anxiety	I stay calm even when I am unexpectedly called to do presentation in English.	2.71
11.		I feel nervous while waiting for my turn to perform.	3.06
12.		The longer I have to wait to present in class, the more anxious I become.	2.90
13.		Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am doing a presentation in English.	2.68
14.		I use gestures and facial expressions confidently during my presentation in English.	1.94
15.		I feel more confident when I make eye contact with the audience during my presentation.	2.32
16.		I am afraid that other students will laugh at me if I say something wrong in English.	2.65
17.		I feel comfortable expressing my ideas in English even when I am unsure of the grammar.	2.32
18.		I feel confident presenting in English even if my performance is not perfect.	2.32
19.	Test Anxiety	I feel extremely nervous when I know my English presentation will be graded.	2.97
20.		I worry that making mistakes during my presentation will negatively affect my grade.	2.90
21.		I find it difficult to concentrate during my presentation because I am focused on how I will be graded.	2.55
22.		The thought of being evaluated during my presentation makes me feel stressed.	2.55
23.		I feel more confident when I know the grading criteria for my presentation.	2.16
24.		I often worry that my presentation will not meet the expectations of the lecturer.	3.16
25.		I feel a sense of relief when the presentation assessment is over.	3.52

### Discomfort in Speaking English

The findings reveal that discomfort in speaking English is the most dominant factor contributing to students' speaking anxiety during presentations. This aligns with previous research, which discussed the impact of language barriers and a lack of self-confidence in second language learners (Horwitz et al., 1986). The most significant is the fear of spontaneous speaking. This is highlighted by the statement "*I start to panic when I have to do a presentation without preparation in advance,*" which had the highest mean score of 3.23. This result is supported by interview excerpts, where students shared that they often avoid presentations when unprepared. One student expressed:

**Excerpt 1**

*"I have thought about avoiding presentations sometimes, but I knew it was not an option."*  
(Student R.M.A's statement, translated by the researcher).

These statements emphasize how unpreparedness can cause more anxiety during presentations. Similarly, the statement *"I can get so nervous that I forget things I already know when I am doing a presentation in English"* further highlights the impact of spontaneous speaking. With a mean score of 3.13, many students admitted that nervousness made them forget well-prepared material. One student shared:

**Excerpt 2**

*"Even though I have prepared the material and memorized it, the nervousness often takes over, and sometimes my mind goes completely blank for a moment."*  
(Student T.H.G's statement, translated by the researcher).

This shows how the fear of speaking impromptu can make it harder for students to recall information and cause them to feel more anxious during presentations. This result supports the social comparison theory, which says people often compare their abilities to others (Festinger, 1954).

Lack of self-confidence is another factor that significantly contributes to discomfort in speaking English. The statement *"I often feel insecure because I compare my English skills with others in the class"* also had a mean score of 3.13. Students reported feeling insecure when they perceived their English-speaking abilities as inferior to their peers. One student noted:

**Excerpt 3**

*"I worry more about being judged by my classmates. I am concerned about their opinions because some have better speaking skills than me."*  
(Student H.R.N's statement, translated by the researcher).

This suggests that the anxiety from peer comparison is not just about the fear of making mistakes, but also about the perceived judgment from classmates. This finding highlights the need for instructors to create a supportive classroom environment that minimizes judgment.

**Communication Anxiety**

The findings show that nervousness while waiting to present is the highest factor contributing to communication anxiety. The statement *"I feel nervous while waiting for my turn to perform"* had a mean score of 3.06, indicating that students experience significant anxiety while anticipating their turn to speak. One student shared:

**Excerpt 4**

*"I feel my anxiety growing as the time to present gets closer. I start to overthink everything and worry about what I will say."*  
(Student A.P's statement, translated by the researcher).

**Excerpt 5**

*"After performing, I realized that the nervousness was before I started."*  
(Student P.S.A's statement, translated by the researcher).

This shows that the waiting period before presenting is a major source of anxiety, as students start to overthink and become more nervous as their turn gets closer. The pressure of knowing they will soon have to speak makes them feel more stressed and anxious. This resonates with previous studies, which found that the waiting period before speaking is often filled with increased anxiety, as individuals start to overthink their performance (Yaqubi and Rokni, 2013).

Another statement, *"I stay calm even when I am unexpectedly called to do a presentation in English,"* had a mean score of 2.71, showing that many students experience significant anxiety when unexpectedly called on to present. One student noted:

**Excerpt 6**

*"Even though I've prepared the material and memorized it, the nervousness often takes over."*  
(Student L.L's statement, translated by the researcher).

This shows that even when students are well-prepared, the fear of being called on without notice makes them nervous and anxious. It was also observed that the fear of being called on unexpectedly to present led to anxiety, as students were often unprepared for such situations, reinforcing the importance of preparation and predictability in reducing speaking anxiety. This suggests that educators should prioritize building students' confidence and ensure a more forgiving classroom atmosphere, in line with recommendations for a positive learning environment.

### **Test Anxiety**

The findings indicate that test anxiety is a second dominant factor that contributes to students' speaking anxiety during oral presentations. The significant factor contributing to test anxiety is the relief students feel after the assessment is over. The statement "*I feel a sense of relief when the presentation assessment is over*" had the highest mean score of 3.52. This high mean score indicates that students feel a strong sense of relief once the presentation is completed, which shows how much pressure they feel during the presentation. One student shared:

#### **Excerpt 7**

*"Once the assessment is done, I feel the stress lifting off me. It's like I can finally breathe again."*  
(Student N.A.'s statement, translated by the researcher).

This highlights the stress they feel throughout the process and the strong relief they feel once the presentation is finished. This finding corresponds with research that highlighted how evaluation in academic settings, particularly in public speaking, can trigger test anxiety (Nemati et al., 2020).

Another contributing factor is the fear of not meeting the teacher's expectations. The statement "*I often worry that my presentation will not meet the expectations of the teacher*" had a mean score of 3.16, suggesting that students feel significant pressure to meet specific expectations from their instructors. One student noted:

#### **Excerpt 8**

*"I keep wondering if the teacher will think my presentation is good enough or if I missed something important."*  
(Student T.Y.A.'s statement, translated by the researcher).

This pressure to meet expectations is a major source of anxiety for students. The fear of not meeting the instructor's expectations was another major contributor to students' anxiety, as students worried that their presentations would not meet the required standards. This pressure to meet expectations is a major source of anxiety for students. As other studies observed, students are often burdened by the need to perform perfectly, which can worsen their anxiety (Foutz et al., 2021).

The nervousness about being graded is also a significant factor. The statement "*I feel extremely nervous when I know my English presentation will be graded*" had a mean score of 2.97, showing that students are especially anxious when they are aware their presentation will be evaluated. One student mentioned:

#### **Excerpt 9**

*"Just knowing that I will be graded makes me more nervous than actually presenting."*  
(Student T.H.G.'s statement, translated by the researcher).

This indicates that the awareness of being graded significantly contributes to students' speaking anxiety during their presentations.

### **Strategies to Overcome Students' Speaking Anxiety in Presentation-based Assessment**

The strategies to overcome speaking anxiety during presentation-based assessments were identified from both the questionnaire and interview data. In the questionnaire, participants were asked to select multiple strategies to reduce their anxiety, providing a broad range of responses. Additionally, participants shared more details of the methods they employed to manage speaking anxiety in the interviews.



Table 2. Analysis of Students' Strategies

Strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Practicing the presentation multiple times before the actual day	24	77.42%
Preparing cue cards or an outline as a guide	19	61.29%
Practicing in front of a mirror or recording myself	17	54.84%
Joining clubs or organizations that involve public speaking (debate, etc.)	12	38.71%
Using breathing or relaxation techniques	21	67.74%
Thinking positively and calming myself before the presentation	18	58.06%
Making eye contact with friendly-looking audience members	15	48.39%
Avoiding direct eye contact with the audience to reduce nervousness	9	29.03%
Hoping the presentation ends quickly	12	38.71%
Accepting the anxiety and not trying to do anything about it	9	29.03%

The most frequently used strategy is practicing the presentation multiple times before the actual day, which was reported by 77.42% of students. This suggests that students find repetition helpful in building confidence and reducing nerves. As one student shared in the interview:

**Excerpt 10**

*"I always prepare the material well the night before, which helps me feel calm and ready to present."*

(Student T.H.G's statement, translated by the researcher).

This shows that repeated practice is important for students to gain confidence and feel ready for the presentation. This finding supports the cognitive-behavioral approach to anxiety, which emphasizes the importance of repeated exposure to a feared activity to reduce anxiety (Maher and King, 2023).

Using breathing or relaxation techniques was the second most popular strategy, with 67.74% of students adopting it. These techniques help students reduce physical tension and calm their nerves. One student noted:

**Excerpt 11**

*"I use deep breathing techniques before I start presenting. It helps calm me down, especially when I feel the nerves coming"*

(Student T.Y.A's statement, translated by the researcher).

This reflects how managing physical responses through relaxation can directly reduce anxiety. This findings align with studies that found that relaxation techniques can significantly reduce physiological symptoms of anxiety (Alamsoudi and Sarkhosh, 2025).

Another significant strategy is preparing cue cards or an outline as a guide, which 61.29% of students reported using this strategy. Having a written guide helps students stay organized and reduces uncertainty during their presentation. One student mentioned:

**Excerpt 12**

*"When I prepared the material and practiced beforehand, I felt more in control when presenting"*

(Student P.S.A's statement, translated by the researcher).

This indicates that organizing ideas through outlines or cards helps students feel more confident. This strategy is consistent with the cognitive load theory, which suggests that reducing cognitive load (e.g., by having an outline) helps improve performance under stress (Brünken et al., 2002)

Thinking positively and calming myself before the presentation was also widely used, with 58.06% of students adopting this strategy. Maintaining a positive mindset helps students feel more confident and manage their nerves. One student expressed:

**Excerpt 13**

*"I tell myself, 'You can do this,' and focus on the positive aspects of my presentation"*

(Student N.A's statement, translated by the researcher).

This shows how positive thinking can help students change their focus from fear to their strengths. Lastly, practicing in front of a mirror or recording myself was used by 54.84% of students. This strategy allows students to observe their performance, improve their body language, and improve their delivery. One

student shared:

**Excerpt 14**

*"Practicing in front of a mirror helps me see how I present myself. It makes me feel more confident when speaking"*

(Student L.L.'s statement, translated by the researcher).

This suggests that observing their own presentation allows students to improve their delivery and gain confidence. Positive thinking and practicing in front of a mirror are reflecting the importance of mental rehearsal and self-observation in building confidence. These strategies help students focus on their strengths and improve their delivery, which in turn helps reduce anxiety.

**CONCLUSION**

The study investigated the factors contributing to speaking anxiety in oral presentation-based assessments among English Language Teaching (ELT) students and their strategies to overcome it. The findings revealed three primary domains of speaking anxiety: discomfort in speaking English, communication anxiety, and test anxiety. Discomfort in speaking English was mostly caused by the fear of speaking without preparation and low self-confidence due to comparing oneself with peers. Communication anxiety was mainly the result of feeling nervous before presenting and worrying about being judged for making mistakes. Test anxiety was strongly affected by the awareness that the presentation would be graded and the pressure to meet the instructor's expectations.

To manage these anxieties, students commonly used strategies such as practicing the presentation multiple times, utilizing breathing and relaxation techniques, preparing cue cards or outlines, thinking positively, and practicing in front of a mirror or recording themselves. These findings are consistent with existing theories of language anxiety and stress management, reinforcing the importance of thorough preparation and self-management techniques.

This study contributes to the field by focusing on speaking anxiety in oral presentation-based assessments among ELT students. Unlike previous studies that mostly discussed general speaking anxiety, this research highlights the specific causes of anxiety in presentation-based assessment and the strategies students use to cope. The results provide useful insights for improving student well-being and learning in language classes. It also shows the importance of creating a supportive classroom environment where students feel safe from judgment and have chances to practice and receive feedback to help reduce anxiety. For future research, exploring the effectiveness of certain methods, such as public speaking training programs or peer support initiatives, in reducing speaking anxiety and improving presentation performance among ELT students could be helpful. Investigating the long-term impact of these strategies on students' overall language proficiency and confidence in public speaking would also be a valuable contribution to this study.

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