

Speaking Anxiety Among Indonesian Undergraduate Students in Argumentative Speaking Classes

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Abstract

The aims of this research are: (1) to determine the level of speaking anxiety among Indonesian undergraduate students, especially in argumentative speaking classes; (2) to identify factors that influence students' speaking anxiety in argumentative speaking classes; and (3) to explore students' strategies for overcoming their speaking anxiety in argumentative speaking classes. This research was conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. The participants were 3rd-semester students of the English Language Education Department. The research method used in this research is qualitative descriptive. Data collection was carried out through the Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire from (Horwitz, 1986) in (Zhang, 2024), and interviews. To obtain data validity, researchers applied methodological triangulation. Next, the qualitative data was analyzed using the model proposed by Miles and Huberman in (Purbaya et al., 2024) with the following steps: data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusion. The research revealed that: (1) 48% of students suffer from moderate levels of anxiety, namely students become nervous or restless when their speaking ability seems hampered, (2) 6 factors cause speaking anxiety in students, namely; level of English proficiency, fear of making mistake, low self-esteem, lack of preparation, motivation, learning techniques; and (3) students use four effective strategies such as preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer-seeking strategy to overcome their anxious feelings.

Keywords: Speaking, Foreign language anxiety, Argumentative speaking, Factors, Learning strategy

INTRODUCTION

Speaking anxiety is a common issue among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, particularly in the context of Indonesian undergraduate students. (Rachmawati & Jurianto, 2020), (Fasya et al., 2023), (Sholikhah & Isnaini, 2024) stated that speaking anxiety is a serious issue among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. This issue can significantly hinder students' ability to communicate effectively

in academic contexts, especially during speaking classes where the articulation of thoughts and arguments is crucial.

Argumentative speaking is one of the abilities/skills that students must master because with this skills students can provide arguments on a particular controversial topic. (Maghfiroh & Hikmat, 2023) stated that argumentative speaking/speech is a type of persuasive presentation where the speaker aims to persuade the listener or audience to

change their mind on a controversial topic based on strong facts and evidence. Argumentative speaking generally discusses topics that are currently being debated by society, such as the latest controversial issues or topics. These topics come from political debates and issues that often appear in the media. The topics chosen can be ethical, social, political, religious, etc. The audience should be challenged to re-think their long-held values and asked to reconsider their deeply held opinions/beliefs based on new evidence or perspectives on the issue being discussed.

In arguing, especially when using English, students have problems that are almost the same as speaking skill problems in general, but the problem here is more intense because students need sharp thinking to make an argument. (Maghfiroh & Hikmat, 2023) also stated that the challenge when students make argumentative speeches is that when speaking/expressing opinions, students appear to stutter, are confused about vocabulary, and feel excessively anxious. Likewise, when making videos and debates, most students have great difficulty in expressing the sentences they will say.

Many factors can influence the ability to speak argumentatively, speaking English sharply as a foreign language, such as knowledge of vocabulary, grammar rules, and feelings of anxiety before and during speaking. This is in line with a statement that challenges in English-speaking performance for non-native speakers include vocabulary, grammar, anxiety, adjustment to linguistic difficulties, reliance on the mother tongue, and inhibition Woodrow as quoted in (Suciati, 2020). Students will feel afraid, nervous, and panic when asked to speak English, they stutter and often refuse if the teacher or someone asks them to speak English; they prefer silence to speaking. These characteristics indicate that students experience symptoms of speaking anxiety.

From this information, researchers assume the most influential factor in making students experience difficulties is a high level of anxiety, students may not know exactly what factors cause their anxiety; and don't know how to deal with their anxiety, especially when speaking argumentatively. This causes them to be unable to stop the anxiety they experience. Problems should not be allowed to continue because they can affect the development of students' English, especially in argumentative speaking.

There has been previous research that discusses speaking anxiety, namely research that discusses speaking anxiety that focused on junior high school students conducted by (Marpaung & Fithriani, 2023), (Hidayati et al., 2022), (Dwiyanti et al., 2024), (Meyriza et al., 2024), (Mateo & Suganob, 2024). Another researches that discuss speaking anxiety focusing on high school students has also been conducted by (Rahayu, 2024), (Marlia et al., 2023), (Zuhri et al., 2022), (Nuridzdzati & Akhiriyah, 2023), (Roul Sinadia et al., 2023). Research that discusses speaking anxiety at the college level, research still focuses on general speaking courses, such as that conducted by (Ikhsaniyah, 2022), (Nuradilla, 2023), (Sana et al., 2024), (Marliana & Yuyu, 2023), (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020), (Radjuni et al., 2024), (Aeni, 2020), (Martiningsih et al., 2024), (Nurahman et al., 2023), (Syahfutra, 2021). The results of previous research from junior high school, senior high school, and college stated that the average student still had anxiety, ranging from mildly anxious to very anxious. There are several factors that influence students' speaking anxiety that were found from previous research, starting from the level of English proficiency, self-esteem, fear of making mistake, and various other factors. And there are also strategies that they use, namely preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, etc.

Previous studies at the college level have not studied speaking anxiety in argumentative speaking classes, they still focus on general speaking courses so researchers are interested in studying speaking anxiety that focuses in argumentative speaking classes or one of the classes in college that discusses the procedures for good and correct argumentative speaking. Thus, "Speaking Anxiety Among Indonesian Undergraduate Students in Argumentative Speaking Classes" is a new and interesting study because many Indonesian students experience anxiety when speaking argumentatively in English because in argumentative speaking, apart from mastery of the material, there are also many other factors that influence it. This can affect their ability to speak argumentatively. This research will discuss the level of student anxiety, the factors that influence it, and the strategies used by learners/students to overcome their speaking anxiety in argumentative speaking classes.

METHODOLOGY

This research uses qualitative descriptive research. As said by Ary in (Anjarani et al., 2022) The focus of qualitative research is to understand social phenomena from the perspective of the participants who participate in this research. It is understood that this research involves human participants to describe the events. This study was conducted in Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta precisely at the argumentative speaking class. The participants consisted of 25 third-semester students of the Department of English Education. There are two data sources used in this research, namely Questionnaire FLCAS/Questionnaire for Students' Anxiety and Interview. In collecting data, researchers used the Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by (Horwitz, 1986) in

(Zhang, 2024) as a tool to classify students into high to low levels of anxiety, and Interviews to find out the factors that influence students' speaking anxiety and what strategies are used to overcome their speaking anxiety in argumentative speaking classes. Researchers used qualitative data analysis to examine the data. First, researchers used FLCAS scoring to analyze students' anxiety levels. 33 items in the FLCAS are analyzed with a five-point type scale, allowing students to express the level of agreement or disagreement with a given statement: (SA) Strongly Agree, (A) Agree, (N) Neutral, (D) Disagree, and (SD) Strongly Disagree. Then, for each student who responded to the questionnaire, it was calculated which level of anxiety they fell into (Very anxious: 33-65, Anxious: 66-86, mildly anxious: 87-107, relaxed: 108-123, very relaxed: 124-165). After that, for each level of anxiety, the total number of students in that level is calculated and converted into a percentage. Then for the cause and solution of students' speaking anxiety, researchers use three steps involved in data analysis, according to Miles & Huberman in (Purbaya et al., 2024): Data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing or verification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. The Level of Students' Speaking Anxiety

According to the third chapter, the FLCAS questionnaire is used in research to classify students' anxiety levels in argumentative speaking, while interviews were used to collect information of importance towards the analysis needs of data, like factors that influence students and strategies for dealing with them. Based on the data that has been analyzed through the FLCAS scoring, the researchers were finally able to answer the anxiety levels of students in argumentative speaking classes. The

percentage of students at each level of anxiety is presented in the table below.

Table 1. FLCAS Scoring

Level	Range	Total	Percentage
Very anxious	33-65	2 students	8%
Anxious	66-86	8 students	32%
Mildly anxious	87-107	12 students	48%
Relaxed	108-123	-	-
Very relaxed	124-165	3 students	12%

Based on the category, it can be observed in the table that the majority of learners or students have a score range between 87-107, the percentage is 48 percent, indicating that students' speaking anxiety is generally "Mildly Anxious". Then followed by 8 students with an anxious level with a percentage of 32%, and 2 students with a very anxious level with a percentage of 8%. From the results of the table, it was shown the most students felt anxious and afraid when speaking argumentatively in front of the class. From the results of the data obtained, the students' relaxed level in the argumentative speaking class was non-existent and the very relaxed level was only 3 out of 25 students with a frequency of 12%. This means that only 3 students did not feel anxious or stressed and 22 students felt anxious when speaking in argumentative speaking class.

2. Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

There are several factors that influence the speaking anxiety experienced by Indonesian undergraduate students in argumentative speaking classes, these factors include:

1. **Low English Proficiency:** Many students struggle with the English language, which can lead to anxiety

and feelings of inadequacy when speaking argumentatively in English. As mentioned by students' number 5 and 6 "I just don't prepare enough, it's like I don't study enough and it's hard to choose English vocabulary because there's a lack of vocabulary" and "For me, because I don't understand the issue that will be the topic of conversation, especially when the counter team asks difficult questions about that issue, it makes me confused and answers as I know". Students who have a low level of English proficiency mostly experience difficulty in speaking argumentatively. The lack of students' English proficiency makes it difficult for them to find the right words, form sentences, and communicate ideas or messages in argumentative speaking activities.

2. **Fear of Making Mistakes:** The fear of making mistakes while speaking can be a significant source of anxiety for students, especially when they are not confident in their language skills. As mentioned by students 4 and 2 "Personally, because I'm an introvert, my mentality isn't strong enough to speak, so I'm less confident and afraid of making mistake, especially if I'm wrong, I'm afraid my friends will laugh" and "Because this is an exam so I feel afraid every time I speak, I feel nervous, afraid, excited. I'm afraid I'll make a mistake, I also suddenly go blank so I stammer when I speak". Fear of making mistakes, this fear is related to the issue of correction and also negative evaluation. Furthermore, this is greatly influenced by the fear of students being teased or laughed at by their friends and corrected by teachers.

3. **Low Self-esteem:** Learners or students with low self-esteem, may feel more anxious when speaking argumentatively in front of others, as they are more likely to doubt their abilities and fear being judged. As mentioned by student's number 4 and 1 "Personally, because I'm an introvert, my mentality isn't strong enough to speak, so I'm less confident and afraid of making mistake, especially if I'm wrong, I'm afraid my friends will laugh" and "Maybe when the lecturer called me to give an argumentative speech, I felt a little shaky and really nervous, I wasn't confident about speaking in front of a lot of people, plus I was also nervous, nervous and afraid of making a mistake." They always underestimate their abilities by comparing them with others. Students who have low self-esteem normally compare their appearances with others, and they become more anxious and nervous when a person has more abilities than them.
4. **Lack of Preparation:** students who are less well-prepared for a speaking task may experience higher levels of anxiety because they do not know precisely what to say or how they should set up their arguments. As mentioned by student number 5 "I just don't prepare enough, it's like I don't study enough and it's hard to choose English vocabulary because there's a lack of vocabulary." Students will struggle with the classes because they have not prepared anything before coming to class. Moreover, the lack of preparation will make them confused and don't know what to talk about.
5. **Motivation:** Students who are not motivated to participate in the

speaking activity may feel more anxious, as they are less likely to engage fully and may worry about the outcome. As mentioned by student number 7 "Because I'm not fluent in English, it's a bit difficult for me to take this class, I feel anxious, nervous, afraid, etc. Therefore, before the exam, I practiced more, and thank God I got quite good results." It is important to pay attention to motivation because it can affect whether or not learners are willing to reason in English. If learners or students have a clear motivation to become better speakers, they will have more interest and skill in arguing in English.

6. **Learning techniques:** Students who are not familiar with the learning techniques used in the argumentative speaking class, may feel more anxious and uncertain about how to perform well. As mentioned by student number 3 "More nervous than regular English speaking because you have to speak according to the correct method (AREL). Ordinary speaking might be easier without the AREL method" Lecturers with the right learning techniques can be a solution to increase student speaking participation. If it is felt that students are not familiar with this technique, the lecturer can provide further explanation via WhatsApp groups or students themselves who take the initiative to learn about this method.

3. Strategies to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

To overcome speaking anxiety, students use various strategies, there are several strategies for students to overcome their speaking anxiety. In this research, researchers found 4 strategies used by the students to overcome their anxiety in

speaking English namely preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer-seeking strategy.

1. **Preparation:** Students often prepare extensively before speaking to feel more confident and reduce their anxiety. As mentioned by students' numbers 5,6 and 7 "My advice is to practice more speaking, especially argumentative speaking, using the AREL method to make it easier to face the exam". "Prepare for the debate thoroughly by practicing speaking in front of the mirror, watching professional English debates, and being more updated with the latest situation / frequently reading news that is currently viral. (practice makes perfect)" and "I usually practice by watching films/listening to songs in English and then translating them into my mother tongue to increase my vocabulary. And also because this is an argumentative class, I watch good and correct debates to be better prepared for the exam".
2. **Relaxation Techniques:** Techniques such as deep breathing and visualization are used to calm the mind and reduce students' anxiety. As mentioned by students numbers 1 and 2 "I usually overcome it by controlling my breath and encouraging myself by thinking I can do it" and "If I'm anxious, I usually overcome it by controlling my breath and don't be afraid of making mistake because this is a class that frees us to have opinions (speak argumentatively)."
3. **Positive Thinking:** Students try to maintain a positive mindset by focusing on their strengths and the importance of the topic they are discussing. As mentioned by student

number 4 "The point is, don't be afraid of criticism from friends or teachers, with this criticism you can be better than before."

4. **Peer Seeking tactic:** Seeking support from peers can help students feel less isolated and more confident in their abilities. As mentioned by student number 3 "Get out of your comfort zone (don't be lazy/ afraid to speak) Practice more on the first one, secondly, if possible, find a partner who has mastered the material and invite them to practice together".

DISCUSSION

In this section, the researcher will present the overall findings from the research data collected to answer the research questions in this article: the level of students' speaking anxiety, factors that influence students, and the strategies students use to overcome their speaking anxiety.

Based on the results or findings of this research, the majority of students in the third semester of the Department of English Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta precisely in the argumentative speaking class are at the mildly anxious and anxious level, and students with very relaxed and very anxious levels are a minority in this research. Then, from the results of the interviews it was discovered that not only students with low anxiety started to experience anxiety or nervousness when speaking argumentatively, but students with high anxiety also experienced the same thing.

The second point raised from the findings was the factors that influence students' speaking anxiety. At least, six factors were found to influence students' speaking participation: the low level of English proficiency, low self-esteem, fear of making mistakes, lack of preparation, motivation, and learning techniques.

This research is similar to the findings of (Nuradilla, 2023), researchers found 2 similarities between these studies: low level of English proficiency, and fear of making mistakes. Furthermore, researchers also found 2 similarities with the findings (Ikhsaniyah, 2022), namely low self-esteem, and lack of preparation. Researchers also found similarities with the findings (Taqwa, 2022) researchers found similarities between these studies: motivation. One of the different factors or new findings of this research is learning techniques.

The level of English proficiency is one of the factors that causes speaking anxiety. As stated by (Nuradilla, 2023) English proficiency is the factor that causes the most anxiety in influencing students to speak English in class. A low level of English proficiency can serve as a language barrier for students, especially in argumentative speaking classes. Language barriers such as a lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, and bad pronunciation have been identified as causes of anxiety among foreign language learners when speaking the target language. Therefore, students with a low level of English proficiency will experience difficulties in argumentative speaking class activities.

The second factor is fear of making mistakes. In relation to the fear of making mistakes, this is related to problems with correctness from teachers/lecturers and negative assessments from peers. As stated by (Nuradilla, 2023), most foreign language learners will tend to think that other people will judge them negatively. Thus, students will prefer to remain silent rather than risk failing, and will lower their self-confidence in front of many people.

The next factor is low self-esteem. Students with low self-esteem tend to compare themselves to others and feel anxious and nervous when someone has superior qualities. (Ikhsaniyah, 2022) stated

that many students feel that their English skills are far below those of their friends, giving rise to feelings of anxiety and fear that their friends will laugh and make fun of them when they speak. This happens because they think too much about other people's opinions about themselves. As a result, students' self-esteem will cause them to become more nervous when speaking argumentatively and feel anxious when arguing in front of many people.

The fourth factor is a lack of preparation. Knowledge of the material being discussed is something that students need to pay attention to before speaking argumentatively. Students or learners who have not prepared before entering the class will feel difficult and anxious in class because they have not mastered the material/topic. This finding is in line with a researcher named (Ikhsaniyah, 2022) He also suggested that students need to prepare carefully before speaking. So that students know what they want to talk about and reduce the worries they feel. If students do not have sufficient preparation for learning, they will feel more anxious when they speak in front of many people.

The fifth factor is motivation. The high desire of students to master the skills of argumentative speaking may influence students' argumentative speaking abilities to a great extent. When students have clear motives to become better speakers, students will be more interested in speaking and enthusiastic about learning argumentative speaking in English if they have a strong desire to improve their speaking skills. (Taqwa, 2022) stated that when students have a clear motivation to improve their English speaking skills, it will enhance their interest in speaking English. When students have strong and clear motivation, their desire to learn speaking abilities grows, and they become more confident in the classroom.

The final factor is learning techniques. Lecturers with the right learning techniques can be a solution to improve students' speaking skills, especially in argumentative speaking. In arguing, the speaker must use an effective delivery technique, namely the AREL technique (Sri Wahyuni et al., 2020) AREL is an abbreviation for Assertion, Reason, Evidence, and Link Back. Of course, each learning technique has its difficulties, students who are not familiar with the learning techniques used in argumentative speaking classes, may feel more anxious and unsure of how to perform well.

The third case discussed in this finding is the strategy to reduce students' speaking anxiety. In this study, there are four strategies found to reduce students' anxiety, namely preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer-seeking tactics.

According to (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004) in (Ikhsaniyah, 2022) the students use five strategies to overcome their anxiety in speaking English namely relaxation, preparation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. The strategies found in this study are almost similar but there are slight differences with the strategy stated by Kondo and Ying in (Ikhsaniyah, 2022). However, in this research, the researcher only got four similar strategies namely preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer-seeking tactics.

The first strategy found was preparation. Some students confessed that they had prepared themselves before speaking argumentatively in English. They prepare by reading materials, practicing speaking with friends, practicing speaking in front of a mirror, watching a short film, and making small notes. Several reasons were expressed by students about preparing themselves before speaking English, including to not be less nervous or anxious,

more confident, minimize mistakes, and not sound stiff when speaking English.

The second strategy is relaxation. Relaxation is an action that students or learners do to become calmer when they feel anxious speaking argumentatively in English. Several activities were revealed, which the students normally do to calm themselves, including deep breathing, listening musics, watching films, listening to professional debates through social media, and being updated with the latest news.

The third strategy is positive thinking. Students who strive to think positively when overcoming anxiety about speaking argumentatively in English are confident, optimistic, always eager, and don't think about unimportant things, they are ready to be criticized to become better than before.

The last strategy is the peer-seeking tactic. In this research, learners or students chose to be near their friends to be calmer. Apart from that, they also showed that they could discuss with each other and practice argumentative speaking in English together.

CONCLUSION

Speaking anxiety is a significant issue among Indonesian undergraduate students, particularly in argumentative speaking classes. The majority of students in the argumentative speaking class were at the "Mildly Anxious" level. The research that has been conducted regarding students' speaking anxiety and the factors and solutions to overcome it in argumentative speaking classes is expected to provide new perspectives and find new understandings to help students have a better understanding of themselves. Factors such as low English proficiency, fear of making mistakes, low self-esteem, lack of preparation, motivation, and learning techniques contribute to this anxiety. Students employ various strategies to cope with their anxiety, including preparation, relaxation techniques, positive thinking, and peer-seeking tactics.

Understanding these factors and strategies can help educators and researchers develop more effective interventions to mitigate speaking anxiety and improve students' overall learning experience. Researchers suggest that students should recognize and address their anxiety levels, rather than ignore them, and explore various methods to overcome it. Teachers should understand the causes of student anxiety and find ways to mitigate them, while also helping students develop self-confidence and providing opportunities for them to practice speaking in a relaxed atmosphere. For future researchers, it is recommended to delve deeper into the factors that contribute to anxiety, considering various perspectives such as methods, learning contexts, and student backgrounds.

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