

EFL University Students' Psychological Problems in Speaking

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Abstract

EFL students do not only have linguistic problems but also psychological problems when learning English. The present study aims to describe psychological problems in speaking. This study is conducted under descriptive design. Participants in this study were 20 fifth-semester students of the English Education Department, Universitas PGRI Sumatera. The instrument used in this study is an online questionnaire. The findings indicate that although anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes are significant problems, respondents showed a generally neutral attitude toward these problems. However, the presence of these psychological barriers, coupled with a lack of motivation, suggests that targeted interventions are needed to improve English-speaking performance among respondents.

Keywords: EFL, Psychological Problems, Speaking Skills.

Introduction

Speaking skills are very important when learning a second or foreign language. The success of language learning is measured by the learners' performance in speaking the language they are learning. Most people who learn a language will be able to speak so that they can communicate. Speaking is one of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Speaking will also be used twice as much as reading and writing in our communication, speaking is usually compared to writing, and both are referred to as productive skills. Speaking is also defined as constructing meaning that involves the production, reception, and processing of information. Form and meaning depend on the context of the participants speaking goals (Burns, 2022). According to (Leong and Ahmadi 2017) speaking is one of the most important skills to be developed and improved as a strong communication system. In addition, speaking is the main approach to human communication (Afshar and Asakereh, 2016). Speaking also helps to establish communication with people around and get a lot of knowledge information, expand friendships and easily establish relationships with others. In addition, students who increase their vocabulary find it is easier to communicate in expressing opinions, ideas, feelings, and learning concepts.

Meanwhile as (Joesoef, 2022) states, speaking is one of the most difficult skills that students have to deal with. Speaking is considered the most important skill of the four English language skills. According to (Srinivas, Rao 2019) the capacity to speak English is very crucial in humans' lives. Language has social characteristics in which conversation seems to interact with different to expressing ideas and responding opinion. There are a few approaches to improve speaking for example by practicing English regularly with friends. In additional to (Wulandari, 2022), communication will be effective if the interlocutor can understand what the speaker intended. According (Leong and Ahmadi 2017) there are five components of speaking skills concerned with pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Methods

This research used descriptive quantitative research methods. Sugiyono (2016:7) explains that quantitative research methods are methods based on the philosophy of positivism, used to examine the sample and research population. Quantitative research is research that presents data in the form of numbers as results of the research. The descriptive research method is an internal method research into the status of a human group, an object, a condition, a thought or current events. Descriptive methods are used to create a picture or a systematic, factual and accurate description of a phenomenon. Quantitative descriptive research is research that describes variables as they are supported by data in the form of numbers resulting from actual conditions.

Based on the statement above, this research would be categorized into quantitative descriptive research. The research method used is a survey method. According to (Sugiyono, 2010) survey research is "research conducted on large or small populations". Researcher used this type of research, namely describing situational conditions from data through questionnaires. The results of the analysis are to describe and explain in detail the analysis of students' problems in speaking as performance in the English Language Education Department.

Participants are important in research. In this study, the participants would be fifth semester students of the year 2022 intake majoring in English Education at the Universitas PGRI Sumatera Barat with a total of twenty participants. In this research, an online questionnaire instrument would be used by a Google form. Questionnaire is a data collection technique that is carried out by giving a set of written statements that are closed or open to the respondent for them to answer. The questionnaire that would be used in online data collection is a closed questionnaire with eighteen items. The answer scores are arranged based on the Likert scale.

Result and Discussion

Research conducted on psychological problems of speaking performance, respondents gave answers that anxiety some felt neutral towards statements related to anxiety, with 60% being neutral when asked if they felt nervous speaking in front of the class and 60% also being neutral when asked about anxiety when speaking in English. This shows that although anxiety is present, anxiety may not be a dominant factor for most respondents. However, there are indications of mild anxiety, especially with physical symptoms such as sweating or shaking when speaking in front of others.

Shyness appears to be a notable concern, with 50% of respondents feeling neutral about being too shy to speak English even when they know the answer, and 55% preferring to stay quiet in English class out of fear of being caught. This indicates that shyness significantly impacts the willingness of respondents to engage in English speaking activities, potentially hindering their language development. Confidence in English speaking abilities is a major issue, with 70% of respondents doubting their ability to speak English well.

Insecurity about pronunciation was also common, with 35% being neutral and 30% disagreeing with statements regarding confidence in their pronunciation. This lack of confidence is likely a significant barrier to effective communication in English. Motivation to improve English speaking skills is relatively low among the respondents. For instance, 30% disagreed with being motivated to improve their English speaking ability, and 55% were neutral about seeing the point in practicing English. This lack of motivation may stem from the perceived difficulty or lack of enjoyment in speaking English, as evidenced by the 35% who were neutral about enjoying English speaking.

The fear of making mistakes is a prevalent concern, with 55% of respondents being neutral and 30% agreeing that they are afraid of making mistakes when speaking English. Additionally, the worry about being laughed at by classmates was evident, with 55% neutral and 20% disagreeing with this fear. This suggests that the fear of judgment by peers is a significant factor that may discourage active participation in English speaking. The finding from questionnaire can be seen below:

1. Anxiety

The majority of respondents (60%) reported feeling neutral when asked if they feel nervous speaking in front of the class, with only 5% strongly agreeing. 60% also reported feeling neutral about anxiety when asked to speak in English, while 15% disagreed. 50% of respondents reported neutral feelings about sweating or shaking when speaking in front of others, with a smaller percentage (25%) disagreeing. On average, anxiety was prevalent, but most respondents did not strongly agree with the statements related to anxiety.

Table 1. Questionnaire Result on Anxiety

No	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	I feel nervous when I have to speak in front of the class.	5%	25%	60%	10%	0%
2	I often feel anxious when asked to speak in English	0%	25%	60%	15%	0%
3	When I have to speak in front of others, my hands often sweat or shake.	5%	15%	50%	25%	5%
4	I have difficulty concentrating because of anxiety when speaking in public	5%	30%	50%	15%	0%

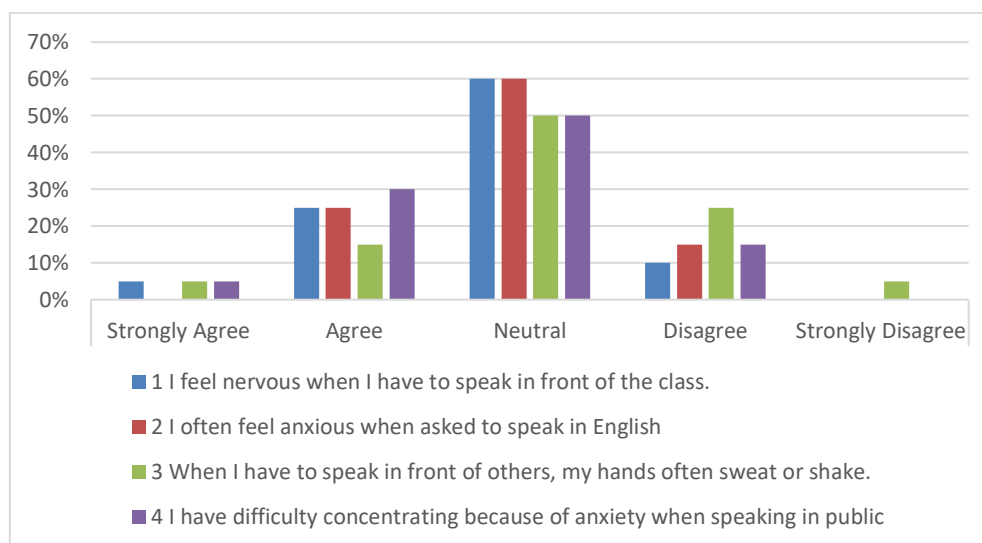


Figure 1. Questionnaire Result on Anxiety

2. Shyness

Half of the respondents (50%) were neutral about feeling shy when speaking English even if they know the answer, with 25% agreeing. 55% preferred to stay quiet in class, indicating fear of being caught or corrected, with only 5% strongly agreeing. Shyness seemed to be a significant issue, with respondents mostly indicating neutral to moderate levels of shyness. The data provided highlights the issue of shyness in speaking English in an academic context. Here is an analysis of the findings: 1. Neutral Responses about Shyness: 50% of respondents were neutral about feeling shy when speaking English, even when they knew the answer. This suggests that the majority of participants were either unsure or indifferent about their shyness. This may indicate a tendency to be unsure or reluctant to admit shyness, or that they only experience shyness in a mild

way, not strong enough to affect their confidence. Agreement about Shyness 25% agreed that they felt shy when speaking English even when they knew the answer, indicating that a quarter of respondents did recognize shyness as a problem.

Table 2. Questionnaire Result on Shyness

No	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5	I feel too shy to speak English, even when I know the answer	0%	25%	50%	20%	5%
6	I prefer to stay quiet in English class because I am afraid of being caught	5%	15%	55%	25%	0%
7	I often avoid speaking English because I am shy	10%	10%	45%	35%	0%

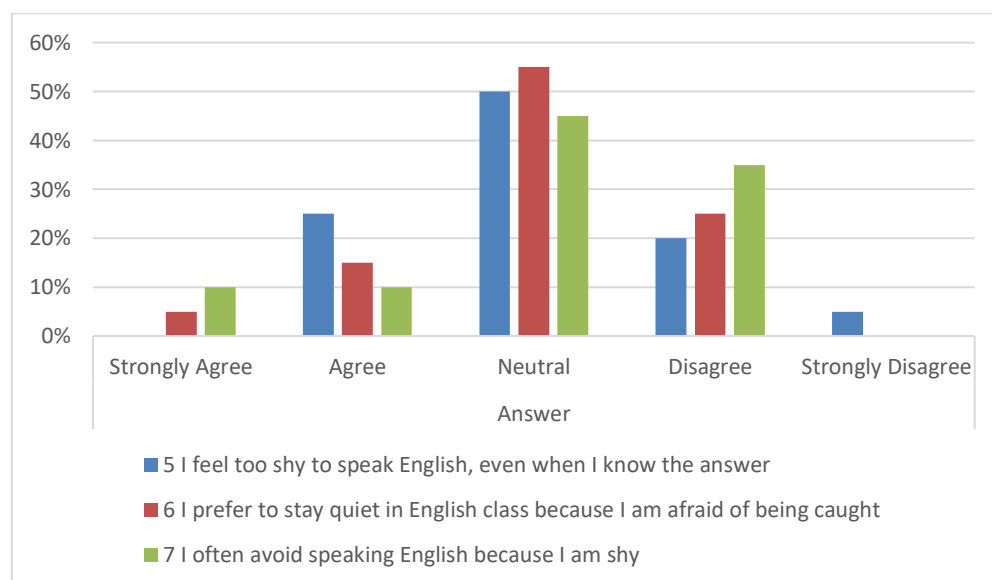


Figure 2. Questionnaire Result on Shyness

3. Lack of Confidence

A significant portion (70%) doubted their ability to speak English well, with a minimal percentage strongly agreeing or disagreeing. Insecurity about pronunciation was common, with 35% being neutral and 30% disagreeing. 65% of respondents were neutral about lacking confidence in their ability to speak English, with a small percentage (15%) disagreeing.

Table 3. Questionnaire Result on Lack of Confidence

No	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8	I doubt my ability to speak English well	10%	10%	70%	10%	0%
9	I feel insecure about my English pronunciation	5%	30%	35%	30%	0%
10	I believe that my English speaking ability is not good enough	0%	45%	35%	15%	5%
11	I hesitate to speak English because I lack confidence in my ability	0%	15%	65%	20%	0%

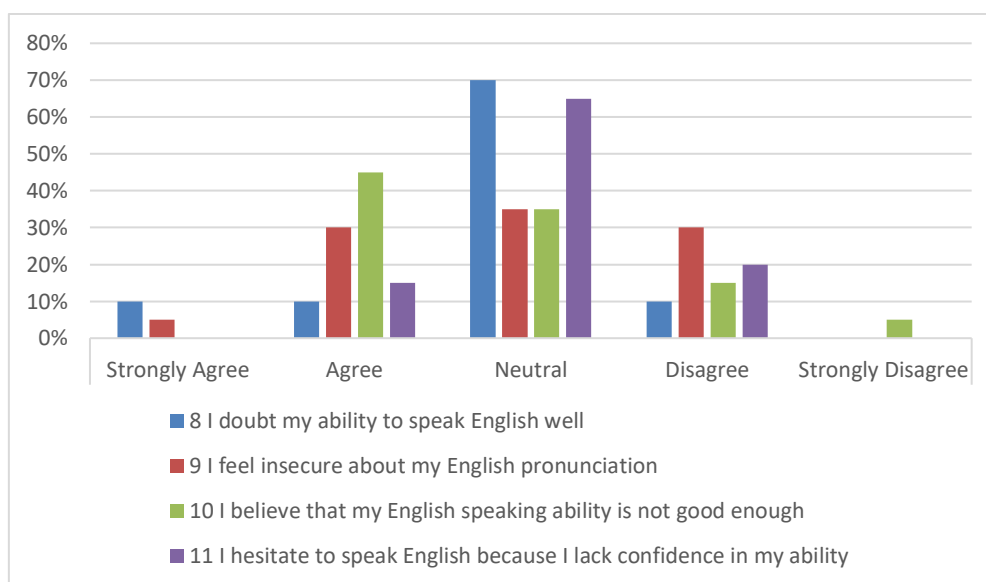


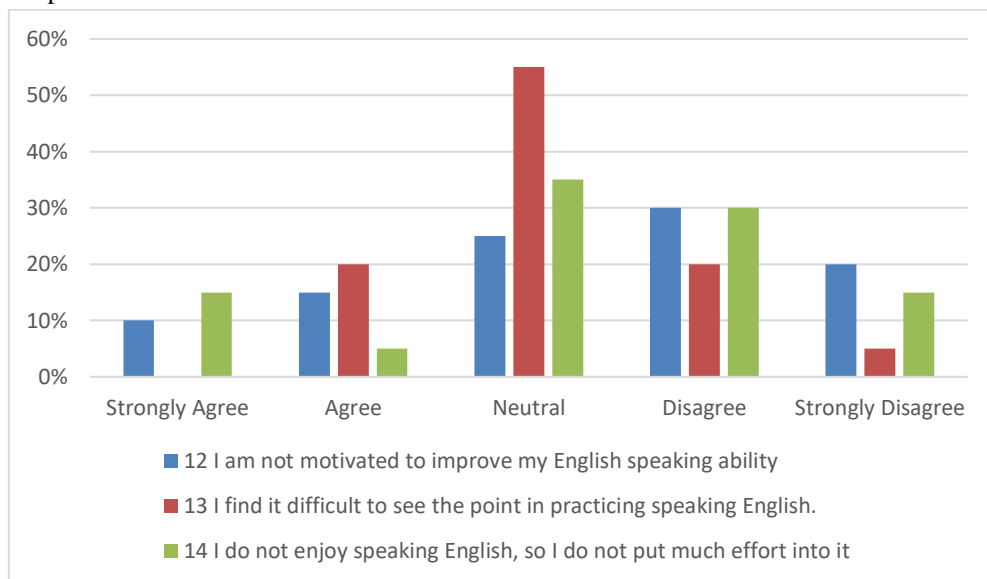
Figure 3. Questionnaire Result on Lack of Confidence

4. Lack of Motivation

Motivation to improve English speaking skills was lacking, with 30% disagreeing and 25% being neutral. The responses showed difficulty in seeing the point of practicing English, with 55% being neutral and 20% agreeing. A moderate lack of motivation was evident among respondents, with many not enjoying speaking English.

Table 4. Questionnaire Result on Lack of Motivation

No	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12	I am not motivated to improve my English speaking ability	10%	15%	25%	30%	20%
13	I find it difficult to see the point in practicing speaking English.	0%	20%	55%	20%	5%
14	I do not enjoy speaking English, so I do not put much effort into it	15%	5%	35%	30%	15%

**Figure 4. Questionnaire Result on Lack of Motivation**

5. Fear of Making Mistakes

Respondents were neutral 55% about the fear of making mistakes when speaking English, while 30% agreed. The fear of classmates laughing at mistakes was neutral to moderate, with 55% neutral and 20% disagreeing. Overall, the fear of making mistakes was a significant factor affecting speaking performance, with most respondents tending to be neutral but still showing signs of worry.

Table 5. Questionnaire Result on Fear of Making Mistakes

No	Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15	I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking English	0%	30%	55%	15%	0%
16	I am worried that my classmates will laugh at me if I make mistakes in English	0%	20%	55%	20%	5%
17	I prefer to remain silent rather than risk making mistakes when speaking English	5%	30%	45%	20%	0%
18	Making mistakes in English makes me feel embarrassed.	10%	25%	40%	25%	0%

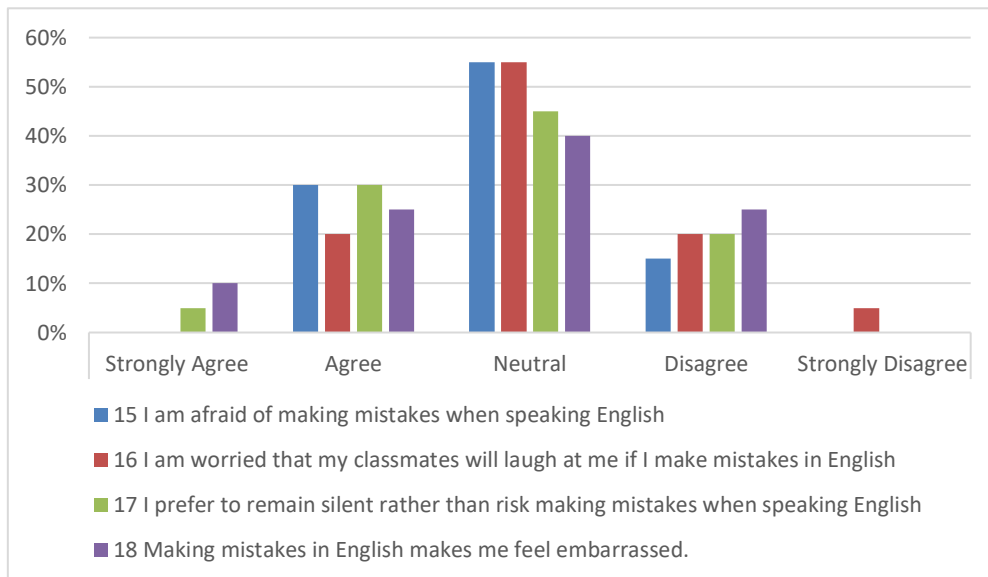


Figure 5. Questionnaire Result on Fear of Making Mistakes

Based on explanation above, 30% students choosing agree and 50-60% students choosing neutral when answering questionnaire about anxiety factor. Anxiety is the sense of panic attacks. It is an emotional response that occurs while speaking. According to (Collins Cobuild in Zsuzsa, 2010) anxiety is a sensation of nervousness and worries about something. According to (Suleimenova, 2020) anxiety is described as mental discomfort or disquiet brought on by a fear of danger or catastrophe. Anxiety is a negative manner of expressing human emotions. Anxiety is an unpleasant or affective state that individuals desire to avoid or get rid of it. It is approximately as synonym for a variety of fear.

Then, 25% students choosing agree and 45-55% students choosing neutral when answering questionnaire about shyness factor. Shy students may avoid speaking in class, even when they know the correct answers or have something meaningful to contribute. This avoidance behaviour can lead to missed opportunities for practice and improvement in language skills. Shyness often leads to a reluctance to participate in classroom activities, which in turn limits the opportunities for students to

practice and develop their speaking skills (Brown, 2007). Then, Shyness can inhibit a student's fluency, as the fear of being judged or making a mistake causes them to speak less and with more hesitation (Horwitz & Young, 1991). Also, shyness not only affects a student's willingness to speak but can also lead to social isolation, further reinforcing the cycle of anxiety and avoidance (Dornyei, 2005).

Further, 45% students choosing agree and 65-70% students choosing neutral when answering questionnaire about lack of confidence. Students who lack confidence often hesitate before speaking, which results in frequent pauses, disrupted speech, and difficulty in maintaining the flow of conversation. A lack of confidence can cause students to hesitate and second-guess themselves, leading to fragmented speech and reduced fluency (Brown, 2007). Moreover, students who lack confidence often avoid speaking situations, which further deprives them of the practice necessary to build their language skills (Dornyei, 2005). Then, this limits their linguistic range and prevents them from developing more advanced language skills. When confidence is lacking, students tend to stick to simple language, avoiding complex structures that could lead to errors (Macintyre & Gardner, 1994)

Furthermore, 20% students choosing agree and 55% students choosing neutral when answering questionnaire about lack of motivation. This lack of engagement results in limited language development. A lack of motivation is often manifested in reduced effort and minimal engagement in speaking tasks, which hinders language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2001). When motivation is low, students tend to procrastinate and avoid speaking tasks, which perpetuates a cycle of poor performance and further demotivation (Williams & Burden, 1997). Without motivation, students are unlikely to challenge themselves, resulting in stagnation or even regression in their language skills (Ushioda, 2008).

Moreover, 30% students choosing agree and 55 % students choosing neutral when answering questionnaire about fear of making mistakes. The fear of making mistakes can paralyze students, leading to unwillingness to engage in speaking activities and ultimately hindering language acquisition (Horwitz, 2001). Students who are overly concerned about making mistakes tend to restrict their language use to what they know is safe, which limits their growth as language learners (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). When students fear making mistakes, they often develop a negative self-image, which reinforces their reluctance to speak and hampers their language development (Dornyei, 2005).

Conclusion

This study was conducted to determine what psychological problems students face when speaking and what are the most dominant psychological problems faced by students when speaking. Based on what has been discussed, presented, and analyzed, the researcher concluded that overall, the findings indicate that although anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes are significant problems, respondents showed a generally neutral attitude towards these problems. However, the presence of these psychological barriers, coupled with lack of motivation, suggests that targeted interventions are needed to improve English speaking performance among respondents. Efforts to build confidence, reduce shyness, and eliminate fear of making mistakes can be very helpful in improving their speaking ability

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