

## Examining Foreign Language Anxiety's Impact on English Education Students' Speaking Skills at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau

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**Abstract.** Anxiety is widely recognized for its significant impact on language learners' performance, commonly known as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in language learning contexts. A major source of this anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation. This study aimed to investigate how English education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau perceive the fear of negative evaluation in relation to their speaking ability. Using a qualitative approach with a descriptive research method, the study employed convenience sampling to select participants from the English education program. Data collection involved distributing questionnaires and conducting interviews to gain deeper insights into students' perspectives. The findings indicate that a substantial proportion of students (63.2%) reported experiencing fear of negative evaluation during their speaking classes. The primary concern identified among participants was the fear of making mistakes in front of both lecturers and peers, with an overwhelming majority (94.7%) expressing agreement on this issue. This study sheds light on the specific anxieties faced by English education students in a university context, underscoring the pervasive impact of fear of negative evaluation on their language learning experiences. By exploring these perceptions, the study contributes valuable insights into understanding the psychological barriers that hinder students' speaking abilities in the English language classroom. Addressing these anxieties is crucial for developing effective strategies to support students in overcoming their fear and enhancing their language proficiency and confidence.

**Keywords:** English Education Students, Foreign Language Anxiety, Negative Evaluation, Psychological Barriers, Speaking Ability.

### 1 Introduction

English is an international language that has become one of the compulsory subjects at every level of education in Indonesia. Language itself is an essential component of human life, enabling effective communication. In learning English, there are four crucial skills: speaking, writing, reading, and listening. This is also highlighted in a

study conducted at the Evangelical University in Africa (UEA) by Jeff [1], who found that among the four skills in English, speaking is considered one of the most difficult to learn. In his study, Jeff found that speaking was rated as the students' biggest challenge with a below-average rate of 14.27%, followed by writing (6.40% below average rate), reading (6.27% below average rate), and listening (4.80% below average rate) according to Nunan [2].

In June 2022, the researcher conducted interviews with several students of the English Education program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau. When asked about their experiences from the second to the eighth semester, they all shared the same perspective regarding English learning since elementary school, noting that it is a mandatory subject. However, despite this, most of them still find learning English to be difficult.

The general issues among them include difficulty understanding English material, trouble memorizing vocabulary, lack of opportunities to practice speaking in English, an unsupportive environment for speaking English, low self-confidence in expressing themselves in English, and insecurity due to fear of being laughed at by other students when making mistakes in speaking English. It has long been recognized that anxiety significantly impacts language learners' performance. In the context of language learning, this condition is known as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). FLA is a common phenomenon in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes [3]. Zheng [4], states that understanding anxiety as one of the major psychological emotions is the first step in providing the necessary support for anxious second language learners. According to research conducted by Cabaltica & Arcala [5], the results indicate that 28 out of 39 students agreed that the main factor affecting their language performance is the pressure to perform well. The factors of students' lack of confidence and the pressure to perform well occur because both teachers (30% or 8 out of 9) and students (37% or 31 out of 39 students) agreed that students are fearful or anxious about making mistakes, which prevents them from receiving comprehensible input.

This research is necessary to identify the factors of anxiety that can hinder foreign language learning. This includes the fear of negative evaluation, which has been proven to be one of the major contributors to anxiety in foreign language learning. Therefore, this study will explain how the fear of negative evaluation affects the speaking ability of English Education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau.

## **2 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety**

Anxiety is an emotional condition involving unpleasant feelings of worry about current or future events. Brown [6] defines anxiety as an unpleasant feeling, frustration, lack of confidence, fear, and worry. He believed that self-esteem-related anxiety plays a significant role in mastering a second language. In language learning, the anxiety referred to is Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). In Horwitz and Cope's journal [7], foreign language anxiety is described as "a unique and complex construction of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning in the classroom." Similarly, according to Macintyre [8], language anxiety is characterized

as stress, nervousness, emotional reactions, and concerns associated with learning a foreign language.

Foreign language anxiety is also a specific concern in situations caused by the uniqueness of formal foreign language learning, particularly insecurity in language abilities [9]. Horwitz et al. [10] emphasize three main sources of language anxiety influencing anxious feelings in language learning: 1) communication anxiety, 2) test anxiety, and 3) fear of negative evaluation.

## 2.2 The Fear of Negative Evaluation

Yokus [11] defines fear of negative evaluation as a state of fear and anxiety where individuals worry about being negatively judged, ridiculed, or belittled by others in interpersonal relationships. Fear of negative evaluation prioritizes perceptions of others' views or evaluations [3][7]. This fear is central to many conceptualizations of social anxiety [12]. Aydin [13] explains that fear of negative evaluation arises when students feel incapable of making a good social impression, leading to anxiety about others' judgments.

According to Shabani's research [14], it was found that the primary causes of fear of negative evaluation include fear of receiving a bad impression from others, fear of making mistakes, fear of negative perceptions from others, and fear of being judged incorrectly. Kitano [15] believes that the demands and difficulties of language courses, as well as class size, can be sources of fear of negative evaluation among students. Idri [16] found that interaction, evaluation, language proficiency, and error correction are the primary sources of fear of negative evaluation, based on interviews with eight students in her study.

## 2.3 Speaking Ability

According to Hughes [17], speaking is the initial process through which children learn language; it is an integral part of daily life for many people in language activities and serves as a primary driver of language change. Additionally, Nunan [2] explains that speaking involves the ability to systematically produce verbal utterances to convey meaning. Speaking ability refers to one's capability to articulate words or communicate sounds using the ordinary voice, enabling individuals to express ideas, share information, or communicate thoughts with others.

Recent studies on foreign language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation include Aguila & Harjanto [18], who investigate contributing factors to foreign language anxiety and its impact on students' speaking abilities. Madaci & Tighilet-Ikene [19] examine the influence of fear of negative evaluation on oral performance among first-year English students at universities. Wardhani [3] explores fear of negative evaluation in foreign language anxiety among Indonesian students in speaking classes.

In this research methodology, the researcher employs two main instruments. First, questionnaires are distributed to students enrolled in the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau. The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect data regarding students' perceptions of the fear of negative evaluation. After collecting the data from the questionnaires, interviews are conducted with the participating

students to delve deeper into the factors of fear of negative evaluation from their perspective.

### 3 Method

The approach of this research is qualitative, where the researcher collects, categorizes, analyzes, and draws conclusions from the data to understand phenomena such as behavior and motivation holistically and descriptively in a natural context [20]. The method used is descriptive, aiming to accurately describe the facts and characteristics of the research subject [21]. Descriptive research focuses on a single variable [22]. A survey design is used in this research, with questionnaires and interviews as the research instruments.

In research, the population is the entire group that is the focus of attention, consisting of specific subjects or individuals. According to Sugiyono [23], a population includes objects or subjects with certain quantities and characteristics chosen for study. In this research, the population consists of 189 students from the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau. The process of selecting individuals from the population for research is called sampling [22]. Due to limited resources and time, the researcher cannot study the entire population and uses sampling to obtain generalizable findings.

The researcher applied the convenience sampling method to determine the research participants. According to Sugiyono [24], convenience sampling is a sampling method that allows the researcher to freely choose the sample. This method was used because speaking ability is an important aspect for every student in the English Education Program, who have experience speaking in class as well as in Speaking 1, Speaking 2, and Speaking 3 courses. Therefore, any student enrolled in the English Education Program can provide useful information. With a population size of 189 students in the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau, the researcher took 10% of the population, resulting in a sample size of 19 students from the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau. This is based on the sampling approach according to Arikunto [25], which states that if the subject of the research is less than 100 people, the entire subject should be taken as the sample. If the subject is large or there are more than 100 people, the sample size can be 10-15% of the whole population.

The researcher applied two data collection techniques, namely questionnaires and interviews. According to Bulmer [26], a questionnaire is a tool for collecting information from participants, encompassing their attitudes, ideas, and beliefs about a specific topic. Data were collected from respondents using a questionnaire. The respondents in this study were given 15 questions about their feelings regarding being evaluated in class by peers and lecturers. The type of interview used by the researcher was semi-structured and in-depth interviews.

According to Boyce & Neale [27], an in-depth interview is a data collection technique used in qualitative research to understand participants' perspectives on a particular issue.

This research was conducted at the Main Campus of Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau, located on Jalan Tuanku Tambusai, Pekanbaru City, Riau Province, Indonesia, in August 2022. The participants of the study were students from the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau. The researcher conducted interviews with students using two methods: face-to-face interviews and via the WhatsApp platform. These interviews aimed to complement the data collected from the questionnaire. The researcher analyzed the interview data using the qualitative analysis technique from De Hoyos & Barnes [28].

The first step was to organize the collected data. Then, the researcher applied codes to describe and categorize the data. After that, the data were connected to each other and finally interpreted to draw conclusions and obtain findings and results from the research.

## 4 Results

The researcher conducted a study and obtained all data through two data collection methods, namely questionnaires and interviews. The data reported by the researcher focused on: "Determining how students perceive fear of negative evaluation in foreign language anxiety regarding their speaking ability, and identifying factors influencing this fear of negative evaluation in foreign language anxiety on students' speaking ability." After distributing the questionnaires, the researcher then processed the data into percentages. The questionnaires were distributed to assess students' perceptions of the fear of negative evaluation in foreign language anxiety concerning their speaking ability.

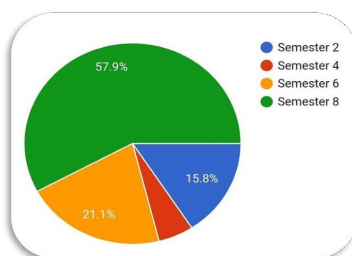


Fig. 1. English Education Program Student.

In this study, the researcher found that the majority of students participating in the research were eighth-semester students, as shown in Figure 1. When grouped by gender, the participants were predominantly female, comprising 89.5% of the total. The researcher formulated questionnaire statements for this study. The questionnaire inquired about the students' fear of being negatively evaluated by others based on their speaking abilities. The descriptive explanation for the data is as follows:

**Table 1.** Percentage of Respondents' Responses.

<b>Questionnaire Statement</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
Afraid of lectures' evaluation	36,8%	63,2%
Concerned about peers noticing their mistakes	78,9%	21,1%
Nervous when speaking in oral classes that they will say or give the wrong answer	63,2%	36,8
Embarrassed of lectures' corrections	68,4%	31,6%
Become discouraged if the lectures' points out and corrects their mistakes	68,4%	31,6%
Worry of peers' judgments	57,9%	42,1%
Worry of making mistakes next to lectures' and peers	94,7%	5,3%
Afraid of speaking in classroom	52,6%	47,4%
Worry about what lectures' and classmates may think	84,2%	15,8%
Get confused if the lectures' interrupts to correct the mistakes	68,4%	31,6%
Lectures' and peers' corrections help improve language proficiency	100%	0%
Worry of being negatively evaluated by teacher and peers	84,2%	15,8%
Classmates comment will affect students's performance	47,4%	52,6%
Classmates comment will affect students's performance	63,2%	36,8%
Already experienced fear of negative evaluation during English Speaking Classes	63,2%	36,8%

Table 1 displays the respondents' answers to the questions designed by the researcher, providing valuable information to support the success of this study. Additionally, the results from the conducted interviews are useful in addressing the second objective of the research, which is to identify the factors contributing to the fear of negative evaluation in foreign language anxiety regarding the speaking ability of English education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau.

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with students from the English Education Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau to explore the factors causing their fear of negative evaluation when speaking English.

Initially, the students discussed their English learning experiences and their feelings towards speaking. Despite starting to learn English in elementary school, many students found it challenging, particularly due to difficulties with grammar and vocabulary. Student 3 noted struggles with grammar rules and a limited vocabulary, a view shared by Students 2, 13, and 19. Student 1 also mentioned issues with pronunciation and word meanings, highlighting the range of challenges faced by the students.

When asked about speaking skills, the students generally found speaking to be the most challenging part of learning English. Student 8 highlighted the difficulty of correct pronunciation, while Student 4 mentioned the struggle due to limited exposure to English from a young age. Student 14 pointed out that mastering pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar is essential for confident speaking, suggesting that these fundamental skills are crucial yet challenging for students. These responses indicate that speaking is particularly anxiety-inducing compared to other skills like listening or reading due to its complexity and the students' perceived shortcomings.

The primary focus of the interviews was to identify the factors contributing to the students' fear of negative evaluation when speaking. Many students reported fear of judgment from peers and lecturers, fear of being laughed at, and anxiety about error correction. For instance, Students 6 and 17 expressed fear of negative judgment and ridicule, while Students 5 and 18 were anxious about making mistakes and being corrected. Additionally, a lack of language proficiency, as noted by Students 17, 19, and 11, led to fear of miscommunication and incorrect word usage. These factors collectively increased the students' anxiety and fear of negative evaluation when speaking English, highlighting the multifaceted nature of their concerns.

## 5 Discussion

This study set out to explore the factors contributing to the fear of negative evaluation in foreign language anxiety among English education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau, with a particular focus on their speaking abilities. The major findings revealed that students' fear of negative evaluation stems from several key factors: fear of judgment by peers and lecturers, fear of being laughed at, anxiety about error correction, and lack of language proficiency. These findings underscore the significant impact of negative evaluation anxiety on students' ability to speak English confidently and effectively.

The results of this study are crucial as they align with and extend the existing literature on foreign language anxiety (FLA) and its specific impact on speaking skills. The findings support Jeff's [1] assertion that speaking is perceived as one of the most difficult skills to master among English learners. The identified factors of anxiety, such as fear of judgment and error correction, resonate with the work of Horwitz et al. [7] and Macintyre [8], who highlighted communication anxiety and fear of negative

evaluation as central to language learning anxiety. Furthermore, this study adds to the body of knowledge by providing empirical evidence from a specific context—English education students in Indonesia—which has been relatively underexplored in previous research. The high percentage of female participants (89.5%) and the predominance of eighth-semester students provide a unique demographic lens through which the results can be interpreted. This demographic detail is significant as it may influence the generalizability and applicability of the findings to similar educational settings.

The results are consistent with previous studies that have highlighted the prevalence of anxiety in language learning. For instance, Wardhani [2] and Cabaltica & Arcala [5] noted the significant role of performance pressure and lack of confidence in contributing to FLA. The high levels of fear of judgment and error correction observed in this study are also in line with findings by Kitano [15] and Idri [16], who pointed out that these factors are primary sources of anxiety among language learners. Moreover, the study's focus on the fear of negative evaluation aligns with Shabani [14] and Aydin [13], who identified fear of making mistakes and receiving negative feedback as critical components of language anxiety. The emphasis on pronunciation difficulties echoes the work of Hughes [17] and Nunan [2], who discussed the challenges of mastering spoken language due to its inherent complexity and the need for precise articulation.

Despite the valuable insights gained, this study has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small (19 students), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study relied on self-reported data from questionnaires and interviews, which could introduce bias or inaccuracies in the responses. The cross-sectional nature of the study also means that it captures a snapshot in time, rather than examining changes in anxiety levels over an extended period.

Future research should consider expanding the sample size and including a more diverse group of participants to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how students' anxiety levels evolve over time and in response to different pedagogical interventions. Additionally, exploring the role of specific pedagogical strategies, such as peer support and constructive feedback, in mitigating FLA could be valuable. Addressing these research gaps would further our understanding of FLA and help develop more effective strategies to support language learners in overcoming their anxiety.

## 6 Conclusion

This study effectively identifies key factors contributing to the fear of negative evaluation in foreign language anxiety among English education students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau, particularly in their speaking abilities. The findings reveal that fear of judgment by peers and lecturers, fear of being laughed at, anxiety about error correction, and lack of language proficiency significantly impact students' confidence and performance in speaking English.

By addressing these factors, this research fills a critical gap in understanding the specific sources of anxiety affecting Indonesian EFL students, offering empirical



evidence from a unique educational context. The study's novelty lies in its detailed exploration of eighth-semester students' experiences and perceptions, contributing valuable insights to the broader discourse on language learning anxiety.

The implications of these findings are significant for educators and curriculum developers, suggesting the need for supportive pedagogical strategies that reduce anxiety and foster a more positive learning environment. Future research should build on these results to develop targeted interventions that can further mitigate the fear of negative evaluation and enhance language learning outcomes.

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