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## (UN)SILENCING THE SILENCE: EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY IN ANSWERING LECTURERS' QUESTIONS

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**Abstract:** This study attempts to explore the factors and strategies of EFL students' speaking anxiety in answering the lecturer's questions. A qualitative design using a case study method was employed to gather information about individual experiences. This study examined EFL students' speaking anxiety when responding lecturers' questions at a Jambi public university. The researchers selected 10 active EFL students who had finished all courses, were accessible, and eager to engage in this research. The researchers collected data through interviews and supervisor notes. The findings were analyzed thematically. Linguistics and knowledge issues (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and lack of knowledge), psychological

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issues (fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation), and performance issues (lack of preparations, environmental conditions, and time pressure) were identified. This study also found that EFL students reduce anxiety through self-management (practice and preparation, learning from mistakes), self-psychology (relaxation and motivation), and help from others (friends and family).

**Keywords:** *EFL students, factors affecting anxiety, speaking anxiety, strategies to alleviate anxiety*

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking anxiety is one of the most frequent issues faced by EFL students. This has been consistently shown in related previous studies that most EFL students, not limited to Indonesian students, experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety to speak in English (Abrar, 2017; Asysyfa, 2019; Erdiana, et al., 2020; Sundayanti, et al., 2023; Toubot, et al., 2018). This phenomenon may occur because speaking is a complex skill to learn. Its complexity relates to the competences required by students and also speakers in order to be able to speak effectively, including linguistic and sociolinguistic competences (Abrar, 2019; Hinkel, 2011; Nunan, 1999). The students' inability to appropriately master the needed speaking competencies may affect their participation and communication, such as participating in classroom activities.

In EFL classroom context, speaking is used as a medium of teaching and learning activities, and one of them is question and answer activity (Q&A). This activity may occur among students in the classroom and also between student and lecturer and/or teacher. In this activity, many students are often reluctant to initiate the conversation, ask the questions, and also respond to the questions especially from their lecturers or teachers. This passive behavior was caused by some reasons, including being corrected in front of the

class, giving inappropriate answers, cultural differences, and having unequal power relations between lecturers and learners (Florescu & Pop-Pacurar, 2016; Ong, et al., 2016; Suryani, et al., 2020; Wang, 2022; Zakiya et al., 2022). Another rationale of this occurrence may also be the result of students' anxiety to speak and answer their lecturers' questions (Abrar, 2022; Tsiplakides & Keramida 2009). The issue of anxiety in answering questions is central as it is a frequent case faced by EFL students when communicating and interacting with their lecturers in the classrooms.

Theoretically, Anxiety is a feeling which is associated with psychological and emotional states accompanied by several signs, including nervousness, rapid heartbeat, rapid breathing, trembling, and sweaty palms (Abrar, 2022; Asyfyfa et al., 2019; Chastain, 1988; Horwitz, et al., 1986; Rumiyati & Seftika, 2018). Thus, speaking anxiety refers to a fear of communication apprehension which inhibits learners from speaking. Speaking anxiety has a big influence on learners' self-confidence. It may cause an overwhelming condition where the students remain quiet and cannot speak, even if they have capabilities to convey their voices and also to answer questions from their lecturers'. Therefore, speaking is the most provoking anxiety factor (Price, 1991).

Since 1980's, a number of studies exploring the causes of language anxiety have been conducted. Young (1991), for instance, represented six potential causes of language anxiety, including personal and interpersonal, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language tests. Moreover, Horwitz *et al* (1986) argued three influential anxiety affecting factors, including apprehension of verbal communication, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This finding is a well-known one and is still relevant to this day in the discourse of language anxiety.

In the last decade, there have been a growing number of documented studies investigating the issue of speaking anxiety in the EFL context. Hanifa (2018), for instance, qualitatively investigated the factors that generate students' speaking anxiety. In her study, she identified three central themes, including cognitive (topic, genre, interlocutors and processing demands); affective factors (feeling and self-consciousness); and performance factors (mode, degree of collaboration, discourse control, planning and rehearsal, time pressure and environment). Moreover, Asysyfa (2019) conducted a mixed-method study exploring students' speaking anxiety in high school. The quantitative data showed that students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety. Moreover, the results of qualitative data revealed that fear of mistakes, lack of confidence, limited vocabulary, negative evaluation and embarrassment are the factors which triggered students' anxiety. Besides, this study also reported that using English websites, watching English films, speaking with native speakers, positive thinking, memorizing more English vocabulary are effective ways to overcome the feeling.

A more recent study on the issue is the study by Taqwa, et al., (2022). They, through a mixed-method study, focused their study at identifying the level and factors of speaking anxiety. The results of the study indicated that students experienced moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety. The study also highlighted that there were seven factors affecting students' speaking anxiety, such as English proficiency level, students' low self-esteem, fear of making mistakes, lack of preparation, motivation, the method used, and lecturer's attitude. Furthermore, Abrar et al., (2022) qualitatively investigated influencing factors of speaking anxiety and ways to overcome it. The results of the study showed that EFL students' speaking anxiety were affected by language barriers (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency); psychological issues (low motivation and personality); and language proponents (lecturers, classmates, and unfamiliar topics). In terms of ways to alleviate the feeling of speaking anxiety, the researchers revealed two main themes, such as self management

(self-practice and doing positive activities) and getting-helps (friends' help and motivation).

Beside those studies, some other studies also investigated EFL speaking anxiety (see Ariyanti, 2016; Çağatay, 2015; Mayangta, 2013; Mulyono et al., 2019; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Rumiayati & Seftika, 2018; Suciati, 2020; Sundayanti, et al., 2023; Tercan & Dikilitaş, 2015; and Woodrow, 2006). Although the previous studies provided insightful information related to the issue, the discussion was still in general teaching and learning speaking context. This present study tried to bring up a similar issue by limiting the focus of the inquiry to the aspect that has scarcely been discussed but is often faced by EFL learners in a classroom context, that is answering lecturers' question(s). By doing this study, the researchers expected to fill the gap in the literature and to identify more unique findings which surely contribute to the topic. This study tried to answer the following research question ; (1). What are the factors affecting EFL students' speaking anxiety in answering the lecturers' question? (2). How do they alleviate their anxious feeling in answering lecturers' questions?

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This study aimed to explore the affecting factors of EFL students' speaking anxiety in answering the lecturer's questions and their strategies in alleviating the feeling. In order to achieve the aforesaid aim, the researchers used a qualitative design with a case study approach. The reason for using a qualitative design was because this method focuses on exploring and providing deeper insights of a case or a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Flick, 2022; Yin, 2014). Moreover, A case study is a qualitative tradition which facilitates the researchers to analyze a case or a bounded system naturally and comprehensively (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Heale & Twycross, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). Therefore, the use of a qualitative method with a case study approach seemed to fit the context of this inquiry because it helped the researchers to gain

genuine, in-depth, and comprehensive information related to EFL students' speaking anxiety in answering lecturers' questions.

### **Research Participants**

The participants of this research were taken from non-probability sampling namely purposive sampling (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; Creswell & Port, 2016; Tongco, 2007). They were recruited from one public university in Jambi by considering the following inclusive criteria. First, participants should be active students (registered) at an English education study program. The reason for including this as the main criterion was because it fit with the purpose of the study. Second, participants had completed most of the classes (third year). This criterion was on the basis of communication intensity with the lecturers. Third, participants experienced anxiety in responding to the lecturers' questions. This criterion is pivotal as this inquiry aimed at exploring the issue. Last, participants voluntarily took part in the research.

We started the participants' recruitment after determining the criteria. We firstly contacted the research site administrator to get permission and to get prospective participants' information before conducting the research. Then, we distributed demographic questionnaires to our prospective students to find out whether the students' experienced anxiety or not in answering lecturers' questions. The demographic data showed that 17 students experienced the feeling of anxiety, but only 10 of them (6 females and 4 males) agreed to take part in the research voluntarily.

### **Data Collection Technique**

In collecting the data, we employed a qualitative data collection technique which facilitates the researchers to gather in-depth and robust information about participants' experiences, views, knowledge, and beliefs concerning EFL students' speaking anxiety in answering lecturers' question, that is a semi-structured interview (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Ryan et al., 2009). An interview protocol consisting of 10 items and questions was used to guide the interviews.

Technically, before the interviews, we explained the objectives of this inquiry to the participants and asked them to sign informed-consent forms. In general, the process of the interview went well and all participants seemed to enjoy the conversation. Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and was audio-recorded. In terms of language, the participants chose Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of discussion. They argued that it was easy for them to express their opinion in that language.

### **Data Analysis Technique**

After completing interviews, we began analyzing data. In this stage, thematic analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) was used. The selection of the analysis was considered the most suitable and in accordance with the needs of the researchers, all data obtained and has been gathered and then analyzed using this technique. In the process, the thematic analysis went through several processes analyzing the data, the process consisted of six steps as follows; familiarize with the data, generate codes/themes, create themes, review themes, define and name themes, and produce the report. Each one of the stages was conducted to determine the final result of this research.



**Figure 1.** The phases of thematic analysis

In the first phase, the researchers started to familiarize with the pertinent data by listening to audio recordings and transcribing. In this phase, the researchers went through all the data from the entire interview and started taking notes and studying the transcriptions multiple times. In generating data, the researchers assigned codes to the data. The researchers put an important mark on the part of the transcription that the researchers found interesting. The next step was searching for themes; the researchers started by looking at the list of

codes and then tried to combine some themes into a single theme. After that, the researchers reviewed and refined the themes that have been identified during the previous phase. This was done to get a set of themes that were coherent and distinctive, in order to represent data accurately. The next phase was defining and naming themes; the researchers named and described each of the themes that the researchers identified in the previous steps. Last but not least was producing the report, the researchers wrote up the findings and the discussions.

### **Trustworthiness and Ethical Consideration**

To verify the accuracy of data or trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) the technique of member checking was used. To do this, we returned the transcription of interview data to all participants to cross check the data and to get their feedback. In addition, we also shared the data analysis among us to ensure the accuracy of our interpretation.

Another aspect we are really concerned about in this study is research ethic. In complying with this issue, we removed all identifiable information and changed it into pseudonym/coding as a way to ensure the appropriateness of the research and to protect the safety of the participants (Abrar, 2022; Silverman, 2013). Therefore, in the manuscript, we labeled the participants with *P1*, *P2*, *P3*, and so forth

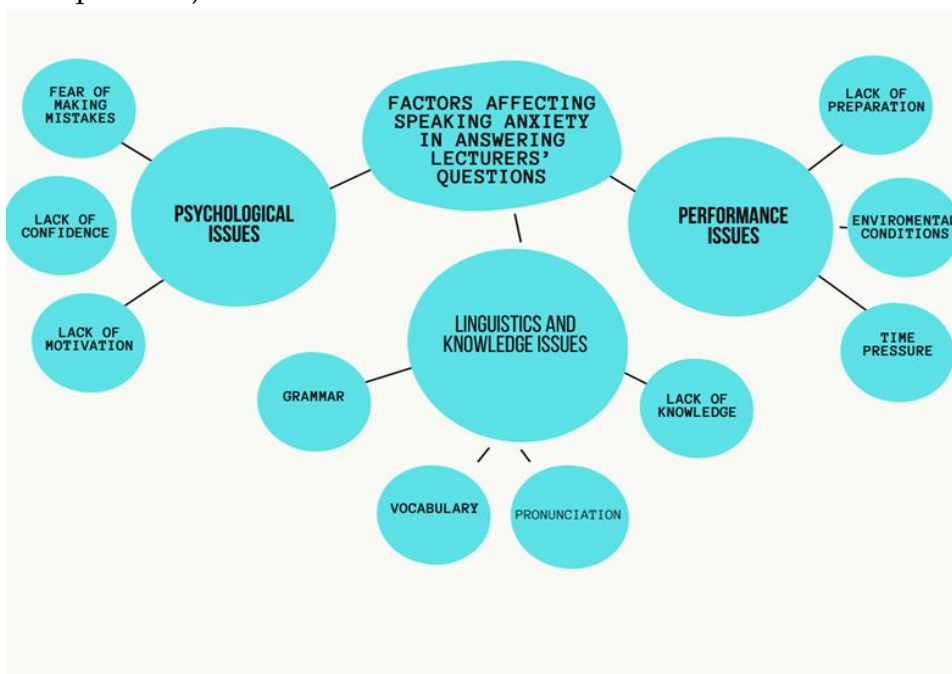
### **FINDINGS**

This section provides the results of findings which correspond to two research questions. The first research question relates to the factors affecting EFL speaking anxiety in answering the lecturers' questions. Then, the second one is about the strategies employed by EFL students to alleviate their speaking anxiety.



## Factors Affecting Speaking Anxiety in Answering Lecturers' Questions

Going through thematic analysis, there were three emerging themes found from the interview based on analysis of transcriptions such as 1) linguistics and knowledge issues (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, lack of knowledge); 2) psychological issues (fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation); 3) performance issues (lack of preparations, environmental conditions, time pressure).



**Figure 2.** Theme and subtheme of factors affecting speaking anxiety

### *Linguistics and Knowledge Issues*

Based on the result of the data analysis, the issue of linguistics and knowledge is the main theme that hinders EFL students from speaking English. Linguistics itself is the scientific study of language; it deals with language and its components. Besides, Knowledge in general means the fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity obtained through experience or association. Four prominent linguistics and knowledge issues include grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and lack of knowledge. Eight out of ten

participants who were interviewed stated explicitly that grammar was one of the factors that caused them to be anxious in speaking English to answer the lecturers. For instance, **P2** stated, "Because of my lack of knowledge of grammar, it was a factor that made me anxious to answer questions from the lecturer". Another statement stated by **P3**, "Another problem for me is the grammar. In my opinion, grammar is still one of the biggest fears of speaking English...". From the data shown, it can be concluded that grammar is a problem for EFL students related to their speaking anxiety triggers.

Another sub-theme is vocabulary. The interviews revealed that eight of ten participants claimed to have experienced problems with vocabulary. As **P3** stated, "The first problem for me was definitely vocabulary. Because it's not my first language that makes me have limited knowledge of vocabulary to say and that becomes a problem for me". Similarly, **P8** shared, "If I want to speak, I should have better prepared first, otherwise, I will get confused about what I want to say because the problem is also in the vocabulary, actually, I know what to say, but because I don't know the vocabulary in English, it discourages me to speak up". The data revealed that having a limited vocabulary hindered them from responding to the lecturers' questions and speaking a lot in the classroom.

Another factor faced by EFL students in speaking anxiety when answering the lecturer's questions is pronunciation. Eight of them directly admitted that pronunciation is one of the factors they faced while answering the lecturer's questions. **P2** for instance, stated: "My biggest problem when I want to speak for answering questions is my pronunciation". Another also explained, "The factor that made me anxious because I am not fluent in speaking English maybe because my pronunciation as well, which in the end made me afraid to speak because I was afraid of being wrong, afraid of not being able to understand, and afraid of being asked questions by the lecturer" (**P7**). In this interview transcript, it can be proven that pronunciation is one of the factors that can actually make EFL students anxious when speaking.

The last linguistics and knowledge issue is lack of knowledge. Lack of knowledge also affects the performance of EFL students in speaking, as evidenced by eight out of ten participants stating the problem with the thing. *P6* said, "In my opinion, not being familiar with the topic also has an effect, because not being familiar with the topic means I am also lacking in knowledge, right, thus if I lack knowledge, how can I answer and it surely will make me anxious". Besides that, *P9* explained, "Lack of understanding of the material or maybe lack of knowledge is a problem. When I was not familiar with the topic, it made me panic to answer". Based on several transcriptions, it can be seen that the lack of knowledge of the questions, the material, or even the language itself is a problem that causes anxiety.

### *Psychological Issues*

Based on the interviews conducted, it was revealed that one of the main themes of factors in speaking anxiety when answering the lecturer's questions is psychological issues. This theme is extremely prevalent, as all of the participants claimed to have experienced it at some point in their English speaking. The first psychological factor mentioned is the fear of making mistakes. For instance, *P4* mentioned, "The feeling of fear when speaking English is like a feeling of fear of being mistaken, whether it's the wrong word or the wrong context". In line with *P4*, *P2* stated, "Based on my experience, the psychological factor that has the most impact is fear, fear of making mistakes when answering the lecturer, and then fear of getting scolded by the lecturer for being wrong". Based on several statements from the participants it was identified that the fear of making mistakes was a factor of their anxiety in speaking.

Another psychological issue is the lack of confidence. According to the interviews, eight of the participants mentioned problems with their self-esteem. As stated by *P5*, "My psychological factor is more to lack self-confidence which ends in fear. Because of it, it makes me afraid and anxious. The fear is closer to fear of making

mistakes, afraid of being ridiculed and afraid of people's negative perceptions of me". On another hand, *P7* also said that, "Based on what I felt, aside from being afraid of making mistakes, a lack of confidence is also a problem, maybe because I'm also an introvert, thus I do not feel confident. There is an anxious feeling when I should speak up in front of people, it is like all the attention is on me it makes me worried". It can be concluded that one of the psychological factors that causes anxiety is lack of confidence.

Another factor that causes speaking anxiety in answering lecturers' questions, in terms of psychology, is low motivation. Three participants gave their opinion about the lack of motivation being one of the disturbing factors. As *P3* stated, "Motivation was another factor that is quite influential for me. Having low motivation made it difficult to do something including speaking because there is no passion, at the end I ignored the results, and that made it difficult for me to improve better". Moreover, *P6* also commented, "It can be said that I have low motivation because I'm a pretty lazy person. In my mind, if there are people who can do it, why should I, thus my motivation can also be said to be lacking and that might be a problem". It can be identified that low motivation due to laziness is a barrier for them in speaking in a psychological context.

### *Performance Issues*

The last theme emerges is performance issues. This performance issue includes things that happen around the participants when they are in speaking condition when answering the lecturer's questions. There are several sub-themes found within this theme. The first sub-theme is lack of preparations. Five of the participants stated that the lack of preparation was a hindrance to their readiness to speak. For instance, *P3* stated, "If I am not prepared enough, I will be confused about what to discuss, and what to talk about". Moreover, *P7* said that, "Based on my experience, if I don't have prepared for the material in class it will be difficult later to

answer questions, so there is a chance for anxiety to arise because I don't understand the material and lack of preparation". Lack of preparation is a problem in terms of performance issues for them in speaking to answer questions from the lecturer.

The second is environmental conditions. In this context, the environment for EFL students is in classroom conditions. It was found that the conditions in the classroom also became a trigger for the participants' speaking anxiety. There were several reasons mentioned by the participants, seven out of ten participants expressed it, *P5* uttered, "Sometimes the circumstances of the class also influence especially classes that are not supportive or conducive. My classmates grin at me when I make a mistake". Another statement came from *P7*, she said, "And for the environmental conditions in the classroom, it's more of a pressure, like not being ready to be the center of attention in class, because I am bound to be in the spotlight, so that's all the problem that makes me worried". From the several statements highlighted, it can be explained that conditions that were not conducive and not possible for the participants could cause them to feel anxious when answering questions from the lecturer.

The last sub-theme emerges is time pressure. In this context, time pressure concerns the length or short of time available or readiness when suddenly asked. Nine out of ten participants expressed complaints about this aspect, including what was conveyed by *P1*, "I tend to have problems with time pressure. It is like suddenly being asked a question, moreover I have to answer spontaneously and quickly, and when the lecturer is waiting for my answer it makes me really worried". *P6* also has given her concerns, she said, "Time pressure also affects my anxiety, such as the lecturer giving a certain time limit to answer, because of the readiness issue as well, hence making it difficult for me to think about what words to say. It is like there is difficulty composing sentences if given a time limit for speaking". Based on some of the statements above, it can be explained

that time pressure is a problem for EFL students in answering questions from lecturers that cause anxiety.

### The Strategies in Alleviating Speaking Anxiety in Answering Lecturers' Questions

There are several identified strategies used by the participants as a strategy in alleviating their speaking anxiety in answering the lecturer's questions. There are three themes that appear to be discussed in this regard, these themes include self-management strategies (practice and preparations, learning from mistakes), self-psychology strategies (takes relaxation, motivation), and help from others (help from friends and help from family).



Figure 3. Theme and sub-theme of strategies in alleviating speaking anxiety

#### *Self-Management Strategies*

The first theme discussed is self-management strategies. In this theme, the scope includes the ability of participants to solve problems in their own way. There are two related sub-themes within, the first one is practice and preparations. Having good practice and preparation is one of the strategies mentioned by many participants. They assumed that training and preparation are capable enough to help them minimize their anxiety. This was proven by nine participants who admitted and gave explanations. For instance, as *P1* stated, "For me, a strategy to minimize my anxiety is more for

preparation and practice". Another participant also stated, "Obviously the first step I took was by mastering the language through self-practice, the practice seemed to be more familiar with the language. Then it was like learning with the elements of the language and so on" (P3). From the transcripts that appear, it can be indicated that proper practice and preparation will greatly help in order to reduce anxiety when speaking.

The second strategy in order to alleviate speaking anxiety is learning from mistakes. Three out of ten participants mentioned that even an evaluation of their previous mistakes could help them to be even better. As stated by P3, "and the last one is learning from mistakes, for me, I have to be able to reflect or evaluate myself, about anything that is seemed lacking and keep trying to improve, and the results of learning from these mistakes can be an additional reference for self-practice thus I think it is related between learn from mistakes and practice". In another interview, P5 also commented, "Another strategy that I tried to apply besides self-practice was learning from mistakes, more precisely learning from things that made me anxious before. Thus, from that experience, I can have more preparation and practice". Learning from mistakes is a good method in terms of reducing anxiety when speaking by anticipating and learning every mistake that has been made.

### *Self-Psychology Strategies*

The second theme found through interviews is self-psychology strategy or in psychology it is called self-help. Self-help is known as how an individual is able to solve his own problems without aid from other people who are related to their feelings. Based on the interviews that were conducted, implicitly the participants had done this way from what they had conveyed; the first way in terms of self-psychology is taking relaxation. This was acknowledged by the statements of ten participants who carried out this aspect. For instance P2 explained, "If I am in a state of anxiety, I usually try to relax, at least take some time to calm down, even if it's for a while".

Same with *P5* that also stated, "When the feeling of anxiety comes, I definitely take a calm position first, because if I don't try to relax, my anxiety will definitely not be controlled and it will bother me. My relaxed form is more towards taking deep breaths, thus it can make me more relaxed". From the results of the transcription of the data, it can be seen that the strategy of taking relaxation when someone is in an anxious condition has a good effect on reducing anxiety when speaking in response to questions from the lecturer.

The second strategy that helps EFL students in reducing anxiety in speaking in terms of self-psychology is motivation. Motivation is quite important according to the participants, having high motivation is able to maintain enthusiasm to be able to improve themselves even better. Nine out of ten participants mentioned this aspect to be quite important. For instance, *P3* stated, "The factor to be even better is the reason I finally have the motivation to be able to speak better. In the end, that motivation can help me to be better at speaking". A similar opinion was also expressed by *P7*, stating, "For me, the factor that helps a lot to improve myself is motivation". With good motivation and enthusiasm, being able to encourage individuals so that the will and desire to do something appears to be able to get results or realize a goal, in this case, reducing anxiety in speaking.

### *Help from Others*

The last theme identified used by participants is help from others. There are two main sub-themes within this theme. The first aid most mentioned by the participants was help from friends. The assistance obtained proved to be very helpful for the participants to improve and reduce their speaking anxiety. This is supported by statements from ten participants who agreed to this. As *P1* explained, "For me, help from friends is the factor that helps me the most, especially in improving my speaking. They help me a lot with things I don't know and I come to know by asking them. I ask a lot of things, especially about vocabulary, I often ask them about vocabulary". Another participant *P9* also revealed, "For factors who help me a lot,



it's from friends, friends can be a place for me to have a discussion, moreover they also sometimes give motivation, and can convince me that I can do it". Based on the statements that have been mentioned, help from friends is seen as the most possible assistance and has the most positive impact on strategies to reduce anxiety.

The last help is coming from the family. One participant stated that the role of the family was one of the important things to provide additional motivation. *P9* explained that, "Other assistance came from the family, especially my mother. Because at the beginning of the semester when there was an assignment to speak in front of the class, a kind of individual presentation, that made me feel excessively anxious. Finally, I told my mother about my anxiety, and my mother responded by motivating and supporting me, encouraging me like that and it helps me to be more confident". Although not all participants were open about their anxiety about speaking to their families, it can be seen that assistance from the family also had a very positive impact on increasing motivation and self-confidence.

## DISCUSSION

The purposes of this research are to find out the factors affecting EFL students' anxiety in answering the lecturer's questions and their strategies in alleviating their anxious feeling in answering the lecturer's questions. The participants in this research were ten EFL students. In this chapter, the discussion is based on the research questions given: 1. What are the factors affecting EFL students' speaking anxiety in answering the lecturer's questions? And 2. How do they alleviate their anxious feeling in answering the lecturer's questions? In this section of the research, the researcher discusses the findings and correlates them with related theories from previous studies.

## **The Factors Affecting Speaking Anxiety in Answering Lecturers' Questions**

Based on previously presented data, there were several factors affecting EFL students' anxiety in answering the lecturer's questions. The first factor is linguistics and knowledge issues. Being a student who studies a different language from his/her first language will undoubtedly face multifaced of challenges. The aspect or factor that is most interfering to EFL students speaking anxiety, within this theme, is vocabulary. Based on the statements of the participants, it was revealed that vocabulary was the factor that hindered them from speaking, this happened because they still had a low vocabulary. This finding is in line with Abrar et al., (2022) who stated that low-sufficient vocabulary is one of the main factors affecting EFL students' speaking anxiety which results in nervousness and hesitation when speaking. It can be concluded that without having sufficient vocabulary, students cannot communicate effectively or express their ideas in terms of speaking.

The second identified factor is a psychological issue. The most prevalent problem identified from this theme is the fear of making mistakes. From the data, it was revealed that the rationale of this factor is the students' unpreparedness for the response of answering questions that will be given either by the teacher or friends in class. This is in line with the results of some previous studies, such as Asyfyfa et al., (2019), Naser & Nijr (2019), Taqwa, et al., (2022) and Zakiya, et al., (2022) which highlighted that speaking anxiety is caused by fear of evaluation from other people. Therefore, the fear of making mistakes is something that really hinders EFL students to speak and to respond to questions. Besides, the data also revealed that fear of making mistakes was caused by less supportive reactions from lecturers and friends. This was also stated by Hanifa (2018), that the fear of failing to speak is also caused by fear of reactions that will arise afterward such as being scolded by the lecturer, laughed at, ridiculed, or judged by friends. Fear of making mistakes is the factor that cannot be ignored as a barrier to someone's speaking because, in

fact, this factor is the problem most EFL students face and an obstacle in improving their speaking ability.

The third factor that emerges is performance issues. Among the three sub-themes, environmental condition (classroom environment) was identified as the most prevalent sub-theme. Based on the interview data, unconducive classroom conditions caused inconvenience and anxiety for students to speak. Several participants also explained that the form of unconduciveness they felt was noisy and big classes. They further argued that being the center of attention when speaking in front of a large group of people made them afraid and anxious to speak. As stated by Suciati (2020), speaking anxiety can also emerge due to having to speak in front of a large crowd. On the other hand, Olivares et al., (2009) revealed anxiety to be the center of attention as one of the factors that can disturb a person. It is related to discomfort towards other people because they are afraid of being evaluated by others. From the discussion, it can be concluded that environmental conditions, e.g., noisy and big classes, can hamper EFL students from speaking in class.

### **The Strategies in Alleviating Speaking Anxiety in Answering Lecturers' Questions**

After gaining data that explains the factor of EFL students speaking anxiety in answering the lecturer's questions, the researcher also gained some EFL students' strategies for alleviating their speaking anxiety. The first strategy is self-management strategies. In the context of self-management, it is defined as a strategy that is used by someone in order to improve their performance without any intervention from other people (Mason & Unsworth, 2016). As has been explained, the self-management strategy is carried out by an individual in order to achieve certain goals in his/her own way. In this theme, practice and preparation are the most mentioned strategies. Practice is obviously an important aspect to expedite someone in carrying out an activity, especially in terms of speaking. Practice will impact good if it is done properly. This is in line with the findings of Abrar et al (2022) who stated that practice is the most

effective way to improve one's performance, especially in alleviating speaking anxiety. On the other hand, it is no less important that good preparation will also have a good effect on one's speaking performance. As explained by Hanifa (2018), student speaking performance will be successful if they are given preparation time. Proper preparation will make it more possible to minimize anxiety in speaking. Therefore, it can be concluded that strategies through training and preparation can reduce anxiety if both are done properly.

The second strategy is self-psychology or more familiar in the field of psychology called self-help strategy. This assistance is a simple technique that is carried out by someone related to the feelings or emotions of an individual. Based on the transcription, the most prevalent theme that emerged was relaxation. This action they take when they are in a state of anxiety. Some actions that can calm them down and make them focus again are taking a breath, taking a moment to be silent, taking the best position, and avoiding eye contact. This relaxation action is in line with what was stated by Shamsuri et al., (2021) and Asrida (2017) that taking relaxation actions can reduce a person's anxiety under certain conditions. Furthermore, Shamsuri et al., (2021) explained that simple things that are usually done in relaxation are controlling breathing, avoiding eye contact to reduce anxiety, or even adjusting the volume. Taking relaxation measures has been proven to be a good thing for EFL students to do in terms of overcoming their anxiety. Apart from being relatively easy to do, this action can also calm them down.

Last but not least is the help from others. The most common theme encountered through transcription is help from friends. The participants stated that help from friends is one of the important roles that can make them develop and improve their speaking abilities. In terms of broadening their horizons, friends are able to become a place of calming discussion for the participants. With discussions, they are able to reduce their fears and doubts. In the same vein, Abrar et al (2022) explained that one of the friends' assistance that is able to overcome student anxiety is discussion. Moreover, active help from

friends in the form of motivation, encouragement and advice are effective to get rid of an individual's (speaking) anxiety. As revealed by Aliyu et al., (2019), active interaction between friends can relieve student anxiety because friends can provide encouragement and input without feeling ridiculed or judged. Based on the description above, the help of others, especially from friends, is very important for EFL students to be able to overcome their anxiety problems, and for some people, and maybe the best strategy they can do it.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that EFL students have several factors that affect anxiety in speaking when answering the lecturers' questions. Based on the data collected, there are three themes that are evident, such as linguistic and knowledge issues; psychological issues; and performance issues. The most prevalent and mentioned factors based on interviews were grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence. In addition, it was also revealed the strategies used by EFL students in alleviating speaking anxiety when answering the lecturers' questions. three main strategies were identified as effective in alleviating the feeling of anxiety, including self-management (training and preparation; and learning from mistakes), self-help (relaxation and motivation), and help from others (help from friends and family). Among them, the most engaged by the participants were practice and preparation, relaxation, motivation, and help from friends.

Although this study has comprehensively explained the factors affecting students' speaking anxiety in answering lecturers' questions and the strategies to alleviate the feeling, it does not mean that it has no limitations. This study solely focused on the exploration of the students' perspective, and the lecturers were excluded. Future studies can explore the issue from the perspective of lecturers, such as lecturers' strategies in managing students' anxiety in speaking. Besides, this study has a relatively small sample, to be exact 10 participants, in only one higher education institution. Thus, the

results cannot be generalized into a wider context. Further researchers may use a different method, e.g., quantitative, which possibly allows the researcher to employ more respondents and therefore the findings of the study can be generalized.

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