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Psychological Barriers to English Speaking Participation among Secondary School Students

Dandi Dharma[1], Terasne[2], K. Dedy Sandiarsa S.[3]
[1,2,3]English Language Education Department, FBMB, Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika
Jl. Pemuda No. 59 A, Mataram, Indonesia 83125
E-Mail: dandidarma70@gmail.com

Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji hambatan psikologis yang berkaitan dengan partisipasi berbicara bahasa Inggris siswa di SMAN 1 Tanjung. Penelitian deskriptif melibatkan 56 siswa dan menggunakan angket serta wawancara untuk menelaah ketakutan melakukan kesalahan, rasa malu, kecemasan, rendahnya kepercayaan diri, dan rendahnya motivasi. Sumber penelitian melaporkan kecemasan sebagai hambatan paling menonjol, diikuti ketakutan melakukan kesalahan dan rasa malu, sedangkan kepercayaan diri serta motivasi menunjukkan variasi antarsiswa. Artikel ini mempertahankan temuan tersebut sebagai pengalaman terkait situasi berbicara, bukan diagnosis psikologis atau bukti kausal terhadap kecakapan berbicara. Pembahasan diperdalam melalui penelitian pembelajaran bahasa dan publikasi dosen Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika mengenai speaking anxiety, motivasi, self-confidence, self-efficacy, task design, dan performa berbicara. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa tekanan evaluasi, respons teman sebaya, kesiapan sebelum berbicara, dan keyakinan terhadap kemampuan dapat berinteraksi dengan tuntutan linguistik dalam membentuk partisipasi. Guru disarankan menyediakan persiapan yang terjangkau, pemerataan giliran berbicara, budaya koreksi yang menghargai siswa, serta umpan balik spesifik. Penelitian lanjutan perlu menghubungkan laporan siswa dengan observasi interaksi dan pengukuran performa berulang agar hubungan antara hambatan psikologis dan perkembangan berbicara dapat dijelaskan dengan lebih tepat.

Kata kunci: speaking participation; language anxiety; fear of mistakes; self-confidence; motivation

Abstract

This study examined psychological barriers associated with students' participation in English speaking at SMAN 1 Tanjung. The descriptive study involved 56 students and used questionnaires and interviews to examine fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, low

confidence, and low motivation. The source study identifies anxiety as the most prominent barrier, followed by fear of mistakes and shyness, while confidence and motivation vary across learners. The present article retains these findings as accounts of speaking-related experience rather than psychological diagnoses or causal evidence of speaking proficiency. The discussion is strengthened through language-learning research and publications by UNDIKMA English education scholars on speaking anxiety, motivation, self-confidence, self-efficacy, task design, and speaking performance. The findings indicate that evaluation pressure, peer response, preparation, and perceived capability can interact with linguistic demands in shaping participation. Teachers are encouraged to provide manageable preparation, equitable speaking opportunities, respectful correction, and specific feedback. Further research should connect learner reports with observed interaction and repeated speaking-performance measures to clarify when psychological barriers arise and how they relate to speaking development.
Keywords: speaking participation; language anxiety; fear of mistakes; self-confidence; motivation

INTRODUCTION

Speaking in a foreign language requires learners to coordinate linguistic knowledge with real-time cognitive and social demands. They must decide what to say, retrieve vocabulary, formulate grammatical relationships, articulate sounds intelligibly, monitor the listener, and respond under time pressure. A learner may therefore understand classroom content but hesitate when the same knowledge must be displayed publicly. Speaking difficulty should not automatically be interpreted as unwillingness, low ability, or a single psychological weakness. Performance and learners' beliefs or feelings about performance need to be examined as related but analytically distinct phenomena (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Woodrow, 2006).

Foreign-language anxiety is especially relevant because speaking makes competence visible to other people. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized classroom language anxiety as a situation-specific experience associated with communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Later research has shown a

generally negative relationship between second-language anxiety and achievement, although the strength of that relationship varies across contexts and measures (Teimouri et al., 2019). Anxiety can therefore be educationally consequential without being treated as a clinical diagnosis or a fixed learner trait.

Fear of making mistakes and shyness overlap with anxiety but should not be collapsed into it. Fear of mistakes concerns the anticipated consequences of an inaccurate response, particularly when learners expect ridicule, criticism, or public correction. Shyness concerns discomfort with social exposure and may change with audience, familiarity, and task structure. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) showed that anxious language learners can hold demanding standards about performance and react strongly to perceived imperfection. Such expectations help explain why a learner may remain silent even when some relevant language is available.

Self-confidence, self-efficacy, motivation, and willingness to communicate introduce further distinctions. Confidence is a broad sense of capability, whereas self-efficacy concerns judgments of being able to perform a particular task (Bandura, 1997). Willingness to communicate is situational readiness to enter interaction and depends partly on perceived competence and anxiety (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Motivation concerns why learners invest effort and persist, not merely whether they volunteer in one speaking event (Ryan & Deci, 2000). A descriptive study should therefore avoid turning these constructs into interchangeable labels for the same experience.

Indonesian EFL research makes these distinctions especially important because classroom participation often provides the main regular opportunity to speak English. A learner's history of correction, opportunities for rehearsal, peer reactions, topic familiarity, and access to language resources can influence whether speaking feels manageable. Broader reviews of English education in Indonesia likewise emphasize the importance of contextualizing classroom evidence rather than assuming that findings transfer uniformly across settings (Zein et al., 2020).

Research by English education scholars at Universitas Pendidikan Mandalika (UNDIKMA) provides a directly relevant local conversation. Farosy et al. (2019) reported

significant relationships among anxiety, learning motivation, and speaking skill among junior secondary learners in Mataram. Hanan and Budiarti (2019) found that a Think-Pair-Share classroom-action intervention was accompanied by development in both motivation and speaking competence. These findings show that affective experience and participation can accompany performance development, while the different designs also caution against treating motivation or anxiety as a single independent cause.

Local experimental and correlational studies further demonstrate the importance of task-sensitive interpretation. Suadiyatno et al. (2020) found that students with lower anxiety demonstrated better speaking performance and reported an interaction between contextual teaching and anxiety. Sumarsono et al. (2020) similarly reported that self-efficacy was associated with speaking performance in task-based instruction. Setianingsih et al. (2024) later found a strong relationship between self-efficacy and speaking among senior high school learners. Together, these studies support attention to learners' beliefs and emotional conditions while preserving the difference between self-efficacy, confidence, anxiety, and observed proficiency.

The local literature also indicates that psychological barriers can interact with classroom design. Sandiarsa et al. (2021) documented speaking anxiety during the rapid learning shift of the Covid-19 period and identified lack of confidence, fear of mistakes, limited practice, and low speaking skill as important contributors. Jupri et al. (2022) incorporated foreign-language anxiety into a classroom-action study of Two Stay Two Stray speaking instruction, while Hidayatullah and Haerazi (2022) used board-game activities to increase structured opportunities for speaking. Syarifuddin et al. (2022) likewise emphasized the value of an instructional environment that encourages practice. These studies suggest that participation is shaped by the relationship between learner experience and the opportunities created by the task.

Language difficulty itself can also contribute to a psychological barrier. Nugraha et al. (2022) reported pronunciation difficulties among UNDIKMA English education learners and noted how pronunciation errors can be connected with reluctance or reduced confidence. A learner who anticipates difficulty pronouncing a word may

interpret a speaking turn as a social risk, while an anxiety response may further disrupt retrieval and monitoring. The present study does not attempt to establish the direction of that relationship, but it treats linguistic demand and psychological experience as potentially interacting conditions.

The source study at SMAN 1 Tanjung focuses on five dimensions reported by learners: fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, low confidence, and low motivation. It uses questionnaires and interviews to describe how these concerns appear in English speaking. The present article retains the source study's descriptive purpose while refining the interpretation of each construct and relating the findings to local research. The aim is to explain what the reported pattern can support, identify proportionate pedagogical implications, and specify what additional evidence would be required to connect perceived barriers with speaking development over time.

METHOD

The study employed a descriptive design involving 56 students at SMAN 1 Tanjung. The investigation focused on psychological factors reported in relation to English speaking: fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, low confidence, and low motivation. The design did not manipulate these factors or assign learners to treatment conditions. Its purpose was to describe the pattern of learners' reported experiences within the school context rather than to estimate the causal effect of a psychological variable on speaking proficiency.

Questionnaires and interviews were used as the main sources of evidence. The questionnaire provided a common set of prompts through which learners could report the focal concerns. Interviews supplied contextual explanations about how those concerns were experienced in speaking situations. These methods were interpreted as evidence about perception and experience; they were not treated as diagnostic instruments for mental-health conditions and were not relabeled as objective speaking-performance measures.

The analysis organized the source findings around the five reported dimensions and retained the qualitative ordering described in the manuscript: anxiety was the most prominent barrier, followed by fear of making mistakes and shyness, while confidence and motivation varied across learners. The article does not reconstruct percentages, scale scores, or significance tests that were not available in the supplied source. Interview explanations were used to clarify possible classroom meanings without converting individual accounts into verified causal relationships for the entire group.

Interpretation was strengthened by comparing the source findings with research on language anxiety, willingness to communicate, self-efficacy, motivation, feedback, and speaking instruction, including locally relevant UNDIKMA scholarship. The comparison was construct-sensitive: findings about self-efficacy or speaking performance were not treated as direct measurements of the source study's confidence or anxiety categories. Student names were excluded, the supplied authorship order and correspondence information were retained, and no undocumented ethics approval number, consent procedure, or additional data-collection event was introduced during article preparation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The source study identifies anxiety as the most prominent psychological barrier associated with English speaking participation. Fear of making mistakes and shyness are also described as important concerns, while confidence and motivation vary across learners. This ordering is reported qualitatively because the supplied manuscript does not provide a verified numerical distribution that can be reconstructed safely. The findings therefore support a profile of perceived barriers rather than a statistical ranking of effect sizes or a causal hierarchy among the five dimensions.

Table 1. Reported psychological dimensions and interpretive boundaries

Dimension	Source-reported pattern	Interpretive boundary
Anxiety	Reported as the most prominent barrier in learners' speaking experiences.	A situation-specific experience; not a clinical diagnosis or a direct proficiency score.
Fear of mistakes	A major concern associated with speaking and anticipated error.	Reflects expectations about consequences of error; it is not identical to actual accuracy.
Shyness	Reported as an important participation-related concern.	May vary by audience, task, and familiarity; should not be treated as a fixed personal label.
Low confidence	Varied across learners and speaking situations.	Broad confidence is distinct from task-specific self-efficacy and from measured performance.
Low motivation	Varied rather than forming a uniform barrier for all learners.	Motivation concerns reasons and persistence; silence in one speaking event is not a motivation score.

Anxiety becomes educationally important when it changes what a learner is able or willing to do during the speaking event. A student who anticipates negative evaluation may divide attention between constructing the message and monitoring how classmates or the teacher might react. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) described how anxiety can interfere with cognitive processing, while Woodrow (2006) demonstrated that oral

communication can be a particularly anxiety-provoking domain. The present findings are consistent with that literature, although the source design does not establish that anxiety caused a measurable loss of proficiency for every respondent.

The local context strengthens this interpretation. Sandiarsa et al. (2021) investigated EFL learners' speaking anxiety during a rapid shift in learning conditions and identified lack of confidence, fear of mistakes, limited practice, and low speaking skill as major contributors. The overlap with the SMAN 1 Tanjung findings is notable because both studies locate anxiety within a cluster of instructional and learner conditions rather than as an isolated phenomenon. At the same time, the present study is descriptive and should not borrow the stronger causal language of another design.

Suadiyatno et al. (2020) provide complementary evidence from an experimental context, reporting that lower-anxiety learners achieved better speaking performance and that anxiety interacted with contextual teaching. Their result supports the educational significance of anxiety in a nearby regional setting, but it does not mean that the current questionnaire categories explain the same proportion of speaking performance. The appropriate comparison is conceptual: anxiety can matter for speaking, and the conditions of instruction can alter the context in which learners experience it.

Fear of making mistakes is closely connected with evaluation, but it is not equivalent to making many mistakes. A learner may produce relatively accurate language and still hesitate because an error feels socially costly. Conversely, a learner may speak frequently despite inaccurate forms. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that anxious language learners can show perfectionistic tendencies, making ordinary classroom error feel more consequential. This distinction suggests that teachers should examine the expected consequence of error rather than simply telling learners that mistakes are normal.

A productive classroom response is to separate correction from humiliation. Feedback can identify a communicative success, specify one problem, and provide a next step without turning the error into a public judgment of ability. Hattie and Timperley

(2007) emphasize that effective feedback clarifies current performance and directs subsequent action, while formative assessment research similarly supports feedback that helps learners close a specific gap (Black & Wiliam, 1998). For hesitant speakers, such feedback may make another attempt more feasible than undifferentiated praise or public criticism.

The role of shyness should also be interpreted situationally. A learner may avoid whole-class speaking but contribute in a pair, speak on a familiar topic but withdraw during spontaneous questioning, or respond after preparation but remain silent when required to answer immediately. MacIntyre et al. (1998) conceptualize willingness to communicate as a situational readiness shaped by confidence, anxiety, interlocutor, and context. The present study's shyness category is therefore useful as a signal to inspect participation conditions, not as a permanent label attached to a learner.

This situational interpretation has direct implications for task design. A teacher can vary audience size, preparation time, topic familiarity, and the complexity of the required response. Moving from private planning to pair rehearsal and then to a brief individual contribution can reduce unnecessary social load while preserving the speaking demand. The goal is not to remove all challenge but to create a sequence in which learners can experience manageable success and gradually participate under less supported conditions.

UNDIKMA classroom research provides examples of how structured interaction can create such opportunities. Hanan and Budiarti (2019) reported improvement in both motivation and speaking competence through Think-Pair-Share, and Jupri et al. (2022) used Two Stay Two Stray in a speaking classroom where foreign-language anxiety was explicitly considered. Hidayatullah and Haerazi (2022) also showed how board-game activities can organize repeated speaking opportunities. These studies do not prove that a particular cooperative format will remove anxiety in SMAN 1 Tanjung, but they illustrate how task structure can make participation more accessible.

Confidence should likewise be grounded in evidence of capability. Telling learners to be confident provides little information about what they can do next. A short

successful response, a repaired utterance, or an understandable explanation can provide concrete evidence that a learner can act effectively. Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy framework emphasizes mastery experience as an important source of capability belief. Although the source study uses the broader term confidence, the instructional implication is similar: confidence-building is more credible when linked to demonstrated progress than when treated as a personality intervention.

Local research supports the value of this task-related interpretation. Sumarsono et al. (2020) found that higher self-efficacy was associated with stronger speaking performance in a task-based context, and Setianingsih et al. (2024) reported a strong positive relationship between self-efficacy and speaking among senior high school learners. These findings justify attention to learners' judgments of capability. However, self-efficacy is a more specific construct than general self-confidence, so the studies should not be used to relabel the present questionnaire or to infer a coefficient that the source did not estimate.

Sumarsono and Amin (2019) add an important caution. Their contextual teaching study reported an improvement in students' self-confidence but did not find a statistically significant effect. This reminds readers that a concept can be educationally meaningful even when a particular study does not yield a significant statistical difference. It also reinforces the need to distinguish descriptive improvement, perceived confidence, and measured speaking performance rather than forcing them into a single positive conclusion.

Motivation is another category that requires precision. A learner can value English and want to improve while still avoiding a public speaking turn because the immediate task feels risky. Conversely, frequent participation may be driven by familiarity, social confidence, or teacher prompting rather than sustained motivation to learn. Ryan and Deci (2000) distinguish motivational quality from simple behavior frequency. The present finding that motivation varies across learners should therefore lead teachers to ask what students value, what they expect to achieve, and what conditions make effort seem worthwhile.

Farosy et al. (2019) provide a directly relevant local comparison because they examined anxiety and learning motivation together in relation to speaking skill. Their findings indicate that affective variables can relate to speaking performance in a regional junior-secondary context. Yet the current study does not estimate a multiple correlation or establish a direction of influence. It should therefore use Farosy et al. to explain why anxiety and motivation deserve joint attention, not to imply that the same statistical relationship has already been demonstrated at SMAN 1 Tanjung.

Motivation can also change when the instructional environment changes. Sumarsono et al. (2022) found that remote learning produced a mixed motivational experience: some learners reported difficulty and reduced interaction, while others described greater independence, curiosity, and confidence. The lesson for the present study is that motivation should be interpreted as responsive to context rather than as a fixed characteristic of a quiet learner. A student's reluctance in one speaking situation may change when interaction, support, and task clarity change.

Linguistic difficulty and psychological barriers can reinforce one another. A learner who expects difficulty retrieving vocabulary or pronouncing a word may anticipate embarrassment; anxiety may then reduce the attentional resources available for retrieval and monitoring. Nugraha et al. (2022) documented pronunciation errors among UNDIKMA English learners and explicitly connected pronunciation difficulty with confidence concerns. The current data cannot determine whether linguistic difficulty preceded anxiety or resulted from it, but teachers should avoid explaining all hesitation as purely psychological.

For that reason, preparation support should target both the language and the participation conditions. A small set of useful expressions, brief planning time, or a chance to rehearse can reduce avoidable linguistic uncertainty without supplying the entire answer. Syarifuddin et al. (2022) emphasize the value of instructional environments that encourage learners to practise speaking, and Hidayatullah and Haerazi (2022) similarly demonstrate how structured tasks can create repeated oral

production. The pedagogical objective is to make speaking feasible while preserving learner responsibility for meaning.

Peer response is another mechanism that can increase or reduce perceived risk. Ridicule, interruption, or immediate comparison with the most fluent student can make participation costly. Respectful listening, predictable turn-taking, and feedback focused on the task create a different social environment. Engagement research emphasizes that participation is partly shaped by the social and emotional conditions of learning (Fredricks et al., 2004). Teachers therefore need to establish norms for listening and correction rather than assume that group work is automatically supportive.

The source study's questionnaire and interview evidence should be read together but not as substitutes for observed performance. A questionnaire can identify common concerns across 56 learners, while an interview can reveal why the same concern has different meanings for different students. Neither source directly shows pronunciation accuracy, fluency, grammatical control, or interactional effectiveness. A learner may report high anxiety yet complete a speaking task successfully, or report confidence while producing limited language. Future research should therefore connect self-report with independently assessed speaking samples.

A useful extension would record the circumstances in which a barrier becomes active. Instead of asking only whether learners are anxious, researchers could compare prepared and spontaneous speaking, pair and whole-class audiences, familiar and unfamiliar topics, or first and repeated attempts. Such task-specific evidence would help determine whether anxiety is generalized or concentrated in particular situations. It would also prevent a broad psychological label from obscuring the instructional condition that can actually be modified.

Repeated measures would strengthen the interpretation further. The present study describes a cross-sectional pattern of reported barriers; it does not show whether anxiety decreases, confidence grows, or motivation changes over time. A longitudinal classroom design could measure learners' perceptions before and after specific speaking sequences while also collecting performance data. This would make it

possible to examine whether changes in psychological experience correspond to changes in speaking behavior and quality rather than assuming that the relationship is immediate or one-directional.

The local UNDIKMA literature collectively supports a multidimensional view of speaking development. Farosy et al. (2019), Hanan and Budiarti (2019), Suadiyatno et al. (2020), Sumarsono et al. (2020), Sandiarsa et al. (2021), Hidayatullah and Haerazi (2022), Jupri et al. (2022), and Setianingsih et al. (2024) show that speaking in Indonesian EFL classrooms is connected with anxiety, motivation, confidence, self-efficacy, task organization, and opportunities for practice. The present study contributes a descriptive profile that identifies which concerns students themselves associate with participation at SMAN 1 Tanjung.

The strongest classroom implication is therefore diagnostic rather than prescriptive. Teachers should not assume that every quiet student needs the same intervention. One learner may need vocabulary preparation, another may need a smaller initial audience, another may need reassurance about peer response, and another may need a more meaningful reason to speak. The five reported dimensions can guide follow-up questions and task adjustments. Their value lies in making barriers discussable and observable, not in assigning a permanent psychological identity to learners.

A practical response can combine three principles: manageable preparation, equitable participation, and specific feedback. Preparation reduces avoidable uncertainty; equitable turn structures prevent confident learners from monopolizing opportunities; and feedback links participation to a concrete communicative improvement. This combination addresses the interaction between linguistic demand and psychological experience without claiming that anxiety must disappear before learning can occur. It also retains academic challenge by requiring a message that listeners can understand.

Finally, psychological support and speaking development should be evaluated separately but related analytically. A successful speaking program can aim to reduce

unnecessary fear, increase willingness to participate, and improve communicative performance, but evidence for each goal should be collected with an appropriate measure. This distinction prevents a more comfortable classroom from being mistaken automatically for higher proficiency and prevents a speaking score from being interpreted as proof that anxiety has been resolved. The present findings are most useful when they lead to this more precise approach to teaching and evaluation.

CONCLUSION

Students at SMAN 1 Tanjung reported anxiety, fear of mistakes, shyness, and varying confidence and motivation in relation to English speaking, with anxiety identified as the most prominent concern. These findings describe classroom experience rather than clinical conditions or proven causes of proficiency. Teachers should combine manageable preparation, respectful correction, equitable speaking opportunities, and task-specific feedback. Future research should connect learner reports with observed participation and repeated speaking-performance measures so that changes in psychological experience and communicative development can be examined separately and over time.

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