



Exploring Students' Speaking Anxiety When Presenting Recount Texts in Grade X at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran

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ABSTRACT

Speaking anxiety constitutes a significant psychological barrier that can impede English as a Foreign Language learners' oral performance, particularly when they must organize linguistic content and communicate it spontaneously. This study investigates the manifestations and underlying dimensions of speaking anxiety among tenth-grade students when presenting recount texts at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, the study collected data through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with four focal participants, and documentary evidence from a class of 22 students. The analysis drew on Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's three-component model of foreign language classroom anxiety, encompassing communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, supported by Krashen's affective filter hypothesis and MacIntyre and Gardner's cognitive interference model. The findings revealed widespread speaking anxiety: only one student volunteered to speak, 16 performed after prompting, and five refused to participate. Students exhibited silence and avoidance, hesitation and stammering, physical nervousness, and deliberate avoidance behaviors, while fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension emerged as the most pervasive anxiety dimensions. The study concludes that linguistic demands and real-time communicative pressure intensify speaking anxiety, highlighting the need for anxiety-sensitive pedagogical strategies in English speaking instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking represents a fundamental productive skill in English language learning because it enables learners to construct and communicate meaning through oral interaction. Effective speaking requires learners to simultaneously integrate vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and discourse management under the demands of real-time communication, while their psychological condition, particularly confidence and emotional readiness, substantially influences their oral performance (Perkasa et al., 2022). Learners therefore need both linguistic competence and psychological readiness to participate effectively in communicative interactions. Rusdin and Purwati (2023) similarly emphasize that successful oral communication depends not only on linguistic knowledge but also on learners' willingness and readiness to engage actively in the communicative process. This challenge becomes particularly significant in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where learners often have limited opportunities to use English authentically beyond the classroom.

Despite the importance of speaking competence, many learners experience substantial psychological difficulties when communicating in a foreign language, a phenomenon commonly conceptualized as *speaking anxiety*. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) encompasses a distinctive combination of self-perceptions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors associated with the particular demands of classroom language learning. Scholars generally conceptualize FLCA through three interrelated dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension can inhibit learners from initiating or sustaining oral interaction, while test anxiety may intensify psychological pressure when students perceive speaking activities as evaluative situations. Fear of negative evaluation can further discourage oral participation because learners anticipate criticism, embarrassment, or unfavorable judgments from teachers and peers, thereby constraining their speaking performance in EFL classrooms (Hidayati et al., 2022).

The demands of oral genre production can intensify these psychological challenges among students at the *Madrasah Aliyah* level in Indonesia, particularly when tenth-grade students perform recount texts. Oral recount tasks require students to reconstruct past experiences chronologically while simultaneously applying appropriate past-tense structures, temporal connectives, vocabulary, and coherent oral delivery (Tomlinson, 2012). Students must therefore manage linguistic formulation, memory retrieval, narrative organization, and real-time delivery while facing the social pressure associated with speaking before others. Preliminary classroom observations at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran revealed recurring indicators of speaking anxiety during oral recount activities, including reluctance to volunteer, minimal verbal responses, hesitation, and avoidance of public speaking tasks. These behaviors suggest that oral recount production may create an interaction between linguistic demands and affective pressure that influences students' willingness and ability to communicate effectively.

Previous studies have documented speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners and demonstrated its potential influence on students' willingness to participate and their oral language performance (Aprianto & Zaini, 2019). Existing research, however, has provided limited attention to how speaking anxiety specifically manifests during oral recount text performance among students at the *Madrasah Aliyah* level. Examining anxiety within a particular oral genre is important because recount texts require learners to coordinate chronological narration, grammatical accuracy, memory retrieval, and spontaneous oral delivery, which may generate distinctive forms of communicative pressure. This study addresses this gap by examining the observable manifestations and underlying dimensions of speaking anxiety among tenth-grade students during oral recount text activities at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research question: How does speaking anxiety manifest in the oral recount text performance of tenth-grade students at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran?

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore how students experience and demonstrate speaking anxiety during oral recount text activities. A qualitative approach enables researchers to examine the meanings individuals attribute to social and human phenomena and to interpret their experiences within natural settings. Because speaking anxiety involves subjective psychological experiences, including feelings, beliefs, perceptions, and observable behaviors that numerical data alone cannot fully represent, the researchers observed and interpreted anxiety-related responses as they naturally occurred in the classroom. The descriptive design also enabled the researchers to provide a detailed account of the behavioral manifestations of anxiety during students' oral performances (Creswell, 2015). This methodological orientation therefore allowed the study to connect students' observable behaviors with their reported experiences of anxiety during English speaking activities.

The study was conducted at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran, North Sumatra, Indonesia, during the 2025/2026 academic year. The researchers selected the school because its English curriculum incorporates recount texts as an oral learning task for tenth-grade students, while preliminary observations revealed observable indicators of speaking anxiety during classroom speaking activities. The primary observation took place in Class X-1 on Wednesday, May 6, 2026, during an oral recount text activity. The class comprised 27 enrolled students, of whom 22 attended and participated in the data-collection session. These 22 students constituted the observational participants from whom the researchers identified patterns of speaking anxiety and subsequently selected focal participants for more detailed investigation.

The researchers employed purposive sampling to select information-rich participants whose experiences were particularly relevant to the research question. Following the classroom observation, they selected four students, identified by the codes AKP, DAPS, FYA, and W.A, as focal participants for the semi-structured interviews. These students demonstrated the highest frequencies and most pronounced manifestations of speaking anxiety during their oral recount text performances. Their observable responses included behaviors associated with reluctance, hesitation, nervousness, and avoidance during speaking activities. Selecting these focal participants enabled the researchers to examine in greater depth the psychological experiences underlying the anxiety-related behaviors documented during classroom observation.

The researchers employed three data-collection techniques to facilitate methodological triangulation and strengthen the credibility of the findings. First, they conducted non-participant observation using a checklist based on the behavioral manifestations of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) identified by Sugiyono (2020), including

silence and avoidance, hesitation and stammering, physical signs of nervousness, and deliberate avoidance behaviors. Second, they conducted semi-structured interviews with the four focal participants immediately after the observation to explore students' subjective experiences across the three FLCA dimensions: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The researchers conducted all interviews in Indonesian, audio-recorded them with participants' consent, and transcribed the recordings verbatim to preserve the accuracy of participants' responses. Third, they collected documentary evidence, including photographic records and classroom participation notes, to provide supplementary contextual information and support the interpretation of observational and interview data.

The researchers analyzed the data using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (2014), which involves three concurrent processes: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. During data condensation, they selected, coded, and organized relevant observational, interview, and documentary evidence according to the three FLCA dimensions and their corresponding behavioral manifestations. They subsequently displayed the categorized data systematically to identify recurring patterns and relationships between students' observable behaviors and their reported anxiety experiences. The researchers continuously compared evidence across the three data sources before drawing and verifying conclusions concerning the manifestations and dimensions of speaking anxiety. They strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings through methodological triangulation, data triangulation, member checking, and *thick description* to ensure that the interpretations remained grounded in participants' experiences and the classroom context.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Observation Findings

The researchers conducted the classroom observation in Class X-1 at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran on May 6, 2026. Among the 22 students present, only one volunteered to speak first, providing an immediate indication of widespread reluctance to perform individually in English. The English teacher subsequently implemented a chain method in which each student who completed the task selected the next speaker, resulting in 17 students delivering their oral recount texts while five students refused to participate despite repeated encouragement. The observation checklist showed that most students who performed exhibited at least one observable indicator of speaking anxiety. The most frequently documented indicators included stammering and disrupted speech, extremely low or inaudible voices, visible nervousness, dependence on written aids, avoidance of eye contact, requests for peer assistance, past-tense errors, and pronunciation difficulties.

Components of Speaking Anxiety: Interview Findings

Semi-structured interviews with the four focal participants—AKP, DAPS, FYA, and W.A—provided further evidence of the psychological dimensions underlying the anxiety-related behaviors observed during classroom performance. The researchers analyzed participants' responses according to the three components of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) conceptualized by Sheen (2010): communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. All three dimensions appeared in the participants' accounts, although their intensity varied across individuals. Communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation occurred across all four focal participants, whereas test anxiety appeared more prominently among three participants. These interview findings complemented the observational evidence by connecting externally visible behaviors with students' subjective experiences during oral recount text performance.

Communication Apprehension

All four focal participants reported substantial communication apprehension when required to speak English publicly. AKP stated, "I feel nervous and embarrassed when I have to speak English in front of the class because I am not accustomed to using it in daily life," while DAPS explained, "I usually stammer and tremble because I feel that my classmates are watching me closely." FYA associated her nervousness with limited exposure to English in daily communication and difficulty retrieving vocabulary under pressure, whereas W.A described experiencing *deg-degan* (heart pounding) and confusion when called upon to perform. Classroom observations corroborated these self-reports through students' consistent dependence on written aids, avoidance of eye contact, and extremely low speaking volume. Piniel and Zólyomi (2022) explain that communication apprehension can generate negative self-evaluation

that progressively constrains oral performance, a pattern reflected in the convergence between participants' reported experiences and their observable behaviors.

Test Anxiety

Three of the four focal participants—DAPS, FYA, and W.A—reported heightened anxiety when they recognized that their speaking performance would receive formal evaluation. DAPS described becoming “*makin gugup, makin terbata-bata*” (increasingly nervous and increasingly hesitant) when she became aware of the evaluative context, while FYA explained that teacher assessment produced greater anxiety than ordinary public speaking: “*kalau guru menilai kita, itu buat kita lebih gugup daripada kalau cuma maju ke depan biasa aja*” (when the teacher evaluates us, it makes us more nervous than simply speaking in front of the class). W.A similarly reported panic and fear of receiving an unfavorable evaluation when performing under the researcher's observation, whereas AKP demonstrated comparatively lower test anxiety. These accounts indicate that students did not experience speaking anxiety solely because they had to use English publicly; awareness of formal assessment intensified the psychological pressure for most focal participants. This pattern corresponds with the affective-filter perspective discussed by Rianti et al. (2022), which suggests that heightened anxiety in evaluative situations can restrict learners' ability to access and effectively use linguistic knowledge they have already acquired.

Fear of Negative Evaluation

All four focal participants expressed concern about receiving negative judgments from classmates when making mistakes during English speaking activities. AKP and FYA explicitly reported fearing that classmates would laugh at them if they produced incorrect English, while DAPS explained that previous experiences of peer mockery following pronunciation errors in informal interactions had generated a persistent fear of public performance. W.A similarly described how anticipating peer laughter disrupted his ability to complete an oral performance: “*nanti tiba-tiba mereka ketawa sendiri yang nengok, terus jadi nggak selesai-selesai*” (they might suddenly laugh while watching, and then I cannot finish). All four participants consequently expressed a strong preference for group-based speaking activities over individual performances, suggesting that reduced individual exposure lowered their perceived social threat. Fahmadi et al. (2025) note that fear of negative evaluation can diminish learners' willingness to communicate publicly in a foreign language, a relationship clearly reflected in the participants' accounts.

Behavioral Manifestations of Speaking Anxiety

The classroom observations revealed several recurring behavioral manifestations that demonstrated how speaking anxiety influenced students' participation and oral performance. These manifestations did not occur uniformly across all students, but several patterns appeared repeatedly among those who participated in the recount text activity. The researchers categorized the observable responses into silence and avoidance, hesitation and stammering, physical signs of nervousness, and deliberate avoidance behavior. The categories also corresponded closely with experiences reported by the four focal participants during the semi-structured interviews. This convergence strengthened the interpretation that the observed behaviors reflected anxiety-related responses rather than isolated classroom behaviors.

Silence and Avoidance

Silence and avoidance constituted one of the most prominent manifestations of speaking anxiety during the classroom activity. None of the four focal participants volunteered to perform, and each demonstrated visible discomfort when called upon to speak. More significantly, five students—RA, W.H.N, M.H, M.R.F.S, and H.A—refused to perform throughout the session, representing the most pronounced form of avoidance documented in the study. Students may use silence as a protective response when they perceive speaking publicly as exposing their linguistic limitations, while complete withdrawal from oral production indicates a substantially stronger avoidance response. Syahfutra (2021) associates such withdrawal with heightened affective barriers that can discourage learners from participating in language-production activities.

Hesitation and Stammering

The researchers observed hesitation and stammering in approximately 14 of the 17 students who performed, making these behaviors the most widespread anxiety indicators among participating students. All four focal participants demonstrated frequent pauses, repetitions, disrupted utterances, or incomplete sentences during their oral recount performances. FYA repeatedly lost track of the narrative sequence, W.A combined recurrent stammering with an extremely low voice, DAPS demonstrated pauses, stuttering, and past-tense errors, and AKP spoke very softly while stammering frequently and maintaining minimal eye contact. These patterns indicate that anxiety affected not only students' willingness to communicate but also their ability to maintain fluent and organized speech once they began performing. Botes et al. (2020) explain that anxiety can interfere with cognitive processes involved in language encoding and retrieval, thereby constraining learners' capacity to produce fluent speech in real time.

Physical Signs of Nervousness

The observation checklist and photographic documentation also captured several physical manifestations of anxiety during students' oral performances. These responses included trembling, shaky or unstable voices, lowered heads, persistent avoidance of eye contact, and extremely low speaking volume. Several students tightly held their written notes and maintained a lowered head throughout substantial portions of their presentations. Such physical responses provide observable evidence that students experienced anxiety not only cognitively but also physiologically during individual speaking tasks. Graves (2008) describes these physiological responses as consequences of speaking anxiety that can further disrupt learners' concentration and ability to produce language effectively during oral performance.

Deliberate Avoidance Behavior

The researchers also identified deliberate avoidance strategies that students appeared to use to reduce their exposure during oral speaking activities. These strategies included lowering their heads, remaining silent when called upon, depending almost entirely on written aids rather than attempting more spontaneous speech, and requesting assistance from peers during presentations. The five students who refused to participate demonstrated the clearest and most extreme manifestation of avoidance behavior observed during the session. Such strategies may temporarily reduce students' psychological discomfort while simultaneously restricting opportunities to practice spontaneous English communication. Symons et al. (2017) associate heightened affective barriers with avoidance of language-production situations as a coping response, which can ultimately limit opportunities for developing oral proficiency.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that speaking anxiety constituted a pervasive and observable phenomenon in Class X-1 at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran rather than an isolated experience affecting only a small number of students. Only one of the 22 students volunteered to speak, five refused to perform entirely, and most of the 17 students who completed the task demonstrated one or more observable indicators of anxiety. Interview findings further revealed the simultaneous presence of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, although the intensity of each dimension varied among participants. Communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation emerged most consistently because all four focal participants reported concerns associated with public English communication and peer judgment. The convergence of these behavioral and self-reported findings indicates that anxiety influenced both students' willingness to participate and the quality of their oral performance.

The findings correspond with Christie's (2005) study of Indonesian EFL students at the secondary-school level, which similarly documented avoidance behaviors and reduced classroom participation associated with speaking anxiety. They also parallel Nattinger's (2014) findings concerning speaking anxiety in conventional instructional settings, where limited fluency, low confidence, and reluctance to participate characterized students' oral performance. The present findings extend this pattern by demonstrating how these anxiety-related responses become visible during a specific oral genre task requiring students to recount past experiences publicly. Sheen's (2010) discussion of anxiety in relation to classroom conditions also corresponds with the interview evidence, particularly because three of the four focal participants reported greater anxiety when they became aware that teachers or researchers were evaluating their performance. These similarities suggest that classroom evaluation and public exposure can interact with learners' existing linguistic insecurity to intensify anxiety during oral production.

The oral recount text task created a particularly demanding context because students needed to coordinate chronological narration, past-tense structures, vocabulary retrieval, pronunciation, and coherent oral delivery under real-time communicative pressure. Observation data demonstrated these simultaneous demands as several students struggled with narrative sequencing, past-tense accuracy, fluency, and pronunciation while also exhibiting visible anxiety. The affective-filter perspective discussed by Aprianto and Zaini (2019) helps explain this interaction by suggesting that heightened anxiety can constrain learners' access to linguistic knowledge during language production. Students who possess relevant vocabulary or grammatical knowledge may therefore experience difficulty retrieving and applying that knowledge when anxiety consumes attentional and cognitive resources during public performance. Fahmadi et al. (2025) further observe that limited opportunities for authentic speaking practice in Indonesian secondary-school contexts may leave learners psychologically underprepared for individual oral performance.

The convergence of classroom observations involving all 22 students, semi-structured interviews with four focal participants, and supporting documentary evidence indicates that speaking anxiety substantially mediated the relationship between students' linguistic resources and their actual performance during oral recount text activities at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran. Observable behaviors such as hesitation, low speaking volume, avoidance of eye contact, dependence on written notes, and refusal to participate corresponded closely with participants' reported communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These findings demonstrate that speaking difficulties cannot be interpreted solely as evidence of insufficient vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation because psychological pressure also influences learners' ability and willingness to mobilize their existing linguistic resources. The findings consequently position speaking anxiety as an important affective factor that English teachers need to consider when designing and assessing oral recount text activities. Anxiety-sensitive instruction that gradually increases speaking demands, reduces excessive evaluative pressure, and provides psychologically supportive opportunities for oral practice may help students participate more confidently and use their linguistic knowledge more effectively.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that speaking anxiety substantially influences the oral recount text performance of tenth-grade EFL students at Al-Washliyah Private Islamic Senior High School Kisaran. The findings revealed all three dimensions of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety—communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation—among the four focal participants and, to varying degrees, across the broader classroom context. Students manifested anxiety through four major behavioral patterns: silence and avoidance, hesitation and stammering, physical signs of nervousness, and deliberate avoidance behavior, as reflected by the fact that only one of the 22 observed students volunteered to speak, five refused to perform, and most participating students exhibited multiple anxiety indicators. The linguistic and cognitive demands of oral recount texts, including chronological organization, accurate use of past-tense structures, vocabulary retrieval, and real-time oral delivery, further intensified students' anxiety responses. These findings demonstrate that students' oral difficulties cannot be attributed exclusively to limited linguistic competence because psychological pressure also mediates their ability and willingness to mobilize existing language resources during public speaking tasks.

This study remains limited by its focus on a single class at one private Islamic senior high school, the relatively small number of focal interview participants, and its examination of speaking anxiety within one specific oral genre, which restricts the broader transferability of the findings. Future research should involve more diverse participants across different educational settings, examine anxiety across multiple speaking tasks, and employ longitudinal or intervention-based designs to evaluate whether cooperative learning, task-based language teaching, process drama, or other anxiety-sensitive strategies can reduce speaking anxiety over time. English teachers should progressively prepare students for individual oral performances through lower-anxiety activities such as pair work, small-group storytelling, guided rehearsal, and collaborative speaking tasks. Teachers should also establish supportive classroom norms that frame linguistic errors as a natural component of language development and actively discourage peer ridicule to reduce fear of negative evaluation.

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