

Speaking Anxiety in English Learning in Grade XI Students of Walisongo Pecangaan High School: Forms, Factors, and Strategies to Overcome It

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ABSTRACT

This study maps the forms, factors, and strategies for overcoming speech anxiety in grade XI students at Walisongo Pecangaan High School (pesantren context). Using a descriptive qualitative approach (case study), six students were selected on a purposive–maximum variation basis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and class observations in speaking sessions, then analyzed thematically by triangulating cognitive, physiological, and behavioral indicators. The results showed that the majority of the speakers were at medium to high levels. Four forms of anxiety arise and intertwine: (1) physiological—cold sweats, tension, speech blocking; (2) cognitive—a sense of "inadequacy", a concern about grammar accuracy; (3) behavior—avoidance, hesitation to start, waiting to be called; (4) linguistics—vocabulary limitations, accuracy focus. Internal factors are mainly low self-efficacy and accuracy orientation; External factors include a class climate that is too quiet/serious and peer judgment. Teacher support—wait-time, prompting, and non-judgmental feedback—acts as a damper that lowers affective filters and maintains willingness to communicate. Practical implications include tiered scaffolding (pairs→small groups→plenary), pre-task planning with keyword cards, delayed feedback policies, and fun strategies such as TPR-storytelling. This study enriches the study of FLCA in the context of pesantren and recommends mixed research with FLCAS adaptation, WTC/performance measurement, quasi-experimental test of intervention packages, and longitudinal tracking (XI→XII).

I. Introduction

The ability to speak English is a crucial competency in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning at the secondary school level, as it directly relates to academic achievement, readiness for further study, and participation in a performance-based curriculum. Numerous studies have consistently shown that speaking anxiety negatively affects oral performance, language development, and willingness to communicate (WTC); even moderate levels of anxiety can significantly suppress students' verbal participation and spontaneity in the classroom [1], [2]. As a result, learners may remain silent, avoid initiating turns, or respond minimally, limiting the communicative practice required for effective language acquisition.

Previous research has identified that speaking anxiety emerges from a combination of internal and external factors. Internally, low self-efficacy, fear of making errors, and concerns over grammatical accuracy frequently undermine learners' confidence [3], [4], [5]. Linguistic constraints, such as limited vocabulary and pronunciation difficulties, further reinforce feelings of inadequacy. Externally, classroom dynamics—peer judgment, evaluative pressure, overly serious or silent classroom atmospheres, and direct correction practices—can intensify anxiety during speaking tasks [6], [7]. These findings suggest that speaking anxiety is not merely an individual

psychological issue, but a pedagogical challenge shaped by classroom ecology and instructional practices.

From a theoretical perspective, speaking anxiety in EFL classrooms is commonly explained through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) framework, which encompasses communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test-related anxiety [8], [9]. These affective factors operate in line with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, where heightened anxiety functions as a filter that blocks language input and inhibits processing, while supportive learning environments lower this filter and promote participation [10], [11]. Consequently, managing learners' affective states becomes a prerequisite for sustaining WTC and optimizing speaking practice.

Despite extensive research on speaking anxiety, studies that map its forms, triggering factors, and coping strategies within pesantren-based secondary schools remain limited. In such contexts, strong norms of discipline, respect for authority, and classroom silence—while pedagogically valuable—may unintentionally amplify fear of negative evaluation and reduce spontaneous oral participation. Understanding how speaking anxiety manifests in this setting is therefore pedagogically important, as it allows teachers to design context-sensitive strategies that balance cultural values with communicative language teaching goals. Addressing speaking anxiety in this context is not only about improving individual performance, but also about creating learning environments that encourage active, low-anxiety engagement in English speaking activities.

II. Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using a case study design. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six Grade XI students at Walisongo Pecangaan High School, selected purposively to represent variation in speaking anxiety experiences. Classroom observations during speaking sessions were also conducted to capture students' verbal participation, nonverbal responses, and interaction patterns.

Data were analyzed thematically through three stages: open coding, categorization, and theme validation. During open coding, interview transcripts and observation notes were examined line by line to identify meaningful units related to speaking anxiety. These codes were then grouped into broader categories, which were refined into themes through cross-checking between data sources to ensure consistency and trustworthiness. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. All participants were informed about the research objectives and procedures, provided voluntary informed consent, and were assured that their identities would remain confidential through anonymization and the use of pseudonyms.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Results

1. Respondent Profile

Six Grade XI students from Walisongo Pecangaan High School participated as respondents in this study and were anonymized as S1–S6. All participants were enrolled in the same English class and were involved in speaking activities during the observation sessions. The respondents were selected using purposive–maximum variation sampling to represent differences in self-reported speaking anxiety experiences and participation patterns.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews conducted outside regular class hours and classroom observations during speaking sessions. Interview data were documented through detailed field notes, while observations focused on students' verbal participation, turn-taking behavior, facial expressions, body posture, and responses to teacher prompts and feedback. All data were anonymized, and participation was voluntary.

The respondents demonstrated varied self-perceptions and observable participation behaviors. S1 reported relatively stable confidence despite acknowledging vocabulary limitations and was observed initiating speaking turns. S2 expressed concerns related to grammatical accuracy and tended to provide brief responses with pauses. S3 reported low self-confidence and was frequently

observed avoiding eye contact and speaking only when directly nominated. S4 described mild anxiety but showed increased participation following teacher encouragement. S5 and S6 associated their anxiety with physiological reactions such as tension and difficulty initiating speech, which were reflected in long pauses and hesitations during observation.

2. *Speech Anxiety Level*

Students’ speaking anxiety levels were identified through triangulation of interview data and classroom observations. Interview data focused on students’ self-reported feelings, perceived difficulties, and reactions during speaking activities, while observations captured verbal participation, turn-taking behavior, pauses, and nonverbal expressions. Based on the consistency of cognitive, physiological, and behavioral indicators, students were qualitatively categorized into three levels of speaking anxiety: low, moderate, and high.

One student (S1) was categorized as having low speaking anxiety. In interviews, S1 acknowledged limitations in vocabulary but reported willingness to attempt speaking tasks. Classroom observations showed that S1 frequently initiated responses without being nominated, used paraphrasing strategies when encountering lexical difficulty, and maintained participation throughout the session.

Two students (S2 and S4) were categorized as having moderate speaking anxiety. S2 reported concerns related to grammatical accuracy and described the classroom atmosphere as very quiet and focused. Observational data showed that S2 tended to wait to be called upon, provided brief responses, and paused frequently before speaking. S4 reported feelings of anxiety during speaking tasks but indicated increased confidence following teacher encouragement. Observations confirmed that S4’s participation increased after prompting and wait-time, with smoother initiation of responses compared to initial turns.

Three students (S3, S5, and S6) were categorized as having high speaking anxiety. S3 reported a sense of low confidence and discomfort during speaking activities. During observations, S3 frequently avoided eye contact, showed hesitation when turns approached, and spoke only after direct nomination. S5 and S6 reported physiological reactions such as tension, cold sweats, and difficulty initiating speech. These reports were reflected in classroom observations through long pauses, repeated fillers, delayed responses, and incomplete utterances.

Across cases, variations in speaking anxiety levels were accompanied by differences in participation patterns and observable behaviors. Students with lower anxiety levels tended to initiate turns more readily, while those with higher anxiety levels showed greater hesitation, avoidance of eye contact, and reliance on direct teacher nomination.

Table 1. Summary of Speech Anxiety Levels per Respondent (Interview–Observation Triangulation)

Cod e	Anxiety Level	Interview Evidence (Core)	Observationa l Evidence (Core)	Primary Triggers	Protectiv e Factors	Cod e	Anxiety Level
S1	Low / nearly none	Acknowledges limited vocabulary but “still willing to try.”	Initiates turns without being called; uses paraphrase/code-switching when searching for words.	Limited lexis (managed)	Function al self-confidence	S1	Low / nearly none
S2	Moderat e	Grammar-related worry; describes the class as “too	Waits to be called on; short answers	Grammar accuracy; classroom	Teacher promptin g; wait-	S2	Moderat e

		silent and hyper-focused.”	with pauses.	silence	time		
S3	High	Feels “not capable”; loss of self-confidence in a serious/pressurizing classroom climate.	Avoids eye contact; averts gaze; speaks only after being called on.	Pressurizing classroom climate; low self-efficacy	—	S3	High
S4	Mild–moderate (managed)	Feels anxious but “more confident after teacher motivation.”	Participation increases after encouragement; responses become smoother with wait-time.	Performance concerns	Teacher motivation and scaffolding	S4	Mild–moderate (managed)
S5	High	Reports “cold sweat” and “stiff body”; struggles to start speaking.	Long pauses; repeated fillers; occasional speech blocking.	Fear of negative evaluation; classroom silence	—	S5	High
S6	High	“Afraid of peers’ comments”; difficulty expressing words.	Avoids taking turns; responds only when called; struggles to complete sentences; averts gaze.	Peer judgment; pressurizing classroom climate	—	S6	High

a) Distribution: Low = 1/6; Light–Medium/Medium = 2/6; Height = 3/6.

b) Note: Identity is disguised; Indicators are drawn from the consistency of the interview narrative and the observed behavior patterns.

3. Forms of Anxiety

Analysis of interview and observation data revealed four recurring forms of speaking anxiety: physiological, cognitive, behavioral, and linguistic. These forms frequently appeared in combination rather than in isolation, with multiple indicators observed within individual participants during speaking activities.

In the physiological domain, students reported bodily reactions associated with speaking tasks. S5 and S6 described symptoms such as cold sweats, body tension, and difficulty initiating speech. During classroom observations, these reports were reflected in long pauses before responding, repeated use of fillers, delayed initiation of turns, and occasional interruption of utterances before completion.

In the cognitive domain, anxiety was expressed through students’ self-perceptions and concerns related to speaking performance. S3 reported feelings of being “not capable” and low confidence when required to speak. Observational data showed that S3 frequently avoided eye contact, lowered head position as turns approached, and delayed responses until being directly nominated.

S2 reported concern over grammatical accuracy, which was accompanied by observable hesitation, pauses before speaking, and self-correction during utterances.

In the behavioral domain, most participants (S2–S6) demonstrated avoidance-related behaviors during speaking activities. These behaviors included waiting to be called upon, minimal initiation of turns, limited response length, and avoidance of eye contact. Classroom observations indicated that spontaneous verbal participation was limited, with only one or two students initiating responses without teacher nomination.

In the linguistic domain, students reported challenges related to vocabulary and grammatical formulation. S1 acknowledged limited vocabulary but continued to participate by paraphrasing and using occasional code-switching when encountering lexical difficulty. In contrast, S2 emphasized grammatical accuracy as a concern and was observed pausing frequently to monitor form, sometimes truncating utterances during self-correction. These patterns indicate that linguistic challenges were experienced differently across participants and were accompanied by varied participation behaviors.

Overall, the four forms of anxiety were reflected through consistent interview narratives and observable classroom behaviors. Physiological reactions were commonly associated with delayed responses, cognitive concerns appeared alongside hesitation and self-monitoring, behavioral indicators manifested as turn avoidance, and linguistic challenges were visible through pauses, self-corrections, and meaning negotiation strategies during speech.

Table 2. Mapping Forms of Anxiety, Interview–Observation Indicators, and Their Impact on Participation

Code	Dominant Form	Interview Indicators (core)	Observational Indicators (core)	Impact on Oral Participation
S1	Linguistic (positive buffer)	Limited vocabulary, but “still willing to try.”	Initiates without being called; uses paraphrase/code-switching when searching for words.	Participation relatively stable; accuracy fluctuates.
S2	Cognitive + Linguistic + Behavioral	Worried about grammar; class feels “too silent,” creating tension.	Waits to be called; hesitant pauses; truncates sentences to self-correct grammar.	Limited participation; brief answers.
S3	Cognitive + Behavioral	Feels “not capable”; declining self-confidence.	Avoids eye contact; averts gaze; speaks only after being called on.	Avoids taking turns; very low initiative.
S4	Behavioral (mild–moderate, controlled)	Anxious, but improves after teacher motivation/support.	Responses improve after prompting and wait-time; temporary increase in fluency.	Participation increases when teacher scaffolding is present.
S5	Physiological + Behavioral	Cold sweat, stiff body; difficulty initiating (speech blocking).	Long pauses; repeated fillers; stops mid-sentence several times.	Delayed responses; frequent avoidance.
S6	Physiological + Behavioral (+ Cognitive)	Afraid of negative peer comments; tense as turn approaches.	Avoids taking turns; struggles to complete sentences; averts	Very limited participation; requires direct

			gaze.	nomination.
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Physiological symptoms (S5–S6) correlated with long pauses and speech blocking; cognitive symptoms (S2–S3) appear as recurrent hesitation in initiation and self-improvement; behavioral symptoms (majority) in the form of turn avoidance; linguistic barriers act as manageable triggers(S1) or reinforce anxiety (S2). Interview-observation integration confirmed that the quality of the classroom climate and the teacher's support patterns directly contributed to the emergence or subsidence of these forms of anxiety.

4. *Trigger/Preservative Factors of Anxiety*

Interview and observation data identified a set of internal and external factors that co-occurred with students' expressions of speaking anxiety during classroom activities. Internal factors were primarily related to students' self-perceptions of ability and linguistic demands, while external factors were associated with classroom atmosphere, peer presence, and teacher feedback patterns.

At the internal level, students reported doubts about their speaking ability and concerns related to linguistic accuracy. S3 described feelings of being “not capable,” which were accompanied by reduced verbal initiative and avoidance of eye contact during observation. S2 emphasized concern over grammatical accuracy, and classroom observations showed frequent pauses, delayed initiation of speech, and self-correction during responses. In contrast, S1 acknowledged limited vocabulary but continued to attempt speaking tasks, as observed through paraphrasing and code-switching when encountering lexical difficulty.

At the external level, several students (S2, S3, S5, and S6) described the classroom atmosphere during speaking activities as very quiet and serious. This description was accompanied in observation by long pauses, delayed responses, and limited spontaneous participation. S6 additionally reported concern about peers' comments, which coincided with avoidance of eye contact and reluctance to initiate turns. S5 reported physiological tension when speaking in front of classmates, reflected in observable hesitation and repeated fillers.

Teacher feedback patterns were also noted in relation to students' participation behaviors. S4 reported feeling more confident after receiving encouragement from the teacher. Observational data showed that S4's verbal participation increased following prompting and the provision of wait-time, with smoother initiation of responses compared to earlier turns.

Overall, internal and external factors appeared alongside variations in students' speaking behaviors and anxiety expressions. Differences in self-perception, linguistic concerns, classroom atmosphere, peer presence, and teacher feedback were consistently reflected in interview narratives and classroom observations across participants.

5. *Emerging Strategies in the Field*

Strategies for managing speaking anxiety emerged from two primary sources: teacher practices observed during classroom activities and students' self-initiated coping efforts reported in interviews. These strategies were identified based on their recurrent appearance in interview narratives and observable changes in students' participation behaviors.

From the teacher's side, supportive classroom practices were frequently mentioned by students and observed during speaking sessions. S4 reported feeling more confident after receiving encouragement from the teacher. Classroom observations showed increased verbal participation following teacher prompting, provision of wait-time, and the use of non-judgmental responses to student answers. S2 also demonstrated more complete responses when questions were broken down into smaller units or when additional time was provided before responding.

From the students' side, individual coping strategies were limited but observable in certain cases. S1 reported continuing to speak despite limited vocabulary by using paraphrasing and occasional code-switching, which was reflected in observations through sustained participation and meaning negotiation during speech. In contrast, students with higher anxiety levels (S3, S5, and S6) did not report consistent personal strategies and were observed relying primarily on direct teacher nomination to participate in speaking activities.

Overall, strategies related to teacher support were more consistently associated with observable changes in participation patterns than self-initiated student strategies. While some students demonstrated adaptive behaviors during speaking tasks, others showed limited use of independent

coping strategies, as reflected in continued hesitation, avoidance of turn initiation, and reliance on teacher guidance.

Table 3. Summary of Triggering/Maintainer Factors and Identified Strategies (Interview– Observation)

Cod e	Dominant Internal Factor	Dominant External Factor	Interview Evidence (core)	Observational Evidence (core)	Cod e	Dominant Internal Factor
S1	Limited vocabulary (managed by self-efficacy)	—	“My vocabulary is limited, but I’m still willing to try.”	Initiates without being called; uses paraphrase/code-switching when searching for words.	S1	Limited vocabulary (managed by self-efficacy)
S2	Concern over grammatical accuracy	Very silent/hyper-focused classroom	“Afraid of making grammar mistakes; the class is too silent and tense.”	Waits to be called; hesitant pauses; truncates sentences to self-correct grammar.	S2	Concern over grammatical accuracy
S3	“Feeling not capable,” low self-confidence	Serious/pressurizing classroom climate	“I feel incapable; it makes me even less confident.”	Avoids eye contact; averts gaze; speaks only after being called.	S3	“Feeling not capable,” low self-confidence
S4	Mild–moderate anxiety (managed)	Teacher support (protective factor)	“I feel more confident after the teacher motivates me.”	Participation increases after encouragement; fluency improves with wait-time.	S4	Mild–moderate anxiety (managed)
S5	Physiological responses (cold sweat, stiff body)	Fear of negative evaluation; classroom silence	“Tense; my body feels stiff; hard to start talking.”	Long pauses; repeated fillers; stops mid-sentence several times.	S5	Physiological responses (cold sweat, stiff body)
S6	Physiological responses + concern about peer	Pressurizing classroom; worry about peers’ comments	“Afraid of peers’ comments ; I get confused	Avoids taking turns; struggles to complete sentences;	S6	Physiological responses + concern about peer

	judgment		about what to say.”	averts gaze.		judgment
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The table above shows that 1) Internal factors—doubts about proficiency and grammar confidence—trigger hesitation in starting speech; 2) external factors—very quiet/serious classes and peer judgment—nurture avoidance; 3) consistent teacher support to reduce anxiety (S4, part of S2); and 4) independent strategies are still minimal in students with high anxiety (S3, S5, S6), so more structured pedagogical interventions are needed to build sustainable coping.

B. Discussion

The findings of this study show that the majority of the interviewees are in the range of moderate to high anxiety, with triggers that are interrelated between linguistic barriers, self-perception, and class dynamics. The constellation is aligned with EFL literature in secondary schools that emphasizes the impact of speaking anxiety on verbal performance, willingness to communicate (WTC), and curriculum achievement: the higher the anxiety, the lower the breadth of participation and the quality of speaking performance [1], [2]. In this context, the classroom atmosphere that is too quiet/serious—as said in S2, S3, S5, and S6—correlates with increased pauses, fillers, and turn avoidance. In contrast, teacher support in the form of wait-time, prompting, and non-judgmental feedback lowers the affective burden (seen in S4) and opens up space for participation. The pattern emphasizes that classroom climate management is a key variable in maintaining WTC and the consistency of speaking practice required by the curriculum.

When viewed through the framework of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), the indicators that emerged map three main domains: communication apprehension (hesitation in starting, avoiding gaze), fear of negative evaluation (fear of peer comments, corrections), and test/evaluative anxiety (increased tension on valuable tasks) [8], [9], [12], [13]. The mechanism can be explained through the affective filter hypothesis: high anxiety raises the filter thereby cutting off access to language input and processing [10], [11]. In our data, the ascending filter was seen in S5–S6 (physiological symptoms and speech blocking) and S3 (declining self-confidence), while the decreased filter was seen when the teacher gave scaffolding (S4). The consequences for WTC are also consistent: when anxiety decreases and social support increases, verbal participation is more easily triggered [19], [20].

The internal dimensions—especially self-efficacy and accuracy orientation—are important differentiators between cases. S1 exhibits functional self-efficacy: vocabulary limitations do not automatically lead to avoidance, as they rely on paraphrasing and code-switching to maintain the flow of speech. This is in line with evidence that self-efficacy is inversely proportional to anxiety and contributes to better oral performance [1], [4], [5]. Instead, S2 places grammar accuracy as a stressful standard of performance that triggers pauses in doubt and repetitive self-improvement; S3 narrates "incapability" that lowers initiative. These findings affirm that interventions that strengthen self-efficacy while shifting the focus from accuracy to initial fluency can suppress anxiety and maintain continuity of speaking practice.

In the external-cultural dimension, the context of pesantren based schools presents class norms that uphold order, silence, and respect for authority. Although conducive to concentration, prolonged "silence" in a speaking session can be read as evaluative pressure—as seen from the increase in avoidance in S2, S3, S5, and S6. The literature on pesantren education shows a strong integration of character, spirituality, and academics [16], [17], [18], [19], [20], [21] but the mapping of the form-factor-strategy of speaking anxiety at level XI is still limited. The contribution of this study is to offer a subtle map that shows how the norm of "silence = focus" can shift to suppressive silence on verbal tasks, as well as how teacher support practices function as an effective affective buffer. In other words, the reframing of class norms (e.g., "silence to hear, productive noise to try") becomes relevant in order to maintain cultural values without sacrificing the WTC.

The direct pedagogical implications of these findings include the design of tiered scaffolding (pairs → small groups → plenary), pre-task planning and keyword cards to lower cognitive load, delayed and friendly feedback policies to reduce fear of negative evaluation, and wait-time question-and-answer rhythms to lower affective filters. Fun/movement-based strategies such as TPR-storytelling can be considered to lower anxiety while expanding fluency. Because independent strategies for students with high anxiety (S3, S5, S6) are still minimal, teachers need to teach coping explicitly (short breathing exercises before performing, positive self-talk, graduated exposure), as well as building anti-mockery norms and transparent assessment rubrics. Going forward, mixed research with FLCAS-Speaking adaptation and WTC/oral performance measurements, along with quasi-experimental tests of the above intervention packages, will strengthen generalizations and assess longitudinal impacts from classes XI to XII.

IV. Conclusion

This study mapped the forms, triggering factors, and coping strategies of speaking anxiety among Grade XI students at Walisongo Pecangaan High School within a pesantren-based educational context. The findings indicate that most students experienced moderate to high levels of speaking anxiety, manifested through intertwined physiological (e.g., tension, speech blocking), cognitive (e.g., feelings of inadequacy, concern over grammatical accuracy), behavioral (e.g., avoidance, hesitation to initiate turns), and linguistic forms. Internal factors such as self-efficacy and accuracy orientation, together with external factors including a very quiet classroom atmosphere, peer evaluation, and feedback practices, were consistently reflected in students' speaking behaviors. Teacher support—particularly wait-time, prompting, and non-judgmental feedback—was associated with increased verbal participation and reduced hesitation.

From a pedagogical perspective, the strategies identified in this study are aligned with key principles of flipped learning, thereby extending the instructional relevance of the findings without altering the research design. Pre-task planning strategies, such as keyword preparation and rehearsal, correspond to the pre-class phase of flipped learning, where cognitive load can be reduced before in-class speaking activities. Reduced in-class pressure—observed through supportive teacher practices, delayed feedback, and tiered participation formats—supports active and low-anxiety interaction during classroom time. Furthermore, the gradual development of self-regulation strategies, including positive self-talk, rehearsal, and peer-supported practice, reflects the principle of learner autonomy that underpins flipped learning environments.

Accordingly, integrating flipped learning principles into EFL speaking instruction may provide a pedagogically coherent framework for managing speaking anxiety in pesantren-based secondary schools. By reallocating preparation to the pre-class phase and using classroom time for supported, low-anxiety interaction, teachers can maintain curriculum achievement while fostering students' confidence and willingness to communicate. Future research is encouraged to examine this alignment empirically through mixed-methods designs, incorporating adapted FLCAS measures, WTC indicators, and longitudinal or quasi-experimental interventions to assess the sustainability of anxiety-reduction strategies across grade levels.

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