

**INDONESIAN EFL COLLEGE STUDENTS' ANXIETY  
IN ENGLISH ORAL PRESENTATIONS:  
FACTORS OF ANXIETY AND STRATEGIES TO COPE WITH ANXIETY**

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**Abstract**

This descriptive qualitative research examined the anxiety of students majoring in English literature when giving an oral presentation in English. The fifth and seventh semester students were the subjects of research. Observations, interviews, and questionnaires were used to identify factors causing anxiety among the students in their oral presentations in class and to study their strategies to overcome anxiety. The results reveal that fear of making mistakes, shyness, lack of self-confidence, lack of motivation, embarrassment, limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, peer influence, lack of preparation, teacher's presence, and lack of experience were factors contributing to the students' anxiety. Anxiety was also influenced by the attitude of the class teacher, which can either boost students' confidence or reinforce their worry. To overcome their anxiety, the EFL students applied memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. Many students, particularly those who practiced, reflected on themselves, or asked for criticism, developed progressive confidence.

**Keywords:** anxiety, oral presentations, EFL students

**INTRODUCTION**

A barrier to learning a foreign language is anxiety. Some studies have revealed that anxiety can lower students' self-confidence, inhibit communication, and have a negative effect on their academic progress (Han et al, 2022; Pan & Lau, 2025). Anxiety may also lead to difficulty processing new information, a fear of making mistakes, and avoiding speaking (Haroud et al., 2025; Hu & Wang, 2014). It not only hinders language learning but also creates self-doubt and low performance, affecting students' success in mastering a foreign language (Han et al, 2022; Wu, 2023).

Eysenck et al. (2007) defines anxiety as an unpleasant emotional and motivational state that occurs in threatening situations (336). This unpleasant feeling is usually felt by students when taking exams, both oral and written exams. These uncomfortable feelings can influence every action that students will take, whether it is to avoid these feelings or to overcome these feelings during the exam. Anxiety usually appears in the form of tension, uneasiness, nervousness, and worry related to autonomic nervous stimulation (Horwitz et al, 1986). Horwitz et al. distinguishes foreign language anxiety into three: 1) communication apprehension, which is the fear of talking to others; 2) test anxiety, which is the worry about being judged on tests and assignments; and 3) fear of negative evaluation, which is the concern about what others, like teachers and peers, think of the speaker (p.127).

Possible factors contributing to language anxiety are lack of confidence (Fatma, 2012; Juhanna, 2012b; Hadi et al., 2020; Aziz et al., 2022), lack of vocabulary (Fatma, 2012; Juhanna,

2012a), lack of preparation (Fatma, 2012; Hadi et al., 2020; Aziz et al., 2022), lack of motivation (Fatma, 2012; Juhanna, 2012b); lack of speaking practice and exposure to the target language (Tanveer, 2007), shyness and fear of making mistakes (Fatma, 2012; Juhanna, 2012b), and lack of technical knowledge (Hadi et al., 2020; Aziz et al., 2022). Fatma (2012) classify the factors into two: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors include fear of making mistakes, shyness, lack of self-confidence, and lack of motivation, while external factors include embarrassment, limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, peer influence, and lack of preparation. Teachers also may affect students' oral presentation performance. Teachers, who are not sympathetic, do not provide sufficient support and personal attention, play favorites, and fail to prepare students to meet teachers' expectation, are contributing factors causing students difficulties in their oral presentations (Palacios cited in Nguyen, 2011).

To overcome language anxiety, Kondo and Ying (2004) suggest preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation (262). Preparation refers to efforts to control future threats by improving learning strategies, such as studying seriously. Relaxation involves tactics to reduce somatic anxiety symptoms, such taking a deep breath and trying to calm down. Positive thinking is characterized by palliative function to suppress problematic cognitive processes underlying students' anxiety, such as imagining oneself giving a great performance and trying to enjoy the tension. Peer seeking is distinguished by students' desire to seek out other students who appear to be having difficulty understanding the class or controlling their anxiety. For anxious students, the awareness that others are having similar problems can be a source of emotional regulation through social comparison. Resignation is characterized by students' unwillingness to do anything to relieve their anxiety. This can usually take the form of giving up or sleeping in class.

Oxford (2003) proposes six strategies for managing language anxiety: memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy, and social strategy. Various memory-related strategies allow students to learn and retrieve information regularly. The memory strategies are often used to memorize vocabulary and structures in the early stages of language learning (Oxford 13). Cognitive strategies allow students to manipulate language materials directly. The strategy is in the form of practicing in a naturalistic environment and practicing structures and sounds formal (Oxford 12). Compensation strategy helps students master the four skills of the target language for both comprehension and production. The strategy helps students by using synonyms, gestures, or pause words to help students make up for lost knowledge (Oxford 13). Metacognitive strategy is used to manage the overall learning process. The strategy includes collecting and organizing materials, organizing study space and schedules, monitoring errors, and evaluating the success of tasks (Oxford 12). Affective strategies refer to mood and anxiety levels. The strategies usually involve rewarding oneself for good performance, taking deep breaths, and positive self-talk (Oxford 14). Research by Mardiningrum and Ramadhani (2022) found out that creating classroom environment that empowers students to solve problems

independently is also a strategy to cope with anxiety in addition to comprehensive preparation and building self-confidence and eye contact.

The current research was to find out factors that cause EFL students' anxiety in oral presentation and to identify strategies the students implement to overcome anxiety. Students in the fifth and seventh semesters of a language school in Yogyakarta were the participants of this research. They were the target group of this research as they had prior presentation experience in English, mostly in groups.

## **METHOD**

This research was descriptive qualitative with 20 students of STBA LIA Yogyakarta majoring in English literature of batch 2021 and 2022. Eleven students of batch 2021 gave a presentation in the Seminar Proposal class and the American Studies class, and nine students of batch 2022 delivered a presentation in the Teaching Methodology class.

Data were collected data from observations, interviews, and questionnaires. A checklist adapted from Dumarni's research (2018) was used in the observations to observe students' symptoms of anxiety, students' performance in the oral presentations, and strategies to overcome anxiety. Symptoms of anxiety include smiling shyly, appearing tense, looking down often, avoiding eye contact, and being silent before presenting. Students' performance observed include stuttering, reading from notes frequently, lacking mastery of material, and delivering only a brief presentation. Strategies to overcome anxiety observed include memorizing before presentation, moving hands, bringing notes, avoiding eye contact, moving feet, taking a deep breath, folding hands, and leaning on a table. The interviews were conducted with the teachers of the three courses to find out their opinions on the students' performance. Interviews with the students and online questionnaires distributed to the students were to identify the internal and external factors causing students' anxiety and strategies they used to cope with anxiety. The questionnaire questions about factors causing students' speaking anxiety were created based on the theory of Fatma (2012) and the questions about strategies to overcome speaking anxiety were based on Oxford's language learning theory (2003). Responses are categorized as never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always.

Triangulation method, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, was used for the analysis. Data from observations, interviews, and questionnaires were analyzed to gain a comprehensive understanding and to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

#### ***Observations***

The key categories observed were symptoms of anxiety, students' performance, and strategies to reduce anxiety.

### 1. Symptoms of anxiety

In the Seminar Proposal Course, smiling shyly was very common symptom of anxiety among students of batch 2021. Appearing tense was noted as a frequent symptom. Looking down often was occasionally observed among the students. Other symptoms like avoiding eye contact, being silent before presenting, moving feet, leaning on the table, or folding hands were rarely seen in the students. In the American Studies Course of batch 2021, smiling shyly and being silent or looking down before presenting were frequent symptoms of anxiety observed. Being tense was occasionally present. Avoiding eye contact or moving feet were also less frequent symptoms of anxiety among the students. The most frequent symptom of anxiety observed in students of batch 2022 in the Teaching Methodology Course was looking at a group partner or members instead of the audience. Smiling shyly was frequent but not dominant symptom. Appearing tense or looking down was not prominently observed, suggesting it is a less frequent symptom of anxiety.

### 2. Students' performance

In the Seminar Proposal Course, stuttering was a common performance issue. Reading from notes frequently was also common during presentations. Lack of mastery of material rarely occurred among the students of batch 2021. Similarly, in the American Studies Course, stuttering was the most frequent and consistent performance among the students, reading from notes was frequently observed, and lack of mastery of the material was rare. The performance of batch 2022 students in the Teaching Methodology Course was slightly different. Stuttering and reading from notes was extremely common. Yet, lack of mastery of the material was also less frequently seen among the students.

### 3. Strategies to reduce anxiety

In the Seminar Proposal Course, moving hands and memorizing before presentations were the most common anxiety-reduction strategies used by the students of batch 2021. Bringing notes, avoiding eye contact, being silent before presenting, moving feet, leaning on a table, or folding hands were less frequently observed. Likewise, memorizing beforehand and moving hands were practiced by all batch 2021 students in the American Studies Course, indicating very common strategies to reduce anxiety. Also, less frequent strategies were bringing notes, looking down or avoiding eye contact, being silent before presenting, moving feet, leaning on a table, and folding hands. In contrast to the students of batch 2021, bringing notes was practiced by most students of batch 2022 in the Teaching Methodology Course, in addition to moving hands, reflecting a very common anxiety-reducing behavior. Memorizing beforehand was a moderately common strategy noted among the students. Leaning on a table or folding hands were infrequent strategies used by only a few students.

## ***Interviews***

### ***Interviews with Teachers***

The interviews with the teachers of the three courses were to figure out the students' presentation performance.



The teacher of the Seminar Proposal course noted that all students brought notes although they did not read through those notes. They used information on their PowerPoint to help them deliver their presentation and give them confidence. Nevertheless, they all looked nervous at the start of their presentation.

Student performance in the American Studies course varied. The teacher reported that only one student did not prepare well and misread her notes while others struggled to speak in English, mumbled, or spoke too fast. Though a few did not thoroughly learn their presentation materials, the majority of students were organized and confident. Some students showed signs of nervousness, especially those who mumbled or made anxious gestures.

The Teaching Methodology teacher found that the majority of students used both English and Indonesian in their presentations. In addition, the students were mostly organized, but some lacked mastery of their topics. Although nervousness was common, students were able to manage their anxiety when giving presentations. Only one student delivered a presentation completely in English without looking at written notes.

### ***Interviews with Students***

The interviews with the students asked questions about the internal and external factors of their anxiety when giving presentations as well as strategies they practiced to cope with anxiety.

#### 1. Internal factors of anxiety

The internal factors include shyness, confidence, and motivation in speaking in public using English. The majority of the 2021 batch students admitted to being timid or afraid, particularly as a result of being watched, bad experiences in the past, or a lack of exposure. Confidence frequently depended on mastery of the material. The students' confidence levels ranged from moderate to high. A few students started with low confidence and improved their confidence through practice. Regarding motivation to speak in public using English, some students asserted that they spoke in public for personal development, while others were externally driven, such as due to academic requirements.

As for the 2022 batch students who were more junior, the internal factors were mostly often triggered by linguistic problems and public presence. The students' anxiety was based on how one views oneself and the fear of making a mistake, not always on their performance. Confidence depends on the situation and is greatly influenced by preparation. More prepared students report feeling more confident. Despite their fears, the majority of students showed strong motivation to get better. There was only one externally driven student.

#### 2. External factors of anxiety

The external factors questioned the students' mastery of vocabulary, grammar, social judgment, preparation, and the role of lecturers. Interviews with students of batch 2021 revealed the following factors. Vocabulary limitations were a barrier to fluency for more than half of the students. Although grammar frequently caused anxiety, students used a strategy, such as focusing only on a

single grammatical tense. Fear of being judged was not a common concern, but it made students who had received negative feedback felt more anxious. One common factor, particularly for students with high anxiety level, was a lack of preparation. In addition, students' anxiety was greatly influenced by their teachers' attitude. The interviews also affirmed that teacher's criticism as well as teachers' seriousness affected students' future anxiety.

All students of batch 2022 acknowledged that limited vocabulary often hindered them speak English fluently in public. Vocabulary and grammar became two biggest external factors affecting confidence and presentation delivery. Peer criticism did not overly bother most students; only one student considered it a big anxiety trigger. Lack of preparation was usual and clearly weakens confidence. All students acknowledged that teachers influenced their anxiety. Strict teachers could be both motivating and intimidating. Despite prior presentation experience in groups, speaking in English was still a challenge. Group work was still not enough to build full confidence.

### 3. Strategies to overcome speaking anxiety

Most frequently used strategies practiced by students of batch 2021 were preparing notes or outlines, positive self-talk, and relaxation techniques (e.g., prayer). Frequent strategies used include practicing before presentation, such as recording themselves, practicing in front of a mirror, and inviting peers to evaluate them; peer feedback and discussion –most students discuss anxiety with friends or ask for feedback—; using gestures, synonyms, or pause words –several students used gestures or verbal fillers to help retrieve forgotten content—; and presenting in pairs. Occasionally or rarely used strategies mentioned by a few students were practicing in real settings, creating detailed preparation schedules, using pause words, and using peer support.

As for students of batch 2022, the most common strategies were preparing notes/materials; practicing before presentations either in naturalistic settings or through reading, memorizing, or rehearsing alone; and praying or meditating to calm themselves before presenting. Frequently strategies to manage speaking anxiety were using verbal or non-verbal aids, such as gestures, synonyms, pause words; positive self-talk to encourage themselves before speaking; presenting in pairs/groups. Less frequent strategies were discussing anxiety with friends and avoiding peer support or self-talk.

### **Questionnaire**

Of 20 students, 18 filled out the questionnaires. The questions were to find out factors of students' speaking anxiety in English presentations and strategies employed by students to overcoming speaking anxiety.

Table 1 presents internal and externals that contribute to speaking anxiety in English presentations. It categorizes speaking anxiety into internal and external factors, based on how frequently students experience specific feelings or situations when giving a presentation in English.

**Table 1**  
**Factors of Speaking Anxiety**

A. Internal	Factor	Frequency and Percentages				
		Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1.	I feel scared when giving a presentation in English.	1 (5%)	2 (11%)	7 (38%)	5 (27%)	2 (11%)
2.	I feel shy when giving a presentation even though I did not do anything wrong.	3 (16%)	6 (33%)	3 (16%)	4 (22%)	2 (11%)
3.	I feel less confident when giving a presentation in English.	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	7 (38%)	5 (27%)	1 (5%)
4.	I am motivated to do a presentation in English.	-	1 (5%)	9 (50%)	3 (16%)	4 (22%)
<b>B. External</b>						
1.	I feel embarrassed when I make mistakes when presenting in English.	1 (5%)	4 (22%)	6 (33%)	4 (22%)	2 (11%)
2.	I feel that limited vocabulary hinders me when presenting in English.	-	3 (16%)	7 (38%)	3 (16%)	4 (22%)
3.	I find it difficult to use correct grammar when presenting in English.	-	2 (11%)	6 (33%)	7 (38%)	2 (11%)
4.	I feel anxious about the assessment of other friends related to the presentation I did.	2 (11%)	2 (11%)	8 (44%)	3 (16%)	2 (11%)
5.	I feel unprepared when presenting in English.	2 (11%)	4 (22%)	8 (44%)	2 (11%)	1 (5%)

The internal factors refer to students' inner emotions and self-perceptions, comprising feeling scared during presentations, feeling shy even when giving presentations, lacking confidence, and motivation to deliver presentations in English. Those factors mostly appeared in the "sometimes" category. Over 75% of students (sometimes 38%, often 27%, and always 11%) felt scared to some degree when presenting. Shyness was experienced moderately to frequently (rarely 33%, often 22%, and sometimes 16%), despite not doing anything wrong. A significant portion of students (65% -- sometimes 38% and often 27%) felt less confident when speaking in English. While many students are somewhat motivated (sometimes 50%), only a few feel highly motivated (always 22% and often 16%).

The external factors involve language limitations and social or academic pressures. Those factors are also mostly seen in the "sometimes" category. A majority experienced occasional embarrassment (sometimes 33%, often and rarely 22% each, always 11%), but few were severely affected. Vocabulary limitation was a major external factor, affecting 60% of students frequently (38%) or always (22%). Grammar challenges were experienced by over 70% of students (often 38% and sometimes 33%). Peer judgment caused anxiety in most students (sometimes 40%, often 16%, always 11%), though severe anxiety was less common. Lack of preparation was a notable issue (sometimes 44%, rarely 22%), but only a few students consistently feel unprepared.

Table 2 displays students' strategies to cope with speaking anxiety. The strategies listed in the questionnaire include reviewing notes before a presentation, making a schedule for preparation, preparing an outline or small notes, practicing in a naturalistic or simulated presentation setting, recording practice sessions, relaxation techniques (e.g. breathing, meditation, prayer, walking,

listening to music), positive self-talk, discussing anxiety with friends, asking friends for help with confusing points, and using synonyms, gestures, or pause words to recall missing information.

**Table 2**  
**Strategies to Overcome Speaking Anxiety**

Strategies	Frequency and Percentages				
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
1. I review my notes before a presentation.	-	3 (16%)	2 (11%)	6 (33%)	7 (38%)
2. I make a schedule to prepare for the presentation.	3 (16%)	1 (5%)	7 (38%)	6 (33%)	1 (5%)
3. I prepare by making an outline or small notes for the presentation.	-	2 (11%)	6 (33%)	7 (38%)	3 (16%)
4. I practice in a naturalistic environment or as if doing a real presentation.	1 (5%)	2 (11%)	7 (38%)	6 (33%)	2 (11%)
5. I record my practice to monitor mistakes and evaluate my practice.	4 (22%)	7 (38%)	7 (38%)	-	-
6. I relax by taking a deep breath, walking, meditating, listening to music, praying before a presentation.	2 (11%)	1 (5%)	4 (22%)	8 (44%)	3 (16%)
7. I do positive self-talk to myself (e.g. you can do it your-self, it will be over soon, it is the same as practicing in front of a mirror).	1 (5%)	3 (16%)	4 (22%)	6 (33%)	4 (22%)
8. I discuss the feelings of anxiety that I feel with my friends.	4 (22%)	5 (27%)	4 (22%)	4 (22%)	1 (5%)
9. I ask my friends for help to get verification or clarification on confusing points.	1 (5%)	7 (38%)	5 (27%)	4 (22%)	1 (5%)
10. I use synonyms, gestures, or pause words to remember information that is missing during the presentation.	-	2 (11%)	7 (38%)	5 (25%)	4 (22%)

The most frequently used strategies were reviewing notes, making outlines, using relaxation techniques, and positive self-talk. A total of 71% was reviewing notes before a presentation (33% often, 38% always); 54% of students (38% often and 16% always) prepared an outline notes; 60% of them (44% often and 16% always) used relaxation techniques regularly; as many as 55% of them (33% often and 22% always) employed affirmations to manage anxiety, and 71% (38% sometimes and 33% often) showed effort to simulate real conditions for fluency and comfort.

Less commonly used strategies include scheduling preparation time, asking friends for help with confusing points, and using gestures or synonyms, and. Scheduling was used by 87% of students (38% sometimes, 33% often, but 16% never); asking friends for help were employed by 87% of students (38% rarely, 27% sometimes, and 22% often); and using synonyms, gestures, or pause words to recall missing information were used by 85% of students (38% sometimes, 25% often, and 22% always).

The least practiced strategies were recording presentations and openly discussing anxiety with friends. Recording practice sessions was not commonly used by the students (38% sometimes and rarely each, and 22% never). Discussing anxiety with friends was also not a common strategy

with only 5% of students always did it, while 22% never, rarely, sometimes, or often employed this strategy.

## Discussion

Most commonly observed symptoms of speaking anxiety across the three courses (Seminar Proposal, American Studies, and Teaching Methodology) were smiling shyly, stuttering, reading from notes, and looking tense. Teachers of the three courses observed that students looked nervous, used notes, and relied on PowerPoint. Some lacked mastery of material but showed effort to stay organized. Students reported that anxiety often stemmed from being watched, fear of grammar mistakes, or previous negative experiences. Confidence improved with preparation and familiarity. The majority of students who sometimes or often felt scared or shy reported low to moderate confidence. Many were motivated to improve, but some were only extrinsically driven (e.g., assignments).

Common internal factors are shyness, past failure, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes. Students felt shy because many people saw them while they were giving a presentation. Some sometimes lacked self-confidence while giving a presentation which was evident when they avoided eye contact with the audience. Students' fear of making mistakes were because they worried about making mistakes in grammar and pronunciation, were not very fluent, had limited vocabulary, and lacked thorough preparation. Confidence improved with preparation and peer support. Batch 2021 students were affected by past experiences. Batch 2022 students were more influenced by language limitations. Fatma (2012) and Juhana (2012b)'s causes of internal anxiety including shyness, fear of mistakes, and lack of confidence are all confirmed here. Eysenck et al. (2007) suggest that anxiety affects cognitive focus. It was observed in students who stuttered, rushed, or misread notes. As for external factors, vocabulary and grammar were the top anxiety triggers. Preparation strongly influenced confidence. Teacher's attitudes, whether strict or supportive, significantly affected anxiety. Peer judgment was a concern for few, but feedback from teachers had lasting psychological effects. Oxford (2003) categorizes these into: Cognitive challenges (vocabulary, grammar), affective barriers (fear, judgment), social pressure (peer/teacher feedback). Tanveer (2007) emphasizes that lack of exposure and language practice can elevate anxiety. Students in this research reported difficulty in individual English presentations despite prior group experience.

To overcome speaking anxiety, batch 2021 students often used memorization, hand gestures, and peer pairing. Batch 2022 students frequently used notes, gestures, prayer, and rehearsals. Teachers reported that note-taking, self-talk, prayer, and practice with peers, simulating presentation scenarios were frequent strategies used. Rare strategies were leaning on tables, folding hands, and avoiding eye contact. Most frequently used strategies were reviewing notes, outlining, relaxation, and positive self-talk. The results aligns with Kondo & Ying (2004)'s five anxiety-coping strategies: 1) preparation (seen in reviewing notes and outlines), 2) relaxation (seen in prayer and

meditation, 3) positive thinking (self-talk), 4) peer seeking (occasional peer help), and 5) resignation which was visible in students who avoided preparation or were externally motivated only. The results also conform to Oxford's strategies: 1) memory strategy; students memorized the material and reviewed the notes or PPT they had made (note-based preparation), 2) cognitive strategy; students practiced in front of a mirror and in a natural environment or as if doing a real presentation (rehearsal and mirroring); 3) compensation strategy; students used synonyms, gestures, and pause words to remember the material they forgot when giving a presentation; 4), affective strategy; students relaxed by taking deep breaths, avoiding eye contact with the audience, folding their hands behind their backs, leaning on the table, praying, meditating, moving their hands and feet, and discussing the anxiety they felt with their friends (relaxation, self-talk), and 5) social strategy which was used less often; most students rarely asked their friends for help to get verification or clarification on confusing points (peer evaluation).

All of these strategies could not eliminate students' anxiety 100%. There was still a sense of fear and anxiety felt by students when giving presentations in English. However, most of them could control the feelings of anxiety and fear.

## CONCLUSION

This research finds that language-related anxiety is multifaceted, combining both internal feelings (fear, shyness) and external pressures (grammar, vocabulary, teacher expectations). Teacher attitude significantly influences anxiety, either reinforcing nervousness or building student confidence. Students show adaptive coping behaviors, with most relying on preparation-based and internal strategies (note review, self-talk, prayer), while social support strategies (peer discussion, help-seeking) are underutilized. Despite ongoing challenges, many students show progressive confidence development, especially those who rehearse, self-reflect, or seek feedback.

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