

## THE MAIN CAUSES OF ENGLISH FOR OCCUPATIONAL PURPOSES STUDENTS (EOP) SPEAKING ANXIETY

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**Abstract:**

This paper aimed at investigating the main causes of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) students' speaking anxiety. The study involved a total of eight students from two different classes with varying levels of English proficiency. It focused on a case study conducted in an Indonesian company and utilized three types of research instruments, namely classroom observation FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) questionnaires by Horwitz (1986) and semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that experiences in communicating, the kind of students' occupation and Foreign Language Acquisition (FLA) are the main causes of EOP students' speaking anxiety.

**Keywords:**

EOP students;  
Speaking Anxiety



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### INTRODUCTION

English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) has gained popularity in recent years as the demand for English communication skills continues to grow in the global job market. However, despite the importance of EOP, many language learners encounter difficulties in developing their speaking abilities, with speaking anxiety being one of the most common obstacles. Speaking anxiety is a feeling of fear, nervousness, or discomfort that individuals experience when communicating verbally, especially in a second language setting. It is an issue that has received increasing attention from researchers, educators, and language learners as it can have a detrimental impact on learners' academic performance, career advancement, and personal well-being.

The prevalence of speaking anxiety in EOP classrooms is a critical issue that language instructors must address. EOP students often have specific language needs related to their professional goals, such as job interviews, presentations, and negotiations. However, if students experience high levels of anxiety when communicating in English, they may struggle to achieve their language learning goals. Speaking anxiety can also lead to negative outcomes, such as lower grades, reduced participation in class, and decreased confidence in the workplace.

Therefore, understanding the main causes of EOP speaking anxiety is essential for language instructors and learners alike. Research indicates that multiple factors contribute

to speaking anxiety, including personality traits, cultural background, language proficiency, and classroom environment. Identifying the primary causes of speaking anxiety can assist instructors in developing effective strategies to reduce anxiety levels and enhance learners' communication skills.

Although there exists a considerable body of research investigating the phenomenon of students' speaking anxiety, the majority of these studies concentrate on specific educational levels. For instance, research has focused on elementary school (Agius, 2015; Sülter et al., 2022), high school (Mukminin et al., 2015; Santoso & Perrodin, 2022), and college-level students (Pattah et al., 2022; Pontillas, 2020).

This paper aims to explore the primary factors that contribute to EOP speaking anxiety and suggest practical strategies to address this issue in EOP classrooms. The paper will begin by examining the concept of speaking anxiety, including its definition, causes, and effects on learners. It will then review the literature on the main causes of speaking anxiety in EOP students, with a particular focus on language proficiency, classroom environment, and cultural factors. Finally, the paper will suggest practical strategies that language instructors can use to help EOP students overcome speaking anxiety and enhance their speaking abilities. By understanding the causes of EOP speaking anxiety and implementing effective strategies, language instructors can create a supportive learning environment that promotes learners' confidence and success in the workplace.

The affective domain encompasses a significant amount of emotional engagement, including one's perception of self, community relationships, and emotional connections between language and culture. Anxiety is a component of this domain (Brown, 2000). Speaking anxiety, also known as communication apprehension, is a common obstacle that EOP students encounter in their language-learning journey (Bashori et al., 2022). It refers to the fear or discomfort experienced by individuals when communicating verbally, which could affect their academic performance and career prospects (Oflaz, 2019). Understanding the concept of speaking anxiety is crucial in addressing this issue in EOP classrooms.

The definition of speaking anxiety varies among researchers, but most agree that it is a complex phenomenon that involves cognitive, physiological, and behavioral components (Alhazmi et al., 2022). Some researchers view it as a subtype of social anxiety (Kanai et al., 2010), while others consider it a unique form of anxiety that pertains only to communication situations (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020). Despite the different conceptualizations, there is a general consensus that speaking anxiety is a negative emotional state that could impair an individual's ability to communicate effectively (Rodero & Larrea, 2022).

There are several causes of speaking anxiety (Mahmud, 2018), and they could be categorized into internal and external factors. Internal factors include individual differences in personality traits, such as shyness, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (K & Alamelu, 2020). In contrast, external factors include situational variables, such as the audience, the topic, and the mode of communication (Ibrahim et al., 2022). Moreover, some studies suggest that prior negative experiences in communication could contribute to the development of speaking anxiety.

The effects of speaking anxiety on learners are well-documented (Bashori et al., 2021; Zheng et al., 2021). Students who experience high levels of speaking anxiety often exhibit avoidance behaviors, such as staying silent in class or avoiding communication situations altogether. This could result in poor academic performance and limited opportunities in the job market, as effective communication skills are highly valued in the workplace. Furthermore, speaking anxiety could negatively affect an individual's social and emotional well-being, leading to decreased self-confidence and increased stress levels.

One significant factor that contributes to English speaking anxiety is language proficiency (Dung, 2020). Research indicates that learners with lower levels of English proficiency are more likely to experience speaking anxiety. This is because they may lack the confidence and skills necessary to communicate effectively in English, leading to feelings of self-doubt and nervousness. Additionally, learners with limited vocabulary or grammar knowledge may struggle to express themselves clearly, increasing their anxiety levels. Therefore, language instructors must consider learners' language proficiency levels when designing language learning programs and developing strategies to address speaking anxiety.

Another key factor that contributes to English speaking anxiety is the classroom environment (Fatima et al., 2020). Learners who perceive their classroom environment as unsupportive or threatening are more likely to experience anxiety. Classroom factors that can impact learners' anxiety levels include teaching methods, assessment practices, and teacher-student relationships. For example, learners who perceive their teachers as authoritarian or critical may feel more anxious when communicating in English. On the other hand, learners who receive positive feedback and support from their teachers are more likely to feel confident and motivated to speak in English. Therefore, creating a supportive classroom environment is essential for reducing speaking anxiety in EOP students.

Cultural factors also play a significant role in English speaking anxiety (Asif, 2017). Learners from different cultural backgrounds may have different expectations and attitudes towards language learning and communication. For example, learners from cultures that value collectivism and group harmony may feel anxious when expressing their opinions in English, as they may fear disrupting the group's harmony. Similarly, learners from cultures that place a high value on academic achievement may feel more pressure to perform well in language learning programs, increasing their anxiety levels. Therefore, instructors must be aware of learners' cultural backgrounds and adapt teaching methods and strategies accordingly.

To tackle the problem of English speaking anxiety and to improve the speaking skills of students, language teachers have at their disposal various practical strategies (Liu, 2018). Among these strategies, creating a secure and supportive learning environment that promotes students' self-expression without fear of being criticized or evaluated is highly effective. Teachers can foster such an environment by designing activities that cultivate a positive classroom atmosphere. Examples of such activities include icebreakers, group discussions, and role-playing, which encourage students to engage with one another in a non-judgmental way. By incorporating these types of activities into their teaching,

language instructors can help to increase students' confidence and reduce anxiety in speaking English.

In addition to creating a safe and supportive learning environment, building students' confidence and self-efficacy in speaking English is another effective strategy that language instructors can use to address the issue of English speaking anxiety and enhance their students' speaking abilities. Demirdöken & Okur, (2022) suggest that language instructors can help students build their confidence and self-efficacy by providing them with opportunities to practice their speaking skills in a low-stakes environment. This could involve peer feedback and self-reflection activities, where students can give and receive constructive feedback on their language skills without the fear of being judged or criticized. Language instructors can also offer personalized feedback and support to help students identify their strengths and areas for improvement, thereby enhancing their overall confidence in speaking English.

Moreover, language instructors can use technology and multimedia resources to supplement their teaching methods and enhance their students' speaking abilities (Chen, 2022). By integrating online video platforms, such as YouTube or Zoom, instructors can offer their students access to a variety of audiovisual materials that can aid in developing their listening and speaking skills. Additionally, speech recognition software like Rosetta Stone or Duolingo can provide students with instant feedback on their pronunciation and fluency, allowing them to track their progress and make necessary adjustments. By utilizing these technological tools, language instructors can create a dynamic and engaging learning environment that supports their students' language development.

In addition to practical strategies, language instructors can play a critical role in helping students manage their speaking anxiety by providing guidance and resources for stress management (Sarpourian et al., 2022). By incorporating relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing exercises, language instructors can help students reduce their levels of anxiety and promote a more positive and calmer classroom atmosphere. Additionally, instructors can provide students with access to resources such as counseling services and support groups, which can offer additional support and guidance to those struggling with anxiety. By offering these resources and providing ongoing support, language instructors can help students feel more empowered and confident in their ability to manage their anxiety and improve their speaking skills.

In conclusion, the literature on speaking anxiety in EOP students highlights the importance of understanding the factors that contribute to this issue. Language proficiency, classroom environment, and cultural factors are all significant contributors to EOP speaking anxiety. By considering these factors and implementing effective strategies, language instructors can create a supportive learning environment that promotes learners' confidence and success in the workplace.

## **METHOD**

### ***Research Design***

A qualitative research methodology is a suitable approach for exploring the main causes of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) students' speaking anxiety. This methodology allows for a more in-depth understanding of participants' experiences,

attitudes, and perceptions, providing valuable insights into the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, J.W. and Creswell, 2018). In this study, a qualitative research methodology was employed to explore the primary factors that contribute to EOP speaking anxiety.

The study involved eight EOP students from two classes with varying English proficiency levels. A case study approach was employed, where data was collected through classroom observation, FLCAS from Horwitz et al., (1986) and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observation was used to gather information on learners' behavior, participation, and interaction during speaking activities, while semi-structured interviews were used to explore learners' attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of speaking anxiety.

The data collected through classroom observation and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach involved identifying and categorizing key themes and patterns in the data, allowing for a more in-depth understanding of the primary factors contributing to EOP speaking anxiety. The analysis process involved several stages, including data familiarization, code development, and theme identification.

**Setting and Participants**

The EOP program under investigation in this study was taught by a researcher in a company. Upon preliminary observation, it was noted that some students exhibited high levels of anxiety when speaking English. The study included eight male employees aged between 23 and 28 years old with educational backgrounds ranging from senior high school to bachelor's degrees. These participants worked in various departments within the company, including delivery, drafting, 3D design, workshop administration, human resources, project management, health, safety and environment, supply chain management, and information technology.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Table 1** EOP Students' Overall Information

No.	Name	Background of Education	Length of English Learning	Bad Speaking Experience	FLCAS Score	The Anxiety Level
1	Student A1	SMA	Fifteen Years	Yes	102	Mildly Anxious
2	Student A2	S1	Fifteen Years	Yes	110	Anxious
3	Student A3	SMA	Sixteen Years	Yes	119	Anxious
4	Student B1	S1	Seventeen Years	No	89	Mildly Anxious
5	Student B2	S1	Twenty Years	No	75	Relaxed
6	Student B3	S1	Twenty Years	No	46	Very Relaxed
7	Student B4	S1	Twenty Years	No	112	Anxious
8	Student B5	S1	Twenty Years	Yes	87	Mildly Anxious

### Education Background and Anxiety

As shown in Table 1, the students in EOP conversation course have various characteristics as well education background. Those who graduated from senior high school are the students A1 & A3 and the rests are graduated from several universities.

Student A1 & A3 who graduated from senior high school get FLCAS scores 102 & 119 and they belong to mildly anxious and anxious students; on the other hand, student B2 & B3 who graduated from universities are relaxed and very relaxed while speaking because they get FLCAS scores 75 & 46. The correlation between education background & anxiety from this study is not as simple as this description.

In fact, education background of EOP students does not have effects on the student's anxiety level. The students who graduated from university had a tendency to get anxiety when speaking English like students A2, B1, B4, and B5. Herbein et al., (2018), Tuyet & Khang, (2020), and Wati et al., (2022) reveal that the students from elementary, high school and university level had average mean scores 97.57, 97.79, and 97.78, which mean all EFL students in all academic levels have a proclivity to feel apprehensive while speaking.

### A Length of English Learning

All students in EOP conversation course who are relaxed and anxious while speaking has learnt English more than fifteen years. The shortest length of English learning is the student A1 & A2 who have learnt English for fifteen years. However, the students B2, B3, B4, and B5 have learnt English more than twenty years and they belong to the students who have the longest length English learning.

As stated before, between foreign language anxiety level and English learning achievement have a significant negative correlation (Tridinanti, 2018). Foreign language acquisition is not caused by how long the students learnt a language, but how the students continuously get exposures to the language and opportunities to use the language (Djonhar, 2012). In other words, how long the students learn a foreign language does not guarantee that they learn it ceaselessly. They may learn English twice a week for one hundred minutes only in the school activity and it is clearly not enough to acquire English. Therefore, their speaking ability is low and it has effects on the students' speaking confidence then their anxiety become high.

**Table 2** Prior Learning Experience of EOP Students

No	Name	Joining Informal English Course	FLCAS Score	The Anxiety Level
1	Student A1	1-6 months	102	Mildly Anxious
2	Student A2	1-6 months	110	Anxious
3	Student A3	1-6 months	119	Anxious
4	Student B1	More than 12 months	89	Mildly Anxious
5	Student B2	More than 12 months	75	Relaxed

6	Student B3	More than 12 months	46	Very Relaxed
7	Student B4	More than 12 months	112	Anxious
8	Student B5	1-6 months	87	Mildly Anxious

Table 2 shows the EOP students' condition before joining EOP conversation course. It states that students A1, A2, A3, and B5 had ever joined some informal English courses between 1-6 months and the students B1, B2, B3, and B4 had ever studied in some informal English course more than 12 months.

In fact, all EOP students who had ever joined some informal English courses between 1-6 months belong to the anxious students. However, the students who studied English more than 12 months consist of both anxious and relaxed students. Therefore, FLA does not depend on the prior learning experience; on the other hand, it depends on how much they practice the target language and make it become a habit (Sholikhi, 2022)

### Experiences in Communicating and Anxiety

Table 3 EOP Students Experience While Speaking

No	Name	Speaking Experiences	Assuming it as a Bad Experience	FLCAS Score	The Anxiety Level
1.	Student A1	He failed to give information to native speakers about public transportation in Jakarta.	Yes	102	Mildly Anxious
2.	Student A2	Getting negative evaluations from his teacher and classmates while speaking in front of the class	Yes	110	Anxious
3.	Student A3	Others would laugh at the student who made errors and mistakes in front of them while speaking English.	Yes	119	Anxious
4.	Student B1	-	-	89	Mildly Anxious
5.	Student B2	He got difficulties, especially in identifying the English technical terms related to the company project.	No	75	Relaxed
6.	Student B3	He made errors in pronouncing a word when communicating with a native speaker and a native speaker corrected it.	No	46	Very Relaxed
7.	Student B4	-	-	112	Anxious
8.	Student B5	He felt nervous and became forgetful about vocabularies and grammar points that already	Yes	87	Mildly Anxious

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understood before in a  
speaking test.

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Experience in communicating and language anxiety has a correlation. Some bad experiences in communicating have impacts on language anxiety (Hardiyanto, 2022). In other words, the student who has bad experiences when communicating in the past will get apprehension when getting a similar situation in the future.

In the EOP conversation course, both relaxed and anxious students in EOP conversation course had experience getting difficult situations while speaking English; on the other hand, the way they respond it was different each other. The relaxed students did not respond the difficult situation of communication as the bad experiences; on the other hand, they regarded it as the part of learning and they are motivated not to repeat it in the future. As a result, they always look for the ways to improve the speaking ability like watching movies, listening to the music and practicing.

However, the anxious students performed different actions than those who are in the relaxed level. They assumed the difficult situations of communication as a bad experience and made them scary and they were not motivated to improve their speaking skills to face the same situation in the future.

### Students' Occupation and Speaking Anxiety

**Table 4** Students' Occupation and Speaking Anxiety

No.	Name	Occupation	The Use of English	FLCAS Score	The Anxiety Level	FLCAS Score
1.	Student A1	Delivery Staff	passively	102	Mildly Anxious	102
2.	Student A2	Drafter & 3D Staff	passively	110	Anxious	110
3.	Student A3	Admin Workshop	passively	119	Anxious	119
4.	Student B1	Human Research Development (HRD)	passively	89	Mildly Anxious	89
5.	Student B2	Project Manager	actively	75	Relaxed	75
6.	Student B3	Health, Safety, and Environment (HSE)	passively	46	Very Relaxed	46
7.	Student B4	Supply Chain Management	passively	112	Anxious	112
8.	Student B5	IT Support	passively	87	Mildly Anxious	87

Having English conversational partners and practicing their listening using a variety of sources will make the EFL learners successful to improve their speaking (Hwang et al., 2016)v. Similarly, the information in Table 4 above inferred that students' occupation which needs using English actively resulted in the low speaking anxiety level. On the other hand, the occupation that did not demand the use of English actively caused the high speaking anxiety level.



Student B2 and B3 belong to relaxed and very relaxed speaking level because in addition to have higher learning motivation than others, they were also supposed to have good English communication by the Company's manager. Moreover, they were trusted by the company's stakeholders to face native speakers when needing cooperation in a project. More and more using English orally in their daily works would increase their confidence; as a result, they had low speaking anxiety.

Student A1, A2, A3, B1, B4 and B5 were anxious students. Besides communication apprehension, test anxiety, and negative evaluation, they also lacked opportunities to speak English in the real life. Unlike the student B2 and B3, student A1, A2, A3, B1, B4 and B5 were not required to have a good speaking ability by the company's stakeholders. In other words, the head of the company only demanded them to understand how to use English, not how to master it. Consequently, they did not have high motivation to learn how to speak English well and influence their level of anxiety, which is high.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that while education background and length of English learning may not be significant factors in FLA, prior experience in communication and occupation is crucial in understanding and addressing speaking anxiety in EOP students. By providing opportunities for positive communication experiences and exposure to English in relevant work contexts, language instructors can help EOP students reduce anxiety and improve their speaking skills.

## CONCLUSION

The research findings indicated that education backgrounds, length of English learning, and prior learning experience of EOP students did not have a significant correlation with Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). However, there was a notable association between students' communication experiences, their occupation, and FLA. Specifically, students who had unpleasant experiences in the past while communicating tended to experience anxiety when they encountered similar situations in the future. This implies that negative experiences in communicating have an impact on language anxiety. On the other hand, students who had occupations that required active use of English demonstrated a lower level of speaking anxiety, while those who did not use English frequently experienced higher levels of anxiety. Therefore, to reduce anxiety and improve their speaking skills, EOP students must view difficulties in speaking as a motivation to enhance their language proficiency by practicing and exposing themselves to sufficient English language input.

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