The Influence of Fear of Making Mistakes on Students' Self-Confidence and Engagement in English Classroom Presentations at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Samarinda

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Abstract: This study examines how the fear of making mistakes influences students' self-confidence and engagement in English classroom presentations. Speaking anxiety is one of the main psychological obstacles in EFL learning, often driven by fear of negative evaluation, low language proficiency, and past negative experiences. Using a qualitative descriptive method, this research involved eighth-grade students at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Samarinda who had participated in English speaking tasks. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews to explore their emotional responses, anxiety sources, and coping strategies. The results show that most students experience nervousness and hesitation, primarily due to fear of being judged, making errors, or lacking vocabulary. These factors reduce their confidence and lead to lower participation. However, many students attempt to overcome their fear through calming techniques and self-encouragement. The study also found that peer support and teacher involvement significantly affect student motivation and willingness to speak. These findings highlight the need for supportive classroom environments that encourage risk-taking and normalize mistakes as part of learning. Teachers are advised to provide regular speaking practice, positive reinforcement, and collaborative learning activities to reduce anxiety and enhance student engagement in English presentations.

Keywords: Fear of Making Mistakes, Self-Confidence, Student Engagement, English Presentations, Speaking Anxiety

INTRODUCTION

Speaking in English remains a significant challenge for many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, particularly in classroom presentation settings. One of the most persistent psychological barriers is the fear of making mistakes, which often leads to speaking anxiety and avoidance behaviors. This fear is intensified in performance-based tasks such as presentations, where students feel exposed to peer judgment and teacher evaluation (Hanh & Huyen, 2024; Young, 1990). Research by Handayani & Rahmawati (2017) revealed that nearly half of Indonesian students experience moderate speaking anxiety, often caused by fear of ridicule, limited vocabulary, and the pressure to speak correctly. Ajiza et al., (2024) found that fear of making mistakes and classroom pressure are major causes to speaking anxiety among EFL students, particularly during public speaking activities.

This anxiety is closely tied to students' self-confidence. Hanifa (2020) found that students who fear making mistakes tend to avoid participation in speaking activities, leading to decreased language practice and competence. Gregersen & Horwitz (2002) emphasized that perfectionist tendencies can exacerbate this fear, making learners more anxious about their performance. Furthermore, Ghafar (2023) highlighted the pivotal role of self-confidence in fostering engagement and willingness to communicate in English. When students lack confidence, they are more likely to hesitate or withdraw from speaking tasks.

The classroom environment also contributes to the development or reduction of speaking anxiety. Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) suggested that supportive and nonjudgmental classrooms enhance enjoyment and reduce fear, while Hanh & Huyen (2024) advocated for collaborative learning to mitigate anxiety in speaking situations. In particular, presentations due to their high-pressure, public nature often trigger stronger emotional reactions than other forms of oral activities (Savić, 2016). Thus, understanding the dynamics between fear of mistakes, self-confidence, and classroom engagement is essential for improving students' speaking performance.

Although much has been discussed about speaking anxiety in general, few studies have specifically addressed how the fear of making mistakes affects students' confidence and participation in English classroom presentations. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the influence of fear of making mistakes on eighth-grade students at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Samarinda. It aims to identify the psychological and social factors that hinder student participation and explore the coping strategies students use to manage their anxiety during classroom presentations. The study addresses two primary research questions: the impact of fear of making mistakes on students' self-confidence and participation in English classroom presentations, and the tactics employed by students to manage this anxiety during presentations.

METHOD

This study applied a qualitative descriptive design to explore how the fear of making mistakes influences students' self-confidence and engagement in English classroom presentations. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of students' emotions, thoughts, and behaviors when dealing with speaking anxiety. A qualitative method was considered most appropriate because it allows the researcher to analyze subjective experiences that cannot be measured through numerical data.

The participants in this study were eighth-grade students at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Samarinda. The selection focused on students who had experience delivering English classroom presentations and had encountered anxiety or fear during the process. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure the relevance of participant experiences to the research questions.

Data were collected through interviews, which enabled the researcher to investigate students' perspectives in depth. The interviews explored their feelings during presentations, causes of anxiety, frequency of participation, and coping strategies. Each interview was conducted individually, recorded with the participants' consent, and later transcribed for analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Student responses were coded and categorized into recurring themes that corresponded with the research objectives. The themes helped identify common patterns in the causes of fear, its impact on confidence and engagement, and the strategies students employed to manage their anxiety. This method provided rich, contextual insights into how psychological factors affect students' participation in English speaking tasks.

To ensure the reliability of the data, the researcher used credibility, dependability, and confirmability methodologies. Credibility was established by member checking, which allowed participants to evaluate and validate their interview transcripts. Dependability was upheld by meticulously documenting research protocols and ensuring uniformity throughout the data collecting and analysis process. Keeping a reflective journal helped to reduce researcher bias and improve confirmability. Furthermore, triangulation was used by comparing students' verbal responses to researcher observations throughout the interviews, which allowed for data cross-validation. These steps improved the study's reliability and validity, resulting in a more thorough and credible assessment of the students' experiences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to explore the influence of fear of making mistakes on students' self-confidence and engagement in English classroom presentations, as well as to identify the strategies students use to overcome such fear. Through qualitative analysis of interviews conducted with eighth-grade students at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Samarinda, two primary themes emerged: (1) the negative impact of mistake-related fear on confidence and participation, and (2) students' personal strategies for managing this fear.

Fear and Its Impact on Self-Confidence and Engagement

The findings indicate that the fear of making mistakes significantly contributes to students' anxiety and reduces their willingness to participate in English-speaking tasks. Most students expressed that they felt nervous, embarrassed, or even hesitant to speak in front of their classmates. These feelings

are closely linked to a lack of proficiency in English, limited vocabulary, concerns about pronunciation, and fear of peer judgment. For instance, students reported avoiding presentations entirely or withdrawing from class activities when English speaking tasks were assigned. This avoidance behavior not only reduced their speaking practice but also reinforced their anxiety, creating a cycle of disengagement. Nur et al., (2024) discovered a similar tendency in JELL, discovering that students with lower levels of self-confidence participated less in classroom speaking exercises, emphasizing the close relationship between confidence and involvement.

These emotional responses reveal not simply a lack of linguistic ability, but also a deeper psychological stress caused by dread of negative appraisal. According to Young (1990), students are generally more concerned about being criticized than committing linguistic faults themselves, and numerous participants expressed humiliation, avoidance, or discomfort as a result of their classmates' reactions. When this anxiety is not addressed, it becomes a psychological barrier, reinforcing avoidance behavior and preventing learners from actively practicing the language. Furthermore, such anxiety creates a circle in which fear leads to avoidance, avoidance reduces exposure, and reduced exposure restricts language progress, prolonging the cycle of insecurity (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991).

These results are consistent with previous research by Hanifa (2020), who found that language learners often experience anxiety due to perfectionism and fear of negative evaluation. Similarly, Gregersen & Horwitz (2002) emphasized that unrealistic self-expectations lead to increased anxiety and lower confidence. The current study's participants echoed these concerns, particularly regarding their fear of misspeaking in front of peers.

Furthermore, the classroom environment played a crucial role in either aggravating or alleviating students' fears. Students who experienced teasing or ridicule from peers were more likely to withdraw, while those in more supportive settings showed greater willingness to engage. Unfortunately, some students noted that speaking tasks were rarely assigned, and opportunities for oral practice were limited further restricting their chance to build confidence through experience.

Strategies to Manage Fear and Stay Engaged

Despite their anxiety, many students demonstrated a degree of resilience and attempted to manage their fear through self-regulation strategies. Emotional regulation techniques such as deep breathing, staying calm, or using physical distractions (e.g., playing with a button) were commonly mentioned. Others stated that they tried to continue with their presentation regardless of nervousness, suggesting an attitude of perseverance.

Several students also reported ignoring negative peer comments as a way to protect their confidence. These strategies reflect a level of personal agency and motivation, even in the face of stress. As noted by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014), a positive classroom atmosphere and encouragement can significantly improve students' emotional experience during language learning, which supports the idea that internal coping mechanisms must be reinforced by external support systems.

While coping mechanisms such as soothing techniques and ignoring peer criticisms demonstrate some level of emotional regulation, it is crucial to highlight that many of them are reactive rather than proactive. Students control their symptoms without addressing the underlying causes of their worry. This shows a lack of institutional or instructional support. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) underline the importance of creating classroom environments that not only minimize anxiety but also empower students by providing structured speaking chances and positive reinforcement. Without such institutional assistance, students' coping techniques may allow them to "survive" presentations but do not necessarily increase their confidence or competence over time.

Overall, these findings suggest that while fear of making mistakes can hinder participation and reduce confidence, many students are actively trying to cope. Teachers play a vital role in this process by fostering a supportive classroom environment, encouraging regular speaking opportunities, and normalizing mistakes as part of the learning process.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the fear of making mistakes significantly affects students' self-confidence and engagement in English classroom presentations. These findings are congruent with those of Tiyas et al., (2023) in JELL, who discovered that fear of error is a major barrier to pupils speaking effectively in front of the class. Many students experienced anxiety, nervousness, and hesitation when asked to present, primarily due to their limited English proficiency, lack of preparation, and fear of being judged by peers or teachers. These psychological barriers led to a noticeable decline in participation and reduced opportunities for students to improve their speaking skills.

Despite these challenges, students showed resilience through self-developed strategies such as calming techniques, perseverance, and ignoring negative comments. These coping methods indicate a willingness to grow and a need for supportive learning environments. Teachers play a crucial role in shaping these environments by providing consistent speaking opportunities, encouraging risk-taking, and offering constructive feedback rather than focusing on errors.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how psychological factors influence language learning and highlights the importance of both internal coping strategies and external classroom support. Future efforts should focus on integrating structured speaking practices and promoting a culture where mistakes are embraced as part of the learning process.

However, this study has a number of shortcomings. It was held only at MTs Muhammadiyah 1 Samarinda, with a small number of eighth-grade students. Furthermore, the study used only qualitative approaches, which may restrict the findings' generalizability to broader contexts or different educational settings.

Despite these limitations, the findings offer useful information for educators. Teachers are encouraged to foster a secure and supportive classroom environment that promotes student expression and decreases fear of failure. Incorporating regular speaking challenges and normalizing faults into the learning process may help students gain confidence and engagement. Future researchers could build on these findings by employing mixed-method approaches or investigating multiple school levels to gain a better understanding.

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