Factors Contributing to Student Anxiety during Classroom Presentation: A Qualitative Study

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the causes of student anxiety during classroom presentations, focusing on fourth-semester students in the English Education Program at Tadulako University. The aim of this study is to identify the psychological, social, and environmental factors that lead to anxiety when students are required to speak in front of the class. A qualitative descriptive method was used, involving questionnaires based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and semi-structured interviews with selected students. The results show that low self-confidence, fear of being judged negatively, pressure from peers and teachers, formal classroom settings, and limited preparation time are the main factors that increase student anxiety. These findings highlight the importance of creating a supportive and comfortable classroom environment, using teaching strategies that reduce pressure, and giving regular and constructive feedback. By understanding these factors, teachers can help students improve their speaking performance and reduce anxiety. This study contributes to the development of classroom practices that support students' oral communication skills in academic contexts.
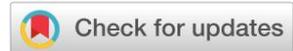
1. Introduction

Classroom presentations are an essential component of the educational process, designed to help students develop not only their understanding of academic content but also their communication skills. Mastery of speaking abilities plays a vital role in this context, as effective presentations require students to articulate their ideas clearly, interact with an audience, and respond confidently to questions. These competencies are increasingly recognized as important, not just within academic settings but also in professional environments where communication is key. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), communication and language development occur through social interaction, making classroom presentations a meaningful avenue for promoting cognitive and linguistic development. Presentations engage learners in active meaning-making processes that enhance higher-order thinking and self-regulation (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Rahman et al., 2019; Youngsun et al., 2024).

Through classroom presentations, students are given the opportunity to systematically present their ideas, organize their thoughts, and make use of supporting visual aids. Such experiences help them build public speaking skills, including clarity in communication, confidence, eye contact, and audience engagement. Beyond these technical aspects, presentations foster interpersonal communication, helping students to practice and refine the skills needed to deliver structured messages effectively in real-life scenarios such as meetings, interviews, and project pitches. In line with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, repeated performance in public speaking tasks such as classroom presentations can increase learners' belief in their ability to succeed, which in turn enhances performance and reduces anxiety. When students are given opportunities to present in low-stakes environments, their confidence gradually builds through mastery experiences, one of the key sources of self-efficacy.

Despite the potential benefits, many students experience presentation anxiety-an emotional and physiological reaction to the stress of speaking in public. This form of anxiety is among the most common psychological issues faced by students in higher education, significantly affecting academic performance and classroom participation. Research indicates that approximately 30% of adolescents and young adults worldwide suffer from anxiety disorders, with performance-based anxiety, such as that experienced during presentations, being a major contributor to

underachievement (Kuzujanakis, 2020; Rahman & Weda, 2018 Ko et al., 2025). This aligns with the affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen (1982), which suggests that emotional variables such as anxiety can act as a filter that impedes language acquisition and performance. When students are anxious, their ability to process and produce language is diminished, limiting the effectiveness of classroom presentations as learning tools (Jung et al., 2025; Sachiya et al., 2025; Karubaba et al., 2024).

Symptoms of presentation anxiety can include a rapid heartbeat, sweating, trembling, and difficulty speaking fluently. These symptoms can disrupt students' ability to deliver their message effectively. Anxiety often stems from a fear of negative evaluation, lack of preparation, and low self-confidence. As a result, students may experience academic setbacks and a reduced sense of engagement, which can hinder their learning experience and personal growth. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) also emphasize that foreign language anxiety is a distinct phenomenon that interferes with the learning process, especially in oral communication contexts. Students may feel that they are being judged more harshly when speaking a second language, intensifying anxiety during classroom presentations.

Based on the researcher's personal experience and initial observations of fourth-semester students in the English Language Education Program at Tadulako University, it has been noted that many students struggle with high levels of presentation anxiety. This anxiety is frequently caused by perceived lack of readiness, fear of being judged, and insufficient self-assurance. Supporting research by Jaya & Oktavia (2022), as well as Kankam & Boateng (2017), reinforces these findings, highlighting how limited practice and absence of constructive feedback can trap students in a recurring cycle of anxiety and underperformance. Such challenges underscore the importance of strengthening students' presentation skills through better preparation and support.

Motivated by both personal experience and direct classroom observations, the researcher is interested in exploring this issue further, particularly because the causes and expressions of presentation anxiety tend to vary from individual to individual. A deeper understanding of students' experiences is essential in order to design effective strategies and targeted interventions. For this reason, a qualitative approach is considered appropriate, as it enables the exploration of individual narratives that reveal how students internalize and respond to anxiety during classroom presentations.

2. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate the factors contributing to student anxiety during classroom presentations. This approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of subjective experiences and contextual factors without seeking to establish causal relationships. The design focuses on describing the characteristics and phenomena experienced by individuals, making it suitable for examining how students perceive and cope with presentation-related anxiety.

The research was conducted in the English Study Program at Tadulako University. The participants were 20 fourth-semester students, selected to complete a questionnaire, and 5 students were purposively chosen for interviews using a snowball sampling technique. This non-probability method ensured that the participants had relevant experience with the research topic and were able to provide rich, meaningful data. Two instruments were used in this study: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire, adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz (2016), consisted of 33 items. These items were designed to assess various aspects of language anxiety, using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Totally Disagree." The questionnaire was administered in Indonesian via Google Forms to avoid language misunderstanding and ensure accurate responses. It included both positive statements (items 2, 5, 11, 14, 18, 22, 24, 28, and 32) and negative statements (the remaining items), with scoring adjusted accordingly. The total scores ranged from 33 to 165, and the level of anxiety was classified based on Oetting's scale into five categories.

Table 1. Likert's Scoring Table (Adapted from Horwitz, 2016)

Statement Type	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Totally Disagree
1	2	3	5	5	
5	4	3	2	1	

Table 1 above presents the Likert scoring system used to measure students' responses to both positive and negative statements in the questionnaire. For positive statements, higher scores are given to stronger agreements (e.g., Strongly Agree = 5), while for negative statements, the scoring is reversed (e.g., Strongly Agree = 1) to maintain

consistency. This method ensures that higher overall scores always reflect more positive attitudes, such as greater confidence or lower levels of anxiety.

Table 2. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Oetting's Scale Classification)

Score Range	Anxiety Level
124-165	Very Anxious
108-123	Anxious
87-107	Mildly Anxious
66-86	Relaxed
33-65	Very Relaxed

The qualitative data analysis followed the framework by Indrajit et al. (2020), involving four steps: coding, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. Initially, relevant data were coded and categorized into themes. Then, unnecessary or irrelevant data were reduced. The remaining data were displayed in narrative form to provide a clear understanding of student experiences. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns, connections, and significant insights related to classroom presentation anxiety.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Result

This study aimed to investigate the levels and causes of English-speaking anxiety among fourth-semester students at Tadulako University. A total of 38 students completed a 33-item questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and in-depth interviews were conducted with 6 selected students. The data revealed that anxiety in English classroom presentations is a significant issue, with most students experiencing high to moderate levels of discomfort when speaking in front of others.

The questionnaire findings indicated that the main triggers of anxiety were fear of negative judgment, lack of preparation, environmental pressure, and fear of making mistakes. Specifically, statements related to eye contact, insufficient time to practice, pressure from the classroom atmosphere, and unclear instructions received the highest agreement scores, ranging from 70% to 80%. These results show that many students are not only anxious about their language ability, but also about the social and situational context of classroom presentations.

The findings show that speaking anxiety in the classroom is influenced by various internal and external factors, such as preparation, environment, feedback, and peer comparison. These insights are crucial for educators to understand the psychological side of language learning and to design better interventions that can empower students to speak with more confidence and less fear. The detailed categorization of responses can be seen in Table 4.34 below.

Table 3. Student's Level of Anxiety

No	Name	Score	Level of Anxiety
1.	Student 1	142	Very Anxious
2.	Student 2	64	Very Relaxed
3.	Student 3	147	Very Anxious
4.	Student 4	118	Anxious
5.	Student 5	105	Mildly Anxious
6.	Student 6	135	Very Anxious
7.	Student 7	123	Anxious
8.	Student 8	137	Very Anxious
9.	Student 9	113	Anxious

10.	Student 10	120	Anxious
11.	Student 11	71	Relaxed
12.	Student 12	87	Mildly Anxious
13.	Student 13	111	Anxious
14.	Student 14	112	Anxious
15.	Student 15	110	Anxious
16.	Student 16	72	Relaxed
17.	Student 17	136	Very Anxious
18.	Student 18	139	Very Anxious
19.	Student 19	73	Relaxed
20.	Student 20	128	Very Anxious
21.	Student 21	114	Anxious
22.	Student 22	143	Very Anxious
23.	Student 23	84	Relaxed
24.	Student 24	154	Very Anxious
25.	Student 25	132	Very Anxious
26.	Student 26	61	Very Relaxed
27.	Student 27	134	Very Anxious

The researcher categorized the students' anxiety levels using Oetting's scale, with the results summarized in the following table:

Table 4. Students' Levels of Anxiety Based on FLCAS Scores

Anxiety Level	**Score Range**	**Number of Students**	**Percentage (%)**
Very Anxious	124–165	12	44.44%
Anxious	108–123	9	33.33%
Mildly Anxious	87–107	2	7.41%
Relaxed	66–86	3	11.11%
Very Relaxed	33–65	1	3.70%
Total		**27**	**100%**

The data show that 77.77% of students fall into the categories of anxious or very anxious. This high proportion supports the conclusion that classroom presentation in English remains a major source of psychological tension for students. These results were further validated by interview responses.

From the interviews, three main factors were identified as major contributors to students' speaking anxiety: lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and fear of being judged. Students frequently mentioned feeling nervous, experiencing physical symptoms like shaking or cold hands, and going blank when facing their classmates and lecturers. Several participants shared that their anxiety intensified when they were unsure of their material, expected to make no mistakes, or when classmates were not supportive. In their own words, students said:

Student 1: "Right in front of the class, I suddenly went blank… in a rush."

Student 2: "I'm an introvert and I'm also afraid of making mistakes."

Student 3: "The classmates' noisy reactions make me nervous."

Student 4: "When there are several lecturers present, it affects me."

Student 5: "When they are noisy, I get even more anxious."

These findings are in line with Horwitz (2016), who both emphasized that foreign language anxiety is rooted not only in linguistic difficulty but also in emotional and psychological factors such as fear of evaluation and lack of self-confidence. In the context of this study, anxiety is not merely a matter of speaking skill but involves students' self-perception, peer influence, and classroom dynamics.

To reduce anxiety, students expressed a need for a more supportive classroom atmosphere, adequate time to practice, and encouragement from both teachers and peers. They also felt more confident when familiar with the topic and when the audience was smaller. These results suggest that reducing pressure, creating emotionally safe environments, and normalizing mistakes can help students perform better and more confidently in speaking activities.

Overall, this study highlights the complex, multi-dimensional nature of language anxiety in classroom presentations. Educators should not only focus on improving students' linguistic competence but also consider their emotional readiness. By fostering supportive learning environments and applying flexible teaching strategies, teachers can help students reduce their anxiety and improve their performance in speaking English in public settings.

3.2 Discussion

The primary purpose of this research was to investigate the factors contributing to students' anxiety during classroom presentations among fourth-semester students at Tadulako University. To obtain the data, the researcher used a questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) consisting of 33 items and conducted offline interviews with six students. The questionnaire aimed to identify anxiety levels, while the interviews explored personal experiences related to speaking anxiety in class.

In the process of data collection, the questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms and followed by classroom-based interviews conducted from Tuesday, March18 to Wednesday, March 19, 2025. The results from the questionnaire were analyzed by classifying responses into categories such as strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. Meanwhile, interview results were analyzed by identifying recurring themes and ranking them by level of influence.

Based on the findings, students' anxiety was mostly caused by three dominant factors: lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and fear of being judged. These results are in line with previous research by Horwitz et al. (2016) who emphasized that speaking anxiety in foreign language settings often arises from emotional stress, fear of evaluation, and low self-esteem. In this study, students admitted to experiencing symptoms like sweating, trembling, mental blocks, and nervous behavior such as avoiding eye contact. These findings highlight that classroom presentations are not only a linguistic challenge but also an emotional experience for many learners.

The questionnaire results also revealed that a significant number of students with statements that reflected anxiety due to insufficient preparation time, unfamiliar topics, unclear instructions, and a pressuring classroom environment. For example, item 18 showed that 78.9% of students believed practice helps reduce anxiety, while item 21 indicated that 60.6% felt anxious due to lack of preparation. Additionally, 81.5% of students agreed that a supportive environment (item 32) helps lower their anxiety.
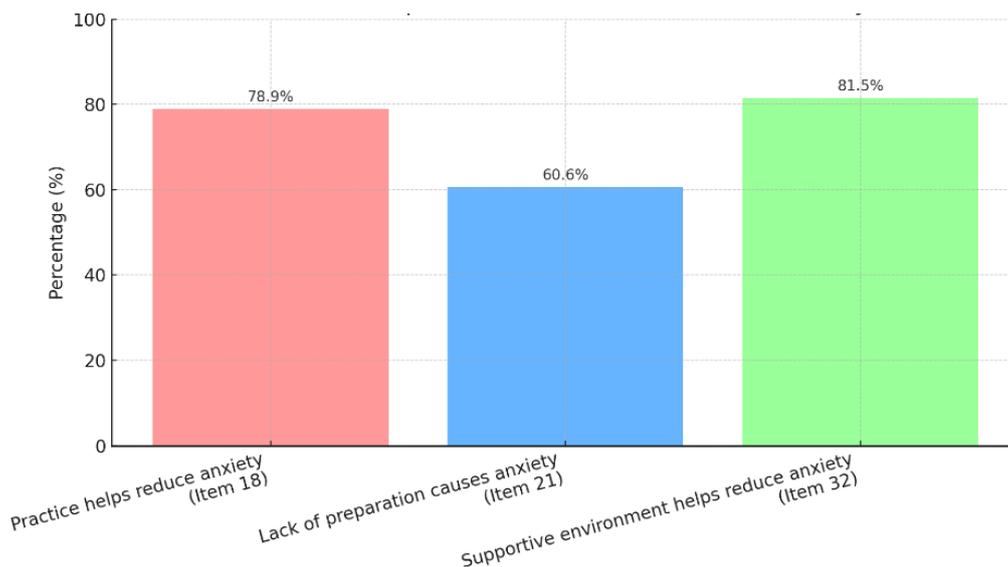
Figure 1. Causes of Anxiety during Presentation

The bar chart shows what students think causes anxiety during classroom presentations. Most students (81.5%) said that a supportive classroom environment helps reduce their anxiety. This means that when teachers and classmates are kind and respectful, students feel safer and less afraid to speak. This result agrees with a study by Zhang and Zhang (2022), which found that students feel less nervous when their classroom is a friendly and comfortable place. A good classroom environment helps students feel more confident and ready to participate. Another high percentage (78.9%) of students said that practice helps lower their anxiety. This shows that if students have more chances to practice speaking, they feel more prepared and less scared. Mahmoodi and Mozaffari (2023) also found that when students do repeated speaking practice, their anxiety goes down and their performance improves.

The chart also shows that 60.6% of students feel anxious when they don't have enough time to prepare. This means preparation is very important. If students don't understand the topic or the teacher's instructions, they feel unsure and nervous. When students are not well-prepared, they are more afraid of making mistakes or being judged by others. Alrabai (2022) explained that good preparation helps students organize their ideas and feel more confident. Some students also said that they feel more anxious when they are corrected in front of others or when the classroom is too quiet. This shows that social pressure makes anxiety worse. Yalçın and İnceçay (2021) found that clear instructions and kind feedback from teachers help students feel more relaxed. In short, the chart shows that both internal factors (like practice and confidence) and external factors (like classroom support and clear instructions) affect students' anxiety levels during presentations.

Furthermore, the interview results give deeper insight into what makes students anxious during presentations. Many students said they felt nervous when their classmates laughed at them or when the classroom was completely silent. They also felt uncomfortable when teachers corrected them in front of others. These situations made them more self-conscious and afraid of making mistakes. This shows that social pressure plays a big role in increasing students' anxiety. When students feel judged or embarrassed, they tend to lose confidence and become more nervous. According to Liu and Jackson (2022), negative reactions from peers can strongly affect students' willingness to speak in class, especially in a foreign language setting.

Interestingly, some students said they felt more relaxed when presenting in front of a small group. This means that the size of the audience can also influence their level of anxiety. When the group is smaller, students feel less watched and less afraid of making errors. This supports the idea from Wang and Zhang (2023), who found that students often perform better and feel more confident in small-group speaking activities. Smaller groups provide a safer space for students to practice their speaking skills without too much pressure. These findings suggest that teachers can help reduce presentation anxiety by creating a more supportive social environment. For example, giving students the chance to practice in small groups before presenting to the whole class can help them feel more prepared and confident. In short, how students feel during presentations is closely connected to how others around them act, and teachers should be mindful of this when planning speaking activities.

4. Conclusion

Based on the research findings and discussion, this study supports the theory that student anxiety in speaking English arises from multiple interrelated factors. These include psychological (fear of failure, low self-confidence), social (peer evaluation), and situational (classroom setting, time pressure) elements. Therefore, it is essential for educators to create a positive and non-threatening classroom environment, provide clear instructions, allow sufficient time for preparation, and encourage peer support. Future interventions such as small group practice, relaxed seating arrangements, and constructive feedback strategies could help reduce students' anxiety and improve their speaking performance.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight that students' anxiety during English presentations is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Psychological issues like fear of making mistakes, social pressure from peers, and the learning environment all play a role in shaping how students feel and perform. To address this, lecturers should build a classroom atmosphere that feels safe and supportive. Giving students enough time to prepare, clear guidance, and chances to practice in smaller groups can make a big difference. Simple changes, such as flexible seating and helpful feedback, may also help students feel more confident and less anxious when speaking in front of others.

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