



To Speak or to Stay Silent? A Mixed-Methods Study of Sungkan and Fear of Losing Face in Out-Of-Class Speaking Anxiety Among Tertiary Indonesian EFL Students

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026-08-27 Revised: 2026-09-29 Accepted: 2026-10-05 Keywords: <i>Out-of-class speaking anxiety (OCSA), Sungkan, Fear of losing face, Socio-cultural factors, Indonesian EFL students, Mixed-methods research.</i> DOI: 10.24256/ideas.v14i2.12463 Corresponding Author: Ginda Yuda Nuraini gindayudanuraini@gmail.com English Education Study Program, Institut Agama Islam Negeri Kerinci, Jambi	<i>This study explored the levels of out-of-class speaking anxiety (OCSA) experienced by Indonesian tertiary EFL students and analyzed how socio-cultural factors shape their anxiety in communication. A total of 54 tertiary EFL students from an Islamic higher education institution in Jambi Province, Indonesia participated in a survey assessing their general level of speaking anxiety outside the classroom. Following the quantitative data collection, five participants were purposely selected for semi-structured interviews to further explore how the Indonesian cultural values of Sungkan (reluctance or hesitation based on respect and social harmony) and Fear of Losing Face contribute to their psychological barriers and avoidance in spontaneous communication. The findings revealed that the students experienced a moderate level of overall speaking anxiety, with anxiety being higher when they faced uninterested interlocutors or discussed unfamiliar topics. The study also found that the socio-cultural values of Sungkan and Fear of Losing Face strongly influenced students' out-of-class speaking hesitation, creating a "paradox of silence", in which learners prioritized maintaining social harmony and protecting their self-image over actively engage in language practice. Practical implications of these findings for educational institutions, EFL teachers, and students within the Indonesian context are discussed.</i>

1. Introduction

In today's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education, oral communication skills are no longer viewed only as academic achievements but also as essential competencies for future careers (Rao, 2019). However, many EFL learners still find it difficult to use their linguistic knowledge in real communicative practice, as moving from structured classroom activities to natural social interaction often creates significant psychological challenges for students (Wilang & Singhasiri, 2017). In addition, the unpredictable characteristics of "extramural English" situations, which occur outside the classroom, expose learners to unexpected situations that involve social pressure and the possibility of negative peer evaluation (Sundqvist, 2009).

In Indonesia, this problem is commonly influenced by psychological factors such as fear of making errors and low self-confidence, which reduce students' willingness to participate orally (Sayuri, 2016). This issue is further connected to the concept of "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC), which suggests that immediate situational and cultural influences often determine whether learners choose to speak, rather than their language proficiency alone (Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Yashima, 2002). Consequently, many EFL students often encounter a difficult psychological conflict when using English outside the classroom: whether they should speak or remain silent.

Psychological barriers in language learning are closely related to the notion of "face," which Brown & Levinson (1987) describe as a person's public self-image. In EFL settings, speaking English publicly can be perceived as a Face-Threatening Act (FTA) because it may endanger one's social reputation. The fear of appearing incapable or being criticized for language mistakes – commonly referred to as fear of losing face – often encourages students to stay silent in order to preserve their social image. Sayuri (2016) observed that Indonesian learners frequently choose silence as a strategy to protect their "face" and avoid embarrassment. Moreover, Wilang & Singhasiri (2017) explained that anxiety in out-of-class communication negatively affects intelligibility and comprehensibility, while Daflizar (2024) found that such anxiety is more strongly associated with learners' self-perceived abilities than with their actual language competence. This relationship indicates that the shift from classroom-based learning to real-world English use is strongly shaped by students' perceptions of social risk and their academic self-image.

While traditional research on Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) mainly focuses on the formal classroom, Out-of-Class Speaking Anxiety (OCSA) often presents a more unpredictable psychological experience (Wilang & Singhasiri, 2017). In the Indonesian context, this anxiety is not only related to linguistic difficulties but also to a complex social negotiation (Rizki et al., 2025). Importantly, this negotiation is strongly influenced by the deeply ingrained macro-societal trait of *Sungkan* (reluctance or hesitation out of respect), which aim to maintain social harmony (Sobari, 2019). *Sungkan* is a complex psychological state of social deference, characterized by a feeling of awkwardness and a desire to avoid causing inconvenience or conflict (Magnis-Suseno, 1997).

In a speaking context, *Sungkan* manifests as a reluctance to practice English because a student may feel "presumptuous" or fear disturbing the social balance. Rather than just forms of politeness, these cultural values can become psychological barriers that affect learners' willingness to express themselves genuinely in social environments (Asmara, 2025).

Psychological studies further indicate that *Sungkan* triggers an internal state of behavioral inhibition characterized by intense hesitation and a desire to avoid perceived social intrusion (CISTA, 2014). In education, this cultural value works as an internal control that reduces learners' willingness to speak and limits their communication (Darwanto, 2022). Consequently, when students move into natural and unstructured environments outside the classroom, the resulting socio-cultural friction forces students to adapt by retreating into a self-protective silence (Prayoga & Handoyo, 2023). The justification for this study lies in the need to understand how local values dictate communicative choices. As Daflizar (2024) argued, speaking apprehension in extramural settings is closely linked to how students perceive their own skills in relation to their social environment.

The cultural value of *Sungkan* functions as a powerful internal control that often leads to a "paradox of silence," where students prioritize social respect over opportunities to practice speaking English (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). In Indonesian society, this tendency is strengthened by the cultural expectation to maintain social harmony and balanced relationships within the community (Sobari, 2019). When combined with the Fear of Losing Face – the fear of appearing incompetent in public (Brown & Levinson, 1987) – the result is often total communicative avoidance. This avoidance represents a deep emotional trial where learners feel psychologically constrained by the intense pressure to avoid interpersonal conflict or perceived self-assertion (Asmara, 2025). Psychological studies also show that this combination of cultural values can lead to strong behavioral inhibition, filling the learner with affective hesitation and a strong desire to avoid perceived social disturbance (CISTA, 2014).

Although general anxiety has been widely studied (Subekti, 2018), its specific manifestation in extramural English settings, or English use outside the classroom (Sundqvist, 2009), has not been deeply explored. This study is further justified by the fact that even when students possess the essential linguistic competence, their Willingness to Communicate (WTC) and overall willingness to speak are heavily suppressed by these situational and cultural variables (Darwanto, 2022; Yashima, 2002). This research contributes to global EFL research by "indigenizing" Western-centric anxiety frameworks, specifically by integrating the localized construct of *Sungkan* into the established theory of Fear of Negative Evaluation.

Thus, this study offers a more culturally relevant understanding of the psychological experiences of Indonesian EFL learners. When these learners confront unscripted out of class contexts, the resulting socio-cultural friction can create psychological discomfort. Consequently, to cope with this unfamiliar environment, many students choose to remain silent as a form of self-protection (Prayoga & Handoyo, 2023). Methodologically, this study used an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to fill an important gap in previous research. This approach allows the researcher to explore more deeply how cultural values help explain and support the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Most previous studies have mainly depended on quantitative data, creating a methodological gap that highlights the need for mixed-methods research to better understand and explain these cultural barriers.

Although many studies have examined linguistic factors related to speaking anxiety, there is still limited research on the socio-cultural factors that influence anxiety in the Indonesian context. In particular, the concept of *Sungkan* has not been widely explored in

EFL research. Theoretically, this research enhances EFL literature by integrating a localized lens, specifically *Sungkan*, into the study of speaking anxiety. For EFL educators in the Indonesian context, this study can serve as a “cultural compass” in understanding students’ speaking behavior. It encourages educators to view learner silence not merely as a sign of limited English proficiency, but as a thoughtful and strategic self-protective response shaped by cultural and social values. From a practical perspective, the findings may help curriculum developers design more supportive and low-pressure out-of-class learning environments that reduce social anxiety and encourage students to use English more naturally and spontaneously.

Ultimately, understanding these socio-cultural influences can help students become more aware of the psychological barriers affecting their communication, enabling them to reduce anxiety and communicate more confidently in real-life situations. If these deeply rooted cultural barriers are not properly identified, conventional teaching strategies may be unsuccessful because students tend to value social comfort and stability more than the risks involved in using English authentically.

To address the problems identified, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent do Indonesian EFL students experience out-of-class speaking anxiety, and what are the primary linguistic triggers of this apprehension?
2. What are students’ perceptions of the cultural value of *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face in their out-of-class speaking interactions?
3. How do the cultural values of *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face contribute to students’ anxiety in out-of-class speaking interactions?

Literature Review

Conceptualization of Anxiety in Foreign Language Learning

Anxiety is a fundamental concept in psychology that is commonly experienced. Within the educational context, anxiety can be categorized into three types: trait anxiety (a stable individual bias), state anxiety (a temporary emotional condition), and situation-specific anxiety (triggered by particular contexts such as examinations or public speaking). Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), referring to a complex set of self-perceptions, beliefs, and emotions associated with the unique process of foreign language learning.

In the present study, the focus is directed toward Out-of-Class Speaking Anxiety (OCSA). In contrast to classroom-based anxiety, which occurs in structured learning environments, OCSA is categorized as situation-specific anxiety developing in informal contexts where students are required to communicate in English, such as interacting with tourists or engaging in conversations in public spaces. This form of anxiety is often triggered by inadequate preparation about the topic of discussion or unfamiliarity with the interlocutor’s accent.

Factors Affecting Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety is driven by two main forces: language ability and mindset. A weak hold of vocabulary and grammar often leads to a fear of errors, while the psychological fear of public embarrassment or failing to answer experts can damage a student’s confidence. The status of the person they are talking to also plays a major role; students feel more anxious when speaking to those they perceive as superior or more expert. This

dynamic illustrates how situational variables can hinder the “Willingness to Communicate” (Yashima, 2002). Furthermore, in the Indonesian context, social expectations make even informal assessments feel high-stakes and stressful (Akbar, 2025).

The Culture of ‘Sungkan’ and ‘Fear of Losing Face’ in the Indonesian Context

Cultural factors play a crucial role in shaping language anxiety, particularly within the Indonesian context. This study emphasizes two key socio-cultural constructs: *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face. The culture of *Sungkan* reflects a sense of unwillingness or discomfort in starting conversations or interrupting others, especially those who are older or hold higher social status. In Indonesian interpersonal communication, this specific deference enforces strict adherence to hierarchical respect (Sobari, 2019). It creates a deep emotional test where learners feel psychologically constrained by the intense pressure to avoid perceived self-assertion (Asmara, 2025). From a psychological perspective, *Sungkan* is manifested as an affective reluctance rooted in the fear of making others uncomfortable or violating relational norms (CISTA, 2014).

This trait directly restricts learners' Willingness to Speak (WTS) by demanding high social deference and politeness in unscripted situations (Darwanto, 2022). When encountering unfamiliar social dynamics outside the classroom, this cultural friction triggers a psychological defense mechanism, prompting students to adapt through conversational avoidance to minimize social risk (Prayoga & Handoyo, 2023). The cultural values of maintaining harmony and showing humility often lead to what can be described as a “paradox of silence,” in which students prefer to stay silent to preserve social comfort rather than risk making mistakes while speaking.

Fear of Losing Face, on the other hand, refers to an individual's fear of embarrassment, humiliation, or negative judgment in social situations. The concept is closely related to maintaining one's dignity, reputation, and social image in front of others. In many collectivist societies, particularly in Asian cultures, preserving interpersonal harmony and avoiding public shame are highly valued social expectations (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Consequently, individuals often become cautious in their communication because they want to avoid behaviors that may damage their social image or create discomfort in social interactions. Within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning contexts, Fear of Losing Face is commonly associated with students' anxiety about making mistakes while speaking English. Learners may fear being laughed at, criticized, or viewed as incompetent by teachers, classmates, or other people around them (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In the Indonesian context, Fear of Losing Face is strongly connected to local cultural values such as *sungkan* and *ewuh pakewuh*. These cultural orientations encourage individuals to maintain politeness, avoid conflict, and protect harmonious social relationships (Magnis-Suseno, 1997). Because of these values, students may avoid speaking English if they believe their mistakes could embarrass themselves or make others uncomfortable. In many situations, learners become reluctant to ask questions, express disagreement, or actively participate in English conversations because they are worried about disrupting social harmony. This psychological condition creates a form of behavioral inhibition that limits students' willingness to communicate, particularly in spontaneous interactions outside the classroom environment.

Research has consistently shown that Fear of Losing Face contributes significantly to speaking anxiety, communication avoidance, and low willingness to communicate among EFL learners (Subekti, 2018). The problem becomes more visible in out-of-class English settings, where communication occurs naturally without the structure and support usually available in formal classrooms (Sundqvist, 2009).

In these situations, students often feel more vulnerable because they must interact spontaneously and face unpredictable social responses. Even learners with relatively strong English proficiency may avoid communication due to psychological pressure and fear of negative social evaluation. Therefore, Fear of Losing Face should not be viewed merely as an individual emotional issue, but also as a socio-cultural phenomenon shaped by local cultural expectations and interpersonal norms. Understanding this concept is important because it can help educators design more supportive learning environments that reduce social pressure and encourage students to communicate more confidently in English.

2. Method

Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In the initial phase, a survey design was applied to collect quantitative data at a specific moment in time, allowing for the establishment of standards and the investigation of relationships between out-of-class speaking anxiety and its linguistic triggers (Cohen et al., 2018). This was followed by a qualitative investigation to offer a deeper description of students' attitudes and opinions, specifically to explain how the socio-cultural constructs of *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face influence the decision to remain silent. By analyzing a characteristic sample from the population, this design ensures a strong examination of the relationship between cultural values and psychological apprehension in EFL learning contexts.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were 54 English Department students at a state Islamic higher education institution in Jambi Province, Indonesia, specifically those in their second, fourth, and sixth semesters. The participants consisted of 33 females and 21 males, with the age distribution presented in Table 1. All 54 participants completed the questionnaire measuring their out-of-class speaking anxiety and socio-cultural factors. For the qualitative phase, five participants were purposively selected based on their relatively high anxiety scores and willingness to provide more detailed information about their experiences. This selection strategy was intended to obtain in-depth accounts from students who reported stronger experiences of speaking anxiety. However, because the interview participants were selected from the higher-anxiety group, their experiences may not fully represent those of students with lower or moderate levels of anxiety.

Table 1: The demographic profile of the participants (N=54)

Characteristics	Variables	n	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	21	38.9%
	Female	33	61.1%
Semesters	Second	14	25.9%
	Fourth	24	44.5%
	Sixth	16	29.6%
Age	18-20 years old	40	74.1%
	21-25 Years old	14	25.9%

The demographic profile of the 54 participants provides a strong basis for exploring out-of-class speaking anxiety in the Indonesian EFL context. In terms of age, most participants were late adolescents and young adults, with 74.1% (n=40) aged 18–20 and 25.9% (n=14) aged 21–25. This age range is important because individuals at this stage are often more sensitive to peer evaluation, social image, and fear of embarrassment. The participants also came from different academic levels, including second-semester students (25.9%, n=14), fourth-semester students (44.5%, n=24), and sixth-semester students (29.6%, n=16). This distribution allows the study to capture the experiences of students at different stages of their academic development, from those still adjusting to university English learning to more advanced students who may face greater pressure to demonstrate strong English proficiency.

Research Instruments

To collect the data, this study used a two-part instrument: an adapted questionnaire and a semi-structured interview protocol. The questionnaire consisted of 31 items divided into two subscales. The first subscale contained 21 items measuring out-of-class speaking anxiety (OCSA), adapted from Wilang and Singhasiri (2017). The second subscale contained 10 items measuring the socio-cultural constructs of *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face. For the purposes of the present analysis, the 10 items representing *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face were treated as a single composite socio-cultural measure, consistent with the study's focus on their combined role in out-of-class speaking anxiety.

This combined scoring was an analytical decision and does not imply that *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face are empirically identical constructs. All items were scored using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all anxious” (1) to “extremely anxious” (5). Scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘not at all anxious’ (1) to ‘extremely anxious’ (5), the questionnaire scores are categorized into five levels: not anxious (1.0–1.7), slightly anxious (1.8–2.5), moderately anxious (2.6–3.4), very anxious (3.5–4.2), and extremely anxious (4.3–5.0) (Wilang & Singhasiri, 2017).

Prior to distribution, the instrument underwent a rigorous translation into Bahasa Indonesia and a validation process involving expert judgment and a pilot reading by two students to ensure linguistic clarity. The questionnaire demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency across the two subscales. The 21-item Out-of-Class Speaking Anxiety (OCSA) subscale showed a Cronbach's alpha of .931, while the 10-item *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face subscale showed a Cronbach's alpha of .865. For all 31 items combined, the overall Cronbach's alpha was .946. The suitability of the data for factor analysis was assessed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity.

The results showed a KMO value of .731, indicating acceptable sampling adequacy, while Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant, $\chi^2(465) = 1188.97$, $p < .001$. These results indicated that the correlation matrix was suitable for factor analysis. To examine the adequacy of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were conducted. Bartlett's test is considered significant when the p-value is below .05, indicating that factor analysis is appropriate for the dataset. Meanwhile, KMO values range from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 reflecting greater sampling adequacy for factor analysis. Specifically, KMO values of $\geq .60$ indicate low adequacy, $\geq .70$ moderate adequacy, $\geq .80$ high adequacy, and $\geq .90$ very high adequacy. The results revealed that Bartlett's test was significant ($p = .000$), and the KMO value was .73.

For the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore the triggers of out-of-class speaking anxiety, particularly fear of losing face, *sungkan*, peer pressure, and the "paradox of silence." The interviews allowed participants to share their experiences and explain how cultural values, social expectations, and fear of negative judgment influenced their willingness to speak English outside the classroom. Through open-ended and follow-up questions, the researcher gained deeper insights into why students often chose silence as a self-protective response despite their adequate linguistic ability.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection followed an explanatory sequential procedure, beginning with the distribution of the questionnaire via Google Forms directly in the classroom. To minimize disruption, the research was conducted after the class sessions had ended, where the researcher provided a thorough explanation of the study's objectives regarding out-of-class speaking anxiety. Before participating, all 54 students provided their informed consent within the digital form, acknowledging that their participation was voluntary and that they were encouraged to provide honest responses.

This in-person administration of the digital survey ensured a high response rate and allowed the researcher to clarify any ambiguities for the participants in real-time. Following the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights. To accommodate the participants' availability and ensure a comfortable environment, these interviews were carried out via WhatsApp voice calls and were digitally recorded with the participants' permission to ensure data accuracy for later transcription. To protect participants' identities, pseudonyms were used throughout the transcription and reporting process.

The quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to describe the students' levels of out-of-class speaking anxiety and socio-cultural factors. Prior to the Pearson correlation analysis, the assumptions of normality, absence of apparent outliers, and linearity were assessed. The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated that the combined *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face scores and out-of-class speaking anxiety scores were normally distributed, with $p = .297$ and $p = .157$, respectively.

Visual inspection of the boxplots showed no apparent outliers, while the scatterplot indicated an approximately linear relationship between the two variables. Pearson's product-moment correlation was then used to examine the association between the combined *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face scores and out-of-class speaking anxiety. The

qualitative interview data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis through coding and categorization to explain the quantitative patterns. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between socio-cultural factors and out-of-class speaking anxiety.

3. Result

Quantitative Result

1. Students' Anxiety Levels

The data from Table 2 shows that out-of-class speaking anxiety among participants is mainly influenced by a combination of social evaluation and cognitive factors. Although the overall average mean of 3.32 indicates a moderate anxiety level, certain situations raise learners' anxiety to a high level. The strongest triggers are when the interlocutor seems uninterested in the conversation ($M=3.91$) and when learners are not familiar with the topic being discussed ($M=3.70$).

The results also suggests that learners are less intimidated by technical corrections ($M=2.89$) and more threatened by the fear of communication breakdown, such as not understanding the interlocutor's intention ($M=3.65$) or having to answer questions suddenly ($M=3.61$). Overall, the anxiety is situational; it becomes stronger when the speaker perceives a power imbalance in language mastery or feels intellectually unprepared, rather than simply fearing grammatical mistakes.

Table 2: Out-of-Class Speaking Anxiety Triggers

No.	Statements	Mean	SD	Levels
1.	I feel anxious if my interlocutor is highly proficient in English.	2.87	1.15	MA
2.	I feel nervous if the interlocutor has an accent like a native speaker.	2.91	1.19	MA
3.	I feel worried if the accent I use is difficult for others to understand.	3.30	0.96	MA
4.	I feel pressured if I fail to understand the words or sentences spoken by the interlocutor.	3.06	1.02	MA
5.	I feel uncomfortable if I am unfamiliar or not well-acquainted with a certain accent from the interlocutor.	3.07	0.84	MA
6.	I find it difficult if the interlocutor uses a regional or specific country's dialect while speaking English.	3.26	0.91	MA
7.	I feel anxious if my interlocutor speaks too fast.	3.35	1.01	MA
8.	I feel more nervous if the number of people I am speaking with in English is more than two.	2.91	1.05	MA
9.	I feel confused if I do not understand the intent or meaning of the interlocutor's speech.	3.65	0.76	HA
10.	I am anxious if I do not know the appropriate choice of words (vocabulary) to convey something.	3.37	0.96	MA
11.	I feel nervous if I have to answer questions suddenly.	3.61	0.96	HA
12.	I feel pressured if I do not know the answer to the questions being asked.	3.39	0.96	MA
13.	I feel worried if the interlocutor uses words that I rarely hear.	3.33	1.01	MA

No.	Statements	Mean	SD	Levels
14.	I feel less confident if I do not understand the topic being discussed.	3.70	0.84	HA
15.	I feel very anxious when everyone is waiting for me to speak.	3.35	1.12	MA
16.	I feel afraid if I cannot arrange words correctly according to language rules.	3.56	0.96	HA
17.	I feel uncomfortable if I see the interlocutor's facial expression looking less than friendly.	3.65	0.99	HA
18.	I feel embarrassed or anxious if my way of speaking is corrected at that very moment.	2.89	1.11	MA
19.	I feel pressured if the interlocutor asks difficult questions.	3.41	0.96	MA
20.	I tend to avoid the conversation if the topic is too difficult for me.	3.20	1.00	MA
21.	I feel reluctant to speak if the interlocutor seems uninterested in chatting.	3.91	0.98	HA
Average		3.32		

MA – moderately anxious; HA – highly anxious

2. Socio-cultural factors

The data in Table 3 show a moderate overall level of the combined socio-cultural measure of *Sungkun* and Fear of Losing Face ($M = 2.90$). The highest mean scores were found for the perceived pressure to perform well because of students' status as English Department students ($M = 3.28$) and the nervousness associated with strong respect for the interlocutor ($M = 3.28$). Other relatively high scores were observed for hesitation to initiate conversations with older or higher-status interlocutors ($M = 3.20$) and the preference to remain silent to maintain conversational harmony ($M = 3.02$). These findings suggest that concerns related to social relationships, status, and interactional harmony were reported at moderate levels among the participants.

Table 3: Socio-Cultural Factors: Sungkan and Fear of Losing Face

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Levels
1	I feel very embarrassed if my friends hear me mispronouncing a word in English in public.	2.52	0.93	MA
2	I feel a loss of self-esteem if I cannot answer a tourist/foreigner's questions fluently.	2.50	0.97	MA
3	I would rather stay silent than try to speak English if I am not sure my grammar is correct.	2.72	1.11	MA
4	I am worried that others will consider me "showy" or "arrogant" if I speak English in public.	2.76	1.18	MA
5	I feel burdened to perform perfectly due to my status as an English Department student.	3.28	1.19	MA
6	I feel sungkan (reluctant/uneasy) to interrupt or ask the interlocutor to repeat their words even if I do not understand.	2.98	0.96	MA
7	I feel hesitant to initiate a conversation with foreigners who look older or have a higher position than me.	3.20	0.94	MA

No	Statements	Mean	SD	Levels
8	I feel it is impolite if I ask too many questions while communicating in English outside of class.	2.78	0.95	MA
9	I feel more comfortable staying silent to maintain the harmony of the conversation rather than forcing myself to speak haltingly.	3.02	1.09	MA
10	My respect for the interlocutor often makes me very stiff and nervous while speaking.	3.28	1.00	MA
Average		2.90		

MA – moderately anxious; HA – highly anxious

3. Relationship Between Socio-cultural Factors and Speaking Anxiety

To determine the relationship between socio-cultural factors and speaking anxiety, a Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was performed. The statistical results indicate a strong positive and significant correlation between the cultural constructs of *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face and the students' anxiety levels ($r=0.748$, $p < .01$, $n=54$).

Table 4: Correlation Between the Combined Socio-Cultural Measure and Out-of-Class Speaking Anxiety

		Sungkan and Fear of Losing Face	Anxiety levels
Sungkan and Fear of Losing Face	Pearson Correlation	1	.748**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	54	54
Anxiety levels	Pearson Correlation	.748**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	54	54

Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

This correlation coefficient of .748 indicates a strong positive association between socio-cultural pressure and speaking anxiety in out-of-class settings. This finding suggests that students who reported greater psychological pressure to maintain social deference and protect their public self-image also tended to report higher levels of speaking anxiety. The significant correlation ($p < .01$) indicates that this association was statistically significant. Thus, for these students, the desire to maintain cultural harmony and academic “face” was strongly associated with psychological hesitation to engage in spontaneous English communication outside the formal classroom.

Qualitative Result

The quantitative results presented in Table 2 and Table 3 indicate that participants experienced a certain level of perceived threat related to their linguistic competence as well as socio-cultural factors. To further examine this issue, this section outlines several themes derived from the analysis of interview data, including OCSA triggers, fear of losing face, the influence of *Sungkan*, peer pressure, and the paradox of silence.

1. OCSA Triggers and Physical Manifestations

The findings showed that anxiety is most often triggered by students' perceived lack of linguistic competence. Many participants described noticeable physical reactions, such as a rapid heartbeat and trembling, particularly in spontaneous speaking situations. For example, Jennie shared her experience when interacting with a tourist, "To be honest, I was nervous. I was afraid of making mistakes and worried that the person wouldn't understand me... My heart was racing, and my hands were trembling." Similarly, Asa emphasized that her anxiety was rooted more in self-doubt than in external factors: "What made me most nervous was my own language ability, especially the fear of being wrong."

2. Fear of Losing Face and Academic Identity

Another important theme is the fear of losing face, particularly in relation to students' identity as English majors. Participants felt pressure to perform well in order to maintain a positive academic image. Carmen, for example, expressed this concern clearly, "People might think, 'Why is she like that, even though she has studied English longer than us?' I feel like I carry a responsibility as an English department student." In a similar vein, Jake highlighted the burden of representing the department, "I feel that I have to perform as well as possible because what I do reflects the reputation of the department."

3. Influence of *Sungkan* and Social Hierarchy

The cultural value of *Sungkan* emerged as a significant factor influencing students' willingness to initiate conversations, especially with people perceived as having higher status or appearing busy. Interestingly, responses varied regarding age differences. While some participants felt more anxious when speaking with older individuals, others, such as Mark, reported greater anxiety when interacting with peers, "I actually feel more hesitant and anxious when speaking with people my own age because they tend to show their reactions more directly." In contrast, Asa felt more comfortable in peer interactions, "When they are the same age, the feeling of hesitation usually decreases."

4. Peer Social Pressure and the 'Sok Inggris' (showing off in English) Stigma

A recurring theme among participants was the heightened anxiety experienced when speaking in front of classmates compared to strangers. The possibility of being judged by peers with similar levels of knowledge created additional pressure. Moreover, the fear of being labeled as "*sok Inggris*" (showing off in English) further discouraged students from using English openly. For example, Carmen commented, "I feel more anxious when I have to speak in front of my classmates because we have similar knowledge, so I'm afraid of being judged." Jennie also noted a contrast in how foreigners respond, "Foreigners are usually more accepting and don't have specific expectations, unlike friends from the same major."

5. Cultural Values and the Paradox of Silence

The final theme highlights what can be described as a "paradox of silence." Participants described situations in which remaining silent helped them avoid mistakes, embarrassment, or negative judgment, but they also recognized that this could reduce their opportunities to use English. The participants reported several strategies for managing these concerns. For instance, Carmen used code-mixing, stating, "I mix English with Bahasa Indonesia so it doesn't seem like I'm trying to show off." Meanwhile, Jennie preferred more private forms of practice. She commented, "I practice regularly in front of

a mirror and use digital applications so I can improve without feeling like I'm showing off." These accounts suggest that participants did not simply avoid English; rather, they reported using different strategies to manage their anxiety and concerns about how their English use might be perceived by others.

4. Discussion

The quantitative findings indicate that out-of-class speaking anxiety was associated with a combination of situational and social concerns. Among the reported triggers, interactions with an uninterested interlocutor and unfamiliar topics received relatively high mean scores, suggesting that these situations were relatively salient sources of anxiety for the participants. This pattern may be understood through Schlenker and Leary's (1982) Social Anxiety Theory, which explains that concern about how one is perceived by others can be related to anxiety in social interactions. In the present study, such concerns may have been connected to students' identities as English Department students and their expectations regarding their English performance. Liu (2007) similarly discussed the role of negative evaluation in language anxiety, while Yashima (2002) examined the relationship between social concerns and willingness to communicate.

However, these theoretical perspectives should be viewed as possible interpretations of the present findings rather than evidence that social concerns directly caused the students' anxiety. The out-of-class setting may also have contributed to these experiences because interactions outside the classroom can involve less structured conditions than classroom activities (Wilang & Singhasiri, 2017).

These findings differ in emphasis from earlier classroom-based research by Horwitz et al. (1986), which highlighted grammar-related anxiety and teacher evaluation. In the present study, anxiety related to being corrected while speaking received a relatively lower mean score ($M = 2.89$) than several situational triggers, whereas sudden questions and unfamiliar topics were among the more pronounced concerns. This pattern suggests that, in out-of-class interactions, students' anxiety may involve not only linguistic performance but also the conditions and demands of the interaction itself.

The findings can also be considered alongside Liu and Jackson (2008) and Mak (2011), who discussed concerns related to negative evaluation and communicative performance. In the qualitative data, some participants described remaining silent or using alternative strategies when they felt uncertain or concerned about embarrassment. However, these accounts should be understood as participants' reported ways of managing their experiences rather than evidence that social responses were the sole source of their anxiety.

The relatively high scores for feeling burdened to perform perfectly because of their status as English Department students ($M = 3.28$) and feeling nervous because of strong respect for the interlocutor ($M = 3.28$) indicate that academic identity and hierarchical relationships were salient concerns in the socio-cultural measure. This pattern can be discussed in relation to Ting-Toomey's (1988) Face-Negotiation Theory, which addresses the management of face in communication. In the present study, participants' accounts suggest that concerns about social image and respectful interaction were relevant to their speaking experiences.

However, these findings do not establish that preserving face was the underlying cause of their anxiety. The relatively lower mean for embarrassment about mispronunciation ($M = 2.52$), compared with the two higher items, may indicate that

different types of social and linguistic concerns were not equally salient to the participants. This pattern provides one possible explanation for the qualitative theme of the “Paradox of Silence,” but it should be understood as an interpretation of participants’ reported experiences rather than a definitive cultural explanation.

The Pearson correlation analysis showed a strong positive association between the combined socio-cultural measure of *Sungkan* and Fear of Losing Face and out-of-class speaking anxiety ($r = .748, p < .001, n = 54$). This finding indicates that students who reported higher levels of the combined socio-cultural measure also tended to report higher levels of out-of-class speaking anxiety. The qualitative findings provide further context for this quantitative pattern, as participants described concerns related to embarrassment, social status, respect for interlocutors, and being perceived as showing off when speaking English. These accounts help explain how the socio-cultural concerns reflected in the quantitative results were experienced in out-of-class interactions. However, the correlation does not establish a causal relationship between the variables. In addition, because both measures were collected through the same self-report questionnaire at one time point, shared method and response effects may have contributed to the observed association.

The qualitative findings also showed that some participants experienced physical symptoms of anxiety, including rapid heartbeat and trembling, during spontaneous speaking situations. These experiences are consistent with MacIntyre’s (1999) description of language anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety that can affect learners’ performance during communication. Participants also described self-doubt about their English ability, particularly when they feared making mistakes or being misunderstood. These accounts suggest that psychological and physical responses were part of some participants’ experiences of out-of-class speaking anxiety. However, the qualitative accounts do not indicate that these symptoms were experienced by all participants or that they were caused by a single factor.

The qualitative findings also indicated that some participants felt pressure because of their identity as English Department students. Participants described concerns about meeting expectations and maintaining a positive image when using English in social interactions. These concerns may be related to the concept of face in communication, as discussed in Ting-Toomey’s (1988) Face-Negotiation Theory. This finding is also in line with Mercer (2011), who discussed the relationship between learners’ self-concept and their emotional experiences, and Tutyandari (2005), who reported that Indonesian students may remain silent because of concerns about negative judgments from others. However, the present findings only show that participants reported such concerns; they do not establish that academic identity or face concerns directly caused their speaking anxiety. The findings therefore suggest that students’ perceptions of their academic identity may be one of several factors associated with their experiences of speaking English outside the classroom.

The cultural value of *Sungkan* strongly influences how students behave in social interactions. Mark’s hesitation to speak with peers, compared to Asa who feels more comfortable with them, shows that *Sungkan* is not only related to age differences but also to Social Presence, as explained by Gudykunst (1995). For some students, peers become a source of strong social pressure because they fear direct judgment from people within their own group. In Indonesian society, *Sungkan* helps maintain harmony and balance in

social relationships (Sobari, 2019). As a result, speaking English with peers can feel like a test of social behavior and personal integrity, because standing out may be seen as breaking norms of humility (Asmara, 2025). Since *Sungkan* involves fear of creating awkwardness or appearing different from the group (CISTA, 2014), speaking English may be viewed as disturbing social equality, which reduces students' willingness to communicate (Darwanto, 2022). When students face unfamiliar peer expectations, this social discomfort often pushes them to remain silent as a way to protect themselves (Prayoga & Handoyo, 2023).

This finding differs from MacIntyre & Gardner (1991), who argued that supportive peers should reduce anxiety by creating a sense of safety. However, in the Indonesian context, judgment from peers may feel more threatening than interaction with strangers. This idea is supported by Mak (2011), who found that in collectivist cultures, familiar peers can increase the fear of losing face. Similarly, Suryati (2015) explained that Indonesian students often avoid speaking English to maintain group harmony and avoid appearing superior to others.

The fear of being labeled *sok Inggris* (showing off in English) is a localized manifestation of Collectivism (Hofstede, 1986). In collectivist societies, "standing out" by using a foreign language can be perceived as an attempt to break group harmony or display intellectual superiority. Carmen's use of code-mixing can be understood as a Face-Saving strategy, as explained by Brown & Levinson (1987), to avoid making others uncomfortable. This supports findings by Liu & Jackson (2008), who found that Asian learners often stay silent or use "safe" communication strategies to avoid appearing arrogant. Similarly, Lauder & Purwo (2024) argued that in Indonesia, using English in informal settings may lead peers to see the speaker as distancing themselves from local identity or trying to appear socially superior.

5. Conclusion

The main aim of this research was to investigate the nature of out-of-class speaking anxiety (OCSA) among Indonesian EFL learners, specifically identifying the linguistic and situational factors associated with anxiety in out-of-class settings while exploring participants' experiences of indigenous socio-cultural concepts, such as *Sungkan* and fear of losing face. By employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study sought to understand why students may choose silence despite possessing adequate linguistic knowledge and to examine how their experiences of anxiety are situated within the Indonesian socio-cultural context.

The findings indicate that out-of-class speaking anxiety is experienced as a social and situational phenomenon as well as a linguistic concern. Quantitative results showed that students experienced a moderate level of anxiety, with anxiety being most pronounced when speaking with uninterested listeners or discussing unfamiliar topics. The correlation analysis also revealed a strong positive association between socio-cultural pressure and communication anxiety.

This association suggests that students who reported greater concerns about maintaining social respect (*Sungkan*) and protecting their public self-image also tended to report higher levels of communication anxiety. The qualitative findings provided further insight into this pattern by showing that participants frequently described silence in relation to concerns about social evaluation, face-saving, and maintaining social harmony. Participants also reported physical symptoms of anxiety, such as trembling and

rapid heartbeat, and associated these experiences with concerns about being perceived as *sok Inggris* (showing off in English) or damaging their reputation as English majors. These findings reflect participants' reported experiences and perceptions; they do not establish that *Sungkan*, fear of losing face, or other socio-cultural factors directly cause speaking anxiety.

These findings have important implications for institutions, teachers, and students. For institutions and educators, student silence should be understood as a self-protective strategy rather than a sign of low English ability. Since students are more afraid of social judgment than grammar mistakes, teachers should move beyond grammar-focused teaching and create low-pressure, psychologically safe environments outside the classroom, such as digital speaking clubs, where students can practice English without fear. For students, understanding how cultural factors affect their anxiety can help them become more confident speakers and gradually move from private practice to authentic social communication.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be taken into consideration. The participants were limited to 54 English Department students from a state Islamic higher education institution in Jambi, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to broader Indonesian EFL contexts or students from other academic disciplines. In addition, the study only captured data from a single period of time, which may not fully reflect changes in speaking anxiety across different academic stages or learning conditions. The research also concentrated primarily on the cultural concept of *Sungkan* and did not extensively examine the influence of other indigenous cultural values that exist within Indonesia's diverse ethnic communities.

To address these limitations, future research is encouraged to extend both the sample and research context by involving participants from various majors, universities, and geographical regions across Indonesia. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners. Additionally, employing a longitudinal approach could help researchers observe how anxiety levels change over time, especially during stressful academic situations such as teaching practicums or presentations.

Future studies should also explore additional local cultural values beyond *Sungkan* in order to develop a richer understanding of the psychological and sociocultural factors influencing communication among Indonesia's multi-ethnic learners. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to investigate the effectiveness of culturally responsive pedagogical interventions, such as "safe-space" speaking activities, to determine their potential in reducing *Sungkan*-related communication barriers and promoting greater speaking confidence.

6. References

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