

STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES IN PUBLIC SPEAKING CLASSROOMS: A CASE STUDY

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ABSTRAK

Studi ini menginvestigasi pengalaman mahasiswa dalam kelas berbicara di depan umum melalui sebuah studi kasus. Melalui wawancara kualitatif, mahasiswa mengungkapkan beragam tingkat kecemasan, dengan ketakutan akan penilaian dan kompetensi menjadi perhatian utama. Mereka juga menggambarkan berbagai strategi penanggulangan, termasuk teknik relaksasi. Temuan menyoroti perbedaan individu dalam tingkat kecemasan, dampaknya pada kinerja, dan strategi pengelolaan yang efektif. Rekomendasi untuk pendidik termasuk menciptakan lingkungan yang mendukung, mengajarkan strategi penanggulangan, dan memberikan kesempatan latihan yang terstruktur untuk membantu mahasiswa mengatasi kecemasan berbicara di depan umum dan mengembangkan keterampilan komunikasi yang krusial.

Kata Kunci: Pengalaman mahasiswa, kelas berbicara di depan umum, studi kasus, strategi penanggulangan, lingkungan pendidikan.

ABSTRACT

This study examined public speaking anxiety (PSA) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at UIN Gus Dur Pekalongan and investigated coping strategies. Through qualitative interviews, students revealed varying levels of anxiety, with fear of judgment and competence being major concerns. Coping mechanisms such as relaxation techniques were employed. Findings underscored individual differences in PSA levels, its impact on performance, and effective management strategies. Recommendations for educators include fostering supportive environments, teaching coping strategies, and providing structured practice opportunities to help students overcome PSA and develop crucial communication skills.

Keywords: *Public speaking anxiety, EFL students, coping strategies, supportive environments, teaching practices.*

INTRODUCTION

This study investigated public speaking anxiety (PSA) among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at UIN Gus Dur Pekalongan through a qualitative case study. By employing in-depth interviews, the study explores the experiences of a specific group of students enrolled in a public speaking course. The interviews

aimed to capture their individual levels of PSA, the factors that triggered their anxiety, and the coping mechanisms they employed to manage it.

Mastering speaking skills in English is considered one of the most challenging tasks for language learners, requiring intensive practice activities. Although writing is another challenging skill, speaking requires students to express themselves verbally, transferring their thoughts, feelings, and knowledge effectively (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Darancik, 2018).

English-speaking practice involves a variety of activities aimed at developing communication competence and training students to engage in effective communication in different contexts. Public speaking, in particular, is considered important because it involves delivering a speech in front of an audience, a skill that is essential for academic and professional success (Quinn & Goody, 2019). Considering that students are prospective teachers, practicing speaking English is also the first step in practicing communication that will be used in teaching in class.

Public speaking, which is characterized by delivering a message to an audience, often causes stress and anxiety in the speaker due to the pressure to appear flawless. This anxiety, known as public speaking anxiety (PSA) or glossophobia, manifests physically and emotionally, resulting in symptoms such as dry mouth, rapid heartbeat, and cognitive impairment (Sugiyati & Indriani, 2021; Coskun, 2017; Li, 2020).

Recognizing the importance of public speaking skills, institutions such as the English Department of UIN Gus Dur Pekalongan offer public speaking courses to equip students with the skills necessary for their future careers. However, PSA is still a common problem among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, as previous research shows (Sugiyati & Indriani, 2021; Fathikasari et al., 2022; Kalra & Siribud, 2020).

This study aimed to reveal the PSA experienced by EFL students at UIN Gus Dur Pekalongan and explore individual strategies to reduce anxiety during public speaking activities. By utilizing the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS), researchers aim to identify the trigger factors for PSA and assess students' comfort level in speaking English.

Speaking anxiety, also known as xenoglossophobia, is a common issue experienced by EFL students. The causes of speaking anxiety include communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Erdiana et al., 2020). In a study conducted by Yaikhong-Usaha (2012), the communication anxiety of Basic Signal Officers in the English classroom was found to be caused by the lack of opportunities to contribute in classroom communication, lack of confidence in speaking English, and affective factors such as interpersonal evaluation, classroom activities, and methods, as well as self-esteem.

Kostic and Bobanovic (2004) noted that speaking anxiety can be caused by a variety of factors, including fear of preparing, concern that others are judging, past failure, poor or insufficient preparation, comparing oneself to others, and tiredness in pronouncing words. Additionally, Kusiak (2009) pointed out that some people do not like to talk in a foreign language, and speaking anxiety can be caused by tiredness in pronouncing words or participating in a difficult discussion.

A study by Erdiana et al. (2020) found that 59% of EFL students experienced moderate levels of speaking anxiety, 38% experienced low levels, and only 3.4% experienced high levels. The main causes of anxiety were when asked to speak English in front of the class, fear of receiving negative comments from teachers and other students, fear of being corrected in front of others, lack of confidence in speaking English, and confusion when speaking English in front of other students.

In another study, Abdullah and Rahman (2017) determined the types of speaking activities that caused high anxiety among EFL students. Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and general feeling of anxiety were among the factors studied in the research.

These studies suggest that speaking anxiety is a significant issue for EFL students and can have a negative impact on their language learning. It is essential for teachers to be aware of the causes of speaking anxiety and to develop strategies to help their students overcome it.

This study employed a qualitative case study approach to explore public speaking anxiety (PSA) and coping mechanisms among EFL students at UIN Gus Dur Pekalongan. In-depth interviews with ten students enrolled in English Debate

and Critical Thinking courses aimed to capture individual PSA levels, triggering factors, and employed strategies. This qualitative approach, as defined by Yin (2016), allows for an in-depth understanding of both psychological and social influences on students' experiences with PSA within the context of their public speaking coursework.

Throughout the semester, students engage in theoretical learning about public speaking concepts and objectives before practicing public speaking activities in face-to-face classes. The lecturer guides them through each session, assigning turns for students to practice and demonstrate their public speaking skills. The qualitative integrated approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of students' experiences and strategies in dealing with public speaking anxiety within the specific context of their coursework.

Some interview questions are as follows:

1. What is your experience in carrying out public speaking activities, such as presentations or class discussions?
2. Do you usually feel anxious or nervous before or during public speaking? If so, can you tell us more about how those feelings affected you?
3. What is the main source of your anxiety when speaking in public? Are there specific situations or aspects that make you feel more anxious?
4. How do you usually deal with anxiety or nervousness before or during public speaking? Do you have a specific strategy that you have found effective?
5. Is there a difference in your anxiety level between speaking in front of classmates and speaking in front of a lecturer or a larger audience?

All students in this study were interviewed using these questions to find out their viewpoints about what individual efforts or strategies they usually apply to reduce their PSA. They were allowed to express their feelings after passing the Public Speaking course which reflected their performance during one semester.

DISCUSSION

Based on the interview questions, answers to the five questions were found, research findings that can be taken:

In the interviews, participants shared experiences covering various public speaking situations, especially in academic contexts such as presentations and class discussions. They admit that feelings of nervousness and anxiety often arise before and during public speaking, influenced by the desire to give their best performance as well as fear of other people's judgment and potential mistakes that might occur.

Participants also identified their main sources of anxiety when speaking in public, which included fear of being judged or making mistakes. In particular, the fear of forgetting the content you want to convey or losing control over the pronunciation of words is an additional factor that increases anxiety. However, they found that preparation strategies such as practice, in-depth understanding of the material, as well as relaxation techniques such as deep breathing and positive thinking, helped overcome the anxiety.

The interviews also highlighted that participants' anxiety levels varied depending on the size and composition of the audience. Speaking in front of classmates tends to be more comfortable because of the feeling of familiarity and support, while speaking in front of a lecturer or larger audience, especially in a formal setting, can cause greater pressure. However, participants strive to approach each speaking opportunity with the same level of preparation and confidence.

The interviews provided a clear picture of the challenges faced by the participants in public speaking, as well as the strategies they used to overcome these anxieties. From this experience, they realize that every speaking opportunity is an opportunity to grow and develop as communicators, although anxiety levels can vary depending on the context.

The respondent demonstrated awareness of varying anxiety levels based on the audience. They expressed greater comfort speaking in front of classmates due to a sense of familiarity and comfort zone of classmates. However, they acknowledged an increase in pressure when facing lecturers or larger audiences. Despite this, they expressed a commitment to thorough preparation and building

confidence for every public speaking opportunity. This highlights their ability to adapt and learn from each experience.

Based on responses gathered from interviews conducted with EFL students regarding their experiences and strategies in dealing with public speaking anxiety (PSA), several key findings emerged:

1. Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA)

The majority of respondents admitted to experiencing some level of public speaking anxiety. While some students report feeling confident and fluent during public speaking activities, others report feeling nervous and anxious.

These studies demonstrate that PSA is a common problem affecting a variety of populations, including physicians, family medicine trainees, and students at higher education institutions. It is important to develop interventions and curricula to improve public speaking and communication skills among individuals affected by PSA.

2. PSA Intensity:

The intensity of public speaking anxiety varies between respondents. Some of them described mild nervousness, while others experienced more severe anxiety that significantly affected their performance and self-confidence.

The fear of public speaking, also known as public speaking anxiety (PSA), varies greatly in intensity from person to person. Research suggests that around one in five people experience very high and consistent levels of PSA. An even larger group, up to seven in ten, may feel moderately high to high anxiety when faced with giving a speech in public. Interestingly, it seems nearly everyone experiences some degree of anxiety in at least some public speaking situations.

The intensity of PSA can be measured using various scales, such as the Public Speaking Anxiety Scale (PSAS), which uses a five-point Likert scale to identify low, moderate, or high levels of trait PSA. The PRPSA survey, developed by McCroskey, also uses a five-point Likert scale to measure low, moderate, or high levels of trait PSA.

In a study conducted by Nordquist (2020), PSA was defined as the intense worry and fear that a person experiences when delivering or preparing to speak to an audience. Another study found that PSA often results in impaired critical

thinking skills and cognitive performance, which might lead to mediocre academic performance. This means that PSA can be experienced at different levels of intensity, ranging from mild to severe. It is essential to recognize the different levels of anxiety and develop strategies to help individuals cope with and reduce the intensity of PSA.

3. Main Sources of Anxiety

The main sources of anxiety identified by respondents included the fear of negative judgment from the audience and concerns about their own competence in delivering the material effectively. Additionally, some students cited specific situations, such as speaking in front of a larger audience or unfamiliar topics, as triggers for increased anxiety.

4. Strategy for Overcoming Anxiety

Respondents used various strategies to manage their anxiety before and during public speaking. This includes practicing deep breathing exercises, visualizing a successful presentation, and doing repeated practice sessions to build confidence.

Here are some strategies for overcoming public speaking anxiety (PSA) :

- a) Relaxation: Engage in relaxation techniques, such as deep breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, or meditation, to reduce anxiety and promote calmness.
- b) Preparation: Prepare thoroughly for your speech by researching your topic, practicing your delivery, and organizing your content. This can help increase confidence and reduce anxiety.
- c) Positive Thinking: Focus on positive thoughts and visualize a successful outcome. This can help shift your mindset and improve your performance.
- d) Problem-focused Coping: Identify and address the specific issues causing your anxiety, such as stuttering, negative perceptions of your voice, or language barriers. This can help you develop strategies to overcome these challenges.
- e) Emotional Support: Seek support from friends, family, or mental health professionals to help you cope with your anxiety. This can provide a sense of comfort and understanding, which can help reduce anxiety levels.

These strategies can help individuals cope with the intensity of public speaking anxiety and improve their overall performance

CONCLUSION

This case study investigated public speaking anxiety (PSA) and coping mechanisms employed by EFL students at UIN Gus Dur Pekalongan. In-depth interviews revealed that students experienced varying levels of PSA, often citing fear of judgment and concerns about their ability to deliver the material effectively as key sources of anxiety. Interestingly, the study also found that students felt more comfortable speaking in front of classmates due to a sense of familiarity and support.

These findings underscore the need for educators to create supportive learning environments that acknowledge the challenges students face with PSA. By fostering a safe space for practice and providing opportunities for students to build confidence, educators can empower them to overcome anxiety and develop their public speaking skills. Furthermore, incorporating relaxation techniques and encouraging thorough preparation can equip students with effective coping mechanisms to manage anxiety before and during public speaking activities.

Ultimately, this study contributes valuable insights into the complexities of PSA within the context of EFL learning. Recognizing the prevalence of PSA and its impact on student communication skills is crucial for educators. By implementing targeted strategies and fostering supportive learning environments, educators can empower EFL students to overcome anxiety and develop into confident and effective communicators.

To reduce public speaking anxiety among EFL students, it is essential for educators to:

1. **Acknowledge Individual Differences:** Recognize that anxiety levels can vary significantly between students and tailor support strategies accordingly.
2. **Promote Supportive Learning Environments:** Foster inclusive and supportive classroom environments where students feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment.

3. Teach Effective Coping Strategies: Provide guidance on various coping mechanisms such as relaxation techniques, cognitive restructuring, and problem-focused coping to help students manage their anxiety effectively.
4. Offer Structured Practice Opportunities: Create opportunities for structured speaking practice in a safe and supportive setting to help build students' confidence and competence in public speaking.
5. Provide Constructive Feedback: Offer constructive feedback and encouragement to students to help them improve their speaking skills and alleviate anxiety.

By implementing these recommendations, educators can play a crucial role in supporting EFL students in overcoming public speaking anxiety and developing the confidence and skills needed for academic and professional success.

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