Analyzing The Freshman' Speaking Anxiety in Academic Speaking Class

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Abstract: Despite the importance of speaking skills in academic settings, students, particularly in learning a foreign language, experience significant anxiety during speaking activities. Horwitz et al. (1986) showed three main factors of anxiety there were communication apprehension factor, test anxiety factor, and fear of negative evaluation factor. This study aimed to identify the most symptom of speaking anxiety experienced by the freshman' students, to identify the factor contributing to speaking anxiety experienced by the freshman' students, and to explore some strategies usually used by the freshman' students to overcome their anxiety. This study was used descriptive qualitative method. Participants in this research were second semester students in regular class consisted of 28 students, but in this research only 6 students were taken who selected using a purposive sampling method. The researcher used questionnaires and interviews to collect the data. The researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis, starting from familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

The findings indicate that the most prominent symptoms are physical, such as a rapid heartbeat, sweaty or cold hands, and a trembling voice. The factor contributing to speaking anxiety experienced by the freshman' students is test anxiety. The strategies to overcome speaking anxiety are preparation, positive thinking, and relaxation. These strategies indicate a relatively good level of self-awareness and emotional regulation among the freshman' students, even though they are still in the early stages of adapting to academic demands.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a complex emotional state that can happen to anyone and anywhere, including in a foreign language class. Learning a foreign language is a group activity involving more than one individual, so it can cause anxiety in the learner. The anxiety experienced by foreign language learners is a form of specific situational anxiety, namely anxiety that occurs in a specific situation, namely the language learning situation. Bosmans & Hurd (2016) explain that language anxiety includes various negative emotions such as worry and fear and is triggered by students who have to perform in a second language. In foreign language

learning activities, anyone has the potential to experience feelings of anxiety, including in learning English.

Symptoms such as those mentioned by Brown (2008) indicate the characteristics of learners who experience anxiety when learning a foreign language, namely feelings of awkwardness, self-doubt, and fear. Language anxiety is one of the affective domains that is considered to interfere with the process of acquiring a second language. In general, Brown (2008) describes that the characteristics of anxiety are marked by subjective feelings of tension, fear, anxiety, and worry related to the rise of the autonomic nervous system. Regarding anxiety in the context of a foreign language, language anxiety is usually associated with foreign language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). In other words, language anxiety is a term used for anxiety that occurs in learners when they become foreign language learners or when participating in foreign language learning activities.

Anxiety that occurs in language learners can be influenced by the internal side of the learner that is related to the learner's cognitive domain or self-concept. For example, learners consider their language skills to be lower than other classmates. Learners' beliefs about language learning, in this case beliefs about language skills, are also one of the causes of anxiety. Self-perception is one of the variables that plays a role in the level of learner anxiety. Not only anxiety during learning or the learning process, but also one of the critical factors influencing communication anxiety. Another opinion was put forward by Young (1991) who stated that learners who consider their abilities weak in a second or foreign language feel more anxious in class.

In addition to internal factors, language anxiety can also occur due to interference or influence from external parties such as teachers. For example, teachers who correct students' mistakes too often, teachers who are too fierce, angry, intimidate students, and dominate all the conversations in class without giving students much time to speak. Furthermore, learning environment conditions such as asking students to appear to speak in front of the class, asking students to speak or respond to conversations suddenly are also one of the causes of anxiety in language learners.

Regarding language anxiety in online or distance learning, there are three

differences between online and offline learning, namely; 1) whether or not there is face-to-face/viewing with other people, 2) building identity, and 3) building relationships with each other. They argue that the existence of two different environments between direct learning and distance/online learning causes differences in the levels of anxiety experienced by learners. Based on the phenomena and problems that have been described, this study aims to determine the symptoms and factors that influence speaking anxiety, especially in face-to-face learning environments.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study is classified as a case study using descriptive qualitative study to explains the results of the data in a descriptive form. This research was conducted at Universitas Islam Kadiri. Participants in this research were second semester students in regular class consisted of 28 students, but in this research only 6 students were taken who selected using a purposive sampling method. Participant selection was based on students who were actively involved in speaking activities in English class and demonstrated interest and willingness to participate in this study.

Data collection was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach. A structured questionnaire was used to explore the factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety. Furthermore, interviews were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the anxiety symptoms experienced by students and the strategies they typically employ to overcome this anxiety. This research was conducted over two days. On the first day, December 16, 2024, the researcher conducted online interviews by sending questions online via WhatsApp, then participants answered the questions with voice notes. On the second day, December 19, 2024, the researcher distributed questionnaires using Google Forms.

To enhance credibility in this research, the researcher employed member checking. Member checking is the process by which interview transcripts or summaries of findings are returned to participants for confirmation, checking, and correction. In this research, after the online interviews were conducted, the

researcher transcribed the interviews data and then sent the transcripts to other participants via private message. For example, the transcript of the interview with participant 1 is sent to participants 2 & 3, the transcript of the interview with participant 2 is sent to participants 4 & 5, and so on. This process ensures that the researcher's interpretations do not deviate from the participants' intended meaning and minimizes subjective bias. For questionnaire data, because it was only used as supporting data, the researcher did not validate the data with statistical calculations.

The researcher analyzed the data using thematic analysis. As recommended by Braun & Clarke (2006), the third stage in thematic analysis is looking for themes, themes that are in accordance with the first research objective. The following are the six stages of thematic analysis that are applied: familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Most Symptom of Speaking Anxiety Experienced by the Freshman' Students

The most symptom of speaking anxiety experienced by the freshman' students can be identified from the findings of interviews with 6 participants in questions one to three. Below are the core answers from students.

First Question (to indicate the presence of physical symptoms).

Researcher : "Do you experience physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweating, or trembling when speaking English?"

Participant 1 : "I experience physical symptoms such as sweaty hands, trembling, and very cold hands."

Participant 2 : "Yes, I usually experience physical symptoms, like heart palpitations."

Participant 3 : "My heart sometimes races when I see the classroom atmosphere or the people in it."

Participant 4 : "Yes, sometimes I feel a little shaky when speaking English."

Participant 5 : "When I speak English in front of the class, my heart races and my hands get very cold."

Participant 6 : "I usually tremble when I'm presenting or speaking in front of many people."

Second Question (to indicate the presence of cognitive symptoms).

Researcher : "Do you often think about other things outside of learning during speaking class?"

Participant 1 : "I've thought about things outside of studying, like unexpected events or fatigue."

Participant 2 : "I usually think about working."

Participant 3 : "I think about other things, like when I hear news or read information about something."

Participant 4 : "Maybe not, because I prefer to focus on learning."

Participant 5 : "I'm afraid I won't be able to answer the lecturer's questions. I also often think about assignments in other courses."

Participant 6 : "I usually think about when class will end and where I'm going to go after it, like the canteen, or what I'm going to do after class."

Third Question (to indicate the presence of behavioral symptoms).

Researcher : "Have you ever intentionally avoided speaking class? If so, why?"

Participant 1 : "I never intentionally skipped class to speak, because I assumed that if I didn't show up, I'd miss the material the lecturer was presenting that day."

Participant 2 : "I've never intentionally skipped a speaking class, but I have skipped when I was sick or had permission."

Participant 3 : "I never leave class to speak on purpose, I leave class when I am sick or just ask for permission."

Participant 4   : "If it was on purpose, maybe not, I only left class when I was sick, asked for permission when there was something necessary, or when I went to the toilet."

Participant 5   : "Never leave class on purpose, only leave class when sick or when asked for permission when there is an activity."

Participant 6   : "I never leave class on purpose, unless I am sick or have permission to be absent."

This study aims to identify the most symptom of speaking anxiety experienced by freshman' students in the context of Academic Speaking class. According to Nevid et al. (2005), anxiety symptoms grouping into three categories, namely physical symptoms, cognitive symptoms, and behavioral symptoms. Physical symptoms are bodily reactions that emerge as a direct response to anxiety-provoking situations. Cognitive symptoms are related to negative thoughts, fear, worry, and unrealistic perceptions of situations.

In the context of an Academic Speaking class, cognitive symptoms ideally appear in the form of worries about being unable to answer the lecturer's questions, fear of mispronunciation and being laughed at, anxiety about peer or lecturer assessment, and repetitive negative thoughts before class begins. Behavioral symptoms of speaking anxiety often manifest in avoidance behaviors, such as leaving class, avoiding speaking when asked, remaining silent during discussions, and missing presentations.

Based on students' answers to question number one, all students experienced physical symptoms. Participant 1 stated that when speaking in informal contexts, she did not experience any symptoms, but when speaking in public, she experienced sweaty hands, trembling, and very cold hands, with the most frequent symptom being cold hands. Participants 2 and 3 admitted to experiencing heart palpitations, especially when they did not understand the material and had to respond to spontaneous questions from the lecturer. Participants 4 and 6 stated that they experienced trembling when speaking English in formal situations, such as presentations or when asked by the lecturer. Participant 5 experienced a combination of several physical symptoms, namely

heart palpitations, cold hands, and a trembling voice, especially due to fear of making mistakes in English pronunciation.

The most common physical symptoms experienced by students were heart palpitations, sweaty or cold hands, and a trembling voice. These symptoms do not appear during general learning, but in specific contexts, such as when lecturers ask spontaneous questions, when having to make a presentation in front of the class, when not understanding the material well, or when asked to provide an unprepared response. These findings indicate that physical symptoms are highly situational and specific to public and unexpected speaking activities.

Based on students' answers to question number two, the data indicate that students do not exhibit many of these cognitive symptoms. When asked whether they often think about other things outside of learning, most participants answered that they think about other things not directly related to speaking anxiety, such as boredom with the material, assignments from other courses, after-class activities (eating in the canteen, etc.), personal problems, or side jobs. Although some participants mentioned having thoughts of being unable to complete assignments and fearing not understanding the material, the context they conveyed was still not strong enough to be categorized as cognitive symptoms of speaking anxiety. Therefore, based on the interview findings, indications of cognitive symptoms in new students tend to be minimal and not dominant.

Based on students' answers to question number three, the data showed that no students intentionally left class to avoid speaking anxiety. Their absences occurred only when they were sick or had urgent matters with permission. Some participants even stated that they still attended class because they recognized the importance of the material, were afraid of falling behind, and worried about difficulties on exams if they were absent. This suggests that students demonstrate responsible academic behavior despite experiencing stress or anxiety in their learning. Overall, the most prominent symptoms of speaking anxiety in this study were physical, while cognitive and behavioral symptoms tended to be less prominent.

The Factor Contributing to Speaking Anxiety Experienced by the Freshman'

Students

The factor contributing to speaking anxiety experienced by the freshman' students can be identified from the findings of interviews with 6 participants in question four. Below are the core answers from students.

Researcher : "What do you think or feel when speaking class is about to start?"

Participant 1 : "I think that I will contribute to the class, especially if the material presented is interesting and arouses my curiosity, I will be very focused on learning."

Participant 2 : "If I have an assignment that day, I think about whether I can do the assignment or not, or if I have a presentation scheduled that day, I will start to overthink about mastering the material."

Participant 3 : "I feel normal, and I don't have any negative thoughts before class begins."

Participant 4 : "I just feel like I need to prepare myself to receive the learning well."

Participant 5 : "It's normal, my heart starts pounding when I'm about to face the exam"

Participant 6 : "I usually feel nervous, this happens because I feel like I don't have a good command of English."

Based on interview data, most participants responded neutrally or positively when speaking class is about to start. Some participants expressed focus and readiness to contribute, while another felt normal without any worries or anxiety symptoms. From these findings, it can be seen that the students in this study did not show significant signs of speaking anxiety as English class was about to begin. It also confirmed by the answer from participant 5, where she stated that her heart was pounding when she was about to face the exam. This suggests that the factor contributing to speaking anxiety experienced by the freshman' students is test anxiety. Students' speaking anxiety may be more related to specific classroom situations (e.g., exam) than to the start of class. In line with

the theory of Horwitz et al. (1986) which states, test anxiety is related to academic evaluation, which is the fear of failing a performance or exam. This finding reinforces the assumption that speaking anxiety is situational and not always present at every learning moment, particularly at the beginning of class.

Some Strategies to Overcome Speaking Anxiety Experienced by the Freshman' Students

Some strategies to overcome speaking anxiety experienced by the freshman' students can be identified from the findings of interviews with 6 participants in question five. Below are the core answers from students.

Researcher : "How do you usually deal with the anxiety you feel?"

Participant 1 : "I pray before asking a question, then prepare by carefully considering what I want to ask so that my question is relevant to the material presented by the presenter or lecturer."

Participant 2 : "I prepare myself more."

Participant 3 : "I usually prepare, then think positively."

Participant 4 : "I often think positively to overcome my anxiety."

Participant 5 : "Usually I do some preparation first, then do some relaxation."

Participant 6 : "Usually I do some preparation first and some relaxation."

Based on Kondo & Ying's (2004) theory, there are five main strategies for overcoming speaking anxiety: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, seeking peer support, and resignation. In the context of this study, the six participants only used preparation, positive thinking, and relaxation strategies. Preparation strategies were the most frequently used by participants, such as reading and understanding the material before a presentation, preparing notes or key points to discuss, and mentally preparing themselves before answering questions. This suggests that awareness of the importance of preparation is key to reducing speaking anxiety. The questionnaire findings also showed that all respondents agreed with the statement, "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class. The statement indicates that if students don't

prepare, they will panic when speaking English. Therefore, to overcome this, preparation is the best way.

Several participants also admitted to using positive thinking to reassure themselves that they were capable of facing class challenges, such as "I can do it because I've studied" and "Just answer as best I can, the important thing is to have the courage to speak." This strategy served as a form of self-control to maintain mental composure and prevent overthinking, which can exacerbate anxiety. Relaxation techniques were also used, although not as frequently as the previous strategies. Several participants mentioned taking deep, slow breaths before speaking, physically calming themselves to reduce tension. Although simple, this technique demonstrates that students have body awareness and are able to use basic methods to relieve tension.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed to identify symptoms of speaking anxiety, the factors that cause it, and the strategies used by freshman students to cope with anxiety in Academic Speaking classes. The findings indicate that the most prominent symptoms are physical, such as a rapid heartbeat, sweaty or cold hands, and a trembling voice. These symptoms appear primarily in situations that require spontaneous verbal responses, such as answering a lecturer's impromptu question or during an unprepared presentation. Cognitive and behavioral symptoms tend to be less dominant. Students do not exhibit excessively negative thinking patterns or avoidant behaviors such as skipping class or deliberately remaining silent. They continue to attend and participate in class despite feeling pressured, indicating a high level of academic responsibility.

The factor contributing to speaking anxiety experienced by the freshman' students is test anxiety. Most participants responded neutrally or positively when speaking class is about to start. Some participants expressed focus and readiness to contribute, while another felt normal without any worries or anxiety symptoms. From these findings, it can be seen that the students in this study did not show significant signs of speaking anxiety as English class was about to begin.

Students' speaking anxiety may be more related to specific classroom situations (e.g., exam) than to the start of class.

The strategies to overcome speaking anxiety are preparation, positive thinking, and relaxation. In preparation, the freshman' students tend to use problem-focused coping strategies, primarily through thorough preparation of material, independent practice, and note-taking before speaking. They also practice positive thinking and simple relaxation techniques to manage emotional stress. These strategies indicate a relatively good level of self-awareness and emotional regulation among the freshman' students, even though they are still in the early stages of adapting to academic demands.

The implications of these findings are crucial for teachers, who are strategically positioned to influence how students experience and respond to speaking anxiety. Creating a supportive, empathetic, and non-judgmental classroom environment can significantly reduce the intensity of students' anxiety. By emphasizing communication over grammatical perfection, encouraging participation without pressure, and normalizing mistakes as part of the learning process, teachers can help students feel more secure and confident when speaking.

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