

An analysis of students' anxiety in speaking activity

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the level of speaking anxiety, identify the factors that cause student anxiety, and find solutions to overcome of the eighth-grade students in one of junior high school in Rangkasbitung. A case study is employed in this study. to explore and explain the students' anxiety in speaking activity. In collecting the data, the researcher interviews eight participants. The results of the study indicated that all participants feel anxious and insecure when speaking English. It is occurred due to limited self-practice and knowledge of English vocabulary.

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking anxiety can greatly impact one's self-confidence because it frequently causes one to feel like a failure when unable to speak out and express what they know. In other words, speaking anxiety is a feeling that makes someone uncomfortable when they stand up in front of a class. When students cannot manage their speaking anxiety, they may be unable to speak in front of the class. It is a temporary condition accompanied by specific physical feelings seen at a certain period of time (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). One's ability to act and talk is affected by sensations such as irregular heartbeat, sweating, stumbling, and difficulty. These feelings are seen as potentially harmful and have a negative impact on their ability to communicate in their own speech (Hanifa, 2018).

Speaking anxiety is one of the problems that have the biggest impact on a person's ability to speak a foreign language. Foreign Language One of the aspects to take into account when generating the language is anxiety. There, fear, shyness, and discomfort were the three main contributors to foreign language anxiety. The study additionally encouraged self-reflection exercises so that students could assess their skills and limitations, solve problems, and gain confidence (Rodrigo Garcia Motta, Angélica Link, Viviane Aparecida Bussolaro et al., 2021).

In summary, speaking is one of the most important English language skills to learn, however speaking anxiety is a problem that affects students' ability to speak. Due to a variety of causes, speaking in public can be particularly difficult for English foreign language students. This study aims to identify the elements that contribute to speaking anxiety and provide strategies for overcoming it. As a result, this study has three goals: to identify the situations that cause students to feel anxious, to look into the factors that contribute to students' anxiety when speaking English in public, and to learn how students deal with anxiety.

2. METHOD

Classroom observation and interviews were utilized by researcher in collecting data. Eight students of the ninth grade were participants in this study. using descriptive analysis techniques. The data were analyzed

using three steps, i.e. data reduction, data display, and conclusion or verification. On the first stage, the researchers tried to find out themes and patterns includes taking out the most essential component, focusing on it, and searching for them. In order to reduce data, researchers focus on the objectives to be met. On the data display stage, the researchers presented the data. For the last stage, the researchers verified the result of analysis based on the obtained data and made conclusion. The subject of this research was the ninth-grade students of one of junior high school in Rangkasbitung.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of observation and interviews, it was found that there are several factors that cause speaking anxiety.

Positive Thinking and Coping Strategies

It refers to a learner's tendency to maintain a positive outlook and manage unpleasant emotions when facing English-speaking situations. It involves the ability to reframe negative thoughts and focus on improvement rather than failure. Positive thinking learners are more likely to see mistakes as part of the learning process and take constructive steps to improve. The interviews revealed that some participants tried to maintain a positive mindset when asked to speak in English, although feelings of insecurity still arose.

“When I speak English, I immediately feel insecure because I am afraid of making the wrong words and being laughed at by my friends.” (S1)

Some students overcame anxiety by preparing themselves and increasing their vocabulary, which they believed was the key to speaking without fear.

“When the teacher tells me to speak in English, I will do so according to my vocabulary and skill level. If I’m mistaken, I will study more diligently and learn more vocabulary.” (S2)

Preparation and vocabulary mastery were perceived as essential strategies to reduce anxiety and maintain optimism.

Self-Confidence (Belief in One’s Own Abilities)

Self-confidence refers to the belief in one’s competence and the ability to perform speaking tasks successfully. High confidence is related to the learning outcome ((Akbari & Sahibzada, 2020). In the context of foreign language speaking, it is closely related to self-efficacy and is often built through language mastery and prior speaking experiences. Participants stated that a strong vocabulary base boosted their confidence to respond to teachers’ questions, even when they faced difficulties in finding the right words.

“I don’t feel anxious about my ability to speak English. I am sure when I am asked a question by the teacher I will answer as best I can because my knowledge of English vocabulary is quite good. If I feel confused, I will ask the teacher again so I can understand.” (S3)

However, others admitted that limited vocabulary knowledge sometimes led to hesitation and nervousness.

“I’m not afraid to speak English, but I often get nervous when I’m told to speak, which makes me feel anxious about my abilities. The best way is to enlarge my vocabulary so that I can be sure of my own ability.” (S4)

This suggests that vocabulary mastery was seen as a foundation for developing self-confidence and reducing anxiety.

Preparedness and Willingness to Participate

It deals learner’s willingness to prepare for and participate in speaking activities, as well as to accept the consequences of their performance. Students who prepared their speaking tasks in advance tended to be more ready and less anxious. Some students prepared short stories or sentences before class when they anticipated being called on to speak.

“If my teacher asks me to tell my activities at home in English, I will do it because I have prepared the story beforehand.” (S5)

Others, however, avoided participation due to nervousness, lack of preparation, or fear of making mistakes. A few participants saw the activity as an opportunity to learn rather than something intimidating. “I feel happy when I am told to read, even though I still stammer, and someone is more proficient than me. I will use it as a lesson.” (S6)

“I feel intimidated, but I also feel challenged to study harder and be even better in the future.” (S7)

Therefore, preparation and willingness directly influenced speaking anxiety.

Realistic Self-Appraisal

Realistic self appraisal involves assessing one’s speaking ability based on actual skill levels, setting achievable goals, and recognizing the need for continuous improvement. This mindset helps learners avoid excessive fear of failure and approach speaking tasks more logically.

Participants acknowledged that the speaking activities designed by teachers motivated them to improve their fluency and vocabulary.

“I feel very motivated with many friends who are already fluent in English in class. I also want to be able to speak English fluently like them. Even though I still feel nervous, I want to continue practicing my speaking skills.” (S8)

Students with this mindset viewed more proficient peers as role models rather than threats, using these interactions as motivation to enhance their skills.

The findings of this study indicate that four interrelated aspects—optimism, self-confidence, responsibility, and rational/realistic thinking—play significant roles in shaping students’ speaking anxiety in the classroom. Among these, limited vocabulary knowledge emerged as the most prominent underlying factor influencing anxiety levels. This aligns with previous research (Setiawan & Sulhan, 2021), which found that a lack of lexical mastery often leads to both reduced confidence and increased anxiety in speaking activities.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the factors influencing students’ speaking anxiety in English classroom activities, focusing on four aspects: optimism, self-confidence, responsibility, and rational/realistic thinking. Among the four aspects, self-confidence—closely linked to vocabulary mastery—emerged as the most decisive in reducing anxiety and increasing willingness to participate in classroom speaking activities. While all four aspects contribute to shaping speaking anxiety, their effectiveness largely depends on students’ lexical competence. Therefore, reducing speaking anxiety requires not only psychological support through fostering optimism, confidence, responsibility, and realistic self-appraisal, but also targeted pedagogical interventions to systematically enhance vocabulary mastery.

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