

EFL Students' Strategies in Dealing with Speaking Anxiety in Post Pandemic Class

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to find out the strategies that the EFL students use to reduce their speaking anxiety in post pandemic class. This research is a qualitative type of research that uses qualitative descriptive method to collect the necessary data in the hope of knowing the strategies used by students in dealing with their speaking anxiety. The participants of this study included students who were in the class of XI Bahasa at SMA Negeri 1 Pangkep. In this study, there were two instruments used, namely interviews which were carried out in two stages as the main instrument and an observation activity involving two observers. The observation was carried out in the classroom while the learning activity was conducted, and the interview sessions were carried out outside of their classroom. By using a purposive sampling technique, six student representatives were selected to be interviewed. The results of the study revealed that there were seventeen methods used by students to overcome their speaking anxiety which were then categorized into six different kinds of strategies. These six strategies according to the research finding are consisting of memory strategy, cognitive strategy, compensation strategy, metacognitive strategy, affective strategy and social strategy.

Keywords: *Speaking anxiety, Strategies in dealing with speaking anxiety, offline learning.*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the main key in communicating, by speaking a person can achieve, express, and explain the intent and purpose of the actions that are being carried out by someone. Pakula, H. M. (2019) defined speaking as a skill that is hard to learn by the students or teach by the instructors or teachers but deemed important nonetheless. Bailey (2005) stated that speaking is more challenging than other skills to master because unlike writing and reading, speaking occurs in real time and requires an immediate respond from the interlocutors and unlike writing, the speaker who express their utterances cannot review or edit about what they intend to say when speaking. There are so many students that are experience troubles while speaking in class, this situation or condition of someone can be exacerbated by excessive anxiety that can be experienced by anyone regardless of a person's age and gender. This excessive anxiety can

arise from various factors that occur and affect a person in negative ways and prevent them to achieve the most of their learning materials.

On the other hand, the learning situation that has suddenly changed drastically due to the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the anxiety conditions of students in all aspects, including their speaking anxiety as explained by Tiatri & Heng (2021) and Pahargyan, T. (2021) in their research. The two studies can also be an evidence of student anxiety in the post-pandemic era as stated by Mello & Grobmeier (2021) that the COVID-19 pandemic is more than just the incidence of infectious diseases but rather it is an obstacle with long-lasting consequences and effects for students such as increased levels of anxiety, stress, sadness, depression, and even suicide. In order to help the students to reduce this anxiety, some studies have also proven that with the right technique and methods, speaking anxiety which is often becomes obstacle in student learning activities can be minimized as found by Raja, F. (2017).

Speaking anxiety can affect a person at a certain level, the higher a person's level of anxiety, the higher the possibility for them to make mistakes. Many previous studies have proven that students' learning abilities in mastering speaking skills are much affected by anxiety and another unavoidable factor with the pandemic that greatly affects many aspects of our lives and exacerbating the level of speaking anxiety which experienced by students. The researcher realizes that there is a need to add insight into strategies to reduce speaking anxiety in students. Therefore, this study will discuss what strategies to reduce speaking anxiety based on students' views in post pandemic class in hope that the research can be additional help for them to conquer the ability of speaking skill.

Conceptualizing Anxiety in EFL Context

As stated by Chiang (2012) in Alsowat (2016) defined anxiety as worry, discomfort, disquiet, disquietude, and inquietude that affect an individual in a specific occurrence. Horwitz (1986) stated that anxiety is a mental discomfort or disquiet brought on by a dread of danger or tragedy. Anxiety, as defined by Muchlas (1976) in (Ghufron & Risnawati, 2010; p.142) is a subjective sensation characterized by mental stress, unease, and tension experienced during disputes or threats. Of all the expert opinions on anxiety, it can be concluded that anxiety is a person's emotional instability to a situation or condition whether it's when speaking or writing that can be influenced by many factors from within and outside the individual which causes a person to be unable to process the situation properly.

Potential Strategies to Reduce Speaking Anxiety

Oxford (1990) as cited in Tee, Joanna, & Kamarulzaman (2020) outlines six of the most commonly used strategies by students to help them to reduce their speaking anxiety in classroom learning activities. They are consisting of memory strategy in which refers to the process of keeping and recalling new information. This technique category includes methods for lowering speaking anxiety like as visualizing or imagery, examining more knowledge, and developing mental strategies. Cognitive strategy in which involving transformation or manipulation, making a framework for input and output as well as rehearsing, analyzing, and reasoning are all methods for lowering speaking anxiety for this strategy. Compensation strategy in which utilized by students to make up for a lack of vocabulary in speaking and attempt to intelligently estimate/guess the content or output to improve their speech production and to reduce their speaking anxiety. Metacognitive strategy where students use this method to usually organize, keep track of, evaluate, and modify their speech. By engaging in these behaviors, students learn to keep an eye on their speech and recognize when something must be modified because it is improper. Affective strategy that regulates students' emotions,

sentiments, motives, and even ideals about language learning. And the last strategy is social strategy in which students would seek for social support around them for assistances.

METHOD

Research Design

The researcher utilized the descriptive qualitative research method where its result is expressed in words, and it include gathering and analyzing non-numerical data such as text audio or video. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) as cited in Irfiana, I. (2020) defined qualitative research as a way to investigates the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials. Furthermore, the objectives of this kind of research is to promote a good comprehend to a certain phenomenon, such as an environment, a process, or even a belief. In this case, the researcher will gather/collect, analyze, and then interpret the data before describing it. Interviews, observations, and literature reviews are all the examples of this kind of study.

Population and Sample

The place for this research is SMA Negeri 1 Pangkep. The time for conducting the research is around three to four weeks after the research begins. The subjects of this study consisted of six (6) senior high school students who were selected from the 26 students which all are in the same class. All participants volunteer themselves and were then selected using a purposive sampling technique where the researcher will determine the necessary data and then will select participants who will be used as research subjects based on or by considering the knowledge of prospective research subjects on the topic to be studied with their prior approval or based on the recommendation by their English teacher. Then, the chosen subjects were contacted by the researcher through their social media contact.

Instruments of the Research

As an effort to gather the required data to support the study's efficiency, the researcher utilized observation and in-depth interview supported by documentation tools such as smartphone, laptop, camera, and other necessary equipment. The in-depth interviews will be the main instrument of the study and the results of the observation will be used as the findings to support the data that are collected from the interview sessions.

Procedure of Collecting Data

The data collection technique used in this study are observation and in-depth interview. The interview conducted outside of the students' class to prevent disturbing their learning process. In collecting and analyzing data obtained from designated volunteers on how students' strategies to reduce their speaking anxiety, the researcher used two stages of interviews as an instrument. In the observation, the researcher is directly involved in the English learning activities in the classroom carried out by the teacher and observe carefully about how students reduce their speaking anxiety during the class with the help of documentation tools such as camera and laptop.

Technique of Data Analysis

The researcher used the qualitative analysis method by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) to analyze the collected data. There are three main steps needed to the implementation of the analysis. The three steps of analysis include data condensation, data display and conclusion and verification. Furthermore, in the earliest stage of the data analysis (the condensation data) is subdivided into several sub-steps consisting of selecting, focusing,

simplifying, abstracting, transforming data according to Misna (2015) as cited in Lukitasari (2019).

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The study findings and discussion were obtained from the two instruments which are observation and two-staged of in-depth interviews. The researcher managed to identify seventeen kinds of methods or efforts made by students in reducing their speaking anxiety where this wide range of efforts are in coordinates with the theory stated by Fedderholdt (1997) where he argues that language students who are able to use wide range of learning strategy will be capable to learn in more efficient way. From these seventeen methods the researcher then categorized them into six different kinds of strategies that are referred from what Oxford (1990) expressed about six kinds of learning strategies as explained below.

1. Memory strategy

Based on results of the findings from the interview and the observation, the researcher is able to identify three kinds of methods used by students to reduce their speaking anxiety in the post pandemic class. They are including memorizing, recalling main ideas and the utilizing of small note as seen from the extracts below respectively.

Extract 1 (Student 2, 16/11/2022)

*“Terkadang saya **menghafal sesuai dengan teks** nya saja kak”* (Sometimes I memorize according to the text only)

Extract 2 (Student 3, 16/11/2022)

*“Cuman **memahami ide pokok**”* (Just understanding the main idea)

Extract 3 (Student 1, 16/11/2022)

*“...biasa juga **bawa kertas kecil** supaya bisa dilihat kalau lupa teksnya”* (...it's also normal to bring paper so I can look at it if I forget the text)

These findings are incoordinate and supported by the theoretical statement expressed by Oxford (1990) as mentioned in Ghorbani, M. R., & Riabi, N. K. (2011) where she stated that memory strategies, traditionally known as mnemonics as the ability to help the learners to store and retrieve information. The evidence of the use of this kind of strategy can be seen in the previous section as mentioned in the findings of this study.

2. Cognitive strategy

In conducting the study, the researcher found that there are two kinds of efforts made by students to reduce their speaking anxiety that can be categorized in the cognitive strategy and they are including practicing alone and making a framework. The evident of this can be seen from the interview extracts below respectively.

Extract 1 (Student 1, 16/11/2022)

*“Biasanya **latihan sendiri** kak, kalau kayak presentasinya tidak terlalu butuh interaksi banyak dengan teman kelompok”* (Usually practice alone, if it's like a presentation that doesn't really need a lot of interaction with group mates)

Extract 2 (Student 6, 16/11/2022)

*“...setiap ingin presentasi selalu **menyusun segala hal yang akan di bahas**”* (...every time I want to do a presentation, I always arrange everything that will be discussed)

The findings of the study above are supported by the theory expressed by Vlčková, K., Berger, J., & Völkle, M. (2013) where they stated that cognitive strategy is including practicing, analyzing, and taking notes.

3. Compensation strategy

The compensation strategy found the researcher from the result of the study are including three kinds of methods which are the use of gesture or mime, the use of synonym and basic vocabularies and the utilizing of direct translation and code-switching. The evident of the three methods are shown in the extract below respectively.

Extract 1 (Student 6, 16/11/2022)

*“...dengan bantuan anggota tubuh sendiri contohnya banyak di luar sana pembicara melakukan hal tersebut. dengan cara **menggoyang kan tangannya** atau **memainkan tangannya** dengan tujuan agar kecemasan berbicara hilang dan membuat mental aman”* (...with the help of their own body, for example, many speakers out there do this. by shaking their hands or playing with their hands with the aim that the anxiety of speaking will disappear and make the person mentally safe)

Extract 2 (Student 6, 26/11/2022)

*“...mencari tahu di google translate (untuk **mencari sinonim** atau **mengganti ke kata yang lebih sederhana**)”* (...find out on google translate (to search the synonym or changing to a simpler word))

Extract 3 (Student 1, 26/11/2022)

*“...tidak pakai bahasa Inggris terus kak di **campur-campur dengan bahasa Indonesia**”* (...we don't use English all the time, we mix it with Indonesian)

These results are supported by several theories in which expressed by Syafryadin, S., Martina, F., & Salniwati, S. (2020) where they defined compensation strategies as an alternative way to help and guide the learners to overcoming their inconvenience or difficulties in mastering the target language. Griffiths, C., & Parr, J. M. (2001) also stated that the compensation strategy is an excuse movement done by students that enable them to make up for their limited knowledge and on the other hand, Oxford (1990) referenced in Margolis, D. P. (2001) also revealed the same tone assertion in which she said that the compensation strategy is meant to make up for a deficient language knowledge such as vocabulary mastery.

4. Metacognitive strategy

After the two stages of in-depth interviews concluded, the researcher identified that the methods to learn English word pronunciations, looking for related content and synchronize the speech with other member of a group presentation are the steps of metacognitive strategy used by students to help them with their speaking anxiety as seen from the extract below.

Extract 1 (Student 1, 26/11/2022)

*“...biasanya kak saya cari dulu **cara pengucapan yang benar** di google”* (...I normally look for the correct pronunciation on Google first)

Extract 2 (Student 1, 16/11/2022)

“Biasanya lihat di Google dengan buku di sekolah (selain YouTube untuk menambah wawasan mengenai materi yang akan dibicarakan” (Usually look on Google with books at school (besides YouTube to gain insight into the material to be discussed)

Extract 3 (Student 3, 21/11/2022)

“...berdiskusi bagaimana supaya presentasinya lebih bagus” (discuss how to make the presentation better)

The result above are supported by the theory of Brown et al. (1983) as cited in Rahimi, M., & Katal, M. (2012) where it is stated that metacognitive strategies are the competences where the students will manage, direct, organize, and guide their learning. With the same tone, Holden (2004) as cited in Serri, F., Boroujeni, A. J., & Hesabi, A. (2012) stated that the metacognitive strategies indicate to the efforts that students use and apply consciously in learning process. Knowing about learning is the other way to define the metacognitive strategy. It has the same explanation that the students learn how to study in which involve the mindset that include the process of learning while they are planning, monitoring, and evaluating their own materials.

5. Affective strategy

Praying, take a breath and think positively by self-talking are all the examples of methods in affective strategy used by students to reduce their anxiousness in speaking based on the study result. The evident of the methods can be seen below respectively.

Extract 1 (Student 5, 26/11/2022)

“Benar, karena sudah menjadi kebiasaan bagi siswa untuk berdo'a sebelum belajar” (Yes/ Right, because it has become a habit for students to pray before studying)

Extract 2 (Student 1, 16/11/2022)

“Tarik nafas supaya lebih fokus lagi sambil berusaha tetap tenang” (Inhale/take a breath to focus even more while trying to stay calm)

Extract 3 (Student 6, 16/11/2022)

“...biasanya saya yakinkan diri sendiri untuk percaya diri, walaupun masih sedikit gugup tapi saya berusaha meyakinkan diri kalau selagi hal positif tidak perlu takut atau malu” (...usually, I convince myself to be confident, even though I'm still a little nervous but I try to convince myself that as long as positive things we don't need to be afraid or ashamed)

The above finding is supported by the theoretical statement put forward by Oxford (1990) as mentioned in Zakaria, N., Hashim, H., & Yunus, M. M. (2019) which has classified this strategy as someone who has control and power of their self-esteem and emotions to create positive values in language learning where students can use positive thinking to improve their language learning. With the same notation, Mandasari, B., & Oktaviani, L. (2018) stated the affective technique is seen to be the most effective at motivating students to acquire a second language because it allows individuals to interact with their emotions and overcome challenges on their own.

6. Social strategy

According to the result of the interview sessions with the research subjects it can be concluded that a series of steps in which are consisting of practice with friends, accept the help and assistances from teacher and friends and joining English club are the examples of method in social strategy that the students actively used to help them with their speaking anxiety based on the result of the instruments used to collect the research' data as shown below respectively.

Extract 1 (Student 5, 26/11/2022)

“(berlatih) dengan teman sebangku atau teman sekelompok kalau materinya di bagi berkelompok oleh guru” (“With a benchmate or a group of friends if the material is divided into groups by the teacher”)

Extract 2 (Student 1, 26/11/2022)

“...kalau saya lupa sesuatu mengenai materi saya biasa dibantu dengan teman untuk diingatkan atau biasanya langsung ambil alih presentasi saya” (...if I forget something about the material, I am usually assisted by a friend to remind me or usually take over my presentation immediately)

Extract 3 (Student 1, 26/11/2022)

“...Saya juga anggota ELSA (English Lovers Association of Senior High School State 1 Pangkep)” (...I am also a member of ELSA (English Lovers Association of Senior High School State 1 Pangkep))

All examples of the methods included in the social strategy above provide opportunities for students to practice how to speak better because by talking with their friends, students do not need to feel any pressure and do not need to pay attention to grammar and use of their vocabulary all the time which results in a decrease in students' speaking anxiety. This is supported by the theory expressed by Mandasari & Oktaviani (2018) where they state that students will have the opportunity to interact and collaborate with their friends and feel more confident because they have the freedom to speak without pressure to make mistakes in their grammar and sentence structure.

Discussion

The analysis revealed that students adopted seventeen distinct methods to combat speaking anxiety, categorized into six primary strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social. These strategies reflect a multifaceted approach to language learning, where memory aids, cognitive exercises, compensatory techniques, metacognitive practices, emotional management, and social interactions converge to form a comprehensive toolkit for students. The research underscores the need for a nuanced and adaptive pedagogical approach in the post-pandemic era, one that acknowledges and leverages the diversity of these strategies.

In response to these findings, educators are encouraged to foster a classroom environment that supports varied learning styles and reduces the pressure associated with speaking a foreign language. This might include integrating technology to provide diverse and engaging learning platforms, promoting collaborative learning to harness the power of social strategies, and developing curricula that emphasize cognitive and metacognitive skills. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of emotional intelligence in teaching, suggesting that educators should be trained to recognize and address the emotional aspects of language learning, such as anxiety and motivation.

The study's implications extend beyond the classroom, suggesting a collaborative role for educational institutions and parents in supporting students' language learning journeys. This support could manifest in resources, policies, and an overarching culture that values and encourages effective communication in a foreign language. Ultimately, the research from SMA Negeri 1 Pangkep provides valuable insights into the strategies students use to overcome speaking anxiety and offers a roadmap for educators, institutions, and families to enhance English language teaching in a post-pandemic world.

CONCLUSIONS

The present study reveals significant insights into the strategies employed by EFL students to mitigate speaking anxiety in a post-pandemic classroom setting. The study's novelty lies in its focused examination of a specific student demographic—XI Bahasa class students—using a blend of qualitative methods, including detailed interviews and in-class observations. This approach has unearthed a rich tapestry of seventeen distinct methods, which are innovatively categorized into six broad strategies: memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, and social.

The novelty of the research also stems from its contextual relevance, addressing the unique challenges and learning dynamics in the aftermath of the pandemic. This study offers a fresh perspective on how students adapt to the evolving demands of language learning in such extraordinary times. The findings underscore the importance of a multifaceted approach to language instruction, one that recognizes and harnesses the diversity of student strategies to overcome speaking anxiety.

Moreover, this research contributes to the field by highlighting the crucial role of emotional intelligence in language education. It suggests a paradigm shift in teaching methodologies, advocating for a more empathetic and student-centered approach that acknowledges the emotional dimensions of language learning. The study also emphasizes the significance of a collaborative educational ecosystem, involving educators, institutions, and parents, in fostering a supportive and resourceful environment for language learners. Overall, this study not only adds to the existing literature on language learning strategies but also offers practical implications for enhancing EFL education in a post-pandemic world. Its innovative approach and contextual relevance provide valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers, aiming to optimize language learning experiences and outcomes in challenging times.

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