

THE STUDY OF STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY IN THE POST-PANDEMIC

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Abstract: Since the COVID 19 outbreak, distance learning is the best way to continue the school activity. the teacher posted the lesson and assignment and the students can access those in the E-Learning. This condition made the speaking activity between students and teacher drastically reduced, and that can potentially make the speaking anxiety of the students increased. This study is aimed to explore the level of speaking anxiety in the post online learning, as well as the factors and the strategies in overcoming the speaking anxiety.

Key words: Speaking Anxiety, New Normal, Speaking

INTRODUCTION

During the pandemic, educators and students find themselves with limited alternatives for facilitating the teaching and learning process. Opting for distance learning emerges as the most viable approach to sustain educational activities. In this method, instructors and learners engage through various mediums, including printed, electronic, or mechanical channels (Moore, 2013, as cited in Hapsari, 2021). Online learning, a specific form of distance education, utilizes web-based platforms such as the internet (Mukhtar et al., 2020). This allows teachers to impart knowledge to students remotely while maintaining the ability to monitor their learning progress.

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In the realm of online education, teacher-student interactions take place through various communication platforms such as messaging apps, social media apps, e-learning tools, and online meeting apps like WhatsApp, Messenger, YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Edmodo, Zoom, Google Classroom, and others. The flexibility inherent in online learning is a notable advantage, as teachers can deliver lessons at their convenience, and students can easily access them through these applications. However, there are also drawbacks to online learning. According to Hapsari (2021), these include diminished social interaction, issues with internet connectivity, a heightened risk of plagiarism or cheating, a lack of direct teacher feedback, and insufficient technological proficiency. These disadvantages can potentially impact students' academic performance.

The English teacher is confronted with a similar challenge. The utilization of E-Learning is the sole option for providing subject materials and assignments to students. Initially, the teacher experimented with Zoom Meetings during the early stages of the pandemic; however, only a few students attended these sessions, as various obstacles prevented the participation of others. Challenges included some students residing in dormitories without consistent access to their devices and others facing limitations in internet connectivity. These difficulties prompted the teacher to opt for exclusive use of E-Learning. Nevertheless, the limitations of this approach became apparent during the face-to-face meetings in the second semester of 2021. Many students struggled to comprehend the teacher's English instructions and faced challenges in actively participating in spoken English activities.

In the context of learning a foreign language, the acquisition of speaking skills is imperative, especially in the case of learning English.

Effectively communicating in English is a crucial aspect of language acquisition, and the teacher experienced the repercussions of this during in-person meetings. According to Brown (2000), the demonstration of an ability to achieve practical goals through interactive dialogue with other speakers is a key indicator of successfully acquiring a language. Therefore, speaking plays a vital role in learning English as a foreign language, enabling learners to effectively communicate in the target language and achieve their language learning goals.

When practicing spoken English, adherence to numerous rules, including spelling, pronunciation, word recognition, meaning, and grammar, can be a source of frustration for students. Research indicates that foreign language learners often set high standards for themselves, expecting to speak fluently with accurate pronunciation and grammatical precision (Pakpahan & Gultom, 2020). Consequently, many students shy away from verbal participation in the classroom, feeling anxious when required to deliver a speech due to the fear of making mistakes and being corrected by the teacher in front of their peers.

Various factors contribute to students' speaking anxiety in English class, with anxiety levels varying among individuals. The ongoing two-year-long pandemic has further influenced these anxiety levels, as online classes can be either more stressful or more relaxing depending on the student. With the pandemic gradually coming under control, the government has permitted schools to resume face-to-face learning. This shift in learning conditions also affects students' anxiety levels when speaking in the classroom. Given these circumstances, there is a need for research on students' speaking anxiety in the post-pandemic era.

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The aforementioned studies share similarities with the current research; however, they primarily concentrated on either online classes or face-to-face instruction. In contrast, this study zeroes in on students' speaking anxiety in the English classroom following an extended period of E-learning. The primary objectives of this research are to ascertain the anxiety levels among 11th-grade students at MAN 1 Blitar after engaging in online learning, identify the causes of this anxiety, and explore how

students cope with and overcome such anxiety. The findings of this study aim to serve as a valuable resource for teachers, offering insights for the development of improved speaking teaching methods, with the ultimate goal of mitigating students' anxiety levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking, one of the four essential language skills in English (listening, speaking, reading, writing), is frequently utilized to evaluate an individual's language competence and performance. It involves articulating sounds and expressing words with the aim of conveying ideas, feelings, thoughts, beliefs, or needs. Speaking is widely considered the most crucial skill to master in language learning, with Pakpahan & Gultom (2020) highlighting its importance as a key aspect of language acquisition. Consequently, speaking holds significant value as it enables individuals to engage in conversations, share ideas, and exchange information with others.

In the process of learning to speak, the development of communication competence and improvements in pronunciation, intonation, grammar, and vocabulary are essential (Natsir, 2016). Nunan (1991) underscores that the ability to engage in conversations in a second or foreign language is the most critical aspect of language learning, with success measured in terms of this proficiency. Thus, learners of English are encouraged to actively participate in effective oral communication.

The development of productive skills/output is inherently connected to the development of receptive skills/input, as the two mutually support each other. In this context, the quality and quantity of spoken language produced by students depend on their proficiency in

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listening to others speak in English. According to Harmer (2001), the learner's generation of language, coupled with observing its reception, contributes to the learning process, transforming output into input. The relationship between speaking and listening is intimate, influencing each other in conversational use. Harmer identifies elements in speaking, encompassing language features (connected speech, expressive devices, lexis and grammar, negotiation language) and mental/social processing (language processing, interacting with others, on-the-spot information processing).

These elements often evoke self-consciousness in English foreign language learners, leading to feelings of anxiety when speaking. The anxiety experienced during the process of learning to speak in English is commonly referred to as speaking anxiety.

Learners encounter specific challenges when it comes to speaking. Despite possessing an extensive vocabulary and proficient writing skills, a substantial number of learners still grapple with a significant issue—the fear of making mistakes. This apprehension becomes particularly pronounced when they are required to perform in front of their peers, generating feelings of nervousness and unease. Consequently, learners who harbor this fear in the context of learning a foreign language may find their studies less enjoyable, impeding their progress in mastering the speaking skill. This phenomenon is commonly identified as speaking anxiety.

Indrianty (2016) considers speaking anxiety a formidable obstacle hindering language learners from attaining a high level of proficiency in speaking a foreign language. Drawing on Horwitz (1991, as cited in Indrianty, 2016), it is emphasized that students' anxiety about

speaking a foreign language can significantly impact their performance, potentially affecting the quality of their oral language production and making them appear less fluent than they actually are. This underscores the importance for teachers to consciously foster a shared and supportive environment, encouraging students to take an active role in creating such an atmosphere.

Given the profound impact of anxiety on various facets of foreign language acquisition, it becomes crucial to identify students who may be particularly anxious in the classroom. This recognition prompted the development of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) in 1986 by Elaine Horwitz, Michael Horwitz, and Joann Cope (Horwitz et al., 1986). This scale serves as a tool to assess the level of anxiety students experience specifically in speaking situations.

Erdiana et al. (2020) outlined three distinct levels of anxiety: low or mild, moderate, and high or panic levels. In instances of low or mild anxiety, students may be either motivated or unmotivated to participate in classroom activities. Motivated students with low-level anxiety tend to actively engage in goal-oriented activities and display heightened focus on their studies. Conversely, unmotivated students with low-level anxiety remain undisturbed by their studies and exhibit a nonchalant attitude in the classroom.

Moving on to moderate-level anxiety, students at this level typically experience a degree of nervousness concerning their studies and exams. They may find it challenging to concentrate independently and often require assistance, particularly from the teacher, to stay focused during lessons.

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The highest level of anxiety, referred to as high or panic-level anxiety, is characterized by students exhibiting extreme concern about the lesson, particularly impending tests. These students may intensify their study efforts to alleviate their anxiety. However, some individuals with high-level anxiety may escalate to panic-level anxiety, rendering them unable to cope with the lesson or test even with guidance.

In accordance with Elis (1994, in Indrianty 2016), anxiety can be categorized into three distinct types:

a. Trait anxiety: Described by Greenberg (2006, as cited in Nur Aziza Al Hakim et al., 2019) as a broad spectrum of anxiety not tied to a specific stimulus, trait anxiety, as per Spielberger in Toth (2010, as cited in Nur Aziza Al Hakim et al., 2019), denotes "relatively stable individual differences in anxiety-proneness." This reflects the variances in individuals' tendencies to perceive stressful situations as dangerous or threatening and respond with an elevation in their state anxiety. Trait anxiety is ingrained in a person's personality, making it challenging, if not impossible, to overcome. Individuals with this characteristic are predisposed to nervousness across various situations, posing difficulties in language learning if anxiety becomes a trait (Indrianty, 2016).

b. State anxiety: Regarded as a constraint on and disruption of a person's emotional stability, state anxiety is either momentary or specific to particular stimuli (Greenberg, 2010, as cited in Nur Aziza Al Hakim et al., 2019). This form of anxiety, defined by Spielberger (1983, as cited in Indrianty, 2016), represents discomfort that substantially hinders a person's ability to respond positively to an event or in a specific environment. It is an apprehension felt at a specific point in time,

triggered by particular circumstances. State anxiety is transient, emerging in reaction to a specific scenario, such as learners facing challenging conditions or events that induce anxiety.

c. **Specific-situation anxiety:** Refers to persistent and multifaceted anxieties triggered by a particular setting or event, such as public speaking, exams, or class participation (Ellis, 1994, as cited in Indrianty, 2016). Spielberger (1983, as cited in Indrianty, 2016) characterizes this anxiety type as an individual's tendency to be apprehensive in a specific time and situation. Specific-situation anxiety is a subtype of trait anxiety, manifesting in distinct scenarios. Consequently, linguistic anxiety can be categorized as situational anxiety.

Various reasons can lead to anxiety, as outlined by Horwitz et al. (1986), particularly focusing on performance-related anxieties, which include communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

1. **Communication apprehension:** This form of shyness is characterized by a sense of unease or fear when interacting with others. Tanver (2007, as cited in Indrianty, 2016) posits that personality traits like shyness, silence, and reticence often contribute to communication apprehension in various ordinary communication scenarios. These traits may even be part of a broader anxiety trait that permeates multiple aspects of an individual's life. Learners experiencing communication apprehension often feel like they are being observed, anticipating judgment and scrutiny, which can evoke anxiety and hinder their ability to speak.

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2. **Test anxiety:** This type of performance anxiety stems from a fear of failure. Sarason (1980, as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986) notes that students with test anxiety often set unrealistic expectations, viewing anything less than perfect test performance as a failure. Test anxiety is particularly prevalent during assessments, evaluations, and especially oral tests. Learners grappling with test anxiety may encounter difficulties throughout their English course as evaluations are a recurring aspect.

3. **Fear of negative evaluation:** This involves apprehension about others' assessments, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the anticipation of negative judgments from others. Watson and Friend (1969, as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986) argue that fear of negative evaluation, akin to test anxiety, has a broader scope as it can manifest in any social, evaluative scenario, such as job interviews or speaking in a foreign language class. Learners may fear negative judgments from teachers and peers, causing a decline in self-esteem in social settings.

Widhayanti (2018) identified several factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety in the classroom, encompassing the following eight elements:

Classroom procedure: Students experienced discomfort when required to speak in English within formal settings or faced individual speaking challenges. This anxiety was evident during individual presentations, public speaking, oral skits, spontaneous reactions, voluntary responses, group discussions, discussions in smaller groups (2-6 members), and discussions in larger groups (more than 6 people).

Students' beliefs: The expectation of flawless correctness, pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and overall proficiency in English heightened students' speaking anxiety.

Teacher's belief: Speaking anxiety among students was linked to the instructor acting as a judge, creating an uncomfortable classroom atmosphere, intimidating students, and displaying rudeness.

Self-perception: Students feared speaking in formal settings and worried about being labeled as "stupid" or receiving a poor grade, contributing to their anxiety.

Social environment: Limited exposure and opportunities to improve, along with factors like a loud audience and unexpected locations or situations, contributed to students' speaking anxiety.

Error in society: The fear of negative responses from both teachers and fellow students was identified as a significant factor in students' speaking anxiety.

Topic understanding: Inability to comprehend the subject matter, particularly when using someone else's research as a basis for presentation, increased speaking anxiety. However, when students chose their presentation topics, anxiety was perceived to be less, as they had a better understanding of self-selected material.

Cultural differences: Interaction with unfamiliar individuals caused anxiety among students, particularly when engaging with strangers they did not know previously. In another study by Fadlan (2020), various factors contributing to speaking anxiety were highlighted, including fear

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of making mistakes, answering questions from participants, exam failure, inability to use appropriate vocabulary, fear of being the center of attention, lack of self-confidence, insufficient English proficiency, inadequate preparation and practice, poor pronunciation, inferior feelings, and lack of presentation experience. This finding was supported by Pratama et al. (2018), who emphasized that lack of confidence, preparation, fear of mistakes, and discomfort with being the center of attention contribute to students' anxiety in speaking in class. These research findings collectively indicate that speaking anxiety in students stems from diverse sources, ranging from internal factors such as communication apprehension, lack of self-confidence, and discomfort with attention to external factors like teacher beliefs, limited exposure and practice, a noisy audience, and English oral tests.

In accordance with Kondo and Yang (2004, as cited in Nur Aziza Al Hakim et al., 2019), students employ five strategies to alleviate anxiety before speaking in front of the class. These tactics include preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, seeking peer support, and resignation.

1. **Preparation:** Prior to speaking, students engage in diligent study and note-taking to gain a sense of control over their performance. This strategy enables them to plan their remarks and mitigate anxiety when facing the class.
2. **Relaxation:** Students purposefully relax their bodies before speaking, aiming to minimize nervousness and enhance their performance.
3. **Positive thinking:** This strategy involves redirecting attention from the stress of speaking performance by focusing on positive

and pleasant thoughts. It serves to bring relief to students by shifting their mindset.

4. **Peer-seeking:** Recognizing the significant impact peers can have, students seek help from their classmates to better understand the subject matter, thereby reducing anxiety. Shared experiences among foreign language students foster mutual understanding of feelings, including fear, nervousness, and worry.
5. **Resignation:** Some students, unwilling to take proactive steps to alleviate language anxiety, fall into this category. Resignation involves attempting to minimize the impact of anxiety by avoiding confronting the issue. For example, a student may choose to sleep in class or skip it altogether.

Pratama et al. (2018) conducted a study revealing that students employ strategies such as rehearsal, relaxation, visualization, gestures (to express feelings freely), and note cards (to maintain control and minimize nervousness) when performing in front of audiences. In a similar vein, Pappamihiel (2002, as cited in Yasuda & Nabei, 2018) investigated Mexican-born middle school students in ESL programs in the United States, finding coping strategies like avoidance (not speaking in class), using friends as intermediaries (asking friends to respond in English), and pretending no one else was present. These strategies bear similarities to those identified by Kondo and Yang, suggesting that they are commonly employed by students facing speaking anxiety.

Nevertheless, when students confront speaking anxiety, there are various strategies they can refer to. Oxford (1990, as cited in Widhayanti,

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2018) identified six learning strategies that students can apply, encompassing memory strategies, cognitive strategies, compensation strategies, metacognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies.

1. **Memory strategies:** These are techniques that aid students in remembering new information for future application. Such methods have a long history of use, involving actions like forming mental strategies, employing imagery and music, thorough reviewing, and taking specific actions.
2. **Cognitive strategies:** Crucial in language learning, cognitive strategies involve direct manipulation or modification and are widely utilized by students. This category includes practices such as practicing, exchanging messages, analyzing and reasoning, and structuring input and output.
3. **Compensation strategies:** These strategies enhance learners' ability to comprehend or produce the target language. They help students master the four language skills to overcome challenges. Actions like intelligent guessing and overcoming difficulties are integral to this method.
4. **Metacognitive strategies:** Students using metacognitive strategies must actively seek opportunities for practice beyond the classroom. This involves centering learning, organizing and planning learning, and evaluating learning.
5. **Affective strategies:** Referring to emotions, motivations, attitudes, and values, affective strategies play a crucial role. Negative emotions may hinder the development of target

language abilities, while positive emotions can aid in their development. This strategy includes activities like minimizing anxiety, self-encouragement, and assessing emotional well-being.

6. **Social strategies:** Given that language involves communication with others, social behavior is intrinsic to the learning process. Social strategies encompass three key activities: asking questions, collaborating with others, and empathizing with others.

In the aftermath of online learning, the teacher adopted a blended learning approach, combining elements of both online and face-to-face instruction. Maharani & Roslaini (2021) define online learning as a system where teachers deliver content, and students engage via the internet using various technological devices or applications. Initially, the aim of online language learning was to provide language learners with increased exposure to the target language in a personalized environment, allowing them to learn at their own pace and convenience (Yaniafari & Rihardini, 2021).

Historically, online learning aimed to support students in enhancing their autonomy as independent learners, enabling engagement between students and teachers regardless of their physical location. Internet platforms were instrumental in fostering independent and inquiry-based learning (Maharani & Roslaini, 2021). The internet offered resources that facilitated student learning without direct teacher involvement, promoting greater autonomy. However, in the current pandemic scenario, online learning and the internet have become essential components of daily life for students, serving as tools for interaction in classroom activities. The impact of online learning on

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students' speaking anxiety can vary, contingent upon individual student factors.

Rizqiya et al. (2021, as cited in Maharani & Roslaini, 2021) posit that online learning may lead to heightened tension and anxiety among students during the learning process. This could be attributed to the challenges students face in interacting with both the teacher and their peers. Kaisar & Chowdhury (2020) also discovered that language learners in virtual classrooms experience anxiety, particularly when fearing falling behind or being unable to fully engage with communication models. Conversely, some researchers found that in virtual language classes, students' anxiety about making mistakes is lower than in face-to-face classes, and the virtual setting is less stressful for language use (Yaniafari & Rihardini, 2021).

According to Yaniafari & Rihardini (2021), online learning has created a less intimidating and stressful environment for communication and engagement. They argue that this less daunting atmosphere in virtual classrooms fosters a more comfortable and enjoyable space for learners' communication abilities, especially beneficial for introverted learners who struggle with speaking in face-to-face classes. Additionally, Bowers and Kumar (2015, as cited in Nur et al., 2021) assert that online courses offer students various benefits, including convenience, flexibility, and easier access to education. In summary, online learning not only provides students with the advantages of convenience, flexibility, and accessibility but also establishes a less intimidating and stressful environment, enabling students to communicate more comfortably.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, a blended learning approach, combining traditional face-to-face learning with online learning, was introduced in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Blended learning, as defined by Ginaya et al. (2018), involves the integration of traditional and online learning methods. Sumarsono et al. (2021) advocate that blended learning is the most practical choice in the post-COVID-19 era, especially following the partial implementation of online learning. In this approach, multimedia usage in the classroom proves highly beneficial and easily implemented, emphasizing that learning occurs both online and in face-to-face settings. Ehsanifard et al. (2020) discovered that blended learning captivates learners more effectively than face-to-face learning, asserting that the integration of technology in the learning environment enhances student engagement and is more successful in improving students' speaking proficiency.

However, in the post-COVID-19 pandemic scenario, the successful implementation of blended learning is uncertain. Sumarsono et al. (2021) highlighted that the application of blended learning may face challenges, with limitations such as social distancing measures and restricted online media posing potential disadvantages in conducting English classes in the post-online learning period.

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