

EFL Student's Coping Strategies In Speaking Test In Post-Pandemic Era

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Abstract

Speaking is one of the basic skills in learning language. This is a challenge for EFL students in post pandemic by quick transition from virtual to direct learning. Coping with unprecedented situations creates extra stress for EFL students. This happened because they were not used to interacting directly in front of the class. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the coping strategies that most EFL student's use to overcome speaking anxiety in post pandemic education. The respondents in this study are 40 students in the first semester of the English Academic Purposes class in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta. The research method used is qualitative research using two types of questionnaires, namely closed-ended questionnaires and open-ended questionnaires. The result demonstrated that EFL students mostly used the strategies of preparation to cope their anxiety in speaking test.

Keywords: Student's Anxiety; Coping Strategies; Speaking Test; Post Pandemic Education

INTRODUCTION

The post pandemic era has forced a massive shift away from virtual to direct learning. This makes EFL students feel anxious because they do not fully master the material during virtual meetings. Especially material related to speaking skills. Speaking skills are skills that can make students communicate effectively. This skill gives them the ability to convey information orally or verbally and in a way that other people or listeners can understand. Thus, it is important to develop speaking skills in order to communicate effectively. However, many students have problems when speaking. Many factors affect students' fluency in speaking, such as motivation, anxiety,

self-confidence, and interest. However, it seems that student anxiety is a major factor in fluency in speaking.

Despite there being a lot of research discussed about techniques and treatments to reduce anxiety in speaking activity when EFL students speak in front of the class, the issue remains prominent, especially among college students. Especially when faced with the speaking test, many students feel less confident and do not dare to start. This happens because they rarely interact directly with their friends or teachers through e-learning or virtual meeting. Speaking test is one of the skills tested in the English for Academic Purposes course at Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta to measure students' communication skills. According to Nurfajri Maharani & Roslaini (2021), speaking test has always been an important skill for EFL students, and they regard speaking is a complex task. This test certainly makes many students have to study and practice a lot. Even though the course is available, they still have to learn on their own in order to achieve the expected results. Therefore, they have anxiety in preparing the test.

Anxiety can occur due to a lack of understanding of the material and basic English. In fact, this anxiety will indirectly affect their concentration in learning. Thus, the level of student anxiety is something that influences the fluency of students when speaking. Anxiety can be triggered by students' lack of preparation when they are about to take the speaking test. Unprepared EFL student with the speaking test experience stress called as academic stress. Academic stress is a condition of students who are depressed because there is no conformity between environmental demands and resources actual owned (Anggraeni et al., 2022). Thus, the EFL students certainly have to cope with the stressors. In dealing with academic stress, students can implement coping strategies.

Coping strategy as a positive effort to prevent, eliminate, or reduce stressors. Therefore, the researchers used five strategies as the indicators to know the strategies that the respondents commonly used to cope their anxiety in speaking test. Several previous studies have conducted research on coping strategies such as Defina & Rizkillah (2021); Nurfajri Maharani & Roslaini (2021); Mayudia (2011); Kertamuda & Haris (2009); Sinaga (2012); Anggraeni et al. (2022); and Rafieyanv (2016). Their research is related to coping strategies in dealing with stress that occur during online learning. Therefore, from several coping strategies, the researchers want to investigate the coping strategies that most EFL student's use to overcome speaking anxiety in post pandemic education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking Skill

Speaking skill is a prominent portion of the curriculum in language teaching and this produces it the main object of assessment as well. Cameron in Talib (2022) states that speaking as meaning expression, it means using language actively so that people can understand its

meaning. Thus, students must be able to use language actively what is conveyed can be received and understood by listeners. According to Harmer (2007:124), there are three reasons that encourage students to speak in class. First, speaking provides an opportunity to practice, this is an opportunity for students to practice speaking in real life comfortably in the classroom. Second, speaking tasks in which students try to apply their languages they know to give feedback for both teacher and students. The third everyone can see how well they are doing. It shows how successful they are, and what problems they have with speaking.

Speaking is about how to convey spoken text that has meaning so that it can be understood by speakers and listeners. This is in line with Nunan (1995; 2) that speaking is interactive processing information. It means that without speaking, we cannot give the information to others. Fulcher (1997; 24) also states that speaking a language is particularly difficult for foreign language learning because the effective verbal communication involves the capability to use the language appropriately in social interaction involved not only verbal communication but also the paralinguistic element of speech, the learners. Therefore, the learner can sense that speaking is a difficult skill in language learning. Furthermore, Nunan (1995: 3) states that the process of producing oral text, there are several elements which build up the establishment of speech, such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy.

In this study, students' speaking ability can be determined through a speaking test. In the speaking test there are several things that become indicators of assessment. According to Harris in Utami (2021), the components of speaking are vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy. After the students did the speaking test the researcher took the total score from each student as research data.

Student's Anxiety

Speaking in front of the class often triggers anxiety and worries about grammatical errors, pronunciation, and not being able to speak spontaneously. Thus, students' speaking anxiety is caused by many factors, such as fear of making mistakes, lack of vocabulary, or pronunciation. Students' anxiety must be overcome immediately because it can become an obstacle to students' fluency in speaking. Kondo (2010) states that anxiety in speaking is seen as a barrier for students in achieving success in improving their proficiency in a foreign language. Furthermore, he also stated that anxiety in speaking is a situation that hinders students from communicating spontaneously in their second language. It is more than half of foreign language learners experience high levels of anxiety. Therefore, language learning anxiety can create potential problems for language learners, especially in speaking.

In other words, students who feel anxious when facing the speaking test will feel less confident. Anxious students may experience problems such as reduced word production and difficulty understanding spoken instructions. In addition, Tanver in Indrianty (2018) says that English learners often express feelings of stress, nervousness or anxiety when learning to speak English. Thus, they have a "mental block" of learning English. Abubakar (2020) states that anxiety can make the students worried, hard to concentrate, always feel insecure and become forgetful during learning.

Rafieyan (2016) states that there are three categories of anxiety, namely, trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. Scovel in Rafieyan (2016: 113) defines that trait

anxiety is a stable personality trait that causes a person to feel deep anxiety various situations. Then, Spielberger in Rafieyan (2016: 113) defines state anxiety is a temporary condition experienced by a person at a certain time. Ellis in Rafieyan (2016: 113) also states that situation-specific anxiety is a trait occurring frequently in certain situations like tests or oral presentations. Horwits in Jannah et al., (2020) argues that anxiety can be caused by nervousness about communicating, fear of bad evaluations, and exam anxiety. In order to measure the anxiety, Horwitz in Jannah et al., (2020) creates the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Based on the results of the FLCAS questionnaire analysis, the result scores of each student included several categories of anxiety, ranging from very anxious, anxious, mildly anxious, relaxed, and very relaxed.

Coping Strategies

Students' anxiety must be addressed immediately because it will have a negative impact and hinder students' progress in learning language. Anxiety will also trigger a stressor. To overcome the stress experienced, students need adaptation strategy, it is called coping strategy. According to Macintyre et al. (2020), coping is a person's process of responding to a stressor by using one or more available strategies. This is in line with Maryam (2017) that coping is effort to reduce the stress that occurs due to the influences of the cultural background, experience in dealing with problems, environmental factors, personality, concepts self, social factors and others. This is in line with Andriyani (2019) that coping stress is a process of recovery from the influence of stressful experiences or physical and psychological reactions in the form of feeling uncomfortable, uncomfortable or moderately depressed faced. Therefore, it can be concluded that coping is visible behavior and hidden that someone did for reduce or eliminate tension.

Coping strategy will be useful for EFL students to find out some of the causes of stress due to changes in the learning system and the various coping strategies students often use in this post-pandemic education. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), coping strategies is divided into emotion-focused and problem-focused strategies (as cited in Macintyre et al., 2020). Students' coping reactions to various stress factors can help them overcome their fears, anxiety and increase their confidence when facing a speaking test directly. Kondo & Yang (2004) found some strategies to overcome anxiety, those are preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation (as cited in Nurfajri Maharani & Roslaini, 2021).

METHOD

The research method applied in this study was descriptive qualitative design. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the human problem. The process includes emerging questions and procedures, data collected from respondents, inductive analysis of data that builds from specific themes to general themes, and the researcher's interpretation of the data. Thus, qualitative analysis was used to investigate the coping strategies that most EFL student's use to overcome speaking anxiety in post pandemic education. The population of this research are 80 students from Chemical Engineering in the first semester from English for Academic Purposes class at University of Muhammadiyah

Surakarta. And finally, the sample of this research consisted of 40 EFL students that were selected randomly. In order to collect the data, the researchers used two types of questionnaires, namely closed-ended questionnaires and open-ended questionnaires. To analyze the data from those questionnaires, the researchers used the Likert scale. The data from the respondents were analyzed using 5 points in Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, 5= strongly agree). The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents through Google Form.

FINDINGS

Coping strategies is a person's process of responding to a stressor by using one or more available strategies. The respondents of this research consist of 29 female EFL students and 11 male EFL students. The indicators of the EFL students coping strategies to overcome the stressor or anxiety are preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. Referring to the formulation of the research problem in this study, the researchers describe the results of the questionnaire that has been given to the respondents as follows.

Preparation

Adequate preparation is essential for EFL students' mental toughness and motivation to improve their performance. Through preparation will make students feel more prepared and avoid anxiety. The results from closed-ended questions about this strategy can be seen in the chart 1 as follows.

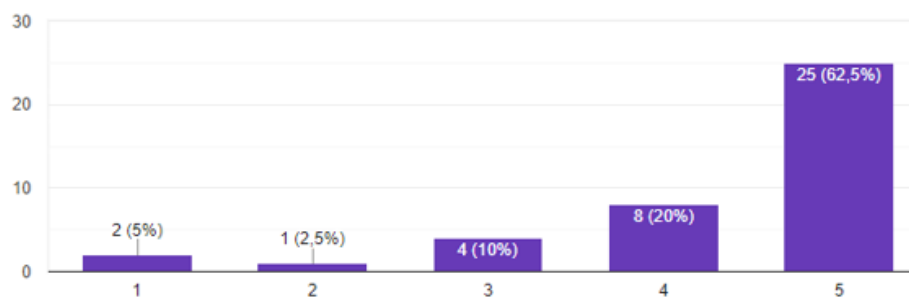


Chart 1. The Result of Preparation Strategy

Based on the chart above, 62,5% percent of respondents from 40 EFL students strongly agree to use preparation as the strategy to overcome their anxiety before taking speaking test.

Meanwhile from the open-ended questions, most of EFL students always make a preparation before taking that test by practicing in front of a mirror, praying, studying the topic to be tested, and practicing pronunciation.

Respondent 1: *"I practice, set breath to calm down, and pray before taking the test."*

Respondent 2: *"I learn the topic and practice my pronunciation."*

Respondent 3: *"I talk to the mirror by myself."*

Respondent 4: *"Prepare by practicing over and over to be fluent."*

Most of respondents who got high scores mentioned that practice is the main step from preparation strategy they do before taking the speaking test. It can help them to reduce the stressor and anxiety before taking the speaking test.

Relaxation

When anxiety or stress occur, many EFL students prefer to overcome it and try to relax. The results from closed-ended questions about this strategy can be seen in the chart 2 as follows.

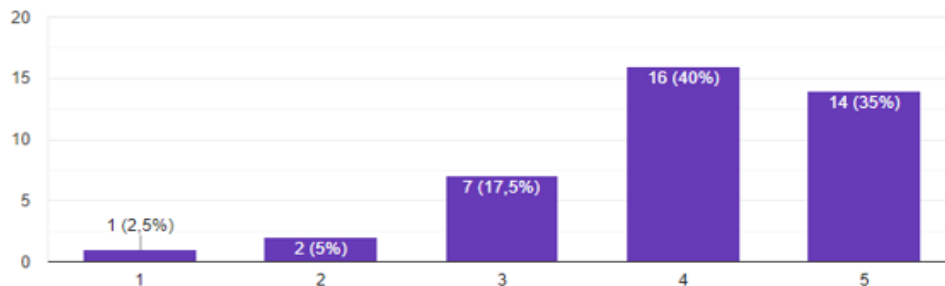


Chart 2. The Result of Relaxation Strategy

Based on the chart above, 40% percent of respondents from 40 EFL students agree to use relaxation as the strategy to overcome their anxiety or stressor before taking speaking test.

Meanwhile from the open-ended questions, most of EFL students make a relaxation before taking that test by regulating their breath to be calm.

Respondent 1: *"Inhale deeply and then exhale slowly, listen to music or talk casually with friends."*

Respondent 2: *"Breath slowly and deeply."*

Respondent 3: *"Deep breath."*

Respondent 4: *"Just breath slowly, and then exhale slowly, repeat the process for some minutes. It should give the relax feeling and calm my nerves."*

Most of respondents who got high scores mentioned that inhale and exhale are the steps from relaxation strategy they do before taking the speaking test.

Positive Thinking

A positive mindset from EFL students is very useful to help them reduce anxiety or stressor. Thus, they can perform more confident. The results from closed-ended questions about this strategy scan be seen in the chart 3 as follows.

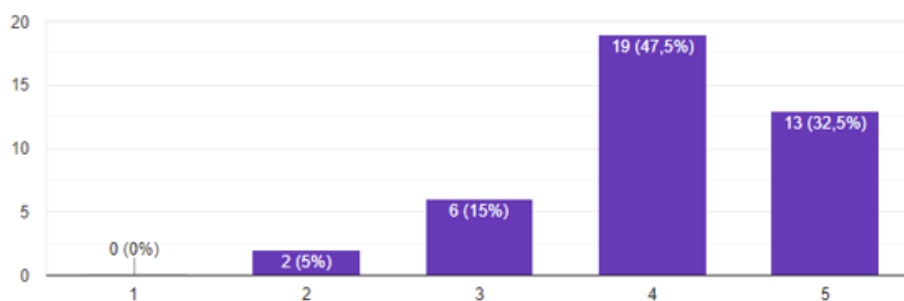


Chart 3. The Result of Positive Thinking Strategy

Based on the chart above, 47,5% percent of respondents agree to use positive thinking as the strategy to overcome their anxiety before taking the speaking test. Meanwhile from the open-ended questions, most of EFL students set a positive mindset before taking that test. Their mindset is quite simple and motivating, such as trying to think everything will go smoothly and the audience will like it.

that it is okay to make mistake,

Respondent 1: *"All I think is I can get through it."*

Respondent 2: *"I believe in myself and I feel confidence."*

Respondent 3: *"People will like the way I speak."*

Respondent 4: *"I think everything will go smoothly because I have been practicing seriously."*

Most of respondents who got high scores mentioned that positive mindset can help them stay focused and calm while talking at class.

Peer Seeking

Peer seeking is the least popular strategy used by EFL students. Most of them reluctant to ask their friends and choose to handle it on themselves. The results from closed-ended questions about this strategy can be seen in the chart 4 as follows.

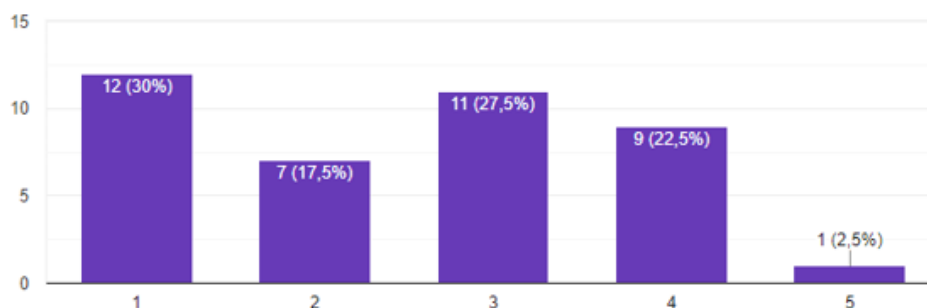


Chart 4. The Result of Peer Seeking Strategy

Based on the chart above, 30% percent of respondents strongly disagree to use this strategy and only 2,5% strongly agree to use it. When they were nervous or forgot vocabulary, they were reluctant to ask their friends for help.

Meanwhile from the open-ended questions, most of EFL students choose peer seeking as the last solution to deal with stressors. When they forgot their dialogue or vocabulary during a speaking test, they try to solve it.

Respondent 1: *"I stop for a moment to think if I really can't then give the code to a friend (if in a group) to help."*

Respondent 2: *"I look at the note."*

Respondent 3: *"I close my eyes."*

Respondent 4: *"I usually think the words that have similarities with the words I forgot and I usually think in Bahasa Indonesia first especially if I don't remember the words."*

Most of respondents who got high scores mentioned that they have to overcome their anxiety when they forget dialogue or vocabulary when speaking in their own way. They prefer to stop a moment and look for alternative answers, look at notes, and try to remember by closing their eyes.

Resignation

Resignation or giving up usually appears when EFL students feel unable to do something. The results from closed-ended questions about this strategy can be seen in the chart 5 as follows.

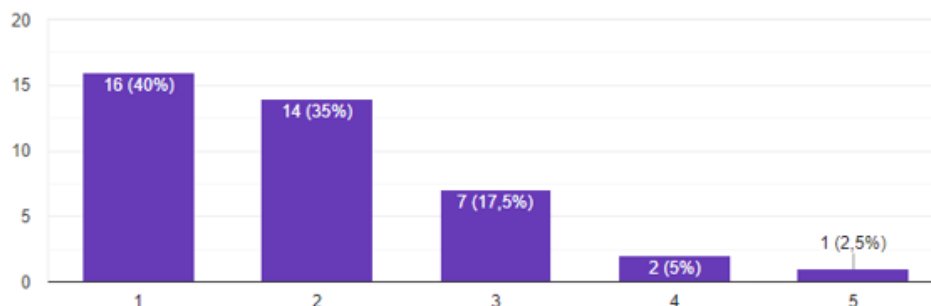


Chart 5. The Result of Resignation Strategy

Based on the chart above, 40% percent of respondents strongly disagree to use this strategy and only 2,5% strongly agree to use it. They decided not to give up and dare to try their own way.

Meanwhile from the open-ended questions, most of EFL students did not choose resignation as the strategy to deal with stressors. When they really feel anxious during speaking test, they try to overcome it by several ways.

Respondent 1: *"I think don't worry to make mistake because the teacher will correct it."*

Respondent 2: *"I avoid any eye contact."*

Respondent 3: *"I always remember my mother's words "at least you have tried, even if you fail you are still a mother's child" with that in mind, I will do the best I can do."*

Respondent 4: *"I Try to stay calm and convince ourselves if we can finish it to the end."*
Most of respondents who got high scores mentioned that resignation was not a solution to overcome their anxiety. They never give up for many different reasons.

DISCUSSION

Comparison between the results obtained from closed-ended questionnaires, open-ended questionnaires and reflective journals suggests that the same factors and strategies suggested by language learners in questionnaire results and mentioned in the reflective journal they also posited that not every factor introduced in the interview is suggested in reflection. The reasons may be not experiencing certain types of anxiety or not finding certain types of anxiety suitable strategies during the two speaking sessions. This means that each language student's perception of anxiety is different from another and there are a number of factors and strategies that can provoke or reduce anxiety in the individual, but not all of these factors and strategies may be experienced or applicable at any given time.

Furthermore, based on the result of the questionnaire, that included in diagram it can be seen that the most dominant strategy used by EFL students at Muhammadiyah University, especially the English Academic Purposes class, is preparation strategy which is 62,5% percent respondent strongly agree to use preparation as the strategy to overcome their anxiety or stressor. As already stated, coping strategies were assessed through five indicators; preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. This study is in line with the results of research from Nurfajri Maharani & Roslaini (2021) that preparation was the most typically used strategy by students. In the preparation strategy the researchers also found the most preparation strategy to learn speaking before standing in front of the class was practices first, then one of EFL students mentioned that he uses some strategies to cope with his nervousness by utilizing helpful tools such as *"using the camera and imagine that the camera is the audience and often practice talking to the topic to be discussed"*.

Furthermore, this strategy enabled the students to put their thoughts into writing, overcome their shyness, and become open-minded with the lecturer's corrections or feedback. From the questionnaire data in this study, researchers can obtain that the idea of a set of factors it can generally causes anxiety in language learners and strategies to cope with them and does not allow language learners to express their real feelings of anxiety. However, since the participants in this research comes from different student backgrounds (gender, nationality, age, education level, and major), types of factors and suggested strategies centered on language perception learners with different characteristics. Meanwhile the other indicators like preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking and resignation although it does not become the most indicator of the most interest does not mean that the indicator is not good, but it can be concluded that there are various factors of EFL students both internal and external, in the face of anxiety in learning in speaking test. This implies that including

participants with greater the range of demographic variables may add more anxiety factors to this scope of study.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the coping strategies that most EFL student's use to overcome speaking anxiety or stressor in post pandemic education. Based on research findings and discussion, the most dominant coping strategy used by EFL students in dealing with anxiety when facing the speaking test is preparation. Based on the results of this study, researchers have some suggestions for the EFL students. Beside preparation, they can implement other coping strategies by identifying their problems in speaking and master try to solve it before taking the speaking test. This study was conducted only on one faculty in one college. For researchers who are interested in mastering coping strategies, it is suggested to conduct research with the various characteristics of subjects or to explore further factors that are more effective in assisting the subject in implementing the coping strategies.

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