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Analysis of Students' Coping Strategies Toward English Speaking Anxiety in Higher Education

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abstrak— Kecemasan berbicara bahasa Inggris masih menjadi masalah yang sering dialami mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi karena dapat memengaruhi kepercayaan diri, partisipasi kelas, dan kemampuan komunikasi akademik. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis bentuk speaking anxiety serta coping strategy yang digunakan mahasiswa untuk mengatasinya. Penelitian ini juga menjawab pertanyaan mengenai faktor penyebab kecemasan dan strategi coping yang paling sering digunakan mahasiswa dalam pembelajaran speaking. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data diperoleh melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi terhadap mahasiswa perguruan tinggi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui proses reduksi data, kategorisasi, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami kecemasan dalam bentuk gugup, takut salah, kurang percaya diri, dan takut mendapat penilaian negatif. Untuk mengatasi hal tersebut, mahasiswa menggunakan beberapa coping strategy seperti latihan berbicara, self-motivation, pengelolaan emosi, serta dukungan sosial dari teman dan dosen. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa coping strategy berperan penting dalam membantu mahasiswa mengurangi speaking anxiety dan meningkatkan keberanian berbicara bahasa Inggris. Penelitian selanjutnya disarankan mengkaji efektivitas strategi coping pada konteks pembelajaran yang lebih luas.

Kata Kunci: coping strategy, speaking anxiety, mahasiswa, pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, perguruan tinggi

Abstract— English-speaking anxiety remains a common problem experienced by university students because it can affect self-confidence, classroom participation, and academic communication skills. This study aims to analyze the forms of speaking anxiety and the coping strategies used by students to overcome it. The study also addresses questions regarding the factors causing anxiety and the coping strategies most frequently used by students in speaking classes. This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations of university students. Data analysis was conducted through data reduction, categorization, and conclusion drawing. The findings revealed that students experienced anxiety in the forms of nervousness, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and fear of negative evaluation. To cope with these problems, students applied several coping strategies, such as speaking practice, self-motivation, emotional management, and social support from friends and lecturers. These findings indicate that coping strategies play an important role in helping students reduce speaking anxiety and improve their confidence in speaking English. Future research is recommended to examine the effectiveness of coping strategies in broader learning contexts.

Keywords: coping strategy, speaking anxiety, university students, English language learning, higher education

INTRODUCTION

English speaking proficiency is one of the essential skills that university students must possess, particularly in meeting academic demands and competing in a globalized world. In higher education settings, students are expected to actively communicate in English, present ideas, deliver presentations, participate in discussions, and engage in academic interactions. However, in practice, many students still experience anxiety when speaking English in front of a class. This anxiety manifests in the form of nervousness, fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and fear of receiving negative evaluations from lecturers or peers. Such conditions make it difficult for students to express their language abilities optimally and contribute to low participation in speaking activities (A. N. Safira et al., 2025).

The phenomenon of English speaking anxiety has become a significant issue in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning at the tertiary level. Speaking anxiety not only affects students' academic performance but also influences their psychological and social well-being. Students who experience speaking anxiety tend to avoid communicating in English, participate less actively in classroom discussions, and encounter obstacles in developing their international communication skills. In the context of modern education, English communication skills are crucial for supporting academic mobility, professional career development, and global interaction. Therefore, speaking anxiety represents a challenge that requires greater attention within higher education institutions (V. Mariyana & Burhayani, 2024).

Several studies have shown that speaking anxiety is influenced by various factors, including limited vocabulary mastery, inadequate pronunciation skills, academic pressure, negative speaking experiences, and fear of being judged by others. Research conducted by (A. Rizkiya & Pratolo, 2024) found that students often fear making grammatical and pronunciation errors when speaking English. In addition, an unsupportive classroom environment can further intensify students' anxiety when speaking in public. These findings indicate that speaking anxiety is associated not only with linguistic competence but also with students' emotional and social factors.

To cope with this anxiety, students employ various coping strategies to remain engaged in speaking activities and classroom learning. Commonly used coping strategies include preparation strategies, positive thinking, relaxation techniques, peer support, and self-confidence building. Research by (N. E. Putri et al., 2024) explained that students tend to practice speaking before presentations, seek support from their peers, and attempt to calm themselves in order to reduce anxiety. Meanwhile, (X. T. Tee et al., 2020), in their systematic review, emphasized that coping strategies play a crucial role in helping students manage speaking anxiety and enhance their confidence in academic communication. These coping strategies serve as forms of psychological adaptation that enable students to deal with the challenges and pressures of learning a foreign language in higher education.

Furthermore, studies on social anxiety in English language learning have also demonstrated a strong relationship with students' communication abilities. (Nurdianingsih et al., 2023) found that social anxiety affects students' English writing performance due to fear of evaluation and social judgment. These findings

indicate that anxiety in English language learning is not limited to speaking skills but is also associated with students' overall psychological conditions. This reinforces the assumption that foreign language anxiety is a multidimensional phenomenon that requires further investigation, particularly regarding how students develop coping strategies to deal with such pressures.

Previous studies have primarily focused on anxiety levels, factors contributing to speaking anxiety, or coping strategies in general. However, there remains a lack of research that comprehensively explores students' experiences in utilizing coping strategies to overcome speaking anxiety in higher education settings, particularly through a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences, feelings, and coping mechanisms from their own perspectives. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by analyzing students' coping strategies toward English speaking anxiety within the context of higher education.

This study aims to analyze the forms of speaking anxiety experienced by university students and to identify the coping strategies they employ to overcome anxiety when speaking English in higher education. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of English language education, particularly in relation to speaking instruction and the psychological aspects of EFL learners. In addition, the results are expected to serve as a reference for lecturers and educational institutions in creating a more supportive learning environment that helps students reduce English speaking anxiety.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to analyze students' coping strategies toward English speaking anxiety in higher education. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences regarding the forms of speaking anxiety they encounter, the factors contributing to their anxiety, and the coping strategies they use during speaking activities in higher education settings.

The study involved 12 university students as participants, selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in speaking courses and their experiences with English speaking anxiety. Research data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations conducted during speaking activities. The interviews were designed to explore students' experiences related to nervousness, lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and the coping strategies they employed to overcome anxiety when speaking English. Meanwhile, observations were conducted to examine students' responses, behaviors, and interactions during speaking activities in the classroom. The research instruments included an interview guide, observation checklist, and supporting documentation.

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by (Miles et al., 2014), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Interview and observation data were further analyzed through coding and categorization processes, resulting in several major themes: forms of speaking anxiety, factors contributing to speaking anxiety, students' coping strategies, and students' expectations regarding speaking instruction. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, data validity was

established through methodological and source triangulation by comparing interview and observation results to verify the consistency and credibility of the data.

This research method was employed to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' experiences in dealing with speaking anxiety and the coping strategies they utilize within the context of English language learning in higher education.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on in-depth interviews and observations conducted with university students regarding students' coping strategies toward English speaking anxiety in higher education, data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, coding, categorization, and identification of major themes in accordance with the research questions. The findings revealed four major themes: forms of speaking anxiety, factors contributing to speaking anxiety, students' coping strategies, and students' expectations regarding speaking instruction in higher education.

1. Forms of Speaking Anxiety Experienced by Students

The findings indicated that students experienced various forms of speaking anxiety when speaking English in front of the class. The most common forms of anxiety included nervousness, lack of self-confidence, fear of making pronunciation and grammatical mistakes, fear of forgetting vocabulary, and fear of receiving negative evaluations from others.

Tabel 1. Forms of Students' Speaking Anxiety

Theme	Representative Quote	Interpretation
Nervousness and lack of self-confidence	"I feel nervous and lack confidence when I am asked to speak English in front of the class." (I1)	Students experience emotional pressure when speaking English.
Fear of making pronunciation and grammatical mistakes	"I am most worried about making grammar mistakes." (I4)	Linguistic errors affect students' confidence during speaking activities.
Fear of negative evaluation	"I am afraid of being laughed at by my classmates." (I1)	Social factors increase students' speaking anxiety.

Based on classroom observations, students experiencing speaking anxiety tended to speak in a low voice, avoid eye contact, and appear hesitant when expressing their opinions in English. These findings suggest that speaking anxiety is not solely related to linguistic competence but also involves psychological and social dimensions.

According to Horwitz's Foreign Language Anxiety Theory, language anxiety emerges through communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. The findings of this study support this theory, as students reported being afraid of making mistakes and receiving negative judgments from those around them. These

results are also consistent with the studies conducted by (N. Safira et al., 2025) and (A. Mariyana & Burhayani, 2024), which found that low self-confidence and social pressure are dominant factors contributing to speaking anxiety among EFL students. Therefore, students' speaking anxiety can be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced simultaneously by linguistic, emotional, and social factors.

2. Factors Contributing to Students' Speaking Anxiety

The findings revealed that speaking anxiety is influenced by both internal and social factors. Internal factors include lack of self-confidence, insufficient speaking practice, and limited use of English in daily life. Meanwhile, social factors are related to the classroom environment and the responses of others toward students' speaking performance.

Tabel 2. Factors Contributing to Speaking Anxiety

Factor	Representative Quote	Interpretation
Lack of self-confidence	"The main cause of my anxiety is a lack of confidence." (I6)	Low self-confidence increases students' anxiety levels.
Lack of speaking practice	"I rarely practice speaking." (I8)	Limited practice prevents students from becoming accustomed to speaking English.
Social environment	"When I'm afraid of being judged, it makes me even more anxious." (I8)	An unsupportive environment intensifies students' speaking anxiety.

The findings indicate that students perceive the academic demands of speaking courses as exceeding their current abilities. According to Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory, such conditions generate psychological stress and anxiety when individuals perceive themselves as incapable of coping effectively with a particular situation. Limited opportunities for speaking practice prevent students from becoming familiar with actively using English, resulting in heightened anxiety during presentations and classroom discussions.

Furthermore, social factors play a significant role in influencing students' levels of speaking anxiety. A supportive classroom environment encourages students to participate more confidently in speaking activities, whereas a judgmental environment increases their fear of making mistakes. These findings support the study conducted by (N. Rizkiya & Pratolo, 2024), which demonstrated that classroom atmosphere and peer responses significantly affect the level of speaking anxiety among EFL students. Therefore, speaking anxiety is influenced not only by limitations in language proficiency but also by communication culture and social interactions that occur throughout the learning process.

3. Students' Coping Strategies for Overcoming Speaking Anxiety

The findings revealed that students employ various coping strategies to reduce speaking anxiety, including cognitive strategies, affective strategies, and social strategies. These strategies help students manage their anxiety while improving their readiness to communicate in English.

Tabel 3. Students' Coping Strategies

Strategy	Representative Quote	Interpretation
Cognitive strategies	"I prepare my materials beforehand." (I10)	Preparation helps students feel more prepared during speaking activities.
Affective strategies	"I try to think positively." (I5)	Positive thinking helps students manage negative emotions.
Social strategies	"I practice with my friends to reduce anxiety." (I9)	Social support helps students feel more comfortable when speaking.

According to Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory, coping strategies can be categorized into **problem-focused coping** and **emotion-focused coping**. Problem-focused coping was reflected in students' efforts to prepare presentation materials, practice speaking, and improve their pronunciation before performing in front of the class. Meanwhile, emotion-focused coping was demonstrated through positive thinking and relaxation techniques aimed at reducing nervousness and anxiety. In addition, students utilized social coping strategies by practicing with peers and helping one another identify and correct speaking errors.

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by (D. A. Putri et al., 2024), which found that preparation strategies and peer support are effective in reducing speaking anxiety among EFL students. Similarly, (K. N. Tee et al., 2020) reported that students tend to employ both practical and emotional strategies to cope with the anxiety associated with public speaking. Classroom observations further indicated that students who regularly practiced speaking appeared more active, confident, and composed when speaking in front of the class than those who practiced less frequently. Therefore, coping strategies play a crucial role in helping students reduce anxiety while simultaneously enhancing their English communication skills.

4. Students' Expectations for Speaking Instruction

The findings revealed that students expect speaking instruction to be more relaxed, interactive, and provide greater opportunities for English-speaking practice.

Tabel 4. Students' Expectations for Speaking Instruction

Expectation	Representative Quote	Interpretation
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More relaxed learning environment	“Speaking classes should be conducted in a more relaxed way.” (I4)	Students need a learning atmosphere that is less stressful and less intimidating.
More interactive learning activities	“Speaking classes should be more interactive.” (I10)	Students desire greater active participation in the learning process.
More opportunities for speaking practice	“There should be more practice so that students become accustomed to speaking.” (I2)	Regular practice helps students develop confidence and speaking fluency.

These expectations indicate that students require a more communicative and supportive learning environment. Within the framework of **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**, language instruction emphasizes the active use of language in authentic communicative situations. The findings of this study suggest that more frequent speaking practice can help students reduce anxiety and improve their speaking fluency.

Based on classroom observations, students appeared more engaged and participative when lecturers implemented group activities, informal discussions, and interactive learning tasks compared to highly formal, presentation-centered instruction. These findings support the study conducted by (A. Mariyana & Burhayani, 2024), which demonstrated that interactive and supportive speaking instruction can effectively help students reduce speaking anxiety. Therefore, speaking instruction in higher education should be designed to be more communicative, supportive, and confidence-building, enabling students to minimize speaking anxiety while enhancing their English communication competence.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that university students experience various forms of English speaking anxiety when using English in academic activities. The most prominent forms of anxiety include nervousness, lack of self-confidence, fear of making pronunciation and grammatical errors, fear of forgetting vocabulary, and fear of receiving negative evaluations from others. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety is influenced not only by students' linguistic limitations but also by psychological and social factors that emerge during the learning process. Internal factors such as low self-confidence, limited speaking practice, and minimal use of English in daily life were identified as the primary causes of students' speaking anxiety. In addition, an unsupportive learning environment further intensifies students' fear of speaking English in front of the class.

The study also found that students employ a variety of coping strategies to overcome speaking anxiety, including preparing materials before speaking, practicing independently, memorizing vocabulary, engaging in positive thinking, applying relaxation techniques, and practicing with peers. These coping strategies help students reduce emotional pressure while simultaneously enhancing their confidence

in speaking English. Therefore, the objectives of this study – to analyze the forms of speaking anxiety and identify the coping strategies used by students to cope with English speaking anxiety in higher education – have been successfully achieved through the findings obtained from in-depth interviews and classroom observations.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings support Horwitz's Foreign Language Anxiety Theory and Lazarus and Folkman's Coping Theory, which explain that foreign language speaking anxiety is influenced by psychological, linguistic, and social factors. This study also contributes to the existing literature by expanding the understanding of EFL students' coping strategies through a qualitative approach that provides a deeper and more contextualized description of students' experiences. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that lecturers and educational institutions should create a more communicative, supportive, and non-judgmental speaking-learning environment. Interactive speaking instruction that provides greater opportunities for practice can help students reduce anxiety and develop greater confidence in using English.

Nevertheless, this study has several limitations. The research was conducted within a single higher education setting; therefore, the findings cannot be broadly generalized to all EFL student contexts. Furthermore, the limited number of participants and the use of a qualitative approach mean that the findings primarily reflect students' subjective experiences. As a result, different findings may emerge when similar studies are conducted in institutions with different academic cultures, educational environments, or student characteristics.

Therefore, future research is encouraged to involve a larger and more diverse sample from various higher education institutions and to employ mixed-methods or quantitative approaches in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of EFL students' speaking anxiety and coping strategies. Future studies may also investigate the influence of teaching methods, social environments, and educational technologies on students' levels of speaking anxiety. In addition, research examining the effectiveness of specific coping strategies in improving students' speaking performance would provide valuable insights and contribute further to the development of English language teaching in higher education.

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