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Anxiousness in Speaking to Public: Students' Perspective

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ABSTRACT

One of important skill that is required for university students to master is public speaking, even more so if they are organization activists. However, mastering speaking through Indonesia and English language requires effort, which made more difficult by their anxiousness. Which is why, the purpose of this study is to research how students from English Education major describe their anxiety as well as overcoming those negative feelings. It is required to research this because public speaking is beneficial after they finished their study and looking for jobs. Narrative Approach will be used to dig deep for nine English Education Department participants' anxiety and their English usage on front of many people. They relay their anxiety in the past when they were in high school and while these students become organization activists and the method, they use to overcome their anxiety to become a better public speaker.

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INTRODUCTION

Public speaking has become one of the soft skills that university graduates must master. McNatt (2019) mentioned that it could be the ability of organization meetings, networking with people, organizational and social levels, and team meetings to implement a project or reflective

activities in class [1]. Briefly, Sugiyanti and Indriani (2021) stated that public speaking refers to “a type of communication addressed in front of many people and usually in the form of a lecture or speech.” No doubt, Schlee and Harich emphasized that public speaking ability can ensure the university's alumni may get hired by the employers [2].

Some quantitative studies about anxiety while doing public speaking for university students were conducted. The first was from Sugiyanti and Indriani (2021), that conducted a quantitative study focused on exploring the level and primary causes of public speaking anxiety among thirty-four English department students. This study did not show any effective strategies to help students solve their anxiety so that they can perform better in public speaking [3]. Another quantitative study of fifty students in one of the private universities in Pakistan was conducted by Raja (2017) mentioned that they need proper counseling, instruction, and coaching to overcome fear while doing public speaking. Fear of public speaking can be overcome by practicing and rehearsing before presentations or speeches [4].

While two qualitative studies were conducted to overcome anxiety in public speaking for university students. Grieve, Woodley, Hunt, & McKay (2021) conducted a qualitative survey comprising four open-ended questions completed by forty-six undergraduate and post-graduate students who feared public speaking. The study suggests that higher education institutions must acknowledge public speaking fear among students and provide more support for oral presentations [5]. Another narrative study by Ma'rufa and Mustofa (2021) explored the anxiety level of one Indonesian EFL student in a public speaking class and how the participant dealt with his anxiety [6]. They mentioned that factors that make students anxious and not confident when speaking in public were “fear of being laughed at, fear of mispronounced, fear of making mistakes, fear of being center of attention, lack of vocabulary, memorizing but when practice becomes forgotten or blank”. The study is still limited to individual experience dealing with public speaking.

While in this study, we want to fill in the gap to know more about students who were active in organization during their study on campus or become leaders in their organization and have lots of opportunities to interact socially because the activities carried out required the ability to conduct public speaking to interact with other people. Mukhran, Faradina, Sari, Afriani, and Amna believed that being active in an organization directly or indirectly trains students to communicate with others [7]. However, those students still experience anxiety during public speaking. Therefore, this study will explore more about the anxiety of students' activists in the English Language Education Study Program and how they overcome their anxiety in dealing with public speaking.

METHOD

Research design

A qualitative narrative study was conducted between April and May 2022 in one of the private universities in Indonesia. The university was conducted because almost all the new students were obliged to be active in some organization within or outside the campus. Furthermore, the school administration was permitted to conduct the study. Clandinin (2016) mentioned that “narrative inquiry is both a view of and a methodology for studying experience”[8]. Therefore, through stories from the participant, we can explore their anxiety and how they overcome it.

Participants and recruitment

The participants were in the fourth semester of English Language Education Study Program. When the researchers offered to do the study, nine participants consented to be interviewed. Some agreed to do face-to-face interviews, some used voice notes on WhatsApp, and some through Zoom.

Data

Data were collected with five semi-structured interview questions to cover all topics of interest. The interview was conducted separately for each participant in English, but some participants answered in Bahasa Indonesia and sometimes used local language. The researchers asked the questions several times to ensure the consistency of the answers. The interview was recorded and then scripted for this study then the interview results were translated into English. Five questions were asked: (1) Have you ever spoken in public using English or another language?

(2) What do you think anxiety is? (3) Why does anxiety interfere with our speech in public? (4) How do you experience anxiety when speaking in public? (5) How do you deal with your anxiety when in public?

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed thematically, employing inductive data. The initial analysis stage consisted of reading and re-reading the transcripts to become fully conversant with the data. Next, the preliminary codes were collated into potential themes. Information that did not align with the study's research questions was removed, and categories were compared to identify major themes. The refined themes were named. Finally, extracts were selected to exemplify each theme [9]. This research was explained using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative frameworks: past, present, and future dimensions of a story [10].

Ethical Approval

The ethical approval was processed through the university leading the study. While the consent of the participants was asked during the interview, pseudonyms were used to ensure the confidentiality of all the participants. After the interview, the researcher confirmed with the participants about their answers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Five questions were asked to the participants, and each answer must be explored to get the theme of the study.

The participants' experience when speaking in public using English or other languages.

Three participants confirmed that they had spoken in public using English before because they participated in a storytelling competition, debate competition, and became English teacher. In comparison, the other six participants did not elaborate if they have done public speaking in English or Bahasa Indonesia.

"Once in high school, I participated in a storytelling competition (English) at Lambung Mangkurat University. The university invited 20 senior high schools, each of the schools participating in the competition had 2-3 students, so there were around 60 participants. The competition was held in a hall with almost 100 people consisting of participants, teachers, committee, and judges." (Interview, P1)

"I once participated in a debate competition (English) to practice my public speaking, and it was very good for the future." (Interview, P2)

Some have done it while they were in high school, and others have done it while they are in university.

"In my opinion, public speaking is how we speak in front of many people, memorize the material, and how we interact in front of many people. Honestly, the first time I spoke in public was when "I was the MC at a campus event where there were quite a lot of invitations. I have also spoken in public during a Thursday event on the road." (Interview, P4)

"I used to speak in public when I was in high school. I was the student council president, attended seminars, and gave speeches in public." (Interview, P7)

One even has done it consistently since she is a teacher.

“I speak in public until now, because I'm teaching in one of the courses that use English.” (Interview, P3)

Five participants ensured that they became public speakers after they were actively involved in organization or community.

“Actually, during my school days, I never joined an organization, but when I was in college, that was the beginning of my public speaking. So, when I joined this organization, I have trained to speak in public.” (Interview, P6)

“I once joined the KBBI (Community Dare to Speak). Before being accepted, I was asked to speak in public. I deliver it like a seminar. When I was in high school, I often participated in debate competitions.” (Interview, P8)

“When I was in junior high school, I often participated in events, and almost in all events, I became chairman and spoke in public, such as seminars during high school to motivate junior students.” (Interview, P9)

The participants thought about anxiety.

There are various ways the participants answered these questions, some have like others, and another's answers were different. One participant believed that anxiety is an uncertain worry and will always be there.

“In my opinion, anxiety is an uncertain worry. For example, I'm anxious when doing storytelling again, and it's an uncertain worry. We can fix what is bad, in my opinion. Anxiety is always there when we speak in public.” (Interview, P1)

One participant portrayed anxiety as nervousness that happened in public.

“Anxiety was clear and certainly happened to me. Anxiety is a situation where we are nervous about facing the situation.” (Interview, P2)

Another added that having your hands shaking and getting embarrassed in public results from anxiety.

“Anxiety is having your hands shaking in public. Anxiety is getting embarrassed in public because many people can laugh at us when we were wrong. (Interview, P4)

Another added anxiety will happen if you try new things and get out of the safe zone, and you can hardly control it when speaking in public.

“In my opinion, anxiety is when we try new things and getting out of the safe zone. So, anxiety is uncontrollable when speaking in public.” (Interview, P5)

A participant thought anxiety is the result of not believing that you can stand in front of people, which stem from the fear of oneself from the words of others; another participant elaborates on the consequences of having anxiety.

“I think everyone must have anxiety, nervousness, excessive panic when speaking in front of many people, and tremors. It's like not believing that you can stand in front of people. This anxiety is also the fear of oneself from the words of others.” (Interview, P7)

"I think anxiety is like doubt, afraid to speak, and thinking that the other person can't understand what we are saying. And we must think badly about ourselves that we will not be accepted by people." (Interview, P9)

The participants thought about how anxiety could interfere with their speech in public.

There are several ways participants were disturbed by anxiety once they made a public speech. Two participants mentioned how their voices and hands would shake, and one participant tried to overcome it by memorizing the script.

"This anxiety really bothers me when speaking in public because when I am anxious, my voice will shake when I am about to do a speech. In my opinion, when you want to speak in public, all the scripts that will be conveyed must be memorized without checking the script anymore." (Interview, P1)

"This anxiety really interfered with my focus. Moreover, my hands immediately trembled and moved erratically. When I became the MC, I was very worried because a change in the program was suddenly announced, and my words immediately stuttered." (Inter-view, P4)

P6 mentioned how they would feel depressed once they were anxious. It resulted in them postponing work assignments and others. They would be at a loss for words when in conversation and immediately fall silent.

"When I'm anxious, it makes me depressed and will make me object to doing something. The difference I was worried about then and now is also very different. I used to be able to get rid of my anxiety right away. But now, when I'm anxious, I'm immediately de-pressed, for example, in postponing work assignments and others. Anxiety is only a little annoying but can be embarrassing because you are at a loss for words and can immediately fall silent." (Interview, P6)

Four participants mentioned how they would lose focus; two participants even forget when it happened to them.

"This anxiety really disturbs my focus when I'm in public; I suddenly shut up and forget my memorization." (Interview, P2)

"(It) distracts my focus, so it can make me blank when I speak in public. Usually, when I'm anxious, I also fail to focus. I would leave behind my cellphone, keys, whatever. I once left my cellphone in the cafeteria when I was very anxious. (Interview, P5)

"Yes, for a while Because I will lose focus even for a moment. So just a glimpse. After that, my focus returned." (Interview, P8)

"I was worried at the start. So, when I try to get rid of that anxiety that is innate to me, and I try to move forward, I muster up the courage to speak and try to talk to people all the time. In my opinion, anxiety can cause disturbance because when we speak in public and worry suddenly comes, and we will forget the material we have learned." (Inter-view, P9)

The participants thought about their experience of getting anxious when speaking in public.

P1 mentioned how they felt blank on stage and forgot what they memorized; It got them traumatized after feeling their effort was in vain.

"...I felt blank in public. At the time, I was taught by my classmate in high school. His brother's words were very influential and made me even more

anxious when I wanted to appear in front. When I went on stage, all the things I had learned and memorized did not meet my expectations. I am not satisfied with the results that I show. I also feel traumatized and don't want to follow storytelling anymore because my intonation and ex-pression are below my expectations. I really stay away from storytelling now.” (Inter-view, P1)

P2 answered with their experience when they were in their junior and senior high school. They elaborated how in junior high school; they were so anxious they felt their stomach was sick and their hands cold. However, they become less anxious in high school, thanks to their friends' responses.

“...When I was in junior high school, I spoke in public and would feel sick to my stomach, and my hands were cold. But there was one moment when I was in high school; I came forward and spoke in public in a comedic way, and thanks God the response from my friends was also very good, and that's where I got up and wanted to continue speaking in public. Friends' response is very influential to me, and I continue to be enthusiastic when speaking in public. (Interview, P2)

P5 mentioned how they felt their body tremor, hands cold, and stuttering their words, but they could overcome it in the end.

“I'm more of an opinion in expressing opinions in public. When I'm anxious, it's more of a tremor, my hands are cold, and my words stutter. When I was the chief executive, I was worried, but I succeeded in delivering what I wanted to convey.” (Interview, P5)

P7 felt panic and fear that people would laugh at them. They felt that if they wanted to continue practicing public speaking, they needed friends to practice with and must be in sync.

“When I am anxious, I panic and fear that people will laugh at me. So now I'm even more worried because the impact of this corona is very influential. After all, our previous formula has disappeared. Of course, everyone has their own advantages and disadvantages. When I want to continue practicing public speaking, I want to keep looking for friends who speak together and must be in sync.” (Interview, P7)

P9 only felt anxious before coming to the front to deliver their speech. Once they held the micro-phone, their anxiety would disappear.

“As for the anxiety, I feel it only when speaking in front of people for a while. When I speak and hold the microphone, the anxiety will immediately disappear.” (Interview, P9)

The participants thought about dealing with their anxiety in public.

P1 would make their voice louder, easing them and making their anxiety disappear. The next thing they mentioned is how you need to be assertive. After that, they mentioned that their strength is in controlling their voice and moving their body to hide their anxiety.

“For me, dealing with it is more vocal because when I am confident in making a loud and louder voice, I will feel released, and the anxiety will go away too. And I would think that it would all be over. But when I am assertive, I also think that ‘you are seen by many people, you can be assertive then you will be confident’. My strength when speaking in public is by controlling my voice. Second, the way to deal with it is by moving my body usually. Then my movements will follow my path when in front. Some-times the movement that

we focus on is moving so that our anxiety will not be known by anyone. (Interview, P1)

P2 got advice from their junior high school teacher. They said you must not show your anxiety to others, regulate your breathing pattern to calm down, and take it easy since you are still learning.

"My junior high school teacher once advised that when we are in public and speak, we must be calm, and even though we are anxious, we must not show our anxiety to others. The way to deal with my anxiety is also when I regulate my breathing pattern and calm down, just take it easy, and if we are wrong, it's okay because we are still learning. (Interview, P2)

P3 received a suggestion from their lecturer. They gave them a quote mentioned as:

"The way I deal with my anxiety. I must prepare it first. At that time, there was a suggestion from my lecturer 'When you are in public, don't always think about the stigma of others; just keep going, right? Is it wrong? Go on. Because when you speak successfully, you are declared successful in public speaking.'" (Interview, P3)

P7 explained how you should interact with the audience and ease up; it will help you refocus on conveying something.

"To overcome this is to interact more with the audience, take it as a joke, and not be too formal. So, it can help us refocus on conveying something." (Interview, P7)

P9 mentioned how, if you felt anxious, stop and take a deep breath; Imagine that you are speaking alone. Another way they suggested is by first practicing in front of a mirror, then to your family, then in front of your friends; following this can develop self-confidence.

"When I'm anxious, I'll stutter. The way to deal with it is to be silent, first take a deep breath, pretending that everyone isn't there, imagining that I'm only speaking in public alone. If he really dared to speak in front of many people, it would be better if he tried to talk to himself in front of the mirror. After that, he tried to speak in front of his parents, sister, and family. After that, try to talk in front of his friends. Then he will continue to try to learn to speak in public. And that person can develop self-confidence" (Interview, P7)

Discussion

This study wants to investigate the anxiety of students' activists in English Language Education Study Program and how they overcome their anxiety in dealing with public speaking. Some thematic results can be drawn from this study. We can see that some of the student activists started their public speaking journey since high school. Public speaking in their perspective was described as in English or Bahasa Indonesia. Their experiences during junior high or high school were explored more when they had to attend English competitions or speak in public as activists.

The students' current position as campus activists brings them more challenges in mastering public speaking related to their role. This situation is in line with Mukhran, Faradina, Sari, Afriani, and Amna, who mentioned that being active in the organization has directly or indirectly to their ability to do public speaking [7]. Therefore, they try their best to overcome their anxiety. They understand that they experience lots of anxiety symptoms such as the feeling of tremors, their hands being cold, their words stuttering, panic, and other effects. However, the role of teacher or mentor can help ensure them that anxious feeling is normal, and they just must prepare the topic and get off track during a public speaking activity [4].

The students used many strategies to overcome their anxiety while doing their public speaking. For example, they tried to take a moment of silence and managed their breath to cool

down, or made their voice louder, relaxed and took it easy, used jokes, and other measures. They gained their confidence if the crowd supported them and gave them the chance to finish their speech. In the end, they believe that the anxiety comes if they do not prepare before the events to avoid being laughed at, mis-pronounced, making mistakes, being the center of attention, lacking vocabulary, forgetting the speech, and other setbacks. [6]. They are still in the fourth semester; practicing public speaking throughout their study can make them confident in public speaking before their studies are finished and help them pursue their career path in the future.

CONCLUSION

Public speaking has many benefits for the student activists' current studies and future careers after they finish their studies. Anxiety was considered normal while public speaking; knowing the symptoms and finding the way out is the excellent way to overcome it. Each person has their own symptoms and a way to solve those problems. This study can be used as a new insight for other students who happened to experience anxiety while doing public speaking. Future research can be conducted to find more ways to solve anxiety problems during public speaking.

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