

Discovering The Coping Strategies Of Speaking Anxiety In English Language Among Esl Learners

Siti Nurfirdaus Binti Mohd Nasir

Department of General Studies, Politeknik Tuanku
Syed Sirajuddin, Malaysia
sitinasir10@gmail.com

Nur Hartini Binti Harun

Department of General Studies, Politeknik Tuanku
Syed Sirajuddin, Malaysia
nurhartiniharun@gmail.com

Zetty Harisha Binti Harun

Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Kedah
harisha@kedah.uitm.edu.my

Robekhah Harun

Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Kedah
robekhah@kedah.uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

This study intended to identify the most common strategy used by ESL learners in order to cope with speaking anxiety and also to determine any differences in the strategies used to cope with speaking anxiety between genders. A set of questionnaire was distributed to 40 students to identify the most common strategy used to help them reduce their language anxiety in speaking English and to determine any differences in the strategies used by gender. The descriptive analysis showed the highest percentage on the students working collaboratively in small groups helps to reduce their nervousness when speaking English for both gender (100%). However, the least chosen strategies are different for both genders, whereby, for female, the item 'accuracy is not the focus and to be able to use English in a friendly environment' respectively showed 75%, meanwhile 85% of male students agreed that 'a humorous teacher helps to reduce nervousness in speaking English'. Finally, from the study, there are several actions that can be taken by the researchers in order to overcome language anxiety by using the right coping strategies among the students.

Keywords: *Speaking Anxiety, Coping Strategies, Language Anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

The first polytechnic education was established and implemented in 1979. The education Industrial Master Plan (1985-1995) has strengthened the role of polytechnics in the country's workforce in order to meet the demands of semi-professional level. Education and training in the polytechnics in the form of industry-led programs are developed in collaboration with the industrial development. The main objective of the establishment is to support the Higher Education Ministry in performing the responsibilities of the workforce at generating a semi-professional and middle executive. To strengthen the role of polytechnics in the field of education and training, Department of Polytechnic Education has launched the transformation polytechnic for the empowerment of education in these institutions in assisting the country's vision to be the advance country by year 2020.

Polytechnic plays a vital role as one of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) higher learning institutions in Malaysia. According to Ministry of Higher Education's Blueprint, there will be an increase in demand for an additional 1.3 million TVET workers by 2020 in the 12 National Key Economic Area (NKEA) identified under the government's Economic Transformation Programme (ETP). However, poor command of English among technical graduates is a major handicap. In fact, the declining standard of English is not isolated to any one sector but prevalent across industries. According to Bardan (2015) merely 200,000 graduates are unemployed in the country due to their lack of English proficiency is the main factor they are out of work.

The English syllabus in polytechnic has been improvised and improved in order to be in line with the national plan in achieving Vision 2020. Currently, polytechnic is implementing communicative English as the focus in the English syllabus. Communicative English is an approach to language teaching which students learn from real life interaction that can help to reinforce the value of their studies and improve their English Communication Skills. However, when it comes to speaking, anxious feelings inhibit these language learners from actively participating in classroom interactions.

1.1 Foreign or Second language anxiety

In Kondo and Yang (2004), MacIntyre defines anxiety as a situation-specific personality trait consists of two psychological components: emotional arousal and negative self-related cognition. Meanwhile, Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is defined as fear or apprehension that arises when a learner is expected to perform in a second or foreign language (Gardner & MacIntyre). Numerous studies have concluded that language anxiety can hamper the learning process in foreign language classroom. As anxiety could impair cognitive function, students who are anxious may learn less and they may unable to demonstrate what they have learned successfully (Hortwitz, 2011; Worde, 2013). Foreign language anxiety is divided into three components: communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation and test anxiety. Communication apprehension refers to the fear of communicating and expressing their thoughts and ideas in their target language. Fear of negative social evaluation refers to the fear that won't be able to make a positive social impression on others and test anxiety refers to the fear of failing in any academic assessment such as taking test.

1.2 Strategies to Cope with Anxiety

Extensive studies have been done to explore the factors of foreign language anxiety, however studies concerning coping strategies for foreign language anxiety are still insufficient. Despite the lacking of empirical work that deals with strategies that students use to deal with their language anxiety, extensive research has been done on helping students coping with their anxiety in the classroom. According to Hembre (1988) there are three approaches act as a remedy to cope with anxiety. The first one is cognitive approach implies that thinking disturbances are the primary sources of anxiety that take place in the classroom. This approach suggests rational-emotive therapy and cognitive restructuring as a way to cope with anxiety. The second approach is affective approach which attempts to lessen the negative involuntary relationship between the classroom and anxiety. In achieving this goal, therapies including systematic desensitization, relaxation training and biofeedback training. Lastly, the behavioural approach presumes that the root of anxiety is due to the poor academic skills. Accordingly, training in study skills is assumed to be able to help students cope with anxiety.

Kondo and Yang (2004) found 70 basic tactics for coping with language anxiety based on their study to 209 students who enrolled in basic English courses at two universities in Central Japan which were cohered into five categories: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer thinking and resignation.

Therefore, due to the reasons mentioned above, the aims of this study are to identify the most common strategy used by students to cope with speaking anxiety among PTSS students and to determine any significant difference in the strategies used to cope with speaking anxiety between male and female. The general objectives of this study are to identify the most common strategy used by students to cope with speaking anxiety among PTSS students and to determine the differences in the strategies used to cope with speaking anxiety between male and female.

- i) to identify the most common strategy used by students to cope with speaking anxiety among PTSS students
- ii) to determine the differences in the strategies used to cope with speaking anxiety between male and female.

The respondents in this study are 30 diploma students from Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin (PTSS) who enrolled in Communicative English courses offered in PTSS for semester 1, 3 and 4. There are 20 males and 20 females. In this study, researchers distributed a questionnaire consists of 12 statements to 30 respondents from PTSS in order to identify the most common strategies used to cope with speaking anxiety and to determine the differences in the strategies used influence by gender. The data collected was analysed.

DATA ANALYSI

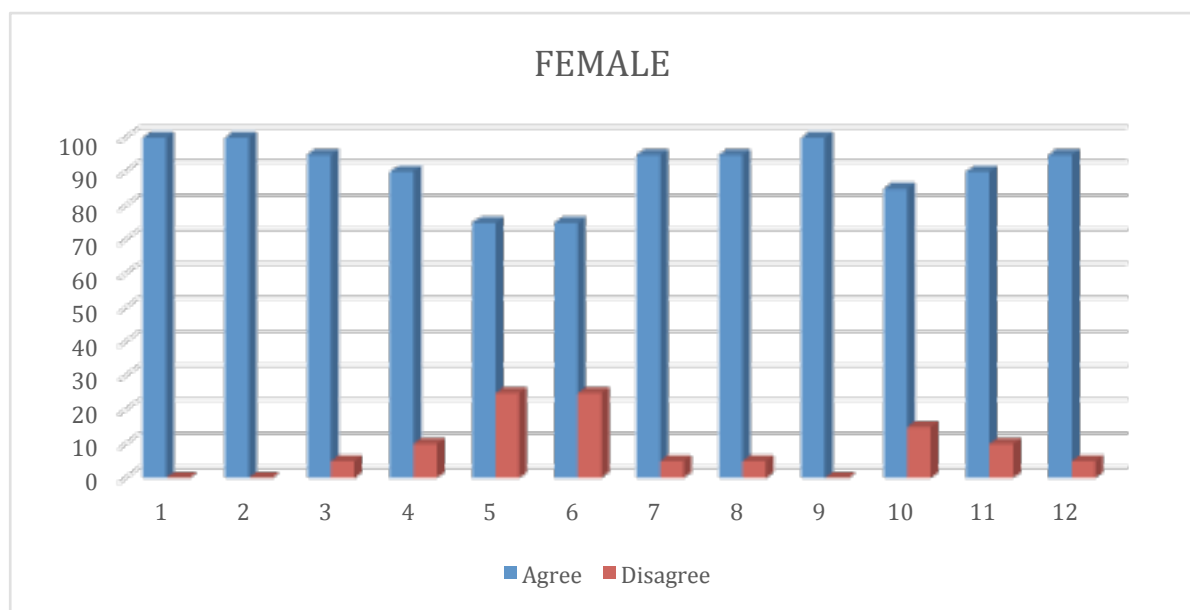


Figure 1 Coping Strategies Used By Female Students

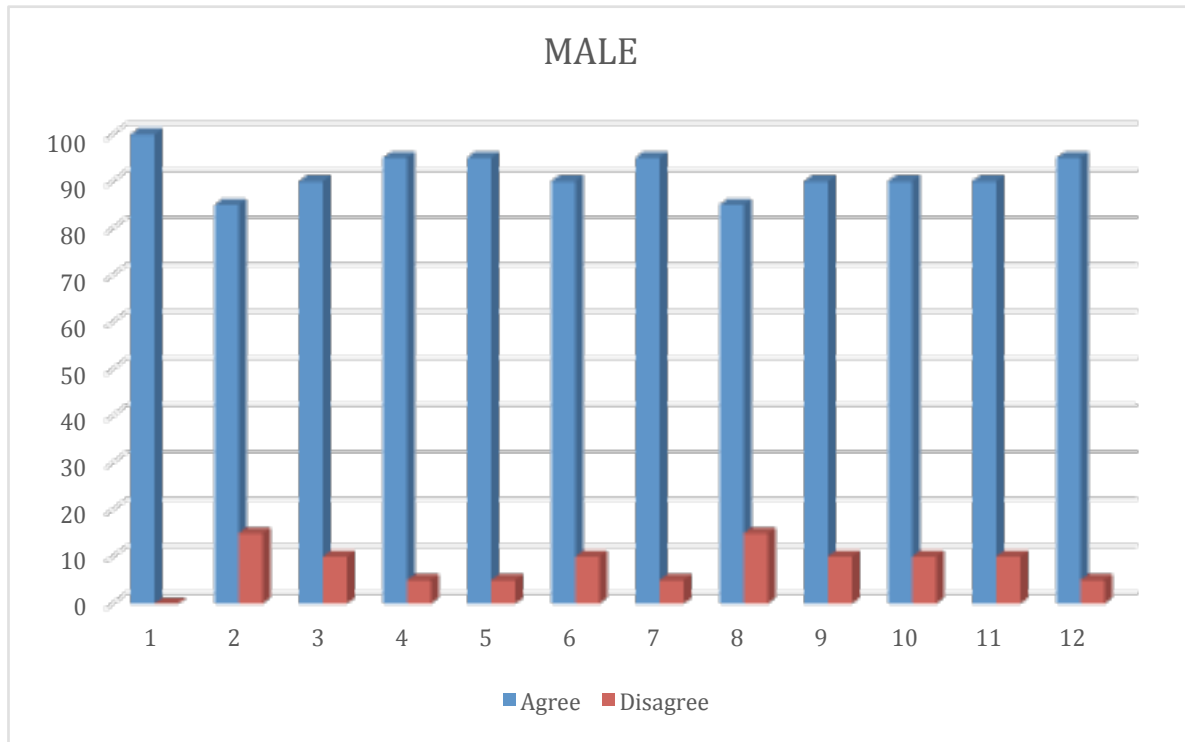


Figure 2 Coping Strategies used by male students

Table 1 Coping Strategies Used By Female And Male Students

INDICATOR					
NO.	ITEM	PERCENTAGE			
		AGREE		DISAGREE	
1.	Having classmates work in small groups helps reduce my nervousness when speaking English.	00	00	0	0
2.	It helps reduce my nervousness to talk with other students about the fears in speaking English.	00	5	0	5
3.	Participating in a supporting group or activity (e.g. English corner) helps reduce my fears in speaking that language.	5	0	5	0
4.	Doing relaxation exercises (e.g. productive self-talk) helps reduce my fears in speaking that language.	0	5	0	5
5.	If accuracy is not the focus, I will not be so nervous about speaking English.	5	5	5	5
6.	I do not feel so anxious when speaking English in a friendly environment.	5	5	5	5
7.	Teachers' encouragement makes me feel relaxed when speaking English.	5	5	5	5
8.	A humorous teacher helps reduce my nervousness in speaking English.	5	5	5	5
9.	A patient teacher helps reduce my nervousness in speaking English.	00	0	0	0

10.	I feel relaxed about speaking English if I know that mistakes are part of the language learning process and made by everyone.	5	0	5	5
11.	I feel relieved about speaking English if my teacher corrects my mistakes indirectly (e.g. just repeat the right form instead of saying that I am wrong)	0	0	0	10
12.	Playing language games helps reduce my nervousness in speaking English.	95	5	5	5

Based on Table 1 for female, there are 12 questions, where 12 items agree with the percentage of (Q1=100, Q2=100, Q3=95, Q4=90, Q5=75, Q6=75, Q7=95, Q8=95, Q9=100, Q10=85, Q11=90, Q12=95) and only 9 items disagree with the percentage of (Q3=5, Q4=10, Q5=25, Q6=25, Q7=5, Q8=5, Q10=15, Q11=10, Q12=5). Based on Table 1 for male, there are 12 questions, where 12 items agree with the percentage of (Q1=100, Q2=85, Q3=90, Q4=95, Q5=95, Q6=95, Q7=95, Q8=85, Q9=90, Q10=90, Q11=90, Q12=95) and 11 items disagree with the percentage of (Q2=15, Q3=10, Q4=5, Q5=5, Q6=5, Q7=5, Q8=15, Q9=10, Q10=5, Q11=10, Q12=5). The result has shown that 100% of PTSS students for both gender chose the same strategy which is having classmates work in small group helps to reduce their nervousness when speaking English. However, the least chosen strategies are different for both gender which are if accuracy is not the focus and speaking English in friendly environment respectively 75% for female, meanwhile for male a humorous teacher helps to reduce nervousness in speaking English with 85% as the least chosen strategy.

Based on the questionnaires that have been collected, 100% percent of the respondents answered Agree for Q1 (Having classmates work in small groups helps reduce my nervousness when speaking English.) which is the highest percentage because many students feel more confident and less panic when they work together with their classmates in small groups compared to when they have to speak English alone speak in front of the crowd. This happened perhaps due to lack of vocabulary and self-motivation. Surprisingly, both gender chose the same strategy to cope with their anxiety.

Based on the analysis above, the researchers will take several actions in order to help students to overcome language anxiety by using the right strategies.

- i) Incorporate more language games in class for example by using board games and role play in order to encourage the students to work in group so that, it can enhance self-confidence and reduce language anxiety.
- ii) Organize the friendly match between classes in order to improve students' communicative skills and increase their motivation in learning English (e.g.: elocution, role play, debate etc.).
- iii) Provide platform for students to expose them to experience outside classroom environment to reduce the nervousness when speaking English (e.g.: language camp, field trip, workshop etc.)

The planned actions will be conducted in 5 weeks and the observation will be done in 2 weeks.

Step 1

The planned action 7.1 will be conducted by the lecturer during the English lesson for 2 weeks. The class lecturer need to be more creative and innovative to create interesting language games and incorporate the games in the lesson. The objective of using language games in class is to encourage collaborative learning because students learn better in small group. By using language games in class, students will feel more relax and less nervous when they have to use English to speak. For example, a role play game is very interesting and effective to allow students to practice the language is real life situation. Moreover, most of the language games are done is small group or in pair to reduce the speaking anxiety and enhance the learning.

Step 2

The planned action 7.2 will be conducted within 1 week. The lecturer will organize one friendly match (e.g.; debate, elocution etc.) and the students have to compete with other classes from different programs. The purposes of having the friendly match are to improve students' communication skills and increase their motivation level in learning English. The competition will be divided into three rounds which are preliminary round, semifinal round and final round. The winner of the competition will get a prize sponsored by English unit.

Step 3

The planned action 7.3 will be conducted within 2 weeks. The lecturer will provide platform for students to expose them to experience outside classroom environment to reduce the nervousness when speaking English. Lecturer will bring students to any programs that focusing on English communication skills. The objective of bringing students to join this kind of programs is to expose students to experience outside classroom environment, so the students will have a chance to practice the language is less stressful environment like in classroom. In addition, this can also improve their English language and eventually will reduce their anxiety level in using English because students will feel more confident to use the language.

CONCLUSION

This study, conducted through individual, was an attempt to apprehend the true nature of language anxiety and the strategies used to cope with anxiety. The results of this study clearly indicate that the most common strategy used to reduce anxiety among students is by doing activities in small group. Almost all research subjects acknowledged that people feel anxious and nervous while speaking English in front of others. Some ESL/EFL learners even expressed that they feel 'stupid' when they cannot speak English well and others maintained that they try to skip or escape the situations, which demand speaking in front of others, either in the classroom or outside of the classroom. What seems to distinguish speaking is the public nature of the skill; this poses a threat to peoples' self-concept, self-identity, and ego, which they have formed in their first language as reasonable and intelligent individuals (Horwitz et al., 1986: 128). Every factor or situation that creates possibilities or enhances the chances of exposing their deficiencies and language imperfections in front of others is likely to cause language anxiety for ESL/EFL learners. This situation could be either classroom interaction in the form of open class forum, group participation or class presentation, or giving a short talk in any public event is likely to challenge learners' communicative abilities. What makes a language classroom a highly anxiety-evoking place is its evaluative nature: evaluation by the teachers, peers, and by a learners' own 'self', accompanied by high expectations and beliefs about L2 learning. It was found that the feelings of anxiety become more threatening when the language instructors' manner of error correction is rigid and humiliating and when they consider language class a performance rather than a learning place.

A major cause of facing these students' difficulties was found to be the lack of sufficient input and chances of practicing speaking skill in the social contexts where English is not used as an L1. Many times students reported that they know certain vocabulary items and sentence structures but they do not come out right when needed in any communicative situation. This indicates that learners tend to feel panic when they have to speak in English language due to lack of practice, either in the classroom or in the society, these difficulties are likely to continue causing trouble for the learners. However, for effective alleviation of language anxiety, the comparison of the results obtained in this study with those of the past studies suggests that there do not seem to be any specific remedies for language anxiety. Language anxiety can be postulated, may not require any 'special treatment' but what it does demand is the careful attitude of the language teachers in order to understand and to effectively diagnose this phenomenon in the learners. Then, it requires

the application of modern approaches that lay emphasis on enhancing learning opportunities in an environment that is conducive to learning.

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