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## STUDENTS' FEAR IN PUBLIC SPEAKING: REASONS AND STRATEGIES

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### Abstract

Communication skills is one of the essential skills that are important among college students. As a college student who is getting ready to start on their chosen career, they should take the opportunity in any activities that developed communication skills in a wider and complete aspect so that communication skills can be fully developed. However, one of the barriers to the communication process is fear of public speaking. Focusing on how college students cope with their fear of public speaking, this research aims to analyze the reasons behind the students' fears in public speaking and recommend strategies to overcome this fears. Descriptive quantitative design was used to analyze the data gathered. 15 students the second graders of English Department STKIP PGRI Pacitan in Public Speaking class were investigated by observing, questionnairng and interviewing them dealing with the process of learning Public Speaking. The result indicated that all respondents experienced fear in public speaking. The students admire that their fear of public speaking is due to so many reasons such as lack of adequate and appropriate vocabulary, worried about making mistakes, low English proficiency, lack of preparation and practice, afraid of being laughed at and losing their face, the audience size, and lack of confidence. However, almost all of students believe that their fear of public speaking can be overcome by using some strategies and also some profesional helps.

**Keywords:** Fears, Public Speaking, English Education Students.

### INTRODUCTION

Public speaking is one thing that is very important in all fields, especially in the academic field. Through the learning of public speaking skills, it would be beneficial for the students as they will be able to brush up on their personal and social interaction, academic improvement and most importantly on their career benefits. (Yee, 2014). Practicing public speaking make a student be able to build up confidence in persuading others more effectively on the ideas and opinion that they would like to share. Besides, in an academic setting, being involved in public presentations and group discussions are common activities that a tertiary student need to master. When students have the chances to present their speeches in front of their peers, observing the feedbacks given, this would prompt the student to be more self-motivated in getting new ideas and forming opinions to share for the next time.

For some people the anxiety in public speaking becomes so intense that it interferes with the ability to perform at all. In the case of students, this may lead to avoiding certain courses or even majors where oral presentations are required, never speaking in class, or deciding against certain careers because they would require occasional speaking before a group. Students who are very anxious about public speaking in class may sometimes also avoid social events they would like to attend or may not talk to classmates they would like to get to know. Students are concerned they will be embarrassed if they speak.

They say they will make a mistake, look “stupid” to others, or be judged unattractive. Some students say they get upset thinking about others looking at them or being the center of attention. Others express the belief that no one would be interested in anything they would have to say, or that nothing they would say would be worthwhile. The bottom line is fear of unfavorable evaluation by others. In addition to the emotional aspects of public speaking anxiety, there are often physical symptoms as well. These are symptoms that are associated with anxiety, and include trembling or shaking, cold clammy hands, shaky voice, rapid heartbeat, sweating, blushing, dizziness, shortness of breath, digestive discomfort, or forgetting something you know or were about to say. The situation is also faced by the students of Public Speaking class of English Department STKIP PGRI Pacitan. Some of them experienced fear in public speaking and felt nervousness before a performance or speaking engagement.

The fear associated with public speaking can be minimized, however, if students pay attention to overcome the most common problems of public speaking. The purpose of this study is to identify and investigate the causes behind the students’ fear of public speaking and recommend steps that could be adopted to overcome their anxiety problems. This study presents the reasons behind the fear of public speaking in students and problems caused by their fear.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking before a group of people or public has been a long standing issue in the communication and language field. Students tried to avoid speaking in public because of embarrassment, shaky voices, rapid heartbeat, feel discomfort, inferiority complex and low self-respect (Clements , 1996). According to Krannich (2004) delivering speech, presentations in class and before public have been an important dilemma faced by students. Public speaking anxiety is a problem faced by many people, include students in particular. McCroskey (1977) found that invariably twenty percent of students are faced with public speaking anxiety.

Gardner (1994) explained the idea behind fear experienced as often related to a particular situation where the second language in which the speaker is not fully competent is to be used in public speaking. For some years now researches have been directed towards public speaking anxiety. Public speaking anxiety is usually associated with fear among different categories of people in any society (Gibson, 1980). In addition, “public speaking anxiety represents a cluster of evaluative feelings about speech making” (Daly, 1989) in which case speakers who are very anxious do not experience positive feelings related to the context of public speaking. Some researchers in communication have tried to examine the explanation involve the psychological and physiological parts of public speaking anxiety in order to propose considerable remedy that may lessen the unfavorable influence of anxiety for public speakers.

16 Foreign language anxiety is usually associated with public speaking and it affects language learning too. Anxiety would cause learners to be less responsive to learning the language. Language anxiety appear when students avoid conveying complex message in foreign language, lack of confidence, froze up in role play activities or forgot previously learned vocabulary or grammar. Liu (2007) explained that some students are reluctant to speak due to anxiety. This may be caused by low English proficiency, lack of practice, competition and task difficulty. The awareness of performing badly in English also will lead to the loss of self-esteem among the students.

Besides, speaking was frequently described as an anxiety-provoking activity. This study has revealed that a multitude of variables has contributed to students' anxiety when speaking English in class. The causes are mainly lack of vocabulary, low English proficiency, lack of preparation and practice, fear of making mistakes, being laughed at and losing face inability to express ideas and memory dissociation. Mueen [2000] stated that there are several factors which affect students' performance in speaking English fluently; such as, lack of adequate and appropriate vocabulary, shyness, nervous, fearful to speak, and lack of confidence. Harry [2006] stated that "anxiety and depression are just two effective factors that contribute to learning difficulties or are the result of learning difficulties. The impact of persistent failure can adversely affect a pupil's self-esteem, confidence, perceived self-efficacy, attitude and motivation. When confronted by certain tasks pupils may develop anxious feelings, fearing they will fail." In addition, Biber [2007] believed that some academic speaking skills such as giving an oral presentation or participating in classroom discussion require a much broader range of vocabulary knowledge, grammatical sophistication and discourse competence than is the case with typical daily life conversation.

Dealing with speaking fear, Ur [1996.] stated the factors that affect speaking skill as follows:

1. Inhibition

Students are worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism, or simply shy.

2. Nothing to say.

Students have no motive to express themselves.

3. Low or uneven participation.

Only one participant can talk at a time because of large classes and the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.

4. Mother-tongue use.

Learners who share the same mother tongue tend to use it because it is easier and because learners feel less exposed if they are speaking their mother tongue."

According to Kirkwood (2002), anxiety disorders are among the most common mental disorders encountered by public speakers. People who feel anxiety while speaking in public generally tend to avoid situations where they have to perform, but when they encounter such situations, they suffer

intense distress and anxiety. According to Kant (2000), people in general negatively assess and appraise those who demonstrate their fears towards public speaking and fail to make a strong impression through confident gestures. These problems can act as hurdles in achieving ones goals that could be both personal and professional. Hence, speakers need to develop strong public speaking skills to enable them to become more confident.

Regardless of the obstacle in public speaking, the good news is that by experiencing public speaking anxiety there is a lot people can do to make things better. Good preparation before doing presentations, including careful choice of topic, thorough preparation, practice iincidentally, and polished public speakers practice could be good things to cope with the problems of public speaking fears.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

The type of this research is quantitative research in descriptive and inferential as well. The researcher will apply an adapted questionnaire as an instrument. The participants will require answering all the items in the questionnaire to give their own perception and feeling about their fears in public speaking and some possible causes. The reseracher will conduct a small scale exploratory research to analyze the needs of students of public speaking class at for formulating strategies that would overcome their fears in public speaking.

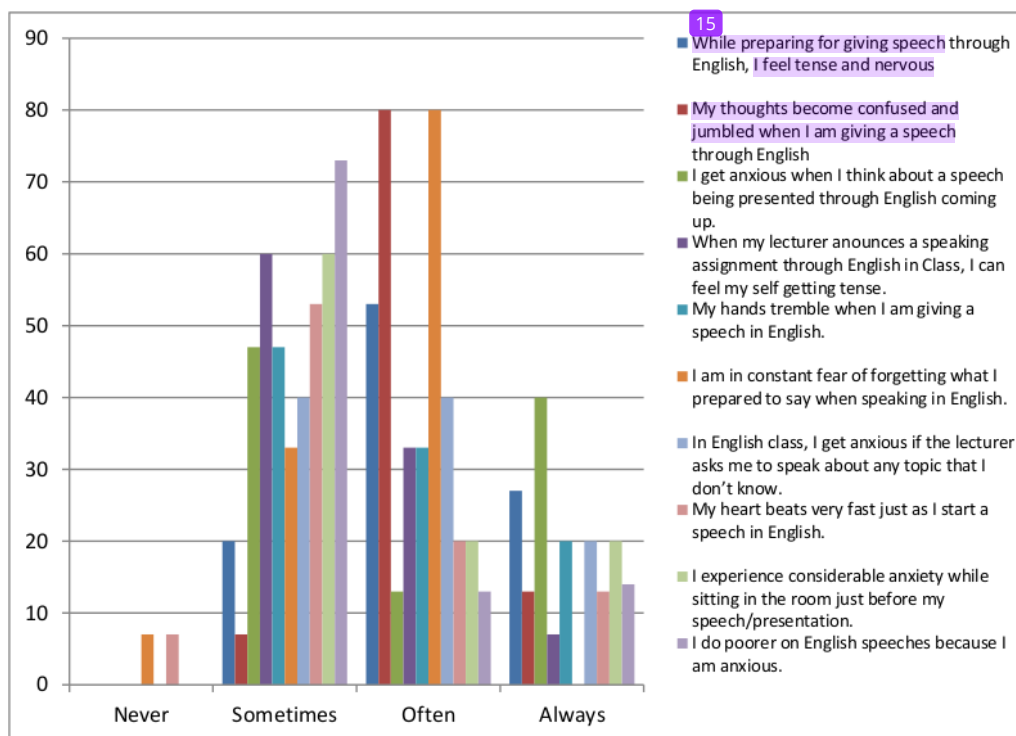
### **FINDING AND DISCUSSION**

The results are diferenciated into three parts: Students' fear in public speaking, the reason of existng of fear in public speaking, and the strategies recomended to be applied to overcome the problems of fear in public speaking.

#### **1. Students' Fear in Public Speaking**

Concerning to the first problem of the research, the result showed that most of students feel fear of public speaking. The result of questionnaire are displayed in the following table 1.1.

**Table 1.1 Students' Fear in Public Speaking**

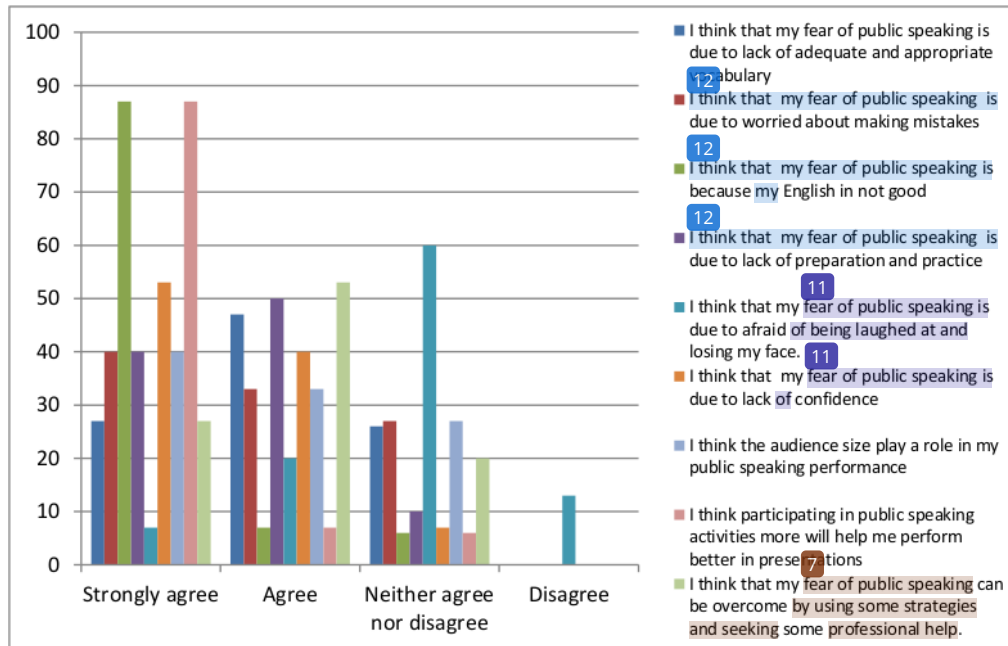


The findings indicate that the majority of respondents admitted that they are all experienced fear to speak in front of others. The answers to the questions whether the students feel anxious, nervous, getting tense, and jumbled when they speak in front of audiences or not was that almost all of them surveyed feared giving speech through English. Furthermore, most of them admitted that their heart beats very fast and their hands tremble just as they start a speech in English. More than 90% surveyed experienced those physical conditions when they speak in front of public. In short, the majority of them were found to be afraid of public speaking. In line with McCains' (2012) research results that showed that, nearly 90% of people reported feeling shy or uncomfortable speaking in front of others.

## 2. Causes of Students' Fear in Public Speaking

The responses of respondents regarding the causes of their fear of public speaking can be seen in the following table 2.1

**Table 2.1 Causes of Students' Fear in Public Speaking**



The table 2.1 revealed that there are many reason behind the students' fear in public speaking. The answer to the first question whether the students thought their fear of public speaking is due to lack of adequate and appropriate vocabulary was that 27% of students strongly agree, 47% of them agree, while 26% of the neither agree or disagree. None of students disagree with it.

The answer to the second question whether the students thought their fear of public speaking is due to worried about making mistakes was that 40% of students strongly agree, 33% agree, and the rest of 27% neither agree nor disagree. While for the third question whether the students thought that their fear of public speaking is because their English in not good, it can be seen that 87% of them strongly agree, and 7% agree, while 6% of them neither agree nor disagree.

Dealing with the forth question whether the students thought that their fear of public speaking is due to lack of preparation and practice was that 40% of them strongly agree, and 50% of the agree, while 10% neither agree nor disagree. Then, concerning the fifth question whether the students thought their fear of public speaking is due to afraid of being laughed at and losing their face, 7% of them strongly agree, 20% of them agree, and 60% of them neither agree nor disagree. Whereas, 13% of students disagree with the item.

Furthermore, almost all respondents thought that students' fear of public speaking is due to lack of confidence. It seen from the table that 53% of them strongly agree, 40% agree, and 7% neither agree nor disagree with the item number six. Respondents also thought that the audience size play a role in their

public speaking performance, as 40 % of them strongly agree, 33% of them agree, and 27% of them neither agree nor disagree with the item number seven.

Concerning to the way out from the problems of fear of public speaking, the respondents thought that participating in public speaking activities more would help them perform better in presentations as 87% of them strongly agree, 7% of them agree, and 6% of them neither agree nor disagree with the item number eight. In addition, most respondents thought that their fear of public speaking can be overcome by using some strategies and seeking some professional help. It can be seen from the answer of the ninth question that 27% of them strongly agree, 53% agree, and 20% of them neither agree nor disagree with the item.

### 3. Recommended strategies to overcome the problems of fear in public speaking.

The research results show that the problems of fear in public speaking can be overcome by some strategies. The following techniques can be applied by students to overcome public speaking fear.

1. Believe that being anxious is natural.
2. Watch some videos of good speech and use them as references to learn about different types of body language like gesture, postures and facial expressions to match with the various emotions and messages.
3. Make better preparation and understanding the topic to eliminate worry about making mistakes in public speaking.
4. Practice to speak in front of others for several times, starting from a small number of people then in the next opportunity with greater number of audiences.
5. Make anticipation to the audiences' responses so that it could be more confident to answer.
6. Make record of speech and watch it several times for self evaluation, and make learning improvements.
7. Participate actively in some public speaking events to make more comfortable with many different speaking environments that will ultimately reduce the level of fear in public speaking.

### CONCLUSION

Based on the result of study, it can be concluded that significant number of respondents has indicated that they experience fear in public speaking for a wide range of reasons which made them to be anxious, confused, trembling, feel very tense, make their heart beat fast, make them nervous, make them forget what they prepared to say and make them perform poorer when delivering speech in front of audiences. Furthermore, students have identified that they found great difficulty in English public speaking for some reasons such as lack of adequate and appropriate vocabulary, worried about making mistakes, low English proficiency, lack of preparation and practice, afraid of being laughed at and losing



their face, the audience size, and lack of confidence. To cope with the problems, the students believe that the fear of public speaking can be overcome by using some strategies and also some professional helps.

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