

Exploring the Level and Primary Causes of Speaking Anxiety in Thesis Seminar Among EFL Students

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Abstract

Speaking anxiety in this research was interpreted as a feeling of nervousness when EFL students were speaking English while delivering the material in the thesis seminar. The purposes of this study were (1) to find out the levels of speaking anxiety in thesis seminars and (2) to find out the primary factors that influence speaking anxiety in thesis seminar among EFL students of English Department at Mulawarman University. The design of this study was the quantitative method. This study dealt with a descriptive quantitative approach. In this case, the researcher took 56 students; 36 students in the academic year 2015 and 20 students in the academic year 2016 from English Department at Mulawarman University as the sample to investigate the level and primary causes of EFL students' public speaking anxiety in thesis seminar. In this study, the quantitative data from the result of the adapted Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) questionnaire proposed by Yakhong and Usaha (2012) was analyzed by descriptive statistic SPSS 26. The results of SPSS 26 indicated that there were 62.8% of students experienced a medium level of public speaking anxiety in the thesis seminar. Furthermore, it was found that lecturers' or contributors' characteristics (LCC) became the primary factor that contributed to influence speaking anxiety in thesis seminar.

Keywords: Speaking, Anxiety Level, Factors Influencing Anxiety, Thesis Seminar

1. Introduction

Performing public speech in front of an audience may be a bit difficult skill for some students as they confront anxiety since it has major factors such as psychological aspects (Anandari, 2015). Therefore, this anxiety has become one of the barriers for students to deliver and explain the ideas on their own. Sutker and Adam (2001) said that anxiety is the psychological aspect that has been formed from the nervous system, emotive, and attitude component. It is a shocking feeling to be afraid of something. The core meaning of anxiety is to cause fear, uneasiness, and dread in a stressful condition. It makes students difficult to overcome their anxiety because it consumes one of their courage, especially when it becomes overwhelming. This may cause failure aspect on speaking skill due to the stressful condition that students get. As Brown (2007) stated that speaking skill is one of the difficult skills to be acquired rather than other three skills: writing, reading, listening. In addition, speaking in a foreign language is considered by students as the most anxious language-producing skill in the learning experience and cited that it is the hardest skill to be learned (Horwitz et al. 1986). It can be concluded that anxiety has a big influence on their success or failure in speaking skills.

Some factors can affect students' anxiety to have the willingness to participate in learning activities, especially in speaking English. Students that have a higher level of anxiety, will take less participation in activities that need speaking ability because they are likely to be afraid of making mistakes rather than taking a risk to speak (Saville-Toirke, 2006). Consequently, the students tend to underrate their speaking ability since

they focus more on their failure to pronounce the word correctly or to use grammar rather than their successes in EFL class. This will cause anxiety in their future. In addition, Tseng (2012) stated that four main factors contribute to affect students' anxiety: self-perception, cultural differences, presentation in the classroom, and fear of making mistakes. Based on the theories above, it can be concluded that anxiety is an accidental performance that occurs when a speaker has low self-esteem.

In English Department, students are expected to be able to explain and deliver their materials in front of the audience, especially in thesis seminars. Three years of studying on campus is a long time, but the capability of each student to speak English fluently while presenting in a thesis seminar is different. They will face many factors that influence their ability in speaking English. This will make students tend to be anxious to deliver their presentations in thesis seminar. To pass the thesis seminar, students need to prepare and understand how to explain the topic to the examiners and audience.

Those reasons made the researcher wanted to find out the level of students' speaking anxiety and the main factor that influences their speaking anxiety in thesis seminar. Measuring the level of speaking anxiety was highly recommended to know how the degree of students speaking anxiety and the main factors which contribute to affecting their performance in thesis seminar. Hence, this current study intended to answer the following research questions.

1. What are the levels of speaking anxiety in thesis seminar experienced by EFL students of English Department at Mulawarman University?
2. What are the primary factors that influence speaking anxiety in thesis seminar among EFL Students of the English Department at Mulawarman University?

2. Literature Review

The data of this research were presented in the form of numbers and descriptions. As a result, the quantitative descriptive method was applied in this study. Fraenkel et al. (2012) described that quantitative research as a method to solve the social problem that explains the phenomenon by gathering data based on numerical from applying mathematical design. The quantitative data in this research was collected through an adapted questionnaire from Yaikhong and Usaha (2012). The questionnaire was used to measure the level and primary causes of speaking anxiety in thesis seminar among EFL students at English Department at Mulawarman University.

A recommended minimum number of subjects is 100 for a descriptive study. However, the following general rule to help in determining sample size that had been made by Gay et al. (2012) stated that for smaller populations if the number is around 100 or fewer, sampling all the entire population. Since the researcher needed to try out the instruments, 20 students from the population were taken as the test for validity and reliability for the questionnaire. 20 students are enough to be subject to testing validity and reliability (Frankel et al, 2012). As a result, 56 students were taken as the sample in this study.

The researcher adapted the questionnaire which is consisted of 20 items. Out of 20 items, 4 are apprehension of verbal communication, 4 are test anxiety, 4 are fear of negative evaluation, 4 are lecturers' or contributors' characteristics, and 4 are comfort in speaking English. Every item was remarked on a five-point Likert Scale. The students were asked to indicate on a given scale from 1 to 5 how they felt about speaking English in the thesis seminar. (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Undecided, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree).

The scoring interval was cited in PSCAS (Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale) by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) to examine the level of anxiety

Table 3.7 PSCAS Scoring Interval

Contexts	Distributors
>68	High anxiety
50-68	Medium anxiety
<50	Low Anxiety

3.Methods

Findings of EFL Students' Speaking Anxiety Level in Thesis Seminar

To find out the levels of speaking anxiety in thesis seminar experienced by EFL students of English Department at Mulawarman University. The adapted questionnaire was used. The adapted PSCAS questionnaire's results reflected from 56 samples of English Department students in the academic year 2015 and 2016. The researcher used 20 valid items-questionnaire on five Likert scales such as strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, and strongly agree. The point was 1,2,3,4, and 5.

Table 4.1 The Findings of Students' Speaking Anxiety Level

Minimum Score	40
Maximum Score	83
Mean	64.88
Std. Deviation	9.06955

From all the students' speaking anxiety questionnaire results, the researcher found that the minimum score was 40 and the maximum score was 83. The mean score was 64.88, which fell in the category of "medium Level" speaking anxiety. The standard deviation was 9.06955.

The result showed that from 56 students, there were 3 students (5.36%) who had low speaking anxiety levels, 35 (62.5%) students who had medium speaking anxiety levels, and 18 (32.14%) who had high speaking anxiety level. With that being said, the percentage of students whose speaking anxiety level was categorized as a medium was also the most dominant of all with 35 out of 56 students.

In conclusion, to answer the first research question which to find out the levels of speaking anxiety in thesis seminar, the result of this study indicated that English Department students in the academic year 2015 and 2016 who had passed their thesis seminar showed that they had a medium level of speaking anxiety. With a mean score of 64.8, it fell into the PSCAS interval category of 50-68. From 56 students, 35 of them were the dominant result who scored as a medium level of speaking anxiety.

Findings of the Primary Factors Influencing EFL Students' Speaking Anxiety in Thesis Seminar

To answer the second research question, the researcher investigated the factors that influence speaking anxiety in thesis seminar among English Department students at Mulawarman University in the academic year 2015 and 2016 by calculating and combining

the percentage of “strongly agree (SA)” and “agree (A) to get the total score of agreement of the items in adapted PSCAS questionnaire.

Communication Apprehension Factor

Table 4.2 Frequencies and Percentages of Communication Apprehension (CA)

No	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	A+SA
5	I start to panic in thesis seminar when I have to speak English without a preparation in advance						
	F	0	11	10	26	9	35
	%	0	19.6	17.9	46.4	16.1	62.5
20	In thesis seminar, I can get so nervous I forget things I know						
	F	2	16	6	25	7	32
	%	3.6	28.6	10.7	44.6	12.5	57.1
10	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English in a thesis seminar						
	F	0	23	10	18	5	23
	%	0	41.1	17.9	32.1	8.9	41
16	I dislike using my voice and body expressively while I am speaking English in a thesis seminar						
	F	1	34	7	14	0	14
	%	1.18	60.7	12.5	25	0	25
Average A+SA (%)							26

According to the table above, the result from the CA factor indicated that the students experienced communication apprehension with a mean frequency of 26 % of the responses choosing items 5, 20, 10, and 16 in which those were classified into communication apprehension factor. This CA factor was placed in the fourth rank from the other five factors. The highest percentage among the items is showed with a score of 62.5% (item 5), which stated that most students agreed that they start to feel panicked in thesis seminar when they were going to speak English without preparation in advance. Following this, 57.1% of the students agreed that in the thesis seminar, they can get so nervous when they forget things they know (item 20). Furthermore, 41% of students agreed that they get nervous and confused when they are speaking English (item 10). Lastly, 25% of students dislike using their voice and body expressively while speaking English in thesis seminar (item 16).

In conclusion, this study revealed that the communication apprehension factor contributed (CA) around 26% as the fourth rank factor. Item 5 has the highest percentage as speaking anxiety factor in thesis seminar. This showed that most of the students started to be panic while having no preparation to deliver their thesis in the seminar.

Test Anxiety Factor

Table 4.3 Frequencies and Percentages of Test Anxiety (TA)

No	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	A+SA
15	I am afraid that I will fail my thesis seminar						
	F	2	14	5	25	10	35
	%	3.6	25	8.9	44.6	17.9	62.5
11	Even if I am very well prepared, I feel anxious about speaking English in thesis seminar						
	F	1	14	7	29	5	34
	%	1.8	25	12.5	51.8	8.9	60.7
6	I get nervous when the advisors or examiners ask me to explain in English which I have prepared in advance						
	F	0	22	9	22	3	25
	%	0	39.3	16.1	39.3	5.4	44.7
1	I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English in thesis seminar						
	F	0	20	12	24	0	24
	%	0	35.7	21.4	42.9	0	42.9
Average A+SA (%)							29.5

In test anxiety factor as the second rank in contributing as the cause of speaking anxiety, table 4.3 demonstrated that 29.5% of students experienced test anxiety in thesis seminar, and they agreed that the most causes of anxiety are derived when they had the feeling if they will fail in thesis seminar (see item 15). Furthermore, the response on item 11 showed that 60.7% of students felt anxious about speaking English, even if they are well prepared. Moreover, the table showed that 44.7% of students felt nervous when the advisors or examiners asked them to explain something, even they already prepared well (item 6). Closely related to this, item 1 showed that 42.9% of students never felt quite sure of themselves while speaking English in the thesis seminar.

Considering these results, it can be said that those factors are linked to their self-confidence. Item 15, 11, 6, and 1 showed that even though they had prepared in advance or well prepared before the thesis seminar, they still experience a considerable level of anxiety. Related to this, 35 believed that they were afraid if they failed their thesis seminar.

Fear of Negative Evaluation Factor

Table 4.4 Frequencies and Percentages of Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

No	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	A+SA
12	It embarrasses me when I cannot answer the question correctly from examiners and the audience						
	F	2	4	8	31	11	42
	%	3.6	7.1	14.3	55.4	19.6	75
7	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called by the moderator						
	F	0	7	14	28	7	35
	%	0	12.5	25	50	12.5	62.5
17	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and freeze while I am speaking English in the thesis seminar						
	F	0	20	12	21	3	24
	%	0	35.7	21.4	37.5	5.4	42.9%
2	I am afraid that other audience will laugh at me while I am speaking English in thesis seminar						
	F	5	34	3	11	3	14
	%	8.9	60.7	5.4	19.6	5.4	25
Average A+SA (%)							28.75

Table 4.4 displayed that the average frequency of fear of negative evaluation (FNE) experienced among English Department students in thesis seminar was 28.75%. As a result, this factor was placed in third place of speaking anxiety factor in thesis seminar. By investigating the items included in this particular factor, the data showed that 75% of students felt the embarrassing experience while could not answer the questions correctly (item 12). It is the highest percentage of an anxiety-influencing factor in FNE. Following this, 62.5% of students agreed that they felt their hearts pounding while called by the moderator (item 7). From these results, it can be described that the students suffer from rapid heartbeat when they were waiting for their turn to present their thesis in the seminar. Next, 25% of students responded that they were afraid if the audience would laugh at them while explaining their thesis (item 2).

It can be concluded that the fear of making mistakes while performing their thesis seminars such as forgetting things, high heart pounding so that they made too many spaces or unnecessary fillers. The feeling of tension and frenzy while speaking English and the thought of embarrassment when someone would laugh at them contributed a lower role to this factor. With this, the FNE factor was ranked in third place with a percentage of 28.75%.

Lecturers` or Contributors` Characteristics

Table 4.5 Frequencies and percentages of Lecturers` or Contributors` Characteristics (LCC)

No	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	A+SA
13	I am afraid my advisors will be disappointed						
	F	0	8	3	31	14	45
	%	0	14.3	5.4	55.4	25	80.4
3	I feel intimidated by examiners						
	F	2	16	9	23	6	29
	%	3.6	28.6	16.1	41.1	10.7	51.8
8	I am confused with the examiners' arguments						
	F	2	13	14	26	1	27
	%	3.6	23.2	25	46.4	1.8	48.2
18	My advisors do not encourage me when I feel anxious during a thesis seminar						
	F	2	13	14	25	2	27
	%	3.6	23.2	25	44.6	3.6	48.2
Average A+SA (%)							32

According to table 4.5, the average percentage of lecturers' or contributors' characteristics (LCC) experienced among English Department students in thesis seminar was 32%. As the highest factor that influenced speaking anxiety in the thesis seminar, item 13 showed among 80.4% of students believed if they were afraid that they could not fulfill advisors' expectations. Thus, 51.8% of students also had fears about the characteristic of the examiners (item 3). This showed that students hindered their speaking ability after the intimidation from the examiners. However, 48.2% of students believed that they could not understand the argument from examiners due to the lack of students' ability to comprehend these (item 8). Closely to this for item 18, 48.2% of students agreed that their advisors seemed careless while students had anxiety during speaking in thesis seminar.

According to this result, it can be concluded that lecturers' or contributors' characteristics (LCC) were the highest factor. It positioned as the first place to contribute as the primary factor that affected students speaking anxiety in thesis seminar with the total percentage around 32%. From the other items, item 13 showed a significant role to contribute the LCC factor as the primary factor to influence speaking anxiety in the thesis seminar.

Comfort in Speaking English Factor

Table 4.6 Frequencies and Percentages of Comfort in Speaking English (CNE)

No	Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	A+SA
19	I cannot answer the questions from the audience with confidence during thesis seminar						
	F	0	17	10	28	1	29
	%	0	30.4	17.9	50	1.8	51.8
14	I do not feel relaxed while I am presenting my thesis						
	F	0	17	14	24	1	25
	%	0	30.4	25	42.9	1.8	44.7
9	I have fear of speaking English in thesis seminar						
	F	2	21	14	15	4	19
	%	3.6	37.5	25	26.8	7.1	33.9
4	I do not feel confident while I am speaking English in thesis seminar						
	F	0	17	20	15	4	19
	%	0	30.4	35.7	26.8	7.1	33.9
Average A+SA (%)							23

The last factor is related to students' perspectives toward English speaking activity in thesis seminar. Table 4.6 showed that the average frequency percentage of the comfort in speaking English is 23% among students who agreed with items in this factor. This frequency demonstrated that less than half of the students' sample experienced uncomfot in speaking English. It can be viewed from the data on item 14 that around 44.7% did not feel relaxed

during the presentation of their thesis, 33.9% of students felt frightening during speaking English in the thesis seminar (item 9), and only 33.9% of students did not feel confident while speaking English in thesis seminar (item 4). However, the data on item 19 appeared that 51,8% of students faced that they could not answer the question with confidence in thesis seminar. It represented that almost half of the sample still had problems with their confidence in speaking English during the thesis seminar.

To conclude this result, the comfort in speaking English factor during thesis seminar had shown that students' level of confidence still can be considered with a good point. It is supported by the amount the sample, only less than half of students felt low confidence during speaking English with a percentage of 23%. It made CNE factor placed in the last place of speaking anxiety factor in thesis seminar.

In conclusion, these results were used to answer the second research question which aimed to find out the primary factors that influence speaking anxiety in thesis seminar among EFL students of English Department. The findings showed that from five speaking anxiety factors, lecturers' and contributors' characteristics (LCC) ranked as the primary factors that influenced speaking anxiety. As the primary factor, the LCC factor contributed with 32% from the other factors.

Based on the result of the study above, the researcher gave some interpretations. From the result of the PSCAS questionnaire, it was shown that the mean score of English Department students was 64.8. It was indicated that the students in a medium level of speaking anxiety. As Rachmawati and Jurianto (2020) stated that students who experienced moderate anxiety levels are caused by less confidence and low language proficiency in a certain condition. It means that students who have an anxious feeling about confidence to speak English, tend to change it and try to explain with another language as the result of negative feeling and nervous if their statements could not fulfill and reach the audience.

4. Result

Moreover, from the result of the PSCAS questionnaire, the researcher found some factors influencing students' speaking anxiety in thesis seminar. The factors were communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety (TA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE), lecturers' and contributors' characteristics (LCC), and comfort in speaking English (CNE).

The first rank was lecturers' and contributors' characteristics factor (LCC). The result showed that this factor was the highest factor that influenced students speaking anxiety in thesis seminars with the average percentage was 32%. As Zia and Norrihan (2015) mentioned that creating a supportive and encouraging environment for students was needed to elevate students' self-confidence and then lead them to improve their speaking performance.

The second rank was test anxiety factor (TA). This study revealed that the test anxiety factor as the cause of students speaking anxiety with an average frequency of 29.5%. The highest percentage among the items of test anxiety was item 15 which stated that they are afraid that they will fail their thesis seminar. Considering this result, it could be said that the factor was linked to their self-confidence. Leong and Ahmadi (2017) argued that students who lack self-confidence would be afraid of making mistakes and feeling humiliated.

The third rank was fear of negative evaluation factor (FNE). This factor influenced speaking anxiety in thesis seminar with an average percentage was 28.75%. Item 17 stated that certain parts of their body felt very tense and freeze while they were speaking English in the thesis seminar. As Gibson (1992) argued that public speaking anxiety is manifested in various ways such as blood pressure, trembled hands, and avoiding eye contact with the audience.

The fourth rank was communication apprehension factor (CA). The result showed that the communication apprehension factor had an average frequency of 26%. The highest percentage among the items of communication apprehension (CA) was item 5 which stated that they start to panic in thesis seminar when they have to speak English without preparation in advance. As Mak (2011) stated that speaking in front of people without preparation was an anxiety-influencing factor.

The fifth factor was comfort in speaking English (CNE). From the result of the questionnaire, it was revealed that comfort in speaking English (CNE) was in the last rank of factor influencing students speaking anxiety in thesis seminar with an average percentage was 23%. The highest percentage among the items of comfort in speaking English (CNE) was item 19 which stated that they could not answer the questions from the audience with confidence. Toubout, Hock, and Binti Atan Abdullah (2018) stated that self-confidence is one of the personal factors that exceedingly associate with anxiety.

On the other side, the researcher found similarities and difference of the previous studies with this study. The similarity between this study and Rachmawati and Jurianto (2020) is: their research showed that students got medium speaking anxiety level. Medium speaking anxiety based on their result means that students were influenced by their own confidence to share their idea to the public. It was caused from comfort in speaking English factor (CNE). It was similar with this study which most students who had their thesis seminar done fell into the medium category. Meanwhile, this study found that the primary factor that influenced students' speaking anxiety in thesis seminar was lecturers' and contributors' characteristics factor (LCC). This factor influenced speaking anxiety through examiners and advisors' characteristic. It means that students were afraid if they could not fulfill their expectations. From this factor students had not prepared well during making the research proposal. They tend to have lack time of consulting with their advisors. It caused them to feel confused and worry to face the thesis seminar.

5. Discussion

Based on the findings and the discussions which have been explained in chapter IV, the researcher drew some conclusion below that related to the problems of the studies. This current study concluded that EFL students at the English Department academic year 2015 and 2016 in Mulawarman University experienced a medium level of speaking anxiety in thesis seminar. From the result of the adapted PSCAS questionnaire proposed by Yaikhong and Usaha (2012) in which is initially used to examine students' level of anxiety, the mean score was 64.88 which fell in the category "medium". From a total of 56 sample students who had passed their thesis seminar, there were 3 students (5.36%) who scored low speaking anxiety level, 35 (62.5%) students who scored medium speaking anxiety level, and 18 (32.14%) who scored high speaking anxiety level. The minimum level of students' speaking anxiety in thesis seminar was 40 and the maximum score was 83.

From the five components of factor analysis, the researcher related these as the causes of speaking anxiety in the thesis seminar. The findings showed that from five speaking anxiety factors, lecturers' and contributors' characteristics (LCC) ranked as the primary factors or the first factors that influencing speaking anxiety. It was calculated that the percentage of LCC was 32% of students who agreed with the items on this factor. Next, the test anxiety factor (TA) was ranked in second place with an average percentage of 29.5% of students who responded with the items. In the third place, there was fear of negative evaluation factor (FNE) with the percentage of 28.75% as the influencing anxiety factor. Following this, the communication apprehension factor (CA) was positioned in the fourth rank with a percentage of 26% students agreeing with the items. Lastly, in the factor of comfort in speaking English (CNE) which was placed in the fifth rank, there was 23% of students agreed that they did not feel comfortable speaking English in the thesis seminar. The following suggestions are specially addressed to English lecturers, EFL students, and future researchers:

1. For English lecturers, this study provided references for lecturers to examine their students' speaking ability, especially during the academic presentation. By knowing this issue, the researcher hopes that lecturers will be able to create the most suitable learning materials so that it meets students' ability and also to improve their speaking that can be hindered by anxiety. The researcher also hopes that the lecturers need to build an environment which the English-speaking activity is an obligation for students during teaching and learning in the class.
2. For EFL Students in any university, the result of this research can be used as a reference in understanding the students' weakness in speaking English during thesis seminar. They are hoped to train their speaking ability for academic purposes. Therefore, preparing some alternative strategies to solve the problems that occur while speaking in the thesis seminar so that they can perform better. The researcher also hopes that for them to be able to speak English in daily conversation during in the class or outside the class.
3. Since this study used only the quantitative method, future researchers are expected to analyses more deeply and use a different method in their research. The next researcher also can add the other factors as the other variable that can affect speaking anxiety. The next researcher also can add more complete instruments to get a better result. To help the other students that will face the thesis seminar, next researchers are hoped to conduct a study related to the strategies that can help EFL students to overcome their speaking anxiety in the thesis seminar.

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