

Investigating Levels, Factors, And Coping Strategies for Speaking Anxiety

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Abstract: *Malaysian undergraduates often face challenges in English proficiency despite learning the language from primary school. Feeling worried or anxious in speaking could contribute to the deficiency. Thus, this study explored the levels and factors of speaking anxiety in Diploma engineering students of UiTM Johor from Pasir Gudang Campus. In addition, this study investigated their strategies to cope with speaking anxiety in ESL classrooms. Thus, this descriptive survey method study involved 50 technical students as subjects, and the data was collected using the researcher's self-administered survey known as the Level, Factors, Coping Strategies of Speaking Anxiety Survey (LFCSAS). The quantitative data were analysed using mean and percentage. The findings showed that most of the participants experienced moderate levels of speaking anxiety. Moreover, this study showed that the factor of test anxiety is the highest factor that contributes to English speaking anxiety. To reduce nervousness, students applied various coping strategies and it is considered that peer-seeking strategies enhance their positivity and confidence in speaking English.*

Keywords: English Speaking Anxiety, Engineering Students, Levels, Factors, Coping Strategies

1. Introduction

English is a global and universal language as it is crucial for communication and modernisation. In Malaysia, English is considered a second language and is used in education and the workforce. Hence, proficiency in the language is a valuable asset for students as a good command of the language is useful for acquiring knowledge and engaging with the real world. However, speaking anxiety is a common issue among Malaysian students who are learning English as a second language (ESL) in the classroom. Research has indicated that Malaysian undergraduates frequently feel anxious when speaking in English, which might hinder their language proficiency and academic performance. Miskam and Saidalvi (2019) mentioned that most Malaysian graduates still face difficulties in forming sentences or speaking in English despite the exposure from school. This study focuses on engineering students as they have challenges in English communication due to their technical learning environment. This issue can be attributed to various factors that hinder the ability to speak the language. To address this issue, it is important to explore the levels of speaking anxiety experienced by Malaysian ESL

students and the factors behind it would provide valuable insights for developing effective coping strategies.

2. Problem Statement

Zuki et al. (2022) found that engineering students in Malaysia encounter difficulties in grammar utilisation, vocabulary assimilation, and pronunciation. Due to their technical learning environment, it is difficult for them to enhance their language skills and it leads to anxiety in the classroom. Thus, anxiousness remains a complex subject that requires additional attention and research efforts. This issue is also seen as a significant problem in ESL classrooms, with a considerable number of students still encountering it. The phenomenon of speaking anxiety has gathered a large body of studies that looked at the levels and factors of speaking anxiety (Gebi, M. (2017); Sabbah, S. S. (2018); Abbasi et al., (2020); Hadi et al., (2021); Sri et al., (2021)). Nevertheless, inadequate study was discovered that put their exploration of speaking anxiety among engineering students (Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018). This research aims to examine the elements that contribute to speaking anxiety and the extent to which it affects students' speaking competence during oral presentations as well as coping mechanisms to overcome speaking anxiety.

3. Research Objectives and Research Questions

This study aims to explore the extent and major factors of speaking anxiety in ESL classrooms. Additionally, it also discovers the coping strategies utilised by learners to overcome speaking anxiety. Precisely, this study is done to answer the following questions;

- How do learners observe their levels and factors of speaking anxiety?
- How do learners observe their coping strategies for speaking anxiety?

4. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 depicts the theoretical structure of this study. The fear of public speaking arises from multiple sources. Rahmat (2019) categorises the fear of speaking as either trait anxiety or state anxiety. Trait anxiety pertains to the inherent qualities of individuals that make them prone to experiencing stress when communicating in the desired language. State anxiety can arise from the external conditions surrounding the learners. It might also arise from feeling apprehensive about the assessment. Thus, various contributing factors could lead to speaking anxiety and need further exploration.

A previous research by Lin et al. (2020) on speaking anxiety was conducted in Sarawak, Malaysia. They investigated the levels of anxiety experienced by undergraduate students in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms when speaking. The study assessed four elements that impact students' levels of anxiety when speaking English: communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of unfavorable assessment, and comfort in using English. The findings revealed that both male and female students had anxiety while engaging in speaking activities, particularly when undertaking chores in isolation. In addition, the students cited other factors contributing to their worry, including their restricted language competence and the apprehension of making errors. Following the previous research, this study is done to investigate (a) the levels and factors for speaking anxiety. It is also done to explore the coping strategies of learners who have speech anxiety.

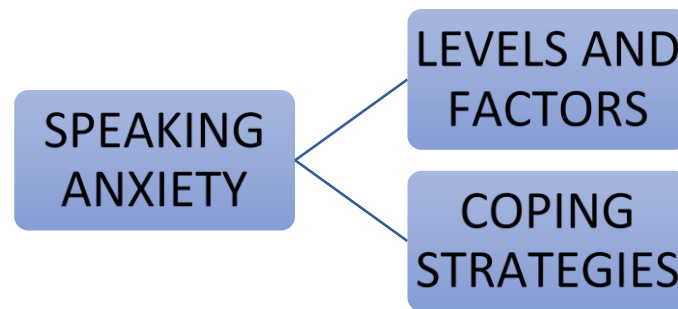


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework -Speaking Anxiety: Levels, Factors, and Coping Strategies

5. Methodology

This quantitative study is done to explore the levels, factors, and coping strategies of speaking anxiety among technical engineering students. A purposive sample of 50 participants responded to the survey. The instrument used is a 5 Likert-scale survey rooted from Balemir (2009), Horwitz et al., (1986), and Kondo (2002) to reveal the variables in table 1 below. The survey has 3 sections. Section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has 12 items on Levels and Factors for speaking anxiety. Section C has 8 items on coping strategies of speaking anxiety. A descriptive statistic was used to analysed the data in this study.

Table 1: Distribution of Items in the Survey

Section	Categories for Speaking Anxiety	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha
B	LEVELS AND FACTORS	12	.921
C	COPING STRATEGIES	8	.701
		20	.822

In this study, the LFCSAS served as the main instrument in the quantitative data collection. The newly developed set of questionnaire Table 1 also shows the external reliability of the survey. The analysis shows a Cronbach alpha of .921 for section B, a Cronbach alpha of .701 for section C, and a total Cronbach alpha of .822 for all 20 items. This reveals the reliability of the instrument used. Further analysis using SPSS is done to present findings to answer the research questions for this study.

6. Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 2: Percentage for Gender

1	Male	56%
2	Female	44%

Table 2 illustrates the percentage of participants involved in this study. It comprised of 50 Diploma Engineering students in UiTM enrolling in the Integrated Language Skills course (ELC 231) and took a speaking test in Week 11, which enquired to do an oral presentation. Most of the respondents were male which is 56% and followed by female with 44% who took the oral test and then answered the LFCSAS survey. The participants were selected using purposive sampling as all of them were in their third semester and registered for an English course.

Table 3: Percentage for Disciplines

1	Mechanical	30%
2	Civil	44%
3	Chemical	22%
4	Electrical	4%

According to the data in Table 3, the sample consisted of 30% from Mechanical engineering, 44% from civil engineering, 22% from chemical engineering, and 4% from electrical engineering. The highest percentage is from civil engineering, followed by mechanical and chemical engineering. Meanwhile, Electrical engineering has the lowest rate of the disciplines. The study aimed to obtain useful insights from the participants who had relevant experiences to share and address the issue of speaking anxiety. The participants from different engineering disciplines helped to capture a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

Findings for Levels and Factors

This section presents data to answer research question 1- How do learners perceive their levels and factors of speaking anxiety? The descriptive analysis is presented as follows:

Descriptive Analysis of the Level of Speaking Anxiety

Table 4 shows the overall mean score for twelve items in LFCSAS, which centre on the level of speaking anxiety. In this scale, participants with average responses ranging from 1.00 to 2.49 were categorised as slightly anxious, those with scores between 2.50 and 3.49 were categorised as moderately anxious, and those with scores between 3.50 and 5.00 were categorised as highly anxious.

Table 4: Mean for Levels and Factors of Speaking Anxiety

Statements	Mean
Q1I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my second language class.	3
Q2I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	2.9
Q3It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in a second language.	3.4
Q4I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	2.7
Q5It embarrasses me to answer voluntarily in my language class.	3.1
Q6During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	3.6
Q7I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	2.1
Q8In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	2.8
Q9I worry about the consequences of failing my second language class.	2.4
Q10 The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	3.9
Q11I feel anxious about speaking English even I prepared for the contents.	2.9
Q12I feel fear of giving a wrong answer while answering questions in English class.	2.8

Based on the table above, the mean ranges from 2.1 to 3.9. The highest mean score is for item Q10; 'The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get' which is 3.9 and the lowest score is 2.1 for item Q7; 'I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am'. The overall mean score is 2.96 which indicates that the respondents have a moderate level of speaking anxiety.

Descriptive Analysis of the Factors of Speaking Anxiety

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis of the Factors of Speaking Anxiety

Factors of Speaking Anxiety	Items	Mean
Communication Apprehension	1,2,3,4,5	3.00
Fear of Negative Evaluation	6,7,8	2.83
Test Anxiety	9,10	3.10
Fear of making mistakes	11,12	2.78

According to the table above, it can be seen that test anxiety has the highest mean ($M=3.10$) followed by communication apprehension ($M=3.00$), fear of negative evaluation ($M=2.83$), and fear of making mistakes ($M=2.78$). Therefore, Test Anxiety is the dominant factor that contributes to English-speaking anxiety among the participants. Similarly, this finding is consistent with findings from a study by Hashim and Zamri (2023) with test anxiety recorded as a major contributor to speaking anxiety.

Findings for Coping Strategies

This section presents data to answer research question 2- How do learners perceive their coping strategies for speaking anxiety?

Table 6: Mean for Coping Strategies of Speaking Anxiety

Statements	Mean
Q13I try to make a habit of studying English frequently.	2.3
Q14I try to relax when I am in my English class.	2.1
Q15I always think positively that I am able to speak English in the classroom.	2
Q16I tell myself that others must also be anxious.	2.4
Q17I tell myself that I am OK when I feel anxious in my English class.	2.4
Q18I prepare myself better.	1.9
Q19I try to guess the meaning of difficult sentences.	2
Q20I try to put up with the situation when I am nervous.	1.9

The results show the overall mean of each item for coping strategies for speaking anxiety. Items Q16 and Q17 shared the same mean of 2.4 and indicated as the highest distribution. Item Q16 reflects that students moderately comfort themselves by acknowledging others' anxiety. Meanwhile, item Q17 suggest that self-soothing helps when they feel anxious. The data are simplified into Table 7 below to find the coping strategies used by the respondents.

Table 7: Coping Strategies for Speaking Anxiety

Coping Strategies for Speaking Anxiety	Items	Mean
Preparation	13,18	2.1
Relaxation	14	2.1
Positive Thinking	15,17,19	2.2
Peer Seeking	16	2.4
Resignation	20	1.9

As shown in the table above, the coping strategies with the highest mean are peer seeking ($M=2.4$), followed by positive thinking ($M=2.2$), relaxation ($M=2.1$), preparation ($M=2.1$), and resignation ($M=1.9$). The findings prove that the participants used all five strategies to alleviate speaking anxiety in the ESL classroom. Item 16; 'I tell myself that others must also be anxious'

contributed to the highest average showing that the peer seeking strategies managed to help participants to feel calm. Qin and Poopatwiboon (2023) suggest that employing behavioural strategies, such as preparation and seeking assistance from peers, can effectively reduce speaking anxiety. They held the belief that this approach increased pupils' optimism and self-confidence in English communication. However, resignation strategies with a lower mean of 1.9 suggest that participants have an effort to continue with the task rather than evading the situation.

7. Conclusion

The results of this study discovered that students had moderate levels of anxiety due to test anxiety. The data indicates that individual speaking performance failure is attributed to test difficulty levels. This dominant factor makes the students feel afraid during an oral presentation. Therefore, to lessen anxiousness during oral presentation, students prefer to use peer seeking strategy as it enables them to feel calm and confident in English class. Hence, the results of this study are important for educators as they shed light on the factors contributing to student anxiety and provide outcomes for reducing anxiety while enhancing students' oral skills. The findings can assist instructors in detecting responses that may heighten or diminish students' fear when speaking in class. Furthermore, this study presents students with potential triggers of anxiety and offers them valuable understanding for mitigating their anxiety.

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