

Do English Education Department Students Experience Communication Apprehension? An Investigation of Their Level and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, investigation into students' communication apprehension has emerged after being abandoned. It is believed classroom interaction in oral competency consists of students' activities which mainly facilitate them to develop their communication skills. However, not all students have the same ability in communication. This study aims to investigate the students' level of communication apprehension and the strategies used to overcome. The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 instrument was used to measure students' level of communication apprehension, and was analyzed with quantitative descriptive. An interview was conducted to find out their strategies to overcome it. The data collection method was carried out by distributing to 20 respondents, the English education department students of Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta. The obtained data in the form of questionnaire transcription was analyzed as its formula, while interview data was analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The results showed that 5 students were categorized as low level, 3 students were in average level, and 12 students experienced in the high level. Efforts done by students to overcome the communication apprehension are cognitive, affective and social strategies. Based on the findings, it can be declared that the majority of students experienced high level of communication apprehension and they preferred an effective strategy to reduce communication apprehension. The findings of the research demanded that lecturers conduct meaningful activities such as group discussions to promote autonomous students' communication practice.

Keywords: communication apprehension, students, level of CA, strategies

1. INTRODUCTION

The speaking course provides students with experience in how to respond to formal and informal oral communication. Students can communicate confidently and cooperate in mastering oral expressions by linguistic rules. The learning experience in this course is speaking practice. Students individually or in groups listen to the expressions and then reveal detailed and general information, then shared it to other students. Students are also able to

convey ideas or suggestions related to the information they have heard. In the end, students can tactfully, correctly, and quickly convey information and ideas to participants who are engaged in the communication process.

The speaking course is integrated with listening skills referred to the curriculum conducted by the study program. Not all students acquire good oral communication skills, likewise students of the English language education study program at the University of PGRI Yogyakarta. Based on the results of students' learning achievement in public speaking courses, as many as 58% of them are at the lower middle level. It meant they experienced Communication Apprehension (CA). This is very unfortunate because students of English education study programs should experience higher ability in communicating using the target language. Several factors can affect communication skills, namely positive communication, comprehension and expression, negative communication, communication errors, and enhancement of communication (Ozdipciner, et.al., 2015).

Positive communication is one of the factors that influence communication skills. Positive communication is associated with the positive behaviour of the speaker, for example paying attention when other people are speaking, giving time for others to respond to conversations, respecting the opinions of others, and so on. Meanwhile, comprehension and expression are related to how the speaker understands and empathizes with other people, namely adjusting the intonation of speech, understanding other people's difficulties, giving time for others to listen, and so on. Negative communication and communication errors are negative factors, for example, boredom in communicating, discomfort communicating with the opposite sex, and hatred when criticized by others. Finally, enhancement of communication relates to the speaker's efforts to communicate, for example communicating suggestions by not hurting other people, asking questions about something, and realizing mistakes in opinions (Ozdipner, et.al., 2015).

Research was done on workers in Polish organizations to find out what factors influence the effectiveness of internal communication by Polish organizations. It is concluded that factors influencing internal communication are information sharing, an insufficient amount of information, not valuing communication, time, hierarchy, lack of feedback, and too much information (Chmielecki, 2015). The results of this study can be a basis for practitioners of communication skills in taking action to improve students' communication skills.

Additionally, oral communication apprehension is influenced by perceptions of peer evaluation, prior experiences of communicating with new people, and preparation activities (Birne et.al., 2011). The perception of peer evaluation means fear of peer evaluation. Meanwhile, based on the interviews with the participants, it was revealed that communicating with others leads to heightened anxiety. Then, it is underlined the preparation activities meaning knowing more about the understanding of topic become more beneficial in the communication process. The results of this study indicate that many factors influence students in producing spoken language.

Speaking skill complements student professionalism as prospective English teachers. This skill helps students understand the message conveyed by the teacher. Therefore, the ability to communicate especially oral communication (speaking) is one of the keys to the success of the language learning process. There are several types of speaking skills (Brown, 2003), namely imitative (the speaker imitates); intensive (the speaker produces short sentences); responsive (interaction through short conversations, brief instructions); interactive (conversations with more than two participants and involve long sentences); extensive (including speeches, story-telling, oral presentation). The ability to communicate is closely related to understanding. Wyer and Shrum (2015) state that the process of understanding has an important role in communicating and persuading. Research indicates that understanding the communication process can influence responses to communication media.

The ability to communicate is one of the benchmarks in mastering knowledge. Through communicating with others, one is transferring knowledge to others. The ability to communicate verbally using English is mandatory for all students. According to Idrus, et.al, (2011), engineering graduates' ability to communicate in English is influenced by self-efficacy which consists of three constructs, namely aptitude, attitude, and aspiration. The three constructs are interrelated, meaning that they cannot stand alone.

Communicating using spoken language is also called speaking. Research conducted by Uchihara and Clenton (2018) aims to investigate the extent to which vocabulary size affects L2 speaking ability. Based on this research, it can be concluded that vocabulary size has a significant effect on vocabulary comprehension. However, students who have a large vocabulary size do not always pronounce complex vocabulary during speech classes. Then, it can be concluded that students' vocabulary mastery is not related to speaking ability.

Various ways are used by teachers to improve students' communication skills. One of them is the implementation of learning techniques or media. Nagasaki, et.al (2020) developed language communicative abilities by using interactive and individual rehearsals. The results of the study concluded that interactive rehearsals for learners helped improve L2 communication abilities. However, individual rehearsals can improve the ability to express opinions. Thus, it is suggested that these two techniques can be implemented in the L2 communication ability class. In addition to learning techniques, instructors can also use media to improve speaking skills.

Communication apprehension is also called speaking anxiety or speaking fear. Communication apprehension is also synonymous with communication anxiety or communication aversion. The theory of communication apprehension emerged as several causes, namely fear of failure, audience or participants of communication, high stake, uncertainty, and being the center of attention. Communication apprehension is the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (Richmond & McCroskey, 1998). They found that individual experienced barriers or anxiety to interact with others. Communication apprehension is an emotional state expressed as ~~an~~-anxiety experienced by an individual about anticipated or actual communication with another person or persons (McCroskey, 1982). It is an emotional state of a person who experienced speaking barriers.

Richmond et.al (2009) divides communication apprehension into two levels, namely high level and low level. Students who experience a high level of communication apprehension have characteristics including that students experience anxiety and are afraid to speak, students are unable to control themselves, students are not motivated to speak/discuss, and tend to be introverted. Meanwhile, students who experience low communication apprehension have characteristics that tend to have low general anxiety, tolerate ambiguous situations, have a high degree of self-control, are adventurous, is emotionally mature, are extroverted, have high self-esteem, innovative, can tolerate relatively high levels of disagreement, and is assertive.

Audiovisual is utilized in speaking class by the instructors. Chen et.al, (2021) examined the effect of video featuring connected speech instruction on students in Taiwan. The results of the study show that the use of video-connected speech classes for freshmen in Taiwan is proven to be able to improve speech skills. The results of the questionnaire show that video

media can improve learning attitudes to speaking English. Thus, it is hoped that video media can be implemented by instructors to enhance learning outcomes in English communication abilities

Some factors that affect speech barriers or fears are also experienced by students of the English language education study program. Even though they are students who study language, internal and external factors influence the mastery and production of spoken language. Efforts were made by the lecturers to increase students' confidence in communicating by implementing speaking learning strategies such as discussions, dialogues, role-playing, simulations, and so on. However, the results obtained were not optimal because the characteristics of the students in each period were different. Finally, the lecturers must adjust the speaking learning techniques to students' characteristics.

Emotional intelligence plays an important role in reducing communication apprehension, namely aspects of emotionality, sociability, and self-control (Fall, et.al., 2013). So, it is expected that the three aspects of emotional intelligence are included in the communication learning curriculum planning. The integration of emotional intelligence in the process of learning to communicate can make learners independent in producing the target language. Apart from integrating elements of emotional intelligence in the process of learning to communicate, mentoring is also recommended (Jones and Procopio, 2017). In their investigation, the treatment of research subjects, namely by implementing mentoring techniques in students' communication mastery, was said to significantly reduce the level of communication anxiety.

Learning strategy does not have the same meaning as learning style. Learning styles are general approaches that students use in acquiring a new language or other subjects. While learning strategies are related to a specific actions, behaviors, steps, or techniques conducted by students to enhance their learning (Oxford, 2001). Language learning strategies of L2 learners can be divided into six major groups. **Cognitive strategies**; learners manipulate the language material in direct ways, through reasoning, analysis, note-taking, summarizing, synthesizing, outlining, practising naturalistic settings, and practising structures and sounds. **Metacognitive strategies**; learners manage the learning process overall, such as identifying needs, organizing materials, monitoring mistakes, evaluating task success, and others. **Memory-related strategies**; learners link one L2 item or concept with another but do not necessarily involve understanding. **Compensatory strategies**; learners make up for missing

knowledge. **Affective strategies**; learners identify mood and anxiety levels, talk about feelings, reward themselves for good performance, or use deep-breathing and positive self-talk. **Social strategies**; learners work with others and understand the target culture as well as the language (Oxford, 2001). Learners individually adopt different L2 learning strategies because they have their own beliefs and habits.

Several attempts were conducted by instructors to reduce communication barriers. Zuzmusni et.al (2010) researched the communication barriers of ESL students and the tendencies of their activities to overcome them. Based on the results of the study, students were categorized with a relatively high level of communication apprehension. The students chose group discussion activities to reduce speaking anxiety. Awada and Gutieres-Colon (2019) state that cooperative learning instructions and blogs play a role in reducing anxiety about intercultural communication. The study concluded that cooperative instruction and the use of blogs can effectively reduce students' speaking anxiety. The results of this study imply that the use of communication technology can reduce students' communication anxiety, as well as learning strategies and approaches. The learning strategy using cooperative instruction motivates learners to speak. Cooperative instruction might be considered as learners acquire their target language through communicating with others in a social environment.

Meanwhile, several learning preferences tend to be carried out by students who experience a high level of CA (Russ, 2012). According to him, students' learning preferences are independent learning, listening and observing others, taking analytical and observational approaches, using different views in analyzing learning experiences, and creating, testing, and perfecting learning models.

Based on the previous research and the low learning outcomes of English language education students, this research was conducted. The purposes of this study were to measure the level of students' communication apprehension using an instrument called the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24) designed by McCroskey and to explore how students' conducting strategies reduce the anxiety they experience in communication performance. The questions of this investigation are as mentioned in the following.

1. Categorized in what level of CA do students of the English Education Department of UPY?

2. What strategies of learning do students conduct to reduce CA?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

To investigate the level of communication apprehension and the strategies experienced by students of the English education department, it is explained the method of research consists of research design, sample and data collection, and data analysis.

1. Research Design

The researcher conducted a descriptive quantitative design for measuring the level of students' communication apprehension. The instrument for measuring the range of communication apprehension was the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24) designed by McCroskey. Later, the qualitative descriptive design was applied to find out the strategies done by respondents to overcome their communication apprehension (CA). Hence, the researcher interviewed 20 students of the English Education Department of Universitas PGRI Yogyakarta.

2. Sample and Data Collection

The respondents of this research are third-semester students. There were 20 students involved in this research. Those students were taking the speaking subject. Data was collected through questionnaire distribution and interviews. A questionnaire instrument was distributed to reveal students' level of CA. The instrument was adopted from McCroskey's Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24). It consisted of 24 items questioning respondents on communication barriers. Meanwhile, the interview was conducted to know are done strategies done by students to overcome CA.

3. Analyzing of Data

This research was conducted in a qualitative research design adopted from Miles and Huberman (1994). Data obtained from students responding to the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA-24) was analyzed through scoring items and followed by categorizing each response in the available range. Those are scores above 80 mean high CA; below 50 means low CA. Scores between 51 and 79 are categorized in average. An interview view was conducted with students to reveal their preferences for reducing anxiety about communicating. All participants were interviewed and the results were analyzed descriptively. Miles and Huberman's qualitative descriptive analysis was used to complete this report.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Questionnaires were distributed to 20 students majoring in English education in the third semester. They took the speaking course as the medium of instruction. The results of the questionnaire data distributed to students majoring in English education in the third semester are presented in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Level of CA among Students

Scores	Σ Students	Level of CA
≤ 50	5	Low CA
51 – 79	3	Average CA
≥ 80	12	High CA

The findings resulting from the distribution of the questionnaire can be seen that most students experience high anxiety in communicating. However, they still make efforts to overcome communication apprehension. Furthermore, the following table is related to students' strategies in reducing obstacles encountered when communicating. Researcher interviewed 15 students. The question directed to the interviewee is what strategies are conducted by students to eliminate English communication comprehension. Strategies generated from the interview with students are summarized in the following table 2.

Table 2. Interview Transcription of Strategy to Overcome CA

Students	Transcription	Category of Learning Strategy
S1	I learned more vocabulary and stayed calm. I don't care about other disruptions at around me.	Cognitive strategy
S2	When I'm nervous, I'm sure other people have felt that way too, so there's no need to worry too much.	Affective strategy
S3	I prepare materials well in advance and practice before speaking in front of others.	Cognitive strategy
S4	I calm my mind by taking deep breaths.	Affective strategy
S5	I practice in front of the mirror and think that speaking assignments are practice, so there's no need to worry.	Cognitive strategy
S6	I took a deep breath, and then I calmed down and relaxed.	Affective strategy
S7	I take little notes on what I have to say and stay calm.	Cognitive strategy
S8	I practice a lot and am confident with my self-talk. No need to imitate others.	Affective strategy

S9	I convinced myself, I could complete the task in discussion or public speaking.	Affective strategy
S10	I usually take a deep breath and control my thoughts.	Affective strategy
S11	I actively ask questions in class and do a lot of tasks which involves talking to other people. I like speaking with others.	Social Strategy
S12	I prepare the material that will be delivered well in advance.	Cognitive strategy
S13	I didn't look at the audience so as not to get nervous.	Affective strategy
S14	I suggest not being afraid to speak in front of other people.	Affective strategy
S15	I took a deep breath to calm my mind.	Affective strategy

3.1. Students' Level of CA

The results of the questionnaire showed that 12 out of 20 students experienced anxiety in speaking or communication apprehension. As many as 5 students are categorized as the low CA level, 3 students are in the average CA level, and 12 students fall into the high CA category. The high level of CA experienced by students can be influenced by several factors. Research conducted by Birne et.al (2011) revealed several factors causing CA by students. These factors are fear of peer evaluation, prior communication experiences, and preparation. Supporting this statement, several factors cause CA in public speaking, are identified in the following; stage fright, reticence, unwillingness to communicate, predispositions toward verbal behavior, shyness, and audience anxiety (McCroskey in Burgon, 1982).

Research conducted on university students in several regions in Indonesia investigated speaking anxiety, as the research conducted by Djaguna, et.al, (2020). This study adopted the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz, et.al to measure students speaking anxiety. The research subjects were students of Ahmad Dahlan University. The results showed that the majority of students were in the medium-level category of anxiety. Additionally, by using the CA measurement of McCroskey, students experienced anxiety prominently.

Measuring speaking anxiety was also carried out on Tidar University students. Sugiyanti and Indriani (2021) investigated the level and causes of public speaking anxiety in students majoring in English, using the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) proposed by Yaikong & Usaha. The results showed that 58% of students experienced the medium level of public speaking anxiety. Based on many research results on speaking anxiety or communication apprehension experienced by students, it can be underlined that the majority

of students majoring in English education department still experienced communication apprehension and this needs to be taken seriously by educators. They can design teaching techniques and activities to reduce communication apprehension and provoke students' achievement of English communication.

3.2. Strategies to Overcome CA

Based on data from interviews with 15 students, it was revealed that students prefer effective strategies to manage their CA. Affective strategy carried out by 9 students. As previously mentioned, in general, the strategies used by L2 learners to master the target language are categorized into six majors, namely cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensatory, affective, and social strategies. The results of the interviews concluded that students tend to choose effective strategies in CA. The activity chosen is understanding anxiety and calming down by doing positive things like taking deep breaths. Affective strategies that tend to be applied by students are complemented by cognitive strategies. Some of the efforts they do are preparing materials and equipment before communication performance. Whom some like to interact with other people, in this case, it is called social strategy.

Referring to L2 learning strategies summarized by Oxford (2001), it seems that affective and cognitive strategies are often used in overcoming communication apprehension. The results of research conducted by Jones and Procopio (2017) refer to cognitive strategies for reducing communication barriers. They implemented mentoring activities for students. Mentoring activities could reduce communication apprehension. Statistically, students who received mentoring treatment were included in the low level CA category.

As with social strategy, cooperative learning is also used in regulating CA. Awada and Gutierrez-Colon (2021) stated that cooperative learning instructions and blogs were approved to be effective in lowering the high CA of students. Cooperative learning is a learning technique that emphasizes student tolerance towards other members to reduce communication anxiety, and provide freedom while increasing learner comfort and confidence. Apart from communication technology in the form of blogs, media utilization is also used in overcoming CA. Dupagne et.al (2007) utilizes video. However, the results of the study concluded that the use of video did not significantly reduce the CA experienced by

learners. From the results of these two studies, it can be said that not all information technology is able to reduce the level of communication anxiety among students.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the data findings, it allowed us to conclude that the majority of English education department students of UPY experienced a high level of CA. Strategies for reducing communication apprehension are mostly affective strategies, namely taking a deep breath and controlling self-feeling. Some other efforts are cognitive and social ones. Cognitive strategy relates to preparing instruments, such as practising and taking notes. Students agreed well preparation before taking part in communication class would reduce their anxiety. The fact that students were categorized in the high level of CA, cannot be underestimated. The findings demand a task for instructors of oral communication comprehension to intensively support and improve students' oral competency in English such as through group discussion activities.

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Declaration of conflicting interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this work.

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