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MINIMIZING EFL LEARNERS' SPEAKING ANXIETY IN THE POST-PANDEMIC ERA

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic which lasted for more than 2 years had a tremendous impact in Indonesia. One of its impacts on the education sector that is still affecting until the post-pandemic period is learning loss. Learning loss also affects students' psychology. In speaking learning, anxiety is one of the students' obstacles to speaking fluently. This study aimed to investigate the strategies employed by students to mitigate speaking anxiety in the post-pandemic era. The case study design was used to do an in-depth investigation of complex problems regarding students' speaking anxiety in a school. The study involved six students in grade seven at a junior high school in West Java, Indonesia, as participants. The participants selected were those representing different speaking abilities

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based on their speaking test results. The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The findings show that students employ several strategies to mitigate their speaking anxiety, including preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer-seeking. In other words, those strategies reflect students' resilience to deal with learning loss in the post-pandemic era. This study is intended to serve as a valuable resource for educators and EFL learners by providing strategies to alleviate speaking anxiety effectively.

Keywords: *speaking anxiety, EFL learners, learning in the post-pandemic era*

INTRODUCTION

During the COVID-19 pandemic, students must engage in remote learning from their residences. It is imperative that all academic disciplines, including the English language, be delivered through online platforms. Adnan (2020) suggests that online learning has the potential to serve as a feasible substitute for traditional forms of education. The learning process can also be considered passive due to the predominant usage of asynchronous methods, such as chat-based platforms like WhatsApp groups or Google Classroom. Synchronous learning, which involves the utilization of web conferencing platforms like Zoom or Google Meet, was rarely practiced due to concerns about the excessive consumption of internet data. This phenomenon leads to a tendency among students to exhibit passivity and laziness, particularly in the domain of oral communication.

In the post-pandemic era, it is widely perceived that most educational institutions possess a commendable level of preparedness to facilitate face-to-face learning. Nevertheless, the students' passive behavior and lack of passion persist in the traditional classroom. Due to their familiarity with online learning, students are hesitant to engage in classroom discourse actively and experience apprehension

while presenting in front of their peers. Cerelia et al. (2021) also stated that long-term online learning will result in learning loss. The Education and Development Forum (2020, as cited in Cerelia et al., 2021) defined learning loss as the situation when students lose general or specialized information and abilities or face academic obstacles as a result of certain conditions such as extended gaps or discontinuity of the educational process. Learning loss can result in limited interactions between teachers and students or among students, a lack of concentration and focus, and a lack of understanding of the learning materials. Furthermore, learning loss has psychological influences on students. Challenges faced by students affected their psychology in a variety of ways. This study may be evidence of students' anxiety in the post-pandemic era. As stated by Mello and Grobmeier (2021), learning loss as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is an obstacle with long-term consequences and effects for students such as increased anxiety, stress, sadness, depression, and even suicide. To help students reduce this anxiety, some research has shown that with appropriate techniques and strategies, speaking anxiety which often serves as an obstacle to student learning activities may be reduced (Raja, 2017).

Most students demonstrate proficiency in their first and second languages. Meanwhile, they often encounter cognitive obstacles while attempting to acquire and communicate in a foreign language. Rosita and Halimi (2023) stated that improving English speaking skills might be challenging in a country where English is regarded as a foreign language. Indonesia is one of the countries considered English as a foreign language. Tanveer (2007) asserts that many EFL learners experience a sense of inadequacy in their ability to effectively communicate, as the acquisition of speaking skills proves to be a challenging task. Students apply significant efforts to pursue their English language proficiency, employing various strategies to enhance their speaking abilities. However, numerous factors contribute to students' failure to improve their speaking skills. Maulani (2022) said that anxiety is a significant determinant. She also

asserted that the acquisition of English as a foreign language is significantly affected by speaking anxiety, which often detrimentally affects students' proficiency in spoken English. Witt and Roberts (2006) claimed that speaking anxiety might be attributed to past bad experiences and an individuals' inability to deal with circumstances beyond their control. Foreign language anxiety refers to a specific form of anxiety closely linked to acquiring and utilizing a foreign language. Furthermore, foreign language anxiety refers to the state of apprehension or anxiety experienced by students when they are required to demonstrate their language skills in the target language (Gabarre et al., 2016). It can be concluded that foreign language anxiety is the emotional state characterized by unease, tension, apprehension, and fear individuals encounter while studying or utilizing a foreign language.

Students with communication apprehension exhibit fear of making errors in their speech, lack self-assurance, and demonstrate poor performance in acquiring proficiency in the English language. According to Rayani (2012), a lack of vocabulary, a lack of grammar, and apprehension about committing errors contribute to poor oral communication skills and increased anxiety levels. According to Rajitha and Alamelu (2020), students tend to exhibit higher anxiety levels during speaking assessments than other assessments when engaging in English-speaking activities. It is common for students to encounter considerable anxiety when engaging in English communication with peers or other people. Ellis (1994) classified anxiety in speaking into three distinct types. Those include state anxiety, trait anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. State anxiety refers to a temporary experience of heightened nervousness resulting from a shift in an individual's emotional state, typically prompted by external stimuli (Maulani, 2022). Horwitz and Dolly (1991) stated that trait anxiety refers to a predisposition to show anxious responses, even in situations that are not threatening. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) defined situation-specific anxiety as a phenomenon characterized by individuals experiencing progressive stress levels

when facing certain circumstances, such as public speaking, written exams, and others. Language anxiety is a form of anxiety that can be categorized as situation-specific anxiety (Rajitha and Alamelu, 2020).

Students may use several strategies to deal with the anxiety. Based on the research conducted by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), it has been identified that students employ a range of strategies to overcome their apprehension towards speaking English. These strategies include preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer-seeking, and resignation. Many EFL learners have heightened anxiety when they fail to prepare for their classes. By enhancing cognitive and educational capacities, preparation encompasses active measures to mitigate an imminent threat (Maulani, 2022). Preparation encompasses the process by which students enhance their learning strategies to mitigate anxiety (Rahmah and Azhimia, 2022). It is noteworthy that the strategy of preparation was the most utilized to reduce anxiety. Many essential strategies exist for students aiming to improve their English language proficiency. Maulani (2022) said that these strategies include dedicating significant effort towards language acquisition through diligent study, enhancing self-preparation skills, thoroughly reviewing course materials before seeking assistance from teachers, consulting dictionaries for clarification, asking questions to teachers, engaging in mental exercises to practice English, critically reflecting on areas of difficulty, attentively listening to classmates' contributions during class, striving for excellence, engaging in mindful reading, and establishing a consistent daily routine for English language study. According to Argaman and Abu-Rabia (2022), empirical evidence suggests that anxious students have the potential to achieve equal performance outcomes to their non-anxious peers when given adequate time to prepare and practice (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991a). Regular communication helps students develop confidence, fluency, and adaptability in their spoken language use (Haerazi et al., 2023).

Relaxation is among the various strategies employed to cope with speaking anxiety. According to Grasha (1987, as cited in Rahmah

and Azhimia, 2022), engaging in deep inhalation and exhalation for three to five minutes effectively alleviates stress. If a student is well-prepared but continuously worries and fears, it is advisable to employ relaxation techniques to alleviate anxiety symptoms. Several fundamental relaxation strategies include engaging in deep breathing exercises, nurturing a sense of calmness and optimal performance, fostering a sense of belonging within a team, and enhancing one's self-esteem.

Some students who experience anxiety try to develop a mindset focused on positive thinking. This strategy emphasizes the affective domain of the students. Positive thinking encompasses strategies to redirect away from stressful circumstances and towards positive and enjoyable stimuli, alleviating student anxiety (Rahmah and Azhimia, 2022). Positive thinking is acknowledged for calming and alleviating the psychological processes contributing to student anxiety. The components of positive thinking encompass nurturing self-confidence, having positive attitudes to English, fostering optimism, reinforcing the belief that favorable outcomes are attainable, striving to omit external opinions, nurturing self-belief, savoring the tension, imagining oneself giving the best performance, affirming one's capability, and affirming one's potential for surpassing others.

Some students with language anxiety may employ a coping mechanism where they engage in self-comparisons with students facing similar challenges. Peer-seeking is a practice where students actively seek out and engage with fellow students interested in studying a foreign language (Rahmah and Azhimia, 2022). Students can engage in meaningful interactions with a suitable learning companion or participate in a small-scale support group of students feeling similar experiences. This strategy proves helpful when students proficiently communicate their experiences and strategies with their educational peers in an English class. Students desire to identify their peers who may be experiencing challenges related to cognitive functioning in the classroom and managing their anxiety.

This is evidenced by their preference to seek out and connect with these students.

Resignation represents the extreme strategy. It refers to students' resistance to alleviating their anxiety by not joining the learning process (Rahmah and Azhimia, 2022). Embracing reality can be seen as one of the strategies for mitigating the effects of stress and anxiety. According to Rahmah and Azhimia (2022), students experiencing anxiety may exhibit various behaviors such as disengagement, lessened motivation, reduced effort, or even sleeping during class. Students exhibit a profound fear concerning the accompanying stressors. Consequently, students are reluctant to make further attempts or engage in efforts following a failure.

Some researchers investigated the phenomenon of speaking anxiety among students in Indonesia. First, the study by Santoso and Perrodin (2022) was done to explore the factors that led to the experience of speaking anxiety among students. This study aimed to determine the factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety at Salatiga Private Middle School. Based on the results obtained from this study, it can be concluded that the critical factor contributing to the participants' anxiety when speaking is their fear of linguistic accuracy and grammatical correctness. Second, Putri and Marlina (2019) investigated the types and levels of speech anxiety experienced by first-year EFL students enrolled in the English Language Educational Program at Universitas Negeri Padang. The objective of this study was to determine the kinds and levels of speaking anxiety experienced by first-year EFL students. The results indicate that the prevalence of speaking anxiety among students in Indonesia is at 82%, representing a moderate level. The survey participants expressed apprehension about oral examinations (44%), issues related to interpersonal interactions (34%), and feedback from peers and teachers (22%). Various kinds of speaking anxiety exist, with the fear of public speaking examinations being the most prevalent. Third, in a study conducted by Hasibuan and Irzawati (2020), the researchers examined the influence of students' speaking anxiety on their

speaking performance. The primary objective of this study was to investigate the impact of speaking anxiety on the speaking performance of first-year students. The study's results demonstrate a correlation between the experience of anxiety when making speaking engagements and the subsequent performance of students. Speaking anxiety is a psychological phenomenon that induces fear and uneasiness, eventually impacting one's ability to function effectively in spoken language tasks. Similar to the previous research, this research addressed speaking anxiety. However, the previous research only concerned with the factors influencing anxiety, the levels of anxiety, and the impact of anxiety. This research, on the other hand, focused on investigating strategies used by students to overcome their anxiety in the post-pandemic era since most of the research discussed speaking anxiety during the pandemic. There are only a few studies that examine speaking anxiety in the post-pandemic era.

This study aimed to investigate strategies for reducing speaking anxiety experienced by EFL learners in the post-COVID-19 epidemic. It attempted to figure out strategies employed by students to minimize their anxiety in the post-pandemic era. The researchers expected that this study would provide teachers and EFL learners with insights into practical ways to reduce speaking anxiety. Thus, these strategies can be employed to address and alleviate anxiety-related challenges experienced by EFL learners.

METHOD

Research Design

The present study utilized a qualitative method. The researchers conducted a qualitative study to observe events within their naturalistic contexts to comprehend or see them (Creswell, 2012). This study aimed to investigate the students' strategies to overcome speaking anxiety in the post-pandemic era. The case study design was used to do an in-depth investigation of complex problems regarding students' speaking anxiety in the school. Baxter and Jack (2008) defined a case study as a comprehensive and meticulous

approach to acquiring profound understanding and information on a subject of investigation, encompassing programs, events, activities, and similar aspects.

Research Instrument and Participants

The data in this study were collected using semi-structured interviews. The instrument used was an interview protocol. There were 17 questions in the form of close-ended and open-ended questions. These questions were designed based on anxiety theory by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004). The questions were about the strategies to minimize speaking anxiety including preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer-seeking, and resignation; the method to reduce anxiety such as deep relaxation and self-hypnosis; and the efforts made by students to overcome their anxiety. The participants in this research comprised six seventh-grade students from a junior high school in West Java, Indonesia. The English teacher recommended selecting three female and three male students to serve as respondents (S1-S6), considering their English-speaking test scores and their speaking anxiety. S1 and S2 represented the highest speaking scores. S3 and S4 represented the medium speaking scores. S5 and S6 represented the lowest speaking scores.

Data Collection Procedure and Data Analysis

The initial procedures involved the selection of participants and the formulation of the study question. Then the researchers gathered and scrutinized the acquired data. Finally, the process of interpreting and disseminating the results was undertaken. The data analysis was conducted using Miles and Huberman's (1994) model that consists of data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions/ verification. First, the researchers transcribed the interview results. To decrease the volume of data, the researchers made deliberate choices to narrow down and streamline the dataset. Subsequently, the researchers presented the condensed dataset, indicating that the information was organized and explained through

phrases, paragraphs, and tables. The researchers finalized the procedure by concluding the findings.

FINDINGS

Based on the existing theories, five distinct strategies are aimed at reducing speaking anxiety. These strategies include preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer-seeking, and resignation. However, while conducting interviews with a cohort of six students enrolled in the seventh grade, it was found that the strategies employed by students to mitigate speaking anxiety encompassed various measures. They are preparation (preparing the tasks adequately), relaxation (implementing strategy to mitigate anxiety), positive thinking (being optimistic), and peer-seeking (exchanging experience with peers).

Preparation

One of the strategies to mitigate speaking anxiety is preparation. Students who experience anxiety but have adequately prepared and engaged in practice can complete tasks or perform like non-anxious students. The following findings are found from interviews conducted to ascertain the impacts of preparation.

Table 1.

The result of interviews on the impacts of preparation

Task Completion Time	Students' Reflections
Plenty of time	Students exhibited more calm, concentration, and thoroughness while completing their assignments. Additionally, they would exhibit optimal performance in speaking performance (S1, S3, S4, S5, S6).
Limited time	Students completed their homework hurriedly and carelessly. Additionally, they would exhibit poor speaking skills (S1, S3, S4, S5, S6).

Table 1 shows that students' achievement in task completion depends on specified deadlines. The time constraint given to students to finish the task resulted in heightened anxiety, leading to a decrease

in the quality of their work characterized by careless, incorrect, and hasty efforts. Students could not maintain their concentration. Students prioritized meeting deadlines over ensuring the precision of their work. The student's response can be seen below:

"If the time is limited, I do it hurriedly and haphazardly." (S1)

However, when students were allowed ample time to accomplish the assignments, they likely approached the assignments with increased relaxation, concentration, and thoroughness. If students have sufficient time to practice their oral communication skills, their performance will be optimal. If students are given a limited amount of time to practice, their speaking performance will likely not reach its full potential as stated below:

"If I am given enough time, I do the work meticulously and correctly." (S6)

Furthermore, students enhanced their learning strategies through their preparation. Students gave full attention during the teacher's explanation and regularly practiced speaking. Regular practice allowed them to comprehend the subject matter deeply and fostered their English language communication proficiency. In addition, students were looking at the learning materials covered in their English lesson and acquiring new vocabulary. This experience facilitated the acquisition of prior knowledge among the students, enhancing their preparedness to engage in the learning process. Committing the new language to memory also enhanced their spoken communication abilities. The following are the students' responses:

"I pay attention to the teacher and look for additional materials and then practice speaking." (S1)

"I learn the topics that will be discussed and read the dictionary to memorize new vocabulary." (S2)

Relaxation

The second strategy is relaxation. Students employed the implementation of this particular strategy as a means to mitigate their apprehension toward public speaking. They experience increased relaxation and enhanced focus, particularly while engaging in English oral presentations before the class. Based on the research findings, there are two potential approaches to relaxation. The result is seen in Table 2.

Table 2.

The interview results on the relaxation techniques to mitigate anxiety

Methods	Students' Reflections
Self-hypnosis	Students perceived the audiences as statues and refrained from making direct eye contact, diverting their attention towards other focal points (S1).
Deep relaxation	Students inhaled deeply and subsequently exhaled at a slow pace (S2, S6).

Table 2 shows that students employed self-hypnosis and deep relaxation techniques to alleviate their nervousness when giving English presentations in a classroom setting. The utilization of self-hypnosis involved the cognitive process of visualizing the audience as statues or other non-living entities, which resulted in increased relaxation and reduced feelings of intimidation among students while delivering English speeches in a classroom setting. The students refrained from making direct eye contact with the audience and instead directed their gaze toward other focal points to mitigate their nervousness. The following is an excerpt from the student's response.

"I imagine people as statues. I do not look into their eyes, but I stare at other objects to reduce anxiety." (S1)

In addition, students engaged in deep relaxation by inhaling deeply and exhaling for around 3-5 minutes, aiming to induce a state of increased relaxation and concentration. Additionally, it aided in the reduction of nervousness and tremors experienced by students when delivering speeches in English before their peers as stated below:

"I tried to take a deep breath and tried to focus to get rid of the anxiety". (S2)

Furthermore, the study revealed that deep relaxation effectively mitigated excessive stress reactions among students, enhanced their self-esteem and self-confidence, and fostered positive interpersonal connections. The result is seen in Table 3 as follows.

Table 3.

The interview results on the deep relaxation effects

Effects of Deep Relaxation	Students' Reflections
Avoid overreaction to stress	Students exhibited enhanced relaxation and concentration and reduced tension levels (S1, S2, S4, S5, S6).
Enhance self-esteem	Students strongly believed in their abilities and demonstrated an increased sense of self-appreciation (S1, S2, S4, S5).
Enhance self-assurance	Students exhibited increased confidence, relaxation, and proficiency in the assigned tasks (S1, S2, S5, S6).
Enhance interpersonal relationships	Students experienced a higher level of pleasure and a reduced sense of awkwardness when conversing with their friends and relatives. This experience fostered a greater sense of closeness and empathy towards their family and friends (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6).

Table 3 shows that implementing deep relaxation techniques affected students' well-being. Specifically, it was seen that deep relaxation led to improvements in self-esteem, self-assuredness, and interpersonal connections among the student participants. Additionally, it was noted that students could effectively manage their stress levels and prevent excessive reactions to stressful situations. Implementing deep relaxation techniques increased calm and concentration among students when delivering English speeches in a classroom setting. The level of stress experienced by students was also reduced. The implementation of deep relaxation techniques increased comfort among students who had previously experienced fear or anxiety when presenting in front of their peers. The student's response can be seen in the following excerpt.

"Yes, by doing deep relaxation I feel calmer and less stressed." (S1)

Students who previously had doubts about their academic abilities see an increase in self-assurance and realize that their performance is indeed satisfactory. Furthermore, the practice of deep relaxation has been found to facilitate enhancing students' interpersonal relationships, particularly regarding their familial and social connections. They engaged in relaxed and personal conversations with their families and close acquaintances as stated below:

"After doing deep relaxation, I became more confident that I could do it." (S5)

"I feel more fun and am less awkward when having conversations with family and friends." (S2)

Positive Thinking

The third strategy is positive thinking. It is recommended that students actively disengage from negative thoughts that have the potential to impede their academic achievement. The following findings are derived from an interview to explore students' attempts to divert their attention from negative thoughts.

Table 4.

The interview results on positive thinking strategies

Strategies	Students' Reflections
Focusing on the favorable benefits of public speaking	Students believed engaging in public speaking offered new experiences, enhanced their academic standing, boosted their self-assurance and courage, and improved academic outcomes that reduced the risk of being subjected to ridicule and mockery by their peers (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6).
Contemplating pleasant things unconnected to public speaking	Students expressed positive thoughts about several aspects, including imagining themselves as public figures, engaging in monologues, embodying intellectual competence and academic achievement, and eliciting a sense of pride in their parents (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6).

Table 4 shows that students employ two distinct strategies to nurture positive thinking to mitigate their apprehension and unease when engaging in public speaking. The first strategy focuses on the favorable benefits of public speaking. Students contemplated various positive aspects associated with public speaking in English. Students believed they would receive additional points from the teacher. They were motivated to exhibit courage by speaking confidently to their classmates. Additionally, students would have the opportunity to gain new experiences by participating in performances before their peers. Despite the occurrence of errors, they were able to transform them into valuable learning opportunities, with the potential to fix these errors later. Their performance would exhibit improvement compared to previous levels. As a result, the avoidance of criticism and mockery from peers was achieved through their better performance. The student's response can be seen in the following excerpt.

"The positive thing that I think about when speaking in public is I become more confident and braver." (S5)

The final strategy involves contemplating something pleasurable unconnected to public speaking. To enhance students' self-assurance, students employed the strategy of imagining themselves as public figures when engaging in English speaking in public. In addition, they also imagined themselves engaging in monologues without drawing any attention. It instilled a sense of liberation in their ability to express themselves verbally. Additionally, they imagined themselves as brilliant and successful students. As a result, students exhibited greater self-assurance when communicating in English with their peers because they believed that they would not make potential errors. In addition, students' successful performance would elicit a sense of pride in their parents. The students' responses can be seen below.

"I imagined that I am a public figure when speaking in public." (S1)

"I think I can make my parents proud if I speak in public." (S4)

Peer-Seeking

The last strategy is peer-seeking. Peer-seeking refers to consulting with fellow students to exchange experiences or engage in discussions about acquiring a foreign language, mainly English. Based on the study's results, it was found that students engaged in peer consultations to alleviate their anxiety related to English language acquisition. The participants discussed the materials covered in their English course and exchanged information and insights with their classmates to build a comprehensive understanding of the contents. Consequently, it would reduce students' anxiety and apprehension towards being left behind as they realized their friends were encountering similar challenges. Furthermore, the students were engaged in collaborative group work as a means of accomplishing the assignment objective assigned by the teacher.

Within collaborative assignments, students experiencing anxiety can seek assistance from their group members, facilitating the task's group completion. It facilitated the completion of duties. In addition, students engaged in vocabulary discussions and English conversational exercises with their fellow students. Engaging in English conversations fostered their linguistic adaptation and mitigated their apprehension of speaking. In addition, students discussed collaborative approaches to completing their homework assignments with their classmates. Implementing this strategy mitigated potential misunderstandings about the completion of homework assignments. Thus, it facilitates accurate and successful completion. This experience reduced their apprehension towards making errors. Furthermore, they sought input from their classmates regarding the translation. Frequently, students asked about translating texts either from English to Indonesian or vice versa. Consistent with this, students were also asking about the required materials to comprehend. Students had feelings of anxiety and a sense of being left behind when they encountered difficulties comprehending the English language during their learning process.

To mitigate this fear, students who encountered difficulties comprehending the course materials were encouraged to seek assistance from their classmates who possessed a better grasp of the task at hand. They sought clarification from their classmates to enhance their comprehension. The students' responses can be seen below.

"I discuss the material that has been studied in class and share knowledge." (S1)

"I ask about things I do not understand. Usually, I ask friends about the translation." (S3)

Peer-seeking is a strategy that involves actively seeking out fellow students who may exhibit difficulties comprehending the course material and managing their anxiety. Based on the findings, students sought out their peers who experienced difficulties comprehending English to manage their anxieties. They explained the subject matter to their classmates that required assistance to comprehend. The intervention alleviated students' apprehension of potential abandonment. Additionally, students showed their ability to autonomously address anxiety to their classmates through techniques such as self-hypnosis and deep relaxation. The recommendations provided solutions for their friends who could not effectively manage their anxiety, as they were equipped with the knowledge and techniques necessary to mitigate its effects. A student stated:

"I explained how I managed to overcome my anxiety to my friend." (S1)

Of the five strategies to minimize speaking anxiety, only four strategies were applied by students. The summary of strategies can be seen in the following table.

Table 5.

The summary of strategies to reduce anxiety

No.	Strategies	Sub-Strategies
1	Preparation	a. Plenty of time to complete a task b. Enhancing the learning strategies
2	Relaxation	a. Self-hypnosis b. Deep relaxation
3	Positive thinking	a. Focusing on the favorable benefits of public

		speaking
		b. Contemplating pleasant things unconnected to public speaking
4	Peer-seeking	a. Consulting with fellow learners
		b. Seeking out fellow learners who may have anxiety

DISCUSSION

Based on the findings, four types of strategies were applied by the students to overcome their anxiety. They are preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer-seeking. The resignation strategy was not applied by students.

Students who experience anxiety but have adequately prepared and engaged in effective study habits have the potential to successfully finish tasks or perform like their non-anxious peers. Students would painstakingly do the task if they were afforded sufficient time to accomplish it. Moreover, it is plausible that students experiencing anxiety may exhibit improved performance if provided with sufficient opportunities to engage in sufficient practice. In line with this, Maharani and Roslaini (2021) argue that adequate preparation can be beneficial for students in reducing their anxiety levels during oral communication. Nevertheless, the study's findings solely demonstrated the advantageous effects of preparation in mitigating speaking nervousness. This research has a slightly different finding. Besides mitigating anxiety associated with speaking, this study also found that adequate preparation enhances students' task performance and speaking abilities. It is considered that adequate preparation significantly reduces speaking anxiety and enhances students' speaking performance and task completion quality. As stated by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), preparation provides students a plenty of time to make themselves ready for the speaking assignments. Similarly, the study by Dansieh et al. (2021) also revealed that the most crucial thing that students can do to ensure the success of their public speaking is to have proper preparation in advance.

The utilization of deep relaxation techniques has been categorized as a strategy for mitigating students' anxiety levels when engaging in English oral presentations before their peers. Deep relaxation has been found to have several positive effects on students, including the ability to effectively manage stress, enhance self-esteem and self-assurance, and foster better interpersonal relationships. In line with this, Siha (2023) found in her research that students did relaxation to mitigate their speaking apprehension. The study of Li and Wang (2019) also discovered that in learning a language, utilizing language for self-comfort, self-relaxation, and self-conditioning to the fullest extent possible is one of the best techniques to reduce students' speaking anxiety. This research has a slightly different finding. Besides mitigating excessive responses to stress, the practice of relaxation also enhances self-esteem, self-confidence, and interpersonal relationships. Students exhibited a greater sense of relaxation and concentration during their speaking activities as a result of a reduction in their stress levels. The state of deep relaxation was found to enhance students' comfort levels when presenting in front of their peers. This experience fostered an increase in their self-assurance and facilitated the recognition of their competence. In addition, deep relaxation positively impacted students' interpersonal connections. They engaged in relaxed and personal conversations with their families and close acquaintances. It showed that deep relaxation is widely acknowledged to have numerous significant effects on students, extending beyond the mere reduction of speaking anxiety.

Positive thinking is one of the viable strategies for mitigating speaking nervousness. Students should ignore any negative thoughts that have the potential to impede their academic achievement. The study conducted by Maulani (2022) shows that the practice of positive thinking significantly impacts speaking anxiety levels. The researcher's findings revealed that positive thinking was associated with increased confidence and courage among students during public speaking engagements with their peers. Her findings indicate that

students diverted their attention away from negative thoughts by refraining from contemplating the most unfavorable outcomes that could potentially emerge. However, this research found that students have two strategies for positive thinking. First, students focused on the favorable benefits of public speaking. Second, students contemplated pleasant things unconnected to public speaking. Students mitigated potential negative outcomes and cultivated optimistic perspectives by contemplating the advantages of public speaking, which can enhance their skills and foster a more relaxed and confident manner when speaking to their peers. It showed that positive thinking can be effectively implemented using enjoyable methods. In line with this, the research by Landkoorn et al. (2022) involved students with moderate anxiety levels in an exposure therapy that engaged students in positive mental imagery. In this activity, anxious students imagined themselves giving a speech and envisioning it positively. The result of this research indicates that there is a significant change in students' presentation ability after the therapy.

Furthermore, the objective of peer-seeking is to identify fellow students who exhibit signs of academic difficulty and anxiety management challenges within the classroom. As a result, students possess many strategies to assist their peers in managing anxiety within the context of an English classroom. Similarly, research conducted by Nugroho and Hapsari (2024) indicated that students employed the peer-seeking strategy to reduce their anxiety by studying in a group as a good support. In addition, a study conducted by Maulani (2022) discovered that students experienced an improved emotional state due to a shared experience of anxiousness among their peers. Students have the potential to engage in the exchange of personal experiences and provide mutual support, thereby mitigating their levels of anxiety. The findings of this research differ slightly in that students not only prefer peers who share similar levels of anxiety to facilitate personal improvement, but they also demonstrate a motivation to assist fellow students who struggle with

comprehension in English class and managing their anxiety. The findings of this study indicate that students shared their ability to address anxiety with their classmates independently. The primary objective of this strategy was to assist students who experience apprehension or anxiety when engaging in spoken communication. Furthermore, they explained the subject matter to their classmates, assisted their peers in enhancing comprehension, and alleviating their feelings of worry. It showed that peer-seeking is a practice that involves actively seeking out fellow students who experience similar struggles with anxiety to find solutions and provide assistance to peers in overcoming anxiety when speaking.

Regarding various strategies that students use to cope with their anxiety, teachers play a crucial role in assisting their students to mitigate their anxiety in speaking. Teachers can use several strategies, like creating a friendly classroom atmosphere and encouraging students to speak English confidently. Similar research proposes several teacher's strategies to reduce students' speaking anxiety such as encouraging students to be well-prepared, motivating students to speak braver in English, creating a good teacher-student rapport, and engaging students in group activities (Hanifa 2018; Riasati, 2011 as cited in Erdiana, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Anxiety is one of the main factors contributing to students' success in speaking. Therefore, figuring out the strategies used to overcome anxiety will play a vital role in enhancing students' speaking competency. Among the strategies for minimizing speaking anxiety are preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, and peer-seeking. Preparation can be enhanced by optimizing one's readiness in the learning endeavor. Furthermore, relaxation can be accomplished through self-hypnosis and deep relaxation techniques. Positive thinking can be cultivated by focusing on the favorable aspects of public speaking or diverting one's thoughts onto other pleasurable subjects. Moreover, peer-seeking involves actively

seeking out fellow students who exhibit signs of struggling with comprehension and managing their anxiety in the classroom setting. The limitation of this study is it only involves a few respondents, so the findings cannot be generalized. Hence, it is recommended that further research be conducted by applying a quantitative method and involving a large number of respondents to obtain more comprehensive findings. In addition, further research can be conducted to establish a correlation between speaking anxiety and other domains of inquiry that contribute to language acquisition. Neuroscience and the study of the brain represent two contemporary scientific disciplines that hold potential for inclusion in the investigation of the neural mechanisms behind anxiety experienced by students.

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