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# STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN SPEAKING ENGLISH DURING DISTANCE LEARNING

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## Abstract
The ability to speak a foreign language is prominently influenced by one of the obstacles, namely speaking anxiety. In fact, the researcher found that the students tended to be anxious in speaking English in class during their presentation even though it was conducted through distance learning because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Referring to this background, this study aimed to examine what the students' anxiety in speaking English is during the distance learning and how they cope with the anxiety during the distance learning. A case study was employed in this research as one of descriptive designs in qualitative research. Moreover, the data was collected through analysing students' self-reflection documents, a close-ended questionnaire, and an interview as the research instrument. Additionally, the participants of this study were 36 Science students at grade X of SMA Kristen Petra 1 Surabaya. After conducting the research, the researcher discovered that the distance learning during Covid-19 pandemic made the students anxious in speaking English. Hence, it is significant for teachers as the facilitator to be able to play their roles to reduce the students speaking anxiety in a foreign language classroom..

Keywords: distance learning, foreign language anxiety, speaking anxiety

## Introduction
In the beginning of 2020, the world was shocked by a virus called COVID-19 which started on Wuhan, China. The virus turned the world into a pandemic which at least, lasted almost until the end of the year. This incident went widespread around the globe and as the consequence, many aspects of life were affected by this incident – especially in the education field.

In Indonesia, the government under the Ministry of Education and Culture conducted some adjustments to deal with this situation. That was why the government mentioned Surat Edaran nomor 3 Tahun 2020 about the Covid-19 Prevention in the Education Units. Also, to adapt to new school's situation, to implement the distance learning, and to carry on an online learning, the government mentioned the Surat Edaran nomor 4 Tahun 2020 about The Implementation of the Education Policy during the Emergency Period of the Spread of Corona Virus Disease (setkab.go.id, 2020). By referring to the adjustments and policies, educational institutions and schools apply Distance Learning as one of the solutions to prevent the virus transmission.

Distance learning is a kind of learning in which the learners might not always be physically present at school. Additionally, the definition means that the learners learn



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and qualify in their chosen subjects online without having to attend a learning center, a university building, or schools (Sadeghi, 2019). Furthermore, there are many platforms where the students can have an access, as the examples are Google Classroom, Zoom, Schoology, and other Learning Management Systems (LMSs).

However, this type of learning also has many obstacles or weaknesses in its implementation during the Covid-19 pandemic. According to Fojtik (2018), there are some weaknesses regarding with the distance learning; Teachers and students have little experience with this form of teaching, and the need for thorough technical security. In addition, it also leads to students' anxiety of foreign language (Pichette, 2009) and one of the foreign language anxieties which the students encounter is the students' speaking skill.

A good speaker should strive communicate his/ her ideas clearly so that those ideas can be accepted well in accordance with what is wanted by the listeners (Heriansyah, 2012). Moreover, the most significant problem in foreign language classroom is that the English language learners often express the anxiety when speaking and communicating in the target language (Fitriah and Muna, 2019). As the consequence, foreign language anxiety can become an obstacle that influences one's acquisition in mastering a language (Dordinejad and Ahmadabad, 2014). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1086) also added that speaking in the target language seems to be the most threatening sector in foreign language learning.

In snowballing pandemic and the need for academic continuation, educational institutions have shifted to distance and online learning. E-learning tools play a significant role to assist students, teachers, and instructors to facilitate them having a connection to communicate (Subedi, et. al, 2020).

The learning process changes into online learning during pandemic. The pandemic effects globally across the world. It is including educational institutions to switch the way teachers, teaching professionals, and facilitators teach into more technology-used. Hence, it paves the teaching method into online learning or web-based learning (Radha, Mahalakshmi, Kumar, Saravanakumar, 2020).

In this study, the researcher conducted a case study to analyse the students' anxiety in speaking English during distance learning. Also in this study, two research questions were analysed which are (1) what is the anxiety faced by the students in speaking English during distance learning? and (2) how do the students cope with the anxiety in speaking English during distance learning?

There are several studies conducted by the experts which also discuss about the students' speaking anxiety in speaking English. At the same time, there are also some studies which was conducted in distance learning. the first study was done by Elaine K. Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz, and Joann Cope in 1986 entitled "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." The next study was by Deyuan He in 2017 entitled "How to Cope with Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Effectively? the Case of University Students in China." Another study about how the students cope with their anxiety was conducted by Ali Karakas in 2012 with the title "How to Cope with Speaking Anxiety in EFL Classrooms." Francois Pichette in 2009 revealed a study entitled "Second Language Anxiety and Distance Language Learning." Again, in 2014, a research was conducted by Emrah Ekmekci entitled "Distance-education in Foreign Language Teaching: Evaluations from the Perspectives of Freshman Students."

In this study, the researcher conducted a case study research about the students' anxiety in speaking English during distance learning. By conducting this study, the

researcher tried to discover what anxiety which the students encountered during distance learning and how they were able to cope with their own anxiety in English class. In its implementation, the researcher did a class observation of speaking class where the students performed their presentation to the whole class. Further, the students' self-reflection works were also analysed to look up further finding.

### *Students' Foreign Language Anxiety*

Foreign language anxiety is defined as the feeling of tension and apprehension which are specifically associated with second language context, which is including speaking, listening, and learning (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994) as cited in Harada, Eguchi, Moriya, Suzuki (2017). Horwitz. Horwitz, and Cope (1986) stated that anxiety is the major problem to be overcome in learning to speak another language. Tulgar (2018) mentioned the fear of being assessed orally, worries about the fluency, intonation, and pronunciation, the fear of implementing the target language with other people, discussing about unfamiliar topics and having time limitation in talking were the major factors which is causing anxiety when speaking. Other factors which affect the anxiety levels of learners are such as limited vocabulary knowledge, self-confidence, attitudes toward the target language and learners' background in the target language (Akkakoson, 2016) as cited in Tulgar (2018).

According to Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986), there are three related performance anxiety: 1) communication apprehension; 2) fear of negative evaluation; and 3) test anxiety.

Communication apprehension plays a significant role in foreign language anxiety. According to McCroskey (1984) as cited in Indrianty (2016), communication apprehension is a fear about actual or anticipated communication with the other individuals, and it is a behavioural trait related to the psychological constructs of shyness and reserve. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) mentions that communication apprehension is a kind of shyness that is characterized by anxiety in communicating with people. Furthermore, as cited in Tati & Golingi (2016), Tseng (2012) stated that speaking activity such as 'presentation' using the target language is a source of the students' anxiety.

Fear of negative evaluation is an extension of the second component which is considered as 'apprehension about others' evaluations, the act of avoiding the evaluative situations, and the expectation that others will evaluate oneself negatively (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986).

Test anxiety is defined as a type of performance anxiety which is stemming from a fear of failure (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986).

In reducing students' foreign language anxiety, Kondo and Yang (2004) as stated in He (2017) mention that there were five categories of tactics for coping with the language anxiety: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer thinking, and resignation. Resignation in its definition is that the students seem to do nothing to reduce their anxiety. However, it is not an active coping strategy and does not have any pedagogic value.

### *Speaking Skill in English*

Good English language skills open doors now wherever people are in the world. It is no wonder if English becomes a demanding skill for today's learning, especially for the 21st century learning. Furthermore, a survey held by Cambridgeenglish.org

(2020) which employed 5,300 employers in 38 countries mentioned that English plays significantly all over the world.

Speaking is one the productive skills that demands English language learners to have a huge courage and confidence in conveying message to the listener. It is crucial for everyone to build good communication among them (Fitriah and Muna, 2019). Additionally, of all the four macro English skills, speaking seems to be the most important skill required for communication (Zaremba, 2006) as stated in Al-Eiadeh et.al (2016).

Oradee (2012) mentions that English learning and teaching have an aim to focus the students to be able to use English for communication and as an equipment for advancing their studies. Speaking, as one of the English skills, is the most essential skill for it is the primary skill for communication (Aungwatanakun, 1994) as stated in Oradee (2012). On the other hand, students sometimes find difficulties in expressing their idea. Al-Hosni (2014) as stated in Gudu (2015) mentioned that unwillingness to learn and anxiety in speaking skill subject are the two major issues for learning English. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) added that the difficulty in speaking in a classroom might be the most frequently cited issue of the anxious students.

### *Distance Learning*

UNESCO recommended the implementation of distance learning programs which schools and teachers can make use of it to reach learners remotely and reduce the disruption of education (Setiawan, n.d) as stated in Sadeghi (2019). Sadeghi (2019) stated that distance learning is the kind of learning which the students could not always be physically present at school. In other words, the learners study and qualify in the chosen subjects through online without having to attend the exam center, a college building, or educational institution. Mehrotra, Hollister, and McGahey (2001) also added that distance learning is a current reality which is creating opportunities and also challenges for the educational institutions. A reality which offers the students to expand their choices in when, where, how, and whom they learn; a reality which makes the education accessible to ever larger numbers of people.

By referring to the existence of distance learning, e-learning tools play a significant role in assisting people, especially during this pandemic. It aims to help the teachers, instructors, and the students to facilitate the learning and teaching process (Subedi, Nayaju, Subedi, Shah, Shah, 2020). Furthermore, most of them are free which can help assure the continuous learning during this COVID-19 pandemic (Almaiah, Al-Khasawneh, and Althunibat, 2020) as stated in Subedi, Nayaju, Subedi, Shah, Shah (2020).

## Method

A case study, as one of descriptive design in qualitative research was employed in this study. The study took three routes: questionnaire, document analysis, and an interview. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010), case study is a kind of ethnographic research study which is focusing on a single unit, for example an individual, a group, an organization, or a program. The goal of case study is to gain a detailed description and understanding of the entity or the "case". One of the advantages of this methodology is that there is a close collaboration between the participants and the researcher, while allowing the participants to tell their stories (Crabtree and Miller, 1999) as cited in Baxter and Jack (2010).

This research was undertaken at SMA Kristen Petra 1 Surabaya. The subjects of the research were the 36 Science students of the tenth grade who have dealt with the speaking activity, specifically group presentations on September 18th and then continued on September 21st – 25th 2020.

For the first part of the study, the researcher distributed a close-ended questionnaire to the students through Google Form. As the second part of the research, the researcher analysed the students' self-reflection which had been done as their reflection after doing the group presentations.

In analysing the data, the result of the questionnaire could be seen to find out students' anxiety in speaking English. Here, the researcher employed Likert Scale, as proposed by Nemoto and Beglar (2013), is a psychometric scale which has multiple categories in which the participants choose to represent their feelings, opinions, ideas, and attitudes about a particular issue. In analysing the data, the options for each question in the questionnaire were arranged from Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The researcher then also examined the Mean score (the average score) of each questionnaire item.

The questionnaires were distributed to see students' responses. The questionnaires consisted of 21 questions which were divided into three parts. They are students' anxiety related questions, ways how students cope with the anxiety, and the role of teacher in minimizing the students' anxiety in speaking English in a classroom during distance learning. All questions given were written in English.

The researcher collected students' self-reflection as the inquiry for this study. There were three main questions related to the study. The first question is what is the anxiety that the students encounter during the English presentation? Then, the second one was how do the students cope with the anxiety? And the last one was how did the teacher play roles in English presentation?

Moreover, an interview was conducted as a supplement research instrument for data gathering. The researcher picked a student as the representative of the class. The researcher then confirmed each question distributed in self-reflection form previously.

## Findings and Discussion

The findings' stage was started by distributing a close-ended questionnaire. In this study, the researcher used Likert Questionnaire, which consisted of five categories. They are Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree.

It was about students' anxiety in speaking English during the distance learning proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) called FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale). However, in its implementation, the researcher picked up some of the statements of FLCAS based on the students' situation when the data collecting was conducted in class. The following is the results of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Result of types on students' anxiety during distance learning

| **Types of anxiety in foreign language learning** | **Questionnaire Items** | **Mean** |
|---|---|---|
| **Communication apprehension** | I am not sure with my speaking ability in my English class. | 3.0 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | I worry that the messages which I deliver will not be understood. | 3.7 |
| | I am anxious that I will not able to sufficiently express my thought and idea. | 3.6 |
| | Before doing the presentation, I feel sure and relaxed. | 2.6 |
| **Fear of negative evaluation** | I should have positive impression on others' eyes. | 3.8 |
| | I pay more attention to my mistakes rather than error correction which should be administered. | 3.1 |
| **Test anxiety** | I am nervous that I will fail my presentation. | 3.7 |
| | I am afraid of making mistakes during the presentation. | 4.3 |

Based on Table 1, there were three major points which the researcher tried to discover the results regarding the types of foreign language anxiety in speaking English in a classroom. They were communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The researcher also examined which parts got the highest and the lowest mean scores in the questionnaire items.

Among the three, the highest mean score was at the questionnaire item on the *'test anxiety'* which the students were afraid to make mistakes during the online presentation. Its point was 4.3 which meant that the students agreed about the statement. Kralova and Soradova (2015) mentioned that in test anxiety, the students were making themselves put the high demands of a perfect performance or mastery of the foreign language. The result of the research was in line with the idea of the previous research that the students were anxious to fail in their performance.

The second aspect of students' anxiety in English speaking class was their fear of negative evaluation that they received from their peers. Carter, Sbrocco, Riley, and Mitchell (2012) said that an individual is socially anxious that they are going to be negatively evaluated due to their performance. The result was quite higher namely 3.5. The student supposed to search or to focus on the perceived imperfection during the activity was on.

However, there was a part in the second type of the *'communication apprehension'* anxiety which was the lowest score among all. It was 2.6 which depicted that the students felt sure and relaxed before doing the presentation. Kralova and Soradova (2015) also added that the communication apprehension caused fear among the students for not being able to understand someone's speech or talk. The finding mentioned that the students seemed to not pay much attention on their peers' responds.

To support the findings, analysing the students' self-reflections or it can be called as the document analysis. The results of the students' anxiety then be classified into what type the students' anxiety in speaking English during distance learning is.

It was in line with the student's statement as followed:

F5 mentioned,

> *"There were no difficulties during the presentation. Yet, I was a bit anxious and nervous with the audience, because it was the first time I got into this online presentation."*

Another interesting finding was that the students felt that they had to have a good impression to others' eyes. The point was the second highest namely 3.8.

F5 also added,

> *"My anxiety was about what if I was laughed by the whole class. It would be so embarrassing."*

M12 said,

> *"For minimizing the nervousness, I practiced speaking in front of my laptop camera a day before the presentation took place. Then, to overcome the grammatical errors, I made a simple note about where I felt using the wrong grammar during my presentation and repeated my presentation over and over again."*

By being interviewed, F5 confirmed that,

> *"Yes! It was important because it was a presentation assignment. I was aware that impression counted as part of the evaluation. Then, it was not for an assignment, it was important, too. I was afraid that I would leave bad impression especially to new friends."*

It was in line to what Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) mentioned, fear of negative evaluation meant that the learners avoid the evaluation situations and the expectation which others would evaluate themselves negatively.

Table 2. Comparison of students speaking anxiety during distance learning and face-to-face meeting.

| Students preference | Questionnaire Items | Mean |
|---|---|---|
| **Distance learning** | I feel anxious to do the presentation during the distance learning. | 3.5 |
| | Distance learning makes me enjoy in doing the presentation (speaking). | 2.8 |
| **Face-to-face meeting** | I feel confident when I do the presentation in front of the class (face-to-face meeting). | 2.4 |

Looking at Table 2, the mean score pointed that, in this study, the highest mean score was 3.5 compared with the face-to-face meeting presentation which was only namely 2.4. The students seemed to be neutral for this point. However, the students' anxiety during distance learning to doing the presentation was bigger rather than the face-to-face one. It was in contrast with Pichette (2009) which stated that there was no any difference in students' anxiety profiles between distance learning and in the

classroom. The students were more anxious in having online presentation activity as stated in the following student's self-reflection:

F5 stated,

> *"That was my first time in presenting in high school. Let alone virtually. Besides my well-being, I was more concerned about any technical difficulties that might've happened."*

Another statement was explained by M8,

> *"If one of my group members had a problem, the presentation would not go well. That example was happening on Friday, one of our group members, me, had an internet connection problem."*

It is considered that presenting and integrating language skills in distance language learning courses are more challenging (Ekmekci, 2014). The researcher interpreted that the distance learning in this case study was challenging due to factors such as the internet connection and the e-learning tool used, Zoom.

F5 was again interviewed and stated,

> *"It was because I had to rehearse several times just to make sure that there weren't any technical difficulties. For the presentation about 'Countries and Cultures' I had to create a Zoom room and learnt to manoeuvre screen sharing every single day. Also, I got more nervous for the online one since I felt more confident if everyone was looking at me and being engaged at my presentation. That way, I felt like being the center of attention. In the online class, I didn't have real audiences that were willing to listen to me, so the atmosphere was different. And I was unable to concentrate whenever my family was around."*

Therefore, by looking at the data, there are some points which would be mentioned on how the students coped with their anxiety during the distance learning.

Table 3. Ways the students cope with the anxiety during distance learning.

| **Ways the students cope with the anxiety** | **Questionnaire Items** | **Mean** |
|---|---|---|
| **Preparation** | I do some preparation for my online presentation. | 4.1 |
| **Relaxation** | I do some pleasant activity to make me calm and less worried. | 3.5 |
| **Positive thinking** | I set my mind to think positively. | 3.8 |
| **Peer seeking** | I look for a suitable learning partner to talk or to share. | 3.4 |
| **Resignation** | I do nothing to lessen my anxiety, i.e: giving up, stopping making any effort. | 2.0 |

Table 3 depicted on ways how the students coped with their speaking English anxiety during the distance learning in classroom. The first questionnaire item which was about the preparation got the highest mean score of the total namely 4.1 in which the students agreed that they prepared the English presentation to reduce the anxiety. It was in contrast with the last point about 'resignation', that the students did nothing to minimize their anxiety. The lowest mean score was only 2.0 which shown that the students disagreed about this way of coping. Kondo and Yang (2004) as stated in He (2017) mentioned that there were five categories of tactics for coping with the language anxiety: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer thinking, and resignation.

Examples below were the students who prepared for the presentation during the distance learning. Students opinion about their ways to cope with the anxiety coming up:

First point about 'preparation',
M12 stated,

> *"For minimizing the nervousness, I practiced speaking in front of my laptop camera a day before the presentation took place. Then, to overcome the grammatical errors, I made a simple note about where I felt using the wrong grammar during my presentation and repeated my presentation over and over again."*

F5 explained,

> *"I practiced screen sharing every single day way before presentation. I made a single zoom room to get the hang of it."*

Second and third points about 'relaxation' and 'think positively',
F7 mentioned,

> *"I would also try to calm myself down by having a thought that I would finish my slide only in few minutes. And read all the sentences carefully, so I would not misspell it."*

F17 stated,

> *"I always motivate myself, think positive things, try to relax, and be confident when presenting."*

Hence, by referring to students' anxiety found in class while they were presenting, the teacher as the facilitator in class should be able to take parts in bringing down the students' anxiety in foreign language class during the distance learning.

Table 4. Roles of teachers in reducing students' anxiety in an online English-speaking class

| **Roles of teacher** | **Questionnaire Items** | **Mean** |
|---|---|---|
| **Karakas (2012)** | The teacher was the main cause of my speaking anxiety along with my friends. | 2.6 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | The teacher encouraged the students' attempt, praised the efforts. | 3.9 |
| | The teacher tolerated my mistakes in doing the presentation during distance learning. | 4.0 |
| | The teacher created a supportive and relaxed classroom environment when the presentation was conducted. | 4.0 |
| | The teacher provided feedback to the students. | 4.0 |

As an additional finding, the researcher discovered the roles of teacher as a facilitator in bringing down the anxiety. The last table, Table 4, represented the teacher roles in lessening students' anxiety in speaking English. From the table, three out of five points gained the same mean score, 4.0, in which it was the highest point among all. The students seemed to agree that the teacher in class played a role in reducing their anxiety, such as encouraging students attempt and praising their efforts, tolerating their mistakes while doing the online presentation, creating a supportive and relaxed classroom environment when the presentation was conducted, and as the last point, providing feedback to the students.

It was in contrast with the first point. It was only 2.6 that the students seemed to disagree with the statement *'the teacher was the main cause of their speaking anxiety along with their peers.'*

There were some approaches in which the teacher could participate in students' anxiety-reduction. Karakas (2012) stated that therefore, the first step to minimize students' anxiety is to raise the teachers' awareness about their harmful attitudes towards the students. As the consequence, there were some ways to minimizing students' anxiety in foreign language class to be employed for teachers. Karakas (2012) added that teachers need to encourage and praise the efforts they made, tolerate their students' mistakes, create a supportive and relaxed classroom when the presentation was conducted, and provided feedback to them.

As student was asked for to write their self-reflection and interviewed, they expressed their opinions about the roles of teacher in classroom to reduce the anxiety arisen.

M3 mentioned,

> *"She listened well to my group presentation. During the presentation, the teacher and the students were muted. It made me less worried."*

M4 stated,

> *"She complimented our work, so that it helped me to suppress my anxiety."*

F6 also added,

> *"The teacher roles during the presentation and evaluation days were pretty good. She could give us some advice, so that we could do better for the next presentation. She also taught us about the pronunciation as well as the way she could be more interactive with us."*

It could be seen from the table as well that the teacher along with their peers were not the main cause of students speaking anxiety. Most of the cause of their anxiety were the mispronounce of particular words, the technical difficulties during the distance learning, such as internet connection and computer lagging.

M4 mentioned,

> *"My major causes of anxiety were nervousness, being unprepared, failure, melancholy, and shyness."*

M9 added,

> *"I was afraid that I might say something wrong during the presentation, and I was also afraid of the way I spoke that might confuse some people. I was scared if I failed at something during the presentation."*

Even though teachers were not the major reason of students being anxious, they needed to keep in mind that each learning situation, especially in English speaking class, was unique. And the problems might come up due to the students who were anxious in pointing out the idea through presenting or speaking.

## Conclusion

This study has found that most of the students in the class are dealing with their anxiety in speaking English during the distance learning due to Covid-19 pandemic. The anxieties coming up are varied and they have their own ways on how the students cope with the anxiety during speaking English while presenting the work. Furthermore, it is essential for them also to cope with the anxiety so that it will not affect their learning and performance in class during the distance learning (Covid-19 pandemic). Hence, it is essential for the teacher as the facilitator in class to be able to minimize the anxiety of the students in speaking English by carrying out the preventive actions mentioned in the finding.

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