Investigating speaking anxiety among the SEA Teacher students

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ABSTRACT

The SEA Teacher Program or Southeast Asia Teacher Project is an educational program that provides opportunities for prospective teacher students from Southeast Asian countries to gain teaching experience in neighboring countries. Students involved in this program face their challenges. One phenomenon that occurs is anxiety about speaking English in a teaching context. This study aims to investigate the factors that cause speaking anxiety in 9 Ahmad Dahlan University students who took part in the SEA Teacher program in the Philippines. The research method used is descriptive qualitative. Data was collected through focus group discussions (FGD) and interviews. The basic theory used in this research is Horwitz et al. (1986) which states that three factors influence speaking anxiety, including anxiety about tests, anxiety about negative evaluations from other people, and fear of communication.

The results of this research prove that two of the three causes of speaking anxiety presented by Horwitz et al. (1986) are proven to exist. In addition, this research also found that there are other factors that cause speaking anxiety among the SEA Teacher students which are differences in language status, culture, school environment, lack of self-preparation, and unfamiliar material. These findings provide important insights into understanding speaking anxiety in regional higher education and more effective coping strategies.

1. Introduction

The SEA Teacher Program is an educational program that provides opportunities for student teachers from Southeast Asian countries to gain teaching experience in neighboring countries. The program, which is held only once a year, only accepts a few students to join the program. The specialty of this program is that it requires students to come to a new area and adapt to a different environment and culture. In this program, students will gain hands-on classroom teaching experience with a different language, curriculum, and culture. This program presents an anti-mainstream teaching atmosphere with a different background, language, and education system from Indonesia.

Universitas Ahmad Dahlan send nine students to the Philippines for the SEA Teacher program. The university cooperates with campuses in the Philippines, which are Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology, West Visayas State University, Capiz State University, and Saint Anthony University.

In the cooperation program between Universitas Ahmad Dahlan and the campus in the Philippines, English is the main language of instruction that is used. According to Plantika & Adnan (2021), English is a subject that must be studied in Indonesia because it has many advantages in the fields of education and work. According to Septiyana and Aminatun (2021), English is an international language that is learned by the community to keep up with the times, especially in the fields of science and technology. In order for the teaching process to run smoothly, the SEA teachers need to have a good command of the English language because English is an international language. This is also the reason why this research is conducted. Researchers want to dig deeper about the challenge while using english as the main language that is used by SEA Teacher students there.

Based on the statement, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan students should be able to communicate fluently in English. Speaking anxiety is one of the many challenges students face due to these demands. According to Abrar et al. (2016), speaking anxiety is a significant issue in foreign language education in Indonesia and Southeast Asian countries participating in the SEA teacher program. They describe speaking anxiety as a complexity consisting of an individual's perceptions, behaviors, emotions, and assumptions about the use of a foreign language in a foreign language classroom environment. In addition, speaking anxiety or nervousness when communicating is a psychological condition that can impact the way a person speaks or communicates both in public and in social situations.

Some studies have discussed speaking anxiety. First, the research entitled Factors Causing Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in Speaking by Akbar et al., (2018). The results of this study show that most students experience speaking anxiety. Some of the factors that cause speaking anxiety include fear of facing tests, fear of negative judgment, and fear of communication in English when speaking. The second research is a journal entitled Student's Strategies to Overcome English Speaking Anxiety by Rizkiya & Pratolo (2023). The results of this study show that there are several things that affect anxiety, such as communication fear, exam fear, and fear of negative evaluation.

Based on the explanation above, it can be said that speaking anxiety research has many references. However, this study will only focus on SEA Teacher students that are still rarely explained by the other researcher. The objective of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute anxiety among SEA Teacher students.

2. Method

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. According to Gay and Peter (2012) explain that qualitative research is a type of research that involves the process of analyzing, collecting, and interpreting visual and narrative data, where the data is not expressed in numerical form, in order to gain an in-depth understanding if individual experience, their perceptions of phenomena, as well related ideas. This research to find out about SEA Teacher students speaking anxiety and understand the factors that play a role in this phenomenon. There are 9 students as the subject of this research. In this research, there are two types of instruments used, which are focus group discussion and interviews.

Focus group discussion (FGD) is a qualitative approach that is often used to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues. This approach is designed to collect data from a purposefully selected group of individuals, rather than relying on a statistically representative sample of the broader population. This research uses semi-structured interviews starting from the issues included in the interview guide. This interview is intended to gain a deeper and more detailed understanding of the factors that cause students' anxiety levels and to find solutions to overcome the anxiety phenomenon of SEA Teacher students.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Findings

The following are the results of researchers regarding the causes of SEA Teacher students' speaking anxiety. In using two data collection methods, researchers found several causes of speaking anxiety which were divided into several themes which were presented in descriptive explanations. Among the themes found by researchers are:

3.1.1. Lack of Preparation

Lack of preparation is one of the causes of SEA Teacher students' speaking anxiety. This data was found during focus group discussions and interviews. SEA Teacher students said that lack of preparation, especially in teaching practice, could cause speaking anxiety.

3.1.2. Language Status

This data was found in the results of student discussions. The difference in language status where English is a second language in the Philippines while in Indonesia it is still considered a foreign language can trigger SEA Teacher students' speaking anxiety. Students worry if the students they teach have better language skills.

3.1.3. Unfamiliar materials

Another cause of SEA Teacher students' speaking anxiety is unfamiliar material. This data was found during the group discussion process. Students stated that in the Philippines they had to study foreign material and present it in class. This can trigger speaking anxiety.

3.1.4. Fear of negative evaluation

The next cause of anxiety is fear of other people's negative judgment. SEA Teacher students feel worried about being assessed badly by students in the Philippines. They are afraid of being judged negatively, especially in the context of how they teach in class. This data was obtained from interviews with several students.

3.1.5. Fear of communication

Fear of communicating is one of the causes of anxiety for SEA Teacher students. This data was obtained from the results of interviews. They feel inferior and are quite hesitant in speaking. The cause of this anxiety is also related to other causes such as lack of preparation.

3.2. Discussion

In this chapter, researchers will examine the findings using the theory of Horwitz et al (1986). Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three components of speaking anxiety: test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication anxiety. Utilizing this framework, researchers aim to delve deeper into the real-world experiences of SEA teacher students. Each theme will be analyzed through the lens of Horwitz et al. (1986) theory to gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors at play.

Lack of preparation is one of the causes of speaking anxiety that is felt by SEA teacher students. In both discussion groups and interview sessions, inadequate preparation was identified as a significant contributing factor to speaking anxiety. During the interviews, five out of eight individuals disclosed experiencing anxiety due to their lack of preparedness, particularly for teaching demonstrations. Similarly, in the group discussions, nearly all participants concurred that inadequate preparation could potentially lead to speaking anxiety. Srinawati and Maulana (2019) assert that lack of preparation is an internal factor contributing to speaking anxiety during student presentations. This view is also supported by Luo (2014), who highlights that speaking anxiety during presentations is influenced by a lack of preparation.

Besides lack of preparation, language status is another cause of SEA Teacher students' speaking anxiety. This is because English in the Philippines has status as a second language, while in Indonesia it still has status as a foreign language. Due to this difference in language position, SEA teacher students feel worried, scared and anxious if their speaking skills are lower than the students taught in class.

Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized foreign language speaking anxiety as a distinct complexity involving self-perception, beliefs, behavior, and emotions. This anxiety occurs when individuals feel they cannot meet their own expectations of being effective communicators in a foreign language, similar to their proficiency in their native language.

Another cause of speaking anxiety is unfamiliar material. Based on the results of the discussion group, SEA Teacher students will have a companion teacher in a Philippine school. The teacher's job is to teach the material that the students are going to teach to the students. SEA Teacher students

admit that sometimes they are given material that is unfamiliar, such as material about African culture. This, of course, requires the students to study foreign material and sometimes they say they are afraid when misunderstandings occur in class because the SEA Teacher students feel they have not mastered enough of the material being taught.

Horwitz et al. (1986) identified fear of negative evaluation as a key factor contributing to speaking anxiety. This fear involves concern about being judged or assessed by others. Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that individuals who are particularly afraid of negative evaluations are highly sensitive to the opinions of those in the classroom, including teachers, native speakers, proficient second language speakers, and peers. From that statement it is proof that fear of negative evaluation is also found in the interview session.

The last cause of speaking anxiety is fear of communication. Horwitz et al. (1986) explains that this fear encompasses feelings of shame, hesitation, and apprehension when engaging with others. This anxiety leads individuals to focus more on the potential negative outcomes of their interactions.

One of the students stated:

> "*This feeling of anxiety comes when I am afraid of conveying the wrong knowledge to students. I'm afraid that students won't be able to understand the way I speak, and that sometimes appears in my mind and makes me feel nervous and in a cold sweat*" (MF stated).

Other researchers such as Fithriani (2021), also stated that a common factor contributing to speaking anxiety is the fear of being misunderstood. Fithriani (2021) highlighted that this fear of misunderstanding is the primary reason why students are so apprehensive about making grammatical mistakes, which ultimately hinders their ability to use the language freely.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that students who participated in the SEA teacher program exhibited a notable degree of speaking anxiety, particularly in the context of school teaching in the Philippines. The following factors have been identified as potential causes of speaking anxiety such as 1) lack of preparation, 2) language status, 3) unfamiliar material, 4) Fear of negative evaluation, and 5) Fear of communication. The results of this study support and complement Horwitz et al. (1986) theory regarding the causes of speaking anxiety. This research may provide new insights as well as additional viewpoints regarding Horwitz's et al. (1986) theory that may not be fully explained.

This research can also be utilized as a suggestion for students, lecturers, and researchers in the future. For students, this research provides an overview of the causes of speaking anxiety, which enables them to analyze themselves if they do have speaking anxiety and to understand some of the causes of anxiety. For educators, this research can serve as a resource for understanding how to respond to students' speaking anxiety. Besides that, this research can also be used as a reference for further research, especially for students who will take part in international education programs. This research can be used as a tool to identify the potential for speaking anxiety when running a student exchange program. By understanding the various causes of speaking anxiety, future researchers can develop media or strategies to address this anxiety.

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