

A Conceptual Review on Internal and External Coping Mechanisms of Speaking Anxiety in an Oral Presentation in ESL Classrooms

Nursuhaila Ibrahim^{1*}, Noor Hanim Rahmat², Normala Sulaiman³

¹Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor, Kampus Pasir Gudang, Johor, Malaysia

²Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia

³Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Cawangan Johor, Kampus Segamat, Johor, Malaysia

*Corresponding Author: nursu957@uitm.edu.my

Received: 22 March 2025 | Accepted: 2 May 2025 | Published: 1 June 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55057/ijares.2025.7.3.1>

Abstract: *This conceptual paper investigates the coping mechanisms of speaking anxiety among ESL (English as a Second Language) learners during oral presentations in the classroom. It aims to enhance understanding of the internal and external coping mechanisms employed during oral presentations in the ESL classroom. The techniques used for this paper are based on past studies published in journal articles and books related to this research area. This paper proposes a framework as a foundation for the role of internal and external coping strategies to alleviate speaking anxiety for learners engaged in oral presentations. These results are crucial for ESL learners looking to improve their oral communication skills while reducing speaking anxiety. Additionally, they impact ESL educators' understanding of language learning challenges and advocate for a supportive learning environment in classrooms.*

Keywords: speaking anxiety, oral presentation, internal strategy, external strategy, ESL classrooms

1. Introduction

English serves as a global lingua franca, playing a significant role in communication and modernity. It is widely used in business, science, technology, and education to facilitate communication across countries and borders. In the context of the Malaysian education system, English is known as a second language and is mainly used in teaching and learning. Thus, the ability of effective communication is vital for learners to interact and acquire knowledge. In an English as a second language (ESL) classroom, learners need to communicate and use the language for learning purposes. Nevertheless, the challenges they face due to anxiety hinder their ability to participate effectively in the classroom. According to Badriyah and Novita (2023), they describe anxiety is a mental state encompassing emotional responses, physiological reactions, and behavioural manifestations. This is a multifaceted impact on learners, affecting their emotions, bodily reactions, and behaviour. Selvam et al. (in Hussein, 2021) mentioned that language anxiety adversely affects student performance, attitudes, emotional well-being, and satisfaction with the learning experience.

Speaking in English can be challenging for learners due to various reasons, depending on the learners' background and proficiency. Despite English being the medium of instruction, learners also struggle with communication in the classroom. This led to a lack of ability for them to speak clearly in the language. Hence, this study proposes a framework that serves as a main attempt for the study of coping strategies to lessen speaking anxiety in oral presentations.

In this study, the researcher adopts a conceptual framework based on coping strategies identified by Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004), which categorizes learners' coping mechanisms of speaking anxiety into preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. Nevertheless, the present study extends the categories by separating them into internal and external coping mechanisms.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Speaking Anxiety

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined anxiety as a diverse complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning, rising from the exclusivity of the language learning process. The feeling of nervousness or anxiety occurs before or during certain tasks in language classrooms. This phenomenon is common for language learners in a classroom due to various reasons. However, it influences learner performance, especially in oral presentations.

Moreover, speaking in English is not easy for learners with a low proficiency level, especially when performing in front of others. Eventually, many researchers have investigated this issue and identified the causes, effects and managing strategies for speaking anxiety. For instance, in a study by Hashemi & Abbasi (2013), they mentioned that speaking anxiety hinders the creative performance of language learners while learning English. In a research by Ahmad Al-Khotaba et al. (2020), speaking anxiety is considered a psycholinguistic block that affects learners' performance in the classroom. They found that learners with high anxiety levels have weak performance in the oral task. Thus, effective coping mechanisms are useful to lessen learners' anxiety when speaking in the target language.

2.2 Internal Strategies

Internal strategies of speaking anxiety indicate individual independent strategies to boost their speaking performance and alleviate nervousness or anxiety without external assistance. It is categorized into positive thinking, resignation, preparation, and relaxation.

2.2.1 Positive Thinking

Positive thinking refers to an encouraging mindset that involves learners' cognitive ability. Shokrpour et al. (2021) declared that positive thinking alleviates student anxiety and enhances their capacity to manage stress, enabling them to fit in their views, feelings, and behaviours. This internal coping strategy enables learners to maintain their confidence and prevent negative thoughts.

2.2.2 Resignation

Moreover, another internal coping mechanism is resignation. This strategy means learners giving up or accepting their situation. This strategy is rare, but still occurs as learners tend to put up with the situation because of feeling anxious and nervous.

2.2.3 Preparation

Learners used various strategies to overcome anxiety, such as preparation and practice, as well as body movement (Netta et al., 2020). Preparation includes the planning process, such as reviewing, practicing, anticipating, and organising the content of presentation. (Kondo & Yong, 2004)

2.2.4 Relaxation

This technique has been proven to be an effective coping mechanism, such as stretching the muscles, meditating, and listening to music (Oxford, 1990 as cited in Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). Taking a deep breath during the presentation enables learners to feel calm and prevents feelings of fear and anxiety when using the target language. Ariga (2019) emphasizes that proper breathing controls the blood pressure, heart rate, and respiration, which helps to reduce anxiety.

2.3 External Strategies

External Strategies require learners to ask for assistance from others to lessen their speaking anxiety. In this study, the researcher classified peer seeking as an external coping strategy.

2.3.1 Peer Seeking

Learners seek help from friends to improve pronunciation by practicing speaking with them (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). This strategy helps learners find comfort for themselves. Seeking peers who have the same anxiety can stimulate emotion, knowing that other people also experience anxiety. Thus, turning to friends or classmates increases emotional support and encourages learners to perform better in oral presentations.

3. Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 below presents a conceptual framework of the internal and external coping mechanisms to cope with speaking anxiety in oral presentations in the classroom. The suggested conceptual framework is as follows:

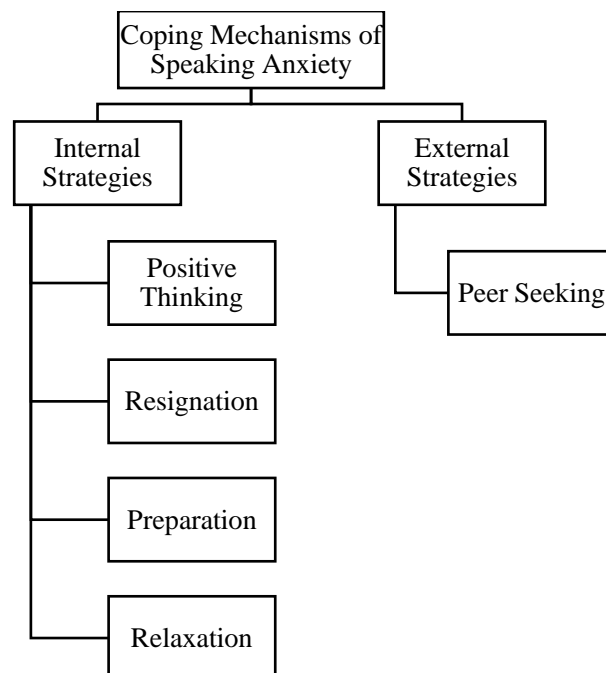


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework

4. Conclusion

By addressing these coping mechanisms for speaking anxiety, learners can improve their communication skills when performing in a classroom. This research proposed a conceptual framework that explores internal and external coping strategies to reduce speaking anxiety in oral presentations. Therefore, it is hoped that the proposed framework offers valuable support for future studies on speaking anxiety.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the supervisors for providing guidance and recommendations for this study.

References

- Ahmad Al-Khotaba, H. H., Alkhataba, E. H. A., Abdul-Hamid, S., & Ibrahim, B. (2020). Foreign language speaking anxiety: A psycholinguistic barrier affecting speaking achievement of Saudi EFL learners. *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)*, 10. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3512637.
- Ariga, R. A. (2019). Decrease anxiety among students who will do the objective structured clinical examination with deep breathing relaxation technique. *Open Access Macedonian Journal of Medical Sciences*, 7(16), 2619–2622. <https://doi.org/10.3889/oamjms.2019.409>
- Badriyah, I. L., & Novita, D. (2023). Students' anxiety in English speaking class at a private junior high school in East Java, Indonesia. *International social sciences and humanities*, 2(1), 84–93. <http://proceeding.unmuhjember.ac.id/index.php/iss/article/view/130>.
- Hashemi, M. & Abbasi, M. (2013). The role of the teacher in alleviating anxiety in language classes. *Int. Res. J. Appl. Basic Sci.*, 4(3), 640- 646.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. A. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132. <https://doi.org/10.2307/327317>
- Hussein, N. H. (2021). Anxiety in oral presentation among ESL students: Factors and strategies. *International online journal of language, communication, and humanities*, special issue November, 100–108
- Kondo, D. S., & Ying-Ling, Y. (2004). Strategies for coping with language anxiety: the case of students of English in Japan. *ELT Journal*, 58(3), 258–265. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/58.3.258>
- Netta, A., Trisnawati, I. K., & Helmanda, C. M. (2020). Indonesian EFL students' strategies in dealing with speaking anxiety in a public speaking course. *ACCENTIA: Journal of English Language and Education*, 1(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.37598/accentia.v1i1.807>
- Rajitha, K., & Alamelu, C. (2020). A study of factors affecting and causing speaking anxiety. *Procedia Computer Science*, 172, 1053–1058. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2020.05.154>
- Shokrpour, N., Sheidaie, S., Amirkhani, M., Bazrafkan, L., & Modreki, A. (2021). Effect of positive thinking training on stress, anxiety, depression, and quality of life among hemodialysis patients: A randomized controlled clinical trial. https://doi.org/10.4103/jehp.jehp_1120_20
- Toyama, M., & Yamazaki, Y. (2021). Classroom Interventions and Foreign Language Anxiety: A Systematic Review with Narrative Approach. In *Frontiers in Psychology* (Vol. 12). Frontiers Media S.A. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.614184>