STUDENTS’ PREPARATION AND THEIR ANXIETIES IN PERFORMING THESIS PRESENTATION IN ENGLISH

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Abstract
The study reports the students’ preparation and their anxieties performing the presentation. Questionnaires arranged based on Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS) were given to 50 students who finished their presentations to find out how they prepared for the presentation and what they felt facing the D day. Eighteen oral presentations were video recorded to observe the students facial expression, body-language and attitude. It is found that all students experienced anxieties in different degrees. Surprisingly most students, both male and female underwent severe anxiety, even some female suffered from very severe. The students’ preparation varied so did the length of the time they spent. Most received help from others to do preparation and practices. Two third of the students faced the screen rather than the examiners while they were presenting their thesis. They expected the examiners to be friendlier and all of presentation devices i.e. LCD, computer, pointer, board markers should be well-prepared in the examining room beforehand. Collaborative alternative solutions are elaborated in this paper.

Keywords: student’s anxiety, student’s preparation, thesis oral presentation

Introduction
At the end of four-year term of Business Administration study programs of an Indonesian polytechnic the students have to present their thesis in English in front of a team of five examiners for about 10 to 15 minutes. The department has set the syllabus with a course of English for specific purpose in which presentation skill is included to promote. However, among the components of oral thesis examination scorings, the thesis oral presentation score is the lowest. Therefore, observing the students’ preparation and whether they experience the anxiety that obstructs their language performance and language proficiency may help them find alternative ways to perform better.

When students are nervous and shaky, the audience hardly ever notices (Wright, 1995). People will notice if students start behaving unnaturally. Unfortunately, some nervous mannerism do get recognized by audiences, students may perform physiological reactions, a sense of inadequacy, anxiety, or depression, impaired psychological functioning (e.g. inability to concentrate, to work effectively, to solve problems) or aberrant needs or behavior (e.g. intense aggressiveness, compulsive acts). Anxiety which is described as “an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physical signs (such as tension, sweating, and increased pulse rate), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one’s capacity to cope with it” (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2017) is deeply rooted in the psychological history of the individual. Social stress can result in physiological symptoms which in turn yield to psychological interventions (e.g. gastric ulcers). It has been remarked as psychosomatic conditions. A wide range of physiological responses people generally show when they are anxious; pulse is quickened, breathing is faster, galvanic skin response is accentuated. However groups differ not only in the extent
and pattern of these responses but also in their subjective counterparts. Women more commonly report cold hands or feet, while men more often mention heart palpitations or breathing difficulties when asked to describe a typical anxiety response (Korchin, 1976). Previous studies on students’ speaking anxiety on the basis of FLCAS (Foreign language classroom anxiety) developed by Horwitz, et al. (1986) have been done by Mahmoodzadeh (2012), Baran-Lucarz (2014) and Deyuan He (2013). They found that anxiety can obstruct the learning process and is associated negatively with language performance and language proficiency.

Iranian female learners were found to be more prone to experiencing Foreign Language (FL) speaking inter-language system. With respect to level differences, the results demonstrated that gaining more FL knowledge may not necessarily lead to a substantial reduction in experiencing FL speaking anxiety, since more proficient participants were more subject to the anxiety-provoking factors within their inter-language system than less proficient participants (Mahmoodzadeh, 2012). Baran-Lucarz (2014) finds that high-pronunciation anxiety learners have statistically lower degrees of willingness to communicate than their low pronunciation anxiety classmates. Deyuan He (2013) argues that exploration of the reasons will provide an empirical basis for seeking effective strategies to deal with foreign language speaking anxiety in China’s universities.

There are three research questions promoted in this study:
RQ 1: How did the students prepare their presentation?
RQ 2: What are their anxieties like measured with Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HAM-A)?
RQ 3: What do the students expect the department to help them?

**Methodology**

This qualitative study uses questionnaire and interview to collect data, to find out the students’ activities in preparing their English oral presentation of their undergraduate thesis and their anxieties. The Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale (HARS) is applied to measure the anxieties. There are 50 students participated in this study, 28% males and 72% females, aged 20 to 23. They majored in Business Administration study program of an Indonesian polytechnic, which English is their foreign language. The students were asked to fill the questionnaire which was written in Indonesian after they finished experiencing their thesis oral examination.

**Data analyzing procedures**

1. Analyzing students’ preparation

   The activities to prepare for the presentation were identified. All of the students’ answers were listed and categorized.

2. Analyzing students’ anxieties

   There are 14 conditions reflecting anxieties observed in this study. They are anxious mood, tension, fears, insomnia, intellectual, depressed mood, somatic muscular, somatic (sensory), cardiovascular symptoms, respiratory symptoms, gastrointestinal symptoms, genitourinary symptoms, autonomic symptoms and behavior at interview. The respondents were asked to rate by finding the answer which best described the extent to which he/she had those condition. They had to select one of the five responses for each of the fourteen questions. Each item was scored on the scale of 0 (not present), 1 (mild), 2 (moderate), 3 (severe), 4 (very severe), with the total range of 0-56. If a participant gets fewer than or the score of 17, he or she is indicated suffers from mild severity; 18-24 mild to moderate severity and 25-30 moderate to severe and 30-56 severe to very severe.

3. Analyzing students’ non-verbal communication
The 18 recordings of the students performing the thesis oral presentation were analyzed to discover the students’ non-verbal communication. They have signed the letter of informed consent and agreed their oral presentations were video recorded.

**Finding and Discussion**  
RQ 1: How did the students prepare their presentation?

The activities to prepare for the presentation include the practices and preparing the power points. There are four kinds of activities students did to prepare their oral presentation:

- a. Memorizing
- b. Practicing oral presentation with others’ help
- c. Audio recording their oral presentation text and listening to it and put himself as a listener
- d. Video recording their oral presentation practice and watching it and putting himself as an examiner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. How Students Prepare Their Presentation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Done alone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparing oral presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preparing PPT</td>
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</table>

The activities to prepare for the presentation include the practices and preparing the power points. The study found that most students prepared them alone and the rest received their peers’ help, only 4% students enjoyed others’ total help. The students spent different time lengths of preparing their oral presentation. It was ranged one to four days.

<table>
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<th>Table 2. student’s Preparing Time Length</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Two days</td>
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<tr>
<td>Three days</td>
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<td>More than three days</td>
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<td>50</td>
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Commonly, female students worked alone in preparing their oral presentations, power points of their presentations and also their abstracts; they did them by themselves without others’ help and spent more time than male students. Meanwhile, male students received their peers’ help. From this point, females were more autonomous than males in managing their work.

1) Students’ anxieties
Arnold and Brown (1999 in Mak, 2011) believe that anxiety in Language learning may possibly be the most pervasive obstruction to the learning process. All 50 participants experienced anxieties at different levels as it is seen at Figure 1. More than 50% participants were in severe anxieties; a quarter underwent moderate anxieties; and only few students endured mild anxieties. It means that 68% students need help.

<table>
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<th>Figure 1: Students’ anxieties</th>
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<td>In general female students felt more anxieties than males in preparing and carrying out their thesis presentation in English. None male participants suffered from very severe anxieties. However, 72% males suffered from severe anxieties.</td>
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It is found that generally the participants report psychosomatic symptoms such as worries, feelings of tension, somatic (muscular), respiratory, gastrointestinal and autonomic symptoms. Females suffer more difficulty in falling asleep, broken sleep, unsatisfying sleep and nightmares than males. It is also reported that females experience difficulty in concentration more than males. It goes with Imane’s findings (2016) that anxiety makes language learners nervous and afraid which may lead to poor speaking skill. If learners cope with their anxiety they will enhance their speaking skill. Anxious students may have difficulty in learning, difficulty in using knowledge and difficulty in expressing themselves.

2) Students’ non-verbal communication
After observing 18 video recordings of students' presentations it is found that 50% students did not make eye contact to the examiners. Mostly they looked at the screen of the projectors. More than one third students stood stiff, they looked so tense, and they did not move their hands to support their presentation. Almost a quarter of them could not smile during the presentation and few students needed to speak louder. Those reflected the symptoms of anxieties.

There are three functions of non-verbal communication. The first function is to help convey the message clearer or to strengthen it. For example when someone is using his or her fore finger pointing to a person with forward rapid movements while he is yielding, it means that he or she is really angry. Second function is to represent the verbal communication; for example, someone is nodding instead of saying ‘yes.’ Third function is performing the feeling or picturing emotion like nervousness, which usually is marked by no eye contact, shaking voice and trembling hands. This study identifies that the participants experience anxieties. They are seen from the absent of their eye contacts, stiff facial expression and low voice tone.

3) Students’ expectation
From the returned questionnaires it was uncovered that the students expect their examiners to be able to attend the thesis court room on time and not too often leave out and get into the room. They said that opening and closing examination door distracts their focus while they are presenting and answering questions. Even there were lecturers knocked on the door, got into the room and have noisy conversations with the examiners.

The participants stated that the department should conduct a socialization and give guidance on how to carry out the presentation. Although there are some topics on how to do an oral presentation in some courses (i.e. business communication and business English), they expect that additional guidance may promote their confidence in doing the presentation.

To minimize their anxieties they also write that the department ought to earlier announce the date of the oral presentation. They found that the announcement was just given one to three days before the examining date. Such
short time is not enough to do appropriate preparation. They also think that a decorated presentation room completed with lap-top, LCD projector, screen and laser pointer being ready to use will support their confidence. Moreover, they presume that the examiners who are friendlier in delivering the questions, not intimidating, may settle more relaxed situation. Furthermore, some participants recommend the examination time should be shorter and the school library should be completed with more up-to-date books and references.

**Implication**
Finding out that most students suffer from severe anxieties related to the oral English presentation and the preparation, the school needs to encourage all the supporting units to attend the problem collaboratively. The study implies that many components at the school should work together. First, trainings for students on how to deliver thesis oral presentation can be an appropriate activity to promote the students’ confidence in delivering their presentation in English. The trainings for small classes (a maximum of six participants per class) can be conducted by the language center of the school for four six meetings of 90 minutes. The optional course may include the making of the effective presentation in power point, drafting the oral presentation and practicing on how to deliver the oral presentation and answering questions. The practices must dominate the course materials. When the students get their confidence they will feel little anxiety, as it is stated by Kogerer (2016): “To decrease anxiety, the teachers believed ample oral practice in small groups in a supportive environment to be part of the solution.”

Second, giving more portions on practicing oral presentation at the present related courses such as Business Communication and Business English is possible to take place. The students who major in business Administration undergo those courses in semesters 3, 4 and 5. There are topics that provide students with opportunities to practice oral presentation such as introducing new products, describing graphs, delivering reports. To give the students opportunities to experience more being in front of public means to get the students used to speak at the present of audience. When someone gets used to do something he or she will not feel nervous.

Third, providing the video recordings of good examples of delivering oral thesis presentations is an excellent effort to endorse students to do self-directed learning. Agustinus, Rini and Hardiningsih (2016) in their study found that there is much improvement in their speaking skills experienced by polytechnic students who watched videos of business transactions provided by the lecturers. The videos which are easily accessed via YouTube help them avoid the procedure mistakes in handling the transactions. Knowing what to do upholds their self-confidence.

**Conclusions**
In preparing and oral presenting their thesis female students experienced anxieties at all levels - mild, moderate, severe and very severe anxieties. Meanwhile, males suffered from severe anxieties are more than females. Females did their preparation on their own and consumed less time than males. Males needed others’ help in doing their preparation and spent longer time. Males worried about answering questions after presentation session and waiting for the announcement on their oral examination result and females only concerned on how to answer questions.

**References**


