

Coping Strategies for Public Speaking Anxiety in EFL Learners: A Study of EDSA English Study Club Members

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) among EDSA English Study Club members, which hinders their ability to perform English-based public speaking activities. PSA is influenced by individual and group factors, potentially affecting members' self-development and English-speaking skills if left unaddressed. Effective mentoring and techniques are essential to alleviate anxiety and enhance public speaking abilities. Implementing training focused on coping strategies serves as a complementary measure, enabling participants to optimize their performance, particularly during discussions. This study, conducted using an action research approach, involved 22 participants through structured questionnaires and personal reflections. Results indicated that the most frequently employed coping strategies were relaxation (22.7%) and well-preparedness (18.2%), with well-preparedness identified as the most effective (27.3%). Additionally, 90.9% of participants reported a reduction in PSA. Despite their potential benefits, positive visualization and gradual exposure were underutilized. The findings highlight the importance of structured interventions, cultural considerations, and long-term resilience-building for managing PSA effectively in EFL contexts.

KEYWORDS

Public Speaking Anxiety; Coping Strategies; English Study Club.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini meneliti Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) di antara anggota EDSA English Study Club, yang menghambat kemampuan mereka dalam melakukan kegiatan berbicara di depan umum dalam bahasa Inggris. PSA dipengaruhi oleh faktor individu dan kelompok, yang berpotensi mempengaruhi pengembangan diri dan kemampuan berbahasa Inggris para anggota jika tidak ditangani. Pendampingan dan teknik yang efektif sangat penting untuk mengurangi kecemasan dan meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara di depan umum. Menerapkan pelatihan yang berfokus pada strategi mengatasi kecemasan berfungsi sebagai langkah pelengkap, yang memungkinkan para peserta untuk mengoptimalkan kinerja mereka, terutama saat berdiskusi. Penelitian ini, yang dilakukan dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian tindakan, melibatkan 22 peserta melalui kuesioner terstruktur dan refleksi pribadi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa strategi

KATA KUNCI

Kecemasan Berbicara
Publik; Strategi
Penanggulangan; Klub
Belajar Bahasa Inggris

penanganan yang paling sering digunakan adalah relaksasi (22,7%) dan persiapan diri (18,2%), dengan persiapan diri diidentifikasi sebagai strategi yang paling efektif (27,3%). Selain itu, 90,9% partisipan melaporkan adanya penurunan PSA. Terlepas dari potensi manfaatnya, strategi seperti visualisasi positif dan pemaparan bertahap kurang dimanfaatkan. Temuan ini menyoroti pentingnya intervensi terstruktur, pertimbangan budaya, dan pembangunan ketahanan jangka panjang untuk mengelola PSA secara efektif dalam konteks EFL..

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INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the learning and use of English by individuals in a country where English is not the primary language of communication (Ellis, 2005). EFL learners often face unique challenges, including limited exposure to authentic language use, lack of confidence, and increased anxiety when engaging in spoken communication (Macintyre & Gardner, 1991). One of the most common manifestations of this anxiety is Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA), this anxiety can significantly impact learners' ability to communicate effectively in English, it's a form of communication apprehension characterized by nervousness, fear, and self-doubt when speaking in front of an audience. (McCroskey, 1977). In EFL contexts, PSA is exacerbated by limited vocabulary, pronunciation concerns, and social pressure. (Horwitz et al., 1986). If left unaddressed, PSA can hinder learners' confidence, motivation, and English proficiency over time. (Ellis, 2005). While previous studies have examined PSA in language learning, research has yet to extensively explore coping strategies in student-led communities such as the EDSA English Study Club. This study aims to fill that gap by analyzing the coping mechanisms used by its members and evaluating their effectiveness.

The theoretical framework of this study is grounded in the concept of language anxiety and coping mechanisms. Kondo & Ying-Ling (2004) Categorized coping strategies into affective, cognitive, and behavioral approaches. These strategies help learners develop confidence, reduce fear, and enhance public speaking skills. Effective coping strategies not only alleviate anxiety but also improve learners' clarity and communication abilities. (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Techniques such as relaxation and positive visualization promote mental calmness, while regular practice reduces pressure over time. The long-term benefits include increased self-confidence, improved critical thinking, and enhanced emotional resilience. (Leavitt, 2010).

Public speaking is an essential component of English proficiency, requiring confidence, adaptability, and strong communication skills. Anxiety often disrupts fluency and focus, but effective strategies help learners overcome fears, articulate ideas clearly, and maximize their communicative potential. (Fitriani et al., 2022). Wahyuningsih & Maisyanah (2021) Identified several key challenges that hinder speaking proficiency. To address these challenges, the EDSA English Study Club fosters interactive and engaging speaking activities that encourage participation and reduce anxiety. (Abdullah et al., 2018). The club integrates technology and provides learners with diverse opportunities to practice speaking in both community and public settings.

Joko & Sembodo (2018) Found that language anxiety remains a significant barrier in EFL learning, but it can be mitigated through targeted interventions. Wahyudi & Azmi (2021) Emphasized that students experience reduced anxiety and increased enthusiasm when engaging in group discussions, largely due to the supportive and non-judgmental environment (Van Lier, 2004). However, factors such as peer judgment and fear of mistakes often exacerbate PSA, necessitating structured coping strategies. (Ilyas et al., 2021).

The English Department Student Association (EDSA), particularly through its English Study Club, serves as an ideal platform for developing public speaking skills. As an organization that facilitates various English-based activities—including discussions, speeches, debates, and storytelling—the club provides members with a supportive environment to practice and enhance their communication abilities. Despite these opportunities, beginner-level members frequently experience anxiety, often due to social expectations, fluency concerns, and fear of peer evaluation. (Carr & Kemmis, 1986). By systematically integrating coping strategies into club activities, EDSA English Study Club members can learn to manage anxiety effectively. This structured approach has been shown to increase confidence, improve speaking performance, and cultivate valuable interpersonal communication skills in academic and professional contexts. (Baumfield et al., 2016). Given these observations, it is essential to systematically investigate which coping strategies are most frequently used by EDSA English Study Club members, which are the most effective, and how their application impacts PSA reduction. To achieve this, the present study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the most commonly employed coping strategies by EDSA English Study Club members?
- 2) Which coping strategies are the most effective in reducing PSA?
- 3) How does the application of coping strategies impact anxiety reduction?

METHOD

This study employed an action research design, a cyclical process of planning, action, observation, and reflection aimed at improving practice and addressing PSA. (McNiff, n.d.). Action research allows for continuous feedback and adjustments based on data, promoting a collaborative learning environment. (Kemmis & McTaggart, n.d.). By incorporating real-time reflections, this study assesses the effectiveness of coping strategies and provides insights into their practical application. (Mills, 2003).

- 1) **Participants:** A total of 22 EFL learners from the EDSA English Study Club participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring a mix of different English proficiency levels and prior public speaking experiences. The participants consisted of 12 females and 10 males, representing diverse perspectives on public speaking anxiety. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and participant anonymity, were strictly observed (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).
- 2) **Data Collection Methods:** To comprehensively evaluate coping strategies, three data collection methods were used:

Table 1. Data Collection Methods Used in the Study

Data Collection Method	Number of Participants	Duration	Key Themes Covered
Structured Questionnaire (12 questions)	22	20–25 min per participant	Coping strategies, effectiveness, PSA triggers
Semi-Structured Interviews	10 (selected from the 22 participants)	30–40 min per session	Personal experiences, strategy application
Observations (during public speaking sessions)	22	Ongoing	Real-time strategy implementation, behavioral responses

- 3) **Data Analysis:** The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis for qualitative data (interviews and observations) and descriptive statistics for survey responses. Interview transcripts were coded to identify recurring patterns in coping strategy usage. Survey data were quantified to determine the frequency and perceived effectiveness of each strategy, supporting a mixed-methods approach to understanding PSA reduction.

This structured methodological approach ensures a well-rounded understanding of how coping strategies are applied in real-world EFL public speaking contexts and their impact on anxiety reduction..

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Public speaking anxiety is a prevalent issue among EFL learners, often resulting in avoidance behaviors and decreased language performance. Understanding the coping strategies that learners use can provide educators and students with practical solutions for managing PSA. This study examines both the effectiveness and the frequency of coping strategies among EDSA English Study Club members to determine which approaches are most beneficial.

The findings reveal that while some strategies are widely used, others remain underutilized despite their documented effectiveness. The following subsections discuss the distribution of coping strategies, their perceived effectiveness, and their overall impact on anxiety reduction. To better understand how EDSA English Study Club members manage their public speaking anxiety, this study analyzed the frequency and effectiveness of various coping

strategies. The results reveal that while some strategies, such as relaxation and preparation, are widely adopted, others remain underutilized despite their potential benefits. Table 2 provides a summary of the coping strategies used by participants, their frequency of application, and their perceived effectiveness in reducing PSA.

Table 2. Frequency and Effectiveness of Coping Strategies

Coping Strategy	Usage (%)	Effectiveness (%)
Relaxation	22.7%	22.7%
Preparation	18.2%	27.3%
Self-Acceptance	18.2%	9.1%
Positive Reinforcement	18.2%	9.1%
Problem-Solving	9.1%	13.6%
Mirror Practice	9.1%	9.1%
Cognitive Reframing	4.5%	9.1%
Positive Visualization	0%	0%
Gradual Exposure	0%	0%

1) Most Commonly Employed Coping Strategies.

The data demonstrated that the Relaxation strategy was the most commonly employed strategy by participants (22.7%), indicating a preference for techniques that facilitate physical and mental calm before public speaking. These strategies include techniques such as deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation. The Well Prepared strategy (18.2%) was the second most common, indicating that many participants felt more confident when thoroughly preparing materials, such as by repeating presentation practice and scripting neatly. Self-acceptance and Positive Reinforcement also received the same percentage (18.2%), suggesting the importance of self-acceptance and positive reinforcement in dealing with anxiety. The use of Problem Solving and Mirror Practice strategies was 9.1% and 9.1%, respectively, suggesting that, while these strategies were employed, they were not as frequently utilized as the aforementioned main strategies. The 4.5% utilization of Cognitive Reframing, in conjunction with the non-selection of Positive Visualisation and Gradual Exposure, indicates that these techniques may not have been as well-known or as highly regarded by the participants.

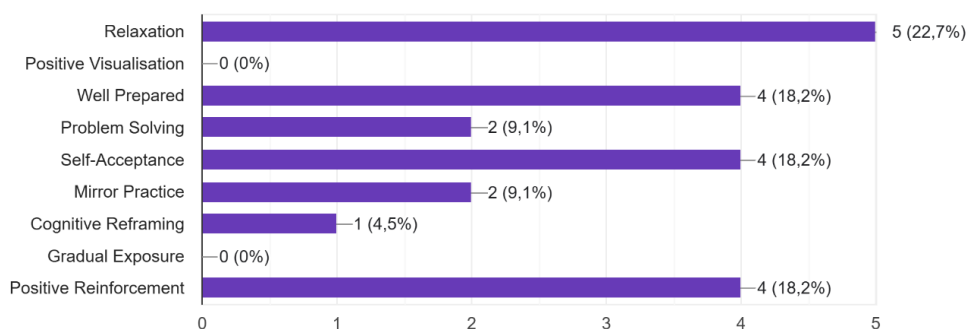


Figure 1. Most Commonly Employed Coping Strategies

2) Most Effective Coping Strategies

The Well Prepared strategy was identified as the most effective approach (27.3%), which may be attributed to the sense of control it provides over the situation. This assertion is supported by previous literature that suggests preparation can mitigate uncertainty and enhance self-confidence. The Relaxation strategy was rated as effective by 22.7% of participants, thereby supporting the theory that relaxation can help reduce physiological responses to stress. Other strategies, such as problem-solving (13.6%), were found to be positive, although this was only the case for certain participants. Conversely, strategies such as Self-Acceptance, Positive Reinforcement, Mirror Practice, and Cognitive Reframing showed lower effectiveness (9.1% each). The comprehension and perceived efficacy of Gradual Exposure and Positive Visualisation strategies were also found to be unsatisfactory among participants.

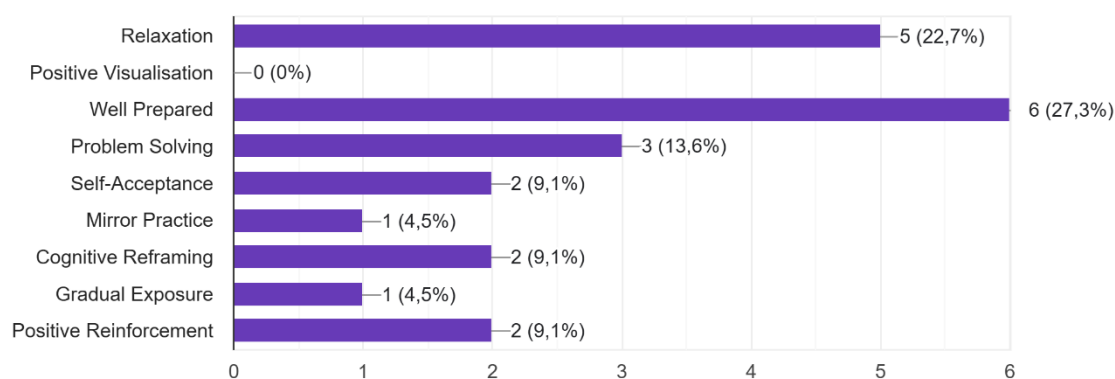


Figure 2. Most Effective Coping Strategies

3) Impact of Coping Strategies on PSA Reduction

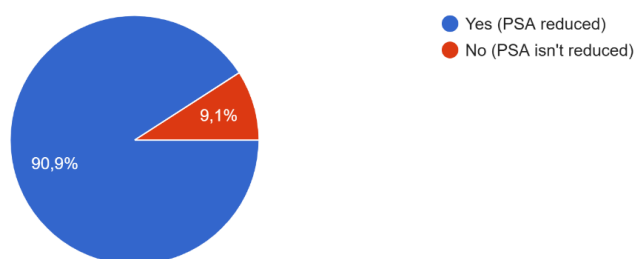


Figure 3. Impact of Copying Strategies on PSA Reduction

The findings revealed that a significant proportion of the participants, amounting to 90.9%, reported a notable reduction in anxiety levels following the implementation of these coping strategies. This observation aligns with the earlier research that emphasized the efficacy of systematic strategy application in aiding individuals in managing public speaking anxiety. (Horwitz et al., 1986). However, it is noteworthy that a minority of 9.1% of the

participants did not exhibit substantial changes, a phenomenon that might be attributed to the heterogeneity in the application of the strategies or the presence of other psychological factors.

The findings indicate that while the majority of participants experienced a notable reduction in PSA through various coping strategies, the results also reveal gaps in awareness and application of certain techniques. Relaxation and Well-Prepared strategies were both the most frequently applied and the most effective, reflecting their accessibility and practical impact. However, underutilized strategies such as Positive Visualization and Gradual Exposure, despite their proven efficacy, highlight the need for better education and guidance on their implementation. Furthermore, the analysis indicates that social and cultural factors, including peer judgment and perceived competence, exert a significant influence on anxiety levels, underscoring the necessity for the creation of supportive environments. Additionally, strategies necessitating consistent efforts, such as cognitive reframing and mirror practice, demonstrated limited effectiveness due to inadequate application. The fact that a significant proportion of participants did not report substantial improvements highlights the need for personalized approaches, taking into account individual differences and external stressors. Moving forward, fostering long-term resilience through gradual exposure and self-reflection, while addressing cultural influences, could enhance the comprehensive management of PSA.

While certain coping strategies, such as relaxation and preparation, were widely applied, some strategies remained underutilized. Positive visualization and gradual exposure were minimally employed, suggesting a lack of awareness or understanding of their benefits. Future interventions should focus on educating learners about these strategies and providing structured opportunities to practice them in a supportive setting.

Additionally, participants linked their anxiety to peer judgment and perceived competence, highlighting the role of social pressure in PSA. The fear of making mistakes in front of an audience often discouraged learners from actively engaging in public speaking activities. A supportive learning environment that emphasizes encouragement over evaluation could help mitigate these effects and encourage learners to experiment with various coping strategies without fear of negative judgment.

Despite the valuable insights gained from this study, certain limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, as the study only involved 22 participants from a single student-led organization. Furthermore, self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants' perceptions of their anxiety levels and coping strategy effectiveness could be influenced by personal factors. Additionally, this study focused on short-term outcomes, meaning that the long-term impact of these strategies remains unclear. Future research should explore coping strategies in diverse EFL settings, conduct longitudinal studies to assess their long-term effectiveness, and investigate ways to enhance awareness and implementation of underutilized techniques.

CONCLUSION

Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) is a prevalent challenge among EFL learners, influencing their confidence and ability to communicate effectively. This study investigated the most commonly employed coping strategies, their effectiveness, and their impact on PSA reduction among EDSA English Study Club members. The findings indicate that relaxation (22.7%) and preparation (18.2%) were the most frequently used strategies, with preparation (27.3%) being the most effective. (McCroskey, 1977). Additionally, 90.9% of participants reported reduced anxiety, confirming the positive impact of systematic coping strategy application.

Despite the effectiveness of these strategies, positive visualization and gradual exposure were notably underutilized (0%), suggesting a lack of awareness or confidence in their implementation. (Horwitz, 2001). Social and cultural factors, such as peer judgment and perceived competence, played a significant role in PSA, reinforcing the need for a supportive learning environment that encourages students to experiment with various coping strategies without fear of negative evaluation. These findings are particularly significant for EFL educators, language learners, and curriculum developers, as they underscore the necessity of incorporating structured coping strategies into public speaking training. Educators should focus on not only teaching effective strategies but also fostering a supportive learning environment that minimizes peer judgment and promotes self-confidence. By integrating these strategies into classroom activities, students may develop greater resilience and adaptability in real-world communication.

While this study provides valuable insights, it is limited by its sample size and reliance on self-reported data. Future research should expand on these findings by testing coping strategies with a larger sample, comparing different EFL learner groups, and conducting longitudinal studies to assess the long-term impact of coping mechanisms on PSA reduction. Additionally, expanding this research beyond student-led organizations to formal classroom settings and professional training programs could provide a more comprehensive understanding of PSA in diverse learning contexts. (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). Developing structured training programs to enhance the accessibility and application of underutilized strategies could further support EFL learners in overcoming public speaking anxiety.

Ultimately, addressing PSA is not just about reducing anxiety—it is about empowering learners with lifelong communication skills that extend beyond the classroom and into academic, professional, and social domains. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this research highlights the importance of equipping EFL learners with the tools necessary to become confident and effective speakers.

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