



Are they really anxious? A critical issue of speaking anxiety in the English thesis defence examinations

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Abstract

Anxiety in spoken English is a common topic in ELT research. However, little is discussed in the literature regarding anxiety in English public speaking particularly in a very awaited yet the most thrilling event called a Thesis Defence Examination (TDE). Therefore, this study aims at investigating postgraduate students' anxiety in facing TDE at the end of their study program at the Postgraduate Program of English Education, Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. Conducting quantitative research, we distributed questionnaires to 23 students who have undertaken TDE at the postgraduate program in the odd and even semesters of one academic year. The questionnaires were adapted from the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) by McCroskey (2013). The results of the analysis indicate three big topics that we have discussed thoroughly in this paper; these are anticipatory anxiety, physiological symptoms and lack of control during speech performance. Students are less anxious when they are in total control and understanding of their own data before giving a thesis presentation. They are not concerned about the uncertainty aspects that will occur during the performance nor did they feel worry about what they ought to anticipate. The palpitation of heart-race might be the most pronounce physiological response over the mental disturbance. Meanwhile, cognitive-declined, behavioural avoidance, and psychological dimension of fear can transpire from the result of lack of control during speech performance.

Keywords: anxiety; English language; public speaking; postgraduate students; thesis defence examination

1. Introduction

Anxiety is commonly experienced by people in their daily life. In medical field, anxiety is defined as a feeling or a reaction to a stressor that someone shows through his/her psychological and physiological behaviour (Himanshu, Dharmila, Sarkar & Nutan, 2020). Anxiety appears when someone's fear arises due to a stressful situation that is hard for him/her to face, for example, a mother is anxious when her child has an accident, an employee feels anxious when he has to complete many works within a limited time, and a student experiences anxiety to face an examination. From these examples, we notice that anxiety occurs in different contexts or fields of life. In our study, we focus on the anxiety that appears among the English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners.

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Anxiety in learning EFL is always experienced by EFL students of all education levels. This anxious feeling usually appears when the students are required to use the language to communicate to each other, either in an oral or a written form. They are generally afraid of making mistakes and receiving negative feedbacks or comments from their peers, teachers or interlocutors. This feeling has somehow decreased their motivation to keep using English as a foreign language in communication, either inside or outside the classrooms. Regarding this matter, English teachers have an important role to maintain students' eagerness to learn and use the language. They can firstly map the students' anxiety based on the language skills used in different communicative events. In written communicative events, students may have to write different types of texts in English, as well as to understand different types of texts they read. Meanwhile, in oral ones, they may have to perform a speech as one example of oral communicative events, or interpret a speech that they listen to. EFL students need to have English knowledge and skills, and strategies to achieve the goal of these communicable and informative events (Usman et al., 2018). Therefore, English teachers are suggested to explore the communicative events that increase students' anxiety when they have to perform, before finding out the sources of the anxiety.

In our study, we focused on an oral communicative event called Thesis Defence Examination (TDE). At the Postgraduate English Education Department of Syiah Kuala University, this examination is conducted using English as the medium of communication. As EFL learners, making sure to fulfill the examiners' expectation and pass the examination by using English is considered challenging for the students. There should be some limitations that they commonly have to face when they are defending their argument in English. This condition can surely increase their anxiety and suddenly stop them from speaking English. A prevention for this condition is important to do. Therefore, in our research, we explore the anxiety experienced by the Postgraduate English Education students who have passed the TDE. It is very critical to see if the students are really anxious in this final examination or not.

Studies on anxiety in the field of language learning have been very much conducted by scholars, focusing on different language skills, for example in reading skill (e.g. Huang, 2012; Zhao, 2009) and in writing skill (e.g. Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999). Meanwhile, more previous studies concentrated on the skill of speaking other than the other skills. More scholars in this area centralized their investigation on the sources or causes of EFL speaking anxiety (e.g. Ahmed, Pathan & Khan, 2017; Akkakoson, 2016; Ansari, 2015; Melouah, 2013; Mukminin, et al., 2015; Wang & Roopchund, 2015; Woodrow, 2006; Yahya, 2013). Some scholars aimed their attention at the level of speaking anxiety among EFL students (e.g. Erdiana et al., 2020; Melouah, 2013; Wang & Roopchund, 2015). Moreover, classrooms interventions were also conducted by previous studies to decrease EFL learners' speaking anxiety and the same time increase their performance (e.g. Barrett, Sonderegger & Sonderegger, 2001; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). The relationship between EFL speaking anxiety and speaking performance also became the topic of exploration (Ansari, 2015; Woodrow, 2006). In addition, Pappamihel (2002) found out the types of speaking anxiety amid EFL students. There are many aspects of speaking anxiety have been explored by researchers previously focusing on different oral communicative events; however, little is discussed in the literature regarding anxiety in English public speaking particularly in a very awaited yet the most thrilling event called a Thesis Defence Examination. Thus, the purpose of our study is to investigate the extent to which the students studying at the Postgraduate Program of English Education of Syiah Kuala University experienced anxiety in the TDE.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1 English Public Speaking

Public speaking is an oral presentation in a form of speech with a particular topic (Nikitina, 2011) that someone presents to public for academic, business and other purposes. In public speaking, someone shares ideas to others using “logical and organized language” (Li, Gao & Zhang, 2015, p. 53). Here we can see the importance of language in a public speaking, especially the international languages including English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese to speak in an international forum or in an event that uses the international languages. In this paper, we talk about English language used in a public speaking. English language plays a critical increased role from year to year in all sectors of life; and the needs to perform good English public speaking skills has rapidly grown (Zhang & Ardasheva, 2019), particularly among ESL and EFL students (Zhou & Veloo, 2020; Zhang, Ardasheva & Austin, 2020). Being able to speak and deliver oral presentation is a crucial skill to share information to, persuade, and entertain audience. On the top of that, some schools across the globe such as schools in the UK have even included oracy (spoken language skills) alongside literacy and numeracy. Despite its importance, however, English public speaking has become the most worrisome performance someone has to do in front of people (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021); and this situation specifically occurs among EFL and ESL students because they are afraid of making errors (Ananda, Fitriani & Samad, 2020; Aziz, Fitriani & Amalina, 2020) in the English language. At university level, the English public speaking that university students need to perform includes for example an individual oral presentation on a certain topic related to the subject being enrolled, and also an oral presentation in Thesis Defence Examination (Li, Gao & Zhang, 2016). For the Thesis Defence Examination, the anxiety level to perform for this event is even more higher, exclusively for those whose English is not their first language; because performing in this event is not only to pass, but also to graduate from their study program.

1.1.2 Thesis Defence Examination

Thesis Defence Examination (TDE) is a final examination which is undertaken by university students orally at the end of their study program to present their research results and to defend their knowledge in front of a board of examiner (Samad & Adnan, 2017, 2018). The terms used for this final examination are varied in different universities across the globe, for example, an institutionalized pedagogical activity is the term employed by the universities in the United States (Hasan, 1994). Meanwhile, in most European countries, this examination is called a public defence; while in the United Kingdom, the common name is *viva voce* (Samad et al., 2019). Within Indonesian context, different terms are used depending on the degree that the students are pursuing. For the bachelor's degree, a script defence examination is commonly used; while for the master's and doctorate's degrees, the terms are respectively named as Thesis Defence Examination and Dissertation Defence Examination.

This final, awaited, yet thrilling examination is a systematic one; meaning that it has some elements that are interrelated to each other. The elements include the purpose of the exam, the rhetorical steps, the members, the terms used, and the criteria of assessment (Swales, 1990, 2004). The examination aims at assessing students regarding their research knowledge and other related knowledge that they have already obtained from the study program by passing some steps from the introduction to the closing step. Some members with some roles are also involved in this exam, for example, the examiners are assigned to ask questions and provide suggestions, and an examinee is defending his/her research results and arguments. Some other potential members include a chairman and audiences. All of the members are using specific terminologies in the examination; and the examiners have some criteria to assess the examinee and decide whether the examinee can pass the examination or not.

Some examinees may have been familiar with this examination system, while some others may not; and this has raised the anxiety issue among the students.

1.1.3 Speaking Anxiety Measurement

Since decades, scholars on language anxiety have developed tools to measure language learners' anxiety levels and the causes that stimulate anxiety. In 1985, Krashen created the Affective Filter Hypothesis and argued that the variables of affective take part in the process of acquiring second language. An affective filter is formed in a language learner's mind when the anxiety level is high and this filter blocks him/her from acquiring the language which can be caused by environmental factors, for example, being corrected while making errors so as to feel embarrassed among peers. With the Affective Filter Hypothesis, language teachers are able to map the students' anxiety level and try to lower their students' affective filter for a better learning environment and an improved language performance. Thenceforth, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) designed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) consisting of thirty-three items to figure out foreign language students' level of anxiety and how this affects them in learning the language. They also classified the sources of anxiety that they divided into three varieties; these include communicative apprehension, negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The identification of students' level of anxiety and sources of anxiety in learning the second or foreign language by the language teachers using FLCAS is hoped to help the students perform better in the classrooms. Moving to the 1990's, Oxford (1999) researched the categories of language anxiety, the factors that correspond to anxiety, as well as the sources of anxiety. Similarly to Krashen (1985) and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), the tool developed by Oxford (1999) is also aimed at examining the phenomenon of language learning anxiety so as to find the ways for the language students to decrease their anxiety level and improve their language performance.

Another tool for anxiety measurement is called Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) by McCroskey (2013). There are thirty-four items created in the PRPSA form that are scaled from 1 to 5 respectively indicating strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. We chose this measurement for our study to investigate our student-respondents' speaking anxiety because PRPSA is still an up-to-date measurement based on the year of publication, and the items included in the assessment are specifically focusing on the anxiety in public speaking. Since TDE is a presentation that our respondents did in public and were observed by audiences, therefore, TDE is regarded as a public speaking as well. Thus, the use of PRPSA by McCroskey (2013) in our study is appropriate. From the thirty-four statements in PRPSA, we divided them into three big themes. We name the first theme as "anticipatory anxiety: it is a fight or flight situation" which involve statements number 1, 5, 8, 15, 21, 23, 28, 31 and 33. This theme is related to the respondents' level of anxiety when they are thinking about a future situation they might face in TDE. The second theme is "physiological symptoms: is it only in your head" presented by the items number 2, 9, 10, 14, 19, 20, 22, 25, and 32. For this theme, we reviewed if the respondents' physiological symptoms are related to the speaking anxiety occurring in the TDE which is characterized by their body responses. The last theme, "lack of control during speech performance", investigated the respondents' anxiety control occurring during the presentation in the TDE. This investigation is reflected in the statements number 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, and 34. In this paper, the presentation of the respondents' anxiety in TDE is based on these three themes.

1.2. Research question

Based on the objective of our research that we have described previously in this paper, we created a research question for our research as follows: "To what extent do the postgraduate students of the

English Education of Syiah Kuala University experience anxiety in a public speaking called Thesis Defence Examination?

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive quantitative method in conducting the research, and used questionnaire as the data collection technique. The questionnaire was distributed to the research participants as an intention to describe the actual condition (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007) of our participants' speaking anxiety in the Thesis Defence Examination event. This research was conducted at the Postgraduate Program of English Education of Syiah Kuala University which is located in Banda Aceh, the capital city of Aceh Province, Indonesia. To select the respondents for our research, we considered non-probability sampling and chose purposive sampling technique that can also be used for quantitative research (Tongco, 2007). The criteria for choosing the respondents were set. First, the respondents are the students of the program who are already in the fourth semester and above of their study time. Second, they already passed all the core and optional subjects. Third, the students have conducted their own research and have completed writing their thesis. Finally, they have undertaken the Thesis Defence Examination. The criteria are set so because the students have currently faced the TDE and they can feel whether they were really anxious or not before, during and after the event; and we believe that the items of the questionnaire that they filled could reveal the level of their anxiety. After talking to the administrative staff of the study program, we eventually had 23 out of 40 students to be the respondents of our research. We noticed that there were 40 students of the study program who have completed writing their thesis; however, only 23 (57%) students already passed the TDE.

The research instrument that we used in gathering the data is questionnaire forms. The forms consist of 34 statements adapted from the Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) by McCroskey (2013). We specifically change the word "public speaking" in the questionnaire with the word "Thesis Defence Examination" to lead the respondents' thought directly to TDE. The items are scaled ranging from 1 to 5 that respectively refers to strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The questionnaires filled by the students were analyzed following the steps of analysis suggested by McCroskey (2013) in PRPSA. The first step is adding the scores of items number 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 10, 13, 14, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, and 34. The second one is adding the scores of the items number 4, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, 17, 18, 24, and 26. After completing steps 1 and 2, we moved to step 3 by calculating the scores based on the following formula:

$$\text{PRPSA} = 72 - \text{total from step 2} + \text{total from step 1}$$

3. Results

In this section we present the results of the analysis of the questionnaires filled by the students as the respondents of this study. The presentation of the results is divided into three themes based on the 34 statements in the forms. The first theme is "anticipatory anxiety: it is a fight or flight situation" that includes the statements number 1, 5, 8, 15, 21, 23, 28, 31 and 33. For the second theme, we name it "physiological symptoms: is it only in your head?" to present the statements number 2, 9, 10, 14, 19, 20, 22, 25, and 32. The last one, which is "lack of control during speech performance", describes the statements number 3, 4, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, 18, 24, 26, 27, 29, 30, and 34.

3.1. Anticipatory Anxiety: It Is A Fight or Flight Situation

This section presents the responses from the first domain of the questionnaire regarding an increased level of anxiety by thinking about a situation in the future. The object of this analysis was to find out whether or not the students experience anxiety before performing the Thesis Defence

Examination (TDE) which in turn might shade some light into a rationale explanation as to why it has happened.

The results of the questionnaire indicate that the respondents do experience anxiety while preparing for their TDE presentation. It shows 57% of them agreed that they feel tense and nervous before giving the presentation (#1). Rather than the notion of the presentation itself (#15), they were more anxious about the idea of waiting to give the presentation (#33). Around 39% of the respondents agree that the prospect of waiting right before the performance is much scarier than giving a thesis presentation itself (52%) in which they did with confidence. In their opinion (#21), sitting in the room just before the thesis presentation starts fueling a considerable amount of nervousness (48%). Additionally, being aware that only a little time remains during the thesis presentation may also cause some distress (23#), as it makes them feel very tense and anxious (43%).

Table 1.1. The Percentage Answers of Structured Questionnaire

No.	Statement	Disagreement (%)		Neutral (%)	Agreement (%)	
		SD	D		A	SA
1	While preparing for giving a presentation in thesis examination, I feel tense and nervous.	-	3 (13.04%)	7 (30.43%)	11 (47.82%)	2 (8.69%)
5	I get anxious when I think about a thesis presentation and questions/comments coming up.	4 (17.39%)	6 (26.08%)	6 (26.08%)	6 (26.08%)	1 (4.34%)
8	I look forward to giving a thesis presentation.	-	-	4 (17.39%)	14 (60.89%)	5 (21.73%)
15	I face the prospect of giving a thesis presentation with confidence.	-	5 (21.73%)	6 (26.08%)	7 (30.43%)	5 (21.73%)
21	I experience considerable anxiety while sitting in the room just before my thesis presentation starts.	1 (4.34%)	6 (26.08%)	5 (21.73%)	9 (39.13%)	2 (8.69%)
23	Realizing that only a little time remains in a thesis presentation makes me very tense and anxious.	1 (4.34%)	5 (21.73%)	7 (30.43%)	9 (39.13%)	1 (4.34%)
28	I feel anxious when the department announces the date of a thesis presentation.	3 (13.04%)	11 (47.82%)	3 (13.04%)	6 (26.08%)	-
31	I have trouble falling asleep the night before a thesis presentation.	7 (30.43%)	7 (30.43%)	6 (26.08%)	2 (8.69%)	1 (4.34%)
33	I feel anxious while waiting to give my thesis presentation.	1 (4.34%)	5 (21.73%)	8 (34.78%)	9 (39.13%)	-

* Strongly Disagree = SD, disagree = D, Neutral = N, agree = A, Strongly Agree = SA, MD = Median, MO = Mode, Range/Item = 4.

In the context of something akin to excitement of a future event, the majority of them agree (82%) that the TDE is something to look forward to (#8). It is not something that might affect their night rest because of how anxious they are for tomorrow (#31). More than half of the respondents (61%) state that it was something that might result in sleep disturbance. Same can be said concerning all of the hassle around their research topic (#5) saying that the possible questions and comments proposed by the examiners do not make them worry (43%). Within the same context of anticipation, the students do not feel anxious when the department announces the date of a thesis presentation (61%) (#28).

3.2. Physiological Symptoms: Is It Only in Your Head?

The second domain of the questionnaire intends to observe whether there was the relationship between the physiological symptoms and the anxiety that occur during the Thesis Defence Examination. In addition to that, the most pronounced body responses the students experience will be distinguished.

The report from the respondents' questionnaires stated that most of the students do not experience significant physiological symptoms that occur as the result of anxiety in regard of TDE. More than half of the respondents (57%) agree that their body shows no negative responses in regard of an increased anxiety level when they see the words "presentation" and "thesis presentation" on a course outline when studying (#2). A total amount of 43% result demonstrates the same outcome regarding whether or not they feel on edge when it was announced that students are expected to perform a presentation in a thesis examination (#9). The same can also be said for point 22, where 52% of the respondents experienced neither rigidity nor feeling tense while they were giving a thesis presentation. The synchronous effects with minimum level of body responses in terms of rigidity and feeling tense — of before, during, and after the presentation— found in the present study suggest that students do not experience any significant physiological symptoms as the effect of anxiety. This is corresponding with the fact that 57% of the respondents have had to experience hand-trembling while giving presentation (#10) with only one respondent came up with the opposite.

Table 1.2. The Percentage Answers of Structured Questionnaire

No.	Statement	Disagreement (%)		Neutral (%)	Agreement (%)	
		SD	D		A	SA
2	I feel tense when I see the words "presentation" and "thesis presentation" on a course outline when studying.	5 (21.73%)	8 (34.78%)	5 (21.73%)	5 (21.73%)	0
9	When the department announces a thesis presentation in a thesis examination, I can feel myself getting tense.	1 (4.34%)	9 (39.13%)	7 (30.43%)	6 (26.08%)	-
10	My hands tremble when I am giving a thesis presentation.	1 (4.34%)	12 (52.17%)	5 (21.73%)	4 (17.39%)	1 (4.34%)
14	I get anxious if someone asks me something about my topic that I don't know.	1 (4.34%)	4 (17.39%)	6 (26.08%)	7 (30.43%)	5 (21.73%)
19	I perspire just before starting a thesis presentation.	4 (17.39%)	6 (26.08%)	6 (26.08%)	6 (26.08%)	1 (4.34%)
20	My heart beats very fast just as I start a thesis presentation.	5 (21.73%)	1 (4.34%)	5 (21.73%)	11 (47.82%)	1 (4.34%)
22	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a thesis presentation.	5 (21.73%)	7 (30.43%)	6 (26.08%)	4 (17.39%)	-
25	I breathe faster just before starting a thesis presentation.	3 (13.04%)	7 (30.43%)	-	10 (43.47%)	3 (13.04%)
32	My heart beats very fast while I present a thesis presentation.	-	7 (30.43%)	5 (21.73%)	8 (34.78%)	3 (13.04%)

* Strongly Disagree = SD, disagree = D, Neutral = N, agree = A, Strongly Agree = SA, MD = Median, MO = Mode, Range/Item = 4.

However, they do admit of experiencing heart palpitation (#20, #32) and rapid breathing (#25). More often than not, the heart beats are faster at the start of the presentation (52%) before gradually decrease while doing the performance even if not by much (48%). As a consequence, this physiological symptom affects their ability to breathe normally as it can exacerbate breathing before the Defence Examination starts (#25). A total of 57% respondents has the same opinion on this matter. However, they do confide (43%) as to not relate this occurrence to another symptom of anxiety which is excessive sweating (#19). Interestingly, they were concern if they were asked to explain something that is outside of their knowledge even though it is still within the same research topic (#14). For them (52%), it is a nerve wrecking.

3.3. Lack of Control during Speech Performance

The third domain explores the potential emergence of control defiance that might occur during speech presentation. Lack of control inclusion reflects in both physical reaction and psychological response that occur during the presentation as the result of anxiety.

More often than not, the psychological sign of anxiety starts with the feeling of fear. The concurrent result within all statements that account for this specific emotional response shows that the majority of respondents bypassed this specific sign of mental disturbance. The general result (43%) of having no apprehension to present the thesis examination (#6) shows the students' ability to confront their worry (74%) right before starting a thesis presentation and take control of their situation to be calmer and more comfortable (#7). Ironically, 43% of the students admit that this ability to take charge of the situation cannot help them to feel relax while giving the presentation (#11), though neutral (35%) responses indicate impartial level of trepidation thus have no problem of performing the presentation (#13). A high level of disagreement (61%) confirmed that students did not experience helplessness during the presentation (#3). Synchronized effect of before-and-after experience also demonstrates the same report of parallelism. They confess (39%) of not experiencing any kind of nervousness in the hour or so just before giving a thesis presentation (#26) and make it clear that they feel light after it (#4).

Table 1.3. The Percentage Answers of Structured Questionnaire

No.	Statement	Disagreement (%)		Neutral (%)	Agreement (%)	
		SD	D		A	SA
3	My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a thesis presentation.	1 (4.34%)	10 (43.47%)	6 (26.08%)	5 (21.73%)	1 (4.34%)
4	Right after giving a thesis presentation I feel that I have had a pleasant experience.	-	-	4 (17.39%)	11 (47.82%)	8 (34.78%)
6	I have no fear of giving a thesis presentation.	2 (8.69%)	6 (26.08%)	6 (26.08%)	6 (26.08%)	3 (13.04%)
7	Although I am nervous just before starting a thesis presentation, I soon settle down after starting and feel calm and comfortable.	-	1 (4.34%)	5 (21.73%)	7 (30.43%)	10 (43.47%)
11	I feel relaxed while giving a thesis presentation.	-	10 (43.47%)	5 (21.73%)	8 (34.78%)	-

12	I enjoy preparing for a thesis presentation.	-	1 (4.34%)	13 (56.52%)	5 (21.73%)	4 (17.39%)
13	I am in constant fear of forgetting what I prepared to say.	2 (8.69%)	10 (43.47%)	8 (34.78%)	3 (13.04%)	-
16	I feel that I am in complete possession of myself while giving a thesis presentation.	1 (4.34%)	2 (8.69%)	8 (34.78%)	11 (47.82%)	1 (4.34%)
17	My mind is clear when giving a thesis presentation.	1 (4.34%)	4 (17.39%)	8 (34.78%)	7 (30.43%)	3 (13.04%)
18	I do not dread giving a thesis presentation.	1 (4.34%)	5 (21.73%)	9 (39.13%)	6 (26.08%)	2 (8.69%)
24	While giving a thesis presentation, I know I can control my feelings of tension and stress.	1 (4.34%)	3 (13.04%)	4 (17.39%)	11 (47.82%)	4 (17.39%)
26	I feel comfortable and relaxed in the hour or so just before giving a thesis presentation.	1 (4.34%)	6 (26.08%)	7 (30.43%)	5 (21.73%)	4 (17.39%)
27	I do poorer on thesis presentations because I am anxious.	4 (17.39%)	4 (17.39%)	4 (17.39%)	11 (47.82%)	-
29	When I make a mistake while giving a thesis presentation, I find it hard to concentrate on the parts that follow.	7 (30.43%)	1 (4.34%)	4 (17.39%)	-	11 (47.82%)
30	During an important thesis presentation, I experience a feeling of helplessness building up inside me.	7 (30.43%)	7 (30.43%)	6 (26.08%)	2 (8.69%)	1 (4.34%)
34	While giving a thesis presentation, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know.	6 (26.08%)	2 (8.69%)	4 (17.39%)	3 (13.04%)	8 (34.78%)

* Strongly Disagree = SD, disagree = D, Neutral = N, agree = A, Strongly Agree = SA, MD = Median, MO = Mode, Range/Item = 4.

This section was trying to find out whether anxious individuals show deficits in cognitive ability at some stage during the pressure of TDE performance. Many of the participants (44%) reveal that even though they can think straight when giving presentation (#17), they confess that more than half of them (52%) were in constant fear of forgetting what they were prepared to say (#13) as they frequently (48%) were left confused (#3). As the result of this anxiety, around 48% of the respondents admits of forgetting the detailed information they were supposed to present (#34).

Following the questionnaire result, we also examine whether students' constraint over TDE might lead to avoidance. The unbiased response (57%) over the fact that the respondents took delight in preparing thesis presentation (#12) might provide an explanation as to why they (52%) feel in full control of themselves and the situation during the presentation (#16). Subsequently, they (65%) admit of how these circumstances perhaps contribute some kind of assistance in avoiding tension and stress during the examination (#24). However, there was an agreement (48%) of how anxiety affects negatively on their performance (#27) (or even perhaps grade). They admit (48%) that making mistake while giving presentation has an effect on their concentration as its jumble with their thoughtful knowledge that follows (#29).

4. Discussion

One of the most prominent drawbacks of the anticipatory factor is the uncertainty it represents. The uncertainty formulates a complex requirement of a proper plan for the future events; like a precise balance between a much efficient preparatory actions—which ironically might furnish into a potentially inadequate solution—and some other back-up plans that are considered to be effective but potentially unnecessary. In order to understand why anticipatory factor plays a disruptive aspect in anxiety, it is better to understand from the start what the students really experience starting from their time of before the TDE.

Feeling tense and nervous while preparing for giving a presentation is the first cue in anticipatory anxiety that can be used as a standard to measure the potential average of students' anxiety since before to after the examination. Clark (2001) recounts the symptom of anticipatory anxiety to specific cognitive processing that is typically also associated with the emotional processing prior to a feared event. The individual will envisage and think of what will happen which consequently brought out and activate anxiety thoughts that are typically associated with memories of past failures, negative self-images, and poor performance prediction. In this study, the view of anxiety while in the process of preparation is associated with a sense of impending doom as to what will happen before the event took place. Additionally, there is a matter of bad experience regarding presentation in the past that might affect their mental state or readiness. However, students disregard of experiencing anxiety in relation to what kind of question to anticipate or will arise during the presentation. Somehow, this is not in accordance with the first statement, given that mulling about what kind of question and critic from the board of examiners are in league of preparation category. In this case, suppose a parallel between this outcome of Thesis Defence Examination and the common belief of social anxiety in performance were being drawn, there should have been an implication of being feared to be negatively scrutinized by public in social performance—in this case the examiners—which typically lead to excessive anxiety (Mörtberg et al., 2018). Two explanations might support these opposite outcomes: one, students associated presentation with an event that certainly will happen, a reversed psychological subjective aspect of anxiety disorder that called uncertainty that generally occurred due to the unpredictable future events (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013). However, students clearly anticipated this and fully aware that this occasion will occur therefore no anxiety can be found; two, unlike the preparation, students somehow feels that they have full control of the outcome regarding what the questions will be, a situation that dubbed as controllability (Grupe & Nitschke, 2013) where one individual convinced of having full control that can influence a terrible situation to their advantage and mitigate a negative impact (Thompson, 1981). In this regard, instead of avoiding performing because of the anxiety, students were able to evade the negative situation due to the materials and data at their disposal to help them prepare for the event.

This explanation is in concordance with the fact that the majority of the students do not feel anxious when the exact time of the presentation was announced. In their own ways, students succeed in manipulating the negative consequence of avoidance to assist them facing the situation. Accordingly, avoidance can either develop the level of the disorder or maintain it (Clark, 2005; Hofmann, 2007). It is clear that, unconsciously, students are aware that the situation will come to pass hence they take the matter of the best possible preparation into their hand by providing a complete data. Once more, putting them as the ones in full control over the unpredictable situation. In other words, instead of avoiding the stressful situation that may cause and stir their anxiety levels, they choose to face it in a subtle way by marking it as something that they have to endure. The relationship between physiological symptoms on the one hand and avoidance on the other put forward the middle ground of the safety behaviours analogy where individual with social anxiety tend to use the model to

reduce and hide distress (Voncken et al., 2006). Accordingly, since they are able to somehow erect a ‘safe zone’ in their mind as the result of this self-control awareness, the experience has become less threatening; hence, sleep will come easily the night before the presentation. Similarly, on many occasions, researchers have made it clear that reduction in safety behaviours lead to reduced physiological symptoms and negative cognition (Taylor & Alden, 2010; Stangier, Heidenreich & Schermelleh-Engel, 2006; Kim, 2005; Morgan & Raffle, 1999; Wells et al., 1995).

Now let us take a look into the opposite situation of the uncontrolled-situation. Bear in mind that self-controlled awareness only occurs within the sphere of readiness once their accomplished data is presented to the examiners. In this circumstance, it is fair to say that they were the ones who have the answer to the problem. In one hand, their ability to elucidate the data and respond to the question with ‘the right answer’ helps in preventing anxiety. Daly et al. (1989) associate this low level of anxiety to the preparation stage, where an adequate preparation for performance helps in suppressing the anxiety level. However, it doesn’t mean that they would not feel nervous at all. On the other hand, even though they are aware that they were expected to perform, it does not mean the prospect of giving a presentation was easy to carry out. At this point, it is easy to conclude that rather than the long-time preparation, it was the last-minute preparation that increases students’ level of anxiety. At this phase, students were cautious over the specific aspects, important events, and the major features that will transpire (Behnke & Sawyer, 1999). Furthermore, it is believed that it was not a negative projection of an unknown outcome that worried the students but the uncertainty of an unknown experience that might manifest during the TDE. This result draws heavily on Clark and Wells’ (1995) model of assumption that illustrates the occurrence of social anxiety when an individual entered a feared situation. They called it the ‘unconditional beliefs about the self’ which is a projection of negative evaluation of others that lead individual to appraise a situation as dangerous. As the result, the students become anxious. In other words, they can control the information but not the performance.

In the second part of the analysis, the body’s responses to anxiety prior and after the performance were analyzed. In addition to that, how one’s body alerts to the ‘threat’ and its reactions of dealing with the so-called ‘threat’ is also presented. In order to do that, some types of the unique symptoms linked to the anxiety will be the benchmark of this study.

The first two questions (#2 and #9) that are included in this domain somehow present an indirect link to the anticipatory anxiety in terms of the controlled and the uncontrolled situation. In regard to the anticipatory factor, it is important to note that the highest level of anxiety occurred before the scheduled examination period (Martin, 1997). So how come the result of this study shows otherwise? To comprehend this inclination, it is better to understand Behnke and Sawyer’s (1999) take on three characteristic events of the anticipation stage: (1) immediately after receiving the assignment, (2) during speech preparation before the presentation, and (3) immediately after starting speaking. However, the anxiety itself is short-lived (Scherer, 1993) and most “apparent during the first 90 seconds of the speech” (Booth-Butterfield, 1987, p.395), implying that the speakers have a tendency to overcome their anxiety and adjust to the situation. Furthermore, the subsequent event after the anticipatory action could be affected by the nature of the assignment itself (Carlile, Behnke & Kitchens, 1977). In other words, the significant level of the task at hand could affect students’ sentiment and reaction to anxiety. In this study, the students acknowledge the fact that they were aware of the possibility that they will have to present a thesis presentation during their period of study thus they fully expect to have a course specifically outlined for the thesis presentation and thesis examination. As students, they know that they were expected to follow through this period of learning. This ‘prior knowledge’ and ‘responsibility-expectation’ aspect tone down the surprise factor that might lead to anxiety during the performance. In other words, they are aware and prepared to face the thesis defence presentation. Rosenfeld et al. (1995) explain this anomaly regarding low level anxiety during

thesis examination by saying that normally students with high academic achievement were less apprehensive in communication and perceive themselves as competent speakers in front of others while those with less academically successful history were not. Somehow, the awareness, expectation, knowledge, and information that they acquire prior to the D-day of the thesis presentation help dislocate the tension and rigidity that materialized whenever the word ‘presentation’ appeared or mentioned.

Some can be said for the statement “certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while giving a thesis presentation”. Students experienced no qualm of tension while giving the presentation. To understand this concept of physical responses during public speaking, perhaps it is better to remember that while some people generally do feel anxious during the communication process, some were not (Ayres & Hopf, 1993). Due to this personalized conceptualized trait, some were good at public communication while some were faced with various anxieties. Both these factors of poor public speaking performance and bad communication lead to a public speaking anxiety. Bodie (2010) lets it slip that while communication-based anxiety corresponds to public speaking anxiety, the actual presentation (performance) leads to physiological arousal (e.g., increased heart rate), negative self-focused cognitions (e.g., “I’m afraid I’ll make a fool of myself), and/or behavioural association symptoms (e.g., shaking). For these reasons, the students’ full control of what they want to present during the examination plays an important role in minimizing the physical symptom of tension and body responses seeing as they were a proficient public communicator—in this case they were good at presenting their thesis presentation. In lieu to that, this self-controlled awareness upon the situation mayhap lends some kinds of assistants in preventing them of experiencing unnecessary body’s response. There were disagreement concerning hand-trembling while in the process of performing thesis defence.

An interesting point of controlled-situation is proven right whenever they were asked to answer or explain something about their topic but was not within their expertise to elucidate. It has been mentioned in which the ‘prior-knowledge’, in this case the data, helps students reign some sorts of control over the situation and prevent them from experiencing anxiety. Should the examiners inquire them to articulate an issue or a question of their research topic that they were not familiar with, the opposite effect will occur. In this state, feeling anxious and nervous during the Thesis Defence Examination is not something that they can prevent.

This mental disturbance generates the physiological change in the body during the thesis examination, especially in heart rate and breathing (Bodie, 2010). An abnormal increase of heart rate might be associated with the ‘unknown factor’ the students envision before the exam. It could be in the form of the examiners’ responses, the fear of inadequate data presentation, the unexpected questions, or simply because they were feeling not sufficiently skilled or expecting a bad result from the start. However, they were disagreeing that this level of anxiety might cause perspiration in any form either before or after they started the presentation.

5. Conclusion

Examining interrelationships between anxiety in general and students’ speaking anxiety symptom clusters can paint some ideas about what the students’ really feel, experience, and underwent during the Thesis Defence Examination (TDE). It is a result that sheds light into what mentally transpired and being responded into action. Our findings point to the prominent role of uncertainty in the anticipatory factor before the examination that typically led to disruptive and negative drawback in performance. However, a psychological counter attack to uphold the opposite outcomes came in the form of control ability, where the students disregard the anxiety and take full

control of the situation through perfect preparation. This self-control awareness gives them full supremacy to evade avoidance and fear of the unpredictable situation and reduce their anxiety levels. However, it does not mean they can successfully dodge the social anxiety when it rears its ugly head during the uncontrolled-situation in which their project negative self-evaluation and perceived TDE as a dangerous situation. In lieu to that, self-control awareness and preparation also translated positively into the body's responses to anxiety. The students are well-aware of what were expected from them so they came well prepared thus minimizing the unnecessary body's responses.

In TDE, there are some segments that both bachelor and master's students of English Education have to go through by performing their skills in English public speaking, for example, the introduction segment, defence proper segment, and closing segment. In our research, we focus on the anxiety experienced by the English postgraduate students in a Thesis Defence Examination as a whole communicative event, not specifically in each segment. It is also crucial for future researchers to explore students' anxiety in particular segment, exclusively in defence proper segment where the students have to use their English public speaking to argue and defence their argument in order to pass the examination.

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