A STUDY OF SPEECH ANXIETY
AMONG ESL LEARNERS

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Abstract:

This research investigated English as a second language (ESL) speaking anxiety faced by university students. Data was obtained through a group of 44 students in the undergraduate course, in public university in Malaysia through questionnaires in a Google Form. This study examined reasons of anxiety, types of anxiety, and methods to cope with the anxiety. The instrument is a questionnaire. The data was analysed using SPSS. The result of the analysis revealed that ESL students suffered from English language speaking anxiety. Furthermore, fear of negative evaluation and lack of confidence was proven to be the source of ESL speaking anxiety. Additionally, different students have different types of anxiety such trait anxiety and situation anxiety. In order to cope with anxiety, development of self-confidence is important. Preparation is another way to relieve language anxiety for instance implementation of roleplay or simulations.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, ESL, negative evaluation, trait anxiety, situation anxiety

1. Introduction

Officially in Malaysia, English is a second language (ESL) and the language is taught all through primary and secondary school. Nevertheless, many students use English only in school and is therefore not a competent ESL user. These students find speaking English

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a stressful practice, especially if they must do everything in English (Januariza & Hendriani, 2016 ; Rahmat 2020) when they enter university life. One reason why students fear learning ESL is because they are not well versed with the grammar rules. So, this fear of not knowing grammar rules stops the learners from speaking in English (Indrianty, 2016).

Some researchers further describe anxiety as an identification between anxiety aspects that are cognitive such as worry and emotional (Pappamihiel, 2002). In terms of learning languages, anxiety can be categorised by trait and specific situation anxiety. Trait anxiety is more likely seen in personality features. Meanwhile, specific situation anxiety is the feeling of anxious to speak at specific times and events (Indrianty, 2016).

As such, educators who plan, execute the activities and also assess students' success serve the main role in reducing speech anxiety as educators, they should know how to handle the activities that cater to students' proficiency in speaking the English language (Amilia Md Yusof & Rahmat, 2021).

Back in the British era of colonisation, Malaysians regularly used English as their medium of contact aside from Bahasa. A study by Darmi (2013) stated that Malaysia was also one of the Asian countries which widely used English for education systems. Therefore, it will open the door for students in universities to obtain potential careers in different sectors, whether global or foreign.

However, English has become obligatory on all levels of education. Many countries have made it a point to make their students master English at various levels (Aydin, 2008 & Miskam, 2018). A study showed that the more self-confidence the students were, the higher their oral presentation outcomes, while the one with a lower self-confidence, they appeared to try less (Al-Hebaish, 2012). The application of roleplay and simulation will also help with English speaking anxiety. It helps students to communicate with their peers properly and to create a fun atmosphere for the course of English learning. The students' act was based on the situation and surrounding they were facing (Holt & Kysilka, 2006). The purpose of this study is to find out the issue of English language anxiety faced by university students. Specifically, this study is carried out to answer the following questions;

1) How does Negative evaluations influence speech anxiety?
2) How does Lack of self-confidence influence speech anxiety?
3) How does Trait anxiety influence speech anxiety?
4) How does Situation anxiety influence speech anxiety?
5) How can self-confidence reduce speech anxiety?
6) How can Role play and simulations reduce speech anxiety?

2. Literature Review

When communications in English is required, students who learn English as a second language are generally worried about communicating with other people and tend to express their thoughts impulsively. This issue varies for each person as it causes

significant differences in viewpoints depending on their surrounding environment. According to Indianty (2016), as students are expected to speak in English, they felt anxious as they are not fluent. This issue needs to be focused on more because some students are inactive in classes. They are not participating due to their speaking anxiety. As such, they cannot present properly in front of their classmates.

One of the reasons students are anxious to speak in English is that they fear negative evaluation. They are afraid to get negative judgments and thoughts of others (Aripin, Noorezam and Rahmat, 2020). They fear making verbal or spelling mistakes (Ayden, 2008) & Zhiping, 2013). Next, fear of making verbal or spelling mistakes also one of the sources of negative evaluation. To summarize, negative judgments and thoughts of others and fear of making verbal or spelling mistakes are the sources of negative evaluation.

The second reason for the anxiousness of students when they speak in English is a lack of self-confidence such as insecurity about their fluency and lack of encouragement from the educator. Learners have low confidence because they feel insecure about their fluency in English. Some of them have limited knowledge English language such as vocabulary and grammar. Other than that, the root of a lack of self-confidence is that they face a lack of encouragement from the educator (Brown, 2001). Some teachers or lecturers just focus on what they have to teach. Meanwhile, they forget to give motivation to the learners. This result is that students feel demotivated in learning English speaking. To sum up, insecurity about their fluency and lack of encouragement from educators are the causes of lack of self-confidence.

Next, the first type of English language speaking anxiety is trait anxiety, and this could either be a personality or a disorder. An introvert student tends to keep their own thoughts and feelings by themselves and is quiet rather than spending time with other people. A study by Indrianty (2016) stated that, since fear had already been part of a person's character, it can make the learner anxious when asked to speak. Furthermore, constantly feeling anxious in speaking English can lead to serious disorders. In cases of high anxiety, people who have experienced many threatening situations in the past to be more likely to view future situations as threatening to them (Pappamihiel, 2002). This is also greatly influenced by the fear of other students laughing at them or being criticised by the teacher. In general, students who experienced trait anxiety have anxiety as part of their character or as disorder.

The second type of English language speaking anxiety is a specific-situation anxiety such as public speaking and examination. Communication is a skill, and one has to organise their thoughts and prepare to face their audience in an ample period. According to a previous study, when asked to speak in class, students expressed their challenge concerning their inability to articulate their thoughts and to be the object of attention (Indrianty, 2016; Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2020). During oral assessment, students appear to think of their grammatical structure such as singular or plural tenses. Hence, they become confused and anxious when they realise their error, affecting their

presentation. (Shi, 2012). In summary, students experienced specific-situation anxiety for instance during public speaking and examination.

There are some methods that can be used to cope with this issue, which is to develop self-confidence as it can motivate students to involve in conversations and other spoken events and can bring tremendous success towards them. Self-confidence is believing in something would also work well. If students felt that they can do the assignments, they may seem to be inspired to accomplish and complete the tasks (Tridinanti, 2018). Other than that, an individual with elevated self-confidence is therefore more likely to not be afraid in debates and conversations. In addition, in their learning, optimistic students are good because they believe in their abilities and never give up which can motivate them to give much more effort to become more excellent in the future. A study showed that the more self-confidence the students were, the higher their oral presentation outcomes while the one with a lower self-confidence, they appeared to try less (Al-Hebaish, 2012). In conclusion, by developing self-confidence, students can be motivated to involve in conversations and will bring great success towards them.

In addition, English language speaking anxiety can be overcome by the implementation of roleplay and simulation in class. Roleplay encourages students to develop their interpersonal skills by interacting with their group members, sharing their ideas, and discussing the given character. This will indirectly help them to be more comfortable with each other which could lead them to speak in the English language without feeling hesitant (Tipmontree, 2018). Moreover, the way students' act was based on the situation and surroundings they were facing (Holt & Kysilka, 2006). Therefore, roleplay could give an interesting environment of learning as it can be handled either in drama, games, or real-life demonstration (Erturk, 2015). To conclude, English language speaking anxiety could be overcome by the implementation of roleplay and simulations as it will give the students the opportunity to interact with each other better as well as create a fun environment in learning English.

In conclusion, to understand more about this issue, one must know that anxiety in speaking English language comes from negative evaluation and lack of confidence. There are also two types of anxiety faced by students when asked to speak in English language which are trait and specific-situation anxiety. Students also should know that developing their self-confidence and implementing roleplay and simulation in their studies can overcome their anxiousness. Lastly, anxiety in speaking English language should be managed and overcome by students.

3. Material and Methods

This quantitative study's is done to investigate the perception of learners on speaking anxiety. 44 students from a public university in Malaysia was purposively chosen as sample. The instruments used to collect the data using Google Form consist of a

questionnaire with seven separate parts (Table 1); personal details, A, B, C, D, E, F and G respectively. There are 7 sections in the questionnaire.

Table 1: Distribution of items in Instrument

Sect	Heading	Sub-Heading	No of Items	Source
A	Demographic Profile		3	
B	Negative Evaluations	Negative Judgements and Thoughts	2	Aydin, 2008
		Fear of Making Mistakes	3	Zhiping, 2013
C	Lack of Self-Confidence	Insecurity	3	Januariza & Hendriani, 2016
		Lack Encouragement	2	Brown, 2001
D	Trait Anxiety	Personality	3	Indrianty, 2016
		Disorder	2	Pappamihiel, 2002
E	Situation Anxiety	Public Speaking	3	(Indrianty, 2016), (Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2020)
		Exam	2	(Shi, 2012)
F	Develop Self-Confidence	Speaking Confidence	2	Tridinanti, 2018
		Success Confidence	3	Al-Hebaish, 2012
G	Role Play and Simulations	Interaction	3	Tipmontree, 2018
		Fun Environment	2	Holt & Kysilka, 2006), (Erturk, 2015)

For each component containing two different keywords (table 1). Section A has 3 items of demographic profile. Section B has a total of 5 items on negative evaluations. It is sub-divided into 3 items on negative judgements (Aydin, 2008) and 3 items on fear of making mistakes (Zhiping, 2013). Section C has a total of 5 items on lack of self-confidence. It is sub-divided into 3 items on (a) insecurity (Januariza & Hendriani, 2016) and 2 items on (b) lack of encouragement (Brown, 2001).

Next, Section D has a total of 5 items in which 3 items are on (a) personality (Indrianty, 2016) and 2 items are on (b) disorder (Indrianty, 2016). Section E has a total of 5 items on Situation Anxiety and is sub-divided into 3 items on (a) public speaking (Indrianty, 2016), (Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2020) and 2 items on exam (Shi, 2012).

Section F has a total of 5 items on develop self-confidence in which 2 items are about (a) speaking confidence and 3 items on (b) success confidence. Finally, section G has a total of 5 items on role play and simulations and is sub-divided into 3 items on interaction (Tipmontree, 2018) and 2 items on (b) fun environment (Holt & Kysilka, 2006), (Erturk, 2015).

The scales were based on 5-point Likert-type scales, with choices (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). A reliability test (table 2)was done on the survey and revealed a Cronbach alpha of .725 thus confirming its reliability.

Reliability Statistics

| Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.725	30

Table 2: Reliability Statistics

Data collection for the study involved a questionnaire using Google Form as an approach to collect the data from respondents. Data was analysed using SPSS version 26 to reveal the frequency of responses in the form of mean scores.

4. Results and Discussion

The respondents were comprised of 13 male and 33 female students. Majority of respondents' age are from 20 to 21 years old with 58.7%. 23.9% respondents are from 18 to 19 years old and the balance of 17.4% are from 22 to 23 years old. In addition to that the majority of respondents are from semester 3 and 4 with 52.2%. Meanwhile, nearly a third of respondents are from semester 1 and 2 with 28.3%. 15.2% respondents are from semester 5 and 6 while the remaining which is 4.3% are from semester 7 and above.

4.1 Findings for Negative Evaluations

Figure 4: Bar Chart showing frequency for Negative Evaluations
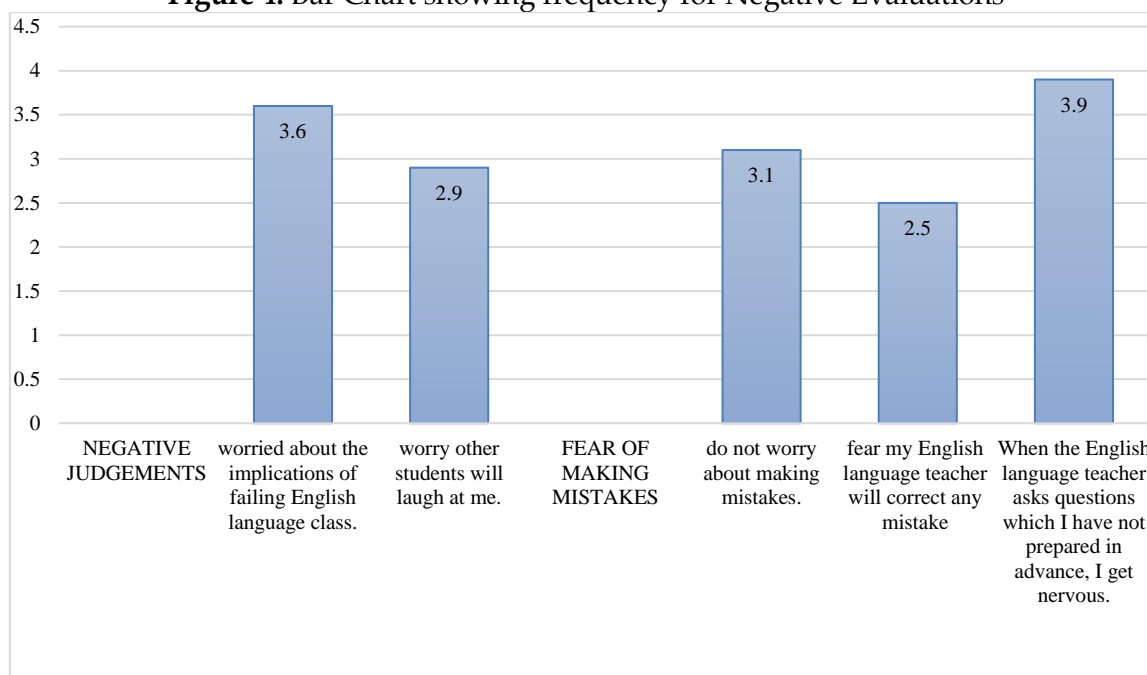
Negative judgement is measured through (a) negative judgements and thoughts (Aydin, 2008) and (b) fear of making mistakes (Zhipping, 2013). The highest mean (3.9) is reported

for students felt nervous if they could not answer their teacher's questions. Next, They were "worried about the implications of failing" (3.6). The lowest mean (2.5) is for "fear their English teacher correcting their mistakes"

4.2 Findings for Lack of Self Confidence

**Figure 5:** Bar Chart showing frequency for Lack of Self Confidence
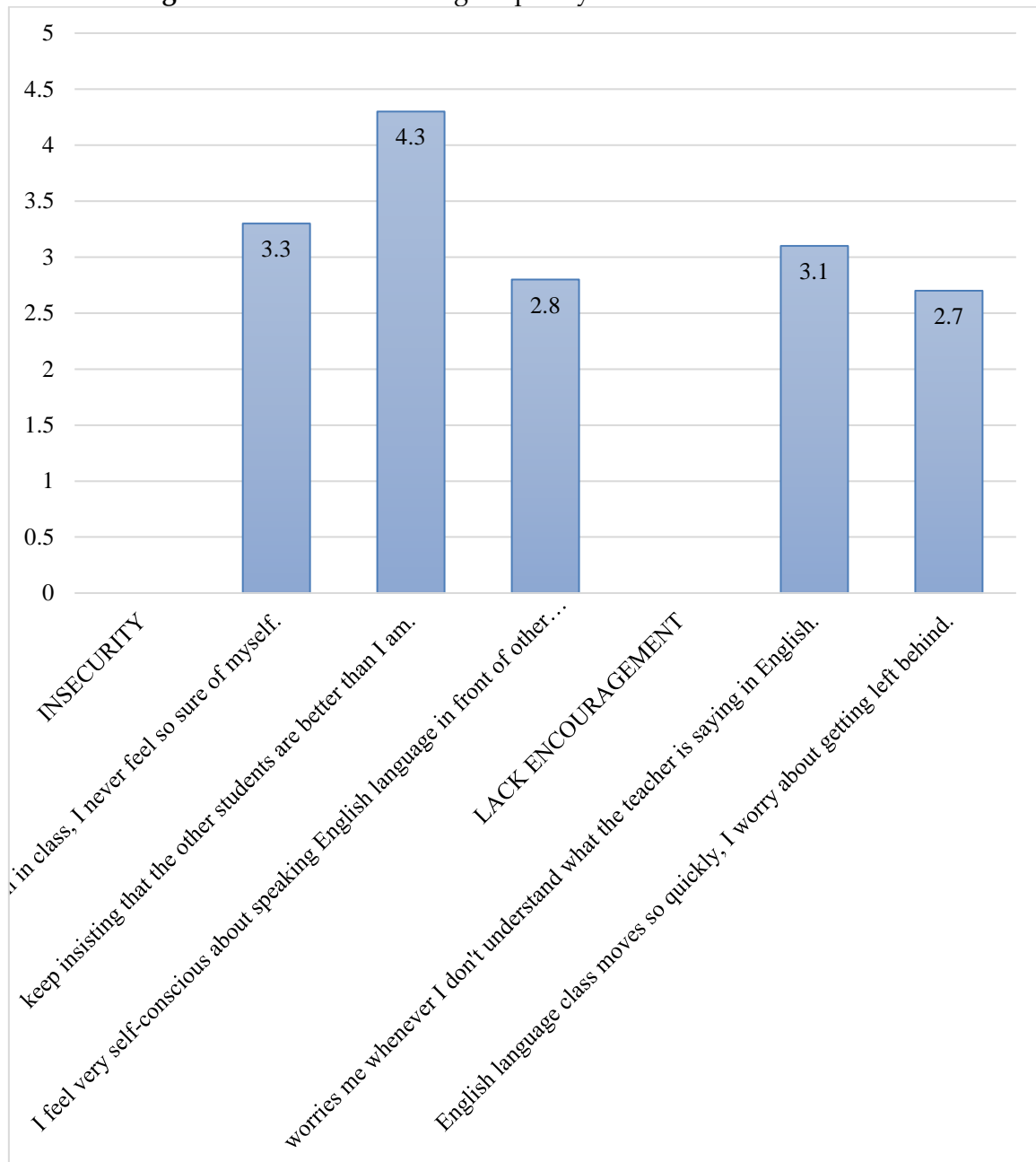
Self-confidence is measured by (a) insecurity (Januariza & Hendriani, 2016) and (b) lack of encouragement (Brown, 2001). The highest mean (4.3) is that the students "kept insisting that the others students are better". They "never felt so sure " when they spoke

English in class (3.3). They also feel worried" when they do not understand what the teacher is saying" (3.1).

4.3 Findings for Trait Anxiety

Figure 6: Bar Chart showing frequency for Trait Anxiety
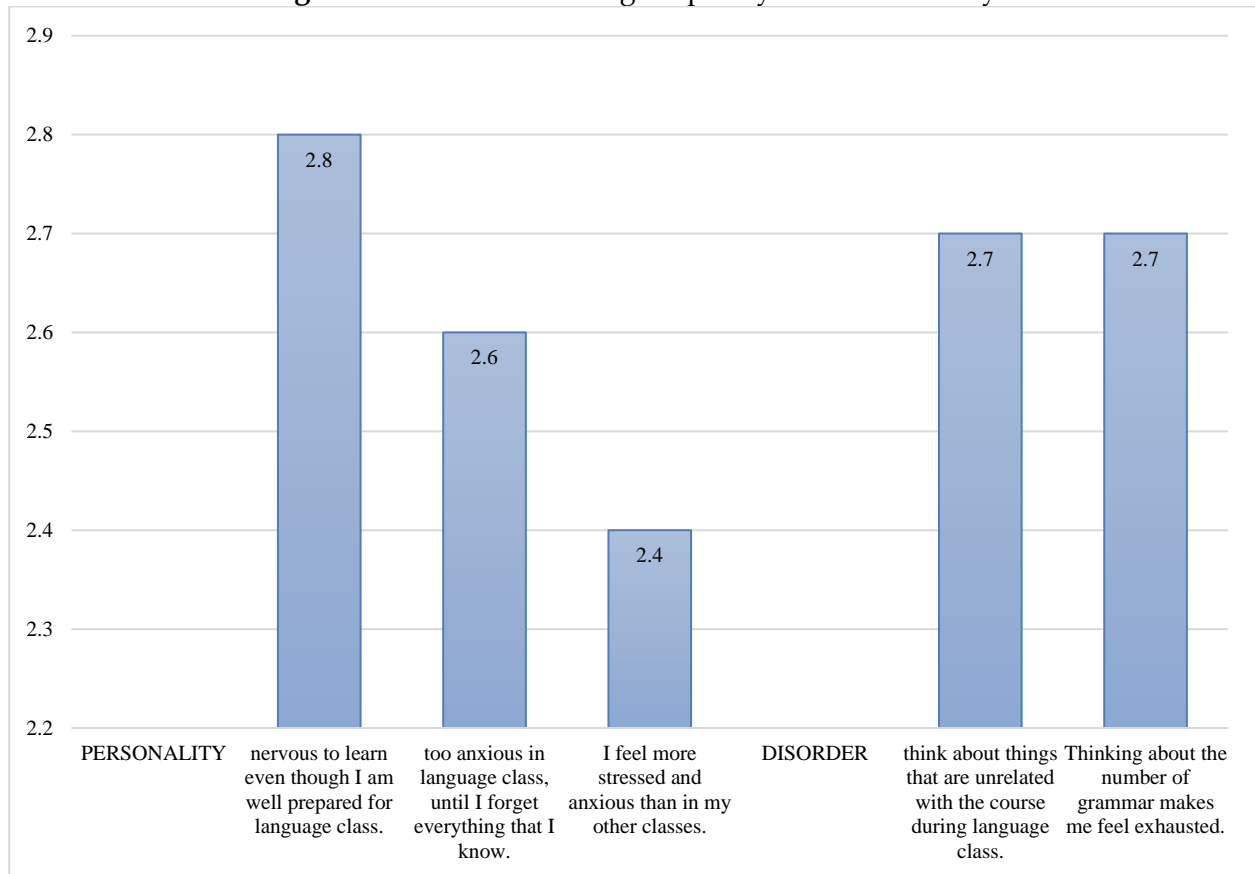
Trait anxiety is measure by (a) personality (Indrianty, 2016), and (b) Disorder (Pappamihiel, 2002). Respondents reported that they were "nervous to learn even though" (2.8) they are well prepared. They also liked to "think of unrelated things in class" (2.7) and worry about grammar (2.7).

4.4 Findings for Situation Anxiety
Situation anxiety is measured by (a) public Speaking (Indrianty, 2016), (Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2020) and (b) Examination (Shi, 2012). The highest mean at 3.8 is for "panic when they have to speak in front of the class" and "tremble when they knew they are called".

Figure 7: Bar Chart showing frequency for Situation Anxiety
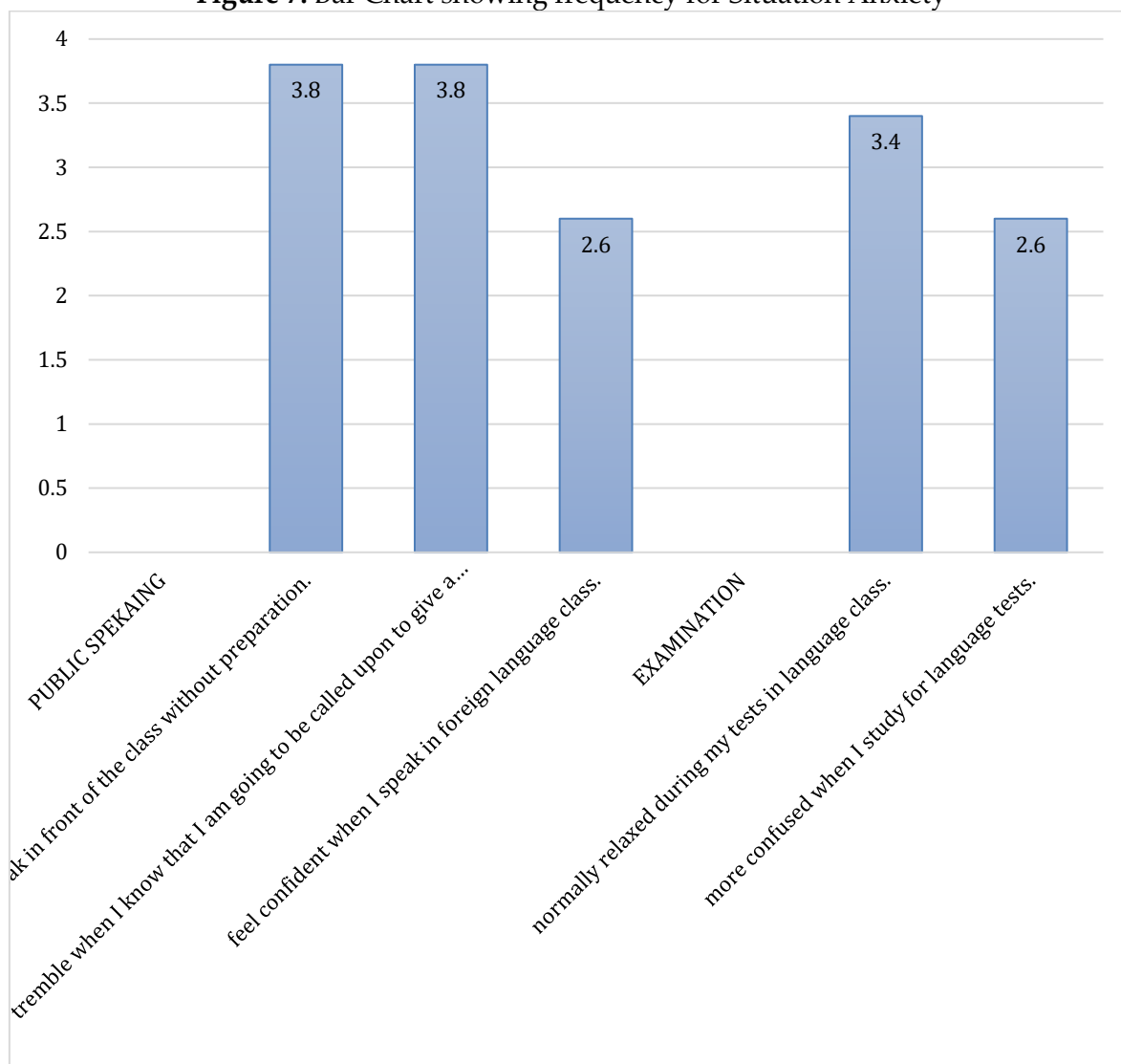

4.5 Findings for Develop Self Confidence

In order to develop self-confidence, learners need to (a) Speaking with Confidence (Tridinanti, 2018) and (b) feel Confidet to Succeed (Al-Hebaish, 2012). Learners put importance for "by mastering English, they will get more job opportunities" (4.5), "pass interview if they can speak English" (4.5) and "present well" (4.5). They also felt if they had confidence, they could communicate with native speakers" (4).

Figure 8: Bar Chart showing frequency for Develop Self-Confidence
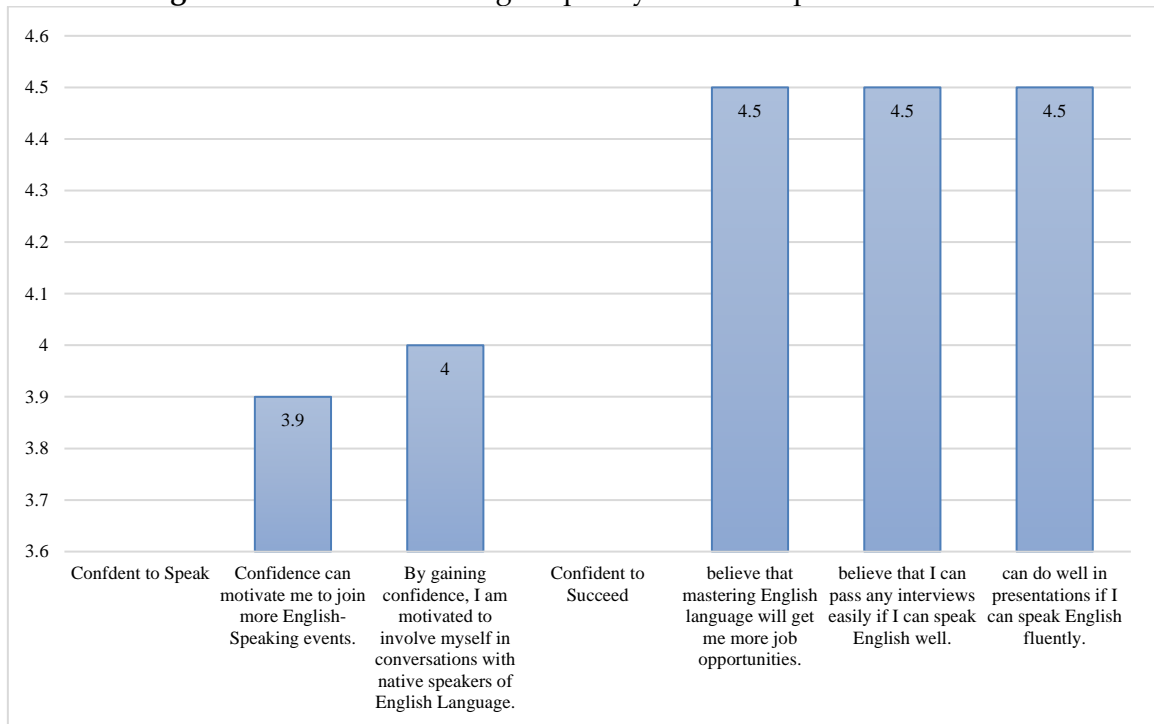
4.6 Findings for Implementation of Roleplay and Simulations

Figure 9: Bar Chart showing frequency for Implementation of Roleplay and Simulations
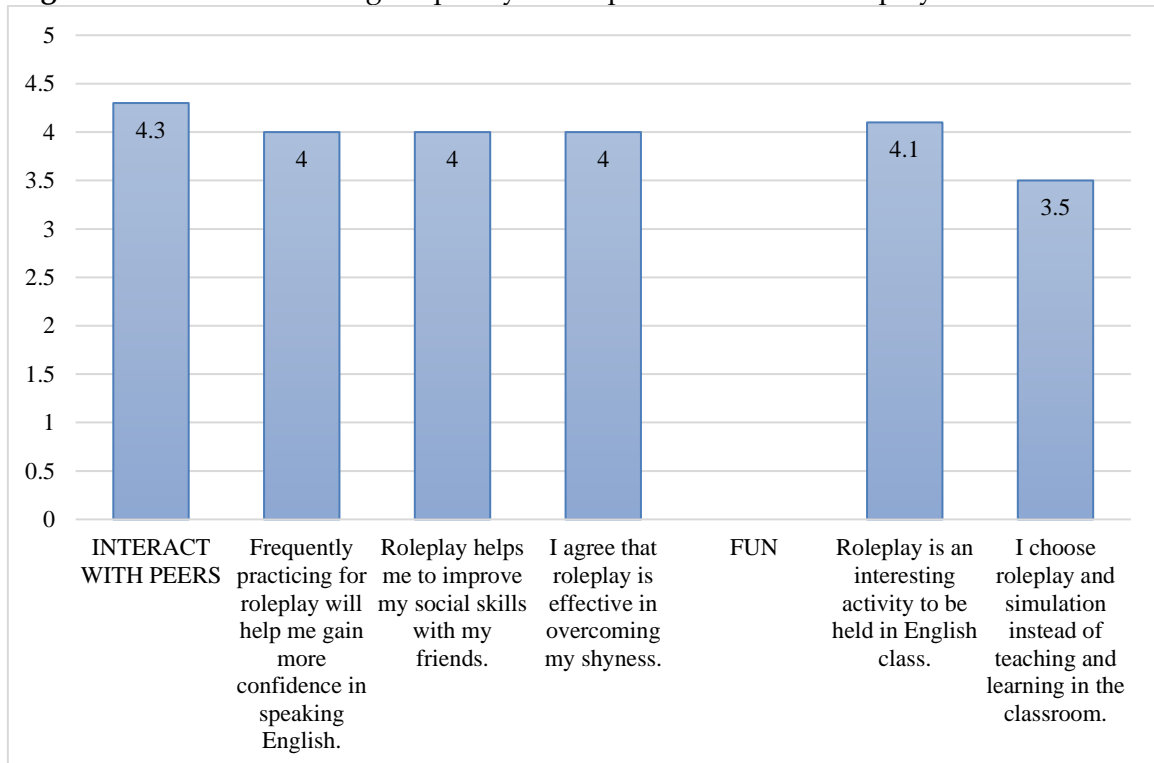
Another way to reduce speech anxiety is by participating in role play and simulations. This helps learner to (a) interact with their peers (Tipmontree, 2018) and (b) Learn in a

fun environment (Holt & Kysilka, 2006), (Erturk, 2015). Learner felt that "roleplay is an interesting activity" (4.1). They agreed that they "frequently practised for roleplay" (4). They also agreed that role play helped them improve their social skills (4) and role paly helped them overcome shyness (4).

6. Conclusion

6.1 Summary of Findings

Findings revealed that learners fear negative evaluation given by their peers and also their teachers. Similarly, Januariza & Hendriani (2016) reported that the students feared being laughed at by other students or being criticized by the teacher if they made a mistake in speaking English. Learners feared public correction if and when they made mistakes. In a study conducted by Aydin (2008), the students feared embarrassment of being corrected in public especially if accompanied by disparaging remarks by the teacher. Next, students were still nervous to learn even if they were prepared for the class. This show insecure they are using the language, Similarly, Januariza & Hendriani, 2016 felt that fear comes for lack of self-confidence. They also worry if they could not understand what was taught by the teacher. This is also reported in the study by Brown (2001) in which the students always felt demotivated when they do not understand their teacher and no encouragement from them. Some students have speech anxiety because of their personality. This is also reported in the study by Hasibuan & Irzawati (2020) that students were concerned about speech problems as in being shy, anxious and nervous to speak in English.

Measures can be taken to help learners with speech anxiety. Learners can be encouraged to speak with the native speakers for authentic use. Tridinanti (2018) agreed that if students believe in their confidence that they can perform. This finding is supported by a study from Al-Hebaish (2012) that the more self-confidence the students were, the greater the effects of their speaking presentation, while the one with less self-confidence tended to try less. Data in this study also revealed that learners liked the interaction they get from classroom activities like role-play and simulations. According to the study by Tipmontree (2018) that interpersonal skills can be developed by roleplay as students had the opportunity to share their ideas and discuss with their teammates.

6.2 Recommendations

There are few recommendations to be made for future researchers in view of the limitations in completing this study. Other than questionnaires, future study should adopt qualitative means of gathering data, such as individual interviews and observations. However, one does not need to fully abandon quantitative methods as doing observations only may lead to biased outcomes. Moreover, a similar study can be performed over a longer time period, so a larger sample size could be achieved. This can bring more variations in the respondents' feedback. Since some students had limited knowledge of English, it is also recommended that the study could be conducted at

different levels of education. Therefore, it can increase the number of sample sizes as well as enhance the generality of the findings.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors, Noor Hanim Rahmat, Amirul Mukmin Abu Bakar, Akmal Haziq Zamri, Aida Nasuha Roslan, Ain Zuhraa Zakaria, Dania Thurayya Ahamd Sabandi and Muhammad Alif Imran Mohamad Zaki, declare no conflicts of interests in the subject matter or materials discussed in the manuscript.

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