

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA) can be defined as the fear of giving a speech in front of audiences. Similarly, Haryanto (2020) said that PSA is a specific phenomenon that occurs when someone is faced with the prospect of speaking or giving a speech in front of an audience. Spijck (2011) as cited in Richter (2021) found that 80% of the participants in his study encountered PSA to a certain degree. On the other hand, the ability to speak in public and deliver an oral presentation is critical for people nowadays to expose and promote themselves, ideas, points of view, and solutions to specific problems in order to succeed in their careers (Hasibuan et al., 2022). Therefore, Zhang and Ardasheva (2019) stated that college students have a rapidly increasing need for good English public speaking skills. Considering that, in a state university in Tasikmalaya, particularly in the English Education Department, there is a Public Speaking course to help students develop their public speaking skills and knowledge. Students must perform English public speaking tasks such as an individual oral presentation on a specific topic with or without aids. Despite its importance, however, Raja (2017) expressed that some people become restless and experience sleeping problems when they have to perform in front of others because of their PSA. In brief, PSA is something that many people experience, including students, who are more likely to experience PSA during an oral presentation, for instance, an oral presentation in the Thesis Defence Examination (TDE).

The TDE is the final stage that students should complete in order to pursue the degree. Samad and Adnan (2018) stated that TDE is a prime requisite for students at the end of their study program in which students must present and defend their thesis in front of a panel of examiners in order to graduate. This requirement might be regarded as the most anxiety-inducing aspect of TDE activities. Because there is question and answer activity between the examinee and examiners about the topic being analyzed in the proper defence segment (Samad & Adnan, 2018). In addition, anxiety may arise during TDE, particularly for those whose English is

not their primary language (Samad et al., 2022). Because speaking in a target language is not easy; it necessitates more than a web of vocabulary and/or knowledge of more semantic and grammatical rules (Amoah & Yeboah, 2021). This notion continues to expand due to the fact that this examination at the English Education Department should be presented in English for communication. EFL students struggle to comply with the examiners' expectations and pass the examination by using English because there must be some limitations that they frequently face when defending their argument in English (Samad et al., 2022). As a result, this situation can certainly increase students' anxiety and end up causing them to stop speaking English abruptly.

Furthermore, this research is based on a real-life phenomenon in which an undergraduate student experienced anxiety in her TDE, such as fear of not understanding questions from examiners, fear of not being able to answer questions from examiners, and fear of not being able to answer questions in English. Coupled by Nur et al. (2022), there are psychological factors that cause students' anxiety in TDE, which include fear of making mistakes, fear of questions from examiners, negative thinking, forgetting the content of the thesis, fear of not being able to convey the message well, fear of criticism from the examiner, and shyness. Those are supported by Haryanto (2020) who claimed that when there is an interaction between the speaker and the audience, PSA frequently arises. Thus, undergraduate students whose TDE processes are hampered by anxiety may have more difficulty concentrating resulting in poor performance. Following the situation above, the researcher is interested in conducting this research to find out the factors that cause undergraduate students' PSA and the strategies they applied to overcome PSA based on their TDE experiences. This issue is crucial to investigate because being aware of the sources of students' PSA and how to overcome them is essential for those who will take the TDE to know how to manage their anxiety and do their TDE optimally and competently in order to pass the examination and graduate, as well as examiners, could create a positive TDE room atmosphere to alleviate students' anxiety.

In recent years, there has been an increase in the study of speaking anxiety, and most studies have studied based on classroom context (Damayanti & Listyani, 2020; Sinaga et al., 2020; Tien, 2018), which most EFL students feel anxious about speaking English in the classroom is because of their lack of knowledge and proficiency, lack of confidence, students' background, fear of negative evaluation by the teacher, and being laughed by friends. However, there has not been sufficient research on PSA, especially in a highly anticipated yet anxious event known as a TDE. The previous research on this issue was conducted by Samad, Fitriani, and Amalina (2022) which focused on examining the extent of English postgraduate students' anxiety in facing TDE as a whole communicative event in a university in Indonesia with a quantitative method. The findings revealed three major topics that students had experienced, there are anticipatory anxiety, physiological symptoms, and a lack of control during speech performance. Whereas, in this present research, the researcher conducted qualitative research focusing on analyzed factors causing undergraduate students' PSA and strategies they use to overcome it based on their TDE experiences, particularly on the proper defence segment in which students' thesis presentation and questions and answers with examiners occurred. Thus, the purpose of this research is to find out what factors cause undergraduate students' PSA in TDE and how to overcome them.

1.2 Formulation of the Problems

This research intends to provide the answers to the following problem formulation:

1. What are the factors causing undergraduate students' public speaking anxiety in the thesis defence examination?
2. How do undergraduate students overcome their public speaking anxiety in the thesis defence examination?

1.3 Operational Definitions

To avoid misunderstandings about the terms used in this research, the researcher provides definitions, such as:

1.3.1 Public Speaking Anxiety (PSA)

Public Speaking Anxiety is a subjective feeling of fear and worries that undergraduate students feel when delivering presentations and answering questions from and in front of the examiners.

1.3.2 Thesis Defence Examination (TDE)

The Thesis Defence Examination is the final phase that undergraduate students must complete at the end of their study program in order to pursue a degree by demonstrating their competence in their research projects by presenting research results and defending their knowledge orally in front of the examining team.

1.3.3 Factors causing PSA

Things that cause or influence a situation or the occurrence of something, in this case, factors causing PSA experienced by undergraduate students in their TDE, particularly in the proper defence segment in which the students' presentations and question and answer sessions with examiners occur, and unpleasant experiences that provoke their anxiety when they know they will face TDE, it is in line with the theory used of five factors that cause PSA.

1.3.4 Strategies to overcome PSA

A plan for overcoming a problem or determining a solution to a problem; in this case, strategies for overcoming undergraduate students' PSA in facing the TDE. These strategies were used by undergraduate students in their TDE to manage and reduce their anxiety, and this is in line with the theory used of five strategies to overcome PSA.

1.4 Aims of the Research

In accordance with the problem statement above, the aims of this research are to know the factors causing undergraduate students' PSA in TDE and how to overcome them.

1.5 Significance of the Study

1.5.1 Theoretical contribution

It is expected to expand a theory regarding the factors that cause PSA as well as the strategies to overcome PSA, particularly in the context of TDE.

1.5.2 Practical contribution

It is expected to be useful for readers and undergraduate students which can help them become aware of their PSA sources and how to overcome the problem in their future TDE. In addition, examiners become aware of creating a positive TDE room environment, such as providing clear guidelines and expectations regarding the TDE in advance, building a rapport, providing constructive feedback, recognizing students' efforts, and showing empathy in order to encourage student success and alleviate unnecessary anxiety.

1.5.3 Empirical contribution

It is expected can help the other researchers who will conduct research related to this topic in their future research.