

## Exploring EFL Student's Strategy in Improving Public Speaking Skill

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### Abstract

Public speaking skills are a must for EFL students to be successful in school, work, and even life. (Lucas 2009,10) in his book: "throughout history people have used public speaking as a vital means communication. Public speaking is a way of making your ideas public of sharing them with other people and of influencing other people". It is considered as an important skill that helps students to be more fluent and confident in presentation and communication for sure. Given the importance of public speaking, it is not surprising that it has been taught and studied around the globe for thousands of years. And for each of the individual there must be their own strategy to improve their public speaking skill. This research aimed to find out or investigate the EFL student's strategy in improving their public speaking skill. Through a qualitative approach, this mini research explores student's experiences and perspectives on the process of improving their public speaking skill. The data were collected through in-depth interviews with 4 students selected using purposive sampling. Data analysis using grounded theory resulted in findings that EFL students use variety of cognitive, effective, and social strategies to overcome challenges in public speaking. The purpose of this mini research are to provide knowledge to other EFL students about what strategies can be tried and used to improve public speaking skills.

**Keywords:** *English Foreign Language Students, Strategy, Public Speaking Skill.*

### Abstrak

Keterampilan berbicara di depan umum merupakan suatu keharusan bagi siswa EFL untuk meraih kesuksesan di sekolah, pekerjaan, dan bahkan kehidupan. (Lucas 2009,10) di dalam bukunya: "Sepanjang sejarah, orang-orang telah menggunakan public speaking (berbicara di depan umum) sebagai sarana komunikasi yang penting. Public speaking (berbicara di depan umum) merupakan cara untuk menyampaikan ide-ide yang ada kepada publik, membagikannya kepada orang lain, dan memengaruhi orang lain". Keterampilan ini dianggap sebagai keterampilan penting yang membantu siswa untuk menjadi lebih fasih dan percaya diri dalam presentasi dan komunikasi. Mengingat pentingnya public speaking (berbicara di depan umum), tidak mengherankan bahwa keterampilan ini telah diajarkan dan dipelajari di seluruh dunia selama ribuan tahun. Dan bagi setiap individu, pasti ada strategi mereka sendiri untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara di depan umum. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui atau menyelidiki strategi siswa EFL dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara di depan umum mereka. Melalui pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian mini ini mengeksplorasi pengalaman dan perspektif siswa tentang proses peningkatan keterampilan berbicara di depan umum mereka. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam dengan 4 siswa yang dipilih menggunakan purposive sampling. Analisis data menggunakan grounded theory menghasilkan temuan bahwa siswa EFL menggunakan berbagai strategi kognitif, efektif, dan sosial untuk mengatasi tantangan dalam berbicara di depan umum. Tujuan dari penelitian mini ini adalah untuk memberikan pengetahuan kepada siswa EFL lainnya tentang strategi apa yang dapat dicoba dan digunakan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara di depan umum.

**Kata kunci:** *English Foreign Language Students, Strategi, Public Speaking Skill.*

## **1. Introduction**

Nowadays, speaking is one of the interpersonal skills that must be mastered. Thanks to the ability to speak in public, a person is considered a competent person. Dunar, H. (2015) in his book "public speaking is a person's ability to speak correctly in public so that the message can be conveyed clearly and the purpose of the speech can be achieved immediately". As stated by Mustamu, R.H (2012:210) that: public speaking is the ability to express ideas in front of an audience. And public speaking is a skill that combines four main elements of education: knowledge, character, skills and art. One of the special gifts we humans have is the ability to speak. It's what sets us apart from all other creatures on Earth. Even before we developed written language with letters and alphabets, we were using our voices to communicate with each other. Language has always been a fundamental part of what makes us human. Even after people knew writing, speaking became more widely used. Because speaking has many advantages: speaking can be more intimate, easier to understand, and more personal. A German figure, Adolf Hitler, said that: "Every revolutionary movement in this world, linguists develop it, not scribes." In our daily lives, some of our time is spent communicating, especially speaking.

In public speech, as in electricity, there is a positive and a negative force. Either you or your audience are going to possess the positive factor. If you assume it you can almost invariably make it yours. If you assume the negative you are sure to be negative. Assuming a virtue or a vice vitalizes it. Summon all your power of self direction, and remember that though your audience is infinitely more important than you, the truth is more important than both of you, because it is eternal. Many EFL students find public speaking to be a daunting task, often experiencing anxiety and apprehension due to linguistic limitations, cultural differences, and fear of making mistakes. Overcoming these challenges requires the development and implementation of effective public speaking strategies. And this research investigates the specific strategies EFL students utilize to improve their public speaking abilities, shedding light on the processes they engage in and the factors that influence their success.

According to the points had been explained above, the research aims at English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students use of strategies to enhance their public-speaking skills. Taking into account the spread application of oral presentation and the distinct challenges that EFL Learners encounter, this research seeks the specific strategies students make use of to improve their public speaking abilities. The insights can be beneficial for student and for teachers as well.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Public Speaking Strategies**

The importance of public speaking in academic, professional, and social contexts has been widely acknowledged in the literature (e.g., McCroskey, 1997; Osborn & Osborn, 2018). Research has explored various aspects of public speaking pedagogy, including audience analysis, speech organization, delivery techniques, and anxiety management (Ayres & Miller, 1994). Within the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), there is a growing body of work focusing on oral communication skills development (Burns, 2012). However, a more focused examination of the specific learning strategies employed by EFL students to enhance their public speaking abilities is needed. This literature review will examine key studies related to public speaking pedagogy, oral communication in EFL contexts, and student strategies, ultimately focusing on the gap this research aims to address. The role of learner strategies in language acquisition has been a subject of extensive research (e.g., Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975). Studies have identified a range of cognitive, metacognitive, and social strategies that learners utilize to enhance their language learning (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). However, the application of these strategies within the specific context of EFL public speaking has received less attention. This literature review will explore key research on learner strategies, particularly those relevant to oral communication and performance, and then focus on the existing literature that specifically addresses EFL learners' approaches to public speaking.

### **2.2. Improving Public Speaking Skill**

#### **2.2.1. Practice and Feedback**

A consistent theme in the literature on public speaking improvement is the crucial role of practice and feedback. Studies have demonstrated that repeated practice, particularly when combined with constructive feedback from instructors or peers, leads to significant improvements in delivery, confidence, and overall effectiveness (e.g., Dwyer, 2010; Sprague & Stuart, 2008). This emphasis on experiential learning aligns with theories of skill acquisition, which suggest that deliberate practice and reflection are essential for developing

proficiency in any performance-based skill (Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Römer, 1993). Furthermore, incorporating video recording and self-evaluation into the practice process has been shown to enhance self-awareness and facilitate more targeted improvement (Allen & Bolls, 2001). The students' ability to convey the ideas or the messages affect their performance on speaking in English (Erlina and Selian, 2021)

### 2.2.2. Anxiety Management

Public speaking anxiety (PSA) is a common obstacle that can hinder effective performance. Research has explored various strategies for managing PSA, including cognitive restructuring, systematic desensitization, and skills training (e.g., Behnke & Beatty, 1981; Daly & McCroskey, 1984). Cognitive restructuring focuses on challenging and modifying negative thoughts and beliefs associated with public speaking, while systematic desensitization involves gradual exposure to anxiety-provoking situations. Skills training, on the other hand, equips individuals with practical techniques for improving their delivery and organization, which can indirectly reduce anxiety by increasing confidence.

### 2.2.3. Delivery Techniques

Effective delivery is a critical component of successful public speaking. The literature emphasizes the importance of various delivery techniques, including eye contact, vocal variety, body language, and use of visual aids (e.g., Lucas, 2015). Maintaining consistent eye contact with the audience fosters connection and enhances credibility (Andersen, 2004). Vocal variety, including changes in pitch, pace, and volume, keeps the audience engaged and prevents monotony. Appropriate body language, such as purposeful gestures and movement, reinforces the message and conveys confidence. The effective use of visual aids can further enhance understanding and retention.

### 2.2.4. Interplay of Content and Delivery

While effective delivery is crucial, the literature also highlights the importance of well-structured and engaging content. Research suggests that speakers who are knowledgeable and passionate about their topic tend to deliver more compelling presentations (Osborn & Osborn, 2018). Clear organization, logical flow, and supporting evidence are essential for conveying information effectively and persuading the audience. Therefore, improving public speaking skills requires attention to both the content of the message and the manner in which it is delivered.

## 3. Method

This mini research employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing thematic analysis to explore the data. Thematic analysis involves identifying and interpreting recurring patterns or themes within qualitative datasets. The participants consisted of two English major and two students from other disciplines, representing three distinct universities in Indonesia in North Sumatera to be precise. Data were collected through interviews, a method consisting of extracting information from chosen individuals. Detailed insights were obtained through semi-structured and in-depth interviews, allowing for a conversation between the researcher and each participant possibly based on an interview guide. Particularly, a semi-structured interview format was chosen. This enabled there to be flexibility in the questioning, with the researcher able to probe more deeply into participant responses and emergent contextual factors.

**Table 3.1 Participants' Criteria**

No.	Participant	Status	Universities	English Learning Experience	Experince in Public Speaking
1	MD	English Student	UMN Al-Washliyah Medan	she has learnt English for 4 years.	More than 3 Times
2	PRI	English Student	UMN Al-Washliyah Medan	She had taught students an English course for 4 years.	More than 3 Times

3	AS	Non-English Student	Budi Dharma Medan	She learnt English for 3 years.	More than 3 Times
4	NF	Non-English Student	STAI Nurul Hilmi Tanjungbalai	She has learnt English for 6 years.	More than 3 Times

#### 4. Result and Discussion

##### 4.1 Result

The result of the research showed that were found strategies employed by EFL students to enhance their public speaking skills. These strategies can be categorized into three main topics:

##### ❖ Preparation and Practice

**“what are your strategies for improving your public speaking skill?”**

*PRI: Practise more and all out preparation especially for the material i need to really master the material of my speech, usually before I perform my speech in front of people I like to search on youtube speech references video about speech, or find articles which is in accordance with the theme of the speech that I want to present and for relieving my nervous I would like to ask for some advices from my lecturer or someone I decide to.*

*MD: Support, I need more support to be confident. And full prepare preparation for my speech before I perform my speech I will prepare it from long ago, I will try to imagine what kind of situation I'm going to face, the problem that may arise, and I always ready for plan B if the situation I'm in doesn't match my expectation. That's why preparation is the most important for me in public speaking.*

Based on the two participants responses, the researcher sum up that participant in this research need full preparation before perform their speech to increase their self-confidence, ensure their speech delivered well and clearly, reduce mistake that may arise, make their speech interesting to listen to, avoid confusion so that their speech can be smooth and well structured.

##### ❖ Language and delivery

**“how do you manage to have a clear and brief speech for public speaking?”**

*AS: As for to make my speech delivered well, and clearly, of course I need to enrich my vocabulary so that if there is a situation where I need to answer my audience question on the spot I can confidently speak and answer the question clearly and understandable with a common choice of words or advance choice of words. I also often watch speech videos of western famous speaker from youtube as a reference for my body language and non verbal communication because that is important, such as maintaining eye contact, using appropriate gestures etc.*

*NF: I always watch western native speaker speech on youtube like TED Talks, Domics, and Motivation2Study channel. So that I can learn their pronunciation, and intonation when speaking because my thought it is really important to have a better pronunciation and intonation, imagine when you have prepared a really good material for your speech but your pronunciation and intonation is sucks, then that is just useless since your audience may misunderstand or worst don't get it at all*

Based on the two EFL students, the researcher summarize that enrich vocabulary, pay attention to pronunciation and intonation, master good body language and non verbal communication play a crucial role that effect in successful of public speaking. They reflect a conscious effort to enhance their linguistic proficiency and overall speech style. By fully understand these aspects students are not only improving their fluency and clarity but also enhancing their ability to connect with their audience and deliver impactful speech.

##### ❖ Overcoming Anxiety and Building Confidence.

**“How can you overcome your self-confidence problem when you are public speaking?”**

*MD: As for me I will seek for more support and of course the most important thing is my willingness, when my willingness is strong I will overcome any problems that ahead of me even my confident will never be a trouble for me anymore.*

*AS: I usually employ positive self-talk to manage my anxiety. It really helps me a lot.*

*PRI: Well preparation is my key to overcome my anxiety. Mastering the material of my speech will help me to enjoy my stage very well.*

*NF: I just set my mind that everything will be alright, and even if I make a mistake I will make it into a lesson for my next speech so that I keep improving to better speaker.*

Based on the answer of all the participants above, the researchers recap that overcoming anxiety in various situations, such as public speaking, requires a multifaceted approach. As evidenced by the shared experiences, individuals employ a range of strategies to cope. These include cultivating a strong willingness to overcome challenges, utilizing positive self-talk to manage inner dialogue, prioritizing thorough preparation to build confidence, and maintaining a growth mindset by viewing setbacks as learning opportunities. By combining these strategies, individuals can develop a personalized toolkit for managing anxiety and enhancing their overall well-being.

## 4.2 Discussion

Based on the interview, the researchers condense that, the three points of this research were likely most use by beginner public speaker. The research findings highlight the multifaceted nature of effective public speaking strategies employed by EFL students. Consistent across the three categories such as preparation and practice, language and delivery, and overcoming anxiety is the emphasis on proactive and personalized approach. Students recognize the crucial role of thorough preparation, including meticulous research, rehearsal, and seeking guidance from mentors. Perhaps most importantly, they demonstrate a remarkable capacity for self-reflection. They view setbacks not as failures, but as valuable lessons, learning to reframe anxiety as a challenge to overcome. The findings of this study align with previous research on effective language learning strategies (Oxford, 1990; Cohen & Macaro, 2007). The emphasis on metacognitive strategies, such as planning and self-monitoring, echoes the importance of learner autonomy in language acquisition (Nunan, 1999). Furthermore, the reliance on social strategies, such as peer interaction and seeking feedback, underscores the significance of collaborative learning environments for developing communicative competence (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). These findings suggest that EFL students are active and resourceful learners who employ a variety of strategies to overcome challenges and improve their public speaking skills. It is believed that learning public speaking is always connected to cultural paradigm (Bell & Jackson, 2022).

The researchers align with existing research on effective public speaking strategies. The emphasis on thorough preparation, consistent practice, and language development resonates with established pedagogical principles. The identification of strategies for managing anxiety and building confidence underscores the psychological and emotional aspects of public speaking. Furthermore, the study highlights the increasing role of technology in enhancing public speaking skills. The use of online resources, language learning applications, and digital tools for recording and analysis reflects the evolving learning landscape and the growing accessibility of resources for language learners.

## 5. Conclusion

The researchers concluded after interviewing some students who often do public speaking and the results showed that most of EFL students in improving their public speaking skill they pay more attention to preparation and practice to enhance their speaking performance by focusing on their speech materials, it also includes practicing intonation, pronunciation, eye contact, facial expression and their body language for the speech so that the movement matches the speech. And from investigating the EFL students the researchers found strategies that can help others EFL students to improve their public speaking skill.

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