

Strategies for mitigating communication anxiety among communication science students during seminar thesis examinations

Hasan Basri¹, Deri Sis Nanda², Susanto Susanto³

¹ Universitas Tulang Bawang, Indonesia.

Email: hasanbasri@utb.ac.id. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0008-9011>.

Corresponding author.

² Universitas Bandar Lampung, Indonesia.

³ Universitas Bandar Lampung, Indonesia.

ABSTRACT

Objective. The objective of this study was to examine the strategies employed by students to mitigate communication anxiety during thesis seminar examinations, a high-stress situation commonly encountered by students in communication science programs in Indonesia.

Methodology. A qualitative study was conducted involving in-depth interviews with 130 communication science students from two universities in Lampung Province, Indonesia, who were about to undertake thesis seminar examinations. To ensure the integrity and reliability of the findings, triangulation analysis was applied.

Results. The analysis revealed a number of strategies that students employ to mitigate anxiety during thesis seminar examinations. These strategies encompassed a range of techniques, including self-soothing practices, controlled breathing, reciting prayers, formulating preparatory notes, simulated presentations (mirror rehearsals), simulated interactions with peers, cognitive restructuring, and experiential learning.

Conclusion. This study illuminated the array of strategies that students employ to mitigate anxiety during thesis seminar examinations, offering insights into coping methods well-suited to high-stress academic settings. The findings underscored the importance of integrating cognitive, emotional, and culturally relevant approaches into interventions designed to help students manage anxiety in public speaking contexts. Future research could further explore the effectiveness of these strategies across different academic and cultural settings, informing support programs that enhance students' resilience and performance.

Keywords: communication anxiety; student strategies; qualitative inquiry; communication skill; science communication; thesis examination.

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1. INTRODUCTION

COMMUNICATION represents an indispensable element of human existence, inextricably linked to the fabric of daily interactions (Carlile & Keidser, 2020; Cooren, 2015). It functions as a conduit through which individuals engage in the exchange, dissemination, and evolution of information, engendering communal cohesion and personal advancement (Scherer, 2012). As discussed by Guler *et al.* (2018), communication is a dynamic process whereby messages, ideas, and concepts are conveyed from one party to another. The efficacy of communication is evidenced by its capacity to transmit information proficiently, a determinant that markedly influences relationships and exerts significant influence over the trajectory of subsequent interactions. However, the interplay of communication among individuals is not perpetually characterized by seamless fluidity. Rather, an array of factors can impede its harmonious course, among which communication anxiety assumes prominence (Duron *et al.*, 2005; Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001; Ma & Lin, 2022). It is inevitable that individuals will experience a certain degree of apprehension when engaging in communicative activities. This emotional state is commonly referred to as communication anxiety.

The acknowledgment of communication's indispensable function highlights its pervasive importance across various domains of human existence. Each communicative act represents an intricate process of encoding and decoding, necessitating the exchange of complex information and interpretations (Egorova *et al.*, 2016; Ito, 2021). The efficacy of communication is contingent upon the proficiency with which messages are formulated, transmitted, received, and comprehended. Furthermore, the efficacy of communication lies in its capacity to cultivate relationships, fostering connections that extend beyond mere verbal discourse (Almeida, 2004; Therkelsen & Fiebich, 2001). This dynamic can exert considerable influence over an individual's decision to perpetuate or sever ties subsequent to the communication episode, thus underscoring its socio-psychological implications. However, this process is not immune to disruption. At the core of any communicative

engagement lies the specter of communication anxiety, an emotional state typified by apprehension and unease. As individuals engage in the multifaceted process of communication, it is inevitable that an undercurrent of anxiety will be present. This psychological phenomenon, designated as communication anxiety, illuminates the underlying emotional intricacies that individuals confront as they traverse the intricate pathways of interpersonal interaction (Hutchins *et al.*, 2021; Parkinson & Simons, 2012). By grasping the intricate nuances of communication anxiety, scholars and practitioners can devise strategies to enhance communicative efficacy and mitigate the potential detriments associated with this pervasive emotional response.

Anxiety is a pervasive psychological phenomenon that has its origins in both intrinsic and extrinsic sources. Individuals experiencing personal anxiety may encounter difficulties in engaging effectively in dynamic discussions, constructing coherent dialogues, and responding to inquiries presented in public forums or professional settings in a clear and articulate manner. This impediment is frequently not attributable to a lack of knowledge but rather to an individual's difficulty in articulating thoughts verbally. Communication apprehension is a nearly universal phenomenon that transcends demographic boundaries and affects individuals across all levels of proficiency, including even the most accomplished scholars. The pervasive nature of communication anxiety underscores its ubiquity in interpersonal interactions, extending to scenarios encompassing both intimate conversations and larger public engagements. Despite the advancement of expertise, communication apprehension persists as a recurring aspect of human interaction. Mastery in specific disciplines does not act as an impervious shield against this anxiety. Consequently, this phenomenon represents a shared human experience, connecting novices and experts alike through the thread of communicative vulnerability. The recognition of the pervasiveness of communication anxiety encourages a broader appreciation of the multifaceted challenges inherent in effective information exchange and underscores the importance of devising strategies to alleviate its impact (Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001).

In the context of tertiary education, a significant concern is the prevalence of communication anxiety among students, particularly when they engage in communicative activities such as consultations, dialogues, and, notably, thesis deliberations with their academic mentors. This experience of communication anxiety emerges as a tangible consequence of students' psychological distress, thereby warranting scholarly investigation. One motivation for this investigation is the observation that students frequently experience feelings of hopelessness, which can create an environment conducive to the development of communication apprehension. Therefore, the research focus is on the practical clarification of strategies for navigating this communication anxiety landscape, particularly in the context of thesis seminars. The decision to investigate the mitigation of communication anxiety within the context of thesis seminars is based on the findings of preliminary interviews with students who have successfully completed the demanding thesis seminar examinations but still experience the residual effects of communication anxiety. The qualitative insights obtained from these interviews have highlighted the crucial importance of this subject matter. These interactions have illuminated the lived experiences of these students, effectively emphasizing the recurrent nature of their struggles with communication apprehension during academic interactions. This accumulated knowledge underscores the vital necessity of this research endeavor, which aims not only to decipher the multifaceted manifestations of communication anxiety but also to uncover effective coping mechanisms relevant to alleviating such apprehensions.

The spectrum of communication anxiety experienced by individuals undergoing evaluative interactions is characterized by a multitude of emotional responses. This encompasses sensations of inadequacy, manifesting as a perceived lack of competence to effectively reinforce arguments during critical discourse, such as those encountered within trial proceedings. This deficiency also extends to instances of cognitive incapacitation, whereby individuals grapple with a compromised ability to assimilate and internalize the salient points articulated by the examiner. Concomitantly, an overarching apprehension towards potential

failure is a prominent feature of this phenomenon. It is characterized by an overwhelming fear of being unable to persuade the examiner of one's adept grasp of pre-existing subject matter. A key aspect of this anxiety landscape is the strong desire to demonstrate mastery over prior course material. However, this ambition is significantly overshadowed by a notable loss of self-assurance. This decline in confidence is largely attributed to the perceived vast intellectual divide between students and their examiners, often attributed to distinct academic backgrounds. The psychological distress resulting from this perceived disparity plays a pivotal role in the elevated anxiety experienced by students during the examination process.

The complex interplay of factors, including perceived competency deficits, cognitive impediments, and the fear of failure, highlights the communication anxiety that is commonly experienced in evaluative scenarios. These dynamics are further compounded by a sense of diminished self-confidence arising from the awareness of academic hierarchy differentials. An understanding of the complex interplay of these elements can facilitate the development of targeted interventions to alleviate communication apprehension and foster improved performance outcomes. Prior research has demonstrated that communication anxiety has a considerable impact on students' academic performance and engagement, particularly in high-stakes contexts such as presentations, thesis defenses, and oral examinations (Archbell & Coplan, 2021; Silaj *et al.*, 2021). As evidenced by studies conducted by Ayres and Hopf (1993) and Lucas and Stob (2019), students frequently encounter elevated levels of anxiety when compelled to present in the presence of evaluative audiences. This can result in the development of avoidance behaviors and a detrimental impact on their performance. Moreover, research by Long and Neff (2018) indicates that students with higher levels of self-compassion tend to experience less fear of evaluation, which subsequently decreases their apprehension about classroom participation. This reduction in anxiety enables them to engage more openly in adaptive communication behaviors, such as asking questions and seeking help.

This study has illuminated the intrinsic significance of mentoring as well as a psychological

paradigm in the domain of interpersonal communication. It is particularly relevant in assisting fellow students who are experiencing elevated anxiety. In this context, it is of the utmost importance to take proactive measures to address such concerns in advance. It is acknowledged that anticipation-oriented measures are indispensable; however, they are insufficient when confronted with elusive causative factors that underlie communication anxiety. This phenomenon is particularly prevalent among students engaged in seminar thesis examinations, constituting a substantial academic hurdle. It is evident that communication apprehension has a considerable impact on the educational sector, particularly in academic settings where it is often experienced at elevated levels. It seems reasonable to suggest that while the academic setting may contribute to the perpetuation of a climate conducive to communication anxiety, it is not devoid of viable ameliorative approaches. Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that effective strategies for communication enhancement and anxiety mitigation are achievable. These strategies are intrinsic and primarily target the individual's inherent cognitive and emotional makeup. The key to addressing communication anxiety lies in the integration of communication skill refinement and the development of self-regulatory mechanisms. Identifying the most effective strategies requires a combination of pedagogical intervention and individual reflection.

This investigation highlights the importance of mentorship and psychological interventions in navigating the complexities of communication apprehension, particularly within an academic context. By acknowledging the interplay of individualistic predispositions and educational contexts, this study underscores the potential for surmounting the challenges posed by communication anxiety through a holistic fusion of tailored communication enhancements and innate psychological resilience. The primary aim of this research is to elucidate and characterize the multifaceted efforts made to address student communication anxiety in the context of thesis seminar examinations. This investigation aims to provide systematic documentation and analysis of the strategies, interventions, and coping mechanisms employed by students to confront and navigate

the communication apprehension inherent to the academic evaluative process. By examining the interplay between cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive and insightful portrayal of the proactive initiatives employed by students to effectively mitigate the challenges posed by communication anxiety during the thesis seminar examination.

The implications of this research extend beyond its descriptive ambitions, with the potential to yield invaluable practical implications for educational institutions and pedagogical practices. By elucidating the array of preventive measures employed by students preparing to take the seminar examination for their theses, this research can serve as a valuable repository of empirically derived insights. These insights have the potential to equip both students and educators with a repertoire of evidence-based strategies that can be employed to mitigate the adverse effects of communication anxiety. By fostering a culture of preparedness and informed pedagogical strategies, this research has the potential to contribute to the alleviation of academic stressors and the cultivation of a more constructive and empowering examination experience. The primary objective of this research is to document the various strategies employed by students to navigate the communication-related challenges associated with the thesis seminar examination. In addition to its descriptive objectives, this study has the potential to initiate a transformative change in the academic paradigm by promoting the proactive use of techniques to reduce anxiety. Consequently, this research is positioned to provide students and educators with evidence-based insights that could facilitate a more effective and harmonious examination process.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research approach driven by the inherent thematic complexity necessitating an in-depth analysis of prevailing realities and intrinsic phenomena encompassed within the investigative scope (Dahlberg & Dahlberg, 2019; Nassaji, 2020). The objective of this research, situated within the framework of a case study, was to elucidate the nuances of communication anxiety. By

embracing the inherent subjectivity of communication anxiety, the approach facilitated the emergence of inductive insights, allowing for the formulation of hypotheses grounded in empirical observations. This methodology underscored the importance of apprehending the interplay of psychological, emotional, and cognitive dimensions inherent in communication anxiety, particularly within the specific context of interest.

2.1. Data collection technique

A. Observation: To gain a comprehensive understanding of student communication anxiety during thesis seminar examinations, researchers employed both active and passive observation techniques. The observations were conducted over a four-month period in 2022 and 2023, in alignment with the schedules of the thesis seminars at the respective universities. Active engagement entailed direct observation of student activities during the seminar examinations, including the manner in which students prepared, presented their thesis proposals, and interacted with examiners. Researchers documented student behaviors, speech patterns, and indications of anxiety or confidence during these sessions in meticulous detail. In contrast, passive observation entailed a more detached stance, where researchers observed and recorded classroom dynamics and student interactions without direct involvement, thereby providing additional insights into the overall seminar environment.

B. In-depth interviews: This phase of the study was designed to examine the cognitive processes that underlie student communication anxiety when confronted with thesis seminar assessments. The study included a sample of 130 students from communication science programs at two universities in Lampung Province, Indonesia. Three experts in the fields of educational psychology and communication studies were consulted to refine the interview protocols and assess the validity of the data. The objective of the in-depth interviews was to identify the specific cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses exhibited by students in these high-stakes evaluations. The interview questions were designed to examine students' self-perceptions,

anticipatory anxiety, coping strategies, and experiences with examiner interactions. Each interview commenced with inquiries about students' preparation processes, subsequently transitioning to more reflective prompts on how they managed anxiety during and after their seminar presentations. In addition to structured questions, researchers employed follow-up probes to elucidate and examine distinctive responses.

2.2. Credibility enhancement

The study's credibility was enhanced through the implementation of triangulation, a technique that involved cross-verifying, expanding, or refining information across various sources or saturation points (Begley, 1996; Hammond & Wiriyapinit, 2005). This was achieved through the following avenues:

- A. Methodological diversity: The combination of multiple research methods yielded a synergistic effect, thereby reinforcing the robustness of the data acquisition process.
- B. Varied informant engagement: The involvement of a diverse range of participants ensured the capture of a more comprehensive spectrum of perspectives, thereby enhancing the overall comprehensiveness of the study's outcomes.
- C. Ongoing validation: The participants were engaged in a process of continuous validation throughout the course of the study and in its aftermath. This process was undertaken with a view to ensuring that the researcher's understanding was aligned with the insights that the participants had to offer.

2.3. Validation and evidence support

The researchers identified and deployed the requisite research concepts, subsequently delineating the corresponding indicators to facilitate a focused investigation. To ensure the credibility of the data, they used supporting instruments, including field notes, voice recordings, and visual aids. These tools served to reinforce the researchers' memory, enhance visual and auditory recall, and thereby substantiate the credibility of the collected data to external parties.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study identified a range of strategies that students employed to manage communication anxiety during thesis seminar examinations. These strategies included self-soothing practices, controlled breathing, prayer recitation, preparatory note formulation, simulated presentations (mirror rehearsals), simulated interactions with peers, cognitive restructuring, and experiential learning. Each strategy is examined in the following sections, along with its observed impact on reducing anxiety among students in this high-stakes academic setting.

3.1. Self-soothing practice

It was observed that students frequently employed self-soothing practices to manage communication anxiety. Self-soothing involved the use of personal objects or sensory cues to create a calming anchor, thereby assisting students in regulating their emotional and physiological responses during presentations. Some students were observed to bring small items with sentimental value, such as a bracelet or necklace gifted by a loved one, to help stabilize their emotions. One student shared, “I bring my mother’s bracelet with me. This bracelet helps me stay calm, especially in situations like this” (Participant 7). Some students described how holding a pen served as a grounding tool. For instance, a student remarked, “When I hold a pen tightly, it helps me focus and prevents my feelings from becoming anxious” (Participant 102). Several students drew on spiritual practices, such as holding or silently counting prayer beads, to ease anxiety. One student explained, “Counting the beads calms me. It’s like a reminder to be patient and helps me not to feel nervous” (Participant 15). Some students who wore familiar perfume or applied scented lotion before their presentations used this as an olfactory anchor. One student explained, “The scent calms me and creates a sense of being at home. It feels like something comfortable and soothing to me” (Participant 9).

The utilization of a self-soothing practices technique has been demonstrated to facilitate emotional regulation by establishing an association between a sensory cue and a calming response. Such sensory anchors provided

comfort and a sense of stability, particularly in the high-stakes setting of a thesis seminar, which students described as intimidating and prone to triggering performance anxiety. The efficacy of self-soothing strategies is predicated upon the tenets of cognitive-behavioral theories, which posit that individuals can be trained to associate specific stimuli with relaxation responses, thereby reducing autonomic arousal (Barlow & Craske, 2006). The research on sensory modulation and self-soothing practices indicates that sensory cues can trigger positive psychological associations and inhibit stress responses. For example, holding or touching a personal object helps anchor individuals in moments of anxiety (Porges, 2011). This is particularly relevant in the context of a high-stress academic setting, such as a thesis examination, where students are required to cope with both internal and external evaluation pressures.

3.2. Controlled breathing

A number of students employed controlled breathing exercises as a strategy to mitigate communication anxiety during thesis seminar examinations. Many students engaged in controlled breathing exercises immediately prior to presenting their thesis. For instance, one student explained, “I take a moment before my presentation to focus on my breathing. I take slow and deep breaths. This helps me avoid anxiety and stay calm” (Participant 82). This practice has been demonstrated to assist in the reduction of physical symptoms associated with anxiety, such as an elevated heart rate and shallow breathing, which are prevalent among students prior to high-pressure situations. A number of students employed a combination of controlled breathing and mindfulness practices, including the cultivation of a focus on the present moment and the clearing of the mind of distracting thoughts. A student shared, “I try to calm myself by breathing slowly and focusing on the present. This helps to calm my mind and avoid overthinking during the thesis exam” (Participant 83). This approach has been demonstrated to assist in the management of anxiety while also facilitating enhanced attention and engagement during the presentation in the thesis seminar examination.

The utilization of controlled breathing as a strategy to mitigate communication apprehension is substantiated by empirical evidence pertaining to the physiological and psychological advantages of this technique. It is established that controlled breathing activates the parasympathetic nervous system, which counters the body's stress response and thereby lowers heart rate and blood pressure (Dincer *et al.*, 2022). This mechanism is of particular importance for individuals who experience heightened anxiety during public speaking, as it helps regulate the autonomic nervous system and promote a state of relaxation. Studies have also demonstrated that slow, deep breathing can enhance cognitive functioning by improving focus and memory retrieval (Bian *et al.*, 2022), which explains why many students in Lampung reported feeling more clear-headed and less overwhelmed during their presentations.

3.3. Prayer recitation

A significant number of students employed spiritual practices, particularly the recital of prayers, as a strategy to mitigate communication anxiety. This practice was found to be beneficial in reducing cognitive distortions and enhancing emotional regulation, thereby fostering a sense of calm and emotional balance. For instance, one student shared, "I take a few minutes to pray before the presentation. It helps me feel calmer and reduce anxiety" (Participant 125). This quotation demonstrates how prayer functions as a cognitive and emotional anchor, offering a moment of personal reflection and composure before confronting the considerable pressure of speaking in front of an audience. Another student noted, "Whenever I feel nervous, I recite my prayers silently to myself. It gives me strength" (Participant 95). The practice of internalized prayer was found to emphasize the sense of divine support that students perceived, which in turn helped them to combat feelings of fear associated with public speaking. A student revealed, "I don't just pray for success, but also for the ability to stay calm and confident. For me, it's not just about the end result, but about making sure my presentation goes smoothly" (Participant 61). This statement underscores the broader impact of prayer on emotional regulation, emphasizing

not only the ability to succeed but also the capacity to manage anxiety throughout the presentation process.

The practice of reciting prayers as a strategy for mitigating communication anxiety can be understood through the lens of emotional regulation and cognitive-behavioral theories. Prayer, as an expression of mindfulness, has been demonstrated to promote relaxation by reducing the physiological and psychological arousal associated with anxiety (Hatch *et al.*, 2022). The act of focusing on a higher power or divine guidance diverts attention from self-criticism, thereby enabling students to reframe negative cognitive patterns that frequently exacerbate anxiety. This is consistent with the findings of research indicating that spiritual practices, including prayer, can provide emotional stability by invoking feelings of connectedness, trust, and peace (Zhang *et al.*, 2023). In the context of Indonesia, where spirituality and religious practices are deeply embedded in daily life, reciting prayers is a culturally appropriate and accessible method of coping with anxiety. Studies have consistently demonstrated that integrating culturally relevant coping strategies into interventions can enhance their efficacy (Mishu *et al.*, 2023). Consequently, incorporating prayer and other spiritual practices into formal training for communication skills could represent a viable alternative for assisting students in managing the stressors associated with public speaking and academic assessments.

3.4. Preparatory note formulation

The strategy of formulating preparatory notes has been identified as an effective method for managing communication anxiety. Some students have indicated that the creation of structured, concise notes with main points, references, and specific content markers has contributed to an enhanced sense of confidence and capability during their presentations. For instance, one student shared, "Having notes with key points makes me more confident, so I don't worry about forgetting important things" (Participant 9). This simple tool enabled students to stay focused and grounded during high-stakes moments. Another student explained, "I highlight important sections of

my thesis and make brief notes, so I feel more prepared to answer questions without having to search through the pages” (Participant 13). A student noted the importance of visual structure in their notes, saying, “I organize my notes to match the flow of my presentation, so I can quickly refer to the important sections without disrupting my concentration” (Participant 29). This approach facilitated not only the recall of information but also the maintenance of a coherent and confident presentation style, thereby reducing the likelihood of panic or hesitation.

The strategy of formulating preparatory notes is consistent with research on cognitive-behavioral techniques for anxiety reduction, which underscores the significance of organized cognitive frameworks as instruments for self-efficacy and confidence. Cognitive tools, such as notes, have been demonstrated to enhance memory recall by structuring information in a retrievable format, thereby reducing the cognitive load during performance (Shi *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore, the practice of creating concise notes can be linked to cognitive theories that highlight how visual and verbal cues assist in the management of working memory, thereby enabling individuals to retrieve information more rapidly in stressful situations (Li *et al.*, 2021). In high-pressure circumstances such as thesis presentations, structured notes provide students with a mental anchor, reinforcing cognitive confidence and reducing the probability of experiencing memory lapses or blankings due to anxiety.

3.5. Simulated presentation (mirror rehearsal)

A number of students employed mirror rehearsals as a strategy to mitigate communication anxiety during thesis seminar examinations. This approach enabled students to practice their presentations in front of mirrors, allowing them to assess their body language, vocal delivery, and overall presentation style. A student shared, “I practiced in front of the mirror, so I could see if I looked nervous or moved too much. This helped me better control my body movements during the actual presentation” (Participant 67). The student’s emphasis on body language demonstrates an understanding of the impact of nonverbal cues on the perception of a presentation. Positive body

language can facilitate communication, reduce anxiety, and enhance the effectiveness of the presentation. Another student stated, “When I practiced in front of the mirror, I could see myself speaking, and that made me believe I could do it well. I felt more confident and calmer” (Participant 100). This example illustrates the significance of self-observation in fostering self-confidence. The act of observing one’s own successful performance can establish a positive feedback loop, which in turn reduces self-doubt and anxiety.

The implementation of mirror rehearsals as a strategy to mitigate communication anxiety during thesis seminar presentations was observed to have a significant impact on the students’ preparedness and emotional regulation. This strategy afforded students the chance to observe their own presentation style, thus allowing them to address any issues related to body language, voice control, and emotional expression. These findings corroborate those of previous studies indicating that self-reflection in preparation for performance can enhance confidence and reduce anxiety (Zhou *et al.*, 2021). In the context of thesis seminar presentations, mirror rehearsals can assist students in controlling their body language and verbal delivery, thereby contributing to a reduction in communication anxiety.

3.6. Simulated interaction with peers

Another strategy utilized by students to mitigate communication anxiety during thesis seminar examinations was engaging in simulated interactions with peers. These mock presentations, frequently structured to emulate the thesis seminar environment, provided students with an opportunity to practice their responses to potential questions and receive constructive feedback. This simulation process assisted students in becoming more familiar with the examination scenario, thereby reducing anxiety and enhancing self-confidence. For instance, one student explained, “I practiced with my friends. They asked questions like the examiners usually do, so I felt more prepared” (Participant 33). This method of peer engagement was frequently cited as an effective approach for anticipating potential questions and rehearsing responses in a low-stakes setting. Similarly,

another student remarked, “We practiced the presentation in front of the group. This way, I could see my reaction when being observed. It helped me stay calm for the actual seminar later” (Participant 2). The practice of presenting in front of a group serves to familiarize the student with the experience of being observed, which can elicit feelings of anxiety. By observing their own reactions in a low-stakes setting, the student gains insight into how to maintain composure and cope with stress, thereby reducing the anxiety they may experience during the actual seminar.

The strategy of simulated interaction with peers is consistent with the concept of exposure therapy in the reduction of anxiety. This approach entails the gradual exposure of individuals to anxiety-inducing situations within a controlled environment, thereby facilitating the development of coping mechanisms and the attenuation of emotional responses over time (Roth-Rawald *et al.*, 2023). This approach fosters emotional resilience by providing students with the opportunity to rehearse their thesis presentation in a less threatening environment, thereby helping them acclimate to the evaluative nature of the seminar. Furthermore, the feedback provided during these sessions can enhance students’ self-efficacy, which has been demonstrated to contribute to reduced anxiety.

3.7. Cognitive restructuring

Cognitive restructuring, a technique whereby individuals alter their perceptions of a stressful situation, was employed by students to mitigate communication anxiety during thesis seminar examinations. This strategy entailed reframing the thesis seminar as an opportunity for personal expression and knowledge sharing rather than a high-pressure evaluation, thereby reducing anxiety and fostering more adaptive communication behaviors. One student reflected, “I kept reminding myself that this thesis seminar exam is an opportunity to share what I have worked on, so I became calmer” (Participant 77). This statement demonstrates how reframing the seminar as an opportunity for academic dialogue assisted the student in overcoming the stress typically associated with public speaking. Another student shared, “Instead of worrying about the possibility of something going wrong

during my thesis defense presentation, I reminded myself that everyone is in the process of learning, and I am presenting my research findings in that exam” (Participant 20). This shift in cognitive perspective enabled the student to direct their attention toward the constructive elements of the seminar, such as the chance to engage in academic discourse, rather than fixating on the possibility of negative assessments.

By reframing the thesis seminar examination as an opportunity for knowledge sharing rather than a judgmental evaluation, students were able to redefine the situation as a more manageable and less threatening event. This cognitive shift is consistent with studies indicating that cognitive reframing can decrease anxiety by altering negative thought patterns associated with performance (Orson & Larson, 2020). Additionally, the studies indicate that such reframing can reduce physiological anxiety responses, thereby enhancing communication performance. Therefore, the cognitive restructuring employed by these students can play a role in mitigating their communication anxiety.

3.8. Experiential learning

The students employed experiential learning as a strategy to mitigate communication anxiety during thesis seminar examinations. They reported learning by observing and imitating successful communication behaviors demonstrated by their peers. This method enhanced their coping mechanisms and increased their emotional resilience, enabling them to better manage the stress and anxiety associated with high-stakes academic presentations. One student shared, “During practice, I saw how my friend stayed calm even when asked difficult questions. I tried to imitate his calmness, and it worked when it was my turn” (Participant 91). This example demonstrates how observing peers who demonstrated proficiency in high-pressure situations enabled students to internalize and replicate effective communication strategies, which subsequently reduced their anxiety levels. Another student recounted, “I learned a lot by watching how my friends handled stressful situations during presentations, and it gave me the confidence to handle my own presentations in the same way” (Participant 110). This response demonstrates that

the students have gained valuable insights and coping strategies by observing their peers' responses to stress during presentations. This form of learning suggests that students can enhance their abilities by emulating the behaviors and strategies of others who have successfully navigated analogous challenges.

The role of experiential learning, particularly through observation and imitation, in anxiety reduction is to provide students with tangible models of effective communication behaviors. The act of observing others, particularly peers who demonstrate competence and composure in stressful situations, serves as an emotional and cognitive model for students. By observing effective coping strategies for anxiety in high-stakes communication events, such as thesis presentations, students can internalize these behaviors, enhancing their self-efficacy and ability to manage anxiety in similar situations (Freire *et al.*, 2020). In addition to acquiring technical knowledge, students gain emotional reassurance, which bolsters self-efficacy and reduces fear of negative evaluation during thesis seminars.

Table 1 presents the distribution of communication anxiety management strategies utilized by the students. The most frequently utilized strategy is prayer recitation, employed by 26 students, representing 20% of the total participants. Subsequently, 23 students (18%) employed experiential learning. It is noteworthy that 20 students (15%) and 18 students (14%) employed preparatory note formulation and simulated interaction with peers, respectively. The use of controlled breathing and simulated presentation (mirror rehearsal) was observed in 13 students, representing 10% of the total participants. In comparison, prayer recitation was employed by a larger number of students, while cognitive restructuring and self-soothing practices were utilized by a smaller proportion, with only eight (6%) and nine (7%) students, respectively, engaging in these strategies. These findings illustrate the diverse approaches and preferences students adopt to manage communication anxiety, with experiential learning and prayer recitation emerging as the most prevalent strategies.

Strategy	Number of students	Percentage (%)
Self-soothing practices	9	7
Controlled breathing	13	10
Prayer recitation	26	20
Preparatory note formulation	20	15
Simulated presentation (mirror rehearsal)	13	10
Simulated interaction with peers	18	14
Cognitive restructuring	8	6
Experiential learning	23	18
Total	130	100

Table 1. Distribution of communication anxiety management strategies.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the strategies that students utilize to mitigate communication anxiety during thesis seminar examinations, thereby elucidating a multifaceted approach to coping with stress in high-pressure academic contexts. The findings indicate that students employ a range of strategies to mitigate communication anxiety, including self-soothing practices, controlled breathing, prayer recitation, preparatory note formulation, mirror rehearsals, simulated peer interactions, cognitive restructuring, and experiential learning.

The findings revealed that self-soothing practices and controlled breathing were employed to manage physiological anxiety responses, thereby promoting a sense of calm and focus. Spiritual practices, such as prayer recitation, provided students with a sense of emotional and cognitive stability, enabling them to effectively manage the stress associated with public speaking. Furthermore, the utilization of preparatory strategies, such as note formulation and rehearsal through peer simulations, enabled students to refine their presentations and anticipate potential challenges, thereby enhancing their preparedness and confidence.

Cognitive restructuring was identified as a key factor in transforming students' perceptions of the thesis seminar from a challenging evaluation to a constructive opportunity for knowledge sharing. By reframing the situation, students were able to reduce anxiety and focus on the positive aspects of the seminar, such as academic dialogue and personal growth. Furthermore, experiential learning, particularly through the observation and imitation of peers, emerged as a valuable tool for anxiety reduction.

The findings of this study contribute to the expanding body of research on communication anxiety, underscoring the significance of integrating cognitive, emotional, and behavioral strategies in mitigating anxiety during high-stakes academic presentations. Furthermore, the culturally relevant practice of prayer and other personalized coping mechanisms highlight the necessity of considering students' individual experiences and cultural contexts when developing interventions to alleviate anxiety. Future research could further explore the long-term effectiveness of these strategies and examine additional interventions that might support students in managing anxiety across various academic challenges, particularly in diverse cultural settings. The integration of these coping strategies into academic support programs could provide students with valuable tools to enhance their performance and well-being in high-pressure situations.

Contribution statement

Hasan Basri: Conceptualization, literature review, methodology, and writing.

Deri Sis Nanda: Literature review, methodology, data analysis, and revising.

Susanto Susanto: Conceptualization, data analysis, writing, and reviewing.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest.

Statement of data consent

The data generated during this study has been included in the article. ●

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