

Coping Strategies and Anxiety Among Maritime Students Before Sea Practice

Aqila Nadra Rabbani¹, Zunaina Zamhariri² and Sierra Sinta Sunarso Putri³

¹State University of Surabaya, ²State University of Surabaya, ³State University of Surabaya
aqila.22223@mhs.unesa.ac.id; zunaina.22034@mhs.unesa.ac.id; sierra.22260@mhs.unesa.ac.id

Abstract: This single participant case study qualitative research investigates the coping strategies used by Indonesian maritime students to manage anxiety before sea practice. A phenomenological case study approach was used with data collection through semi-structured interviews, direct observation during internships, and reflective journals from one maritime student who was purposively selected from the Surabaya Shipping Polytechnic. The participant was selected based on high anxiety levels, active involvement in preparatory activities, and willingness to provide in-depth insights into his experience as a critical case for understanding maritime students' anxiety. Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's framework revealed that relaxation techniques, problem-focused preparation, social support, and diversion methods were the main coping mechanisms used to reduce anxiety and increase readiness. These findings highlight the importance of strengthening psychological and social support systems in maritime educational institutions to promote student resilience and performance during sea training, especially given the unique and hazardous maritime work environment where psychological safety and mental preparedness are critical components of overall safety.

Keywords: coping strategies, student anxiety, sea practice, stress management, social support

1 INTRODUCTION

Students transitioning into their professional careers often face various stressors that can trigger anxiety. Maritime students, especially those approaching sea practice, face a critical phase in their education characterized by high stakes, unfamiliar environments, and emotional challenges. The maritime work environment presents unique dangers and challenges that make anxiety management a critical skill for professional survival and effectiveness. Psychological safety and mental preparedness are essential components of safety at sea, where split-second decisions can have life-and-death consequences. Such anxiety can negatively impact their academic performance and confidence in handling maritime responsibilities. Coping strategies—conscious efforts to manage stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984 in Setyananda et al., 2021)—are vital for effective adaptation.

Understanding how S manages anxiety is crucial for developing appropriate support programs aimed at fostering resilience. Recent research in Indonesia emphasizes the importance of social support, mental preparedness, and family influence in reducing S's stress during practical training (Hasanah, 2021; Prasetyo & Dewi, 2022). This study aims to explore the coping mechanisms used by subjects before engaging in maritime practice, with a particular focus on family attachment and mental preparation. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of targeted interventions to improve the psychological well-being and preparedness of subjects.

2 MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative phenomenological case study approach was used to explore S's experiences, feelings, and coping strategies prior to sea practice. This study used a single participant design as a critical case study, in which one maritime student from the Surabaya Shipping Polytechnic participated. The participant was purposively selected based on their extremely

high level of anxiety, active involvement in preparatory activities for sea practice, and ability to provide rich and detailed insights into the phenomenon under investigation. This critical case approach is justified because the participant represents an extreme case of pre-practicum anxiety, making coping strategies particularly illuminating for understanding how students manage intense stress in the context of maritime education.

The participant is a male student with the initials S, who is currently 20 years old and in Level III, which means he is in his 5th-6th semester. He has completed many theoretical courses and has no previous experience at sea. After obtaining informed consent, the participant agreed to share his experiences through various data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Data was collected through various methods to ensure comprehensive understanding. Semi-structured interviews were conducted both face-to-face and online to gather in-depth information about S's experiences and coping mechanisms. Observations of S during interviews with the campus psychologist and preparation provided additional insight into behavioral responses to stress. Furthermore, S.'s reflective journal during the preparation period offered valuable self-reported data about thoughts and feelings throughout the process. Anamnestic interviews were conducted by licensed psychologists to gather detailed psychological histories and assess participants' mental health backgrounds, providing a clinical context for understanding the coping strategies used.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006 in Naeem et al., 2023). The analytical process involved transcribing interviews, manually coding data, identifying themes, and interpreting patterns related to students' coping strategies. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, member checking, and ongoing reflective analysis to verify consistency and credibility.

The development of the theme is based on relevant theoretical frameworks, such as Lazarus and Folkman's coping model, attachment theory, and homesickness theory, to identify factors that influence the adaptation and coping processes. The validity of the findings is ensured through triangulation of data sources—including interviews, observations, reflective journals, and anamnestic interviews with psychologists—and verified through member checking to ensure accurate and credible data interpretation.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Coping Strategies Used by Maritime Student

Data analysis from observations, interviews, and reflective journals revealed that the coping strategies used by S were diverse and complementary. The subject applied a balanced approach between emotional coping and practical coping, which was in line with the theoretical framework of Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

In terms of emotional coping, S extensively utilizes relaxation techniques such as listening to favorite music, practicing light meditation, and contemplation. These techniques are reported to be effective in calming the mind and reducing momentary anxiety levels, especially when facing academic pressure or uncertainty related to conditions at sea. S also actively seeks social support from family and close friends as a form of social stress management mechanism. For S, family plays an important role as a source of motivation and emotional stability, especially his mother, who serves as the main figure providing comfort and motivation based on her experience and educational background as a teacher.

In terms of problem-focused coping, S demonstrates active involvement in thorough preparation through intensive study, simulation training, and structured study schedule planning. He strives to control external factors that could potentially trigger anxiety and boost confidence, such as ensuring that equipment is complete and conducting regular practice training. This approach reflects an understanding that material and mental preparedness are key factors in reducing the potential for failure and anxiety when facing field practice.

The pattern of coping strategy use also reveals a relatively high level of self-awareness and maturity in stress management. S is able to identify sources of stress, manage study and rest time, and utilize internal reward systems to maintain high motivation during the preparation process. Active use of relaxation techniques shows that S does not rely on just one approach, but implements a combination of strategies that support emotional and mental balance.

Furthermore, Indonesia's collectivist culture greatly supports the success of this coping approach. Support from family and friends has a positive effect on S's perception of stress and strengthens his sense of empowerment and self-confidence. Conversely, S also faces challenges from the external environment, such as noise in the learning environment and physical conditions that still require attention, including suboptimal eating and sleeping patterns.

S also uses diversion strategies as part of his coping repertoire. These techniques include engaging in hobbies such as sports, music, and reading, or participating in physical activities to divert attention from concerns about sea practices. These activities serve as mental breaks and help maintain a positive outlook, reducing stress levels and preventing rumination about potential challenges.

3.2 Themes and Patterns in Coping Strategies

The data reveal that these coping mechanisms are consistent with the theoretical model of Lazarus and Folkman (1984 in Setyananda et al., 2021), which categorizes coping strategies into emotion-focused and problem-focused approaches. Emotion-focused strategies, primarily represented by relaxation techniques and social support, help S manage emotional responses, reducing feelings of fear and anxiety. These strategies do not necessarily change the situation causing stress but help individuals cope with the emotional impact of stress.

Problem-focused strategies, exemplified by active preparation and problem-solving activities, contribute directly to addressing the sources of stress. This approach fosters a sense of control and empowerment by enabling S to take concrete actions to improve readiness and competence. The combination of both approaches shows that individuals intuitively understand the need for comprehensive stress management that addresses both the emotional and practical aspects of anxiety.

3.3 Impact on Readiness and Self-Confidence

The application of these coping strategies was associated with increased readiness and self-confidence in Subject S. Those who actively engaged in relaxation, preparation, and seeking social support reported feeling more prepared and less anxious, which had the potential to improve performance during sea practice. The positive correlation between effective coping and increased self-confidence suggests that these strategies have short- and long-term benefits for S's well-being.

These findings are consistent with previous research showing that effective coping mechanisms are essential in stressful academic and practical environments (Prasetyo & Dewi, 2022). Those who successfully implemented various coping strategies demonstrated greater resilience and adaptability, which are important qualities for maritime professionals who must operate in challenging and unpredictable environments.

4 DISCUSSIONS

This study provides insight into the coping mechanisms used by subjects facing pre-practice anxiety, revealing consistency and unique aspects compared to existing literature. The findings support previous research by Prasetyo and Dewi (2022), which emphasizes the importance of social support during stressful academic periods. Similarly, Hasanah (2021) highlights the role of social networks in stress management, which aligns with our findings regarding the critical role of family support, particularly maternal figures.

However, our research reveals very interesting findings regarding the central role of mothers in the context of maritime education in Indonesia. The mothers of the participants, who are also educators, not only provide emotional support but also academic guidance and motivation. These findings go beyond general research on social support and reflect Indonesia's collectivist culture, where family involvement in educational efforts is deeply embedded in the social structure. This maternal influence appears to be more profound than has been reported in previous studies, suggesting that cultural factors can intensify the effectiveness of family-based coping strategies.

The combination of emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies observed in this study indicates advanced stress management awareness. Unlike some studies that show students primarily rely on one type of coping, our participants effectively balanced both approaches. These findings suggest that maritime students may develop a more comprehensive coping repertoire due to the high-risk nature of their training environment, where emotional regulation and practical preparation are equally critical to success and safety.

The effectiveness of the diversion strategies and relaxation techniques found in this study has practical implications for maritime education. These findings suggest that incorporating mindfulness training, recreational activities, and structured relaxation periods into the maritime curriculum can improve students' natural coping abilities.

4.1 Limitations

This study has several limitations that must be acknowledged. First, the single participant design (n=1) limits the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of maritime students. Although the critical case study approach provides rich and detailed insights, the experience of one individual may not represent the diversity of coping strategies used by other maritime students with different backgrounds, anxiety levels, or cultural contexts

Second, potential participant bias may have influenced the data, as participants were aware they were being studied and may have modified their behavior or responses accordingly. The self-report nature of some data collection methods (reflective journal, interviews) also raises the possibility of social desirability bias or memory bias.

Third, the research was conducted within a specific cultural and institutional context (Indonesian maritime education), which may limit its transferability to other cultural settings or educational systems. Collectivistic cultural factors that appear to enhance coping effectiveness may not apply in more individualistic societies.

Finally, the study captured coping strategies only during the preparation phase, not during actual sea practice, limiting our understanding of how these strategies work in real-world maritime conditions.

4.2 Recommendations for Practice

Based on these findings, maritime educational institutions should develop comprehensive psychological support programs that include specialized training modules on stress management techniques such as mindfulness meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, and cognitive reframing strategies. These programs should teach students how to identify early signs of anxiety and implement appropriate coping responses.

A family engagement program should be established to train family members, especially parents, on how to provide effective emotional support during the student preparation period. This program could include workshops on active listening, motivational communication, and understanding the unique stresses of maritime education.

Academic institutions should create structured peer support systems and mentorship programs that connect senior students with those preparing for sea practice, facilitating knowledge transfer and emotional support. In addition, the physical learning environment should be optimized to reduce external stressors such as noise pollution and provide adequate space for relaxation and reflection.

5 CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that Indonesian maritime students use various adaptive coping strategies, including relaxation techniques, proactive preparation, social support, and diversion methods, to manage anxiety before sea practice. These strategies represent a comprehensive approach to stress management that addresses the emotional and practical aspects of pre-practice anxiety. Strengthening these strategies through structured psychological support and family involvement can optimize students' mental resilience, improving their well-being and performance. Findings indicate that implementing targeted interventions at the institutional level will enhance students' readiness, confidence, and capacity to effectively face the challenges of maritime training. Educational institutions should develop comprehensive support programs that acknowledge the multifaceted nature of student anxiety and provide diverse coping resources. These programs should integrate technical training with psychological support, family involvement, and peer support systems to create a holistic approach to student development and well-being.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Organization A for its financial support in this research and Organization B or its support in participating in this scientific activity. The author would also like to thank Expert C for the useful discussion.

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APPENDIX

If any, the appendix should appear directly after the references without numbering, and not on a new page