

Conference Paper

Language Anxiety Among English Foreign Language Learners

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Abstract.

The purpose of this study was to find out how much language anxiety EFL university students have, what causes it, and how they deal with it. This study aims to fill a gap in the literature regarding the causes of language anxiety, the causes, and how people cope with it, as most researchers have not yet combined those three factors into a single study. The current study used a mixed method, a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used. FLCAS was used as a questionnaire to collect quantitative data. At the same time, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used to select the qualitative method. This study included 40 male and female EFL university students from the Faculty of Business and Social Sciences at one of Jakarta's private universities. Their ages range from 18 to 25 years. In this study, the questionnaire items revealed two levels of anxiety: 1) low anxiety (62%) and 2) moderate anxiety (38%). Three causes of language anxiety were identified using a combination of questionnaire items and semi-structured interviews: 1) Inadequate confidence in speaking English in class; 2) Fear of making mistakes when speaking English; and 3) Lack of vocabulary/grammar knowledge.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, speaking anxiety, FLCAS, level of anxiety, causes of anxiety

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1. Introduction

English as lingua franca - the use of English as a common tool to communicate among speakers of different languages - has been used by South East Asian countries (as the number one foreign language taught and learned in the educational system at many different levels). Foreign language education has expanded rapidly in Indonesia over the last two decades due to its importance today. Based on Minister of Education Decree No. 060/U/1993 dated 25 February 1993, English is designated as the primary foreign language taught in all secondary and higher education institutions in Indonesia.

In Indonesia, over 700 languages are spoken throughout the country. It can be concluded that Indonesians are accustomed to speaking more than one language in daily life. However, using English as a second language in their daily lives is unusual.

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Despite significant advancements in English curriculum and teaching methods, the reality is that most Indonesian learners can barely use English in real life, even for simple purposes.

Many EFL teachers are familiar with the common issues that their students face. Most of their students are afraid to speak up or refuse to participate in the classroom teaching and learning process. Because English is not their mother tongue, it is difficult for most Indonesian EFL (English Foreign Language) students to use and understand English on a regular basis. Their learning will always conflict with their mother tongue. When producing oral utterances or written forms that are not available in the target language, most EFL learners in Indonesia tend to use mother tongue patterns.

Another possible explanation is that EFL students sometimes feel uneasy or anxious about using English, whether in the classroom or when communicating with one another. A large number of studies [1-4] demonstrated that language anxiety, particularly foreign language anxiety, is one of the most important factors influencing second or foreign language learning.

For some people, learning English is only occasionally enjoyable. Because they are required to speak or write in a language they are not proficient in. They must express themselves using words they have never used before, especially in English class.

According to Krashen in Oteir and Al-Otaibi [5], anxiety associated with a foreign language can be classified as a barrier that prevents information from reaching the learner's brain's language acquisition area. Anxiety is a subjective feeling that is frequently associated with nervous system arousal caused by fear, which is more or less caused by a person's imagination or incorrect projection of something. Atkinson in Hardiani [6] backs this up, defining anxiety as an unpleasant emotion characterized by worry at varying levels in each person.

The concept of anxiety was first coined in the Classical Greek Period, and it developed similarly into self-concept, and self-awareness by Western thought, as explained by McReynolds [7].

Lader in Shabani [8] explained that anxiety is difficult to describe since it is a combination of easily studied behavioral characteristics and introspecting inaccessible feelings. Meanwhile, Alloy et al. [9] define anxiety as a "gnawing apprehension about vague or unrealized threats and hardship that exist sometime in the future but are not a clear, immediate danger to well-being." Anxiety is associated with being self-conscious, having negative feelings, and being nervous during interactions.

Foreign language anxiety is a state of anxiety that occurs when a person begins to learn a foreign language. Foreign language anxiety is defined by Horwitz et al. in Subekti

[10] as perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and attitudes that arise in a person as a result of the complex process of teaching and learning a foreign language. Furthermore, there are three types of foreign language anxiety, according to the same source: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

From psychological aspects, anxiety is divided into three types as follows 1) Trait Anxiety, 2) State Anxiety, and 3) Situation – Specific Anxiety.

The purpose of this study is to explore student anxiety levels, their causes, and coping strategies where most researchers have not yet combined these three things into one study.

The significance of this research is to investigate anxiety from the perspective of learners in order to determine what factors cause the anxious feeling. Hopefully, by reducing those factors, EFL teachers will be able to create a more comfortable classroom environment, resulting in a more effective language learning process. Most importantly, EFL learners experiencing language anxiety can serve as a guide for language teachers in reducing language anxiety from the learners' perspective. Furthermore, future researchers could conduct a study to apply the findings of this study to see how foreign language anxiety affects EFL learners.

2. Method

The purpose of this study is to: 1. determine the level of language anxiety among EFL university students; 2. identify the causes of language anxiety among EFL university students; and 3. identify the types of coping strategies used by EFL university students in response to language anxiety.

The current study used a mixed method in case study research to collect data in order to cover a wide range of topics. Mixed method research is a research methodology that involves collecting, analyzing, and integrating quantitative and qualitative data. Mixed methods research, as defined by Kitchenham [11], is a research paradigm that combines specific positivistic elements of quantitative research methods with specific constructivist elements of qualitative research methods. This method combines and provides a better understanding of the research problem than either method alone. It can also be sequential or parallel; each technique can be used alternately or simultaneously to investigate the same phenomenon.

The populations of this study were males and females, and they were university students who enrolled in the EFL course program. Their age range was between 18 – 25 years old.

A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used to collect data in this study. The participant in this study filled out a closed-response item questionnaire adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's [12], The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. Each of the 33 items was rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) (strongly agree). As previously discussed, this scale was designed to assess three dimensions of foreign language classroom anxiety: fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety.

The questionnaire data were analyzed using a 5-point Likert scale, with a possible total score ranging from 33 to 165. (based on Likert scale grading, one point for each item equals 33 points as the minimum total score while five points for each item equals 165 as maximum score).

After filling out and analysing the questionnaire, the interviewee with different levels of anxiety would be invited to do the interview to dig into the topic more completely so that the valuable information would successfully meet the previous research questions.

Analyzing the semi-structured interview began with conducting and audiotaping the interview, which was followed by data transcription. Coding is an important step after becoming acquainted with the data. It would be much easier to develop a general understanding of what is going on, generate themes and theoretical concepts, and organize and retrieve data to test and support these general ideas by categorizing.

To maintain the validity of the interview answers, all of the students were under the condition of anonymity.

3. Discussion

3.1. Language anxiety among EFL university students

In this study, the Foreign Language Classroom Environment Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz and colleagues in 1986 [12], was used to assess the scope and severity of participants' language anxiety. The purpose of using this instrument was to (1) assess the students' level of foreign language anxiety and (2) identify the classes of anxiety based on their level of anxiety.

According to this study, the range was between 54 and 121. This result indicated that this group has two levels of anxiety. There are two levels of anxiety: low and moderate.

Meanwhile, a brief overview of FLCAS findings revealed that EFL university students in the program generally experience a moderate level of anxiety. According to the descriptive results, 62% of the total participants had a low level of anxiety, while 38%

had a moderate level of anxiety. More than half of the participants appeared to have a low level of anxiety.

The data painted a clear picture of EFL students' levels of foreign language anxiety. If scores on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale are accepted as a sign for measuring anxiety levels, it can be concluded that anxiety in this Indonesian EFL case was most likely accompanied by foreign language anxiety. This finding is consistent with the findings of other studies on the level of foreign language anxiety [13-15]. All those previous studies are quite similar to this research. All of them are talking about exploring students' anxiety levels, their causes, and their coping strategies. But, not all of them were engaged in one research. So, the findings, conclusions, and suggestions they give were not fully covered and answered the main problems of students' anxiety itself. They were given conclusions and suggestions only based on their intention. Some of them were not really applicable to other fields of study or real classroom practice.

3.2. Factors contribute to language anxiety among EFL university students

There were three domains of the FLCAS questionnaire. Those were communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The item on FLCAS describes specific situations things which may fit for measuring students' anxiety. However, it was also important to remember that in the scope of the qualitative study, FLCAS would not provide broader areas of anxiety sources and coping strategies to respond to language anxiety.

The second goal of this study was to identify the sources of language anxiety in students learning English as a foreign language (English Foreign Learners). After analyzing the data, the researcher categorized the research findings based on the information gathered in the field. To maintain the confidentiality of research informants, researchers coded or coded the informants as follows: informants 01, 02, 03, 04, and 05, to informants 06.

Based on the findings of the data analysis, the researcher identified four factors that contribute to participants' anxiety when speaking English.

3.2.1. Lack of confidence in speaking English in class.

The results showed that the lack of confidence in speaking English in class was the first cause of anxiety in speaking English. This was stated by informants 01 – 05.

This was even stated explicitly by informant No. 5: "I feel like I speak with a limited vocabulary. Less mastery of language and oral fluency has an impact on low self-confidence."

This finding is consistent with the one discovered by Marwan [16]. He stated that one of the primary causes of student failure is a lack of confidence.

3.2.2. Fear of making mistakes when speaking English

The second highest position is occupied by the fear of making mistakes when speaking English. Based on the data obtained from the study, it appears that the students involved in this study felt anxious speaking English in class because they were afraid of being wrong in speaking English in class. This also affects students with low levels of anxiety. This can be seen from the interview excerpts put forward by informants no. 1, 2, 3, and 5.

Informant no. 1: "And also because of psychological factors, for example, fear of being wrong which affects self-esteem, which causes loss of self-confidence, and also fear of being ridiculed, for example, being laughed at by friends or the audience." While informant no. 5 said: "Fear of making mistakes in speech."

This is consistent with the findings of Nety and Nurhaeni [17]. They discovered that the participants in their study are afraid of making mistakes because they are afraid that their friends will laugh at them and give them negative feedback if they do so while speaking English.

3.2.3. Inadequate vocabulary/grammar knowledge

From the results of the interviews conducted, it was found that the participants' low vocabulary/grammar is also a factor causing anxiety in the process of learning English in EFL students. This is found in the interview excerpt of informants no. 1, 2, and 3.

Informant 1: "The factors are the low skills in English such as listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, and writing skills".

Informant 3: "When I speak English in class, I feel very nervous because I have not been able to master all the vocabulary and the use of tenses. And this thing makes it difficult for me to put together or combine sentences that I will convey in class conversations."

This was also stated by Nety and Nurhaeni [17], who stated that during the interview, the student stated that a lack of vocabulary is the most difficult obstacle in class.

3.2.4. Other factors that contribute to the emergence of anxiety

Lack of intimacy with classmates, which results in a fear of being laughed at by classmates, is another factor that contributes to the emergence of anxiety. Furthermore, anxiety when speaking English was exacerbated by a lack of preparation and unexpected questions.

This finding is consistent with Fatmawati, Haura, and Supiani [18] research. Being ridiculed by peers, such as teasing from friends or teachers, being laughed at by others, or humiliating themselves in public, contributed to students' anxiety, according to their research.

3.3. Coping strategies used by EFL university students to deal with language anxiety

Participants in this study reported that they had used various strategies, including 1) Preparation: "Before starting English class, I usually study the material that will be discussed in class so that I understand a little about the material. Easier to absorb and understand, so this will increase motivation and self-confidence", 2) Relaxation: "When there is an English lesson in class, I try to relax, including when asked by the lecturer or teacher to speak in front of an audience. Usually, I inhale 3-5 times to feel relaxed and calmer.", 3) Positive thinking: "Trying to be confident by not thinking too much about the consequences. For example, the consequences of making mistakes. So, never have a feeling of fear of being wrong, it is precisely those mistakes that make us learn better, for example, in terms of vocabulary, grammar, intonation, and more; by learning and correcting our mistakes, we will make better and can become more confident. themselves in the future.", 4) Looking for Friends: "We both consult each other in learning English. Moreover, both of us have anxiety feelings so we can provide each other support", 5) Resignation: "Speaking only on the vocabulary and order of the language that I master." This finding is in line with the research of Kondo and Ying-Ling [19], Lizuka [20].

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study empirically confirm that students learning English as a foreign language experience varying level of anxiety (English Foreign Learners). The findings indicate that anxiety levels are low to moderate.

Furthermore, based on the findings and discussion, the researcher concludes that the reasons or factors that cause anxiety in English learning include a lack of confidence when speaking English in class, a fear of making mistakes when speaking English, and a lack of vocabulary/grammar knowledge.

Moreover, this study investigates how they deal with foreign language anxiety. According to the findings, the participants used the following methods: 1) preparation, 2) relaxation, 3) positive thinking, 4) looking for friends, and 5) resignation.

Based on the results obtained through research, it is highly recommended that lecturers take various preventive measures that reduce the anxiety level of their students. In addition, lecturers are expected to be able to create a stress-free and supportive classroom and learning atmosphere. And can give more attention to students because each learner is a unique person that requires different methods, learning media, and strategies.

Hopefully, in the future, students' English-speaking skills will be more fluent and developed.

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