

## Conference Paper

# Exploring English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Students' Anxiety Toward a Student-centered Learning Approach: Levels, Factors, and Strategies to Cope with Them

**A. Budiman, Ngadiso, and Suparno**

English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Sebelas Maret University, Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia

### Abstract

It is believed that students' anxiety has an impact on language learning. Consequently, this study aims to reveal: (1) the levels of students' anxiety as they have been following SCL in their lectures as well as factors they believe incur anxiety; (2) what strategies they use when they have anxiety; and (3) their perception toward an SCL approach and possible implementation in the English Education Department (EED) at a university. The respondents of this study are students from the EED across the intakes and comprise 114 students, while the number of samples taken is 38. This study is descriptive and uses the survey as its method. Questionnaires are used to collect data. The data are analyzed using a statistical tool to obtain percentages, averages, and standard deviations. The results of this study show that (1) the majority of students (64.10%) experience severe anxiety and the second-largest group (28.21%) experience moderate anxiety. In addition, the most anxious factors are fearing examinations (34.28%) and worrying about communicating (34.28%); (2) the most widely used strategies for dealing with anxiety are a cognitive strategy (79%) and a memory strategy (51%); and (3) students perceive that SCL is more effective than TCL and they tend to agree when SCL is implemented in their lectures.

**Keywords:** anxiety, EFL context, SCL, TCL

Corresponding Author:

A. Budiman

asepbudiman@student.uns.ac.id

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## 1. Introduction

One of the learning approaches currently applied in the education system is student-centered learning (SCL). SCL is most commonly interpreted as a learning approach that allows students to gain knowledge through the process of discovery and knowledge construction [1]. The term 'SCL' is used in literature along with many other terms associated with SCL, such as 'flexible learning' [2] and 'experiential learning' [3].

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In addition, anxiety is a common feeling experienced by every individual in everyday life. Anxiety is a feeling of worry or fear of a bad thing that will happen soon. Anxiety can be experienced by anyone, both men and women, young and old [4].

Everyone experiences anxiety at different level. There are four levels of anxiety, namely: 1. Mild anxiety – the anxiety at this level can have a positive effect [5]. Mild-level anxiety can motivate, spur development, and improve creativity and learning [6]; 2. Moderate anxiety – at this level, a person may not be able to concentrate and can only focus on the things that cause the anxiety; 3. Weight anxiety is included in the anxiety level of weight is the feeling of fear and tension. At this level, one will have difficulty overcoming the problem and focusing one's mind. 4. Panic anxiety – at this level, a person may experience loss of mind, delusions, and hallucinations. When that happens, a person cannot communicate, concentrate, or control himself [7–10].

One strategy to overcome anxiety is to use learning strategies. Learning strategies can reduce students' anxiety in speaking. A learning strategy is a process of thinking or behaving [11]. Oxford has divided learning strategies into six categories, namely: 1. Memory strategy; serves to store and recall new knowledge; 2. Cognitive strategy; used to know how students learn; 3. Compensation strategy; helps students understand or apply their knowledge even though the knowledge is still limited; 4. Metacognitive strategies; allowing students to organize their own learning; 5. Affective strategies; training students to control their emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values. 6. Social strategy; communication with people who master target knowledge [12–14].

For this reason, this study attempted to carry out an in-depth investigation to obtain an objective picture of anxiety experienced by the students, the level of this anxiety, and their strategies for addressing it in an SCL approach.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Research method

This research used a quantitative approach to a survey method. It is grouped into quantitative approaches because this study does not involve qualitative data [15, 16]. This research was conducted in the English Education Department at one of the Indonesian private universities. There were 114 students actively studying at the EED in the sixth semester, and 38 students were sampled.

## 2.2. Data collection

This study used a questionnaire to collect the necessary data. The questionnaire was distributed to all students who took part in the research. This questionnaire is a self-report tool designed to capture respondents' responses to anxiety. There are two parts to this questionnaire. The first (questionnaire A), which is closed, digs for data about the level of anxiety and the dominant factors causing anxiety. The second (questionnaire B), which is also closed, is a questionnaire designed to find out what dominant strategies students use to overcome anxiety.

## 2.3. Data analysis

Questionnaires that have been completed by students are then analyzed with stages for each research question as follows.

### 2.3.1. Anxiety level

First, their responses are classified into a five-point Likert scale covering categories as well as multiplying each response by the weight of each category: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), doubt (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). Thirdly, these data are then included in the Excel program to find the mean and standard deviation. This program looks for the average score of each student for all 30 items of the statement [17]. The results of this calculation will categorize students into the groups (mild, moderate, weight, or panic).

### 2.3.2. Causes of anxiety

Determination of the contributing factors to which the contribution is calculated from the sum of the total score of 10 statements on each factor (fear of communication, anxiety over tests, fear of negative judgment) divided by the total sum scores into 30 points of the statement.

### 2.3.3. Strategies to overcome anxiety

As for the second questionnaire, the applied analysis is simple. The most widely chosen strategy is a strategy that students believe overcomes anxiety. In other words, if a

strategy is selected by all of the respondents it falls into the category 'always' used, whereas if it is chosen by less than 25% it is classified as 'never used'.

### 2.3.4. Student perception of SCL and its implementation

Just like other analytical techniques, this perception data is also analyzed by percentage and standard deviation statistics. After the students' response to the scale, it is multiplied by the weight of each scale. The number of multiplications is then calculated by dividing the number of scores for each statement by the number of respondents.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Level of anxiety

The study revealed that of the 38 students who were respondents it represented on Figure 1, 64.10% experienced moderate anxiety as they followed an SCL approach. The second largest portion of 28.21% experienced weight anxiety. Three people (7.69%) experienced mild anxiety and none (0%) experienced an anxiety level of panic.

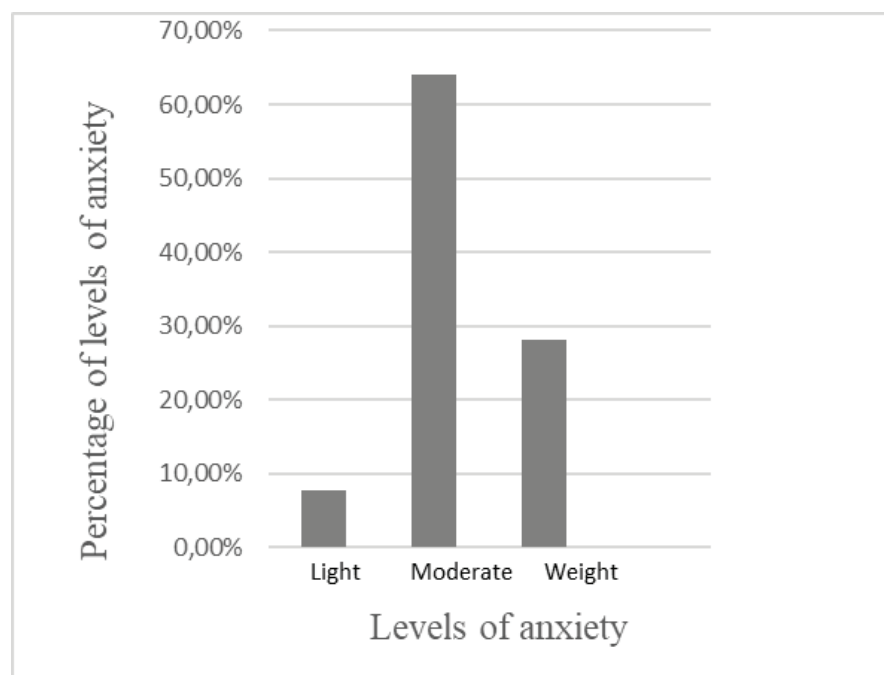


Figure 1: Levels of anxiety.

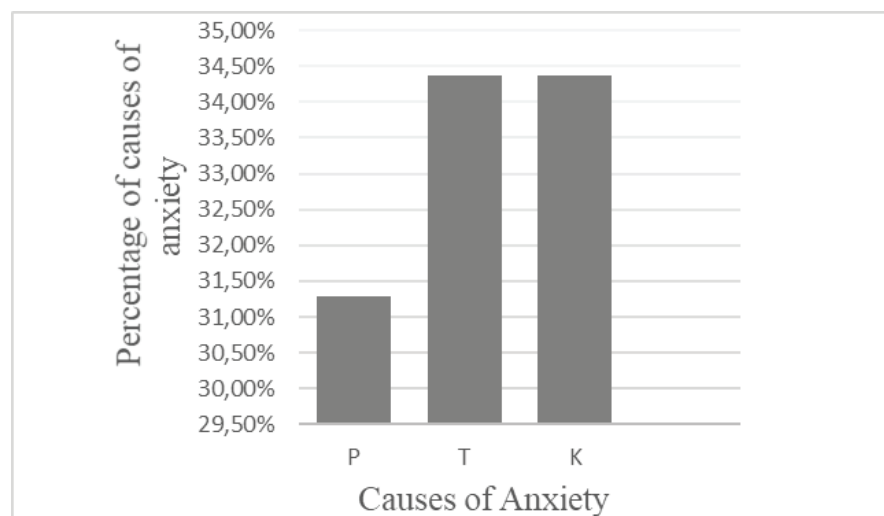
This also creates a positive picture because, as we know, anxiety at moderate and mild levels can actually potentially increase students' motivation [18, 19]. At these

anxiety levels, they can still fully control their behavior. Similarly, those who are at a level of weight anxiety can still control their behavior completely, although there are times when students show symptoms that affect their academic performance.

### 3.2. Causes of anxiety

There are three factors that experts perceive as potentially creating anxiety during the learning process: fear of negative judgment, worrying about tests, and anxiety over communicating. This study reveals that students are not worried about fear being assessed negatively by colleagues and lecturers. They are worried because they are concerned about the test results that they will follow. They are also anxious about things that may arise because of communication, such as the fear that their ability to express an opinion is not as expected.

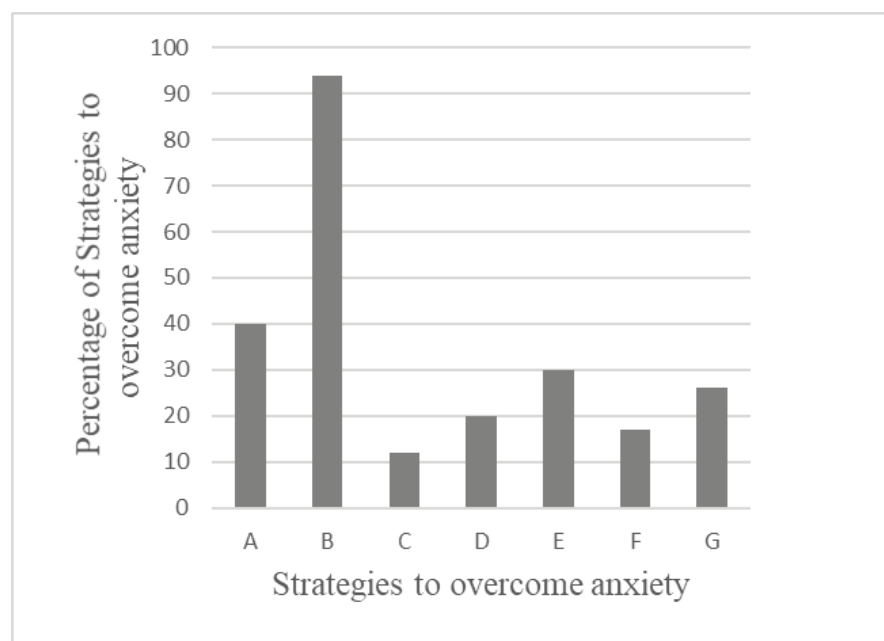
Figure 2 showed that from 38 respondents, 31.28% experienced anxiety over a fear of negative ratings from colleagues or lecturers, while 34.36% experienced anxiety due to exam factors and communication factors. This is interesting because although there are differences, the differences between the factors are not great. It can be said that there is no single predominant factor that causes anxiety among the students as they follow the SCL approach.



**Figure 2:** The composition dependence of the temperature interval of existence of ferroelectric phase. Note: P = Fear of negative rating; T = Fear of tests; K = Anxiety toward communication.

### 3.3. Strategies to overcome anxiety

This study provides findings from seven strategies – memory, cognitive, compensation, metacognitive, affective, social, and other strategies – the most widely used cognitive strategy. Figure 3 showed that this strategy, consisting of three sub-strategies, was chosen a total of 94 times, or an average of 79%, while the second most chosen strategy is the n memory strategy, which was chosen as many as 40 times or equal to 51%. In detail, the choice of strategies by students is as follows.



**Figure 3:** Strategies to overcome anxiety figure list. Note: A = Memory; B = Cognitive; C = Compensation; D = Metacognitive; E = Social; F = Affective; G = Others.

The first strategy is the memory strategy. In this research questionnaire this strategy is represented by two statements, namely point one statement, 'make good preparation', and statement point five, 'memorize all words and sentences to be used'. One statement is selected by 38 respondents or 100%, while option five is chosen by one respondent or 2.6%. This cumulative memory strategy was chosen by 51% of the respondents. They believe that preparing carefully gives them confidence that they will succeed, and such beliefs can significantly reduce anxiety, as stated by Tarigan, who said that being able to prepare everything well will result in fluent speaking as well as reduced anxiety [20].

The second strategy is the cognitive strategy, which in the questionnaire is represented by three points of statement, that is, statement number two, 'Practice, practice,

and practice', point four, 'Make a note outline, keywords, and pictures', and item number 12, 'Read and prepare better for lectures'. Number two is selected by 92% of the respondents, point number four by 90%, and number 12 by 60% of the respondents.

The third strategy, the compensation strategy, in the questionnaire is represented by the statement in point seven, 'Guessing the things to be asked in the exam'. This strategy is a form of anticipation and speculation about what they will face during the exam. By guessing like this they hope to be able to avoid confusion at the time of the exam. Of course, because they are speculative, their guesses may be incorrect. That's why this strategy is not much to choose. Of the 38 respondents, only 12 (31%) chose this strategy. In essence, this anxiety coping strategy is a way of obtaining certainty, certainty that something exists or does not exist is true or incorrect, and so on. Given the certainty, they will not feel anxiety.

The fourth strategy is the metacognitive strategy. As the name suggests, this strategy is concerned with how we think about what we think. In a questionnaire, this strategy is represented by the statement in point nine, 'Focusing on matters relating to classroom activities'. By focusing on what goes on in the classroom, they think they will understand things better, so they will be able to do their duties properly. The belief that this effort will succeed relieves students of their anxiety. This strategy was chosen by 20 respondents (44%) and included in the category 'rarely' used.

The fifth strategy is the affective strategy. This strategy is represented by item number eight, 'Creating a sense of fun when doing the preparation'. This strategy is employed to control the emotions and attitudes of self-facing problems. This strategy can control students' anxiety. However, for most respondents, it is seen as ineffective. Therefore, only three students (7.7%) chose this strategy to overcome anxiety.

The sixth strategy is the social strategy. In this strategy, the questionnaire is represented by point number six, 'Approaching and speaking with a calm-looking friend'. This strategy is only selected by three students (7.7%). Few respondents perceive this as a good strategy for overcoming anxiety. As a strategy to accomplish the work of this strategy it is very likely to be effective, but to overcome anxiety, it is seen as less effective. For some people, approaching a quiet person, which means close to a qualified person, it creates a sense of inferiority. And that means a new problem.

The last strategy is unrelated to those aspects that are not very relevant to the learning efforts. Statement point number three, 'Convince yourself by saying 'quiet, calm, calm'', number ten, 'Silence and ignorance with lectures', and number 11, 'Thinking things related to class activities' are representative of these other strategies. Of these

three sub strategies, only one substrategy is chosen by enough respondents, namely substrategy number three. This substrategy was chosen by 24 respondents or 62% of them, while statement items or substrategies numbers 10 and 11 are each chosen by only one person or 2.6%. This shows that overall this method was chosen by 51%, which means classified as 'often', though closer to 'rare' is used. For students who are very mature, points 10 and 11 are considered completely ineffective in solving problems. Therefore, in an effort to overcome anxiety, this strategy is not widely selected.

## 4. Conclusion

The results showed that the largest proportion of students (64.10%) experienced severe anxiety and the second largest proportion (28.21%) experienced moderate anxiety. The factors that create the most anxiety according to the respondents are fear of examinations (34.28%) and worries about communicating (34.28%). The most widely used strategies to overcome anxiety are the cognitive strategy (79%) and the memory strategy (51%). In addition, with an average score of 3.79 and a standard deviation of 1.539, it can be concluded that the respondents believe that student-centered learning is more effective than teacher-centered learning.

Based on the results of the research, several suggestions emerge, especially for lecturers. First, lecturers should make students feel comfortable in the classroom by creating a fun atmosphere, eliminating the competitive climate and avoiding perfectionism. This could include calling them by their familiar names and spicing up lectures with a little humor that does not offend anyone.

Second, they should reassure students that mistakes are part of the learning process and that it takes a long time to perform well in front of colleagues. Finally, they should organize group discussions in the early days so that students avoid the need to speak in front of a crowd of people.

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