

Speaking Skill's Language Anxiety Experienced by Freshers of English Language Education Department in Islamic Private University

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ABSTRACT

The aims of this study is to find out the language anxiety levels encountered by the freshmen of English Language Education Department, the reasons of the language anxiety, and how the students cope with the language anxiety. It is a mixed-method study conducted in an Islamic private university in Malang. The population included 128 English Language Education Department freshmen in the academic year 2019/2020. Through convenience sampling, 32 students from six speaking classes were obtained. A survey using Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS) questionnaire and interview were applied as the techniques to gather the data. The findings revealed that 91% freshmen are identified to experience a medium level of anxiety (76-119). Besides, the reasons of the language anxiety included communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of making mistakes in the test. Several ways to cope with the language anxiety comprised practicing before class and keeping the up with the positive mind.

Keywords: Freshmen Students, Language Anxiety, Speaking Skills

ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui tingkat kecemasan berbahasa yang dialami oleh mahasiswa baru Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, alasan kecemasan berbahasa, dan cara mahasiswa mengatasi kecemasan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode campuran yang dilakukan di sebuah universitas swasta Islam di Malang. Populasi penelitian ini adalah 128 mahasiswa baru Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris tahun ajaran 2019/2020. Melalui *convenience sampling*, diperoleh 32 siswa dari enam kelas berbicara. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan kuesioner Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS) dan wawancara. Temuan tersebut mengungkapkan bahwa 91% mahasiswa baru diidentifikasi mengalami tingkat kecemasan sedang (76-119). Selain itu, alasan kecemasan bahasa termasuk ketakutan komunikasi, takut evaluasi negatif, dan takut membuat kesalahan dalam ujian. Beberapa cara untuk mengatasi kecemasan bahasa terdiri dari berlatih sebelum kelas dan menjaga pikiran positif.

Kata kunci: Mahasiswa baru, Kecemasan berbahasa, Kemampuan Berbicara

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INTRODUCTION

In the last three decades, the biggest concern of second and foreign language learning is language anxiety¹. According to Sayuri, (2016), the difficulties of Indonesian students in speaking English are lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited ideas, and nervousness.² Besides, Aeni, Jabu, Rahman, & Strid state that most of the students feel anxious because they are afraid of negative evaluations.³ It is hard for them to speak because English is not their first language. The students rarely use English in their daily activities. According to Keong et al., the difficulties in speaking English include the lack of English speaking practice and the inclination of mixing the foreign and native languages.⁴ In fact, speaking skill is one of the major skills that the students have to be mastered. A person is considered successful in learning a foreign language when they can speak the language well⁵. It reflects that speaking skill is significant as a whole life aspect as it helps people to communicate with other people from other countries easily. In this globalization era, the students are required to have competent English-speaking skills. Nonetheless, many students face problems when they learn to speak English.

One of the problems is anxiety—an emotional tension characterized by increased blood pressure, heart rate or breathing rate, sweating, indigestion, or even muscular pain⁶. Language background variables such as self-reported speaking proficiency and frequency of language use contribute to the occurrence of language anxiety. Anxiety will affect the

¹ T. Trang. "A Review of Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's Theory of Foreign Language Anxiety and the Challenges to the Theory." *Canadian Center of Science and Education*, 5 no. 1 (2012): 69–75.

² S. Sayuri. "English Speaking Problems of EFL Learners of Mulawarman University Sayuri." *Indonesian Journal of EFL and Linguistics*, 1 no. 1, (2016): 47–61.

³ N. Aeni, B. Jabu, M. A. Rahman, & J. E. Strid. "English Oral Communication Apprehension in Students of Indonesian Maritime." *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 7 no. 4 (2017): 158.

⁴ Y. C. Keong, A. I. Ali, & F. W. Hameed. "Speaking competence of Iraqi EFL undergraduates of Garmiyah University." *International Journal of Education and Research*, 3 no. 5 (2015): 157–170.

⁵ S. Z. A. Tahir. "Improving Students' Speaking Skill through Yahoo Messenger at University of Iqra Buru." *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 3 no. 3 (2015): 174–181.

⁶ J. A. Irving, P. L. Dobkin, & J. Park. "Cultivating mindfulness in health care professionals: A Review of Empirical Studies of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)." *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, 15 no. 2 (2009): 61–66.

student's speaking skills⁷. Anxiety may also contain harms on learner's performance and academic achievement for foreign language learners⁸. It causes individual apprehension or fear of something that influences the process or the achievement of learning a foreign language.

A study conducted by Rahmawati analyzed student's anxiety in speaking activities of junior high school students.⁹ The study found three main causes of students' anxiety, such as communication apprehension, fear of test, and fear of negative evaluation. Among these causes of anxiety, communication apprehension became the most dominant factor. Another study was conducted by Mardiansyah. This study analyzed the second-year students' speaking anxiety.¹⁰ The findings showed six factors of anxiety, namely personal & interpersonal anxieties, student beliefs about language learning, lecturers' beliefs about language teaching, lecturer-student interaction, classroom tasks, and language tests. Among these factors, lecturer's beliefs and lecturer-student interaction serve as the most principal factors. Although some studies have discussed about the students' speaking anxiety, none of them barely discussed about the freshmen's speaking anxiety and how it may affect the speaking skills of the students. Therefore, the current study is to be conducted to analyze the language anxiety levels encountered by the freshmen of English Language Education Department, the reasons of the language anxiety, and how the students cope with the language anxiety.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study was conducted between January to February 2020. It used mixed design by collecting both qualitative data and quantitative data. The population of this research was 128 freshmen of English Language Education Department of a private Islamic university in Malang in the academic year 2019/2020. Sample random sampling was employed to select the respondents; as a result, 32 freshmen were chosen. FLCAS Questionnaire introduced by Horwitz was employed to measure the level of students'

⁷ S. C. Baker, & P. D. MacIntyre. "The Role of Gender and Immersion in Communication and Second Language Orientations". *Language Learning*, 50 no. 2 (2000): 311–341.

⁸ E. Horwitz. "Language Anxiety and Achievement." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, (2001): 112–126.

⁹ Y. D. Rahmawati. "*Student's Anxiety in Speaking Activities at Grade XI of SMA Muhammadiyah 1 Malang*." *Skripsi*. University of Muhammadiyah Malang, (2018).

¹⁰ Mardiansyah. "*Second Year Students' Speaking Anxiety in English Language Education Department at University of Muhammadiyah Malang*." *Skripsi*. University of Muhammadiyah Malang, (2018).

anxiety.¹¹ In gathering the data, the FLCAS questionnaire was first distributed to all of the respondents. After that, two students who received the highest scores in the FLCAS questionnaire were interviewed. All of the collected data were then classified and analyzed. Eventually, the result of the study was generalized and became the representative of the whole population.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The Language Anxiety Level of Freshmen Students

The FLCAS scores show the student's level of language anxiety in forms of low, medium, and high anxiety with the range from 33 to 165. In this study, the scores of the participants range from 74 to 129. It shows that the lowest score is 74 (low anxiety) and the highest score is 129 (high anxiety). It can be seen in the following table:

Table 1. The Language Anxiety Level of English Language Education Department Freshmen

| Level of Anxiety | Number of Students | Percentage |
|-------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Low Anxiety (33-75) | 1 | 3% |
| Medium Anxiety (76-119) | 29 | 91% |
| High Anxiety (120-165) | 2 | 6% |
| Total | 32 | 100% |

Table 1 shows the total percentage of FLCAS score of 2019 freshmen in English Language Education Department. It displays that 3% of the students are diagnosed to experience low anxiety levels (33-75). Besides, 91% of the students are identified to have medium anxiety levels (76-119). 6% of the students are identified to experience a high anxiety level (120-165). According to the result, the majority of English Language Education Department freshmen have a medium anxiety level in their speaking skill. This finding is similar to the finding of a study conducted by Verawati¹². She found that 88% of the students are identified to experience medium level of anxiety (87-107). Furthermore, Mardiansyah also revealed that 74% of the second year students of an English department

¹¹ E. K. Horwitz, M. B. Horwitz, & J. Cope, "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal*, 70 no. 2, (1986): 125–132.

¹² D. Verawati, D. "Language Anxiety in Speaking Skill (Descriptive Analysis of the Fourth Semester Students in English and Education Departement of Teacher Training and Education Faculty State Institute for Islamic Studies Salatiga in Academic Year 2015/2016)". *Skripsi*. State Institute for Islamic Studies (IAIN) Salatiga, (2015).

are classified to experience medium level of anxiety (76-119).¹³ According to the findings, language anxiety level of the majority of the English department students over the last few years is a medium level of anxiety.

The Reasons of Freshmen's Language Anxiety

From the finding, there are three main reasons triggering the language anxiety, namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

Communication Apprehension

44% of the participants agree that the students start to panic when they have to speak without any preparation in a language class. The reason is attached in following interview transcripts:

Student 88: *"Before the class started, I feel so nervous because I am afraid to make a mistake such as the way I delivered my explanation. But I feel so glad when I already finished my presentation"*

Student 13: *"I am so nervous because my vocabulary is limited. Like I said before, grammar impacts too. When we have to speak, we do not have enough time to think what grammar that we should use. It is different if we have to write it."*

Based on Almas, she finds a similar factor that makes students are anxiety.¹⁴ She finds that 53% of the students are panic if they do not have any preparation before the speaking class. It occurs due to their lack of ability to speak in front of people. In fact, the students feel anxious because of their grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary are also lacking. Additionally, Ala, Oda, Ali, & A Khammat point out in their study that the deficiency of competence also leads the students to experience anxiety in the classroom.¹⁵ It is proven that 49,15% of the students indicate to get anxious when they are called to speak without having any preparation in advance. Those two studies believe that the students feel anxiety when they do not have enough time to prepare for the performance.

¹³ Mardiansyah. "Second Year Students' Speaking Anxiety in English Language Education Department at University of Muhammadiyah Malang." *Skripsi*. University of Muhammadiyah Malang, (2018).

¹⁴ E. A. D. Almas. "A Study of Language Anxiety on the 1st- Year Students of English Language Education Department in University of Muhammadiyah Malang." *Skripsi*. University of Muhammadiyah Malang, (2016).

¹⁵ H. Ala, A. Oda, H. Ali, & M. A. Khammat, M. "Investigating the Factors that Cause Language Anxiety in Iraqi EFL Learners." *Journal of Basrah Researches/Humanities*, 38 (2013): 25–53.

Fear of Negative Evaluation

The students are reported to feel not confident in their ability. It makes them afraid of being judged by their lecturers or friends. Point 19 shows that 22% of the participant students agree that the students are afraid that their lecturer is ready to correct every mistake they make. The reason is depicted in following interview transcripts:

Student 13: *"Yes, maybe. For example, my examination in last semester. One of my teacher said, "Hurry up girl or I will give you low score". Moreover, when your friends get a compliment but you are not, it gets my nerve. It makes me down and breaks my heart so much."*

Students 88: *"Yes, I am. I am typically person who think too much of what people say about my performance. From lecturer point of view, I am afraid when the lecturer correct me in the middle of presentation. It makes my confident drop in front of my friends."*

Then, point 31 shows that 31% of the participant students agree that they are afraid that the other students will laugh at them when they speak the foreign language. The reason is depicted in following interview transcripts:

Student 13: *"It happens very often. The main reason is when my friend is laughed at me. It is like bullying. It makes me more nervous. In addition, I have to presentation in front of my friend. I have to speak English but I am lack of vocabulary."*

Student 88: *"Yes, I am. I am typically person who thinking too much of what people say about my performance. From lecturer point of view, I am afraid when the lecturer correct me in the middle of presentation. It makes my confident drop in front of my friends."*

It goes without saying that fear of negative evaluation has a big impact on students' performance. They are already nervous because they have to speak English. Then, the students have to face their friends' judgment about the performance. The students worry that their performance will get negative evaluation because their ability is poor compared to other students.

The finding is in line with Horwitz et al. who state that fear of negative evaluation may occur in any social, evaluative situation, such as work interviewing or speaking in

foreign language class.¹⁶ In addition, according to Aftat language anxiety has something to do with the issue of negative evaluation and correction; thus, many the students are afraid of being mocked by other students. As a result, the students decide to stop participating in speaking activity due to the negative evaluation that they may get.

Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is a fear that comes in the assessment situation. The finding shows that 13% of the participant students agree that even if the students are well prepared for a language class, they feel anxious about it. The reason that the student participants agree with the statement is given in the interview data:

Student 13: *"In every presentation, I am always afraid. I do not know. When I want to explain something, my mind is not in a line with my words. My mind is blank."* **Student 88:** *"Often. It occurs when I do not study the material for my presentation and not really understand the material. I think that I will make a mistake. Besides, I rarely speak English and it makes me more nervous."*

Students who learn a foreign language will face shyness. It becomes a problem, especially in speaking class. Furthermore, speaking in front of many people—while being assessed—is one of the common phobias that students are going through and the shyness feeling makes the their mind blank.

Ways to Cope with Language Anxiety

The students report the strategies related to reduce their anxiety during the learning process, especially English. The students find the suitable strategies to reduce all of their anxiety. They are carefully thinking about the way to escape from language anxiety. The answer is depicted from the interviews in the following examples:

Student 88: *"I will practice hard during the examination. I can study by myself or discuss with my friend. For me, I prefer to study with my friend because I quickly understand their explanation. Sometimes, I have to hold something such as ballpoint."*

Student 13: *"I will prepare in advance before I have to do the task. For example, if I do not understand the material, I will ask my friends to explain me. Besides, we have to do something that can improve our*

¹⁶ E. K. Horwitz, M. B. Horwitz, & J. Cope, "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety." *The Modern Language Journal*, 70 no. 2, (1986): 125–132.

skills. So far, I feel my anxiety is decrease because of the practice hard. The most important things is pray to Allah. I hope that my performance be better."

In line with this study, Abdul finds that students use relaxation strategy to reduce their anxiety.¹⁷ The students try to take a deep breath and try to be calm. It can minimize students' anxiety even though it is not 100% successful. The other strategies are preparation strategy and positive thinking strategy. Preparation strategy means that the students study hard before they speak English in front of the class, such as frequently studying English and make it as a habit. Besides, positive thinking strategy makes the students be more confident. It gives the students an imagination that the students can give the best performance when the students speak English in front of the class.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, the researcher finds that 91% of the students are identified to experience a medium level of anxiety (76-119). Then, 6% of students are diagnosed with a high level of anxiety (120-165), while only 3% of the students are reported as a low level of anxiety (33-75). It is concluded that the majority of 2019 freshmen in English Language Education Department are reported to experience a medium level of anxiety on speaking skills. There are three factors that make students experience language anxiety, namely; 1) Communication Apprehension; 2) Fear of Negative Evaluation; and 3) Test Anxiety.

Lastly, the students claim some way to reduce their anxiety during their speaking class. Both of the students, state that the students will practice hard before the class started or during the examination days. Also, the students always think about positive thinking and try to calm down themselves by taking a deep breath. It works, even though it is not 100% successful.

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¹⁷ N. B. Abdul, N. B. "EFL Students ' Strategies in Overcoming Anxiety in Speaking English : A Qualitative Study of Freshmen Students of English Department , Muhammadiyah University of Makassar." *A Journal of Makassar Muhammadiyah University*, (2018). Retrieved from <http://www.unismuh.ac.id/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/DEVI1.pdf>

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