A Case Study: Indonesian Students' Speaking Anxiety in Learning English as a Foreign Language*

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Abstract

This research was to investigate the factors contributing to the students' speaking anxiety in learning a foreign language and to find out English language teachers' suggestions to reduce the students' anxiety in learning a foreign language. The participants of this research were a total of 94 third-year students and 5 English language teachers teaching in the same school. The data collection instruments used in this study were the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was developed by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) and a structured interview. The findings of this study indicated that almost half of the participants experience communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and English class anxiety. The participant teachers' suggestions to reduce the students' speaking anxiety included frequent involvement in language practice and vocabulary building activities; building the students' confidence in speaking by creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere; using group work activities so as to reduce student mistakes through peer support; correcting the student mistakes indirectly in front of their peers; using media and entertaining language teaching materials to engage the students speaking practice and the teachers taking the role of a facilitator in language classrooms so as to support the students in their language learning process.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, teaching English.

Bir Vaka Çalışması: İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenen Endonezyalı Öğrencilerin Konuşma Anksiyetesi

Öz

Bu çalışmanın amacı yabancı dil öğrenen öğrencilerin konuşma kaygılarının oluşmasında etkili olan faktörleri öğrenci bakış açısından araştırmak ve İngilizce öğretmenlerinin öğrenci dil öğrenme kaygı düzeylerinin nasıl azaltılabileceği konusundaki önerilerini ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu araştırmaya 94 öğrenci ve aynı okulda görev yapan 5 İngilizce öğretmeni katılmıştır. Çalışmanın verileri Horwitz ve Cope (1986) tarafından geliştirilen yabancı dil sınıfı kaygı ölçeği (FLCAS) ve yapılandırılmış mülakat ile toplanmıştır. Bulgular katılımcı öğrencilerin yarısının yabancı dil konuşma kaygısı çektiğini göstermiş ve bu kaygıların oluşmasında etkili olan faktörlerin konuşma kaygısı, yanlış değerlendirilme kaygısı, test kaygısı ve sınıf uygulamalarından olduğunu göstermiştir. Katılımcı öğretmenlerin bu kaygıların azaltılmasına ilişkin görüşleri aşağıda belirtilen şekilde sıralanmaktadır: konuşma ve kelime hazinesi geliştirme aktivitelerinin daha çok kullanılması; öğrenci öz güvenini geliştirmeye ve endişe seviyelerinin düşürülmesine yönelik bir sınıf yaratmak; akran desteğini sağlamak için grup aktivitelerinin kullanımı; görsel ve eğlenceli dil materyallerinin kullanımı ve öğretmenlerin dil öğrenme sürecine katkıda bulunabilmek için yönlendirici rolünü üstlenmesi.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Konuşma kaygısı, İngilizcenin öğretimi.*

Introduction

English is a language to be mastered by almost everyone in many parts of the world. The situation is not different in Indonesia. English has been taught in Indonesia as an international language at all levels in public education starting from junior high school to university. The students are required to learn the language as a compulsory subject because it is an international language used in most countries in the world. English is important for Indonesia and the most common reason is that English is an international language (Lauder, 2008). In the process of learning English, students find many difficulties in understanding the rules of the target language because it is different from their mother language. Naturally, the students often make

errors although they have learned it for many years. Teaching English in Indonesia is viewed as not very effective by the educators as the learners of the university experience difficulties in using English for communication purposes. In learning a foreign language many factors determine whether the language can be mastered effectively or not. Students' anxiety is one of these factors that contribute to whether or not English learning is attainable. Anxiety is a feeling of worry about something with an uncertain outcome (Bradford, 2010). Naturally, anxieties affect the oral performance of the speakers. Young (1991) stated that there are six types of anxiety in learning languages such as "internal and personal anxiety, the person's understanding of the language being studied, the instructor's view or in this case the language teacher of the language studied. Anxiety in speaking is one of the primary reasons behind the students' failure in expressing themselves in communication.

This study aimed to identify the factors that contribute to speaking anxiety in foreign languages learning. In addition to identifying English language teachers' opinions as to how to reduce student anxiety in learning a foreign language. The following research questions framed the study:

1. What are the factors that contribute to the students' speaking anxiety in learning a foreign language?
2. What are English language teachers' suggestions to reduce the students' speaking anxiety in learning a foreign language?

Research Methodology
The overall objective of this study was to identify the factors that contribute to the students' speaking anxiety in learning a foreign language and to find out English language teachers' suggestions to reduce the students' speaking anxiety in learning a foreign language. The participants of this research were a total of 94 randomly chosen third-year students of Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Banda Aceh and 5 English language teachers teaching in the same school. The students were aged 15-18 while the age of the teachers was between 25-40 years. The researcher used two data collection instruments in this study. These instruments were a questionnaire and a structured interview. The questionnaire was used to get the answers to the first research question while the structured interviews

were used to find the answers to the second research question of the study. The following sub-sections provide detailed information about the data collection instruments of the study. The questionnaire used in this research was a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986). The questionnaire involves two main parts, the first part involves 3 questions to collect demographic information of the participants. The second part aims to obtain the factors that contribute to the students' speaking anxiety in learning a foreign language. The second part of the questionnaire consists of 4 sections involving 33 statements in total. The statements are based on a five-point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 ("strongly agree") to 5 ("strongly disagree"). The first section of the second part of the questionnaire includes eight statements. These 8 statements focus on Communication Anxiety. The aim of the second section in the questionnaire is to elicit the students' perceptions of Fear of Negative Evaluation. This section involves nine statements. Section three focuses on Test Anxiety and the fourth section in the questionnaire is on Anxiety of English Classes with a total of 11 statements. The questionnaire was translated into Indonesian language using back-translation procedures. The aim of using an Indonesian version of the questionnaire was to help the participants understand the questions easy to answer them comfortably. The second data collection instrument was a structured interview. The interviewees were five English language teachers. Interviews were conducted in Indonesian to eliminate any possible comprehension problems. The researcher used audio tape to record the teachers' responses to the interview questions. The interview involved 5 questions. The interview questions were designed after completing the analysis of the responses given to the questionnaire items. Example interview questions include questions such as *(1) The results show that the learners have very high anxiety when speaking in English. How do you think we can reduce students' speaking anxiety? (2) Learners are very worried or afraid when the answers they provided produce a negative evaluation. What are the solutions you offer? (3) What is your suggestion to improve students' speaking ability?* The data collected through questionnaires were subjected to statistical packages for social sciences (SPSS) software version 16. The data collected from the structured interviews were subjected to descriptive analysis.

Findings and Conclusions

Many studies indicate that anxiety is one of the causes that prevent the learners' capacity to produce language (Worde, 2003). Those researchers argue that because of this feeling the learners generally avoid taking risks in the language and as a result they lose their self-confidence. One way to help learners to overcome the negative effects of such feelings is to find out the sources of learner anxiety and to take action to create effective learning contexts for the language learners.

Following the line of argument mentioned above, the first aim of this study was to investigate the factors that contribute to the students' speaking anxiety in learning a foreign language. In the present study, we tried to investigate the factors using four aspects of foreign language anxiety as a basis: Communication Anxiety; Fear of Negative Evaluation; Test Anxiety and English Class Anxiety.

The findings related to communication anxiety showed that almost half of the students have self-confidence in speaking English in class. However, those which equal to the other half of the students who are communication anxious cannot be ignored. On analysing the reasons why those students have communication anxiety, we found out that the students feel anxious when the teacher asks a question that s/he had not prepared before. Therefore, we may conclude that the absence of student preparation is a significant source of communication anxiety for the participants in this study. This conclusion is similar to those pointed out by Mak (2011) and Worde (2003) who stated that the types of speaking and listening activities used in language classes might be one of the causes of communication anxiety. For this reason, they believe that a careful analysis of the types of activities that are used in language teaching can help to reduce the level of anxiety the students' experience. Fear of negative evaluation of students found to be high among half of the participants in the study. Those students, who experience fear of negative evaluation stated that they feel nervous when they think their names will be called in the class. Further analysis indicated that those students believe other students are better than they are in language and this is why they are embarrassed to initiate communication. In his study, KI Abdullah (2010) found that many students feel that others

are more capable than them so they feel anxious about their abilities. Those students indicated they feel nervous when they think their names will be called in the class as they are worried or afraid when the answers they provide produce a negative evaluation. Moreover, the majority of the students in the present study agree that they are disappointed when they do not understand what is corrected by the teacher as those students who have worries about negative teacher evaluation. These conclusions support the ones raised by Tanveer (2007). The participants often state that they feel afraid, and fear making mistakes. Also, as concluded by Fukai (2000), the use of delayed feedback in speaking activities may help to reduce the students' fear of negative evaluation. We might conclude that many students feel anxious about the results of the exam results, too. Similarly, KI KI Abdullah (2010) argued that students feel anxious when they think they have to acquire some rules in order to express their ideas orally.

The second aim of this study was to investigate the English language teachers' suggestions to reduce the level of students' speaking anxiety in learning a foreign language. Similar to the conclusions mentioned above, Fukai (2000) highlighted the importance of the teachers' role in reducing student anxiety. The participant teachers in the presents study stated that they should make the learners feel comfortable in the class and help them feel safe to speak or ask the questions in English. They also highlighted the importance of establishing a low-anxiety learning atmosphere and encouraging students to speak the target language as with Young (1991). In addition, the teachers mentioned that they believe practice makes perfect and that their students need guidance. Reflecting on the teachers' responses to interview questions, it becomes clear that the teachers know they need to be facilitators instead of being judges or an evaluators. While preparing perfectly for teaching, the teacher must consider the affective factors. Given the situation of widespread anxiety in high school English class in Indonesia, English language teachers should be more concerned with these issues. It's the teacher's responsibility to support and help the students to develop themselves.

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