

### EFL Student's Anxiety in Speaking English

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#### Abstract

*The present study intends to investigate the factors that affect students' anxiety in speaking English and the strategies that students use to cope with their anxiety in speaking English. The data of the study were obtained by using mix method. The participants were students of the English Department. Research data were collected by giving questionnaires and interviewing the students. The findings reveal the result that most of the students in the English Department felt anxiety in speaking English. However, most of the students used the strategies to cope with the anxiety while speaking English.*

#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bermaksud untuk menyelidiki faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kecemasan siswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris dan strategi yang digunakan siswa untuk mengatasi kecemasan mereka dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris. Data penelitian diperoleh dengan menggunakan metode campuran. Pesertanya adalah mahasiswa Jurusan Bahasa Inggris. Pengumpulan data penelitian dilakukan dengan pemberian angket dan wawancara kepada siswa. Temuan mengungkapkan hasil bahwa sebagian besar mahasiswa di Jurusan Bahasa Inggris merasakan kecemasan dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris. Namun, sebagian besar siswa menggunakan strategi untuk mengatasi kecemasan saat berbicara bahasa Inggris.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English is known as a global lingua franca. English is the most widely used foreign language in the world. The importance of English is growing day by day. It is proven by the whole world used English as their foreign language even their second language. In addition, English is used mostly on the internet and for book publication with over 60 countries publishing titles in English. Books, magazines, and newspapers written in English are available in many countries around the world (Graddol, 2000).

In the case of studying English as a foreign language, I found that there are so many students in my class who can not speak English fluently. I worked on an English course last year. Therefore I have real proof that university students in Gorontalo can not speak English fluently besides they have their English subject since they are in elementary school. I found so many reasons why they can not speak English fluently. The reasons are nervousness, lack

of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes in front of the class, lack of motivation, and feeling shy while speaking with friends or teachers. Most of them understand what I speak to, but they can not reply to it. They have anxiety in themselves. They do not have any brave to speak English.

This study would like to investigate the students' anxiety about speaking English. In addition, investigating the students' anxiety may contribute to persuading and motivating the students to have more brave to use English in daily life and for academic purposes. The result of the study can help the teachers evaluate the methodology of teaching in speaking class. They can minimize the students' anxiety by improving their teaching and encouraging the students to be able to speak without feeling anxious about speaking English inside or outside the classroom.

### **1.1. Speaking Skill in English as a Foreign Language**

Naturally, to speak means to produce some words representing one's idea. Subconsciously we have produced thousands of words a day or even more than that. No wonder speaking represents a real challenge to most language learners to have the ability to speak in the target language. Thornbury (2006) argues that the nature of the speaking process means that the grammar of spoken language differs in a number of significant ways from the grammar of a written language. In the teaching of foreign language context, the definition of speaking above indicates that speaking is a skill, and as such, it needs to be developed and practiced independently. Regarding speaking in a foreign language, most of the students experienced a feeling of anxiety in the process of learning a foreign language. As argued by many theorists about the phenomena of anxiety.

### **1.2. The Concept of Anxiety and Language Anxiety**

The term anxiety refers to the complex set of negative emotions, which include fear, apprehension, and worry. According to Spielberger and Rickman (1990, as cited in Cheng, 2009), anxiety is an unpleasant emotional apprehension. People with high levels of trait anxiety are generally nervous people in many different situations; they lack emotional stability (Goldberg, 1993, as cited in Cheng, 2009). According to Eysenck (1979, as cited in Cheng, 2009), trait anxiety impairs the cognitive function of memory and learning, leads to avoidance behaviors, and has some other negative effects. It could be concluded that anxiety is a term referring to a collection of negative feelings such as fear, apprehension, and worry, which could lead people to be unstable. Second language anxiety is defined here as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to using a foreign/second language for communication beyond the language classroom.

### **1.3. The Causes of Anxiety**

Based on Liu (2006), there are some causes of reticence (Anxiety in speaking English), they are:

#### **1.3.1. Low English Proficiency**

Low English proficiency is also identified in the present research as a major factor that hindered the students from talking to others in English class. Thus, students may feel weak in speaking English, perceive their English to be poor, and may feel that others are better than him or her.

### **1.3.2. Lack of Familiarity with Task**

The word familiar means well known, often seen or heard, having good knowledge, close or friendly to something. Interest mattered a lot in students' active participation in classroom activities. In short, students will be active in speaking about a topic if he or she is interested, well known, often seen or heard, have good knowledge, or even close or friendly to a topic.

### **1.3.3. Lack of Confidence**

Confidence means having solid beliefs, firm trust, or sure expectations, feeling confident, fully assured, having no failure, etc. Some students might have good pronunciation and be at a high proficiency level, but they still prefer to be reticent because of their lack of courage.

### **1.3.4. Fear of Making Mistakes**

The students worried about losing face in the oral language classroom. Students kept quiet and waited until they were required to speak English because they were afraid and felt embarrassed to make mistakes.

### **1.3.5. Incomprehensible Inputs**

Language inputs come in the form of teacher talk, listening activities, reading passages, and the language heard and read outside of class. It gives students the material they need to begin producing language themselves.

## **1.4. The Strategies to Cope Anxiety**

Based on Liu (2006:23), there are five main categories of strategies to cope with anxiety in speaking English, they are:

### **1.4.1. Preparation**

The students have to use the strategy to increase their subjectively estimated mastery of the subject matter and hence reduce their speaking anxiety in the classroom, even in front of the teacher and other students. This strategy can help the students to be more prepared when they want to speak English in front of the class or speak to their teacher and friends.

### **1.4.2. Relaxation**

Involving a tactic that aims at reducing students' somatic anxiety symptoms can relax the students when the anxiety appears. This strategy can be used when the student speaks with a lot of audiences, like in front of the class. Being relaxed can reduce the increase of heart rate, respiration, muscle tension, and blood pressure.

### **1.4.3. Positive Thinking**

The students also have to use this strategy because this strategy is intended to divert attention from the stressful situation to positive and pleasant cues and bring relief to the student's anxiety in speaking. This strategy is easy to apply because all the students are going to do is think positively, then the anxiety will be gone. When the students keep their minds positive, they will feel more confident and enjoy speaking English because they no longer have anxiety.

#### 1.4.4. Peer Seeking

Peer seeking is usually used as a strategy by students who feel more comfortable doing anything with partners. This strategy makes the students look for friends that they feel at the same level as them, so they do not feel worried anymore. Peer seeking absolutely decreases the anxiety because the students will feel confident with their friends who are on the same level as them.

#### 1.4.5. Resignation

This category is defined by students' reluctance to do anything to alleviate their speaking anxiety. The students reporting examples of resignation seem intent on minimizing the impact of anxiety by refusing to face the problem. This strategy is kind of the last choice if the students have already tried the other strategies and those are not working on them. This strategy will not improve their speaking English because they just refuse anything to cope with the anxiety.

### 2. METHOD OF RESEARCH

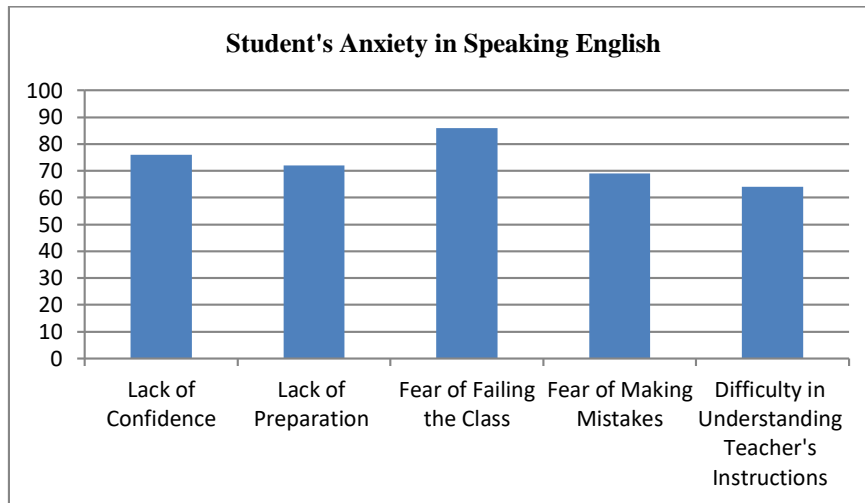
This research is mixed method research. This study employed the mixed method design, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to collect the data (Creswell & Tashakkori, 2007). The basic idea in mixed method research is that the researchers want to use quantitative and qualitative methods together to understand the problem. Because the researcher takes two kinds of data: questionnaires and interviews. The mixed method is a match to handle this data then the result will support each other. The researcher used this approach to collect, analyze, and combine qualitative and quantitative data into a single study.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1.** *The result of anxiety questionnaires*

| Questions | Yes | No |
|-----------|-----|----|
| Q1        | 60  | 40 |
| Q2*       | 41  | 59 |
| Q3        | 79  | 21 |
| Q4        | 64  | 36 |
| Q5*       | 91  | 9  |
| Q6        | 78  | 22 |
| Q7        | 85  | 15 |
| Q8        | 58  | 42 |
| Q9        | 82  | 28 |
| Q10       | 71  | 29 |
| Q11*      | 21  | 79 |
| Q12       | 53  | 47 |
| Q13       | 85  | 15 |
| Q14       | 29  | 71 |
| Q15*      | 26  | 74 |
| Q16       | 73  | 27 |
| Q17       | 62  | 38 |
| Q18       | 68  | 32 |
| Q19*      | 56  | 44 |
| Q20       | 69  | 31 |
| Q21       | 87  | 23 |
| SUM       | 72% |    |

Based on the table above (Table 1), most of the students answer yes, which proves the students feel anxiety while they are speaking English. From the questionnaires, it is found that each statement of the questionnaires has a different result. Some statements have results above 60 answers, which means the statement of the questionnaires related to the students' situation in speaking class.



**Figure 1.** Student's anxiety in speaking English

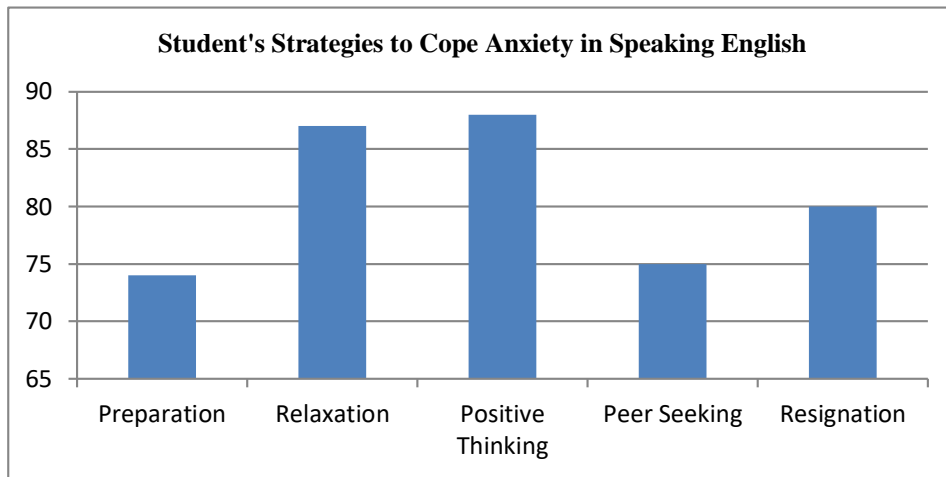
Based on the chart, 86% of students in the fifth semester in the English Department feel fear of failing the class. However, the other factors of anxiety also have a similar result. The chart shows that most of the students still feel anxiety about themselves because the result is more than 50%. All of the factors are 60% above. It shows that anxiety always hits them when they are speaking English.

**Table 2.** The result of the strategy to cope with anxiety in speaking English questionnaires

| Questions | Yes | No |
|-----------|-----|----|
| Q22       | 69  | 31 |
| Q23       | 97  | 3  |
| Q24       | 88  | 12 |
| Q25       | 68  | 32 |
| Q26*      | 35  | 65 |
| Q27*      | 6   | 94 |
| Q28*      | 25  | 75 |
| Q29       | 89  | 11 |
| Q30*      | 30  | 70 |
| Q31*      | 17  | 83 |
| Q32       | 85  | 15 |
| Q33       | 59  | 41 |
| Q34       | 89  | 11 |
| Q35       | 77  | 23 |
| Q36       | 91  | 9  |
| SUM       | 78% |    |

Based on the table above (Table 2), most students used strategies to cope with their anxiety while speaking English. The researchers found that each statement has a different

result from the questionnaires. The final result is that 78% of students use the strategies to cope with their anxiety in speaking English.



**Figure 2.** *Student's Strategies to Cope Anxiety in Speaking English*

Based on the chart, there are some strategies identified from the questionnaires. Most students think positively to cope with their anxiety while speaking English. From the chart, we can see that students rarely do preparation as their strategy in speaking English. It is because preparation got many things to do before the speaking class. So they do not choose that strategy mostly. However, the students still use other strategies to fix their anxiety. It can be seen from the chart that shows the result of the students using the strategies is above 50%, even almost 90%.

Based on Liu (2006:23), there are five causes of anxiety in speaking English. It is low English proficiency, lack of familiarity with tasks, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and incomprehensible input. The questionnaire result shows that most fifth-semester students still felt anxiety about speaking English even though they had already passed three phases of speaking class in university. However, in the findings, there is one cause that is different from the theory in the result of the interview.

The first cause of the theory is low English proficiency. Low English proficiency means that the students did not have any skills or less knowledge about English. Sometimes, there are students that become anxious because they know nothing about one subject. In this case, the researchers did not find any reasons that the participant got this experience. It might be because they are English Department students; they think that they can speak English and still can understand what people say in English.

Next is the lack of familiarity task, which means the student was unfamiliar with the items they had to present in speaking English. In this case, there is a variety of problem that shows a lack of familiarity with the task of speaking English. This is identified from the problem that the student did not have much vocabulary, which made him unfamiliar with the theme while speaking in English. Lack of familiarity could happen because the students did not study at home or the students did not have any preparation for the class. That is why the most response to this theme is that they have less knowledge about pronunciation or lack vocabulary because they are not familiar with the task.

Fear of being judged also can affect anxiety in speaking English. Fear of being judged means the students are afraid the teacher or their friends will rate them and compare them with somebody that has better English. In the interview, the student said they fear the judges

in their environment. Most of the students said that the environment affected their speaking English because Indonesians rarely speak English. This kind of culture actually can genuinely affect the students to become more afraid to show their skills in public. The students prefer speaking Indonesian or their local language on campus, although they are indeed English students.

Lack of confidence can be one of the causes of anxiety in speaking English. There are various problems that come up with a lack of confidence. The first is that the participant feels not confident and nervous when speaking in English. Lack of confidence is the most answer of the students because everyone has it in their selves. Lack of confidence come up with any situation. In this case, students feel various situations when they try to speak in English. Some students lose their confidence because they are shy when they speak, then the other students will laugh at them. This is a sign that the students have anxiety in them. They are not confident. Another problem was when the participant felt not confident, he did not have any idea what to say. The same data come from questionnaire results; about 76% of students believe that anxiety comes from a lack of confidence. This means that more than 50% of English students feel not confident when they are speaking English.

Fear of making mistakes is one of the causes of students' anxiety in speaking English. In this case, various problems make students feel anxious because of the fear of making mistakes. The first problem is fear of pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar mistakes. This was the typical answer of the participant. They were afraid of making mistakes in those three crucial parts of English. This happens because the students think they have to be perfect in the speaking class. Another problem is the participant feels under pressure because he is addressed as an English Department student. Thus, it made him fear making mistakes in speaking English. This is also a widespread issue in other departments. They will think that every English student can speak English fluently. In fact, there are some students that are not good at speaking but good at another skill and vice versa. This makes those students who feel that they do not have much skill in speaking fear of making mistakes, whether in class or in public places. From the questionnaire result, the factor fear of making mistakes has about 69% of students in total. The students are afraid to speak up in English class because they are afraid of making mistakes in vocabulary, pronunciation, or grammar structural things. Again, more than 50% of students fear making mistakes when they speak English.

Based on Liu (2006:23), there are five main strategies to cope with anxiety in speaking English. It is preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking, and resignation. The questionnaires show that more than 50% of students try to cope with their anxiety in speaking English with these strategies. However, from the interview findings, the researcher found one other strategy that some students use to cope with their anxiety in speaking English.

There are some participants that used preparation as their strategy to cope with anxiety in speaking English. The preparation means that the participant prepares everything they need before they face the English Speaking Class. This strategy is related to the lack of familiarity task factor because this strategy can help students to be familiar with the theme of the subject. This strategy makes the students prepare themselves to face the class better. Also, this strategy can make the students more diligent because they will study before any class they have. The participants state that they must prepare their vocabulary and learn how to pronounce a word. Thus, the questionnaire results show that the students will study hard the day before the speaking class and prepare everything they need in the class. From the questionnaire results, it can be identified that there are about 74% of students used preparation as their strategy to cope with anxiety in speaking English. This means most students use this strategy to cope with their anxiety.

Positive thinking could be one of the strategies to cope with anxiety while speaking English. Positive thinking means the participants should put positive energy when speaking English, make everything all right, like giving suggestions to the brain that we can pass this speaking class. Positive thinking is the more uncomplicated strategy that the students can use when anxiety hits them in the middle of speaking. This strategy can make the students' minds healthier because of the positive aura they receive in their brains. While in the questionnaire, the students tend to choose the strategy of telling themselves that they are giving an excellent performance and telling themselves that they are OK with the speaking class and that there is nothing to worry about.

Code mixing is also the strategy found in this study. There are some participants stated that they used code-mixing to cope with their anxiety while speaking in English. Code mixing means combining two different languages when you are speaking one of the languages itself. Thus, the students prefer to mix their language with Indonesian or the local language, so they will feel fine when speaking in English. Code mixing is also learned as a topic of one subject in the English Department. That is why the students answer the question with this strategy to cope with their anxiety. Another opinion comes from the students who said they use Google translate to help them speak English.

Furthermore, one of the participants used the resignation strategy to cope with their anxiety in speaking English. Resignation means the participant chooses to stop talking. He/she chooses to be quiet than make everything worse. It seems that resignation is an extreme strategy. This could be because resignation is one of the ways to “accept the reality” and reduce the stress that students feel. However, resignation only offers a temporary quick solution. Later, students may face more extensive problems. While from the questionnaire data, the researchers found that the students used resignation as their strategy to avoid getting involved in situations that can make them feel anxious.

From all the above explanations, the researchers found only four strategies from the interview data. While based on Liu (2003), there are five strategies that students use to cope with their anxiety in speaking English. In addition, there is one strategy that the researcher found new: code-mixing. This could be an addition to this research and future research about students' anxiety in speaking English.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **4.1 Conclusions**

Referring to the research findings and analysis of the result, it can be concluded that the factors that affect the anxiety of the 5<sup>th</sup>-semester students in the English Department are 1). Fear of failing the class, 2). Lack of confidence, 3). Lack of preparation, 4). Fear of making mistakes, and 5). Fear of being judged.

The factor fear of failing the class is related to the problem of feeling afraid not to pass the class. The next factor is a lack of confidence related to the nervous feeling that the students feel in speaking English. Then, the next factor is lack of preparation related to lack of vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation. The next factor is fear of making mistakes, this factor is related to afraid making mistakes in pronunciation or grammar. The last factor is fear of being judged is related to the judges from the environment that the students receive when they are speaking English.

For the strategies, the researcher concludes that these are the strategies that the 5<sup>th</sup>-semester students of the English Department use to cope with their anxiety in speaking English, 1). Preparation, 2). Positive Thinking, 3). Resignation, 4). Relaxation, and 5). Code Mixing. This study only talks about anxiety from students' point of view and not all the factors of anxiety are taken.



## 4.2 Recommendations

This study was conducted to identify the factors of students' anxiety in speaking English and the strategies that the students use to cope with their anxiety. Obviously, future similar studies conducted with a larger population or different groups of students will be helpful in understanding better anxiety in speaking English. The future researcher also can gain information from the teacher's point of view. In addition, they can add more psychological points that affect the student's anxiety in speaking English. The teacher also should pay attention to the factors that cause anxiety in speaking English. Therefore, teachers are expected to support and encourage students to speak English. From the result of this research, the researcher would like to give suggestions to the students who have anxiety in themselves. The students are expected to increase their self-confidence to speak, gain more knowledge and vocabulary, and learn how to pronounce well. For language learning, the researchers hope that the students can take something good from this research to improve their ability to speak without feeling anxious.

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