Exploring the Sources of Speaking English Anxiety Experienced by Vocational Senior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to prove the practicality of the conceptual foundation of language anxiety observed in an English classroom. It aimed to explore the types of anxiety students experience when doing their speaking activities. Besides, it sought to explore which things cause students to feel the most anxious about speaking English. It used a qualitative phenomenological approach to describe the students' lived experiences. The research subject was students at a private vocational senior high school in North Minahasa, North Sulawesi. The samples consisting of five respondents were taken using a purposeful snowball sampling technique, and some private interviews were conducted to take the data. The data were analyzed using condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. The results showed that the students experienced the fear of being laughed at by their peers when making mistakes, the fear of not making enough preparation to speak, the fear of not knowing words to use, the fear of lacking understanding of lessons explained in English, and the fear of being scolded by an English teacher due to mispronunciation. Finally, most of what causes them to experience language anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation from others.

Keywords: *Language Anxiety, Speaking Anxiety, Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation*

INTRODUCTION

For many years, research in language learning and teaching has been interested in investigating and exploring the factors causing anxiety in speaking English experienced by learners worldwide. As a psychological condition observed in language classrooms, how it affects a learner's ability to acquire a second or a foreign language has been studied. Psychologically, "anxiety involves feelings of uneasiness, worry, apprehension, or fear, and it is the most common of all the so-called mental disorders" (Elliot & Smith, 2010, p. 9). Brown (2007) restated from a literature review that anxiety is commonly divided into two levels. The first level that is the deepest is trait anxiety. It is the more persistent condition of anxiety at the global level. The other is related to a specific event or action. This type of anxiety usually occurs at specific moments or situations and is called state anxiety.

It is believed that the trait anxiety does not impact language achievement. On the other hand, state anxiety has been claimed to be the best perspective from which language studies were conducted; these studies revealed proof that "foreign language anxiety can hurt the language learning process" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 112). For this reason, some language researchers emphasized their efforts to study the characteristics of state anxiety in language learning (Brown, 2007). To give a theoretical foundation to it, Horwitz et al. (1986) categorized its characteristics into the following cases: (1) communication apprehension, (2) test anxiety, and (3) fear of negative evaluation. Paraphrasing Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), Brown (2007) summarized that communication apprehension happens when learners are unable to communicate opinions and views to people. Individuals with difficulty speaking to people in groups tend to have more difficulty speaking in a foreign language class (Horwitz et al., 1986). The second is learners' fear of educational assessment (Brown, 2007). For example, learners with this kind of anxiety will likely think that a non-perfect language test result means nonsuccess (Horwitz et al., 1986). Finally, the third type of anxiety occurs when they fear negative evaluations from other people about their language performance, for instance, their speaking performance in a class activity. They would be sensitive to evaluations from a language teacher or classmates (Horwitz et al., 1986). In practice, the three types of cases can be observable to teachers and students as they do specific activities in a language class.

Various research has studied how English as a foreign language (EFL) learners experienced the first type of anxiety, communication apprehension. These studies found that language learners do experience a certain degree of fear of communicating their ideas to others at certain levels and for some psychological and linguistic reasons (Mohamed Noor et al., 2015; Aeni et al., 2017; Sari, 2017; Molnar & Crnjak, 2018; Amiri & Puteh, 2018; Abu Taha & Abu Rezeq, 2018; Manipuspika, 2018; Subekti, 2020; Jalleh et al., 2021; Malik et al., 2021). Some of them experienced a moderate level of communication apprehension (Abu Taha & Abu Rezeq, 2018; Subekti, 2020), and some others have high levels of this kind of fear (Mohamed Noor et al., 2015; Manipuspika, 2018; Jalleh et al., 2021). Compared to the two other types of anxiety, communication apprehension becomes the highest source of speaking anxiety (Sari, 2017). Specifically, this kind of anxiety is experienced by EFL students in a situation when they have to do specific communicative activities like doing conversations and group discussions (Jalleh et al., 2021), delivering presentations (Amiri & Puteh, 2018), or doing public speaking (Subekti, 2020). These findings were supported by the finding of Manipuspika (2018) that there was a positive relationship between students' English language anxiety and how willing they were to communicate.

In a few studies, the second type of anxiety, test anxiety, was also found as another source of fear. Sari (2017) found that it was the second-highest source of EFL speaking anxiety. However, in another study, it became the highest source of English language anxiety experienced by students (Sabri et al., 2021). For specific reasons like teachers' attitudes, test techniques, and testing environment (Gursoy & Arman, 2016), or affective problems like lack of motivation, lack of self-confidence, and fear of failure (Aydin et al., 2020), students experienced a moderate degree of test anxiety in an English language class. In another case, Cakici (2016) found that the higher the test anxiety level students have, the higher their level of foreign language anxiety would be.

Similar to the theoretical foundation already proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), the other type of English language anxiety experienced by students is the fear of negative evaluation by other people. Molnar and Crnjak (2018), Malik et al. (2021), and Sabri et al. (2021) found that students who studied English as a foreign language also had a certain degree of negative evaluation fear. They fear being in a situation where they think their peers and teachers may say something negative about their language performance. Interestingly, one of Malik et al.'s

findings showed that it was a significant predictor of the first type of fear, communication apprehension.

The findings of the previously discussed studies uncovered some reasons why EFL students experienced language anxiety. These could be specified into the following categories: (1) psychological barriers, (2) linguistic barriers, and (3) academic barriers (Malik et al., 2021). The first barriers are observed as things related to introversion, lack of self-confidence, or inferiority. The second category could be seen as things like not having adequate English words, lack of English vocabulary and structure knowledge, or inability to pronounce words correctly. The last barriers include fearing academic failure, not fulfilling their teachers' academic expectations, fearing authoritarian teachers, and fearing receiving negative assessments or comments from their teachers or peers.

In most related studies previously discussed, the findings generally supported the theoretical foundation stated by Horwitz et al. (1986). They primarily support that the fear of communicating ideas to others in English-speaking activities becomes the number one source of anxiety, followed by test anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation. However, one study revealed that test anxiety becomes the highest source of language anxiety students have in a language classroom (Sabri et al., 2021). To prove and support the practicality of the conceptual foundation, this current study aimed to determine if the population studied in this research experiences the same types of language anxiety when doing their communicative or speaking activities. Besides, it also aimed to prove if the types of anxiety experienced by the respondents of the population follow the same order of anxiety degree or if they might experience different types of anxiety in different order of degrees. Finally, it sought to explore which things cause students to feel the most or the least anxious about speaking English.

METHODS

The current research was conducted using a qualitative approach. Mainly, it was qualitative phenomenological research whose purpose was to describe the experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013) or to view their lived experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). In this research, the phenomenon studied was ESL students' speaking anxiety they experience in learning English as a foreign language. In addition, it sought to describe what types of anxiety they experience and how they experience them.

Population and Sample

The population studied in this research was the eleventh-grade students at a private vocational senior high school. This school is located in a village called Kaima, district of Kauditan, North Minahasa Regency, North Sulawesi Province, Indonesia. The sample taken in this study consisted of five students from two different majors. The sample was chosen using a purposeful snowball sampling technique (Creswell, 2013) and had met the minimum number of samples required (3 to 10) in a qualitative phenomenological study (Dukes, 1984). The respondents consisted of three male students majoring in light vehicle technique and three female students majoring in computer network technique.

Table 1. Respondents' Profiles

No	Respondent	Age	Gender	Major
1	Respondent 1	16	Female	Computer Network Technique
2	Respondent 2	17	Male	Light Vehicle Technique
3	Respondent 3	16	Male	Light Vehicle Technique
4	Respondent 4	16	Female	Computer Network Technique
5	Respondent 5	17	Female	Computer Network Technique

Instrument

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The instrument used in this study was an interview guide listing the respondents' central questions. The researchers asked five central questions and two sub-questions already prepared for questions 4 and 5.

1. Question 1

Do you feel anxious when speaking English?

2. Question 2

If yes, what things cause you to be anxious when speaking English?

3. Question 3

How does each of these things cause you to be anxious when speaking English?

4. Question 4

Which of the causes you mentioned is the most anxious for you?

Subquestion: Can you explain why?

5. Question 5

Which of the causes you mentioned is the least anxious for you?

Subquestion: Can you explain why?

Data Collection Procedure

For ethical considerations, the process of collecting data followed the following steps. First, the researcher contacted and asked for the principal's permission to conduct research at the school. After getting permission from the principal, the researcher contacted the English teacher of grade eleven and explained the data collection process through an interview. The teacher first suggested two students (respondents 1 and 2) for the interview.

To practice the purposeful snowball sampling procedure during the interview, they were asked to reference their classmates who could also be respondents in this research. From them, the researcher then got a few names of prospective respondents. Respondent 1 referred to respondents 4 and 5, while Respondent 2 referred to Respondent 3 for the interview. To avoid being influenced by the respondents' classmates' comments or other fears associated with their school environment, the researcher decided to visit each respondent at home by appointment.

Before each interview started, the researcher asked for each respondent's willingness to be recorded during the interview. During the interview process, an assistant helped the researcher control the recording while the questions were being asked. The interviews were recorded through a smartphone and then transferred to a laptop computer for data analysis.

Data Analysis

This study used a three-step qualitative analysis to analyze the data collected from the interview. This analysis comprises the following steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles et al., 2014). Before starting to do the data condensation, the data recordings were transcribed into scripts of interviews where the interview script of one respondent was separated from another to ease the categorization process.

Data Condensation

In this step, the researcher did a process of categorizing the scripts into similar ideas. Respondents' answers were categorized by analyzing each interview script's sentences, phrases, and words. Parts of sentences that contain similar ideas were compiled into one category. By doing this, the interview scripts were compiled into six categories or response ideas.

Data Display

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When the data condensation step was over, the compiled data scripts were ready for display. Each category was renamed with the most suitable phrase representing the idea found in each compilation group. Based on the similarities of ideas found in the scripts, the researcher displayed the responses into the following categories: (1) anxiety of speaking English, (2) fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, (3) fear of not making enough preparation, (4) fear of not knowing English words, (5) fear of lacking understanding of lessons, and (6) fear of being scolded by their teacher.

Conclusion Drawing

Finally, the categorized data proceeded to the drawing conclusion stage. The results were processed into findings, and a few conclusions were drawn based on the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
Results

The data reduction activities generated some results that answered the research problems. These results are presented in the order of the categories found in the activities. After analyzing the scripts of interviews with a sample of five respondents, the researcher decided that six categories were formed.

1. Feeling anxious when speaking English (5 respondents)
   Interviewer: *"Do you feel anxious when speaking English?"*
   Respondent 1: *"Mmm, yes* (a polite call to someone older in Indonesia).*"*
   Respondent 2: *"Yes, I do."*
   Respondent 3: *"Mmm, I do feel anxious."*
   Respondent 4: *"Yes, feeling anxious."*
   Respondent 5: *"Yes, I do. I feel anxious when speaking English."*

2. Fear of making mistakes and being laughed at (3 of 5 respondents)
   Respondent 1:
   "First, … I am afraid to use English because I fear being wrong. Usually, if I make a mistake, my friends will laugh. That is why I am embarrassed and afraid to speak English."
   Respondent 2:
   "Then, being afraid of making mistakes because when I make mistakes, my friends will make fun of me, and I feel afraid to speak English."
   Respondent 4:
   "Hmm, the first thing is if the teacher appointed me to speak or read in English, I think that when I was wrong, my friends would laugh at me, which was very embarrassing."
   "Mmm, the things that cause me anxious, mmm because of being afraid of my friends who laugh at me, and … when I make mistakes in speaking, my friends will usually laugh at me."

3. Fear of not making enough preparation (1 of 5 respondents)
   Respondent 1
   "The second was because there was no preparation. I usually, Kak, cannot answer the teacher's questions spontaneously because I usually use the dictionary on my cell phone. So, if the teacher asks and I have not translated, I will feel afraid."

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4. Fear of not knowing English words (1 of 5 respondents)
   Respondent 3
   "I am afraid because I do not know the meanings of some English words …."
   "Mmm, for the first, not knowing the English words makes me afraid to speak English. When I am asked to speak English, I do not know which words to use."

5. Fear of lacking understanding of lessons (1 of 5 respondents)
   Respondent 3
   "I'm afraid because … I'm unable to understand my teacher's teaching."
   "Second, I don't understand if my teacher uses more English when teaching because of my poor mastery of English vocabulary. So, I won't understand the more English my teacher uses in teaching."

6. Fear of being scolded by their teacher (2 of 5 respondents)
   Respondent 4
   "Mmm, the things that cause me anxious, mmm, because of being afraid of my friends who laugh at me, and I'm afraid my teacher will scold me when making mistakes."
   "… when I make mistakes in speaking, … the teacher will stare at me in such a way that I become anxious to speak English."
   Respondent 5:
   "Uh… because of my experience, Kak. I liked learning English, but once when learning, the teacher scolded me because I made a mistake in pronouncing a word. Emm, that was my mistake because the teacher had taught me to pronounce the word, but mmm… I always mispronounced it.

Which of these reasons causes the students to feel the most anxious when speaking English? The respondents gave different responses on, which caused them to feel the most anxious.
   Respondent 1:
   "Mmm… I think the most anxious one for me, Kak, uh… is when I don't make enough preparation."
   Respondent 2:
   "Mmm… the most influential fear is … when my friends laugh at me. Why? Because it will become a source of a bully to me."
   Respondent 3:
   "In my opinion, it is not knowing some vocabulary, Kak, because uh… when I'' speak uh… I do not know which words to use…."

   Respondent 4:
   "To me, uh… the one which makes me the most anxious is when my friends laugh at me. When they do so, automatically, I become very embarrassed, Kak. I cannot stand it being laughed at in that way. When this happens, I feel embarrassed that I do not want to try again."
   Respondent 5:

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> *"The most influential one has to do with pronouncing words. Uh… because of my experience, … the teacher scolded me because I made a mistake in pronouncing a word."*

Which of these reasons causes the students to feel the least anxious when speaking English? Like the most anxious causes, the respondents gave different responses on which caused them to feel the least anxious.

Respondent 1

> *"Mmm… for the least anxious one is the fear of making mistakes. Because uh…. I think making mistakes is normal. We are all still learning, right? So, this is less frightening because I think some other friends also make mistakes."*

Respondent 2

> *"I think the least anxious cause in speaking English is mispronunciation. Because mmm… still learning… So, when my pronunciation is incorrect, maybe, it's okay because our teacher will correct it."*

Respondent 3

> *"For the least anxious cause is …, lacking understanding when the teacher is teaching. It is the least anxious when speaking because when I don't understand, I usually ask the teacher."*

Respondent 4

> *"I think being scolded by the teacher is the least anxious for me when speaking English. Uh…because if the teacher scolds me, I make mistakes. Even if the teacher is angry, she'll correct what is wrong."*

Respondent 5

> *"Mmm…, the least influential one is making* mistakes*. Because it is common to make mistakes in the classroom and be laughed at by them (friends), I think it is customary to make mistakes because we are learning. So, if something is incorrect, it is normal.*

Discussion

The previously displayed results infer that the students interviewed in this study are anxious about making mistakes in speaking English because of a few reasons. First, the students are anxious because of the fear of being laughed at by their peers when making mistakes. Second, there is a fear that a student does not make enough preparation to speak English. Third, the fear of not knowing English words can also make a student feel anxious to speak. Fourth, a student may feel anxious when he or she poorly understands any lesson explained in English. Finally, the fear of being scolded by an English teacher due to a mispronunciation may probably cause a student anxious to speak. All these examples were likely found to be the common reasons for fear of speaking English experienced by the EFL students at the school.

The findings generated in this study seemed to support the classical theoretical foundation of foreign language anxiety in learning. Referring to the types of language learning anxiety proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), the three types of language fear are uniquely related and integrated into a clear compound of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors observed in language learning. Similar patterns were also encountered in the findings of this research. All the categories of anxiety found precisely refer to two related performance types of anxiety, communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation.

First, the fear of poorly understanding a teacher's explanation in English, not knowing which English words to use, and the fear of mispronouncing English words when speaking could be categorized as linguistic difficulties, as Malik et al. (2021) proposed. In the same way, these kinds of difficulties include the fear caused by lacking English vocabulary and poor pronunciation ability. These may lead to communication apprehension, and at the same time, it is also related to the fear of negative evaluation by teachers or peers. A student probably thinks that his or her

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English teacher or peers may negatively assess his or her ability to understand spoken language due to the poor understanding of oral instruction, lack of vocabulary, and inability to pronounce a word correctly.

Second, the fear of being laughed at by peers when making speaking mistakes and being scolded by an English teacher due to mispronunciation could be categorized as the fear of negative evaluation from other people. Students' low academic self-concept may cause the fear of being laughed at by peers. This academic self-concept is related to the language anxiety students experience, and those with a high level of academic concept conversely have a low level of language anxiety (Liu, 2012). Similarly, the fear of being scolded by the language teacher could also be categorized as the fear of negative evaluation when viewed from the students' perspectives. When viewed from the teacher's perspective, it is related to the role of an English teacher in an ESL classroom. To play this role, a language teacher may help students reduce their language learning anxiety by giving the necessary assistance they need (Fujii, 2016). Concerning what causes the students to feel the most anxious, the findings revealed a similarity to Malik et al. (2021) that the fear of negative evaluation becomes the predictor of communication apprehension in students. However, these findings contrast with what Sabri et al. (2021) found: test anxiety is the highest source of English language anxiety experienced by students.

CONCLUSION

A few conclusions are drawn as language learning implications to conclude what was found in this study. The vocational senior high school students studied in this research experience similar language anxiety when speaking. Most of what cause them to experience language anxiety is the fear of negative evaluation from others. This may be sourced from the negative assessments they receive from their classmates and their English teacher. Consequently, these students need a language classroom environment where their peers can understand each other strengths and be tolerant of speaking weaknesses other students have. In addition, the English teacher needs to be a motivator and gentle assistant, even a counselor, in helping the students with speaking difficulties in communicative activities to improve their ability. Under this condition, the students are expected to grow satisfactorily in a respectful language class.

Future research interested in studying similar variables can replicate this study or extend theirs to what this study had missed. One missing sub-variable worth receiving the attention of other research is test anxiety. Other research may focus their goals on studying this concerning taking an English oral test and finding out if students experience the same types of anxiety when taking such tests.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest to disclose.

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