

An Analysis of Students' Anxiety in Speaking at Prabumulih University

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Abstract

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The study aims at finding out the anxiety levels and possible factors that provoke the students' anxiety. The study was conducted on 55 information system students at Prabumulih University. To gain the data needed, a set of questionnaires consisting of 33 items was distributed to the students. The questionnaires were referred to as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), designed by Horwitz et al. (1986). It aims to predict learners' foreign language anxiety in the classroom in three domains: (1) communication apprehension; (2) test anxiety; and (3) fear of negative evaluation. Results show that (1) the students generally experienced a mildly anxious level with a mean of 90; (2) worry about failing exams, worry about making mistakes, low self-esteem, and less preparation are the factors that provoke the anxiety. The results reveal that the students' anxiety is at a level that can be managed easily, but if left unaddressed, it can lead to a higher level. Lecturers are expected to help students manage their anxiety by paying attention to the factors that contribute to it.

Kata Kunci:

Kecemasan,

FLCAS,

Berbicara.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui tingkat kecemasan dan faktor pemicu kecemasan mahasiswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris. Penelitian dilakukan pada 55 mahasiswa program studi Sistem Informasi Universitas Prabumulih. Data diperoleh dengan menggunakan instrumen penelitian yaitu kuesioner yang terdiri dari 33 pernyataan. Kuesioner tersebut mengacu pada Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) yang dirancang oleh Horwitz dkk. (1986). Hal ini bertujuan untuk memprediksi kecemasan mahasiswa dalam kegiatan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris keterampilan berbicara dalam tiga domain: (1) *communication apprehension*; (2) *test anxiety*; dan (3) *fear of negative evaluation*. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa (1) siswa secara umum mengalami tingkat kecemasan ringan dengan rata-rata 90; (2),

kekhawatiran gagal dalam ujian, khawatir melakukan kesalahan, rendah diri, dan kurangnya persiapan merupakan faktor pemicu kecemasan. Hasil ini menunjukkan bahwa kecemasan mahasiswa dalam berbicara berada pada level yang dapat dikelola dengan mudah namun jika tidak diatasi dapat mengarah ke tingkat yang lebih tinggi. Dosen diharapkan membantu mahasiswa mengelola kecemasan dengan memperhatikan faktor-faktor yang berkontribusi terhadap kecemasan mereka.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills are productive skills because they involve producing words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs to communicate and express thoughts and feelings verbally. Speaking skills play a vital role in getting engaged in conversations. Communication skills are often measured by how well learners speak. Kadamovna (2021:28) states that the importance of speaking skills is enormous for learners of any language. For the smooth running of any system, the speakers of a language need to be specially and purposefully trained in speaking skills. To become a well-rounded communicator, one needs to be proficient in each of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, but the ability to speak skilfully, provides the speaker with several distinct advantages.

Being skilful in speaking means speaking clearly and understandably. It is required to have adequate skills to communicate by finding the right words, putting them in proper order, and pronouncing them correctly so that the messages carried out are understood as Royani (2022:11) states that speaking concentrates more on communication, that is, how a message can get across from the speaker to the addresses and be well-understood. In addition, Swodo and Haya (2022) explain that as people communicate, there must be a speaker and interlocutor. Therefore, communication involves at least two people; sender and receiver. They need communication to exchange information, ideas, opinions, views, or feelings.

Speaking skills are indicated by several components emphasizing grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (Burns & Siegel, 2018; Harmer, 2001; Brown, 2004; Hill, 2020). Binus University (2017) argues that the four skills were

required to become a good speaker. Grammar knowledge is defined as what learners know about language rules and structures, and the acquisition of grammar is the acquisition of those rules and structures and the ability to use them in a communicative context (Nassaji, 2000:205). Vocabulary is the words used by a person or other entities to communicate with each other in all areas with the use of a language user's knowledge of words (Apdy & Arsifan, 2018:31). Pronunciation is the production of sounds that are used to convey meaning (Kráľová, et al, 2021:ix). Fluency in any language is the ability to be able to hold a conversation with confidence, to use the correct words and combinations accurately, and to do it all with easy confidence (Hill, 2020:xii).

Speaking anxiety is considered one of the obstacles to speaking. Anxiety is possibly the most important factor that obstructs and limits the process of learning a language commonly leading the learner to quit learning the given language (Ocriciano, 2021). Furthermore, he explains that anxiety is associated with negative feelings such as discomfort, ridicule and failure, frustration, apprehension, and anticipatory tension which is generally caused when a learner has to use the target language orally. He (2018:4) believes that foreign language speaking anxiety can be conceptualized as "an individual's fear or nervousness associated with another person or persons. According to Khusnia (2017), anxiety is related to self-focused, negative, and anxious cognition during interaction. Highly anxious students often have relatively negative self-concepts, underestimating the quality of their speaking ability compared to others. Anxiety in speaking, in summary, may be defined as an uncomfortable feeling of nervousness, or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to speak in English.

Some studies found that anxiety might have a negative contribution to students' speaking ability. Nur, et al (2021) carried out a study on students' speaking anxiety during online learning. They concluded that the causal factors of students' speaking anxiety were lack of confidence, shyness, fear of making mistakes, feeling insecure, lack of preparation, limited vocabulary, friends or classmates, embarrassment, and teacher characteristics. Similarly, this study

focuses on the factors that may contribute the students' speaking anxiety. The difference is in the educational stages of the participants. The participants of this study are higher education students.

Rodriguez (2022) carried out a correlational to find out whether there is a significant relationship between student's demographic profile and their anxiety level. She reports that gender contributes more to anxiety compared to the English level, and among the three domains, fear of negative evaluation is the highest cause of students' anxiety. Compared to her study, this study applies a qualitative design and does not group the participants based on gender. Similarly, the participants of the study are higher education students.

Pre-observation done at Prabumulih University revealed that students kept engaged during English class, but when they were asked to improve their speaking ability by having a conversation, they seemed to deal with anxiety. Thus, this study is aimed at finding out the level of anxiety and factors that may provoke their anxiety.

METHOD

The qualitative design was applied in this study. Data were gained from the questionnaires distributed to respondents. The respondents are 55 Information System students of Prabumulih University. The questionnaires were referred to the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz, et al. (1986). It aims to predict learners' foreign language anxiety in the classroom in three domains: (1) communication apprehension; (2) test anxiety; and (3) fear of negative evaluation. The organization of the questionnaire is shown in the following table:

Table 1: Structure of the questionnaire

No	Domains	Number in the Questionnaire
1	Communication apprehension	1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, 32
2	Test anxiety	3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28
3	Fear of negative evaluation	2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, 33

The 33 statements are rated with one of these scales: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. In analyzing the data, the statements are distinguished by positive and negative statements. The way of scoring is presented in the following table:

Table 2: The Scoring

Statements	Number	Scoring				
		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Positive	2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, 32	1	2	3	4	5
Negative	1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33	5	4	3	2	1

To categorize the level of anxiety, the score is converted based on Oetting's Scale (1983).

Table 3: Students' Speaking Anxiety Level

No	Range	Category
1	124-165	Very anxious
2	107-123	Anxious
3	87-107	Mildly anxious
4	66-86	Relaxed
5	33-65	Very Relaxed

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

a. Level of Anxiety

The first objective of the study is to find out the level of anxiety experienced by the third-semester Information System students. Data gained is calculated, and then the score is converted based on Oetting's Scale (1983). The result is presented in the following table:

Table 4: The Summary of Student's Scoring and Categorizing

No	Range	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1	124-165	Very anxious	-	-
2	107-123	Anxious	5	9.09%
3	87-107	Mildly anxious	27	49.09%
4	66-86	Relaxed	22	40.00%
5	33-65	Very Relaxed	1	1.82%
Total			55	100%

The table provides information about the level of anxiety. It is concluded that the main level of student anxiety is "mildly anxious", with 27 or 49.09 % of the respondents. The next level is "relaxed" with 22 or 40.00% of the respondents, 5 or 9.09% of the respondents experiencing an "anxious" level, 1 or 1.82% of them experiencing a "very relaxed", and no one experiencing a "very anxious" level. Overall, they experienced a "mildly anxious" level with a mean score of 90, which is something they can deal with easily but if left unaddressed, it can become severe.

b. Factors Provoking Students' Speaking Anxiety

Turning to the second objective, data gained were rated by using the Likert scale. The results are presented in three domains.

1. Communication Apprehension

One of the main sources of anxiety is communication apprehension. Akyıldız and Aslı (2021:163) explain that fundamentally, comprehension apprehension stems from the individual perception that the learner has some difficulties comprehending others and not being understood by people. Table 5 presents the recapitulation of students' communication apprehension.

Table 5: Recapitulation of Students' Communication Apprehension

No	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	9,52%	46,43%	28,57%	15,48%	0,00%
4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	11,90%	26,19%	9,52%	28,57%	23,81%
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	2,38%	36,90%	9,52%	34,52%	16,67%
14	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	19,05%	29,76%	35,71%	8,33%	7,14%
15	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting	50,00%	10,71%	27,38%	9,52%	2,38%
18	I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	5,95%	35,71%	39,29%	9,52%	9,52%

24	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	11,90%	34,52%	33,33%	14,29%	5,95%
27	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	21,43%	32,14%	20,24%	25,00%	1,19%
29	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	10,71%	33,33%	19,05%	30,95%	5,95%
30	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak a foreign language.	44,05%	14,29%	27,38%	11,90%	2,38%
32	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	8,33%	8,33%	41,67%	15,48%	26,19%

The table gives information about factors that may increase feelings of anxiety in terms of communication apprehension. It can be seen that most students will feel frightened if they do not understand what the teacher says. This factor is claimed to be one of the causes of anxiety, as 28.57% of the respondents agree and 23.81% strongly agree with this statement. Preparation also matters to the respondents. Speaking without preparation in advance is also proven to be one of the causes of anxiety. The table shows that 51.19% of the respondents say they start to panic when they have to speak without preparation in language class.

Regarding confidence, 41.67% of the respondents voted that they do not feel confident when speaking in a foreign class, but 39,29% of them chose to be neutral. 53,57% of the respondents do not get nervous or confused when speaking in their language class. 46,43% of them do not feel very self-conscious about speaking a foreign language in front of other students, but 33,33% of them choose to be neutral. Compared to their response to question number 9 about preparation, it is concluded that less self-confidence may be affected by less preparation. It seems that as long as they are well prepared, they are comfortable enough to speak. Their performance and their confidence depend on their preparation in advance.

2. Test Anxiety

The following table shows data about the students' test anxiety.

Table 6: Recapitulation of Students' Test Anxiety

No	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	8,33%	29,76%	23,81%	32,14%	5,95%
5	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	27,38%	5,95%	34,52%	2,38%	29,76%
6	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	42,86%	30,95%	15,48%	5,95%	4,76%
8	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	2,38%	9,52%	46,43%	13,10%	28,57%
10	I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	8,33%	14,29%	13,10%	29,76%	34,52%
11	I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	9,52%	19,05%	44,05%	16,67%	10,71%
12	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	15,48%	32,14%	15,48%	29,76%	7,14%
16	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	34,52%	20,24%	20,24%	21,43%	3,57%
17	I often feel like not going to my language class.	77,38%	1,19%	19,05%	0,00%	2,38%
20	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	10,71%	39,29%	13,10%	29,76%	7,14%
21	The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	33,33%	33,33%	21,43%	9,52%	2,38%
22	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	21,43%	10,71%	39,29%	5,95%	22,62%
25	Language class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind.	15,48%	21,43%	22,62%	25,00%	15,48%
26	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	25,00%	22,62%	29,76%	17,86%	4,76%

28	When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	11,90%	21,43%	40,48%	4,76%	21,43%
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Turning to test anxiety, the table reveals that most students worry about failure in language class. 64,29% of them worry about the consequences of failing. However, the table also indicates that the majority of students feel comfortable during language class. 36.90% of the students agree that they can feel their hearts pounding when they're going to be called on in language class. This is lower than the percentage of the students who vote otherwise (50.00%). Preparation seems to be one of the factors that affects anxiety. 54.76% of the students do not agree with the statement, "Even if I am well prepared for a language class, I feel anxious about it." It can be concluded that the majority of students feel pleasant enough during the language class, but they worry about the consequences of failing the language test. They need plenty of time to prepare and get ready for a test.

3. Fear of Negative Evaluation

The following table shows information about the students' fear of negative evaluation.

Table 7: Recapitulation of Students' Negative Evaluation

No	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
2	I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	40,48%	11,90%	17,86%	11,90%	17,86%
7	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	8,33%	30,95%	8,33%	38,10%	14,29%
13	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	19,05%	29,76%	35,71%	8,33%	7,14%
19	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	27,38%	19,05%	28,57%	11,90%	13,10%
23	I always feel that the other students speak a foreign language better than I do.	7,14%	21,43%	19,05%	36,90%	15,48%
31	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	23,81%	26,19%	16,67%	20,24%	13,10%

33	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	4,76%	30,95%	17,86%	33,33%	13,10%
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The table shows that in terms of fear of negative evaluation, worry about making mistakes in a language class is the main factor that may raise the students' anxiety. 52, 38% of them agree that they worry about making mistakes. The same percentage also goes to questions number 7 and 23. The two questions aimed at getting information about their self-esteem. 52.38% of the students feel that the other students are better.

Yet, the students think that preparation is a matter in language class. 46.43% of them vow that they may be nervous when the language teacher asks questions that they haven't prepared in advance. Interestingly, the table shows that the evaluation of the teacher does not bother them. 46, 43% of them state that they are not afraid that their language teacher is ready to correct every mistake they make, and 28,57% choose to be neutral.

The study has obtained its objectives to find out the level of anxiety and factors that may provoke their anxiety. It yields that the students experienced a "mildly anxious" level with a mean score of 90. British Council (2023) states that people often feel anxious about speaking in front of classmates, speaking to native speakers, making mistakes, and various other things. It is very common, but if the worries stop learners from speaking, then they might miss opportunities to practice their English. To help reduce anxiety, it is necessary to find out factors that may provoke the anxiety. The result also yields some factors that contribute to students' anxiety. These factors include; worry about failing an exam, feeling fear when they do not understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language, worry about making mistakes, low self-esteem, and less preparation.

Worrying about failing an exam is one of the factors that may increase the students' anxiety. The University of Melbourne (n.d.) argues that this may related to a lack of adequate preparation. Teachers should inform them about the schedule of examinations to let them get prepared. Bhatti and Memon (2016) argue that

formative assessment and feedback will help overcome the EFL learner's fear of getting lower marks or failing language tests.

Fear of not understanding what the teacher is saying in a foreign language also contributes to the students' anxiety. To reduce this, teachers are suggested to reverse the pattern of language skills teaching and give more attention to the communicative approach (Bhatti and Memon, 2016). Related to the feelings of worry about making mistakes, the British Council (2023) suggests that learners should accept problems and mistakes. It suggests that teachers encourage them to face their fears because in learning a language, they will have problems and make mistakes along the way. Making a mistake can teach them a lot and help to improve their skills. It is necessary to remember that good speakers are not people who speak perfectly all the time. Instead, good speakers can solve communication problems when they occur. Moreover, Bhatti and Memon (2016) recommend that teachers should prepare students to accept the fact that the process of learning a language is impossible without making mistakes. They have to make mistakes to acquire communication skills.

Turning to low self-esteem, students are necessary to think positively. British Council (2023) suggests that students need to tell themselves positive things *I can do it. I've got this. It will be OK!* Whether they are a beginner or an advanced-level speaker, thinking negatively will limit what they do. Thinking positively will help them to do their best and improve. In addition, Tripudiyana (2022) states that English teachers should assist students in increasing self-esteem in the learning process as well as in real life and pay more attention to students' potential in speaking skills. They also should create safe, peaceful, confident classes, provide motivation, and reduce anxiety so that students can practice and improve students' speaking skills. Students are also expected not to compare themselves to others as Mind (2022) suggests. What other people often choose to share about their lives is not always the full picture.

Being prepared could help students avoid the build-up of anxiety. Teachers should help them prepare both for speaking practice and exams. Teachers should inform them of the study plan or timetable. Hence, they can begin studying as

soon as possible. Adequate preparation helps students perform well on both. Wrongdoings in this field could lead to test anxiety in students (UNIS Hanoi, n.d.)

Adopted what Bhatti and Memon (2016) recommend, teachers suggest creating a comfortable, friendly, learning-supportive environment class that may prove helpful in alleviating learners' anxiety which can result in the active participation of learners in language class enjoyable and productive. To reduce anxious feelings, teachers also should help students look for a good partner in speaking practice. Help them connect with a supportive partner with whom they feel comfortable speaking with. (Mind, 2022; British Council, 2023; The University of Melbourne, n.d.).

To help reduce the students' anxiety, the study proposes some recommendations. Firstly, to reduce the worry about failing an exam, it is expected that lecturers inform them about the schedule of the examination to let them get prepared, and apply the formative assessment and feedback. Secondly, lecturers are also expected to give more attention to communicative approaches to reduce the fear of not understanding what the teacher is saying in a foreign language. Next, students are expected to realize that mistakes naturally occur during the learning process. Hence, lecturers need to tell them that instead of avoiding such problems, accepting and facing them may help them acquire speaking skills.

In addition, lecturers should assist students in increasing their self-esteem by telling them to always think positively, never compare themselves to others, and never think that others are better. It also suggests that teachers help students find a supportive partner in speaking practice during class. Finally, it is also suggested that lecturers inform the students what to do next so that they may prepare ahead of time and thus get ready for both speaking practice and examination.

CONCLUSION

The study measured the level of anxiety of the Information System students at Prabumulih University. The students' anxiety level is "mildly anxious" with a mean score of 90. Factors that contribute to the students' anxiety in speaking are

worry about failing an exam, feeling fear when they do not understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language, worry about making mistakes, low self-esteem, and less preparation.

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