

English Language Anxiety Among Indonesian Senior High School Students

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Abstract

Anxiety is an important problem in English learning that teachers should acknowledge because it can hinder students' learning development and negatively anticipating outcome in the future, preventing them from improving. Because of this problem, this research was conducted in order to reveal how anxious the students are during English learning by finding out their anxiety levels. This quantitative research used a questionnaire adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to collect the anxiety level result from 121 students. The result revealed that the majority of the students experienced a medium level of anxiety across all questionnaires. On the other hand, individual questionnaire answers revealed that students experienced higher anxiety when they did not understand what the teacher said, were unprepared to speak in front of their peers, and during the test. Overall result suggested that teaching a foreign language to students require proper treatment based on students' need.

Keywords: Anxiety, EFL, Senior High School Students

INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most influential languages in this modern time. Considered as the first international language, it has the ability to connect people around the world in various departments (Rao, P. S. 2019). Everyone from different background uses English to communicate and exchange information in business, politics, information, education, and entertainment. It has become a very important language for those who seek wider opportunities, especially those who want to work outside their home country. It became possible to access a wider range of communicative environment in various forms such as international forums, online groups, and explore information that are exclusively available in English.

Folse (2004) stated that learning a language requires the learner to study various aspects of the language structure. Learners must understand the rules of certain language and how they function such as word formation and conveying a message into the appropriate context if they ever need to use the target language in a real-life situation. A learner who wants to communicate using English means they must invest their time on paying attention to various aspects that make up the English language as well as practice it in order to improve their English skills. Understanding aspects such as pronunciation, writing system, spelling, vocabulary, and many other aspects will help the learner to master the

language skills needed for communication. These language skills consist of reading, listening, writing, and speaking. They are the four primary skills in language learning that must be studied by individuals who are planning to learn a new language especially EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners.

Speaking is one of the language skills that is often used in real-life situation where we communicate with each other orally. Considered as one of the productive skills next to writing, Laksana (2016) explained that speaking is a skill that is used to express an individual's thoughts using language appropriately in order to deliver or receive information from another individual. Being able to speak appropriately depending on various contexts will help an individual to understand and share their thoughts towards each other or even act upon information being shared. The conversation between speakers will be smooth and easy to understand with clear direction between each speaker. Mastering speaking skill also enables anyone to pursue careers that require a higher level of speaking capabilities such as lawyers, politicians, tour guide, teacher, diplomat, and so on.

Learning the English language, however, often poses a challenge, especially among EFL students. The speaker often must think about what to say in a short time before expressing what they are thinking. Afisa (2015) revealed that there are four problems that students face in learning how to speak English. These problems are low vocabulary,

pronunciation, grammar, and confidence. Without adequate vocabulary and grammatical knowledge, learners will have a difficult time to communicate orally, especially when learning foreign language. Students will also often face disturbances during their English-speaking experiences such as incorrect pronunciation in unfamiliar words, stuttering, and inappropriate pause intervals between words. Even with that knowledge about English, speaking can be very difficult to communicate if students don't have the confidence to say it orally. Standing in front of other individuals can be overwhelming for some students and this may lead to speaking anxiety.

Anxiety is an important problem that everyone should acknowledge, especially EFL students. Craske et al. (2011) explained that anxiety is a future-oriented state of mind of someone's readiness to handle negative event possibilities. This negative event that might happen in the future may stem from various aspects depending on each student's past experiences which means each student will have different levels of anxiety that EFL teachers have to take into account in their lessons. This problem cannot be ignored because it can hinder students' ability to learn to speak and express their ideas and if this continues, it will discourage students to learn English speaking even further. Learning to speak is already a difficult task and thus learning to speak using a foreign language without feeling anxious poses an important challenge among a lot of EFL learners. Therefore, this study is conducted to figure out senior high school students' English anxiety level in learning EFL.

There are similarities between foreign language anxiety with 3 performance related anxieties which are communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al. 1986.) Su (2021) explained that communication apprehension or communication anxiety is one's fear or anxiety level connected with either anticipated or real communication with another individual. Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that communication apprehension is "a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communication with people." Test anxiety is another term for unexpected apprehension of someone's ability to reach success in their studies, fear of getting assessed, and uneasiness from possible consequences (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023.) They also added that test anxiety involves someone's negative thoughts, anticipation, and prediction prior to things such as assignment, test, and examination. Fear of negative evaluation according to Basith et al. (2019) is a concern of assessment, fear of bad evaluation, and negative expectation coming from someone else. This expectation can make someone negatively perceive how others see

them if they make mistakes in front of their peers or their teacher.

There are several studies involving foreign language anxiety in students. Kruk (2018) investigated about the changes of anxiety level in one semester and found out that language anxiety not only can change over a long period of time but also during one class and one language lesson to the next. The anxiety level during long-term investigation reaches its highest peak at the beginning and the end of the semester. Some stable anxiety level also happened over several sequences of language lessons in that semester, albeit with some sudden fluctuations that happened in between both before or after the lessons. For short-term investigation, students' anxiety level reached the highest at the beginning of the lesson and the lowest at the end.

Jiang and Dewaele (2019) provided detail on students' anxiety experience in the class. They stated that there are different sources that may cause anxiety to students such as specific classroom activities, tasks, teacher, and their friends are some of the results provided. Tests and exams became the most anxiety-inducing aspect that causes students to worry about themselves while the rest came from teachers and friends. Han et al. (2022) revealed that foreign classroom language anxiety negatively impacts students' academic success. They also stated that students who constantly feel worried struggle academically. This is commonly established in many studies with one common aspect of foreign language classroom anxiety also including a substantial speaking anxiety element. One of the results from similar investigation includes the hindrance of language development during learning due to anxiety. There are various kinds of language anxiety-related researches that have been conducted. However, the majority of them cover language skill specific anxiety such as speaking and writing. Other studies also involved university and primary school students as the subjects. There is a need to conduct research that measure language anxiety level in the classroom environment specifically EFL students in urban senior high school in a developing country like Indonesia. Therefore, the current study is going to explore students' anxiety levels in learning English in an urban senior high school classroom environment. Based on the background that has been mentioned above, here is the research question that is proposed:

1. What are Indonesian senior high school students' anxiety level in learning English?

METHODS

This study aims to identify students' anxiety levels during their EFL learning. In order to achieve this, this study used a quantitative method. Quantitative is a research method in which sets of variables are tested by examining the relationship among variables (Creswell 2014.) The numbered data result of these variables was measured with a statistical procedure. The data were analyzed using descriptive quantitative analysis to figure out the mean score and standard deviation.

The population of this study were 10 classes of 10th grade senior high school students in one urban senior high school in East Java. Students from 4 classes consisting of 30-40 participants each were asked to participate in this research; The total sample were 121 students. This participant availability that involved students is considered to be a type of sampling called convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a type of sampling that involves picking the nearest person as a research participant until the sample size needed has been reached (Cohen et al. 2000.)

The instrument that was used for this study used questionnaire adapted from Berowa (2018) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) based on Park's (2014) scale. The scale consisted of 33 items using 5-points likert scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5) to gather information regarding students' problems when learning English. These questionnaires were divided into 3 aspects consisting of 8 questions for communication anxiety, 5 questions for test anxiety, and 20 questions for fear of negative evaluation.

The data collection was conducted in a span of 1-2 weeks. Students were asked to participate and fill out the questionnaire form that had been created and shared to them. The questionnaire contained close-ended questions about students' anxiety in learning English in the classroom. This questionnaire was created using Google Form before distributing the link to the students with the approval of the teacher. A Google form was used due to its efficiency on collecting the data.

After the participants filled out the form, the researcher analyzed the data using descriptive quantitative analysis by determining the total mean and standard deviation in order to find the anxiety level of the students. The mean score of each classification is presented using tables from SPSS with mean score interpretation divided between very low and very high anxiety levels.

Table 1

Anxiety Level Mean Score

Anxiety Level Mean Score	
Mean	Level
1.0 – 1.79	Very Low
1.80 – 2.59	Low
2.60 – 3.39	Medium
3.40 – 4.19	High
4.20 – 5.0	Very High

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results of the qualitative research conducted on the perceptions of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students regarding the use of English movies as a learning medium to improve their oral communication skills. The results are organized thematically based on the research questions, are based on data collected from open-ended pre-interview questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with seven categorized participants from a university in Surabaya. The approach carried to analyze the data is thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the steps described in the previous chapter. The findings are divided into three sections based on the research questions.

Table 2

Overall Students Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Level

Anxiety Level Mean Score			
Mean	Level	Number of Participants	Percentage
1.0 – 1.79	Very Low	3	2,48%
1.80 – 2.59	Low	26	21,49%
2.60 – 3.39	Medium	57	47,11%
3.40 – 4.19	High	33	27,27%
4.20 – 5.0	Very High	2	1,65%

The table above showed that students experienced certain degrees of anxiety in learning EFL. The majority of participants anxiety levels are medium that consisted of 57 students (47,11%) with the lowest mean score of 2,61 (participant 113) and the highest mean score of 3,38 (participant 90.) High anxiety is the second most anxiety level that students experienced with 33 students (27,27%) followed by low anxiety with 26 students (21,49%.) Lastly, the least number of students experienced both ends of the anxiety level scale with 3 students experienced very low anxiety (2,48%) and 2 students experienced very high

anxiety (1,65%.) Although certain questionnaires showed results where students experienced high and low anxiety, in general students experienced anxiety to a medium degree during their lesson whether in communication, examination, or expectations from others.

Table 3*Communication Anxiety Level*

Anxiety Level Mean Score			
Mean	Level	Number of Participants	Percentage
1.0 – 1.79	Very Low	6	4,96%
1.80 – 2.59	Low	24	19,83%
2.60 – 3.39	Medium	54	44,63%
3.40 – 4.19	High	33	27,27%
4.20 – 5.0	Very High	4	3,31%

The table shows the anxiety level of students in communication anxiety aspect that consists of 8 questionnaires. Majority of students experienced medium anxiety level in communication anxiety with 54 participants (44,63%.) Furthermore, the lowest mean score for medium level is 2,625 (participant 26, 66, 103) and the highest mean score is 3,375 (participant 2, 23, 25, 32, 41, 53, 54, 62, 71, 91, 100, 119.) In addition to communication anxiety mean score, the finding also shows that students have the highest anxiety score in questionnaire number 2 “I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class”, with a mean score of 3,41 which falls under high anxiety. This suggests that students’ unpreparedness to perform a communication in front of the class can lead to a high level of anxiety. The overall result revealed that, in general, students experienced medium level of anxiety in communication. However, it is also important not to ignore certain problems that may cause students to be highly anxious in communication in order to allow students to share their thoughts and ideas clearer, better, and confidently during the lesson.

Table 4*Test Anxiety Level*

Anxiety Level Mean Score			
Mean	Level	Number of Participants	Percentage
1.0 – 1.79	Very Low	6	4,96%
1.80 – 2.59	Low	28	23,14%
2.60 – 3.39	Medium	55	45,45%
3.40 – 4.19	High	27	22,31%

4.20 – 5.0	Very High	5	4,13%
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The table shows the anxiety level of students in test anxiety aspect that consists of 5 questionnaires. Medium is also the most common level of anxiety in this aspect with 55 students that experienced it (45,45%.) On top of that, the lowest mean score for medium anxiety is 2,6 (participant 3, 13, 21, 40, 45, 54, 72, 80, 88, 95, 120) and the highest mean score is 3,2 (participant 11, 14, 20, 23, 25, 36, 37, 52, 66, 75, 77, 84, 86, 87, 89, 104.) The questionnaire answers revealed that students’ anxiety level is neutral with the highest mean score of 3,3 for questionnaire number 9 and 11. Students’ answers on those questionnaires also revealed how the students feel towards test or examinations in EFL. Students have the highest level of anxiety in questionnaire number 9 “I worry about making mistakes in English class” and 11 “I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.” This suggests that although the students felt neither too confident nor too anxious about their experience of the English test, problems around students’ unpreparedness and uncertainty such as making mistakes or dealing with the consequences of failing the class still haunt students and cause a high level of anxiety.

Table 5*Fear of Negative Evaluation Level*

Anxiety Level Mean Score			
Mean	Level	Number of Participants	Percentage
1.0 – 1.79	Very Low	4	3,31%
1.80 – 2.59	Low	20	16,53%
2.60 – 3.39	Medium	64	52,89%
3.40 – 4.19	High	31	25,62%
4.20 – 5.0	Very High	2	1,65%

The table shows the anxiety level of students in fear of negative evaluation aspect that consists of 20 questionnaires. This aspect has the highest amount of medium level of anxiety among students compared to previous aspects with 64 students (52,89%.) In addition, the lowest mean score for medium is 2,6 (participant 18, 23, 35) and the highest mean score is 3,35 (participant 2, 64.) The questionnaire result also shows students have high anxiety level with a mean score of 3,6 for questionnaire number 15, 19, and 27. Based on questionnaire number 15 and 19, it may suggest that students’ perception where they think their peers are better at learning and speaking English make them anxious

because of the possibility of receiving negative evaluation from their peers. On the other hand, questionnaire number 27 suggests students' anxiety may be caused by the students and teacher in the class who might caught them forgetting something important during the lesson. It seems that there was certain degree of standard that students expect when they learn EFL and thought that their peers are also aware of it hence their high expectation towards their peers. This may explain why students are afraid if their teacher and peers might catch them making mistakes during the lesson.

The American Psychiatric Association (2022) stated that it's typical for individuals with anxiety to overestimate the situations they are trying to avoid. They usually think negatively about uncertain things that they are going to face are worse than it actually is. Meanwhile, the result revealed that the majority of students experienced medium level of anxiety across 33 questionnaires divided into 3 questionnaires with a total mean of 3,01 among all students. This means that students generally experience adequate anxiety level for communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation where they neither overestimate nor underestimate the problem that they are facing in EFL classroom. Furthermore, the result of this research revealed similarities with research from Berowa (2018) where majority of the students' anxiety level are medium with total mean of where students also neither acknowledge nor deny certain anxiety level towards English language. Berowa (2018) also added that just enough level of anxiety is important in order to maintain students' motivation and effort in learning. This implies that while students may perceive the English lesson with anxiety to certain degree, students are able to perform English lesson activities without any disruption from the anxiety because the learning experience given to the students are neither too underwhelming that it can cause student to lose motivation due to the lesson lacks any meaningful challenge nor too overwhelming that it can cause students to feel confused and inadequate because the lesson is too difficult or imposing. The overall result suggests that students' anxiety levels have to be balanced to ensure that their ability to learn EFL are not impeded both from the lack of meaningful activity and emotionally perceive the EFL learning negatively which may halt their learning process.

On the other hand, it has been discovered that the findings of this research are slightly different with Hu et al. (2024) result where the students experienced medium and, in some cases, medium to higher level of anxiety with comparable result to previous research similar to it. It is important to note that the result came from subjects with

different educational stages. The research also pointed out that higher educational stage and high-stake assignment from school examinations cause students to experience higher level of anxiety. This suggests that there are a lot of variables that can affect students' classroom anxiety level in learning a foreign language.

It has been established that communication anxiety is a distinct complex of thoughts, feelings, and behaviors associated to classroom language learning (Cong & Li 2022) that may influence an individual to anticipate future event negatively (Li 2021.) Meanwhile students' responses for communication anxiety questionnaires revealed that students felt neutral or uncertain rather than negatively towards future event revealing their medium anxiety level. Several answers imply that students felt uncertain about how they feel both about themselves and in front of their peers when it comes to communicating in foreign language. This uncertainty might be the key in understanding students' communication anxiety as the result of questionnaires number 2 and 7 showed that a lot of students tends to panic if they have to do impromptu speech and started to worry if they do not understand what the teacher said during the lesson. This may suggest that students will experience higher level of anxiety the more they feel unprepared and uncertain from certain foreign lesson activity.

Test anxiety has been one of the most common problems among students (Hyseni Duraki & Hoxha 2018) and students' responses on questionnaire number 9 and 11 highlighted this problem. Almost half of the entire participants fear that they might make a mistake in an EFL class and more than one-third of the participants were worried about its consequences. These findings are in line with Hu et al. (2024) result where students with higher education cause more anxiety level and examination is correlated to anxiety because of its higher stake that students have to face at some point in their learning process. It seems like anxiety is an expected experience for students at any point during the examination process due to its nature where students' knowledge of the subject is being evaluated to make sure they understand the subject they are learning.

Fear of negative evaluation comes from how students negatively perceive situations where they speak to their peers or teacher if they make a mistake (Downing et al. 2020.) While students' responses for this aspect shows that students have adequate anxiety when it comes to fear of negative evaluation, there are certain answers that stand out. Students' responses for questionnaire number 15 and 19 tells us that students believe their peers are better than them in English lesson and speaking. This high expectation to their peers might be one of the contributors

in why students are afraid to perform in class. Students think that their friends are better than them and will point out their mistake if it happens.

CONCLUSION

This research explored the anxiety level of EFL students in an urban senior high school in East Java, Indonesia. It shows that students' overall anxiety level is medium (47,11%). Furthermore, most of the students experienced medium level of anxiety across 3 aspects of foreign language anxiety with 44,63% for communication anxiety, 45,45% for test anxiety, and 52,89% for fear of negative evaluation. This revealed that the majority of students experienced neither anxiety nor ease during the foreign classroom activity. This suggests that students are neither too worried about foreign language classroom activity too much that it might apprehend and prevent them from learning further nor do they feel too comfortable with the lesson which can make them having a hard time to pay attention due to boredom and underestimate the subject. On the other hand, it is important to note that despite the overall medium degree of anxiety, there are certain things that can cause students to be highly anxious such as unpreparedness and uncertainty that need to be identified so that students can have better EFL learning experiences.

The scope of this research can be limited and it is advised that future researcher uses different approach for their study around English language anxiety. Research method like qualitative approach by directly interviewing the students may give a better, more accurate result due to its open-ended nature. Interview will also provide a more in-depth explanation from the students because the information is collected from the firsthand accounts' thoughts and feelings towards EFL. Future studies may also try to increase the number of participants to further increase the accuracy of the result. Participants may also be gathered from different kinds of high schools in order to find the level of anxiety that students experience in that school and make a comparison out of it. EFL classroom lesson need to be thoughtfully designed to be balanced for the students in mind with activities that are neither too laid back that students won't feel challenged enough and lose motivation nor too strict and overwhelming that it can cause students to feel inadequate and doesn't have what it takes to learn English. It is also important to note that educators should be aware of certain aspects that may cause anxiety no matter how small it is because it directly affects students' behavior, experience, and overall performance in the class because the moment students feel uncomfortable with sharing their ideas in the class, it is very likely that their development will be halted. While achieving the optimal level of anxiety in the classroom is

not easy, it is important to understand that ultimately students need to be taught with proper treatment and methods in order to reduce their anxiety during the lesson so that their development isn't halted due to their fear of the English lesson.

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