



## LANGUAGE ANXIETY EXPERIENCED BY ENGLISH DEPARTMENT FRESHMEN OF WIJAYA KUSUMA UNIVERSITY SURABAYA

Ribut Surjowati<sup>1✉</sup>, Wahyu Diny Sujannah<sup>2</sup>, Bkti Wirawati<sup>3</sup>

Wijaya Kusuma Surabaya University, Jl. Dukuh Kupang XXV, Surabaya, Indonesia<sup>1,2,3</sup>

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### Abstract

This research aims to describe the language anxiety level and type frequently experienced by English Department first-year students of Wijaya Kusuma University Surabaya. It used a case study as the research design to explain the phenomenon observed. The research participants were twenty-eight English Department first-year students of Wijaya Kusuma University Surabaya. Each of them was given a five-point Likert scale questionnaire adapted from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The findings unveiled that most first-year students experienced moderate language anxiety levels in which they frequently experienced the fear of negative evaluation. It is suggested that future researchers explore the students' anxiety levels and types by considering their learning proficiency and habit.

## INTRODUCTION

Language anxiety is an experience that almost all learners encounter when learning a foreign language. It has been considered one factor that hinders the success of language learning. According to MacIntyre & Gardner (1994), language anxiety is the feeling of tension and concern specifically related to second language contexts, such as speaking, listening, and learning. The students who feel anxious may avoid asking and answering the questions given by the lecturers. In this sense, different learners may experience different degrees of language anxiety (E. Horwitz, 2001). Those with high language anxiety will likely feel very anxious and tense during the teaching and learning process. Therefore, it will hinder them from being engaged more and actively participating in the class, affecting their learning achievement. It is in line with the findings of the research conducted by Alqahtani (2019), revealing that language anxiety had negative impacts on Saudi English Foreign Language (EFL) learners' proficiency. It interfered with and slowed down the process of acquiring a foreign language. In the same vein, the results of the research carried out by Taye (2018) unveiled that language anxiety levels brought detrimental effects on the Ethiopian Foreign Language and Literature (FLL) students' performance in the classroom. It made them reluctant to communicate in class and, consequently, delayed their language acquisition development.

Some previous studies about language anxiety were carried out, focusing on the level and sources of foreign language learning anxiety. In these studies, firstly, the researcher found that the anxiety level is moderate. The causes are communication apprehension, anxiety about English classes, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Al-Khasawneh, 2016). Secondly, the researcher found that higher education students have a moderate level of language anxiety in the test anxiety component and fear of negative evaluation component. However, they have a high level of language anxiety in the communication apprehension component (Al-Saggaf et al., 2021). The third research is about the type and the level of speaking anxiety faced by the EFL first-year students in the English Language Educational Program of the English Department at Universitas Negeri Padang. It found that the level of students' speaking anxiety is in the middle level. Respondents faced the fear of speaking tests, communication apprehension, and feedback from peers and lecturers (Putri & Marlina, 2019).

The current research differs from the previous ones since they focused more on the students' language anxiety level and type in the offline learning context. In contrast, this research was conducted in the online learning context. The researchers believe that the research findings are beneficial for the lecturers as guidance to determine the appropriate learning activities and choose the best methods to make the students feel comfortable during the

teaching and learning process. It is essential to identify their anxiety as they were not used to speaking English in high school so that the lecturers will be able to determine the interesting learning activities that decrease their anxiety.

The language anxiety levels and types experienced by each student might be different. Thus, it is crucial for the lecturers to know more about those to design appropriate learning activities and find the appropriate strategies to make the students feel less anxious during the learning process, especially for the English Department first-year students, which is based on the interview carried out, they were not accustomed to speaking English during their secondary schools. By enrolling in the English Department, they are demanded to actively communicate in English with their classmates and lecturers during the class. It may trigger language anxiety, and if not appropriately overcome, it will obstruct them from improving their language skills.

Finally, based on the explanation above, the researchers are interested in performing the research aiming to describe the language anxiety level and type frequently experienced by English Department first-year students of Wijaya Kusuma University Surabaya.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter provides an overview of the literature which supports the data analysis. It discusses the definition and types of language anxiety.

### **Language Anxiety**

E. K. Horwitz et al. (1986) define language anxiety as a clear complex of self-awareness, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors associated with language learning in the classroom due to the uniqueness of the language learning process. In this case, if learners feel afraid to make mistakes and be corrected by others, they may feel less motivated to attend the English class. Consequently, it might become a problem for them to gain, recall, and produce a new language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). In fact, many studies have illustrated the negative effects of language anxiety on student performance. The findings of the correlational research by Salehi & Marefat (2014) depicted that language anxiety and test anxiety caused harmful effects on language learning. As a consequence, preventive actions should be taken to mitigate those impacts. Similarly, the research results by Jawad, Z.A. & Al-Obaydi (2015) revealed that language anxiety affected the students' oral English performance quality. In the end, those who were apprehensive about talking in English were less fluent than others.

### ***Types of Language Anxiety***

E. K. Horwitz et al. (1986) divide language anxiety into three types, namely:

### *Communication Apprehension*

Communication apprehension is the tendency to stay away from communication, if possible, or suffer various emotions related to anxiety when one has to be engaged in communication (McCroskey et al., 1976). In this case, the students may feel nervous when they have to speak English in public and prefer to be passive and silent in class. A correlational study by Manipuspika (2018) revealed that a positive correlation was observed between the students' language anxiety and willingness to communicate, in which those with high language anxiety tended to be less willing to voice out their ideas. Similarly, Sham & Azmi (2018) also mention that communication apprehension influences the learners' self-confidence to publicly express their opinions. When they have low self-esteem, they may do anything to avoid asking or answering questions and having a conversation. In the end, if they feel apprehensive about communicating their ideas, it may hinder them from developing their language skills, especially speaking, since this skill is productive and needs to be practiced regularly.

### *Fear of Negative Evaluation*

Fear of negative evaluation is the concern about other people's judgment, despair of their negative appraisal, avoidance of situations related to the evaluations, and the expectation that others would judge themselves negatively (Watson & Friend, 1969). In this case, the students may worry when they commit a mistake, and others will correct it since they are afraid of being judged as incompetent and less proficient. Ansari (2015) opines that those learners who are uneasy about being evaluated negatively deem "language errors as a threat to their image instead of a natural part of the learning process" (p. 39). Instead of taking the opportunities to learn from the mistakes they commit, they are more concerned, feeling anxious about losing face in front of their peers and lecturers. Besides, Rafek et al. (2018) state that learners will lack confidence and not be able to perform well in class if they feel that they are being watched and observed. They are apprehensive that others will try to point out every error they make and laugh at them whenever they commit mistakes.

#### 1. Test anxiety

Fear of test anxiety is "a kind of anxiety in accordance with the performance resulting from the fear to failure" (E. K. Horwitz et al., 1986). In this case, students feel worried they will get low scores and fail the test, especially those with low-level language proficiency and limited vocabulary mastery. Aydin et al. (2021) mention that test anxiety negatively impacts the student's motivation and performance in learning. It makes them procrastinate and less motivated to study the content of the exam. Research carried out by Trifoni & Shahini (2011)

showed that test anxiety made the students commit more mistakes and forget the things they had studied before the test. Their anxiety may lower their concentration during the exam and make them fail to recall their memory regarding the materials. Accordingly, the results may not reflect their actual competence. As Aydin (2009) stated, test anxiety may obstruct learners from demonstrating their real competence in the test results. Consequently, it will be difficult for the lecturers to find their students' real achievements.

## METHOD

This research used a case study as the research design since it focused only on a particular phenomenon faced by a specific group, namely English Department first-year students of Wijaya Kusuma University Surabaya. As stated by Ary et al. (2010), a case study focuses on “a single unit, such as one individual, one group, one organization, or one program to arrive at a detailed description and understanding of the case” (p. 29). The research participants were twenty-eight English Department freshmen of Wijaya Kusuma University Surabaya, consisting of students from different cultural backgrounds. They were chosen since, based on the preliminary study conducted by interviewing a group of students, the researchers found that they did not get used to speaking English during secondary school. At the same time, nowadays, they are required to actively communicate using English with their classmates and lecturers during the teaching and learning process since they enroll in the English Department.

The data were obtained from the English Department first-year students' responses to the five-point Likert scale questionnaire adopted from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale developed by E. K. Horwitz et al. (1986) to measure their anxiety during the learning process. The questionnaire was translated into Indonesian to help students understand the questions and statements. It consisted of twenty-four positive statement items and nine negative statement items related to language anxiety in terms of communication apprehension (items 1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, and 32), fear of negative evaluation (item 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, and 28), and test anxiety (item 2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, and 33). The positive statement items range from strongly agree (5 points) to strongly disagree (1 point). In contrast, the negative statement items range from strongly agree (1 point) to strongly disagree (5 points). This questionnaire was chosen since it was widely used in many research studies to measure students' language anxiety.

To collect the data, all 34 English Department first-year students, which consisted of 8 male and 26 female students, were required to complete the language anxiety questionnaire

based on the instruction. Their responses for each statement item were summed up, and the final score was utilized to get information about the language anxiety level. Afterward, the mean scores for each language anxiety type were counted to get information about the language anxiety type.

After the data were collected, the final score of the language anxiety questionnaire of English Department first-year students was used to categorize the first-year students into high, moderate, and low language anxiety levels. Since the total score was 165 points, those who got scores of <56, 56-110, and >110 would have low, moderate, and high language anxiety levels, respectively. Subsequently, the mean scores of each language anxiety type were compared to find out the language anxiety type they frequently experienced.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Results

A questionnaire was given to all the first-year students to find out the language anxiety level they frequently experienced. The descriptive statistics of the comparison of the first-year students' language anxiety levels can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Comparison of Freshmen's Language Anxiety Level**

Final Score	Level	Total	Percentage
<56	Low	0	0%
56-110	Moderate	17	60.7%
>110	High	11	39.3%

Table 1 divulges that no freshmen (0%) got a final score below 56, meaning no one experienced low language anxiety. Moreover, seventeen freshmen (39.3%) got a final score in the 56 to 110, meaning they experienced moderate language anxiety levels. Finally, eleven freshmen (60.7%) got a final score of more than 110, meaning they experienced high language anxiety levels. Since the number of those who experienced moderate language anxiety levels was the highest, it can be concluded that most first-year students experienced moderate language anxiety levels. To give a better illustration, the percentage of the first-year students' language anxiety level is depicted in Figure 4.

The questionnaire results were then analyzed based on the language anxiety type: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. The mean scores of each language anxiety type were compared to reveal the language anxiety type the first-year

students frequently experienced. The descriptive statistics of the comparison of the first-year students' language anxiety type can be seen in Table 2.

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Comparison of Freshmen's Language Anxiety Type**

No.	Type	Mean Score
1.	Communication Apprehension	3.003
2.	Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.331
3.	Test Anxiety	3.255

Table 2 reveals that the mean score for communication apprehension was 3.003, while that of the fear of negative evaluation was 3.331. In contrast, the mean score on the test anxiety was 3.255. Since the mean score of the fear of negative evaluation was the highest of all types, it can be concluded that first-year students frequently experienced this language anxiety type, followed by test anxiety and communication apprehension. To give a better overview, the mean difference in each freshmen's language anxiety type is illustrated in Figure 4.2.

## Discussions

Generally, the first-year students experienced moderate language anxiety levels. In this case, they felt moderately anxious in responding to the questions and unconfident in speaking in front of others. The finding was in line with the results of studies conducted by Al-Khasawneh (2016), Al-Saggaf et al. (2021), and Putri & Marlina (2019). However, the dominant type of anxiety experienced was different in that the participants of the previous studies frequently experienced communication apprehension or text anxiety compared to the fear of negative evaluation in this current research. It may happen since the subjects had distinct backgrounds, learning experiences, habits, English exposure, proficiency, and learning context.

Regarding the fear of negative evaluation, the students tended to feel afraid of others' evaluations and judgments. They were panicked when suddenly given questions by their lecturers or peers in the classroom setting since they were scared of giving wrong answers and making mistakes since they were not prepared and pressured. Sadeghi et al. (2013) deemed preparation as one of the factors affecting speaking anxiety. The learners needed time to prepare their speeches well before responding to the questions so that they could recall their knowledge regarding the questions asked since, when taken aback, they tended to forget the things they had learned. Furthermore, those who had problems with the proficiency needed to structure their sentences well to express their ideas and make others understand the things they tried to convey with their limited vocabulary.

Additionally, learners were concerned that the lecturers or classmates would correct their mistakes directly, and it would make them feel ashamed and lower their self-confidence even more. They felt agitated that their friends would laugh and humiliate them. As stated by Batiha et al. (2018), rather than viewing feedback as a means of giving constructive aid, students believed that their friends would judge their performance negatively if they committed mistakes, making them feel embarrassed. Afraid of being judged as poor speakers, they tried to keep silent in any way possible during the teaching and learning process. Mhuentoei (2021) argues that students were inclined to avoid situations where others might consider them non-fluent speakers. Ultimately, it would hinder their language development process, and they kept doing it that way.

To overcome the students' problems related to language anxiety, the lecturers may try to build a connection with the students to make them feel at ease throughout the learning process. When having a positive relationship with the teachers, students feel more motivated and engaged with the activities conducted in the class (Suryani, 2018). In this case, the lecturers can avoid being judgmental to create a warmer and more comfortable classroom atmosphere that will trigger the learners to participate more by asking and answering more questions. Besides, the lecturers must also instill that making errors is part of learning. That way, the students can learn more by embracing their mistakes. They should change the mistakes into opportunities that help their growth and map their strengths and weaknesses. As argued by Metcalfe (2017), errors make the learners aware of the appropriate responses, promote active learning, help direct their focus correctly, and give information to the teachers on where to pay more attention to teaching. Since it can inform the lecturers regarding the areas the students need to improve, they can have more input in developing the types of learning materials and activities that should be given in the classroom to adjust to the learners' competence.

On top of that, the lecturers can conduct more activities focusing on cooperative learning. By making students cooperate and collaborate more, they will interact more since they need to have more discussions and exchange ideas. In the end, it will strengthen their relationship and make them feel close to each other. Mhuentoei (2021) opines that learners are not afraid of committing errors when they know their friends well. As a result, they do not hesitate to voice their views in front of others because they fear losing face.



## CONCLUSION

The findings of the research revealed that most of the first-year students experienced moderate language anxiety levels. Moreover, among the three language anxiety types, they frequently experienced the fear of negative evaluation. Hence, since the participants mostly had moderate learning anxiety levels, the lecturers can provide materials whose content can be easily understood even by students with low language proficiency. The lecturers can also design more activities with a cooperative learning model to increase their engagement, collaboration, and willingness to communicate in the class with their peers and lecturers. Subsequently, it is suggested that future researchers examine the students' anxiety levels and types by considering their learning proficiency and habit.

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