

What Causing Them to Be Anxious? : A Study in An English-Speaking Class in West Papua

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini berangkat dari masalah yang timbul pada kelas mata pelajaran Bahasa Inggris di sebuah sekolah di Papua Barat, Indonesia mengenai kecemasan siswa dalam berbicara dalam bahasa yang dipelajarinya. Kami fokus mengidentifikasi karakteristik penanda kecemasan serta penyebab kondisi tersebut. Oleh karena itu, kami menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif. Data dikumpulkan melalui metode observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Berdasarkan observasi dan wawancara, karakteristik penanda terjadinya kecemasan pada siswa terbagi atas tiga kategori, yaitu fisik, sikap, dan kognitif. Selanjutnya ditemukan tiga kelompok faktor penyebab kecemasan berbicara tersebut yakni kemampuan komunikasi, kecemasan mengikuti ujian, dan kekhawatiran terhadap penilaian negatif.

Kata kunci: Kecemasan Berbicara, Bahasa Inggris, Karakteristik, Faktor

Abstract

This research was motivated by problems that occurred in English subjects' class in a school in West Papua, Indonesia, about students' anxiety when they spoke using the language they were learning. We focused on identifying characteristics indicating the anxiety and causes of the condition. Therefore, we employed a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Characteristics indicating the emergence of anxiety in students are divided into three categories, physical, behavioral, and cognitive. Then, we also found three groups of factors causing speaking anxiety: Communication concerns, Test anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation.

Keywords: *Speaking anxiety, English, Characteristics, Factors.*

1. Introduction

Poor English-speaking ability is influenced by various factors, including the lack of English skills, vocabulary, communication practices in the classroom or outside the school environment, and students' poor understanding of English (Tantowie, 2019). That factor could lead to several variables that can affect students' speaking performance. One of those variables is anxiety (Megawati, 2016). Excessive anxiety tends to be negative and can negatively impact those who experience it. Anxiety can attack, intimidate, and even reduce a person's performance in activities. A student's anxiety level while studying plays a major role in determining how effective the foreign language learning process can run (Yusuf, 2015).

Language anxiety is a common problem experienced by students but significantly impacts their speaking performance. It is considered an emotional variable in language learning (Joni and Dharmayanti, 2016) that positively and negatively affects the success of language learning. Some of the causes of speaking anxiety are the lack of self-confidence, causing fear of the language itself. We know that all students have different levels of confidence in learning. Second, students are afraid of making mistakes (Muna, et al., 2019) Students sometimes worry that if they make mistakes in class, their friends will laugh or mock them. Some studies (Idrus, 2022; Utami and Nurjati, 2017) have proven that when a person is afraid of making mistakes, it can lead to language failure and cause them to experience acute anxiety while speaking. Speaking is also difficult for students when they need help understanding the material and lack vocabulary (Idrus, 2022).

Horwitz, one of the popular researchers on this topic, explained that it is very important to convey this to language learners struggling to learn a foreign language. He understands how frustrated

and uncomfortable they are when learning a foreign language. Problems should be the main reason for identifying anxiety problems. Therefore, to overcome this problem, one must have the steps to solve it, and most importantly, in speaking English, one needs confidence in the language (Utami and Nurjati, 2017).

English-speaking activities are prone to anxiety, so students often avoid learning English in class. When students experience anxiety when speaking in English, the same time, anxiety will dominate their mind. Then, when their mind is embedded with fear, they will find it difficult to think and concentrate, and in the end, students will be more reluctant to learn and avoid the English subjects in class (Joni and Dharmayanti, 2016). Furthermore, students will need more motivation to learn English. Based on students' behavior, teachers can be aware of this problem when learning occurs. Teachers will generally judge students who do not pay attention to learning when the teacher is explaining, talking to their classmates, or playing with the book on their desk. As a result, a high level of anxiety in learning English will affect students' achievement in the subject (Taufiqurrochman, 2018).

The discussion above supports our observations in the eighth grade of a Junior High School in West Papua, Indonesia. In the first observation, we found students who looked tense and did not actively participate in learning. In the second observation, we also saw some students who looked nervous and not confidence to stand up in front of the class. Based on this observation, we were interested in a study exploring characteristic signing anxiety they were experiencing and factors leading to the emergence of the condition.

2. Method

This is a qualitative study analyzing data descriptively. According to Bogdan and Guba, qualitative research produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and observable behavior (Suharsaputra, 2012). Data were collected through three steps consisting of observation, interviews, and documentation. The triangulation aims to confirm the validity of data obtained in each stage and to explore them more deeply. The observation was carried out in one class, involving all students, the subject teacher, and other non-living materials/objects like the classroom environment. Then, we carried out interviews with twelve students. We also studied relevant documents like teaching materials and students' assessment records. The data underwent a reduction, coding, and categorization process so that the study goals could be achieved.

3. Findings and Discussion

A. Characteristics of speaking anxiety experienced by students

The literature we reviewed before the study confirms what we found in the present research. Based on observations that we made on how students behaved during the class, indicating that they were experiencing anxiety, we categorized those characteristics into three groups as presented below:

1. Physical characteristics

The physical characteristics in question are a state that can be seen directly by the naked eye, which is also defined by the mind (Saleh, 2019). Some conditions we found in the classroom included:

a. The student's hands or limbs shaking

Hands or limbs shaking might be caused by a situation where the individual feels uneasy due to particular factors (Heimberg, et al., 1995). In the observation, we saw students with the initials LER, KC, LA, and AD who seemed to tremble when they were in front of the class. Their hands shake when the teacher told them to speak and their limbs like legs could not still when standing.

To confirm our interpretation, we invited them to the interview session. LER said that **"I feel my hands shaking when asked by the teacher; I was afraid because I couldn't answer in English."** Then, KC stated, **"My hands and feet were shaking when I stood in front of the class; I was afraid when the teacher asked me to speak in English in front of the class because I felt I couldn't speak English."**

Both of them experienced their limbs shaking. The difference was that LER had her hands tremble when asked a question by the teacher, while KC experienced the condition when she had to speak in English in front of the class. Students with a low ability to interpret and answer sentences in English

will feel afraid if asked questions in English. This feeling of fear and worry comes from their negative thoughts. When they experience the condition, some body parts will react like shaking.

b. The students feel a Heartbeat

Heart palpitations generally occur when an individual feels in a threatening situation, usually, a fast heart is also felt when a person experiences excessive worry (Khairunnisa, 2019). Based on interviews, I found a students who conveyed their feelings when they felt their heart pounding, a student with initial JY stated, **“I feel my heart beat fast, especially when speaking in English.”**

The fast heartbeat experienced by students while studying is normal as long as it does not last long. A student with the initial JW was aware of having his heart palpitated when he was in front of the class and was required to speak in English in front of his friends.

c. The students are unable to speak fluently

Difficulty speaking is an unfavorable condition that can interfere with students' learning processes (Clarck amd Beck, 2012). This difficulty was experienced by some students when learning English. Difficulty in speaking is caused by feelings of tension that make students nervous and find it difficult to say something they want to convey Nggeabak, 2021).

Based on the interviews, the students expressed their difficulties in speaking. Interview with ESK said that **“When I felt anxious, it became difficult to speak,”** while ADS said that **“I found it difficult to speak when I felt anxious; this feeling of anxiety made it difficult for me to say something in English.”**

Both of them had difficulty speaking when they felt anxious; anxious feelings also negatively affected students to express something in front of the class. Sometimes students have prepared themselves to speak in front of the class well, but once they are there, they find it difficult to speak. This difficulty results from students' nervousness, so they find it difficult to arrange the words they want to say.

2. Behavioral Traits

The behavioral characteristics can be seen in the conditions of student behavior which include:

a. The students show avoidance behavior

Based on the observations, I found students who looked panicked and avoided when the teacher asked the students one by one to speak in English in front of the class. When learning was taking place, a student with an initial AS left the classroom to avoid orders from the subject teacher in class. Meanwhile, based on the interviews, I got answers from students about their experiences in class when they were anxious and avoided English lessons. Students with the initials HGS and JY gave their responses about their experiences; HGS said **“I was trying to avoid English lessons,”** while the response from JY **“Sometimes I ignore and avoid English lessons.”**

In this case, students felt they did not have the ability, so they tried to avoid the instruction when the learning process was in progress. Such avoidance inhibits them from finding solutions. This condition leads to a bad impact on the learning process. When students find difficulties like being unable to perform something or not understanding the teacher's orders, they must open up and ask the teacher. They need to instill more confidence in speaking in front of the class. Students also need to understand that making mistakes when speaking in English is natural. It is also necessary for students to realize the impact of feeling worried, and prolonged negative thoughts on English lessons will make it difficult for them to hone their skills in learning the skill.

3. Cognitive Traits

Cognitive has a relationship involving cognition, which is a process of gaining knowledge about consciousness and feelings. Cognitive is a student's thinking process, namely the ability to connect, and consider an event. This cognitive process relates to the level of ability and disability that students have in learning (Yusuf, 2019). The cognitive characteristics that we found in the research subject were:

a. The students have difficulty concentrating

Being difficult to concentrate is an unfavorable situation or problem that almost all students have experienced. According to Sieber et al., anxiety is considered one of the inhibiting factors in learning, which can be caused by difficulties in concentrating and remembering. When students are

lost their concentration in learning or remembering something to express in speaking, they may feel anxious (Ardianto, 2018).

Based on the interviews with students, they find it difficult to concentrate while studying for some reasons. An initial student ESK stated **“I have difficulty concentrating when I feel fear,”** while KC’s opinion was, **“I feel anxious when asked questions by the teacher, and the effect of that anxiety it makes difficult for me to concentrate.”**

Both of them shared the same opinion. Students felt afraid if the teacher asked a question or when they had to speak in front of the class. The inability to concentrate raises anxiety in students. Thus, they should throw away negative thoughts to concentrate on studying well without feeling anxious.

b. The students are not able to solve the problem

Based on the interviews, the inability to overcome problems related to English lessons was faced by students initials ESK and JY. ESK said, **“I am often silent, unable to overcome the difficulties that I experience,”** and JY said, **“I was just silent and unable to answer the questions given by the teacher.”**

When ESK and JY found difficulties in studying, they could only stay silent and could not solve their problems. Difficulties in learning English make students more often silent and cover themselves up when they have difficulties, but students feel it is better to cover it up quietly. The reason for the inability to solve the problem is that students have instilled in their minds that English lessons are difficult, so it is embedded in their minds that they cannot solve it. Students need to know that the solution to their problems is to ask the teacher. When getting a problem, students must ask the teacher the problem they are facing; students must tell the teacher about the difficulty of getting directions from the teacher. When students can be open with the teacher, of course, the teacher will also understand the abilities of each student.

B. Factors that cause students' anxiety in speaking English

From the observations and interviews, we obtained information regarding the causal factors that make students anxious when learning English. This research was conducted in a class consisting of 40 students. Observations were made to find students who felt confused, scared, nervous, shaking, cold sweats, panicked, and so on while learning English. As a result of observation, we found twelve students who seemed to have anxiety in learning English based on the characteristics of students' behavior and behavior in class.

After making observations, we found 12 students who experienced anxiety in learning English. Then, we invited them to the interview session. Causes of anxiety in speaking English found in the interviews were based on 3 factors: Communication concerns, Test Anxiety, and Fear of negative evaluation.

1. Communication Concerns

The causes of communication problems related to students' personalities are shyness and tension. Students' shyness varies from person to person and the situation they face. Problems of communication lead to difficulty in expressing ideas/thoughts (Hermaniar and Azkiya, 2021).

a. The students find it difficult to say what they want to convey because they have low self-confidence

Each student certainly has a different sense of self-confidence, some have high confidence, and some are low. Self-confidence is very influential on student learning outcomes in class. Students with high self-confidence certainly dare to speak in front of the class. On the other hand, students with low self-esteem tend to be less active when speaking in front of the class (Syafitri, et al., 2019). Based on the interviews, we found students with low self-confidence. A student with initial LER said that **“I am not confident when I have to speak in English in front of the class; I am afraid of making mistakes in speaking”** and students with initials RK mentioned, **“I refuse the teacher's orders to come to the front of the class because I feel that my ability to speak English is lower compared to other friends.”**

Both of them are reluctant to come to the front of the class to speak in English; the student with the initials RK refuses because they are not confident in their speaking ability in

English, while LER also feels the same lack of confidence as RK, he does not want to speak in English in front of the class because he lacks confidence in his abilities and is afraid of making mistakes in speaking. Students feel that their friends have better speaking skills. The explanation of students who feel they have self-confidence but lack doubts about their abilities, they are worried about making mistakes when in front of the class; students even compare their abilities with others.

b. The students feel afraid if they do not understand what the teacher says when the teacher speaks in English

Based on the interviews with students' initial HGS and ESK, we found another cause of anxiety experienced by students while studying. The initial student HGS said **"I'm afraid I can't answer the teacher's questions if I don't understand what the teacher is saying."** ESK stated that **"I'm afraid to answer wrongly when I don't understand what the teacher is saying."**

From the students' explanations, both of them felt afraid and worried when they did not understand the meaning of the questions given by the teacher; students often felt afraid when taking the exam given by the teacher, and they were afraid to be asked questions from the teacher, students were afraid of not being able to understand the meaning of questions are given in English, because when students do not understand the teacher's questions, of course, students cannot answer the questions given.

c. The students find it difficult to express something in front of the class because it is awkward when friends in class look at them

When the teacher asks students to speak in front of the class, all eyes will be on the front. Students who do not have a sense of self-confidence when appearing in front of many people will certainly feel uncomfortable in that situation. By what was conveyed by the student with the initials JY and LER, a student stated that that **"sometimes I'm afraid because my grammar in speaking English is sometimes still wrong,"** and student LER stated **I don't feel comfortable when my friends look at me while speaking in front of the class, so it's hard for me to speak."**

In the interview, both of them explained that students find it difficult to express something in front of the class when all eyes are looking at them. Students find it difficult to explain or present something because students need more confidence to appear in front of the class. When all looked at the students performing in front of the class at that time, the students felt nervous to say something.

d. The students feel there are many rules in learning English

Students who are not interested in taking English classes generally feel that English is a complicated subject, besides that Students feel English is a lesson that has many rules, especially in wording, in line with the interviews conveyed by students' initials JM and ADS, JM stated that **"Because English is a lesson that has many arrangement rules in the language,"** and ADS stated that **"Because I find it complicated with the rules of English composition."**

Both of them are not very interested in taking English classes; students feel English is a complicated subject. Students are silent for a long time because they need clarification about arranging words in a sentence they want to convey as it has too many rules.

2. Test Anxiety

Exams are also one of the causes of anxiety in learning a foreign language. Anxiety will arise in students when they are afraid of failure that will befall them. Students who experience anxiety during tests or exams would have difficulty answering questions, while confident students would easily answer all questions (Hermaniar, et al., 2021).

a. The students worry about making a mistake

When the teacher held a test session, students certainly needed to be prepared to answer the questions that would be asked. However, although students had prepared themselves, they commonly still made mistakes when answering them orally using English. The test was carried

out by asking students one by one to come to the front of the class (Noerjanah and Dhigayuka, 2020).

Many students experienced problems during the test. Based on the interviews, some students expressed their experiences when standing in front of the class. HGS said that **“I feel insecure because I am afraid of making mistakes,”** while according to AS, she said **“Because I’m afraid of making mistakes in pronouncing words in English.”**

From the interviews, students with the initials HGS and AS expressed their concerns about taking the test; students were worried about making mistakes in answering the tests given by the teacher. In the test session, students need to know that making mistakes is not a fatal problem. Answering based on the students’ ability is certainly better than not answering at all. Unfortunately, students were worried because they feared getting a bad assessment from the teacher when they made mistakes. Making mistakes is a process in learning; students only need to prepare well to take a test.

b. The students do not enjoy in test

This contributing factor stems from the students' discomfort in taking the English test in class. The causative factor can come from the teacher, students or the atmosphere in the classroom (Mahmud, et al., 2022). Based on the interviews, I found students who did not enjoy taking the English test. Based on ESK, she said, **“I don't enjoy when the teacher gives the test,”** and based on MM, he said, **“During the test process, I didn't feel like I was enjoying it.”**

c. The students are afraid they will fail to take the English test

In the interviews, we met some students expressing their fears when taking the English test. Students who felt they had low English skills feared that the English subject teacher tested their Speaking ability. An initial student, LA, said that **“I’m afraid I can’t take the test well because I sometimes make mistakes in speaking English,”** and a student HGS also conveyed his feelings that **“I’m afraid when I can’t speak English during the test, so I fail to take the test.”**

3. Fear of Negative Evaluation

Teacher assessment does not only occur when students work on assignments. However, the teacher also always monitored movement in the classroom. The evaluation they received was negative. They are not only afraid of exams, but they are also afraid of being evaluated. Negative assessments are also sometimes obtained from friends; the assessments are not only through words but with ridicule. When students make mistakes in speaking, it is not uncommon for other students to laugh at students who make these mistakes (Hermaniar and Azkiya, 2021).

The students feel afraid if the teacher compares their speaking ability with other students.

Each person has different abilities, including the ability to master a skill. However, students sometimes still feel inferior in their abilities. Even students are sometimes afraid if the teacher compares their speaking ability with other students. Students feel that their friends have better speaking skills than they have (Kartini, 2020). In line with the interviews students’ initials JY and ESK, JY stated that **“I feel ashamed because my friends in class have better speaking skills than me,”** and ESK also stated that **“When I speak in front of the class, I am embarrassed because my other friends have much better English speaking than me.”**

Both of them are embarrassed if they have to speak in English in front of the class because students feel their ability is still very lacking; they feel that their class friends have much better abilities. Students with the initials JY and ESK feel ashamed if their abilities are not better than their friends. Students compare so that they often feel insecure about speaking in front of the class.

4. Conclusions and Suggestions

Based on the observation and interviews, we concluded that characteristics indicating the emergence of anxiety in students are divided into three categories, physical, behavioral, and cognitive. Then, we also found three factors causing speaking anxiety: Communication concerns, Test anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation. This study was performed limited to adolescent learners of English. Novel findings may emerge on English Speaking classes for children or adults.

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