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SPEAKING ENGLISH: WHY ARE EFL LEARNERS ANXIOUS?

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the causes of language anxiety in speaking English. It was carried out at Private School of Madrasah Tsanawiyah Jeumala Amal. A qualitative study was used to investigate these matters. The instrument to collect the data were questionnaire. The data of the causes of language anxiety were analyzed by using Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (designed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). The finding showed that, from three causes of language anxiety, communication apprehension was the dominant cause of anxiety, followed by test anxiety and analysis fear of negative evaluation. Meanwhile, anxiety felt by the students included lack of confidence, self-perceptions, lack of preparation, and fear of negative evaluation. Thus, to overcome this problem teachers should be more aware of the students' anxiety in order to motivate them to speak confidently and fluently in English speaking class.

Keywords: Speaking, foreign language, anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is considered as a foreign language and taught as a compulsory subject in high schools, including Islamic schools like *Madhrasah Tsanawiyah Jeumala Amal* private boarding school. This school is located in rural area of *Pidie Jaya* municipality. Aside of Arabic language, the students also learn and practice English in classroom and in the dormitory. However, based on the preliminary study conducted on December, 2015, it was found that most of the students had problem in speaking English in the class. They usually felt fear, anxiety and lack of confidence when asked to do oral performance in front of the class. This was a surprising fact since English language is used as a main language at this school.

According to Spielberger and Rickman (1990, pp. 73-92), anxiety is an unpleasant emotional nervous state accompanied by subjective emotional apprehension. Yang (2012) further explains that:

“Anxiety, also called psychological abnormality, is one of the variable emotions. It is commonly recognized that anxiety is uncomfortable emotional state which is caused by frustration of one's self-esteem. And the frustration is caused because the individual can not fulfill his setting goal or cannot overcome the threat of the difficulties” (Yang, 2012, p. 41).

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) occurs within specific, temporary situations and fades when the threat (or situation) disappears (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Spielberges & Vagg, 1995). The students of *Madhrasah Tsanawiyah Jeumala Amal* private boarding school experienced FLA

whenever English is used. Language anxiety does not decrease over time for all students. If repeated, occurrences of anxiety cause students to associate it with language performance, anxiety becomes a trait rather than a state (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). Also, once language anxiety has evolved into a lasting trait, it can have pervasive effects on language learning and language performance (Oxford, 1991). Hence, when this happens, an individual learner expects to be anxious in foreign language contexts.

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) argue that foreign language anxiety can be related to three different components of anxieties which are related to academic and social evaluation situations: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. According to Horwitz and Young (1991), communication apprehension refers to an individual's level of anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or people, while test anxiety refers to a type of anxiety concerning apprehension over academic evaluation which stems from a fear of failure. Fear of negative evaluation can occur in any social situation which has an evaluative components and is particularly important in the language class where students may feel as if they are constantly being evaluated by their instructor and peers.

The statement indicates that students who struggle with anxiety likely to avoid such activities which require them to speak in foreign language because of fear of making mistakes when speaking in foreign language. This issue had intrigued the researchers to investigate the causes of the students' language anxiety at Islamic Boarding School MTsS Jeumala Amal, Pidie Jaya.

METHODS

This research used descriptive qualitative research to reveal the causes of language anxiety in speaking English experienced by the students of Islamic Boarding School MTsS Jeumala Amal, Pidie Jaya.

The data for this study was collected from 36 female students of second grade by using questionnaire. The questionnaire is adapted from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). The FLCAS has been used in different studies such as Aida (1994), Matsuda and Gobel (2001), Matsuda and Gobel (2004), Piniel (2006), Na (2007), and Huang (2009). Among these studies, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope and Aida reported both a high internal reliability and a test-retest reliability of FLCAS.

The questionnaire was used to categorize the participant into five categories: Very Anxious, Anxious, Mildly Anxious, Relaxed, and Very Relaxed. There are 33 question-items in FLCAS. The students' response on this 5-point Likert scale ranged from "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree" (A), "Neither Agree nor Disagree" (NA), "Disagree" (D), and "Strongly Disagree" (SD). The researchers adapted the questionnaire and translate it into Bahasa Indonesia before administering to the participants. Therefore, if the points are summed up by adding each answer point of each statement, the score of students' anxiety scale would range from 33 to 165. The higher total score is, the more anxious the respondent is.

FLCAS consists of three main types of language anxiety in its questions, those are:

- Communication apprehension: 1, 14, 29, 32
- Test anxiety: 8, 9, 24, 27
- Fear of negative evaluation: 7, 13, 23, 31

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The result of the causes of anxiety is presented in table form of Likert-Scale questions. Percentages of frequencies are calculated separately. The questionnaires consisted of four items for communication apprehension, four items for test anxiety, and four items for fear of negative evaluation.

Analysis from Communication Apprehension

The result of communication apprehension analysis is presented in the following table. There are 4 items related to this kind of anxiety.

Table 1. Analysis from communication apprehension.

No	Statements	SA	S	N	D	SD	Average (M)	Percentage
1.	I never feel quite sure of myself when i am speaking in my foreign language.	0	0	11	9	10	12.2	36.67%
2.	I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speaker.	5	12	6	4	3	20.4	40%
3.	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	6	10	4	9	1	20.2	33.33%
4.	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	4	13	11	1	1	21.6	43.33%
Average							18.6	0.4%

Note:

*SA= Strongly Agree

A= Agree

N= Neither agree nor disagree

D= Disagree

SD= Strongly Disagree

The table above shows the analysis of communication apprehension. The first item endorsed student's statements in which they never feel quite sure of themselves about speaking in the foreign language. In average, 12.2 (about 36.67%) of the students neither agree nor disagree with the statement. It means that students feel quite sure of themselves in speaking in the foreign language. The second item directly shows 40% of students agreeing with the statement. They would be nervous speaking in foreign language (M= 20.4). It can be concluded that students would be nervous speaking in English. The third item reveals that they were afraid when they did not understand every word uttered by the teacher (M=20.2), 33.33% students with agreed upon the statement. They believed that in order to have any chance of comprehending the target language message, they must understand every word being uttered. The fourth item shows that students would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of foreign language (M=21.6), where 43.33% students agreed with the statement. It means that students did feel uncomfortable around native speakers of foreign language.

Anxiety Test

The result of anxiety test analysis is presented in the following table. There are 4 items related to test of anxiety.

Table 2. Analysis from anxiety test.

No	Statements	SA	S	N	D	SD	Average (M)	Percentage
1.	I am usually at ease during test in my language class	5	14	10	1	0	22.6	46.67%
2.	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	4	5	5	11	5	16.4	36.67%
3.	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	2	17	9	2	0	21.8	56.67%
4.	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	0	1	12	14	3	13.5	46.67%
Average							18.57	0.37

Note:

*SA= Strongly Agree

A= Agree

N= Neither agree nor disagree

D= Disagree

SD= Strongly Disagree

Based on the test of anxiety analysis above, the first item confirms that students were usually at ease during test in language class, proven by M=22.6 (46.67%) students with agreed statement. It means that almost half of them found it difficult during test in language class. The second item shows that the students got panic when they had to perform impromptu speech, where 16.4 (36.67%) of the students disagreed with the statement. It can be implied that the students did not feel relaxed when they had to speak in English without preparation. The third item shows the

students felt anxiety when speaking English in front of other students (M=21.8, or about 56.67% of the students agreed with the statement). Perhaps, the students were shy or unconfident when speaking in English. The fourth item shows that the students got nervous and confused in speaking in the target language. About thirteen students (46.67%) disagreed with this statement. It means that students felt nervous and confused in speaking English. Regarding the students' responses, the writer concluded that anxious students felt a deep self-consciousness when they were asked to speak the foreign language in the presence of other people.

Analysis from Fear of Negative Evaluation

The result of fear of negative evaluation analysis is presented in the following table. There are 4 items related to this kind of anxiety.

Table 3. Analysis from fear of negative evaluation.

No	Statements	SA	S	N	D	SD	Average (M)	Percentage
1.	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	0	4	12	10	4	15.2	40%
2.	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	0	5	8	11	6	14.4	36.67%
3.	I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	0	6	12	7	5	15.8	40%
4.	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	3	6	7	9	5	16.6	30%
Average							15.5	0.37

Note:

*SA= Strongly Agree

A= Agree

N= Neither agree nor disagree

D= Disagree

SD= Strongly Disagree

The tables shows that the students kept thinking that the other students were better than him/her (M=15.2), 40% students neither agreed nor disagreed with statement. It means that the students thought that they had no ability in speaking English. The second item shows that students felt embarrassed to be a volunteer when answering question (M=14.4), 36.67% students disagreed with statement. It means that they felt embarrassed and worried when they had to be a volunteer to answer questions in class. The third item proves that the students feel lack of ability in speaking (M=15.8), 40% students neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. It means that the students tended to think about their friends who were much better than them in English. The fourth item tells that the students were afraid if other students would laugh at them (M=16.6), 30% students disagreed with this statement. It means that the students were worried about the perceptions of others when they had to express themselves in English speaking class.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the FLCAS questionnaire, it was found that students' anxiety in speaking English is derived from communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. It was revealed that the students experienced lack of confidence, self perceptions, lack of preparation, and fear of negative evaluation. In this case, anxiety triggers an avoidance to speak English, fearing that they might make mistakes in the class and being laughed at. They usually thought that they could not speak well if they did not have any preparation since occasionally their teacher suddenly called their name to speak. In addition, their classmates often laughed at them every time they performed in front of the class and did poor oral presentations. Therefore, it is encouraged that English teachers to be aware of their students' anxiety which could affect their students' performance in learning English, as well as to make improvement in their teaching strategies.

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