A Study of Anxiety Experienced by EFL Students in Speaking Performance[1]

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Abstract

Many EFL students show anxiety when speaking English in Indonesia. Therefore, the researchers were interested to conduct this study to find out the level of English-speaking anxiety experienced by those students. In this quantitative study, data were collected from 29 students through a questionnaire that was adopted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) consisted of 10 items developed by Horwitz, et al. (1986). The data from the questionnaire were analyzed by using the FLCAS questionnaire scale. The results were described in percentages and are further elaborated in narration. The data revealed that 11 out of 29 students (38%) experienced low-level anxiety, 17 out of 29 students (59%) had anxiety at a moderate level, and one out of 29 students (3,4%) got high-level anxiety. It means that most students experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety. In this case, those findings can be the inputs for every English teacher, especially for the English teachers in which this study was conducted, to be aware of the level of their students' English-speaking anxiety. It is hoped that the findings of this research can give information and add knowledge to English teachers about EFL students' level of anxiety so that they could find an appropriate strategy to reduce their students' speaking anxiety.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the English skills that should be learned by students including junior high school students. It is an activity to use the language orally. Richards (2008) explained that speaking requires talking performance that includes the extent to which the speaker organizes information in an easily comprehensible order, the use of discourse markers, repetition, stress, etc. It means that in speaking activity the speakers must use oral language well to transfer the information to other people (Komariah et al, 2020).

Based on the English curriculum for junior high school in Indonesia, students are required to master the speaking skill and they should get a score above the minimum passing grade, which is about 70-80, depending on each school's policy. However, until today, speaking is still being one of the students' difficulties in learning English for many learners, especially in Indonesia (Fitriani & Zulkarnain, 2019; Halimah, 2018; Hanifa, 2018). Bada, et al. (2011) said that speaking is one of the difficult English skills to improve because the students have limited time to recall words and to care for pronunciation, intonation, and responses, which interrupts the speech, and causes additional difficulties for the speaker.

Getting difficulty to recall words or to respond to other people and feeling anxiety when the teacher asks to speak in English are two examples of common problems faced by the students in English speaking activities. Anxiety is a feeling of getting in a situation that is threatening or difficult. Based on Waters (2003), anxiety is a concern and fear about something that happened. So, it can be concluded that anxiety in speaking can be explained as a fear of expressing oneself orally which cannot make students focus on the speaking process.

Based on the researchers' observation in one of the classes of a junior high school in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, most students showed their anxiety when they were asked to speak in English. They seemed afraid or nervous when the teacher asked them to speak in front of the class. It was only about 25% of 30 students in the class who can speak English confidently, but others seemed nervous and afraid. When the teacher asked them why they feel the anxiety to practice English, almost all of the students said that they were worried about the mistakes they made especially in grammar and pronunciation. Some of them were also not confident in practicing English.

Furthermore, based on the previous studies that were conducted by some researchers, there were still many students feeling the anxiety to speak in front of other students or their teacher. Sugiharti (2007) as cited in Mayangta (2013) stated that students feel uncomfortable to speak in front of other people. Their research finding showed that students are influenced by the other students when they have to speak in front of the class. Then, another previous research conducted by Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009), with samples of 15 students in the twelfth grade, found that six of these students were experiencing English speaking anxiety. In addition, Ansari (2015) who studied thirty students in the higher secondary level found that about ten of these students were experiencing English language anxiety. Occhipinti (2009) researched 100 university-level students as samples. He found that being afraid of making

mistakes in speaking is one of the reasons that make students feel anxiety in a speaking activity.

Anxiety can be caused by some situations. Scovel (1978) in Ito (2008) stated that anxiety can be detrimental if the task is too difficult and the students experience failure. However, the level of difficulty task is relative to the students' ability. The task is easy for students who have higher abilities compared to students with lower abilities, so anxiety will be a more positive experience for higher intelligence students. Furthermore, Coopman (2009) said that a major cause of speech anxiety begins at an early age as a result of learning from negative feedback at home.

As aforementioned above, anxiety is one of the common problems faced by students in speaking class. Young (1990) said that speaking in a foreign language is often cited by students as their most anxiety-producing experienced. Then Hadziosmanovic (2012) added that speaking anxiety is one of the problems experienced by many people especially in front of the public. The level of student's speaking anxiety is different. Debrely (2016) stated that to find out the students' speaking anxiety, we can use the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire that consists of 33 items. Each item equals 33 points of the minimum score in total.

Therefore, the researchers are interested to do research mainly focused at finding out the level of students speaking anxiety in using English experienced by the students at one of the junior high school in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, which is SMPN 1 Banda Aceh. No related studies have ever been conducted at this school, and thus the researchers tend to fill in this gap. This school was chosen because it is considered as one of the favorable schools in the city due to its many achievements by the students, but even so, the researchers' preliminary observation showed that their students still face anxiety in learning English. Therefore, it is important to study their level of anxiety to further understand where they stand and for teachers to prepare lessons to better improve their speaking ability.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Speaking

According to Richards (2008), the speaking activity requires talk performance in which the speaker organizes information in an easily comprehensible order, the use of discourse markers, repetition, and stress to emphasize important points, etc. Moreover, Goh and Burns (2012) stated that students often experience difficulty while speaking. For example, they must engage in various mental processes because they can support their speaking development. However, it does not work optimally to help them to produce speech fluently and accurately. Speaking itself has some aspects to be considered. Rodriques (2000) mentioned some aspects of speaking including mastering a different sound system, vocabulary, grammatical pattern, and oral ability.

Moreover, there are many kinds of speaking activities that can motivate and encourage students to speak and they are mostly used in school or an English competition. The first example is storytelling. Ellis and Jean (2014) defined that storytelling is an activity to tell a story to people. This can be telling a story from a book by reading loudly or telling a story without a book. Furthermore, they also stated

that storytelling is not only used by parents with her children but the storytelling activity is also used by teachers as a technique to encourage and interest students in the classroom. The next activity is the debate. Debate is one of the popular activities in school to improve speaking (Baruah, 2006; Wahyuni et al, 2020). In English class, it is used in a speaking activity. Even though most students feel shy about taking part in debating activity, but it is often involved in English competitions. Furthermore, He explained that in debate activity, the students are allowed to express their arguments in advance. Therefore, it is important to pair the competitors. One makes a point and the other refute it.

Speech is the other example of it. Baruah (2006) stated that speech is one of the speaking activities. It is also commonly used in the English competition. To encourage more students to take part in this activity, the speech topic should be easy and interesting. Last but not least is drama. Grugeon, et al (2015) stated that drama is a good activity that can improve students' speaking skills. The children enjoy taking part in drama activity and most of them create drama for themselves in imaginary play. That is why drama is usually used in school or competition. In addition, Hadfield (1999) stated that there are many ways to encourage students in speaking activities some of them are stated as follows: first of all is role-playing. He stated that it is one of the popular activities in speaking that requires the students to take turns in starting the dialogue. The second is guessing. This kind of activity encourages the students to work in pairs and guess each other about what they fill in their own copies of the form. Finally, describing and drawing. This activity encourages students to sit in pairs. One learner describes one picture orally, and the other one draws the picture based on what she listens.

2.2 Anxiety

Anxiety can be defined as a feeling of worry or fear. Clark and Beck (2012) explained that anxiety is a state of apprehension and physical arousal which we cannot control or predict our future event. Thus, we might feel anxious thinking about performance at work, interview, etc. Then, Onwueghbuzie (2004) stated that anxiety is an uncomfortable feeling or emotional disposition which has cognitive, affective, and behavioral ramification. Speaking anxiety are faced by many people. Thomas (2006) stated that of all 3000 people, there are about 41% of the speaker feel fear in speaking in front of other people. In addition, Neil (2008) explained that everyone feels anxiety from time to time. They feel anxiety when they want to take an exam or job interview, etc. Meanwhile, students might feel worried and anxious when they take an oral test, etc. Moreover, Hanifa (2018) mentioned that most EFL students likely experience anxiety in speaking and communicating in public in a foreign language.

2.2.1 Types of anxiety in a foreign language learning

According to Spielberger et al. (1976), as cited in Woodrow (2006), anxiety can be classified into three categories. They are trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. The stable one is trait anxiety. Trait anxiety can make people feel nervous in a wide range of situations. People with trait anxiety are predictably and generally anxious with many things. State anxiety is understood as a temporary one; it is not constant, especially in the school context. Foreign language anxiety can also be

understood in relation to state anxiety. Lastly, situation-specific anxiety reflects a trait that recurs in specific situations. The situation-specific anxiety is similar to trait except that it applies to a single context or situation only. These views are in line with Cattell and Schier (1963), as cited in Cassady (2010).

On the other hand, Alpert and Habert (1960), as cited in Palwak (2015), divided anxiety into two categories such as debilitative and facilitative. The first type is for a negative way where the students may have problems with concentration, be unwilling or willing but do not want to participate in the in-class activity. The second type motivates students to learn more and prepare for the classes or exams. Furthermore, Spielberger, et al. (1976), cited in Gopang, et al. (2015), stated that speaking anxiety generally consists of two components namely state anxiety and trait anxiety. The state anxiety is subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the arousal of the nervous system. Trait anxiety is associated with a personality trait. In other words, a person who has trait anxiety feels anxious in various situations.

2.2.2 Levels of anxiety

Every speaker has a different level or a different area of anxiety depending on the outside stimulus in a particular circumstance. These differences tend to vary from person to person. Cizek and Samantha (2012) mentioned three levels of anxiety. The first is low anxiety for a person who is completely unmotivated. In school, such a person would appear to be unconcerned about an upcoming test and perhaps unworried. The second, high level of anxiety for a person would appear immensely concerned about an upcoming test. Finally, there is a moderate level of anxiety. It is a person who feels a little nervous about the test. In addition to them, Basavanthappa (2007) stated that there are some levels of anxiety such as a mild level of anxiety, a moderate level of anxiety, and a panic level of anxiety. Mild anxiety often motivates students to engage in a goal activity. Besides, it helps them to focus on studying a test. Then, at a moderate level of anxiety is the person who gets nervous. She/he will feel difficult to concentrate independently. Finally, there is a panic-level of anxiety where in this stage people are unable to do things even with direction.

2.2.3 Factors of speaking anxiety

What makes students having anxiety in speaking can be possibly derived from many factors. Yahya (2013) reported that EFL learners suffer from language anxiety which is aroused by several factors such as unpreparedness for the class, communication, apprehension with teachers, teachers' questions, students' perception of low ability in relation to their peers, and corrections in a classroom environment; tests and negative attitudes towards the English classes. Genard (2015) stated that there are other factors associated with the learners' speaking anxiety such as self-consciousness in front of large groups, fear of preparing nervous, the concern that others are judging you, past failure, poor or insufficient preparation, comparing ourselves to others, etc. In addition, Kusiak (2009) stated that there are some causes of speaking anxiety in a foreign language. First of all, some people do not like to talk in a foreign language. Second, speaking anxiety can be caused by tiredness in

pronouncing words. Third, people sometimes participated in a discussion that is difficult to do.

2.2.4 Overcoming speaking anxiety

Speaking anxiety is a normal phenomenon experienced by students and the teacher should have many strategies to overcome it. Young (1990, p. 539) said that "speaking in the foreign language is often cited by students as their most anxiety-producing experience". In relation to the anxiety problem, Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) mentioned some ways that can be applied by teachers to reduce students' speaking anxiety. First of all, having students to get involved in a short-term project work. In this project work, students have an active role and responsibilities in the implementation of project work, which can boost their confidence and reduce the effect of perceptions of low ability speaking in a foreign language. Second, establishing a learning community and a supportive classroom atmosphere since the collaborative atmosphere can help students to reduce the fear of errors. Then, making fun of a wrong answer was not accepted, and a norm of mistake tolerance was ratified.

2.2.5 The measurement levels of speaking anxiety

Debrely (2016, p. 54) suggested using a questionnaire of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which consists of 33 items to measure the level of speaking anxiety. Whereas, Horwitz, et al (1986) also have developed 33 items of the FLCAS questionnaires. The items of questionnaires consist of some statements aimed to measure the level of anxiety in using language as listed in Table 4, such as 'do notworry about making mistakes in the language class', 'start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in the language class', 'do not understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes', 'get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance', and many more. Each of the items has a 5-point scale ranging according to Strongly Agree (scale point 5), Agree (scale point 4), Neutral (scale point 3), Disagree (scale point 2), and lastly, Strongly Disagree (scale point 1).

3. METHODS

Before conducting this study, a preliminary study had been done at SMPN 1 Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The researchers observed one of the classes (class VIII-2) that were studying English at that time. The students seemed afraid or nervous when the teacher asked them to speak in front of the class. It was only about 25% of 30 students in the class that could speak in English confidently, but others seemed nervous and afraid. When the teacher asked them why they felt the anxiety to practice English, almost all students said that they were worried about the mistakes they made especially in grammar and pronunciation.

This quantitative study involved 29 students from the eighth grade (class VIII) of SMPN 1 Banda Aceh. The data were collected through a questionnaire. Questionnaire items were adopted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) consisted of 10 items from 33 items developed by Horwitz, et al.

(1986). In this study, the researchers only took 10 items of questions that were related to the speaking anxiety statements. The reasons why the researchers took only ten were because some items almost have the same meaning context. Besides, it could also ease the researchers in analyzing the data.

The data from the questionnaire items were analyzed by measuring the level of the speaking anxiety. FLCAS questionnaire scale (scale point 1-5) suggested by Debrely (2016) was used by the researchers in analyzing the data of the study. Each of the 10 items in the questionnaire has a 5-point scale ranging according to Strongly Agree (scale point 5), Agree (scale point 4), Neutral (scale point 3), Disagree (scale point 2), and lastly Strongly Disagree (scale point 1). The students were asked to give a check-list on the available columns. Debreli and Demirkan (2016) explained that one point for each item equals 33 points of the minimum score in total, whereas five points for each item equals 165 of the maximum score. Then, the levels of student's anxiety were determined by summing up students' questionnaire scores and find the average. He also classified them into three categories as in Table 1.

Table 1. The range of anxiety
(source: Debreli & Demirkan, 2016, p. 54)

The average score	Category
≤99	Low
99-132	Moderate
≥132	High

Table 1 shows that the range of the average score was classified into three categories. It also shows a total average score of ≤ 99 which indicates low anxiety. The average score in the rank of 99-132 indicates moderate anxiety, and the average score of ≥132 indicates a high level of anxiety.

4. RESULTS

The result of the students' speaking anxiety through the questionnaire can be seen in Table 2. It shows that the lowest average score was 66 which indicates a low anxiety category and the highest score was 145 which indicates high anxiety category. Based on the analysis result, the researchers found that the level of the students' speaking anxiety placed in the rank of low anxiety, moderate anxiety, and high anxiety.

Table 2. The students' average score and anxiety category.

Student no.	Total questionnaire scores	Average Score $(\frac{total\ score}{number\ of\ items\ (10)} x33$	Category
1	30	99	Moderate
2	35	116	Moderate
3	32	106	Moderate
4	32	106	Moderate
5	21	69	Low
6	44	145	High
7	39	129	Moderate
8	32	106	Moderate
9	36	119	Moderate

Table 2 continued…

10	37	122	Moderate
11	33	109	Moderate
12	33	109	Moderate
13	36	106	Moderate
14	30	99	Moderate
15	26	85	Low
16	30	99	Moderate
17	32	106	Moderate
18	32	106	Moderate
19	34	112	Moderate
20	22	73	Low
21	29	96	Low
22	29	96	Low
23	24	79	Low
24	24	79	Low
25	20	66	Low
26	27	89	Low
27	27	89	Low
28	30	99	Moderate
29	23	76	Low

A further detailed result is presented in Table 3. Based on this table, 38% (11 students) of 29 students experienced a low level of speaking anxiety, 59% experienced moderate and 3.4% experienced high. It can be said that most students experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety in a speaking activity.

Meanwhile, Table 4 shows the situation that most students experienced high-level anxiety.

Table 3. The level of students' speaking anxiety.

Level of students' anxiety	Total students	Percentage
Low	11	38 %
Moderate	17	59%
High	1	3.4%
Total	29	100%

Table 4. FLCAS items and students' anxiety.

Items	Number of responses		
	Low	Moderate	High
I am not confident when speaking English in class.	4(13.79%)	8(27.59%)	17(58.62%)
I am nervous when I have to stand in front of the class to speak.	12(42.38%)	1(3.44%)	16(55.17%)
It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	6 (20.69%)	2 (6.90%)	21(72.41%)
I think other students have speaking ability better than me.	1 (3.44%)	5(17.24%)	23(79.31%)
I feel angry when I don't understand what the teacher is talking about in English.	16(55.17%)	4(13.79%)	9 (31.03%)
I feel shy when I have to answer any question in English.	18(62.07%)	8(27.59%)	3 (10.34%)
It frightens me when the teacher corrects my mistake in speaking English.	19(65.52%)	6(20.69%)	4 (13.79%)
I am confused when speaking English in front of my friends.	11(37.93%)	5(17.24%)	13(44.88%)

Table 4 continued…

I still feel worried although I have prepared myself well before the class begins.	15(51.72%)	8(27.59%)	6 (20.69%)
I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak a foreign language.	15(51.72%)	6(20.59%)	8 (27.59 %)

Based on Table 4, most students experienced a high level of anxiety on the item numbers 1, 2, 3, 4, and 8 (students who get score ≥132) (i.e. 'I am not confident when speaking English in class', 'I am nervous when I have to stand in front of the class to speak', 'It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language', 'I think other students have speaking ability better than me' and 'I am confused when speaking English in front of my friends'). Then in items 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, most students experienced low anxiety (students who get score ≤99) (i.e. 'I feel angry when I don't understand what the teacher is talking about in English', 'I feel shy when I have to answer any question in English', 'It frightens me when the teacher corrects my mistake in speaking English', 'I still feel worried although I have prepared myself well before the class begins' and 'I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak a foreign language').

5. DISCUSSION

The main research aim is to find out the level of students' English-speaking anxiety at one of the junior high schools in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. It was found that 38% (11 students) experienced a low level of speaking anxiety, 59% (17 students) experienced a moderate level of speaking anxiety, and 3.4% (one student) experienced a high level of speaking anxiety. It means that, based on the analysis result, the level of students' anxiety is different based on three criteria such as low level (average anxiety score is < 99) moderate level (average anxiety score is 99 to 132) and high level (average anxiety score is > 132). Based on Shumin (2002), there are three levels of anxiety, namely low anxiety, moderate anxiety, and high anxiety. Low anxiety is experienced by students who attained the anxiety scores below average score. Moderate anxiety is experienced by those who attained a score within the range of below an above-average score. While high anxiety is experienced by students who attained a score above average score. According to this theory, of all the 29 students in this study mostly experienced moderate anxiety (59%), followed by low anxiety (38%), and the least is high anxiety (3.4%) with only one student.

Similar to Luo (2014), he also reported that most of EFL students in China experienced a moderate level of anxiety. In other words, those students who have moderate anxiety levels were the students who got questionnaire scores in an average score between 99 and 132. Even though those students were at a moderate level of anxiety, their level of anxiety score is different among each other. The different levels of students' anxiety experienced by students depend on the situation that makes students feel anxiety in speaking English. According to Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013), some situations make students feel anxiety in speaking English, among them is when they are shy to speak in front of many people and fear to negative evaluation or commend from teachers or other students in the classroom.

In this study, the students mostly felt anxiety when speaking English in front of the classroom (see Table 4), followed by situations such as fear of receiving negative

comments from teachers and other students, frightened of being corrected by the teachers for their mistakes in front of others, had no confidence in speaking English in class, and felt confused when speaking English in front of other students.

As the results showed that there are more students who got moderate level of anxiety and low level of anxiety, with only one student with a high level of anxiety, therefore the teacher urgently needs to help these students to reduce their anxiety. Some strategies to use are such as enhancing students' self-confidence (Sari et al, 2020), motivating students to speak in English and not to be worried about making mistakes (Rahman & Sahayu, 2020), involving students in English programs and asking students to overcome their anxiety by being well prepared for class, having an active role in class and always practicing with peers (Hanifa, 2018). Riasati (2011) further informed that teachers can overcome students' anxiety by removing the fear of tests, establishing friendly relationships with students, running pair and work activities, increasing students' motivation to learn the language, and enhancing students' self-confidence.

6. CONCLUSION

As the objectives of this study are to find the level of English speaking anxiety experienced by the eighth-grade students (class VIII-4) of SMPN 1 Banda Aceh, the results showed that 59% of students experienced moderate level of speaking anxiety, 38% experienced low level of anxiety, and the remaining or only 3.4% of them experienced high level of anxiety. The main causes of their anxiety were when asked to speak English in front of the class, fear of receiving negative comments from teachers and other students, frightened of being corrected by the teachers for their mistakes in front of others, had no confidence in speaking English in class, and felt confused when speaking English in front of other students. These causes can be input inputs for every English teacher, especially those teaching EFL students, to take into consideration in findings ways to help their students in overcoming anxiety in speaking English in class.

Anxiety is one of the speaking problems experienced by EFL students, including the students of junior high schools in Indonesia. This school level is where English is officially introduced to the students by the national curriculum. Although the findings of the present study have shown that a moderate level dominated the students' speaking anxiety, more in-depth studies are still needed especially on investigating teachers' strategies in overcoming the students' speaking anxiety. As this is the first study that discusses the levels of anxiety experienced by junior high school students in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, therefore the research results are hoped to be able to give some contributions, especially to the teachers, to give information about the different levels of anxiety experienced by students in speaking. Besides, this research result can also give information about the situations that make students feel anxiety in speaking so the teacher can use appropriate strategies to overcome the problems. Finally, the investigation about the causes or factors of the students' anxiety in speaking English, for instance, can be used as a topic for further in-depth research.

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