

FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' FAILURES DUE TO ANXIETY IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Abstract: This study aims to determine the factors affecting students' failures due to anxiety in learning English. It was conducted at Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta, within three months. This study was a descriptive qualitative study with a survey design. The study's respondents consisted of 98 from three parallel classes at UKI. The sampling method in this study uses the cluster sampling method. In this study, a set of questionnaires was used to collect the data. It is used to measure English language anxiety. It has three constructs: communication anxiety, fear of negative assessment, and anxiety in exams, and the English learning anxiety has four constructs: personal reason, teacher attitude, test situation, and teaching procedure. The finding of this study is that English language learners have moderately high speaking skills anxiety and that the level of English language anxiety of English language learners at UKI as a whole in the two English language skills, namely listening and speaking skills, reached a medium-high level. Then it is concluded that teachers emphasize compelling and diverse strategies and techniques of teaching English for English language skills, namely listening and speaking skills, to help reduce anxiety among students applying English.

Keywords: *anxiety; factors affecting; failures; learning English.*

INTRODUCTION

When talking about mastery and achievement of English Learning, the conversation focuses a lot on individual affective factors such as attitudes, perceptions, interests, and motivations and focuses less on the anxiety factor as the cause of the issue. This imbalance creates gaps because, in reality, anxiety plays an essential role in determining the success or failure of students in foreign language classes (Zhou, 2016; Nadeak *et al.*, 2020; Dincer & Dariyemez, 2020). Language ambiguity has also been considered one of the most critical aspects of teaching and learning, along with the development of the psychological theory of second language learning in the field of investigation (Zhang & Zou, 2022; Ozdemir & Papi, 2022). It means that the teachers should well manage anxiety in learning the English language. This aspect of anxiety needs to be given attention because of the dominance of the message in realizing memorable English learning because it pays attention to the psychological aspects of students.

Anxiety is an essential construct in psychology. Studies of anxiety in foreign language learning started in the early 1970s (Tóth, 2008). Anxiety in learning English is still felt at

the level of higher education, especially in dealing with reading skills in English. Anxiety is a typical trait that all humans have. People who have a sense of anxiety can never be eliminated. However, the level of anxiety can be minimized, especially in communication skills in English at work, especially at the international level. Learning English subjects has started from entering elementary school to entering college, but the result is that only some students are skilled in communication, possibly uninteresting in English, and lack self-study (Truong, 2021; Ha & Ngo, 2021). An individual can be said to have no self-confidence if he does not dare to speak or appear in public and is ashamed to express his ideas in discussions or meetings (Prieur *et al.*, 2020; Chien *et al.*, 2020; Fakhroh & Hidayatullah, 2018). To improve speaking skills, speakers must master vocabulary and phrases, proper pronunciation, and confidence in speaking. Speaking is a language activity whose purpose is to communicate. Speaking is a mechanical skill, so the more you practice, the more master and skilled a person will be in speaking.

Language anxiety is essential in acquiring and learning a second or foreign language. The term ambiguity of language arises when Horwitz

defines anxiety as involving psychological symptoms, namely a subjective feeling of tension, worry, trembling, and restlessness associated with nervous system stimulation in foreign language learning situations (da Rocha, 2020). The anxiety that is meant in this study leads to language anxiety or, in English words, language anxiety. Language confusion is a complex form of feeling consisting of self-perception, self-confidence, feelings, and behavior related to language learning in the classroom, and it arises from the language learning process (Meng & Feng, 2019). Language anxiety as tension and fear in speaking, listening, or adverse emotional reactions that arise when learning or using a foreign language (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). Language confusion is a feeling of anxiety and stimulation of adverse emotional reactions when learning and using a second language (Prada *et al.*, 2020; Oxford, 2018). The characteristic of an indecisive language learner is an individual who perceives second language learning as an uncomfortable experience, often withdraws from participating in class activities voluntarily, feels pressured not to make mistakes, and is less willing to study it (Al-Seghayer, 2021). If anxiety affects cognitive function, students cannot learn and master what they learn (Hong *et al.*, 2021). This impression will become even more damaging if the learner learns the language, increasing their anxiety level conversely if students who do not have the characteristics of anxiety will feel calm and comfortable learning a second language in class.

Feelings of anxiety is an analysis of anxiety or restlessness experienced by students at Universitas Kristen Indonesia (UKI). It encompasses various related feelings such as fear, nervousness, anxiety, worry, and apprehension due to learning English, especially in listening and speaking skills. Past studies have demonstrated that language anxiety plays a relatively broad role in the context of language learning, whereas as a whole, it shows that there is a significant negative relationship between language anxiety and student learning outcomes (Hu *et al.*, 2021; Fang & Tang, 2021). It means that the higher the anxiety experienced by students, the lower the achievement or language learning outcomes they obtain. Over the decades, scholars have introduced the concept of four basic language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, also known as macro skills (Qian & Lin, 2019). These four basic language skills are related to each other where. In teaching and learning a second or foreign language, the effective

achievement of the four language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking is essential (Banditvilai, 2016). However, in mastering these language skills, scholars have found that anxiety is one of the highest factors that affect and hinder students in learning foreign languages (Ulupinar, 2018; Getie, 2020).

Anxiety was found to directly impact students' learning attitudes and achievement (Sheu, 2017) and is a response to students' anxiety and worry about second language learning, including speech and hearing. Past researchers have made efforts to study anxiety in these four language skills such as speaking skills, listening skills, reading skills, and writing skills. Some studies are the evidence to support the existence of anxiety in language skills and have the formation of different instrument constructs (Dansieh *et al.*, 2021; Hsu *et al.*, 2021; Gok *et al.*, 2021; Chau, 2021). A more specific measurement of language anxiety on language skills is significant to identify the causes of anxiety of language skills more accurately. However, in the context of this study, it is focused on listening and speaking anxiety only.

In connection with the previous description of English-speaking anxiety, three types of related anxiety: communication concerns, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Zhang *et al.*, 2022; Almotiary, 2022). First, communication concerns are fears that individuals experience in oral communication. In English class, worried students do not want to speak in front of others, and they tend to wait until the end of the lecture to ask questions, not raising their hands and expecting someone else to ask the question. Furthermore, anxiety refers to performance anxiety that stems from the fear of failure. Anxious students often place unrealistic demands on themselves and feel that anything less than a perfect test result is a failure (Keeler *et al.*, 2021). Thus, they may become overly concerned and think they will never be able to pronounce a word correctly or give a good presentation. Finally, fear of negative evaluation is defined as concern about the evaluation of others, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others will judge one negatively. In English class, students with a fear of negative evaluation tend to sit passively in class, withdrawing from class activities that can otherwise improve their language skills to avoid anxiety situations.

Studies on speaking anxiety have been carried out abroad that report on the different effects of anxiety on a second or foreign language and its implementation. The relationship between foreign

language anxiety and student achievement in learning non-native languages (Dev & Qiqieh, 2016; Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). Based on his findings, speaking anxiety can be generated by a lack of student learning and learning skills and can be caused by a student's poor performance in the past. Furthermore, the relationship between language anxiety and verbal ability was found that the more anxious the students, the lower the performance displayed in the oral test. The results showed that language anxiety could affect student performance and attitudes about language learning. Finally, the student's English level indicated that the upper secondary level students considered that lack of preparation was a significant contributor to their English anxiety (Pham & Bui, 2019; Macaro *et al.*, 2018). It also shows that lower secondary level students feel less confident in their English learning than high school students. Meanwhile, upper-middle-class students were more afraid of failing in class than lower-middle-level students despite their confidence in their learning. Thus, they also consider it one factor that makes them anxious in their English class.

METHOD

This study is a descriptive qualitative study using a survey. It was chosen for this study because it is suitable for use in research that aims to explain an ongoing phenomenon. This survey method was chosen because it can describe language concerns in English language skills, namely listening and speaking skills. The study's respondents consisted of 98 from three parallel classes at UKI. The sampling method in this study uses the cluster sampling method. In this study, a set of questionnaires was constructed by the researcher by adaptation and modification from the items of previous research questionnaires to measure English language anxiety in detail and comprehensively based on specific themes or constructs that cover four language skills, namely listening and speaking, and reading and writing. This questionnaire is based on a five-point Likert scale. Researchers used descriptive statistics to assess the mean score, standard deviation, and frequency. A set of questionnaires was used to measure speaking skills anxiety to collect data on students' anxiety. It has three constructs: communication anxiety, fear of negative assessment, and anxiety in exams, and the English learning anxiety has four constructs: personal reason, teacher attitude, test situation, and teaching procedure. However, the researcher only

adapted and used the items under the communication anxiety construct because they were related to speaking skills. The researcher adopted the instrument developed by the previous researcher, which has three constructs: background knowledge, text and strategy, and the listener's character. Modifications were made to selected items based on expert views and the pilot study's findings.

Table 1. *Score level interpretation value of questionnaire*

No	Score Range	Interpretation Value
1	1.00-2.00	Low
2	2.01-3.00	Medium-low level
3	3.01-4.00	Medium-high level
4	4.01-5.00	High level

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data, which were taken through by distributing the questionnaire to the 98 eight respondents, are presented as follows. Table 2 shows the mean score, standard deviation, and mean interpretation for the English listening anxiety construct (M = 3.59; SD = 0.55). It suggests that the student's English language skills anxiety was at a medium-high level. The anxiety about speaking skills showed (M = 3.30; SD = 0.48), which indicates that overall the anxiety about speaking English among students is also at a medium-high level.

Table 2. *Descriptive analysis of English language skills anxiety*

Construct	Language Skills	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Language Skill Proficiency	Listening skill	3.59	0.55	Medium-high
	Speaking skill	3.30	0.48	Medium-high

Figure 1 shows the mean score, standard deviation, and meaningful overall mean interpretation for the listening anxiety subconstruct. The analysis results found that the overall mean for the construct of English listening anxiety was 3.57, and the standard deviation was 1.1. It indicates that students experience listening skills anxiety at a medium-high level. The highest mean was 3.90 (SD = 0.82) on the aspect of a person speaking English quickly, and students could not understand it. While the lowest mean value obtained was 3.44 (SD = 1.1) on the aspect of students not being able to listen in English to their ability. This item got a relatively low mean compared to other items likely to be influenced by the listening skills efficiency factor of the students

themselves. Other aspects studied related to listening skills, and anxiety showed little mean differences, and all were at a mean above 3.01.

These findings generally indicate that English language learners have moderately high listening skills anxiety.

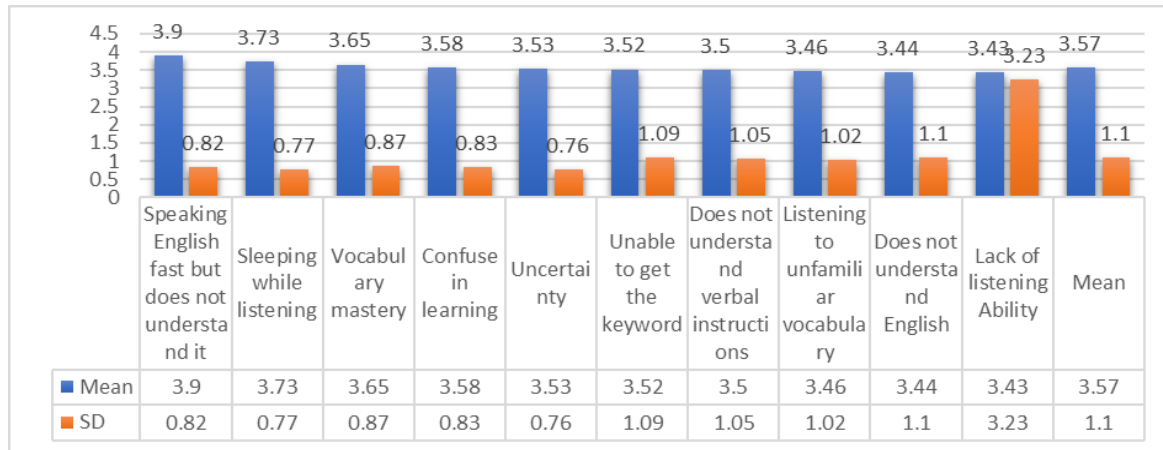


Figure 1. Students listening anxiety level

Figure 2 shows the mean scores, standard deviations, and meaningful interpretations for the overall mean for the speech anxiety sub-construct. The analysis found that the overall mean for the English-speaking anxiety construct was 3.55, and the standard deviation was 1.1. It indicates that students' speaking skills anxiety at a medium-high level. All items' means value was at the medium-high level except one, which was at the medium-low level. The highest mean was 3.93 (SD = 0.82) on the aspect of anxiety facing the English oral test. While the lowest mean obtained

was 3.9 (SD = 0.82), which is the anxiety item in attending an English-speaking class for fear of being corrected by the teacher. This item got a relatively low mean compared to other items likely to be influenced by the factors of shyness and fear of speaking in English. Other aspects studied related to listening skills, and anxiety showed little mean differences, and all were at a mean above 3.01. Generally, these findings indicate that English language learners have moderately high speaking skills anxiety.

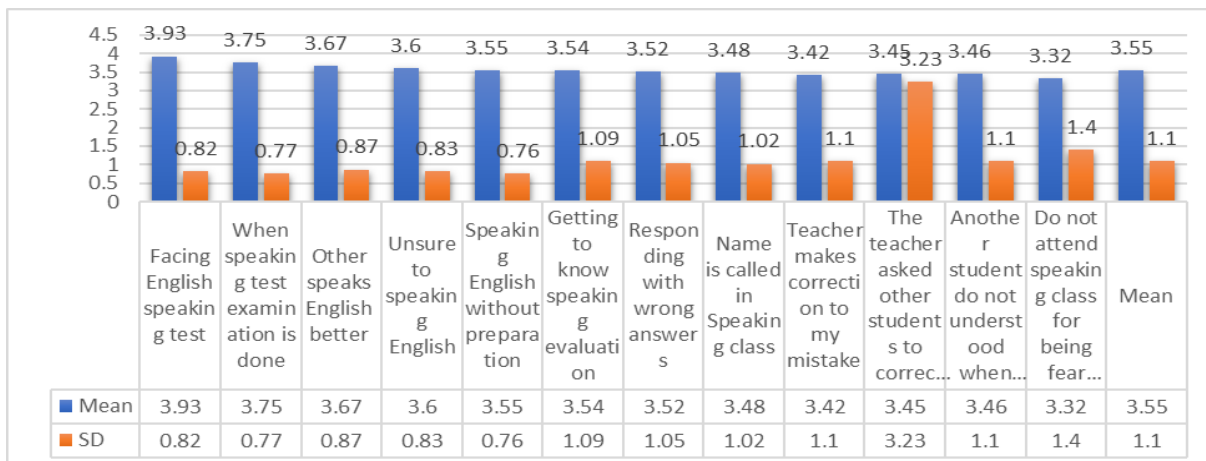


Figure 2. Students' speaking anxiety level

The results of the data analysis showed that the level of English language anxiety of English language learners at UKI as a whole in the two English language skills, namely listening and speaking skills, reached a medium-high level.

For the listening skills anxiety subconstruct, the study's findings indicate that students often experience anxiety, especially when hearing English speech from others rapidly and unable to

comprehend it. Students will feel restless and nervous to respond and proceed to the following communication. The findings of this study are promising and coincide with the findings of a study conducted that found that unintelligible language pronunciation and speed of input transmission heard by students are the leading causes of listening skills anxiety (Cherry, 2021). In addition, it is also influenced by knowledge

background factors, low self-confidence of students, and misuse of listening strategies.

This study also coincides with a study that found that the causes of listening anxiety are based on the audible input characteristics, such as speed or uncertainty with the input heard by a student (Deniz, 2013). These findings are also consistent with a study that found that auditory input characteristics such as pronunciation and intonation speed, text length, and vocabulary level are causes of listening anxiety among students (Nadhira & Warni, 2021). The characteristic features of audible input such as speed rate, level of difficulty, and lack of repetition of word pronunciation are significant factors for listening anxiety.

In this context, teachers need to play an important role in emphasizing English listening skills in teaching. It is because listening skills are essential skills that need to be given priority in the language teaching process. English listening skills teaching techniques are often neglected and not emphasized in Indonesia's teaching of English as a second language (Shah *et al.*, 2017). Listening skills are also not so emphasized that students do not realize the importance of mastering listening skills in learning English (Ha & Ngo, 2021). The implementation of listening skills in English language learning is moderately low. Teachers were found not to emphasize the use of tones appropriate to the situation and less emphasis on listening activities, causing the atmosphere of learning English to be bland and less effective.

This scenario is the cause and obstacle to mastering English listening skills, causing concern among students. It coincides with a study that found that among the external factors that influence the barriers to mastering English listening skills are words, speaker speed, text heard, lack of study aids, and external distractions (Ngwoke *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, English language students must be exposed to practical strategies and diversifying listening skills activities in the classroom.

These findings indicate that students often experience speaking anxiety when facing the English oral test that will be implemented. The findings of this study coincide with a study that stated that they experienced anxiety in facing oral tests (Mohtasham & Farnia, 2017; Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013). Students experienced anxiety during the English oral test, which affected their test performance. The anxiety in oral tests experienced by students was found to be very significant and very high in speaking skills.

The findings of this study are also in line with a study that found that most students experience moderate to high levels of anxiety before sitting the oral test and when faced with unknown questions or ideas during the oral test (Mohtasham & Farnia, 2017). Students who experienced high anxiety in speaking skills would try to avoid participating in activities that spontaneously involved speaking. Students will feel anxious as not being able to organize and deliver their speech correctly and confidently, in turn, makes them fearful and embarrassed (Han *et al.*, 2020). They have negative perceptions of responses or reactions from listeners or peers due to poor vocabulary selection and way of organizing ideas when speaking. The anxiety affects speech speed, accuracy, and output quality during communication.

The findings of this study also show that the level of anxiety of English language students in speaking skills is the lowest compared to other language skills (Khan, 2015). This situation is probably due to the evaluation and assessment of English language subjects for examinations in Indonesia being oriented to the examination system, namely when most of the marks are assessed through writing rather than speaking. Thus, students focus more on the mastery and achievement of writing skills than speaking skills other than listening and reading skills. Several factors cause students' weakness in mastering speaking skills.

Among them is the lack of a weak culture and language environment to support English - speaking students in schools (Berkowitz *et al.*, 2021; Naibaho, 2021). Lack of practice in English and making it a medium of communication is the cause of the weakness of students' mastery of these skills. English is only used during the teaching process of teachers, while the living environment with the atmosphere of English itself is essential in creating an atmosphere of active learning among students (Dörnyei & Muir, 2019). It can improve students' social skills, especially in mastering and acquiring English. From the aspect of teaching English, several weaknesses have been identified. The factors of student-centered teaching, text translation-based teaching, lack of training and questions, lack of teaching aids, lack of activities, passive attitude of students, and lack of English communication contribute to the problem of English speaking skills among students (Ge & Pi 2021). Even more frustrating when there are attitudes and practices of some teachers who do not practice English and do not

follow the communicative approach when carrying out the teaching and learning process in the classroom (Luz, 2015). Thus, teachers should maintain an environment of continuous English speaking and wisely practice communication techniques among students. The speaking skills of the teaching staff play an essential role in the teaching and learning process (Yen *et al.*, 2015). It can directly have a positive effect and motivation to students to cultivate the English language.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show that English language anxiety among English language learners in the two English language skills as a whole is at a medium-high level. This study suggests that teachers emphasize compelling and diverse strategies and techniques of teaching English for English language skills, namely listening and speaking skills, to help reduce anxiety among students applying English. In addition, the importance of mastering these listening and speaking skills is crucial and closely related. Listening and speaking skills become critical skills in human interaction. Thus, to improve their achievement and ability in the English language, students are also advised to use appropriate English language learning techniques and strategies to minimize English language anxiety among them. Thus, the ability of students to master the English language in language learning requires continuous efforts and support from various parties, especially the school.

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