Students Anxiety in Speaking a Foreign Language. The Case of Eleventh Graders

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This research was conducted through a descriptive-qualitative design that aimed to determine the factors of students' speaking anxiety.

Methods. This study used qualitative research involving 205 eleventh grade students of Senior High School on Pontianak, Indonesia who had attended English lessons. Data on students' anxiety in speaking English were collected using two instruments: questionnaires and interviews.

Result. eleventh graders students fall into the middle category, and their lack of mastery leads to speaking anxiety about grammar, a lack of vocabulary, and a lack of preparation.

Conclusion. Foreign language anxiety, especially in speaking, is a challenging problem for most students. Therefore, teachers should provide opportunities for students to practice speaking in front of the class gradually because such activities will positively increase their self-confidence and perception of their performance in the target language. More importantly, teachers and students must collaborate by providing a better learning environment and setting achievable speaking performance standards. If this activity is carried out continuously, it will increase students' motivation in learning foreign languages, especially class XI students at Pontianak High School.

Cognitive Value. This research will provide input for stakeholders, especially English teachers to overcome speaking anxiety in their classrooms.

Keywords: anxiety, speaking anxiety, English speaking, foreign language, senior high school, Pontianak

Introduction

One of widely known factors causing speaking problem is anxiety (Zhang et al., 2018). mentioned that anxiety is a condition in which a person's feelings are driven to become anxious, restless, and frustrated. This feeling becomes more common since the social environment continues to change with the accelerated pace of modern life, especially during adolescence (Xi, 2020). In relation to todays condition, however, anxiety will prevent someone from speaking clearly and fluently in conveying their ideas to others. The fluency shows how proficiency of someone in learning and speaking foreign language, in this context is English. The phenomenon of feeling nervous, anxious and even insecure when speaking English is called foreign language anxiety (Asysyfa et al., 2019). This anxiety will develop when a person is worried or afraid of something that might happen in the future, as well as of speaking in front of other people (Rimmer et al., 2014; Siaw et al., 2020).

Preliminary research on student speaking problems of college students found that they prefer to remain silent in class because of speaking fear (Liu & Liu, 2018; Salawazo et al., 2020) The students argued that the fear happened because of several factors; some students who could speak fluent English, unwillingness to speak, and low motivation. Another study conducted by (Hasibuan & Irzawati, 2020)proved that anxiety was one of the biggest challenges to speaking . The study compared the speaking performance and anxiety in face-to-face (F2F) and synchronous voice-based chat (SVC), and surprisingly it revealed different speaking abilities. The students who had F2F speaking had lower speaking performance than SVC because of anxiety attacks, meanwhile those who had SVC tend to speak more confidently.

In addition, a study conducted by Peni Oktavia and Syahrul Syahrul (2021) mentioned that anxiety has a positive correlation to students' speaking performance (Oktavia & Syahrul, 2021). It was mentioned in the study that anxiety occurred because students were afraid of negative perceptions when they spoke English in front of their friends or classmates. Since English is a foreign language to the students, they tend to laugh and criticise when their friends speak English, as a consequences, they become less confident and afraid to express their ideas in English. Furthermore, students' anxiety in speaking English was caused by their limited vocabulary (Wiraldi et al., 2020). The study revealed that students' low mastery of vocabulary and less knowledge of grammar prevent them speaking, thus they were not able to speak English fluently. Other than that, students were shy, uncomfortable, and lacked confidence in practicing spoken English (Wiraldi et al., 2020). It concluded that speaking anxiety influences students' confidence because they are afraid of failure and mistakes (Asysyfa et al., 2019).

About factors causing speaking anxiety, it was assumed that different students perceived different factors about their anxiety. The different factors might occur because of different learning background, levels, and learning conditions faced by stu-

dents. Thus the present study aimed at investigating students' perceptions regarding the factors causing their anxiety and the strategies to cope with it. Moreover, the level of students' anxiety was under explored. Referring to the earlier researches, many of speaking anxiety inverstigations were explored in senior high school students, and less investigation on vocational high school students. In point of fact vocational students also learn English as a compulsory subject, thus it was believed that students vocals related to speaking anxiety problems urged to be investigated. This study will present a profound references on the issues on speaking anxiety and will be a reference for stakeholders; relevant English teachrs and institutions to cope with the same issue.

The variety of foreign language learning experiences in Indonesia is still interesting and deserves to be analysed further so that it can provide an effective solution to this problem. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to categorise the reasons for students' English-speaking anxiety and find out the students' level of anxiety in the oral English classes. The following research questions will be investigated in this study:

- Examine the factors of students' anxiety when speaking English;
- How is the level of anxiety of high school students and senior high school students in the English class?

Literature Review

Speaking Skills

Speaking is an oral skill defined as the ability to communicate with other people where the speaker and listener do not lose the meaning of the conversation (Gan, 2012; Jintapitak et al., 2016; Kasbi & Elahi Shirvan, 2017; Tuspekova et al., 2020). In a pragmmatic view of language performance, speaking is one of the communication skills in English that is associated to listening. Additionally, Sandra L. Harris (1975) defines speaking as a complex talent that requires the ability to pronounce words and exhibit grammar, fluency, and comprehension, among other capacities (Valette & Harris, 1970). Based on its situation, speaking is categorised into two types; formal and informal. In the formal context, speaking is generally used in giving views, speeches, meeting, and appointments, while the informal is such as used in daily conversation, entertainment, and even slang (Abin & Syam, 2019).

In producing utterances or speaking, certain requirements must be followed by communicators which functions as interpersonal communication, small group communication, and large group communication. Thus, we need to adjust the kind of style in speaking according to its occasion and to which of group we are speaking. Nonetheless, in real life we make mistakes when we communicate to others, either orally or written. Rupert Brown (2000) stated that the problem with speaking is finding ways to combine words into simple phrases and repeating the discussion for each word

(Terrell & Brown, 1981). It was proven by Lingli Zhang (2015) who assured that speaking sometimes becomes students' burden because they are not able to produce utterances that caused by several problems such as worries in making mistakes, and being judged, and the utmost is being embarrassed (Zhang, 2015). Further, the tendency of domination affects students' motivation to express ideas in class.

Speaking Anxiety

According to the American Psychological Association, anxiety is a mood that is manifested physically as well as tension-related sentiments and thoughts. Most of these feelings are associated with an overestimation of unfavourable circumstance (Alshammari et al., 2022)particularly in females and college students. Stress can impact students' overall performance and their physical and mental health. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of life and is associated with high levels of psychological distress. It has considerably affected the education sector, not only locally but worldwide, forcing a shift in the education system from on-site to virtual learning. This cross-sectional study was undertaken to evaluate the prevalence of anxiety and stress regarding virtual learning among health sciences college students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA. On the other hand, anxiety is also defined as a feeling of agitation or worry that gives a sense of discomfort about something that is happening or might happen in the future (Xi, 2020). Anxiety disorder is mostly highlighted by panic attacks and fear with manifestation. Speaking is considered to be the aspect of communicating in a foreign language that causes the most anxiety, as seen by concerns about grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and the inability to speak naturally. As a consequence, the issue of expressing and communicating the idea is the main problem attacking someone with speaking anxiety.

Anxiety is common at a young age, especially in teenagers. Anxiety in public speaking is usually manifested during adolescence, with social anxiety disorder being the most frequently reported risk. Public speaking anxiety causes clinically significant distress and a marked impairment in dopamine functioning. Hannah Plaisted et al. (2022) revealed that the global prevalence of anxiety in children and adolescents reaches 6.5%, with a mean age of 15 years (Plaisted et al., 2022). Adolescents who suffer from social anxiety are generally afraid to speak in front of the class, to appear in front of others, to ask questions of the teacher, to participate in conversations, and to do so in general. Critically, this is a situation that teenagers who stutter find difficult when trying to cope with their stuttering (Rodgers et al., 2022).

Elaine K. Horwitz et al. (1986) sum up some elements that contribute to someone's anxiety, they are fear of communication, test of anxiety, and concern on a bad evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986). First, communication problems include shyness and dislike, which are personality qualities and are becoming prevalent among students.

Second, the test of anxiety refers to a condition when a person receives a formal test or assessment and thought of failure before doing it. Third, concern on a bad evaluation is when a person includes in certain occasion such as meeting or class presentation, students might have a lot of worry related to other's reaction to them. Then, the fear of negative feedback is a continuation anxiety in foreign language, in this case is English. After all, students' anxiety about the motivation to speak a foreign language in particular is heightened by the fact that English is still hotly discussed among researchers in Indonesia.

Research Method

This study was conducted through a descriptive-qualitative method designed (Oruç & Demirci, 2020; Tuncel et al., 2020) aimed at finding out the factors of students' speaking anxiety. The study focused on native phenomena related to students' perceptions of fear of speaking in spoken English lessons in natural settings. Thus, this study research is descriptive in nature in which the data is collected based on the phenomenon of English teaching classes without changing or manipulating the conditions or the surrounding environment (Altunel, 2019). The investigation was conducted at Senior High School (SMA) Pontianak, Indonesia including 205 eleventh graders in that school.

Two primary data; anxiety factors and perceptions through an interview and questionnaire, were collected respectively. The interview attempted to explain how students' anxiety levels in speaking and students' perceptions of speaking anxiety using random sampling technique. Meanwhile, the questionnaire is used to construct an interview sample and filled out by all 205 eleventh graders. Informed consent was given verbally. All students were aware of all information and requirements related to the research from the researcher. Students responded under no pressure. Hence, the questionnaire was first distributed before conducting an interview. The students were eleventh graders at SMA Pontianak, so they had no problem reading and no problem signing the questionnaire. The questionnaire was not given a time limit, the students could fill in the questionnaire on the spot freely without any pressure. The students only provided three responses, agree, neutral, and disagree, all of which were consistent with their personal experiences. During the interview process, students understood all of the researcher's questions. The researcher assured himself that he was not influenced by any form of culture and political views of the students. The researcher has a neutral view. The students were not forced/threatened to answer the researcher's questions. The validity of the data will be a reflection from these two-type data. While the interview is being conducted, the researcher is also taking notes. After gathering data through interviews and questionnaires, the researcher identified the data and conducted an analysis of the data.

Results

The result of the study is categorised into two parts, data from the questionnaire and the interview. The questionnaire was carried out by the subject personally without any coercion from any party. Figure 1 shows the detail results of questionnaire.

Figure 1
Results of the foreign language anxiety questionnaire
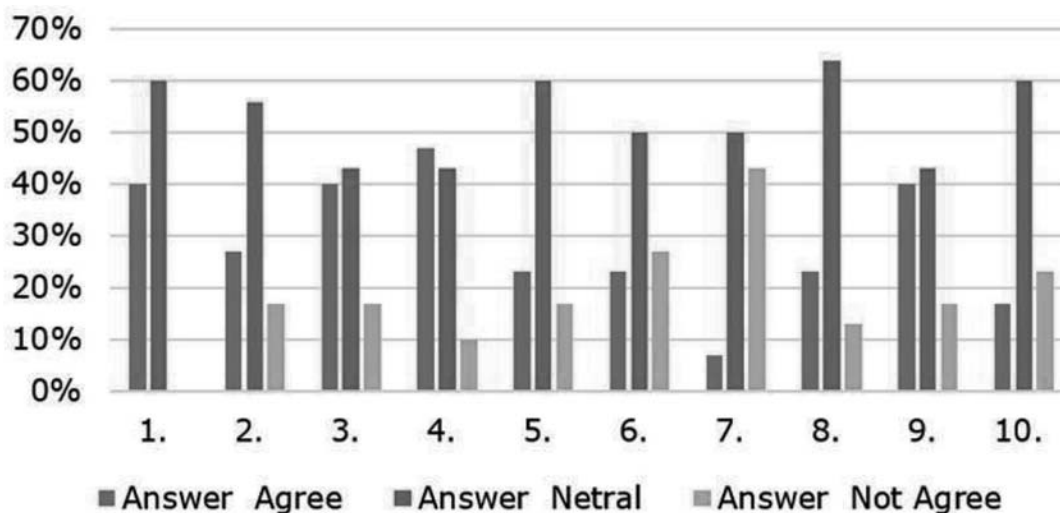
Source. Own research.

Referring to Figure 1, the first question was related to the importance of English speaking. As many as 40% of the subjects agreed that speaking English was not important, while 60% of the subjects considered it is important to speak English. The result shows slight differences among those who consider the importance of English speaking, it was because most students use Indonesian to communicate in their daily lives. Thus, they feel uncomfortable in using English language because they are afraid of making mistakes and mispronunciation.

Second, when speaking English with native speakers, answers containing an element of a past tense question were reported to be given about 27%, neutral answers 56%, and disagree answers 17%. Most of the students, in this regard chose neutral because some English phrases and utterances were difficult to understand. They claimed that the difficulty was understanding caused by the use of unusual native syllables.

The third result is related to the students' confidence in speaking English. The result 43% of neutral answer, 40% agree, and 17% disagree. The more frequently someone speaks or expresses themselves in a foreign language, the more confident they are. It is believed that language should be used frequently to generate a sufficiently high level of vocabulary. There are many rules to follow when speaking a foreign language.

Another condition happened when students performed in a language exam, the result showed that 7% said that they were not nervous, while 43% said neutral. Students'

fears of the most important class topics were presented so quickly that the responses obtained were: 23% agreed, 64% were indifferent, and the rest disagreed. Additionally, when students did not understand the words or utterances in English, 40% students tend to dislike the topic, 43% say they are neutral, and the remaining 17% confirmed they still like the topic. Thus, the atterntion in English class is approved by 17%, neutral by 60%, and disliked by 23% of students.

Furthermore, another result was drawn from the interview. According to the interview results, 23% of the subjects agreed with the grammar rules in speaking, yet 60% answered neutrally and 17% answered incorrectly. However, it is still very important to understand grammar when speaking to assure the accuracy and prevent misunderstanding. In addition, the interview revealed that speaking anxiety happened when the English teacher asked the students to speak in front of the class. It was reported that 23% of children felt afraid, 50% were doubtful, and the remaining 43% were neutral.

Finally, the interview uncovered several student perspectives about the factors that contribute to speaking English with anxiety, including exam anxiety, communication anxiety, and fear of receiving a poor grade. Most pupils believe that speaking English causes anxiety due to communication anxieties. As a result, eleventh graders students fall into the middle category, and their lack of mastery leads to speaking anxiety about grammar, a lack of vocabulary, and a lack of preparation.

Discussions

The purpose of this study was to find out the causes of high school students' experiences of fear when speaking English. Based on the results obtained through interviews, it can be reported that most subjects stated that their fear of speaking was the cause of communication problems. The fear was categorised into fear of testing, communicating, and negative judgment. These kinds of fear affect how students perform and its correlation to fear of failure (Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). Therefore, knowing the reasons behind students' anxiety could reduce the worries so that the solution could directly cope the problem.

Speaking anxiety can be caused by external factors, such as the classroom environment, teacher behaviour, learning procedures, and the environment in the classroom (Djafri & Wimbarti, 2018). More importantly, speaking anxiety could closely related to students' language proficiency. Meihua Liu (2018) mentioned some causes of anxiety to speak English, they are low English proficiency, lack of familiarity of tasks, and lack of confidence (Liu, 2018) 1092 first-year undergraduates answered the English-speaking Anxiety Scale (ESAS. A lack of English proficiency is highlighted as a main problem that prevent students from conversing in English. As a result, students feel inadequate, afraid to be judge, and have less confidence with their competence. Besides, unfamiliarity of the task or topic could be a fear of producing English utterance. It is

presumed that topic interest mattered to encourage students' participation in class. Therefore, preparing relevant topics related to students' interest might help them to communicate ideas and more importantly reduce anxiety (Liu, 2018) 1092 first-year undergraduates answered the English-speaking Anxiety Scale (ESAS. Further, a lack of confidence could be a result of those two preceding factors. Confidence is related to students' belief and trust in themselves, even though students have good speaking proficiency, some of them still lack of courage to speak using English.

In addition, the speaking anxiety can be affected by students' motivation in learning a language. It was revealed by previous studies that motivation has a positive relationship with foreign language anxiety and academic achievement. As a result, student motivation will increase and anxiety in foreign languages will decrease. Similarly, this study showed that eleventh graders showed less motivation in learning English, thus, they faced more anxiety when speaking English. Motivation, on the other hand, can be managed by the individual himself. Eylem Oruc and Cavide Demirci (2020) confirmed that the more effort of the individuals to develop their cognitive skill, the higher level of motivation he has (Oruç & Demirci, 2020). Similarly, Martyn C. Jones and Derek W. Johnston (2006) believe that the one who can control and solve both motivation and anxiety is the individual himself (Jones & Johnston, 2006).

Revealing from the result of the study that most students were embarrassed by the differences from individual to individual and from scenario to scenario. As Ardhea Rosana Putri et al. (2020) mentioned that the frightened students believed their language skills were weaker than those of their other classmates (Putri et al., 2020). Language learners who struggle frequently have lower self-esteem than language learners who succeed. Meanwhile, Rais Abin and Hariadi Syam (2019) noted that fewer students who were safe were at risk of experiencing fear because they worry too much of peer and teacher's bad judgment about their speaking performance in the class (Abin & Syam, 2019). It was agreed that anxiety problems could be a snowballing issue in language learning, specifically in speaking. Horwitz et al. (1986) state that the high foreign language anxiety causes students to not want to communicate in English (Horwitz et al., 1986).

In regard to the students' speaking anxiety, the issue must be coped with with particular strategies according to experts. Even though scholars (Jones & Johnston, 2006) believe that students must have their own strategy to solve anxiety, another scholar (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004)trying to obtain good summaries of lecture notes also believes that anxiety can be coped with by several strategies; preparation, peer seeking, and resignation. Preparation is the core strategy to be familiar with the topic before attending class to perform the outmost. Whereas peer seeking could reduce the anxiety because students share the same emotional regulation with their peers (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004) trying to obtain good summaries of lecture notes. In the context of speaking in class, students will feel more comfortable when they have opinions similar to peers. Lastly, resignation, refers to an action that minimizing the effect of anxiety

(Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004)trying to obtain good summaries of lecture notes. However, we believe that resignation is a good alternative in coping anxiety because students tend to ignore it and alleviating to another activity. All things considered, it is crucial for teacher to deter the students' anxiety and factors behind it to design meaningful speaking activities for the students.

Conclusion

Foreign language anxiety, pertinently in speaking, is a challenging problem for most students. Therefore, teachers must provide opportunities for students to practice speaking in front of the class gradually since the activity will positively reduce their lack of confidence and perceptions about their performance in the target language. More importantly, teachers and students must collaborate together by providing better learning environments and setting achievable standards for speaking performance. If the activity is considered to be done continuously, it will increase students' motivation to learn foreign languages, specifically eleventh graders of SMA Pontianak.

Some limitations were proposed. This study did not compare gender differences in foreign language anxiety because there are differences in the level of psychological development of male and female students. In addition, the subject of this study was only aimed at eleventh grades students in one particular place. Thus, the perception and factors of speaking anxiety might be different for other subjects in different areas. Considering the limitation, this study suggested to identify casual factors that cause anxiety with different genders of students, and different school location; whether it is in urban or rural school.

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