


Students' Anxiety in Learning English (A Case Study at Eleventh Grade of SMK Al Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru)

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<p>Received : February 3, 2024 Revised : March 21, 2024 Accepted : March 22, 2024 Published: March 31, 2024</p> <p>Corresponding Author Author Name: Moh. Rifqi Email: rifqimoh21@gmail.com</p> <p>DOI: 10.29303/jeef.v4i1.589</p> <p>© 2024 The Authors. This open access article is distributed under a (CC-BY License)</p> 	<p>Abstract: This study investigates the types of anxiety experienced by students when learning English and the factors contributing to their anxiety in the Eleventh Grade of SMK Al Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru. It employs a qualitative descriptive research approach with a case study design, utilizing observations, interviews, and documentation for data collection, which is then analyzed descriptively. The results reveal that students experience two types of anxiety: state anxiety and trait anxiety. The causes of this anxiety include communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and deficiencies in vocabulary and grammar. It is also concluded that there are interplays between the current factors with the students' past experience. It is recommended that through the findings of this research, the interventions addressing the identified causes of anxiety can be implemented to support students' language learning experiences.</p> <p>Keywords: students' anxiety, learning English</p>
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INTRODUCTION

LeDoux (2015) explicates that the term "anxiety" in English, along with its counterparts in European languages (e.g., *angoisse* in French, *angoscia* in Italian, *angustia* in Spanish, *angst* in German, and *angst* in Danish), originates from the Latin word *anxietas*. This Latin term, in turn, finds its roots in the ancient Greek term *angh*. While the Greeks occasionally used *angh* to convey a sense of being burdened or troubled (i.e., anguished), its primary usage pertained to physical sensations, such as tightness, constriction, or discomfort. For instance, the medical condition "*angina*," characterized by chest pains related to heart disease, is derived from the Greek term *angh*. Anxiety is derived from the word "anxious". The term *anxious* in this study denotes a sense of being apprehensive or nervous about something (9th Edition of the Oxford Dictionary).

LeDoux (2015) asserts that anxiety is a pervasive aspect of human existence; it is a persistent companion in our lives, constantly presenting us with something to worry about, anticipate with unease, feel uneasy over, or experience stress about. In learning, anxiety often manifests itself as a barrier, hindering students' abilities to fully engage with the material and perform optimally. Whether it's the fear of failure, apprehension about comprehension, or unease during assessments, anxiety in learning can significantly impact students' academic experiences. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that not all instances of anxiety carry the same level of intensity. According to Csóti (2003), anxiety can be a beneficial aspect of a student's development. Mild anxiety can motivate her to reach her maximum potential by making her feel threatened by rivals and afraid of failure. Adrenaline and the stress hormone can help the students perform well in tests by activating her brain to function at top speed. Nevertheless, heightened levels of anxiety are likely to exert an epiphenomenal impact on academic performance by disrupting the information processing system (Nelson & Harwood, 2010).

The rise of English as a means of communication in the international community has been rapid, significantly impacting the way English is taught in schools. Teaching English has become a trend in Indonesia, with students required to study the language. English teachers have begun employing a variety of teaching strategies aimed at equipping students with essential language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, mastering English is a challenging task, requiring students to meet specific criteria (Tran, 2022). These criteria encompass language knowledge, basic understanding, and speaking proficiency across various contexts, necessitating students to possess self-confidence, self-esteem, and self-motivation. The demand for mastering English in the educational landscape often induces anxiety among students. The pressure to meet linguistic standards and perform well in various language skills examinations can exacerbate this anxiety further.

Horwitz et.al. (1986) posits that the process of acquiring proficiency in the English language is distinctive, as students are compelled to communicate in a language they have not fully mastered. Horwitz identifies three components of foreign language anxiety, which include communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Those experiencing communication apprehension feel uneasy expressing themselves in the target language, particularly in speaking, due to limited language proficiency. Students with a fear of negative evaluation perceive language errors as a threat to their image, potentially leading to negative judgments from teachers or peers, rather than viewing mistakes as a natural part of the learning process. Consequently, they tend to be reserved and hesitant to participate in language activities (Ely, 1986). Students grappling with test anxiety perceive the foreign language learning process, especially oral production, as a test scenario rather than an opportunity for skill enhancement and improved communication. The self-confidence, anxiety, and mastery of the subject matter when speaking in front of the class were among the non-linguistic

elements that were considered as speaking performance barriers (Amrullah, 2015).

According to Li, et.al. (2023), cognitive as well as affective capacities influence basic English skills, like speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Krashen (in Mahdalena & Muslem, 2021) also stated that affective can help slow down the process of mastering students' English skills in the course of acquiring English as a second language. Students who possess lower levels of negative affective states tend to acquire more language knowledge than their counterparts with elevated negative affective levels. Consequently, the success of students in learning is significantly influenced by affective factors. Recent mental health surveys indicate that today's teenagers and young adults are experiencing unprecedented levels of anxiety (Prasad, et.al., 2023). Surveys reveal that 70 percent of teenagers identify anxiety and depression as a major problem among their peers, with an additional 26 percent considering it a minor issue (Flannery, 2018). In Indonesia, data from *Riskedas (riset kesehatan dasar)* 2018 in Rokom (2021) showed that more than 19 million people aged over 15 years experienced mental emotional disorders, and more than 12 million people aged over 15 years experienced depression.

The symptoms experienced by anxious students learning English are essentially identical to those associated with any specific anxiety. They encounter feelings of apprehension, concern, and even intense fear. Their ability to focus becomes compromised, they may become forgetful, experience sweating, and have palpitations. Additionally, they engage in avoidance actions such as skipping classes and delaying completion of homework (Horwitz et.al., 1986). They discovered that students who were anxious attempted fewer interpretative messages than students who were comfortable. Horwitz further mentioned that learners experiencing anxiety frequently encounter difficulties in discerning the sounds and structures embedded in the message of the target language. Furthermore, he said that many students did not understand what the teacher was explaining in extended English. Researchers who conduct their studies in their native language have discovered that students who experience greater levels of anxiety when writing shorter compositions tend to write and perform less effectively than their less anxious peers (Horwitz et.al., 1986). In the context of extended use of a second language, the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety frequently manifests itself, in particular during testing situations. Students often demonstrate a familiarity with specific grammar points when discussing them with counselors or while preparing for a test or an oral exercise. However, students tend to "forget" these points when they are required to recall and apply multiple grammar rules simultaneously. This issue can also manifest as persistent "careless" errors in spelling or syntax. It is typically after the test that the student realizes they knew the correct answer but were hindered by nervousness. If the student becomes aware that they made preventable errors during the test despite knowing the correct answers, it can lead to a cycle where anxiety and errors reinforce each other.

Additionally, excessive studying is a connected occurrence. Students who excessively worry about their performance might experience heightened anxiety when they

make mistakes, leading them to try to compensate by increasing their study time. It's understandable that they feel irritated when their compulsive attempts do not result in increased grades. On the other hand, anxious students may adopt the opposite approach by avoiding studying altogether and, in certain instances, even skipping classes in an attempt to alleviate their anxiety (Horwitz et.al., 1986). He also stated that the student's tension and frustration in the classroom can be influenced by specific beliefs about language learning. It is worth mentioning that some students hold the belief that nothing should be uttered in the foreign language unless it can be said accurately, and that it is unacceptable to guess the meaning of an unfamiliar foreign word. These beliefs can create anxiety because students are required to communicate in the second language before achieving complete fluency. Additionally, even exceptional language learners make mistakes or encounter instances where they forget words, necessitating occasional guessing. Such beliefs are likely to generate anxiety due to the perceived expectations and challenges associated with language learning.

This study attempts to investigate the factors contributing to anxiety among eleventh-grade students at SMK Al-Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru when learning English, as explained in the preceding rationale. In the pursuit of understanding and addressing this phenomenon, the researcher proposes a research entitled: "Exploring Students' Anxiety in Learning English: A Case Study of the Eleventh Grade at SMK Al-Istiqomah NWDI Mamben Baru."

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a qualitative research method, recognizing the two fundamental types of research – qualitative and quantitative. The choice of a qualitative approach was based on the nature of the phenomena under investigation, which required qualitative data. In qualitative research, investigators explore phenomena in their natural settings, aiming to comprehend and interpret the observed occurrences (Creswell as cited in Sugiyono, 2017). In this study, the data were subjected to descriptive analysis, a fundamental technique in qualitative research. Descriptive analysis involves summarizing and interpreting data to attain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The researcher employed this technique to collect, organize, and present the data. It's important to note that qualitative methods, including descriptive analysis, do not involve calculations or statistical procedures. The data analysis process in this study encompassed data reduction, data display, and data verification, as illustrated in the outlined scheme.

The researcher employed purposive sampling techniques to select participants for this study, intending to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling is 'used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information' (Kelly in Campbell et al., 2020) and is a way of identifying and selecting cases that will use limited research resources effectively (Palinkas et al., 2015). The study's population comprised all eleventh-grade students at SMK Al-Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru. In this class, there were 10 students, consisting of 4 men and 6 women. Ten students in the eleventh grade were selected to participate in this study as

respondents. This study utilized three types of techniques of data collection: observations, interviews, and documentation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the observation, the researcher discovered that when they were required to speak in front of the class, most of the students experienced anxiety. Specifically, the students appeared nervous and scared as they stepped forward to speak. Additionally, some of them appeared visibly anxious and had difficulty recalling what they were about to say. This anxiety was evident in their body language and hesitancy during their presentations. Table 1 below shows the aspects causing students' anxiety in learning English.

Table 1. Aspects caused students' anxiety

Aspects caused to anxiety	Sign
Communication Apprehensions	Lowering the face while speaking, lowering the voice, lack of eye contact, and stammering.
Fear of Negative Evaluation	Students avoid making eye contact with teachers and disregard their instructions to practice.
Ridiculed by others	The students start losing concentration, wriggling, lowering their voices, trembling, sweating, and either smiling or laughing to cover their anxiety
Lack of vocabulary and grammar	The students still remain silent when the teacher asks them using English. They didn't understand the teacher's explanation.

As indicated in the table above, it is evident that students experience anxiety in specific situations. Particularly, they express apprehension when the teacher initiates speaking activities, such as speaking in front of the class or responding to questions. Observations reveal that students often display nervousness while speaking in front of others. Some employ strategies such as lowering their voices or reading quickly to evade potential reprimands from the teacher. Additionally, a few students may pretend to be engrossed in reading or writing notes as a means to avoid the teacher's attention. In extreme cases, some students actively resist participating in speaking activities to circumvent the potential humiliation or embarrassment associated with public speaking.

Table .2 Kinds of Anxiety

Kinds of Anxiety	Sign
State Anxiety	Students exhibited signs of worry and panic when tasked with speaking in front of the class. The anxiety heightened when the teacher directed questions to them. Additionally, students consistently maintained silence and appeared confused when the teacher explained the material in English.
Trait Anxiety	When the teacher explained in English, students often appeared confused. Additionally, some students resorted to strategies such as pretending to be busy with writing or reading a book to avoid direct interaction with the teacher.

From Table 2, it shows that students felt anxious in particular situations. The students felt uneasy when the teacher

asked them to speak in front of the class, as shown in Tran (2022) and Ely (1986). The students also felt bothered when the teacher explained the material too fast. They seemed to panic when the teacher asked them to answer the question. They kept silent when the teacher asked them to answer the question about the material that they don't understand yet. Therefore, the researcher concluded that students with the feature like that belong to State Anxiety.

Furthermore, the other features that were shown by the students during the observation are students looked confused when the teacher explained the material in English. To avoid their teacher, the students pretend to be busy by doing something while the teacher explains things, like writing something or reading a book, and it can be concluded as the Trait Anxiety.

Data Based on Interviews

Based on students' opinions, the researcher sought to understand the factors influencing speaking anxiety in students. The students who were thought to be anxious in English class were interviewed by unstructured interviews to acquire the data. It was discovered that speaking activities and unclear explanations were the aspects of English classes that disturbed participants the most. They also said that they become nervous when their peers are getting attention when they speak in front of the class. Because they are scared if they make a mistake, their peers will mock them. When the researcher asked why they feel so nervous, the participants responded that they get anxious because they haven't studied the topic thoroughly and don't understand what the teacher is saying. The students also said they got nervous because they had limited grammar and vocabulary. According to Amrullah, et.al. (2021), he stated that students continue to face challenges in comprehending unfamiliar vocabulary and selecting appropriate words for specific situations in English. Additionally, the length of English words poses difficulties for them in terms of memorization and pronunciation of vocabulary. They also figured out that their peers are better than them.

When the researcher asked how the other students would react if their friend or classmate made a mistake, some of them said that their peers would laugh. The researcher also examined the participants' beliefs about the English language. They thought that English is difficult to learn, they need to know about every word to understand.

Furthermore, the students also questioned how the teacher influenced their feelings. They responded that the teacher might cause anxiety through their actions and behavior such as forcing students to practice, using a harsh and intimidating approach, and speaking too quickly. The respondents also stated that the teacher could teach more clearly and slowly by utilizing English only occasionally.

Data Based on Documentation

Based on the students' examination results, most of them indicated that they failed in the examination. That is demonstrated by the score that they got in the examination, which most of the students got below the standard. The students also often did not submit the task that was given by the teacher. The students thought that English is a complicated

subject and difficult to master. It is supported by Horwitz et.al. (1986) that stated, students skipped the class or did not submit the task because the students believe that how hard they try to study English, they will always fail.

Anxiety among students failing to turn in assignments or performing poorly on English tests, or showing other signs of anxiety as previously explained, can often be linked to their past learning experiences, particularly instances where they were not sufficiently encouraged or supported. This lack of encouragement may have caused a sense of self-doubt and insecurity in their abilities. The present situation can be seen as the result of historical factors shaping an individual's development and behavior (Vygotsky, 1978).

In this context, students who have previously faced discouragement or criticism in their English learning journey may carry forward these negative experiences into their present academic experience. The fear of failure, rooted in past experiences of inadequacy, can manifest as anxiety when faced with assignments or tests in English.

Students who have been consistently criticized for their English language skills in the past may develop a fear of failure, leading them to procrastinate or avoid completing assignments altogether. Similarly, students who have previously experienced failure on English tests may approach future assessments with heightened anxiety, impacting their performance.

CONCLUSION

The eleventh-grade students at SMK Al-Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru predominantly experienced trait anxiety and state anxiety. Trait anxiety involves the fear of not understanding all the language input, which increases the likelihood of failure. State anxiety, on the other hand, pertains to the stress of having to speak in front of the class.

Three factors may contribute to their anxiety. The first factor is communication apprehension. Students feel anxious when they are asked to speak, either in front of individual peers or in front of the class. The second factor is fear of negative evaluation. The students feel anxious about receiving a negative evaluation from their teacher or peers, which could highlight their faults. The third factor is the lack of vocabulary and grammar. The students feel anxious when they don't understand what the teacher says in English because they have limited mastery of vocabulary and grammar.

The present situation of student anxiety in learning English can be understood through the lens of historical factors shaping individual development (Vygotsky, 1978). Cognitive development is influenced by social interactions and cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of past experiences in shaping present behaviors and attitudes. In the context of student anxiety, past events or experiences play a significant role in shaping the cognitive and emotional processes underlying their current struggles, as shown in the three factors. For example, if a student has previously encountered difficulties or failures in English learning, these experiences become part of their cognitive "tools" or mental representations of language learning. Negative experiences may contribute to the formation of negative self-perceptions and beliefs about their language abilities, leading to increased anxiety in present learning situations.

In summary, it is important to look into the past experiences, social interactions, and cultural influences in shaping present behaviors and attitudes including anxiety. Student anxiety in learning English can be understood as a complex interplay between past events and present factors, highlighting the need for holistic approaches to address emotional well-being and support language learning.

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