



Teaching Anxiety Level and Coping Strategy of EFL Novice Teachers

Abdul Haris Sunubi, Utari Rustam, Zulfah Fakhruddin, Arqam,
Maghdalena Tjalla, Emilia Mustary, & Nur Afiah
Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

Abstract: *Teaching anxiety is feeling powerless and experiencing tension in teaching. A high level of anxiety affects the quality of teaching performance and teachers' teaching resilience. This study aims to describe teaching anxiety levels and coping strategies of EFL novice teachers in teaching four English skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). This study employed a descriptive quantitative design. The data were collected by using online surveys. Total sampling was employed, and ten novice teachers of Islamic schools in Sidrap regency, South Sulawesi, completed online questionnaires adapted from DASS 42 and the COPE scale. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics. The findings showed that EFL novice teachers experience severe anxiety in teaching productive skills (speaking 15.5 and writing 15.1) and moderate anxiety in teaching receptive skills (listening 13.8 and reading 14.8). EFL novice teachers used problem-focused strategies more than emotion-focused strategies to combat their anxiety.*

Keywords: *Teaching anxiety; coping strategy; EFL novice teachers*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching anxiety affects novice teachers' performance in teaching significantly. Novice teachers experiencing high levels of anxiety are unable to innovate optimally. Less teaching experience is a source of teachers' anxiety because it can affect their competency in controlling problems in learning situations such as mastering teaching materials, classroom management, student assessment, and relations with other teachers (Han & Takkaç-Tulgar, 2019). This shows that teaching anxiety is affected by teaching experience.

So far, research into teaching anxiety among novice teachers tends to be general in nature in describing teachers' anxiety around teaching English. Levels of teacher anxiety in teaching specific materials and skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing, and their coping strategies, have not been thoroughly evaluated. In fact, these skills have different characteristics (productive and receptive) which require different teaching materials, methods, media and assessment (Sonbul et al., 2020; Mortazavi et al., 2021; Khaerana et al., 2022). Previous studies into teaching anxiety investigate its causes (Aydin, 2016; Liu & Wu, 2021), levels (Akinsola, 2014; Aslrasouli & Vahid, 2014), ways to manage it (Sammephet & Wanpet, 2013; Han & Takkaç-Tulgar, 2019). And its effect on teaching performance (Yasmin et al., 2020). The previous research

suggests that teaching anxiety among novice teachers around teaching specific skills, and their coping strategies, have not received much attention.

This study addresses the shortcomings of previous research, which tends to analyse anxiety in teaching English and coping strategies in general. Accordingly, in this study two questions were asked: (1) what are the anxiety levels of EFL novice teachers in teaching four English skills? and (2) what coping strategies are used by EFL novice teachers to overcome their teaching anxiety? The answers to these questions could augment and enrich literature related to teaching anxiety and coping strategies in teaching, especially teaching English as foreign language. They also prepare data for educational policy on, for example, teaching training, peer teaching, and centres of guidance and counselling for novice teachers.

This study is based on an argument that novice teachers tend to experience high anxiety. This tendency is caused by a lack of teaching experience. Teaching experience can help teachers to master materials, methods and media, and to determine how they deal with excessive anxiety which can affect their resilience. Thus teaching experience can affect teachers psychologically in carrying out their duties and functions as teachers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety is an emotional and affective state in which a person feels powerless and experiences tension (Aydin, 2016). A person normally feels anxiety when facing a new situation, place, person or thing. However, everyone's anxiety levels are different, from minimal, mild and moderate to severe (Abas, 2017), because everyone has different abilities to overcome this feeling. For novice teachers, teaching is a new situation. They interact with new people, including students, parents, colleagues, principals and staff, in a new school environment. This situation can cause anxiety in teaching because interpersonal relations have a high impact on teachers' anxiety (Aslrasouli, M., & Vahid, 2014).

Teachers have different mental health, as a result of various factors. Teachers' mental health can be categorised into positive and negative emotions. Positive emotions include enthusiasm and happiness, while negative emotions include anxiety, anger, guilt and shame (Van Veen et al., 2005). Moreover, (Gaaines, R.E., et al., 2019) categorise teachers' mental health into pleasant emotions (excitement and enjoyment) and unpleasant emotions (frustration and boredom). Van Droogenbroeck and Spruyt (2015) state that mental health issues that affect teachers include psychological impairment, somatisation, depression, anxiety, and sleep disorders. These teachers' mental health is affected by socio-demographic factors, teaching load and support levels (Kovess-Masféty et al., 2007).

Teaching anxiety normally occurs at the beginning of the teaching experience. Teaching relates to emotions such as love, hate, satisfaction and frustration (Merc, 2015). Lack of teaching experience and a low level of English

proficiency might affect teachers' teaching anxiety levels. Teachers feel more anxious while teaching a specific skill at which they feel themselves to be incompetent (Öztürk, 2016). Teachers should be aware of the impact on their occupation of feelings. They must be able to control their emotions in order to secure the environment for their students, other teachers, and themselves.

A novice teacher is one with less than five years' teaching experience (Kim, 2011). Less teaching experience is a source of teachers' anxiety because it can affect their competency in controlling problems in learning situations, such as mastering teaching materials, classroom management, student assessment, and relations with other teachers (Han & Takkaç-Tulgar, 2019). Short teaching experience is assumed not to be enough to train teachers to analyse students' learning problems, classroom management, and relations with students, students' parents, and colleagues.

Teachers' anxiety can in turn affect students' levels of anxiety, academic performance, teaching quality and interpersonal relations (Baghani, 2012). Teachers' inability to cope with their anxiety can decrease their spirit and motivation to develop their performance in designing teaching materials and media, managing students' behaviour, and developing teaching methods and strategies. Teachers' anxiety causes students' anxiety and low academic performance (Rodrigo-Ruiz, 2016).

English foreign language teachers face different difficulties in teaching four English skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) because these skills have different characteristics. Listening and reading are receptive skills and speaking and writing are productive skills. Receptive skills are also called passive skills and productive skills are active skills (Golkova & Hubackova, 2014). The differences draw on teachers' ability to properly organise teaching materials, teaching strategy, classroom management, and testing of the four English skills.

Teaching experience relates to students' achievement, work environment, and colleague relations (Podolsky et al., 2019). Teaching experience affects teachers' ability in teaching the four English skills (Karademir & Gorgoz, 2019). Teachers with high teaching anxiety levels may face problems relating to confidence, motivation, self-esteem, and risk-taking ability. When someone is not motivated to perform their job, he or she begins to lose interest in that job. Some teachers choose to ignore English materials and skills they have not mastered. In the worst situation, teachers choose to leave their job because they fail to overcome their teaching problems related to, for example, mental health and pedagogical competence.

In addressing anxiety and other feelings of tension, the literature has proposed personal methods for teachers' to overcome these issues, a process recognized as coping strategy. Coping strategy for teaching anxiety can be defined as teachers' way of managing or coping with stressors inherent in teaching (Murray-Harvey, 2001). Coping strategy aims to manage stressors directly (problem-focused coping) and emotion arising from the stressors (emotion-focused coping) (Biggs et al., 2017).

Coping with the stress of teaching needs to be addressed during the first years of a teacher’s career in order to help schools retain capable novice teachers who are leaving the profession because they find their work environment too stressful. Moreover, by understanding the ways their colleagues cope with anxiety, teachers can get information about ways to be more resilient.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed the quantitative descriptive method with survey design, since its purpose was to describe the level of anxiety experienced by EFL novice teachers in teaching four English skills and their coping strategies to overcome the highest levels of teaching anxiety. Survey design provides a quantitative or numeric description of trends, attitudes or opinions of a population (Creswell, 2014).

Subject of the Research

Participants in this study were English teachers from Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic senior high schools) and Madrasah Tsanawiyah (Islamic junior high schools) in Sidrap Regency, South Sulawesi, with less than five years’ teaching experience. Total sampling was used to choose the sample since the population number of English novice teachers was small –ten English novice teachers.

Data Collection

This study used two questionnaires to collect data. The first was to gather data on teaching anxiety levels, and the second sought data on teachers’ coping strategies. The questionnaire on teaching anxiety levels consisted of 14 items. These were adopted from DASS (the depression, anxiety, stress scale). The questionnaire on coping strategy comprised 27 items adopted from the COPE scale.

Data Analysis

Data was analysed by using descriptive statistics. It includes mean scores and percentages (frequency). The data on teaching anxiety levels was categorised into:

Table 1. *DASS scoring*

Score ranges	Teaching anxiety level
> 20	Extremely severe
15 – 19	Severe
10 – 14	Moderate
8 – 9	Mild
0 – 7	Normal

Table 2. *COPE scoring*

Score ranges	Frequency level
3.1 – 4	Often
2.1 – 3	Sometimes
1.5 – 2	Seldom
1 – 1.4	Never

FINDINGS

Teaching anxiety level

Data on teaching anxiety levels in teaching English skills covers anxiety in teaching listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Table 3. *Levels of teaching anxiety*

English skills	Mean score	Teaching anxiety level
Listening	13.8	Moderate
Speaking	15.5	Severe
Reading	14.8	Moderate
Writing	15.1	Severe

Table 3 shows that EFL novice teachers experience the highest anxiety levels in teaching speaking skills. The table also shows that teachers' teaching anxiety levels in teaching speaking and writing is higher than the teaching anxiety levels when teaching listening and reading.

Table 4. *Frequency of listening teaching anxiety*

Indicators	Scale			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost all the time
Mouth feels dry	2	8	0	0
Difficult to breathe	5	4	1	0
Body feels so weak	4	6	0	0
Feel very anxious when teaching but feel relieved after teaching	2	4	3	1
Much loss of energy	3	5	2	0
Some parts of body sweaty	4	5	1	0
Afraid for uncertain reasons	3	5	2	0
Difficult to swallow	5	3	1	1
Heart beats faster	4	3	2	1
Easy to panic	4	4	2	0
Afraid of being hindered	2	4	1	3
Afraid of not being able to teach well	0	6	1	3

Worry about students' questions	1	6	1	2
Trembling	4	4	2	0

Table 4 shows that, generally, all indicators of anxiety sometimes occur when teaching listening skills. However, three of the ten novice teachers (30%) feel afraid of being hindered and afraid of not being able to teach well almost all of the time in teaching listening skills. The condition that most often occurs in teaching listening skills is feeling very anxious when teaching but relieved afterwards.

Table 5. Frequency of speaking teaching anxiety

Indicators	Scale			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost all the time
Mouth feels dry	0	6	3	1
Difficult to breathe	2	5	1	0
Body feels so weak	3	5	2	0
Feel very anxious when teaching but feel relieved after teaching	1	5	4	0
Much loss of energy	0	4	6	0
Some parts of body sweaty	6	2	2	0
Afraid for uncertain reasons	2	6	2	0
Difficult to swallow	6	4	0	0
Heart beats faster	3	5	2	0
Easy to panic	3	4	3	0
Afraid of being hindered	1	5	2	2
Afraid of not being able to teach well	1	3	3	3
Worry about students' questions	1	6	0	3
Trembling	2	8	0	0

Table 5 shows that generally, all indicators of anxiety sometimes occur when teaching speaking skills. However, three of the ten novice teachers (30%) feel afraid of not able teach well and worry about students' questions almost all of the time. The conditions most often occurring in teaching speaking skills are much loss of energy (60% teachers), feeling very anxious when teaching but relieved afterwards (40% teachers), easy to panic and afraid of not being able to teach well (30% teachers).

Table 6. Frequency of reading teaching anxiety

Indicators	Scale			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost all the time
Mouth feels dry	1	6	3	0
Difficult to breathe	3	6	0	1
Body feels so weak	4	5	0	1
Feel very anxious when teaching but feel relieved after teaching	2	6	2	0
Much loss of energy	0	8	2	0
Some parts of body sweaty	3	6	1	0
Afraid for uncertain reasons	4	5	1	0
Difficult to swallow	3	6	1	0
Heart beats faster	4	4	1	1
Easy to panic	2	6	1	1
Afraid of being hindered	1	4	3	2
Afraid of not being able to teach well	2	4	2	2
Worry about students' questions	0	6	1	3
Trembling	3	7	0	0

Table 6 also shows that, generally, all indicators of anxiety sometimes occur when teaching reading skills. However, the anxiety indicator that occurs almost all of the time is worry about students' question (30% teachers). Then, anxiety indicators often occurring are a mouth feeling dry and fear of being hindered (30% teachers).

Table 7. *Frequency of writing teaching anxiety*

Indicators	Scale			
	Never	Sometimes	Often	Almost all the time
Mouth feels dry	3	5	2	0
Difficult to breathe	4	4	2	0
Body feels so weak	4	6	0	0
Feel very anxious when teaching but feel relieved after teaching	1	7	2	0
Much loss of energy	1	8	1	0
Some parts of body sweaty	3	6	1	0
Afraid for uncertain reasons	2	6	0	2
Difficult to swallow	4	5	0	1
Heart beats faster	2	7	1	0
Easy to panic	2	8	0	0
Afraid of being hindered	1	5	4	0

Afraid of not being able to teach well	1	3	2	4
Worry about students' questions	1	3	2	4
Trembling	2	6	1	1

Data on table 7 shows that novice teachers sometimes feel indicators of anxiety in teaching writing skills. However, the indicators that occur almost all of the time are fear of not being able to teach well and worry about students' questions (40% teachers), and the indicator that most often occurs is fear of being hindered (40% teachers).

The findings show that the EFL novice teachers' anxiety conditions that occur almost all of the time are (1) fear of not being able to teach well, (2) worry about students' questions, and (3) fear of being hindered. EFL novice teachers' anxiety conditions that most often occur are (1) feeling very anxious when teaching but relieved afterwards, (2) fear of being hindered, (3) mouth feels dry, (4) much loss of energy, (5) easy to panic, and (6) afraid of not being able to teach well.

Most EFL novice teachers feel more anxiety indicators in teaching speaking skills than in teaching listening, reading, and writing skills. The significant anxiety indicators occurring in teaching speaking skills are much loss of energy (60%), feeling very anxious when teaching but relieved afterwards (40%), and easy to panic (30%).

Coping strategy

Data on teachers' coping strategy covers a comparison between two models of coping strategy that teachers use to solve their teaching anxiety. These are problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping.

Table 8. Frequency levels of teachers' coping strategies

Coping strategy	Mean score	Frequency level
Problem-focused coping	3.3	Often
Emotion-focused coping	2.7	Sometimes

Data in Table 8 shows that teachers use problem-focused coping more than emotion-focused coping to maintain their mental health. This indicates that teachers first solve their teaching problems then treat their emotions arising from teaching problems.

Table 9. Frequency levels of coping strategy indicators

Coping strategy	Indicators	Mean	Frequency
Problem-focused Coping	Active coping	3.2	Often
	Planning	3.5	Often
	Suppression of competing activities	3.4	Often

	Restraint coping	3.4	Often
	Social support for instrumental reasons	3.2	Often
Emotion-focused Coping	Social support for emotional reasons	2.5	Sometimes
	Positive reinterpretation and growth	3.7	Often
	Acceptance	3.5	Often
	Turning to religion	3.5	Often
	Focus on and venting of emotion	2.4	Sometimes
	Denial	2.7	Sometimes
	Behavioural disengagement	1.8	Seldom
	Mental disengagement	2.7	Sometimes
	Alcohol-drug use	1	Never

Data in Table 9 shows that eventhough novice teachers used more problem-focused coping than emotion-focused coping to solve their anxiety in teaching, some indicators of emotion-focused coping are also often used by the teachers. The indicators are positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance, and turning to religion. Alcohol-drug use is never used to solve teachers' anxiety.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that novice teachers experience higher anxiety levels in teaching productive skills (speaking and writing) than receptive skills (listening and reading). Novice teachers experience severe anxiety in teaching productive skills and moderate anxiety in teaching receptive skills. This indicates that novice teachers are more comfortable in teaching listening and reading than speaking and writing. The comfort in teaching receptive and productive skills is related to characteristics of the skills teaching, in terms of teaching materials, learning environment, and assessment.

Teaching material for productive skills is more complex than that for receptive skills. The complexity of teaching materials makes teachers work harder in preparing and implementing the materials in the classroom. Writing skills materials include grammar, vocabulary, punctuation, coherence, and organisation. Teachers have to teach their students to integrate these materials in writing. These materials' complexity causes learning difficulties for students (Derakhshan & Karimian, 2020). Such difficulties may then cause poor learning outcomes. From the assessment aspect, receptive skills assessment is simpler than productive skills, such as test types and scoring. Most receptive skills assessment is subject to objective test, while productive skills assessment is subjective. Subjective tests need a longer time than objective tests for scoring because many aspects become considerations in scoring productive skills. The complexity of teaching material preparation, teaching implementation, and assessment add to teachers' workload. Then, work overload causes novice teachers' low efficacy (Chichekian et al., 2016) and problems of physical and mental health (Mulholland et al., 2013). Furthermore, (Van Veen et al., 2005) state that work overload causes

teachers' negative emotion that can affect their commitment to developing teaching competence.

The learning environment is one factor that can affect comfort in the teaching and learning process. This environment includes physical, emotional and social-culture conditions (Burruss, M.D., & Peters, J.M., 2015). Climate change affects the comfort of the teaching and learning process (Puteh et al., 2014). Receptive skills teaching has a different climate to productive skills teaching. The atmosphere of receptive skills teaching is calm, but productive skills teaching is noisy. Teachers need extra energy to control students in learning productive skills. According to (Han & Takkaç-Tulgar., 2019), classroom management is a major teaching anxiety source.

To control teaching anxiety, novice teachers use problem-focused coping more than emotion-focused coping. Novice teachers tend to solve their teaching problems by improving their teaching competence and building relations between colleagues, parents and students. This is in line with the research findings of (Jin et al., 2015), that novice teachers need support in the form of feedback from experts to solve their practical problems in teaching, and to develop their teaching competence. Compared to novice teachers, experienced teachers use emotion-focused coping to solve their stress (Alhija., 2015). The differences in teachers' coping strategies is affected by their experience and beliefs in teaching.

Even though English novice teachers use problem-focused coping more than emotion-focused coping, this does not mean that they do not use emotion-focused coping to control their anxiety. They often use three indicators of emotion-focused coping (positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance, and turning to religion). This is in line with the findings of (Bjørndal et al. 2021), who state that to control teaching anxiety, teachers use relationship-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and combinations of the three coping strategies. Moreover, (Austin et al., 2005) mention the term *positive coping strategies* (problem solving, seeking social and emotional support, exercise, and relaxation) and *negative coping strategies* (avoidance and uncontrolled aggression). This study found that sometimes novice teachers use avoidance (denial) to control their teaching anxiety. This indicates that English novice teachers use various coping strategies to solve their teaching anxiety. Teachers' coping strategies are dominated by positive approaches and only one strategic "avoidance" is indicated as negative coping.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that novice teachers feel anxiety in teaching English skills. However, the level of anxiety felt by teachers differs based on the type of skills being taught. English novice teachers feel more anxious in teaching productive skills (speaking and writing) than in teaching receptive skills (listening and reading). To control teaching anxiety, English novice teachers combine problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. However, teachers use more problem-focused coping than emotion-focused coping. This implies that in order to control teaching anxiety, English novice teachers not only focus on solving their problems in teaching, but also treat their negative emotions in

teaching. This study does not mention detailed data on teaching problems that cause severe anxiety in productive skills and moderate anxiety in receptive skills. Therefore, further research is needed, to explore teaching problems in productive skills that cause severe anxiety.

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