



A Mixed Method Study of Teachers' Strategies in Reducing Students' Anxiety levels

Asti Wahyuni B¹, Sanaria Maneba², Nining Syafitri³

astiwahyunib@unidayan.ac.id, sanariamaneba@gmail.com, niningsyafitri@unidayan.ac.id

^{1,2,3}Universitas Dayanu Ikhsanuddin

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the level of students' anxiety and determine the teacher's strategies for reducing students' anxiety levels. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety level Scale (FLCAS) and semi-structured interviews were used to determine the student's anxiety levels and teachers' strategies for reducing the students' anxiety. The result showed that students' anxiety was at the middle anxiety level, with a mean score of 108.61. Therefore, teachers should employ various strategies, namely establishing a secure environment, speaking English effortlessly, and creating pair and group work. The number of strategies enhances opportunities for students to speak the target language in class and fosters a safe learning atmosphere where students may express themselves freely.

Keywords: Mixed Method; Speaking Skill; Students' anxiety level; Teachers' Strategies

Introduction

Anxiety is typically defined as a sensation of fear, dread, worry, and tension. The human body naturally develops anxiety in response to a scenario. This could start early in life or later. According to (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), anxiety is the tension, dread, unease, and worry an autonomic nervous system activation brings on. The most prevalent emotional conflict a person experience is anxiety. Everyone will be genuinely concerned about everything that happens in their lives, particularly if they have to participate in various speaking activities.

Learners of English as a foreign language frequently experience foreign language anxiety (FLA). Students who said they felt uneasy, scared, or disturbed when thinking about using the target language may have FLA. Both the sound and negative effects of worry on learning are possible. Increased motivation to learn and complete activities is an example of a positive consequence; unfavorable effects can include poor academic results. According to the American College Health

Association, more than 23% of college students think anxiety impacts their academic performance. Performance and anxiety are inversely associated, and a downward spiral of performance-decreasing anxiety may result from bad performance. (Susanti, Nabilah, & Irasanti, 2019).

Numerous academics in psychology and education have focused on the issue of anxiety among English language learners. There is not, however, a universally accepted definition of anxiety. In the current study, anxiety was defined as a feeling of unease, annoyance, uncertainty, or worry (Brown, 2000);(Cakici, 2016)

There is no easy way to make students feel less anxious. (Shao, Yu, & Ji, 2013), Even though teachers had high emotional intelligence and considered their students' needs, they could not reduce their students' anxiety levels. Teachers must care about their students. According to (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002), students who struggle with anxiety should be educated that mistakes are acceptable and that learning a language involves making mistakes (King, 2013), as well as that keeping up a discussion is better than remaining silent out of fear of making a mistake. Without considering each student's different learning preferences, interests, and reactions while selecting classroom activities, instructional strategies, or methods (Horwitz, 2000). Therefore, the instructor should try to adopt the pupils' perspective to discover the contributing factors and causes of anxiousness. Additionally, (Zhang, 2019) believed that anxiety was linked to students' academic achievement, self-confidence, and motivation.

Few studies have examined how teachers can help students feel less anxious, even though research on anxiety has primarily looked at it from students' perspectives. Therefore, in order to make a change, the current study set out to identify the teacher's management strategies for the classroom as well as to investigate the level of anxiety among students.

Method

This research was conducted to obtain information about students' anxiety levels and the strategies used by the teacher to reduce students' anxiety by carrying out several research procedures. This research used a mixed-method design. According to (Mills & Gay, 2019), mixed methods research design aims to build on the synergy and strength between quantitative and qualitative research methods to understand a phenomenon more fully than is possible using either quantitative or qualitative methods alone. Quantitative data was collected using the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and qualitative data were obtained using a semi-structured interview.

The population in this research was the eighth-grade students of SMP Negeri 3 Baubau Southeast Sulawesi. Based on the data obtained from the school, the total population is 278 students, which consists of eight classes. The total sample in this research was 60 students. The sample took by using simple random sampling.

Simple random sampling is selecting a sample so that all individuals in the defined population have an equal and independent chance of selection for the sample (Mills & Gay, 2019). The subjects of the interview data were all eighth-grade English teachers, a total of three teachers. Teacher 1 (female, 38 years old), teacher 2 (male, 45 years old), and teacher 3 (male, 47 years old)

For the data collection, two instruments were used in this research. Quantitative data was collected using the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), consisting of 33 items was utilized as the questionnaire form, and qualitative data were obtained using a semi-structured interview. Researchers took questionnaire data and then conducted interviews.

The data analysis techniques for the questionnaire applied in this research were descriptive statistics for the data questionnaire. The FLCAS questionnaire consists of 33 items divided into levels of anxiety ranging from "Very Anxious," "Anxious," "Middle anxious," "Relaxed," and "Very Relaxed." An Oetting scale was used to categorize the anxiety level of the students. To make the interview data anonymous and to get ready for the establishment of categories, the interview data were first transcribed, translated into English, and coded. The coding categories were based on the causes of anxiety, including risk-free environments with lower stress levels (Shao et al., 2013), more seeking practices (Dewaele, Petrides, & Furnham, 2008), and more pair group work (Crawford, McDonough, & Brun-Mercer, 2019). The interview data was analyzed then to find any patterns or relationships

Results

Students' Anxiety

The questionnaire was distributed to 60 students to determine their perceptions of learning anxiety. The explanation of the student's learning anxiety statistical analysis is as follows:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Anxiety

No	Items	Score
1	Mean	108.61
2	Median	108.00
3	Mode	113.00
4	Std. Deviation	15.923

From the table above, the mean score was 108.61, the median was 108.00, the mode was 113.00, and the standard deviation was 15.923. The mean score implies that the students' anxiety was moderate.

The score distribution of students' anxiety was presented based on criteria provided in Oetting's scale (1983). The frequency of each category of students' anxiety is displayed in the following table:

Table 2. Criteria Students' Anxiety

No	Range	Level	Frequency	Percentage
1	124-165	Very Anxious	8	13.6
2	108-123	Anxious	22	36
3	87-107	Middle Anxious	27	45.3
4	66-86	Relaxed	3	5.1
5	33-65	Very Relaxed		0
			0	
Total				100
			60	

The table above shows that none of the students in the category of very relaxed, 3 students, or 5.1 %, relaxed level; 27 students, or 45.3%, in the anxious middle category; 22 students, or 36%, in the anxious category; 8 students or 13.6% were in very anxious. It can be concluded that the students' anxiety was moderate.

Teachers' Strategies

The teacher recommended establishing a secure environment (including lowering stress levels) and more opportunities for speaking English (including more pair work). The following are the results of interviews with teachers:

Table 3. The result of the Interviews

1. Establish a Secure Environment	
Teacher 1	Opening the class with brainstorming by activating students' prior experience
Teacher 2	Convey to students that they will be proud if they make mistakes and do not force students to finish the exercises immediately. Give them tasks that are easy for them to do
Teacher 3	Create a strategy to help students who cannot speak English fluently and fall behind their classmates by lowering the level and amount of the lesson content, using simple phrases, speaking more slowly, and lowering the vocabulary level.
2. Speaking English Effortlessly	
Teacher 1	Students practice speaking English without thinking of making mistakes.
Teacher 2	How to run the class or conduct the lessons that students may engage in without feeling hesitate in speaking English, such as reducing the number of challenging words
Teacher 3	Developing students' positive self-confidence by ignoring how well their English is when speaking
3. Create pair or group work	
Teacher 1	Instead of calling students one by one the class, create pair or group work so that students feel free to express their

	opinions.
Teacher 2	In the classroom, several groups should present at once. The atmosphere will be more enthusiastic when the group that has done their task applauds as a sign that they have finished.
Teacher 3	Pair/ group work will train students to become good partners. For example, students fluent in English will help their friends who need to be fluent in English.

Discussion

Students' Anxiety

Based on the finding, it is obtained that the score of students was in a moderate category by the mean anxiety score was 108.61. Based on the data that had been analyzed, data was obtained regarding the percentage that none of the students fell into the category of being very relaxed. Instead, 3 students (5.1%) fell into the category of being relaxed, 22 students (36%) fell into the category of anxious, 27 students (45.3%) fell into middle anxious, and 8 students (13.6%) fell into the category of being very anxious. The English teacher will consider the result of students' anxiety levels to improve their class performance in reducing their anxiety levels.

Teacher Strategies

After the researchers provided information regarding the level of students' anxiety to the English teacher, they then asked the teacher's perceptions regarding the strategies they used to reduce students' anxiety in learning English. Based on the results of the interviews, some practical ideas were obtained for decreasing students' levels of anxiety.

Establish a Secure Environment

Based on the interviews, results obtained information that Teacher 1, Opened the class with brainstorming by activating students' prior experience. (Dong, Jong, & King, 2020) stated that students with more prior knowledge lead to good quality engagement in the classroom. Teacher 2 stated Convey to students that they would not be ashamed if they made mistakes and not force students to finish the exercises immediately. Give them tasks that are easy for them to do. This is in line with (Chaudron, 1988) students become more anxious when the challenge is too complicated, and there must be a balance between challenge and anxiousness. This problem can be solved by doing more routine work for students to comprehend what they should achieve in class after numerous lessons, and they need to practice the same exercise many times. As well as making sure that the class's content, pace, and

quality are appropriate for the student's abilities, teachers must also think of ways to make the material simpler for the students to comprehend. This was supported by (Bai, Chao, & Wang, 2019). (Al-Murtadha, 2019) Also, visualization and goal-setting practices could strengthen students' motivation to interact with others. Reducing the number of words in the students' tasks is an efficient way to help students finish their homework quickly.

Teacher 3 considered creating a strategy to help students who cannot speak English fluently and fall behind their classmates by lowering the level and amount of the lesson content, using simple phrases, speaking more slowly, and lowering the vocabulary level. The teacher used several strategies so that all students participate in class. Line with the teacher's statement (King, 2013) suggests that students who hesitated to speak should be protected by being taught how to overcome silence. According to (Liu & Jackson, 2008), relationships between classmates are crucial, given that interactions allow students to speak English freely as the intimacy of the classroom increases.

Speaking English Effortlessly

Information obtained from Teacher 1 showed that Students practice speaking English without thinking of making mistakes, Teacher 2 stated how to run the class or conduct the lessons that students may engage in without feeling hesitate in speaking English, such as reducing the number of challenging words and the Teacher 3 stated that developing students' positive self-confidence by ignoring how well their English is when speaking English. All those teachers' statements implied that training students to speak English effortlessly can reduce anxiety. It is important to practice speaking without focusing on mistakes. Students should be okay with making small mistakes as long as they can communicate with each other. As long as students are putting in their best effort, it is acceptable for them to make mistakes because doing so is a necessary part of learning English. Student's ability to communicate in English will progressively advance if they are given more opportunities to do so and gain feedback from others' conversations. Teachers should advise students on conversational techniques if they need to remember the appropriate phrase. They can also write down any serious or regular mistakes students make on the board and discuss these with the class. It is crucial to provide kids with scaffolding (Chaudron, 1988).

Teachers should be sympathetic when encouraging students to try speaking English and should let them know that they may interact with peers in the language. This will help the students develop positive self-concepts and increase their self-esteem. Simple themes and materials are required for other methods to boost students' self-confidence to guarantee positive learning experiences (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Appreciation from teachers and classmates also works (Dweck, 1999).

Create pair or group work

Result of the interview and data provided by Teacher 1: Instead of calling students individually in the class, create pair or group work so that students feel confident in expressing their opinions; Teacher 2: In the classroom, several groups should present at once. The atmosphere will be more enthusiastic when the group that has done its task applauds as a sign that they have finished; Teacher 3: Pair/group work will train students to become good partners. For example, students fluent in English will help their friends who are not fluent in English. Pair or group work allows teachers to give students more speaking time, lets them interact with everyone in the group, and lets teachers observe, move around the classroom, and truly listen to the language produced.

To increase speaking opportunities, the majority of the exercises should be completed in pairs. This is in keeping with the (Carless, 2008) opinion, who claimed that EFL students do not have many opportunities to practice speaking English, and more should be done to give them those possibilities. The importance of teaching students to make the best possible partners for pair work cannot be overstated. Students should be aware of their duty to other students, make an effort to get along with them, and think about how they may create a positive learning environment in the classroom. Students should also be independent, take responsibility for their English studies, and grasp what they must do to learn.

Conclusion

Based on the result of the research, it is obtained that the mean score of the student's level of anxiety is 108.61. It is indicated that students' level of anxiety is in the middle category. Teachers' strategies for reducing the students' anxiety are establishing a secure environment, speaking English effortlessly, and creating pair or group work. The suggestions based on the interview's findings may successfully decrease students' anxiety levels and improve interactions between students and teachers. Making sure that students have a positive experience, inspiring them to be independent learners and take responsibility for their education, and convincing them that attempting is more admirable than achieving everything instantly may all be important. By implementing these suggestions, teachers can help students improve their English.

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