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# **Academic Experiences of Indonesia Student Exchange in the Philippines on Speaking Anxiety:**

# A Narrative Inquiry

Muhammad Subhan Jagad<sup>1</sup>, Andi Rachmawati Syarif<sup>2</sup>, Faridawati<sup>3</sup> E-mail: subhanjagaduchu@gmail.com1, andi.rachmawati@umkendari.ac.id2, faridawati@umkendari.ac.id3

1,2,3 Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari, Kendari, Sulawesi Tenggara

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#### **Abstract**

This study aims to look into the social experiences of students in the seventh semester of Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari's English language education program who have completed the International Credit Transfer program at Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology in the Philippines. A Narrative Inquiry research design was used to conduct the study. The participants of this study are four students. Two of the four students are male, while the other two are female. To gather information on students' experiences with speaking anxiety, an extensive narrative interview technique was utilized. Data analysis followed Clandinin and Cain's (2008), transcript using a three-dimensional framework of narrative inquiry: the dimensions of time, person-social, and place.

Keywords: live experience, anxiety, international credit transfer, studying abroad, narrative inquiry.

#### Introduction

English has been commonly known as the global lingua franca since the late 19th century. It holds the position of being the most extensively utilized foreign language on the internet. Crystal (2000) emphasized the undeniable significance of English in the professional industry, considering its constant evolution. While the other four language skills can be honed individually, it is crucial for students to make an effort in finding a conversation partner to enhance their communication abilities. In the context of speaking English, being able to talk to people and even talking to foreigners, in the language they understand is the purpose of many English learners.

In the context of using English, the main objective for many English learners is to communicate with friends and even foreigners in a language they can understand. However, the primary challenge faced by English students is speaking the language fluently. Consequently, many individuals may lack confidence due to anxiety about making mistakes, as highlighted by Boonkit (2010). It can be overwhelming for them to speak a second/foreign language before achieving fluency. Addressing the issue of anxiety, Thornbury (2005) mentions that a lack of vocabulary, incorrect grammar, and fear of errors are some of the factors that can lead to difficulties in speaking and result in anxiety.

English as a foreign language in Indonesia is not usually used in speaking publicly, but in In the context of the Philippines, English is categorized as a secondary language (Kirkpatrick & Deterding, 2011). Where, of course, the speakers have to really understand and master the use of English appropriately. The local students who are professionally capable of explaining their topics in front of many people.

They also master the use of spoken English so that they will not look nervous and even shocked when presenting any materials in public speaking, for instance in class. Differences in terms of culture, especially the gap in academic demands, and the newly encountered challenges of independence can all cause students to feel confused and uncomfortable (Azizah et al., 2024). Understanding the experiences of student exchange is important because it can inform policies and programs that support the growth and success of international education.

The Indonesian government currently organizes a number of international student exchange programs with the goal of introducing and examining cultures across borders. Global education in Indonesia acknowledges the acceleration of social, cultural, and global changes in performance and technology during the Fourth Industrial Revolution era, as outlined in Article 18 of the March 2020 Decree on National Standards of Higher Education. The Merdeka Campus (MBKM) initiative, launched in 2020 by Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Anwar Makarim, aims to cultivate adaptable university graduates who are well-equipped for the evolving landscape (Baharuddin, 2021).

International Credit Transfer is one example of an MBKM program for foreign students in Indonesia (ICT). Through the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, students are permitted to study for one semester outside of their study program at the same university and for a maximum of two semesters in the same study program at a different university. Some while attending other universities or pursuing their studies off-campus (Sevima, 2023). However, there are a number of implementation-related issues that students face, including communication challenges, culture shock, and even academic difficulties that each

student needs to be able to adjust to.

Higher education's increasing globalization has provided students with opportunities to develop themselves in a diverse academic environment. Student exchange programs offer valuable personal and academic development opportunities by immersing students in diverse cultural settings.

Based on the author's observations of international credit transfer exchange students in 2023 in the Philippines, the problem of students who use English is a lack of confidence and also a lack of mastery of vocabulary and grammar. One of the personal variables that affect success is self-confidence. highly correlated with anxiety. With this program, they will get a lot of new experiences that can make them grow, including overcoming their anxiety problems.

According to certain arguments (Tarry, 2011), studying abroad may have the unintended consequence of changing cultural norms. The benefits of studying abroad for international students are a topic of much debate. The goal of studying abroad should be to gain experience in the host nation rather than to give up one's cultural background and fully integrate into the society in which one will only be living for just a short period (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2008; Kingston & Forland, 2008).

However, along with the enriching experiences, students may encounter challenges, and one prevalent aspect is academic anxiety. This research aims to delve into the theoretical underpinnings and methodological approach to comprehensively understand the phenomenon of academic anxiety among exchange students at NEUST.

To achieve this purpose, three research questions have been asked.

- 1. What are the lived experiences of student exchange participants in the Philippines in terms of their anxiety in speaking during the program?
- 2. What are the positive and negative impacts of students' anxiety in speaking English during the program?
- 3. What impact did students feel before, during and after the program?

#### 1. Foreign Language Anxiety

Anxiety is characterized as an individual's apprehension towards anything that may present a significant danger to them. According to Horwitz and Cope (1998), anxiety is a subjective experience of concern associated with the activation of the autonomic nervous system. Mahmodzadeh (2012) defines anxiety as a response to one's self-efficacy and evaluation of a situation as a potential threat. In simpler terms, Ormrod (2011) suggests that anxiety can be described as a sense of unease and fear regarding the uncertain outcome of a particular circumstance.

Anxiety is a psychological factor that greatly influences the success of the learning process, particularly in the context of learning English. Based on the aforementioned theory, anxiety refers to an individual's reaction when faced with a situation that poses a threat to them. Additionally, anxiety can also manifest as a feeling of restlessness in specific conditions.

There exists a term to describe the anxiety that arises from language performance, and it is commonly referred to as language anxiety or language anxiety. The apprehension and unease experienced when learning and using a foreign language is known explicitly as foreign language anxiety. Put differently, students may feel anxious due to the high level of difficulty in fully understanding foreign language messages during speaking and listening activities. Horwitz et al. (1986) suggest that this awareness could be a reason why some individuals who are usually talkative become quiet in a foreign language classroom.

# 2. Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety

Essentially, this concern will ultimately impact the academic performance of students. When students are worried that their ability to think clearly will be affected, they are more likely to make mistakes. Consequently, they have to put in extra effort, especially when completing tasks, as anxiety hinders their ability to concentrate and interferes with the learning process. Educators have long recognized anxiety as a potential obstacle in foreign language education.

Anxious students tend to struggle with language learning because their cognitive processes are disrupted. It is considered a prevalent and long-lasting human emotion that impacts physiological arousal and cognitive functions (Kanero et al., 2022). Anxiety may prove beneficial by fostering excitement and passion, yet it can also be detrimental by causing distress, uncertainty, dread, and a decline in self-confidence (Karatas et al., 2013).

# Method

#### 1. Research Design

This research investigates students' speaking anxiety in the seventh semester of Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari's English language education program who have completed the International Credit Transfer program at Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology in the Philippines. The research used a qualitative method and narrative inquiry as the design. Narrative inquiry is deemed highly appropriate for exploring student experiences, being the primary and most crucial method for comprehending experiences.

In recent years, researchers have not widely utilized narrative inquiry to investigate and delve into student experiences. The aforementioned research served as the basis for selecting narrative inquiry to explore anxiety in speaking. According to Creswell (2012), "narrative research" as a design focuses on studying a single individual, gathering data through storytelling, describing unique experiences, and discussing the significance of those experiences for the individual. John Dewey's theory of experience, as mentioned by Clandinin & Caine (2008), lays the groundwork for exploring experience through a Three-dimensional space in

narrative inquiry, that is, temporary, place, and sociality.

This three-dimensional space in narrative inquiry enables the examination of the multi-level life experiences of both researchers and participants. It situates and comprehends the stories shared and lived within the broader cultural, social, and institutional narrative. The emphasis on the relationship between the researcher and the participant sets narrative inquiry apart.

# 2. Participants

**Table 1.** Demography of Participants

1 and 10		
Initials	Age	Gender
RW	26	Male
SJ	22	Male
VS	25	Female
FO	21	Female

The subjects of this research are students who participated in the international student exchange program in the Philippines. This research was conducted at the Universitas Muhammadiyah Kendari. Based on the data, seven students participated in this program. However, the participants of this study were four students involved in the interview session. 4 out of 7 students were willing to be interviewed and they did feel related to what they experienced with this research topic.

The individuals chosen to participate in this narrative investigation were deliberately selected. In selecting the participants, the researcher gave priority to their suitability for inclusion. The participants' inclusion in this study was also determined by their willingness to participate actively. Only individuals who signed and returned the research consent form were eligible to become participants in the study.

#### 3. Data Collection

To gather information on students' experiences with speaking anxiety, an extensive narrative interview technique was utilized. The main focus of the interview was on the participants' speaking anxiety encounters within the university setting, conducted in the language they were most comfortable with, be it Indonesian or English. Each interview session with the participants lasted approximately 20-30 minutes, and the researcher tried to minimize his personal reaction during the interview to avoid my influence on the stories.

To ensure accuracy and capture all details, the interviews were verbally recorded with the participants' consent using a digital voice recorder. Furthermore, the researcher took notes in the form of memos to aid in comprehending the context of the participants' stories (Polkinghorne, 2005).

### 4. Technique of Data Analysis

After the data had been collected, the researcher initiated the process of narrative analysis by carefully transcribing the interview recordings personally and engaging in repeated readings of the transcriptions. During the retelling of the narratives, the researcher ensured that every event, story, and experience shared by the participants was narrated in a coherent manner, connecting the elements of place and time. Agar (1980) also recommends that researchers "read the transcript at whole several times.

Immerse yourself in the details; try to understand the interview whole before breaking it into parts". Subsequently, the investigator develops a comprehensive portrayal of the individual's life by employing a holistic approach to presenting content. This particular method of content analysis does not involve initial categories in a narrative study. Once the life story of the participant has been constructed, the researcher proceeds to examine the transcript using a three-dimensional framework of narrative inquiry: the dimensions of time, person-social, and place (Clandinin & Caine, 2008). Moreover, the researcher communicates with the participant through WhatsApp to clarify any ambiguous sentences in the recounted experiences.



**Table 2.** The Proposed speaking anxiety

Table 2 shows that the research will use Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative frameworks: the past, present, and future dimensions of a story. The researcher wanted to find a variety of problems that were anxiety factors in students.

#### **Results**

The study's results were explained using Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) narrative frameworks, which include the past, present, and future dimensions of a story. After interviewing the students, the researcher discovered a variety of problems that were anxiety factors during the student exchange program.

# Past Experiences

The researcher's initial investigation into the participants' life experiences was about whether they felt anxiety before undergoing the program. That is so It was interesting to see how participants shared their feelings in learning to speak English. This is explained in interviews.

RW (Male): "I feel it, and it happened a long time ago. The factor that made me feel anxious was the lack of communication and fear of speaking in public at my campus in Indonesia."

SJ (Male): "I often feel anxiety in speaking in class since I was on the campus where I from. The factor that triggers my anxiety is the fear of getting mistakes in grammar and pronunciation."

VS (Female): "Before joining this program, I felt anxious when speaking English at my home campus. The biggest factor that causes my anxiety to be high is my lack of confidence in my abilities, as well as the fear of negative responses from the audience later."

FO (Female): "I don't feel anxiety when speaking English in Indonesia because in Indonesia I am used to conversing in English, so there is no problem with my speaking anxiety when I am at my home campus."

When the researcher asked about past experiences, most of them said that they had felt anxiety since they were on campus in Indonesia. The reason is that they rarely communicated using English there, which made them less confident in English communication skills, but one of them didn't feel it because they were used to using English conversations in person.

#### **Present Experiences**

This research also asked about participants' direct experiences using English in foreign countries and using it every day. In the interview, one of them said that, at first, she felt awkward taking classes. She tried to fight his anxiety by thinking positively that even though his communication skills were still lacking, local residents could still understand her. She shares that:

VS (Female): "While studying at NEUST, of course, I felt anxious. I felt worried that I would not be able to adapt to the environment there where they were already proficient in English, which was used as their second language. At first the atmosphere there was a little awkward for me because I had never felt in

an environment like that before. But as time went by I felt comfortable and started to adjust. Thankfully, I didn't feel too much fear when talking to local people there because I believed that they could understand my speaking skills, which were far behind theirs due to the lack of application in my daily life. I also feel that their ability to speak English is very good, which is, of course, very different from mine. I think one of the causes of my underdeveloped ability to speak English is excessive anxiety in myself due to a lack of support from the environment around me."

Meanwhile, the others also had more or less the same experience while participating in this program abroad. The others share that:

SJ (Male): "As an international student, I also feel anxious, the reason is because I still feel like I haven't mastered many English vocabulary combinations and lack of preparation in facing the material. The different atmosphere also made me feel anxious; the reason was that I saw many differences in terms of food, habits, language, and environment, which at first required adapting, but as time went by, I started to get used to it. I also feel nervous when speaking in front of the class or facing local students, which puts pressure on me so I don't make the slightest mistake. I felt that the local students there were more fluent in English, which further triggered my anxiety because I felt like I was lagging behind them a lot."

RW (Male): "The atmosphere between my campus in Indonesia and my campus destination has differences, including when we are on our home campus we can still use Indonesian so that we can absorb well what is conveyed by teachers and classmates, while at the destination campus we are required to communicate in English so that it makes me and my colleagues have fear in making mistakes that trigger feelings of anxiety among fellow international students because We still feel that we have not mastered English very communicatively face-to-face with the local citizens."

FO (Female): "I feel anxiety when if I don't adapt to learning there well then we will be underestimated as Indonesian students, and I feel afraid if Filipino students feel uncomfortable because of the difference in whether it is from the way of dressing or different accents. But what I fear is not actually happening."

# **Future Expectations**

At the end of data collection, researchers asked about their experiences after participating in the program and speaking English as future career training. This

was done to confirm participants after exploring past and future life experiences. Participants agreed that after participating in the International Credit Transfer (ICT) program, they felt freer and more confident in communicating in English and were able to apply it on campus, and of course, this was a very important provision for their future careers. They think that by learning lots of new vocabulary, they will be able to improve their communication skills. FO in the interview shared that:

FO (Female): "After participating in this international program, I am more confident and have trust that I can speak English well and can be understood by people abroad. My ability in speaking has improved compared to before I left, because during the 4 months there I spoke English in everyday life which made me more trained and more confident in speaking. My self-evaluation is that I realized that I studied too hard and missed a lot of moments with my Indonesian friends and Filipino friends. Because in my mind at that time I wanted to maintain my academic grades, which made me have my own pressure. In the future, I have to enjoy more and be less tense as an international student. If I get the opportunity to take part in a similar program, I want to gain experience not only from academics, but also to gain new cultural experiences."

While others feel the same way but have different versions among others, they share that:

RW (Male): "During being there for approximately 4 months, it had a good impact on myself. Because I have to speak English in my daily life. The people we meet here every day, they tolerate our grammar mistakes that still need to be developed and learn a lot directly from the experts about new vocabulary which triggers my confidence to increase in talking about what I am thinking."

SJ (Male): "After returning to Indonesia, I don't have worried to use English in public as my daily conversation, I'm not feeling shy anymore."

VS (Female): "After participating in this program I feel much better than before, I feel better able to understand more complex conversations, I feel that my insight into foreign cultures is also much more open, I also feel more confident to face future academic challenges."

# Discussion

In this section, the researcher explains the results of research regarding things that trigger feelings of anxiety in exchange students. Some of them have felt anxiety about studying since they were on their campus and are increasingly triggered by facing a new atmosphere while studying at the Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology, Philippines. This implies that students' speaking anxiety factors come from 3 main factors as explained by Horwitz (2001) states that fear of communication, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety related to academic performance.

With these three phases, some of them felt many positive impacts after participating in the program. Before participating in this program, they stated that they felt anxiety when talking. What makes them is due to the lack of experience in actively speaking English when they are on their home campus. While studying on campus on NEUST, these students often experience anxiety attacks, particularly when it comes to speaking, due to their fear of making mistakes. They feel high anxiety, especially when they are going to carry out a presentation or when undergoing a question and answer quiz.

In addition, situational specific anxiety describes SJ anxiety resulting from lack of preparation. This statement supports (Xiangming, Liu & Zhang, 2020) which states that the lack of English language skills is often an obstacle to their involvement in learning activities in class. They also feel nervous because they have to speak English without any preparation. They will feel more comfortable with conversations in language class if they have prepared themselves thoroughly, for example for a particular theme.

SJ's concerns also relate to a lack of preparation. SJ also stated that speaking English with preparation makes him less nervous and more confident. He also admitted that he was nervous about having to speak in front of many people. He doesn't want to be the center of attention and is afraid of making mistakes. However, he also admitted that he was anxious only in public. He was afraid that he would not be a good speaker.

Finally, after four months they participated in this program and communicated using English daily, one of the participants felt she was making progress in speaking because she was used to it. In addition, she felt more confident due to her increased vocabulary and self-confidence. This means that she has progressed from having minimal experience in speaking English to becoming more skilled.

This finding is in line with Asysyifa, Handayani, and Rizkiani (2019), who stated that many students experience anxiety when it comes to speaking, primarily because they feel unprepared, worry about falling behind in comprehending the subject matter or the teacher's instructions, fear making errors, dread being ridiculed by their peers, and lack self-assurance. the ability to spell, pronounce, and choose English words.

# Conclusion

These findings reveal in-depth students' feelings of anxiety in speaking while studying at NEUST Philippines. In general, this research identifies academic experiences with several things, including positive feelings and negative feelings regarding their anxiety. Positive feelings include feeling alert and motivated, liking

challenges, accepting hospitality, and becoming more confident after going through many challenges while participating in this program.

On the other hand, negative feelings include feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry about adjusting to language and class activities that are different from those found at the home campus. Students strategies for adapting themselves to speaking directly in communicating in the university environment and being actively involved in learning activities. Suppose these feelings of anxiety are paid attention to. In that case, most feel that they have an impact on self-transformation, experiencing improvements in personal qualities in terms of language skills, communication, and increased self-confidence.

The pedagogical implications of the academic experiences of Indonesian student exchange at the Philippines. Exposure to a different educational environment and culture can help students develop a more nuanced understanding of cultural differences, which is crucial for effective communication and teaching. Immersion in a foreign language environment can significantly enhance language skills, which in turn can reduce speaking anxiety as students become more confident in their abilities.

With this program, the existence of a new cultural environment is a challenge to be able to know and try to understand the cultural values of oneself and others. Positive thoughts need to be instilled in order to accept and appreciate these cultural differences. In addition, it is necessary to have confidence, always try to be calm and be able to take the initiative in the situation faced. Even though they feel anxiety, having adequate cultural knowledge and motivation, as well as positive attitudes and behaviours will help in the process of interaction in communication with those who come from different cultures.

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