

## TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN LEARNING TO SPEAK ENGLISH

<sup>1</sup>Auliyanti S. Nurfadhilah, <sup>2</sup>Sahril Nur, <sup>3</sup>Muh. Safar Nur  
<sup>1,2,3</sup> English Education Department, Universitas Negeri Makassar,  
South Sulawesi, Indonesia

Email: [auliyantinurfadhilah@gmail.com](mailto:auliyantinurfadhilah@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Students who are unable to speak fluently and efficiently are not always due to a lack of language proficiency, a lack of motivation, or a lack of interest. Rather than that, it may be that they are suffering from anxiety, which not only impairs students' performance but also inhibits students' efforts to improve their ability to speak. The purpose of this study was to ascertain EFL teachers' perceptions on effective strategies for reducing students' anxiety when learning to speak English. The data were collected through online interview utilizing the zoom application. The participants in this study were six EFL teachers, one male and five females, each with a unique teaching experience. The findings of this study indicate that: (1) the causes of students' anxiety can come from both students and teachers; (2) the primary effect of anxiety in learning to speak English is that students' performances do not improve; and (3) in order to minimize students' anxiety in learning to speak English, teachers believe they must be able to make the teaching and learning process more pleasant and attractive for the students.*

**Keywords:** Student' Anxiety, Teachers' Perceptions, Minimizing Students' Anxiety, Speaking Skills

### A. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety has developed into a significant issue for humans (MacLeod, 1988). It can have a variety of effects on people, including their feelings, their thoughts, their actions, and their behavior (Reiss, 1986). As a result, individuals are incapable of doing adequately since something is interfering with their brain. Additionally, Herman (1975) states that anxiety has been identified as a significant affective element influencing second or foreign language learning.

Students who struggle to communicate fluently and effectively are not always due to a lack of language proficiency, a lack of motivation, or a lack of interest. Rather than that, it could be because they are anxious. There are enormous researchers outside Indonesia have researched about Foreign Language Anxiety that are (J. M. Dewaele, 2018, 2020; Lee, 2020; Presbitero, 2020; Ramírez-Castañeda, 2020; Shirvan, 2021; Smet, 2018, 2018; Zhang, 2019). Their research has consistently revealed that anxiety can impede foreign language production and achievement.

Anxiety is not only capable of impairing students' performance; it is also capable of impeding students' efforts to improve their ability to speak (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; Field, 2005). Given the potential negative consequences of EFL students' language anxiety, it is critical for EFL teachers to identify and understand some of the reasons why students

feel anxious when asked to speak English, as students may experience anxiety for a variety of reasons. By identifying the causes of EFL students' anxiety, it is hoped that teachers will become more aware of their students' language difficulties and will implement appropriate strategies, provide valuable feedback, and perform their roles as a teacher more effectively, thereby reducing EFL students' anxiety and allowing them to perform better both inside and outside of the classroom.

Based on the data found in the previous studies, the majority of students struggle with speaking. One of the difficulties is that students are constantly anxious whenever they wish to speak in front of their peers or teachers. This could be due to a variety of factors, including the fact that their teacher corrects every mistake made by their students, the students' lack of ability to communicate effectively, or most likely the classroom environment (Young, 1991; Horwitz, 2008). Thus, the researcher intends to elicit information about the issues that contribute to students' anxiety while learning to speak English, the effects of anxiety on students, and strategies for reducing students' anxiety in learning to speak English through interviews with the EFL teachers.

## **B. METHOD**

This study used qualitative descriptive method. The researcher provided the description of teachers' perceptions on the causes of the students' anxiety, the effect of anxiety to the students, and the effective ways to minimize the students' anxiety in learning to speak English.

The participants in this study were six EFL teachers, one male and five females with varying levels of teaching experience. They are all graduates of the State University of Makassar's English Education Program. All the teachers teach in different schools: two in junior high, two in senior high, and two in a private English course.

The procedures of collecting data were as follows:

1. The researcher provided three analytical questions
2. The researcher interviewed the EFL teachers by using zoom application for about 15 – 30 minutes.
3. The researcher analyzed the results of interview through coding and then categorized them based on their similarity.
4. The data was then compiled in the form of paragraphs, interpreted, and compared to data found by other researchers or expert to see the weaknesses and the strengths of this study.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. Result**

In this study, the participants were asked three analytical questions used to find out their perceptions on the issues related to students' anxiety as well as their strategies for reducing it when teaching speaking in the class. The result of interview with the six teachers will be elaborated as follows:

#### **a. The causes of students' anxiety in learning to speak English**

The first analytical question was asked to find out the teachers' perceptions on the causes of students' anxiety in learning to speak English. The results of interview with the

EFL teachers indicated that there are many factors which can be considered as the causes of students' anxiety in learning English. The sources of factors are divided into two: the first one comes from the students and the second one comes from the teachers themselves. The factors from each source then are analyzed in the following descriptions.

The anxiety which comes from the *students* in learning English can be caused by six factors, as follows:

- A fear of making mistakes

Most participants agree that a fear of making mistakes can cause the students to feel anxious in speaking class. The teachers realized that their students were reluctant to share their ideas in speaking class because they did not want their teachers to correct their mistakes.

One of the typical answers was:

T4 : *"Based on my experience, the students felt anxiety because they were afraid of making mistakes and also they were shy to share their ideas"*

- Low self-confidence

The second common answers stated by the teachers is low self-confidence. The teachers believe that students who feel anxious when speaking English class were caused by the students did not believe in their own ability as the result they were not confident when they were asked to speak in the class.

The typical answers were:

T1 : *"..., also low self-confidence should be considered as the causes of students' anxiety in learning English."*

T6 : *"..., besides the students had low self-confidence toward their own ability."*

- Lack of vocabulary

Some teachers also believe that lack of vocabulary could raise the students' anxiety in speaking. One of the comments was:

T2 : *"The anxiety in learning to speak English experienced by the students could be caused by lack of vocabulary."*

- Bad perspectives toward the lesson

Another causes of anxiety according to the teacher was the students' perspective toward the lesson. If their perspective is bad, it would automatically affect their attitude which then lead them to feel anxious in the class.

T5 : *"I believe that all people have certain attitudes in learning something, whatever the lesson is, the problem is it could be during the learning process, they have experienced a bad thing and it turned their attitude which automatically affected their perceptions toward the lesson."*

- A fear of judging by the others

Another factor causing the students to feel anxious in a speaking class is that they are afraid of being judged by their classmates and teachers. This often made the students have no willingness to speak in the class. The comment was:

T3 : *"... Besides, they also have a fear of judging by their friends or even their teacher which made them hesitate to participate in any speaking activities in the class."*

- Having no interest and motivation to learn

The last factor considered as the factor of anxiety in the speaking class was students' interest and motivations. The teachers believe that the students who do not have interest and

motivation to learn can lead them to feel anxious especially when they are asked to speak in the class. The comment was:

T5 : *“I saw many types of students but those who look anxious in the speaking class were often caused because they have no interest and motivation in the English class.”*

The anxiety which comes from the *teachers* in learning English can be caused by four factors, as follows:

- The teaching method does not meet the students' demand

One of the causes of anxiety derived from the teacher according to teachers' perceptions was the teaching method which does not meet the students' demand.

T5 : *“...the teaching method should also be considered as the causes of students' anxiety. It was not caused by the teachers who cannot teach the students but sometimes their teaching method does not meet of students' demand.”*

- Bad attitudes

Bad attitude is also considered as the causes of students' anxiety. Some teachers often intimidate the students in the class which make the students feel uncomfortable. As the result, the students feel anxious whenever they are asked to speak because they cannot enjoy the learning. One of the comments was:

T1 : *“students' anxiety can also increase if the teachers cannot show a good attitude, for instance, teachers who often intimidate the students that makes the students feel uncomfortable during the learning process, to teachers.”*

- Cannot perform a good role

Some participants also believe that teachers who cannot perform a good role in the class would also lead the students to feel anxious in the learning process. Motivating and giving some inspirations to the students during the learning process are believed to be able to make the students enjoy the activities in the class so they would not feel too anxious especially when they are to speak. One of the comments was:

T2 : *“For me, anxiety might also raise if the teachers cannot perform a good role in the class, for example, they never try to give motivation and inspirations to their students.”*

- The teaching materials are beyond the students' ability

Some participants also mentioned that teaching materials which are too hard for the students' level can also cause them to feel anxious. This then can make them feel depressed and even cannot think very well. One of the comments was:

T4 : *“I think giving materials which are too hard for the students level can also raise the students' anxiety. They would suddenly feel tense or depressed and even cannot think very well.”*

#### **b. The effects of students' anxiety in learning to speak English**

The second analytical question was asked to find out the teachers' perceptions on the effects of students' anxiety in learning to speak English. The results indicated that there were not significant differences of the effects of anxiety experienced by the EFL students. The main effect of students' anxiety found in this study is the students' performances were not improved. However, there are four factors that contribute to students' inability to improve their performance as a result of their anxiety:

- The students cannot enjoy the speaking activities

The first effect of anxiety found in this study was the students cannot enjoy the activities in the class, this include speaking activities. The typical comment was:

T1 : *“Based on my experience, the effect of anxiety to the students was they could not enjoy and feel comfortable when they are learning English.”*

- The students have no interest in learning and to develop their ability in speaking

The second effect of anxiety was the students have no interest in learning so their English-speaking abilities cannot be developed. The typical comments were:

T2 : *“The effect of anxiety to the students was they did not want to develop their ability in learning to speak English.”*

T4 : *“The effect of anxiety to the students in learning to speak English based on my experiences were the students became lazy to learn, they did nothing in the classroom, and even did not care of the activities prepared for them.”*

- The students cannot concentrate and focus on the lesson

The third effect was students are unable to concentrate and pay attention to the lesson which then affected their performance in the class. One of the comments was:

T5 : *“Anxiety affected the students in many ways such as the students cannot focus on their study because there was a fear of making mistakes, a fear of missing pronunciation. It was like there was an obstacle that blocked them to be developed and understood the lesson. The students became passive in the class and the worst was they turned to hate English very much.”*

- The students have no bravery to speak English in front of the others

The last effect of anxiety found in this study was the students turned to have a fear of speaking in front of their classmates. They preferred to remain silent rather than participating in the speaking activities prepared by their teacher.

T6 : *“The effects of anxiety were the students preferred to keep silent than making mistakes which can make them get laughed by their classmates. The students who do not have self-confidence usually do cheating, copy their friends’ assignments, and tend to be passive such as they feel afraid of asking or sharing their opinion.”*

### **c. Reducing students’ anxiety in learning to speak English.**

The last question was asked to find the effective strategies done by the teachers in reducing students’ anxiety especially when learning to speak English in the class. The data found in this study indicated that to be able to minimize the students’ anxiety, the teachers should be able to make the teaching and learning process more enjoyable and interesting for the students. Thus, there are some suggested strategies which can be applied in the EFL classroom to reduce the students’ anxiety based on the result of interview with the six teachers, as follows:

- Using games

The first activity suggested by the teachers as the participants in this study is to use games as media of teaching speaking. Applying this activity will not only be fun and enjoyable, but also can help the students to reduce their anxiety. The typical comment was:

T1 : *“Based on my experience, to reduce the students’ anxiety we can use games to make them enjoy the lesson.”*

- Applying cooperative learning (pair or group work)

The second activity was to apply cooperative learning that is by asking the students to speak with their pair or group. As they need only to speak with the people they will work with, the students then feel more comfortable to speak so their anxiety can be reduced significantly. Some of the responds were:

T1 : *“We can also make cooperative learning such as by applying pair or group activities. For me, that’s really helpful to reduce the students’ anxiety.”*

T3 : *“To reduce the anxiety of the students based on my experiences, we can create an interesting or fun teaching, divided the students into some groups is one of the strategies that can be applied in a class because they can practice to speak English with their group first before perform in front of all their classmates.”*

- Applying various styles of learning

The third suggestions that was found effective by the teachers to reduce students’ anxiety was to applying various styles of learning. Many teachers apply the same method every time they teach English which make the students feel bored and lose their interest to learn. One of the comments was:

T5 : *“For me, being a creative teacher is very needed to reduce the students’ anxiety, we need to prepare different teaching styles which interest them to learn. Based on my experiences, those strategies can help me reduce the students’ anxiety.”*

- Making a joke

Some teachers also believe that making a joke is an effective strategy to reduce students’ anxiety in speaking class. This strategy can attract their attention and make them laugh, as the result, they will enjoy the activities prepared by their teacher. Some of the comments were:

T2 : *“I try to make them love learning English such as giving games, or sometimes I make a joke in a class so that they do not feel bored and interest to learn English over and over again.”*

T5 : *“For me, of the effective ways to reduce the students’ anxiety is by telling them a joke. I believe that creating a fun environment can help them to be more relax so they will be more willing to participate in the class.”*

- Preparing material which is based on the students’ speaking level ability

The next strategy suggested by the participants in this study was to prepare material which is based on the students’ speaking level ability. Most teachers believe that if the material is too hard for their students’ level, then it will increase their anxiety because they will suddenly feel depressed and unable to follow the activity in the class. One of the comments was:

T2 : *“When starting the class, do not ever try to give the students a difficult material, but try to start the lesson by giving a fun activity which can make them addicted in learning English.”*

- Be more friendly

Showing a friendliness is also believed as an effective strategy in reducing students’ anxiety. If teachers always intimidate the students (for example by showing a fierce expression), it then will increase students’ anxiety because they will be afraid of their teacher

and as the result, they will feel reluctant to participate in the speaking class. One of the comments was:

T2 : *“Try to show your friendly face because the students will not enjoy the English class if their teachers show a fierce face. They will be afraid of us and as the result, they will not have interest to participate actively in any activities in the class.”*

- Telling a motivational and inspiring story

The last strategy suggested by the participants in this study was to tell motivational and inspiring story. This could be by telling the students that making mistakes is not a crime in the process of learning a language, instead, it can be a lesson for them to study harder. One of the typical responds was:

T6 : *“, I always motivate my students to develop their ability. My favorite quote to motivate them is “Don’t be afraid or shy of making mistake because it is the process of learning, if you are afraid making mistakes, you will never learn from your mistakes”*,

## 2. Discussion

In this part, the researcher discussed what has been elaborated in the results to be compared with the previous theories related to anxiety. The researcher also discussed the weaknesses and the strengths from each analytical question.

### a. The causes of students’ anxiety in learning to speak English

In this study, the researcher analyzed the causes of students’ anxiety in learning to speak English based on the EFL teachers’ perspectives. The data showed that, the factors caused the students feeling anxious in learning to speak English come from two sources, the first one comes from the *students* and the second one comes from the *teachers* themselves.

The data found by the researcher were not far different from Hall’s theory. Hall (2019) states that there are three sources of foreign language anxiety, he outlines them into three categories that is: sources associated with the *learner*, the *teacher*, and the *institution*.

The difference between the theories provided by Li (2020) from the data found by the researcher is the researcher did not categorize the source of some causes into *institution* while Young states that all materials provided in EFL curriculum which are beyond of students’ level of ability can trigger the anxiety of the students in learning to speak English. Therefore, the institution can be considered as the source of anxiety in learning English.

In addition, Hall (2019) also claims that a spontaneous activity or examination can increase the students’ anxiety. Thus, it is better for the teacher to tell the students whenever he or she wants to give both oral and written tests. This factor was not mentioned in the findings because none of teachers which were interviewed realized that any kind of spontaneous activities or tests can increase the students’ anxiety. This also became the weakness of the researcher’s findings.

### b. The effects of students’ anxiety in learning to speak English

According to Gkonou (2019) the combination of high levels of anxiety and low self-rated proficiency creates students with low levels of linguistic self-confidence, which reduces motivation for study and communication in the second language. Lee (2020) also said that foreign language anxiety negatively impacts the quality of learning and is a critical factor in a learner’s success or failure in learning a foreign language.

By comparing the theories above with the data found by the researcher, the researcher can conclude that there are not differences between the previous theories from what the researcher found in an EFL teaching and learning process recently. However, the researcher stated the main effect of anxiety in learning English that is *the students cannot show the improvement of performances*. That means that the learning quality of the students decreased. The strength of the data described by the researcher is the researcher listed the causes which affect the decrease of students' performances.

**c. Reducing students' anxiety in learning to speak English.**

Anxiety in learning English is one of the problems of many students. It is triggered by some factors that have been discussed in the prior variable. Therefore, finding some ways that can help the students minimize their anxiety is a must for every EFL teacher.

The previous theory about some factors which can reduce the anxiety comes from Wörde (2003). She discussed in her research "**Students' Perspectives on Foreign Language Anxiety**" that there are three factors that the students believe can reduce anxiety as follows:

1. A sense of community.
2. Pedagogical practices and classroom environment.
3. Role of teacher.

From the data found by the researcher, there are seven things that can be applied by the EFL teachers to help them reduce their students' anxiety. However, the researcher then decided to categorize them into four factors, three of them are the same as the previous theories and the newest one is the *teachers' attitude*. The researcher believes that role of teacher and teachers' attitudes are two different things. Showing a good attitude by acting friendlier in the class can reduce the students' anxiety because they have no reasons to hate their teacher. Thus, teachers' attitude should be considered as the other factor which can help minimize the students' anxiety. Finally, it will become the strength of the data collected by the researcher.

**D. CONCLUSION**

Based on the EFL teachers' perspective, the conclusions of this small research are as follows:

1. There are many factors which can be considered as the causes of students' anxiety in learning English. The sources of factors are divided into two: the first one comes from the students and the second one comes from the teachers themselves.
2. The main effect of the anxiety in learning English is the students cannot show the improvement of performances. It showed that there was a decrease of the students' learning quality as the result of feeling anxiety in learning English.
3. To be able to minimize the students' anxiety, the teachers should be able to make the teaching and learning process more enjoyable and interesting for the students.



## E. REFERENCES

- Dewaele, J. M. (2018). Foreign language enjoyment and anxiety: The effect of teacher and learner variables. In *Language Teaching Research* (Vol. 22, Issue 6, pp. 676–697). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817692161>
- Dewaele, J. M. (2020). Are foreign language learners' enjoyment and anxiety specific to the teacher? An investigation into the dynamics of learners' classroom emotions. In *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* (Vol. 10, Issue 1, pp. 45–65). <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2020.10.1.3>
- Field, John. (2005). *Psycholinguistics: The Key Concepts*. Taylor & Francis e-Library: Routledge.
- Gkonou, C. (2019). Caring and emotional labour: Language teachers' engagement with anxious learners in private language school classrooms. In *Language Teaching Research* (Vol. 23, Issue 3, pp. 372–387). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817728739>
- Hall, B. J. (2019). The effect of discrimination on depression and anxiety symptoms and the buffering role of social capital among female domestic workers in Macao, China. In *Psychiatry Research* (Vol. 271, pp. 200–207). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychres.2018.11.050>
- Herman, C. (1975). Anxiety, restraint, and eating behavior. In *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* (Vol. 84, Issue 6, pp. 666–672). <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.84.6.666>
- Horwitz, E.K. 2008. *Becoming a Language Teacher: A Practical Guide to Second Language Learning and Teaching*. USA: Pearson.
- Lee, J. S. (2020). Affective factors, virtual intercultural experiences, and L2 willingness to communicate in in-class, out-of-class, and digital settings. In *Language Teaching Research* (Vol. 24, Issue 6, pp. 813–833). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168819831408>
- Li, C. (2020). A Positive Psychology perspective on Chinese EFL students' trait emotional intelligence, foreign language enjoyment and EFL learning achievement. In *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (Vol. 41, Issue 3, pp. 246–263). <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1614187>
- MacIntyre, Peter D. and Gardner R. C. (1994). *The Effects of Induced Anxiety on Three Stages of Cognitive Processing in Computerized Vocabulary Learning*. SSLA vol. 16. United States of America: Cambridge University Press.
- MacLeod, C. (1988). Anxiety and the Allocation of Attention to Threat. In *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology Section A* (Vol. 40, Issue 4, pp. 653–670). <https://doi.org/10.1080/14640748808402292>
- Presbitero, A. (2020). Foreign language skill, anxiety, cultural intelligence and individual task performance in global virtual teams: A cognitive perspective. In *Journal of International Management* (Vol. 26, Issue 2). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2019.100729>
- Ramírez-Castañeda, V. (2020). Disadvantages in preparing and publishing scientific papers caused by the dominance of the English language in science: The case of Colombian

- researchers in biological sciences. In *PLoS ONE* (Vol. 15, Issue 9).  
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0238372>
- Reiss, S. (1986). Anxiety sensitivity, anxiety frequency and the prediction of fearfulness. In *Behaviour Research and Therapy* (Vol. 24, Issue 1, pp. 1–8).  
[https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967\(86\)90143-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/0005-7967(86)90143-9)
- Shirvan, M. E. (2021). Longitudinal examination of university students' foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety in the course of general English: Latent growth curve modeling. In *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* (Vol. 24, Issue 1, pp. 31–49).  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1441804>
- Smet, A. D. (2018). Classroom anxiety and enjoyment in CLIL and non-CLIL: Does the target language matter? In *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching* (Vol. 8, Issue 1, pp. 47–71). <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssl.t.2018.8.1.3>
- Wörde, Renée von. 2003. *Students' Perspectives on Foreign Language Anxiety*. Virginia Community College System.
- Young, D.J. 1991. *Creating a Low-Anxiety Classroom Environment: What Does Language Anxiety Research Suggest?* *The Modern Language Journal*. 75 (4), pp. 425-439.
- Zhang, X. (2019). Foreign Language Anxiety and Foreign Language Performance: A Meta-Analysis. In *Modern Language Journal* (Vol. 103, Issue 4, pp. 763–781).  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12590>