# THE EFFECT OF ANXIETY LEVEL ON SPEAKING ABILITY: PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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## ABSTRAK

Psycholinguistics has contributed to numerous theories that explain how a person acquires language, produces and uses spoken and written language. Without adequate English language skills, BSI students will face fundamental problems in their studies, especially in class discussions. A descriptive study was conducted to describe the problems faced by Bina Sarana Informatika (BSI) students during class discussions. This study uses a qualitative method design. A total of 3 students who took part in this study were from the BSI English Department. This study collected data using semi-structured interviews. From the results of the research conducted, there were findings of several causes of mistakes made when students were talking, including children who feels anxious when speaking during discussions. Elements of this error can be classified based on the realm of psychology. The causes of mistakes that have feelings of anxiety and worry are related to the affective domain.

**Keywords: anxiety, speaking, analysis, psycholinguistics**

## *ABSTRAK*

*Psikolinguistik telah berkontribusi pada banyak teori yang menjelaskan bagaimana seseorang memperoleh bahasa, memproduksi dan menggunakan bahasa lisan dan tulisan. Tanpa kemampuan berbahasa Inggris yang memadai, mahasiswa BSI akan menghadapi permasalahan mendasar dalam studinya, terutama dalam diskusi kelas. Sebuah studi deskriptif dilakukan untuk menggambarkan masalah yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswa Bina Sarana Informatika (BSI) selama diskusi kelas. Penelitian ini menggunakan rancangan metode kualitatif. Sebanyak 3 mahasiswa yang mengikuti penelitian ini berasal dari Jurusan Bahasa Inggris BSI. Penelitian ini mengumpulkan data dengan menggunakan wawancara semi terstruktur. Dari hasil penelitian yang dilakukan, ditemukan beberapa penyebab kesalahan yang dilakukan siswa saat berbicara, antara lain anak merasa cemas saat berbicara saat berdiskusi. Unsur kesalahan ini dapat diklasifikasikan berdasarkan ranah psikologi. Penyebab kesalahan yang menimbulkan perasaan cemas dan khawatir berkaitan dengan ranah afektif.*

*Kata kunci: kecemasan, berbicara, analisis, psikolinguistik*

## INTRODUCTION

Pursuing an excellent education could be one of the reasons why most students enrolling college degree in Jakarta and choose English major. Therefore, these students expect to impove insights and get good grades compare to others. However, studying in a big city offers them challenges and obstacles due to the differences they face. As previous studies have investigated (Choudaha & Schulmann, 2014; Gebhard, 2012; McClure, 2007; Robertson et al., 2000; Sawir, 2005; Sawir et al., 2008), such challenges include language, socio-cultural background, economics, and teaching-learning methods.

There are a number of recent studies regarding the problem of using language in class discussions faced by students, including: (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016; Han, 2007; Kuo, 2011; Wong, 2004). As more and more students majoring in English for their studies, this has been and will continue to be an important point for work in the future. Therefore, it seems important to consider the case of students majoring in English.

In almost all universities, class discussions are inevitable. This is genuinely occurred within BSI students, where class discussions tend to be a requirement for passing a course. In such classes, students are encouraged to actively share their knowledge and views rather than passively listening to the lecturer's explanations. In addition, class participation is needed (C.S.W., 1991). Therefore, students are expected to be actively involved in class discussions using English. If not, it will be difficult for them to succeed or achieve.

Since speaking is the only way to participate in class discussions, students must have good oral skills and be able to express their ideas and thoughts very well. However, oral participation in English may not be easy for those whose English is not their mother language, i.e, for some university students. The challenges faced by students in this context have encouraged (Kuo, 2011) to study Asian students in the US and (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016) to study Indonesian students in the UK. Both studies have revealed that students seem to have some problems following class discussions in English. The main reason why class

discussions are not easy for many students could be because the ability to speak a foreign language during class discussions is a multi-faceted competency, the success of which depends on many factors. For example, more and more studies have been conducted to show that speaking involves many aspects and internal components such as linguistic knowledge (Bohlhke, 2014; Brown, 2001a), topic knowledge (Huang et al., 2018; Khabbazbashi, 2017), listening skill (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016; Kuo, 2011) motivation (Al Othman & Shuqair, 2013; Dinçer & Yeşilyurt, 2013) and anxiety (Chiu et al., 2010; Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

Considering that students usually do not do well in this context, it is only natural that further research is conducted to find out how students perform during their studies at BSI, especially in class discussions. For the purpose of this study, college students were recruited as participants. Students have certain characteristics (for example, (Lee, 2011; Li & Jia, 2006; Loh & Teo, 2017; Wan, 2001). The findings of this research will contribute to understanding the learning experience, in the hope of generating a more complete view of the problems faced. faced by students in general.

Several researchers have previously conducted research by (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013), and (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016), language barriers faced by students in class discussions are also seen as a common problem for students. Research was also conducted by (Putu Indra Kusuma, 2021) which explained that students had problems related to anxiety levels in using English. These studies examine problems in participating in class discussions from external and internal aspects. However, these studies failed to provide more in-depth data on the speaking component of class participation, as both studies involved only a large number of participants with the primary focus on qualitative data from interviews.

Therefore, this study attempts to fill this gap by focusing on the speaking problems in classroom discussions faced by BSI students, involving fewer participants to obtain more reliable and more focused findings. In addition, this study provides sufficient qualitative data to gain in-depth insights into the research topic.

This study is important because it will provide a complete explanation of the anxiety factors that affect students' speaking ability. In addition, this complete information will be useful as consideration material by other prospective students, educational institutions, schools/institutions to prepare prospective students. This research aims to investigate the following questions: (1). Do students face speaking problems related to anxiety levels during class discussions at BSI?

**Psycholinguistic**

Psycholinguistics is simply defined as the study of the relationship between human language and the human mind (Maftoon & Shakouri, 2012). In summary, three important processes are investigated in psycholinguistics: (1) language production, (2) language comprehension, and (3) language acquisition (Kelly, 2007).

Psycholinguistics is an integration of two disciplines; psychology and linguistics. Psychology is the study of thoughts and behavior; linguistics is the study of language. So, in general, psycholinguistics can be defined as the study of mind and language. It is concerned with the relationship between the human mind and language because it examines the processes that occur in the brain when producing and understanding language.

Psycholinguistics covers three main points; language production, language perception, and language acquisition. Language production refers to the processes involved in creating and expressing meaning through language. Language perception refers to the processes involved in interpreting and understanding written and spoken language. Language acquisition refers to the process of acquiring a native language or a second language.

**Classroom Discussion**

As a classroom activity, discussion is a manifestation of oral communication to express ideas, opinions, or arguments on a topic. Classroom discussion is a common activity in universities, although there are questions about its effectiveness (Kelly, 2007). Some classroom discussions are initiated by the

lecturer as a lesson opener, and sometimes the students themselves ask questions which leads them to a longer discussion. In general, classroom discussion is common and expected in every class (C.S.W., 1991). Classroom discussion is also one of the best ways to improve knowledge because students can interact with others through the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and experiences (Maeda, 2017).

Thus, however, students may experience many problems during classroom activities, and one of them is engaging in discussions (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016). In particular, there are many factors that affect class discussions such as language limitation (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016), students' language status (Griskell et al., 2020) anxiety over participation in classroom discussions (Maeda, 2017), or due to cultural issues for students who the culture does not encourage asking questions and taking part in discussions (Karuppan & Barari, 2010). In general, these factors can greatly influence student engagement in classroom discussions. To date, several studies have investigated student participation in classroom discussions in terms of using English as a communication tool (for example, (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016; Griskell et al., 2020; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013)

(Griskell et al., 2020) conducted a quantitative study, one of the aims of which was to examine differences between monolingual English-speaking students and bilingual students participating in classroom discussions. They studied 106 bilingual students and 98 English-only students and found that monolingual students participated more actively than their bilingual counterparts when they had the same level of fluency. In addition, they also found that bilingual students had fewer opportunities to participate in classroom discussions.

Regarding how students participate in classroom discussions, (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013) conducted a qualitative research towards ten students. One of the findings was that these ten students were shy and passive when participating in classroom activities. They then claim that cultural differences and a lack of English appear to be responsible for the problem. This discussion was continued by (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016), who studied eight college students in their qualitative study. They found that the language barrier was also responsible for passivity when participating in classroom discussions. Therefore, the above

studies lead to the idea that students who use English as a foreign language may have problems participating in classroom discussions. The nature of this problem deserves further investigation.

**The speaking component in classroom discussion**

Because speaking involves multiple aspects and components, it is one of the most challenging skills to master (Harmer, 2010; Luoma, 2004). For example, it is difficult for students to engage in classroom discussions by speaking English because of many aspects. According to some experts, the ability to speak is related to several features, including the level of anxiety (Al Othman & Shuqair, 2013; Bohlhke, 2014; Brown, 2001b; Chiu et al., 2010; Dinçer & Yeşilyurt, 2013; Hinkel, 2006; Huang et al., 2018; Khabbazbashi, 2017; Yan & Horwitz, 2008)

**Anxiety Level**

Many studies have specifically investigated the relationship between anxiety and verbal communication (Al Othman & Shuqair, 2013; Dinçer & Yeşilyurt, 2013; Ochoa et al., 2016). The results showed that anxiety affects students' oral performance. Therefore, if students have a high level of anxiety, they may not perform better in classroom discussions. Anxiety is also inherent in language learning and exists in three parts, including trait, situation specific, and anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Spielberger, 1983).

Situation-specific anxiety is closely related to verbal communication. It refers to unpleasant states, such as worry, stress, and nervousness that result from certain situations, such as classroom discussions. According to (Dörnyei, 2001), the language classroom is a face-threatening environment. This means that classroom discussions can produce an unsafe environment and atmosphere for students. (Horwitz et al., 1986) investigated situation-specific anxiety in second language learning and creating Foreign Language Anxiety (hereafter is called FLA). Anxiety has a relationship with low performance of language learners in speaking, especially in classroom discussions (Chiu et al., 2010; Karatas et al., 2016; Maeda, 2017; Toubot et al., 2018; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). Therefore, anxiety is central to the success and failure of student performance in classroom

discussions. Students with high anxiety often fail to participate in discussions. However, those with low anxiety managed to participate in classroom discussions without much fear.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This is a descriptive study conducted at Bina Sarana Informatika University (BSI) to describe the phenomenon of speaking problems faced by students in classroom discussions. A total of 3 students who took part in this study were from the BSI English Department.

### Data Collection & Analysis

The object explored in this study is the problems faced by students when participating in classroom discussions based on the anxiety factor. The data was collected through interviews by asking semi-structured questions related to problems encountered during classroom discussions. The qualitative data analysis technique used was psycholinguistic analysis. According to (Krippendorff, 2004) this is a qualitative technique to make valid conclusions from the analyzed text regarding the level of anxiety.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

Interview items given to the students:

- Feeling anxious when grouping in discussion
- Feeling anxious about classroom discussion.
- Feeling anxious at every opportunity given to speak in classroom discussions.
- Feeling nervous in following classroom discussions.
- Anxiety when speaking in classroom discussions.
- Anxiety about the inability to master the topic in classroom discussion.
- Anxiety about the topic being discussed with prior knowledge.
- The ability to minimize excessive levels of anxiety.

This finding was supported by answers from open-ended questions, where participants had difficulty overcoming their anxiety during discussions in classroom. An example of a quote is as follows.

**Quote #1**

"Always feel anxious when there is a grouping for discussion."

**Quote #2**

"I feel anxious when there are discussions in classroom."

**Quote #3**

"Feeling anxious at every given opportunity to speak in classroom discussions so that it makes me unable to have good discussions."

**Quote #4**

"I often get nervous in classroom discussions before I even start speaking. I'm afraid my lecturer will ask me to give my opinion when we discuss in classroom."

**Quote #5**

"When I get the chance to express my opinion, I get nervous and can't speak directly. Sometimes I stop talking before I finish my opinion."

**Quote #6**

"I'm always worried because I often don't master the topics in classroom discussion."

**Quote #7**

"I also feel anxious if the topic of discussion is related to the level of insight, even I often leave the context of the topic of discussion."

**Quote #8**

"I was unable to minimize the level of excessive anxiety. Earlier, I could explain them but due to the excessive anxiety, I got black out."

Regarding anxiety, the level of anxiety is high when they talk during classroom discussion. In terms of open responses, some participants stated that they were afraid when they had the opportunity to speak, afraid of not being able

to express their ideas fluently or having their opinions taken out of context. Sometimes these respondents prefer to remain silent.

**Discussion**

It can be a challenge for students to participate in classroom discussions, especially when using a different language. Some problems may be embedded in classroom discussions because of this phenomenon. A number of studies have confirmed that language is a significant problem for most students (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016; Hellstén & Prescott, 2004; Kuo, 2011; Mori, 2000). The use of language can be an obstacle for students in their studies due to participation in English classroom discussions. Therefore, an in-depth focus at this issue is required for further analysis.

The results showed that most students had difficulty communicating in classroom. (Selvadurai, 1992) states that although students are admitted to university using some equivalent English proficiency tests to prove their proficiency, they still experience difficulties in understanding lectures, expressing ideas and other problems in academic activities. Therefore, there is no guarantee of success in university academic pursuits by a high score on the TOEFL, IELTS, or other equivalent tests.

Problems in speaking in classroom discussions often involve excessive levels of anxiety. (Baker & Westrup, 2003) reported that many students face difficulties in responding in a foreign language because of their anxiety about what to say, the vocabulary to use, or how to use grammar correctly. Students should realize that they need very good language skills to improve their academic performance, especially during classroom discussions. According to (Richards et al., 2002), the success of speaking performances requires the ability to use language very well. Likewise, (Andrade, 2006) illustrates that English proficiency is the main success factor for students' academic studies.

Therefore, it is necessary to master language skills and be proficient in English because an excessive anxiety may affect them in expressing opinions in

classroom discussions. Finally, students may end up preventing themselves from participating in discussions or becoming withdrawn. (Mukminin & McMahon, 2013) determined that students did not feel very confident in presenting ideas verbally and individually, something that might also have happened to other students.

Overcoming anxiety levels is a common problem faced by students at BSI. To avoid all these problems, especially those related to speaking in class discussions, students must be well prepared. English lecturers and students need to collaborate to increase linguistic knowledge for students before learning. According to (Singh, 2014) students must be assisted to face academic challenges through training and preparation programs. Students struggling with speech problems should at least take a preparatory program.

These programs must cover speaking in academic situations, including speaking in classroom discussions. Problems participating in classroom discussions can be triggered by high anxiety. Even though students stated that they had no problems with anxiety in participating in classroom discussions. (Littlewood, 2007) asserts that a foreign language can easily cause anxiety.

In supporting this claim, Dörnyei (2001) establishes that an unsafe environment is inherent in classroom situations. Therefore, students may experience anxiety easily in classroom discussions. Furthermore, anxiety affects verbal performance. Various studies have shown that high levels of anxiety negatively affect student speaking (Chiu et al., 2010; Karatas et al., 2016; Maeda, 2017; Toubot et al., 2018; Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

Some students reported slight problems with speech components, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, most of them still have problems in classroom discussion because many sources are claimed in class to cause anxiety (Effiong, 2016). In addition, severe anxiety can influence people to think that they have poor grammar, vocabulary, and another linguistic knowledge. This finding is in line with (Price, 1991), which showed that when college students experience severe anxiety, they become afraid and traumatized by

speaking unsuccessfully. This is because students may think that they have inadequate linguistic knowledge, even when this may not be the case.

(Owens et al., 2012) stated that severe anxiety can have a negative impact on working memory. As a result, students may suddenly forget the proper grammar and vocabulary to use in communication during classroom discussions. Therefore, it is very important to recognize that anxiety can be a source of failure to participate in classroom discussions.

**CONCLUSION**

This study shows that the cause of mistakes made when students are talking is excessive levels of anxiety. Students who feel burdened (overloaded) have feelings of worry or anxiety when speaking during discussions so that they are less focused on the topic of discussion, experience problems when pronouncing words. The cause of the error that has feelings of anxiety is related to the affective domain. This problem can also affect other students because they mostly have the same characteristics.

The findings in this study must be put in consideration due to the several limitations. For example, it cannot be generalized to all those learning English who have the same problem because the participants involved are limited to only 3 people. Furthermore, this research was only conducted at one university in BSI. Therefore, there is a need to use a larger data set involving many students from different tertiary institutions. In addition, several assumptions in this study need to be confirmed by further exploration. Hopefully this research can be replicated and expanded.

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