

First-Year Students' English Language Learning Anxiety -A Survey at Universitas Serambi Mekkah

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Abstract. *English is a relatively difficult subject for Indonesian-speaking learners. The anxiety of learning English is reported to be associated with the level of English learning achievement. To understand the Universitas Serambi Mekkah students' psychological states towards English learning in general, this study surveyed the first-year students' English language learning anxiety using a questionnaire developed by Iwaniec (2014). This anxiety measuring tool uses five-point Likert-scale questions and consists of 8 items. The population was all new students of the 2023 Academic Year at Universitas Serambi Mekkah with a total number of 1264. A total of 184 students from three faculties participated in the survey. Findings from the eight statements regarding English language learning anxiety show that the first-year students of Universitas Serambi Mekkah in general have a relatively high level of anxiety in learning English. The classroom performance type of anxiety is higher than the academic-achievement one. This implies that the USM English language learners need a secure English learning environment to reduce their learning anxiety.*

Keywords: *Indonesian EFL students, english language learning anxiety, university students*

1. Introduction

Based on EF English Proficiency Index (2023) which surveyed the countries in Asia with the best English Language Proficiency, Indonesia is on number 15th out of 24 countries in Asia. The learning motivation to master the English language fluctuates among most Indonesian individuals due to its relatively complex linguistic regulations, scarce exposure, and ineffective teacher instruction (Lamb & Coleman, 2008). One of the reasons for the fluctuating motivation among Indonesian EFL learners is their experiences with the lessons that they described as often too teacher-directed and textbook-based (Lamb, 2007).

Lacking security in their English language class, learners could develop anxiety (Khattak et al., 2011, William & Andrade, 2008). In Pakistan, university students' English learning anxiety is caused by their nervousness that they will make mistakes the teacher will correct in the class and that they will fail the exam (Khattak et al., 2011). In Japan, which is also an EFL country, William & Andrade (2008) found that anxiety was most often associated with the output and processing (in the sense of mental planning) stages of the learning process and that students attributed the cause of anxiety to the teacher or other people. This study also reported that the effect of and response to anxiety were associated with gender and perceived ability level. In other words, anxiety among English learners in EFL classrooms is highly associated with not only the foreignness of that language but also how the language learning is provided for them by the teacher.

In Indonesia contexts, studies show that English language anxiety impacts almost all areas of language skills; the students' oral communication skill (Said & Weda, 2018;

Djahimo et al., 2018; Anandari, 2015; Hanifa, 2018), writing skill (Kusumaningputri & Wasasongko, 2018; Wahyuni & Usman, 2017), reading skill (Alfaruq, 2019; Muhlis, 2017), and listening skill (Chriswiyati & Subekti, 2022; Liu, & Thondhlana, 2015). The causes are reported to come from various factors such as fear, shyness and discomfort (Anandari, 2015), topics, genre, interlocutors, processing demand, self-consciousness, mode, degree of collaboration, discourse control, planning and rehearsal time, time pressure and environmental conditions (Hanifa, 2018). Thus, Indonesian English language learners' roots of English language learning anxiety are not limited to their internal factors such as shyness or fear, but the combination of their characteristics as learners and the ways learning is presented to them in the classroom.

EFL in Universitas Serambi Mekkah

Universitas Serambi Mekkah has a mission to upgrade its accreditation to a better level. One of the strategies is to connect and work together with abroad institutions such as Malaysia, Thailand, Singapore, Australia, USA and UK. This goal requires the institution to upscale its human resource English achievement for the importance of relation, connection, collaboration and many other activities on an international scale. However, this goal is hard to achieve if the human resources, both students and staff, of this institution still have relatively low English language competencies. The students, in particular, have relatively lower English competencies compared to students studying in public universities—which requires a more competitive process to enter into- in the same town of Banda Aceh. This discrepancy could indicate the level of intelligence factor as one of the contributing factors to one's English learning success. Additionally, it could also indicate the socio-economic and geographical background as the factors as the majority of students studying in Universitas Serambi Mekkah come from remote areas with limited access to the internet and other learning facilities. The present study aimed to measure and describe the anxiety level of the first-year students at Universitas Serambi Mekkah in learning English. The study aimed to answer the following question:

What is the anxiety level of English language learning among the first-year students of Universitas Serambi Mekkah?

2. Method

There are 1264 students registered in the current year of 2023. These students are the population of the study. A total of 184 students from three faculties (Education Faculty, Economic Faculty and Islamic Religion Faculty) participated in the survey. Demographically, they come from varied places in Aceh Province within Sumatra, Simeulue Island, Sabang Island, and North Sumatra Province. The socio-economic background is mostly low. A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was adopted from Iwaniec (2014). There are 8 items tested to measure the anxiety factor. The test was first tested for its reliability using Cronbach Alpha, and Validity using Paired-Sample T-test. Afterwards, the findings for every item are discussed.

3. Results and Discussions

The Reliability & Validity

The Cronbach Alpha for the questionnaire is 0.875. This means that the questionnaire in general is good in terms of the level of reliability. Meanwhile, Pearson's two-tailed correlation test applied to each of the questionnaire items yielded significant level scores > 0.01 for all items (Table 1). This, again, shows that the questionnaire has a good validity level.

Table 1. The Validity Score of the LLAS Questionnaire Items

Item No	Item Statement	t-score
1	1. I tremble when I know I'm going to be called on in language class.	.809**
2	2. Even if I'm well prepared for the class, I feel anxious about it.	.781**
3	3. In language class, I can get so nervous that I forget things I know.	.753**
4	4. I worry about the consequences of failing tests, assignments and exams in English.	.615**
5	5. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	.714**
6	6. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	.655**
7	7. I'm afraid other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	.762**
8	8. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	.744**

The Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 below shows the mean and the standard deviation of the overall scores of anxiety. In general, the means scores across the three faculties are relatively equal; the Education students show slightly higher anxiety scores collectively, followed by the Economic faculty and Islamic Religion faculties. In addition, the highest standard deviation is shown by the Islamic Religion students, and the lowest by the Education students.

Table 2. The Mean and Standard Deviation of LLAS Total Scores in every Faculty

Faculty	Male (n)	Female (n)	N	M	Std. Deviation
Economic	20	23	43	22.09	7.52
Education	39	72	111	23.83	6.82
Islamic Religion	6	26	29	21.71	7.80

The chart below shows that Item 6 has the highest mean score compared to the other items. This item measures the learner's anxiety in the English classroom when compared to the other ones. The second highest mean score is shown by Item number 7 which deals with the learners' fear that the other students will laugh at them if they speak English in the class. The third highest mean score is demonstrated by Item number 5 which measures the learner's embarrassment to volunteer answers in the classroom. The next highest one is item number 1, which measures if the student will tremble if they are asked to come to the front of the class. The fifth and sixth highest mean scores are items 2 and 3, which subsequently measure the student's nervousness and its impact on their memorisation or preparation. The two last items, numbers 8 and 4, are those with the lowest mean scores. Those items measure if the student would worry and panic if they are called without preparation and if they fail the tests.

Overall, the results show that the fluctuation across items is similar across faculties; students across faculties mostly believed that English class makes them feel more tense and nervous compared to their other classes (Item 6). They also mostly feared that they would be laughed at by the other students when they spoke English in the class (item 7). In contrast, Item 4, measures their anxiety if they will fail the English tests or assignments, has a relatively lower score across the faculties, and is the lowest compared to the other items. The latter indicates that failing the exam is the last thing the students feel worry about.

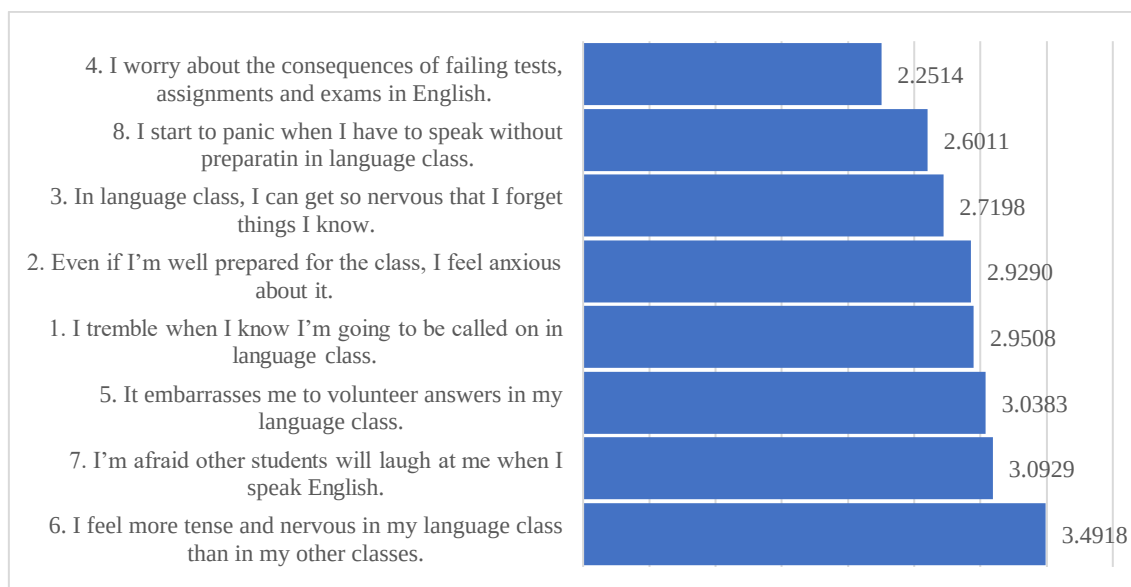


Figure 1. The mean comparison of each category

Figure 2 also suggests that out of the three faculties that participated in the study, the Islamic Religion students show relatively higher anxiety about English learning compared to the Education and Economics students. Meanwhile, the Economic students are the least anxious among all, and the Education shows a relatively moderate one.

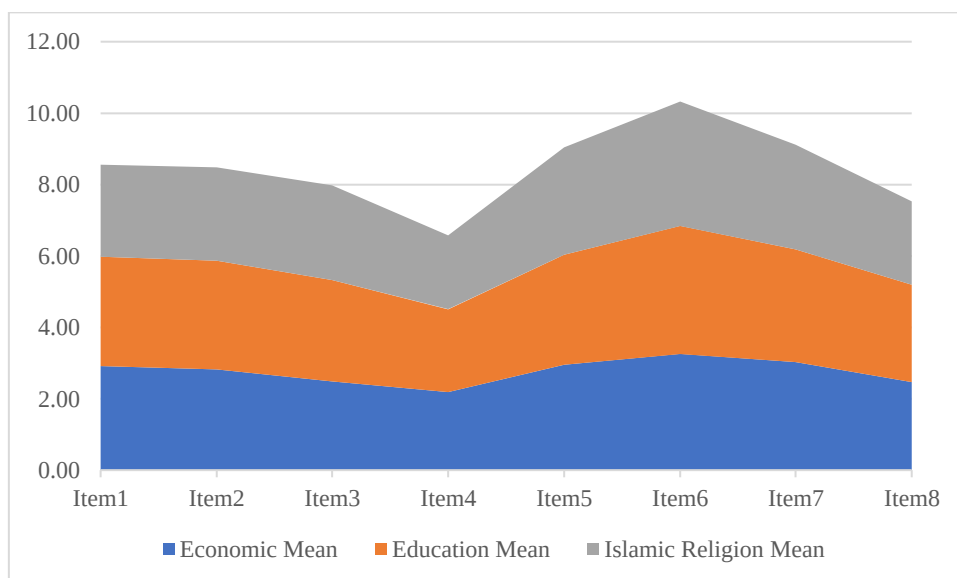


Figure 2. The mean comparison of each category across faculties

Overall, there are three important findings from the present study; firstly, the anxiety about performing in front of the class is the highest in all three groups of students. Secondly, the anxiety on academic achievement is the lowest in all three groups. The findings suggest that students of Serambi Mekkah University are anxious more about their classroom performance or presentation-- where they are required to speak English in front of their friends and teacher-- than their academic performance in English—where they are required to pass the test. This finding is in line with Andayani (2015) that suggested the factors of shyness, fear and discomfort are three types of anxiety

demonstrated by the Indonesian EFL learners. This also confirms what Lamb & Coleman (2007) propose about the fluctuating motivation among Indonesian English learners; that the insecurity in the classroom sometimes lowers their motivation to succeed the learning. In other words, the fear of being laughed at hinders their long-term aim, which is to gain a good grade in the English subject.

Thirdly, the Economic faculty students score relatively lower in anxiety levels compared to the Education and Islamic Religion faculty students. In addition, the Islamic Religion faculty students scored relatively higher than the other two groups of students. However, given number of participants from each faculty was proportional, the results might have been different.

4. Conclusions

The first-year students of Universitas Serambi Mekkah, in general, feel anxious about learning English and to perform orally in front of the class; such as to volunteer answers, or to speak with or without preparation. Furthermore, the anxiety level on this classroom performance outdoes the anxiety level on their academic achievement on the English subject. This implies the learners' low resiliency in overcoming the fear, shyness and discomfort during the learning process, and at the same time reflects their unsecured English classroom learning experience in the past. A more student-centred approach should be provided in the USM English classes to help reduce the learners' anxiety, build their confidence and stabilise their motivation to learn English.

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