



Tracing back the Issue of Speaking Anxiety among EFL Indonesian Secondary Students: From Possible Causes to Practical Implications

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Abstract

This paper aims to scrutinize the possible causes of speaking anxiety issue among the Indonesian EFL secondary students and the critical implications to alleviate the issue. Although several studies have discussed the causes of speaking anxiety, those studies do not emphasize the interrelationship between each cause. Hence, this paper attempts to enrich the related field by tracing back the interconnected relationship between the causes of speaking anxiety, as well as rethinking the possible solutions to cope with this issue. Through the exploration of existing empirical studies and the further discussion on Foreign Language Anxiety framework proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) as the secondary research data, this study classifies the causes of speaking anxiety into two major causes, including affective-related and linguistic-related causes. The promotion of cooperative learning atmosphere and the needs to rebalance the focus of achieving linguistic accuracy and providing broad speaking opportunities are the critical solutions to cope with the issue. This paper also provides suggestions to enlighten both EFL teachers and researchers in conducting classroom activities in rethinking future research agendas.

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INTRODUCTION

Mastering English language skills can be very challenging for Indonesian EFL learners since several problems can be faced during the process of mastering the language. Among other challenges, anxiety becomes one of the major issues for many language researchers as they extend the focus and interest from teachers into the students' problem in the EFL classrooms (Bhatti & Memon, 2016). The term 'anxiety' relates to a psychological condition where the subject experiences the feeling of apprehension and fear due to the association with particular object (Hilgard, Atkinson and Atkinson, as cited in Asif, 2017). In language learning

context, however, the term 'anxiety' is considered as specific and unique since this issue is regarded as one of the affective variables that can give an adverse impact on foreign language learning (Bhatti & Memon, 2016). In other words, anxiety can also impact negatively toward the context of foreign language learning in Indonesia, such as English language learning for the Indonesian EFL secondary students.

As one of the foreign languages that should be learned by the students, English is not commonly spoken by most of Indonesian EFL secondary students in their daily life. Most of the time, the students can only practice this language in the EFL classroom. Therefore, it is assumed that the students can experience a number of issues in the EFL classroom. In relation to the speaking skill, students should not only receive the language competence through source of inputs (e.g. teachers, teaching media) but also practice their capacity to produce the language with their interlocutors during the classroom activities. As a result, students can face a number of challenges in the speaking classroom. In fact, studies have revealed that the issue of anxiety occurs mostly in the speaking skill as learners are expected to interact with other individuals while exercising the language skill (see Çağatay, 2015; Juhana, 2012; Mak, 2011; Noprival, 2016; Yalçın & İnceçay, 2014).

In addition, many EFL researchers in Indonesia have also investigated the possible causes and adverse impacts of the students' anxiety (see Juhana, 2012; Marwan, 2008; Sutarsyah, 2017). For instance, the issue of anxiety can inhibit the students' performance and motivation as they tend to avoid participation in speaking class and make use of language acquisition processes through learning activities. Consequently, when anxiety occurs in speaking activities, it can be assumed that the Indonesian EFL secondary students will not be able to maximize the learning activities in the classroom.

In contrast to the above condition, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (2016) through the Process Standard of Curriculum 2013 mandates the teachers to conduct the learning activities which can encourage the students to participate actively in the classroom. Consequently, this objective will be far from being achieved successfully if the anxiety issue still occurs in most of the EFL classrooms in Indonesia. Therefore, it is critical to examine the nature of anxiety as well as the critical solutions to alleviate this issue.

From the discussion above, this paper aims to answer these research

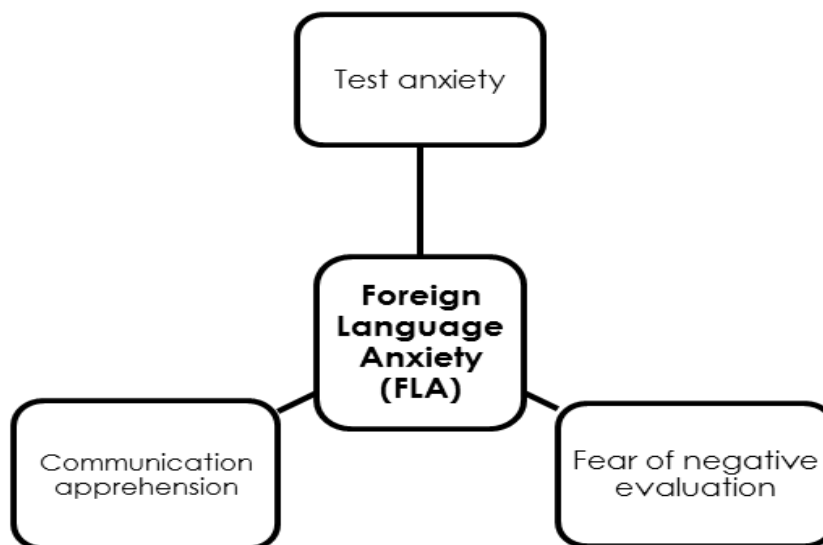
questions namely (1) what are the possible causes of EFL learners speaking anxiety? and (2) what are the practical implications that both teachers and students can do in order to alleviate this adverse issue? While the discussion in this paper can be a reference to enrich the knowledge in the related area, it can also be a reference for the teachers to determine the possible challenges that may appear in the speaking classrooms particularly in the EFL contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The notion of foreign language anxiety (FLA)

One of the prominent theorists in the field of language anxiety includes Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) in the notion of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). This notion refers to the uneasiness faced by the students while learning foreign languages. Furthermore, the researchers also suggested that FLA comprises of three major categories, including test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986). These categories can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. FLA categories proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986)



Test anxiety, as the name suggests, relates to the learners' nervousness while they are conducting a test that stems from being afraid of failing to perform the tests successfully (Horwitz et al., 1986; see also Liu & Jackson, 2008). Fear of negative evaluation deals with the learners' perception that they will be criticized negatively by their peers or teachers when they are practicing or performing the language skills (Horwitz et al., 1986). This situation can occur in various contexts of language learning, including oral exams/presentation (see Yalçın & İnceçay,

2014). Communication apprehension, as the last component, is defined as "a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people" (Horwitz et al., 1986: 127). In this category, the students are unconfident to communicate with other people as they perceive that they do not possess the adequate language skills to interact with other people.

The above FLA categories proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986) will be discussed further while exploring the possible causes of anxiety in the discussion part. Besides considering the discussion of the FLA categories proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), this paper will also explore other relevant sources to discuss the possible causes of speaking anxiety in Indonesian EFL secondary context, as well as the possible solution to alleviate the issue which will be explained in the following section.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper is considered as a conceptual paper which settles secondary data analysis. Terminologically, secondary data analysis is a type of research which begins with an investigation of the data analysis collected by other researchers in the relevant field to explore what is already known and what can be explored further in a certain field (Johnston, 2014). In the case of this research, an in-depth literature review of the areas of speaking anxiety was conducted to examine the previous and current work of experts in the field of speaking anxiety in the Indonesian EFL context.

There are several research steps conducted in this paper. Firstly, the author develops research questions that focus on exploring the possible causes of speaking anxiety, as well as the possible practical solutions to alleviate the issue. Secondly, the author identifies and evaluates the available dataset in the field of speaking anxiety in the EFL context. Thirdly, the author presents the identification and evaluation result of the dataset to answer the research questions. Ultimately, the author also internalizes the result for further suggestions and recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

DISCUSSION

The causes of speaking anxiety

In considering the issue of anxiety in speaking classrooms, many English language teachers and researchers in the EFL countries focus on the attempt to

alleviate the issue by revealing the contributing factors of anxiety and the way to deal with the issue. Among the other causes of anxiety experienced by the students in speaking classrooms, the most salient factors include fear of negative evaluation/making mistakes (see Aeni et al. 2017; Akkakoson, 2016; Anandari, 2015; Ariyanti, 2016; Juhana, 2012; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Noprival, 2016), lack of motivation and confidence (see Ariyanti, 2016; Juhana, 2012; Marwan, 2008; Meylina, 2017; Sutarsyah, 2017), limited linguistic competence (see Aeni et al. 2017; Akkakoson, 2016; Noprival, 2016; Aulia, V, 2018), and limited language practice (Coskun, 2016; Marwan, 2008). Although these studies have listed the possible causes of speaking anxiety, these studies have not put a great emphasis on the interrelationship between each cause. Consequently, this paper will synthesize the causes of speaking anxiety proposed by the studies above into two major classifications, including the affective-related and linguistic-related causes that will be scrutinized critically in the next section.

Affective-related causes

Fundamentally, the two categories of FLA (test anxiety & fear of negative evaluation) promulgated by Horwitz et al. (1986), are closely related to the affective-related causes since both components are linked with the students' negative expectation toward the self-evaluation and others to perform the language skills, including speaking. Furthermore, recent empirical studies show that fear of negative evaluation/making mistakes and lack of motivation/confidence are the most salient affective-related factors of anxiety. Consequently, these factors can lead to detrimental impacts on the students' language proficiency since they are failed to maximize the opportunities to learn the target language (Mukminin et al., 2015; Sutarsyah, 2017). Hence, a thorough discussion of the affective-related causes and its impacts on their speaking performance will be discussed in the next paragraphs.

As mentioned above, there are three critical factors of speaking anxiety experienced by the students in the classroom: fear of negative evaluation, fear of making mistakes, and lack of motivation/confidence. Current experimental studies in the EFL classrooms have revealed that students are likely to have a negative perception on their own ability to perform speaking skills which leads to their fear of adverse judgment from others. Moreover, these factors also lead to their limited

motivation to involve in the classroom activities. An empirical study conducted by Mukminin et al. (2015) in a senior high school classroom in Indonesia unravels that most of the participants in their study perceive that feeling afraid of negative evaluation from others as one of the most debilitating factors in speaking classroom. They discover that the students are often derided by others while performing speaking skills in front of the classroom (Mukminin et al., 2015). Consequently, the students' motivation to learn English is considerably lowered as they are afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers and teachers (see also Anandari, 2015; Ariyanti, 2016).

In relation to the negative impact of this affective-related cause, He (2013) observes that the students who feel afraid of being evaluated negatively tend to avoid participation and be silent during the classroom activities. Similarly, Mukminin et al. (2015) also identify that the students who are afraid of negative responses from their peers or teachers will feel not only worried but also feel unmotivated to interact actively in the classroom. On the contrary, as a productive skill, speaking requires the students to participate actively not only to show their learning progress but also to make use of language acquisition process through the language input and output activities in the classroom. Additionally, teachers are also encouraged to conduct the learning activities that can motivate the students to participate actively in the classroom (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). This objective is therefore unlikely to be attained if the cause of anxiety is not addressed.

Based on the above discussion, a necessary condition of the students' anxiety in the speaking classrooms regarding the affective-related causes can be revealed. For instance, it can be argued that the nature of competitive learning atmosphere in the classroom can inhibit students' speaking performance. The fact that the students experienced anxiety due to fear of making mistakes and being derided by others can signify the limited sense of cooperation in the learning process. Hence, students may feel considerably tensed to save their self-image while performing speaking skills in the classroom (Meylina, 2017). Therefore, the emphasis on positive and motivating learning atmospheres should be conducted to address the issue of affective-related speaking anxiety. Besides the affective-related factors of speaking anxiety, studies have also revealed that limited linguistic reservoir can also lead to anxiety, which will be discussed thoroughly in the next section.

Linguistic-related causes

Communication apprehension, as one of the FLA categories proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), is related to the students' incapacity to communicate with others since they are not equipped with adequate linguistic attributes, including grammar and vocabulary. Furthermore, many researchers also outline that communication apprehension is caused by limited extensive background knowledge and vocabulary of the learning topics being discussed which lead them to feel anxious and unable to perform speaking skills (Aeni et al., 2017; see also Prieto Castillo, 2007; Mukminin et al., 2015; Noprival, 2016). Additionally, other studies have also discovered that limited speaking opportunities in the classroom can also provoke the students' speaking anxiety due to the high emphasis on grammar and vocabulary memorization (Akkakoson, 2016; see also Coskun, 2016). Consequently, it can be argued that the critical condition to alleviate anxiety issue is to balance the focus on the linguistic forms to achieve accuracy as well as the opportunities to produce speaking skills in the classroom to achieve fluency.

In a study conducted by Noprival (2016) at one senior high school in Indonesia, it is discovered that the lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge can impact negatively on the students' participation in an English program. Consequently, the students tend to be silent during the program since they are unconfident with their linguistic competence (Noprival, 2016). This finding is in line with the argument from Aeni et al. (2017; see also Mukminin et al., 2015) that the students with limited knowledge of extensive vocabulary will be reluctant to engage in conversation. Therefore, these findings also relate to communication apprehension category proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986).

Furthermore, other studies also reveal that the unbalanced proportion between teaching linguistic forms and providing speaking opportunities can also lead to the students' speaking anxiety. A study conducted by Akkakoson (2016) discovers that the students' anxiety can be caused by too much emphasis on grammar teaching in the speaking classrooms. This argument is also in accordance with Aeni et al. (2017) who state that the focus on explaining vocabulary and grammar dominate the learning activities in the English classrooms without considering the individual and group interactions. Furthermore, they add that the teachers' pressure on the students to produce grammatical speech is also commonly discovered in the classroom (Aeni et al., 2017). In addition, the pressure

on achieving the grammatical accuracy can be a "stumbling block" for the students to practice the speaking skill (Noprival, 2016: 78).

Based on the discussion above, it can be synthesized that the unbalanced focus between linguistic forms and the opportunities to practice speaking skills have corresponded to the students' speaking anxiety. While focusing too much on grammatical accuracy may inhibit the students' confidence to practice speaking skills (Akkakoson, 2016), limited opportunities to practice new vocabularies and grammatical forms can also limit the students' participation in speaking classrooms (Noprival, 2016). Hence, it can be argued that teachers are required to implement certain learning strategies which can emphasize not only the grammatical accuracy of the students' spoken English but also broaden the opportunities to engage with meaningful interactions in the classroom.

Practical implications to address the issue of speaking anxiety

The above discussion regarding the possible causes of speaking anxiety signify the needs to address the competitive learning atmosphere and the unbalanced focus on linguistic forms and speaking opportunities, which eventually may correspond to the students' speaking anxiety. Consequently, two practical recommendations are proposed to address this adverse issue, which includes promoting cooperative rather than competitive learning atmosphere and balancing the emphasis on linguistic accuracy and meaningful speaking opportunities.

Promoting cooperative learning atmosphere

In the previous section, it is evident that affective-related causes (fear of negative evaluation, fear of making mistakes, and lack of motivation/confidence) stem from the competitive and demotivating learning atmosphere as the students are always worried of being compared with others in the classroom as well as making mistakes which eventually lead to more anxiety-provoking learning ambiance. This statement is in accordance with Palacios (1998, as cited in Horwitz, 2001), in which the students' anxiety level has correlated with the classroom atmospheres. Consequently, there is an urgency to encourage a positive and motivating learning ambiance with the expectation that it can ease the students' feeling in the speaking classroom.

Some empirical studies have revealed that working collaboratively and cooperatively with others can help achieve the purpose of promoting positive and

motivating learning which eventually affects positively on the students' speaking performance (see Prieto Castillo, 2007; Hengki, Jabu & Salija, 2017; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010). Furthermore, it is also identified that the students perceive positively toward the implementation of cooperative learning as it can promote essential skills for the students in the speaking classroom (Parra Espinel & Fonseca Canarúa, 2010). The discussion of some empirical studies which can alleviate students' anxiety by promoting cooperative learning atmosphere will be discussed further below.

Since students are worried of being derided by others when they perform speaking skills, it can be argued that it is necessary for the English teachers to conduct learning activities which can encourage a friendly learning ambiance. Cutrone (2009) suggests that working cooperatively in groups can be a solution for the teachers to promote a shared understanding and harmony between the students in the classroom.

In a study conducted by Suwantarathip and Wichadee (2010), it is revealed that the cooperative learning atmosphere can impact positively on the students' anxiety level. Moreover, the researchers also identify that students' speaking proficiency levels are considerably increased after the implementation of cooperative learning (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010). In addition, the students respond positively on the implementation by perceiving that they feel impressed because of the supportive environment in the classroom as well as plenty opportunities for the students to support, encourage, and praise each other (Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010). This finding is also in line with studies conducted by Hengki et al. (2017) and Prieto Castillo (2007) in the Indonesian and Colombian EFL classrooms respectively, in which learning in groups will not only promote students' speaking proficiency but also positively affect their internal affective-related factors, including their self-confidence and motivation.

Although some researchers have expressed their perspectives to the fact that working in groups can affect positively on lower students' feeling in classrooms, some other researchers believe that working together in groups can inhibit their motivation (see Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014). For instance, the dominance of certain group members can be the main drawback of working in a group (Taqi & Al-Nouh, 2014). Therefore, teachers should be aware that group work will not become a practical solution to address the anxiety issue if it is not conducted

correctly and monitored carefully.

Working collaboratively with other peers, however, can increase the students' familiarity and cohesion both with the tasks and other students which eventually lead to the lowered anxiety level and threats perceived by the students (Pattanpichet, 2011). Furthermore, Prieto Castillo (2007: 85) argues that the essential benefit of working cooperatively with others in speaking classroom is that students "...could express themselves and communicate orally without the pressure of grades or other students' opinion". In other words, when properly conducted and monitored carefully, cooperative learning atmosphere can enable the students to express their ideas in the classroom without overthinking much about anxiety and pressures from others.

Balancing the emphasis on linguistic accuracy and meaningful speaking practice

In the second possible cause of anxiety, it has been discovered that students can feel anxious when the learning activities tend to emphasize linguistic forms excessively which limit the opportunities to involve in a meaningful speaking practice in the classroom. This statement is in accordance with Ruso's (2007) argument that students tend to feel less motivated when the teachers did not provide sufficient speaking opportunities in the classroom. Correspondingly, the students will also experience anxiety when they are not equipped with adequate knowledge of the linguistic features (e.g. vocabulary and grammar) in the English classroom (Ruso, 2007). Therefore, the learning activities conducted at the school should be able to balance the emphasis of linguistic accuracy and meaningful speaking opportunities to alleviate students' anxiety. Researchers have argued that task-based language teaching (TBLT) can be an option to rebalance between the focus on linguistic forms and the focus on meaning-making (see Albino, 2017; Gunawan, 2016), which will be discussed thoroughly in the following paragraph.

In a study conducted at one public junior high school in Indonesia, Gunawan (2016) discovers that the needs of addressing the accuracy and fluency aspects in speaking skills can be accommodated by implementing TBLT. By utilizing the control-experimental group design, it is revealed that the students who study with the implementation of TBLT considerably outperform those who study with the conventional method as the opportunities to utilize language functions in a specified and meaningful context in the classroom increased (Gunawan, 2016).

This finding is in line with Albino's (2017) argument that the students' anxiety level will be reduced when they are provided with the encouragement to speak in the classroom.

Besides uncovering the effect on accuracy and fluency aspects, Gunawan (2016) also investigates the students' attitude in the classroom during and after the implementation of TBLT. Through the distribution of questionnaires, it can be identified that all participants respond positively toward the learning process, with 90% of the participants show a strongly positive response (Gunawan, 2016). Furthermore, the students also report that the learning activities allow them to give attention seriously, participate in learning activities, as well as cooperatively work with peers that lead the learning situation to become pleasant, cooperative, and non-threatening (Gunawan, 2016). Similarly, in a study conducted in an EFL classroom in Luanda, Albino (2017) discovers that the balance proportion between learning linguistic forms and speaking fluency practice is the key to make the students feel encouraged to talk in the classroom.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In conclusion, the primary purpose of this paper is to scrutinize the possible causes and impacts of speaking anxiety, as well as the critical solutions to alleviate the issue. Accordingly, it has been discussed that affective-related and linguistic-related causes can contribute to the students' anxiety. In the affective-related factors, the students' fear of negative evaluation, fear of making mistakes can lead to their indifferent attitude to perform speaking skills. Moreover, limited vocabulary and grammar, as well as limited opportunities to engage in meaningful speaking practice in the classroom become the linguistic-related causes of speaking anxiety. In relation to the key solutions to alleviate the issue, this paper has examined the importance to encourage the cooperative learning atmosphere in the classroom, as well as the needs to promote learning strategies which can rebalance the opportunities to practice speaking skills without overlooking the focus on linguistic accuracy.

Having said this, the primary purpose of English language learning in the Indonesian EFL context should mainly focus on building the students' communicative competence rather than merely focusing on the strict grammatical accuracy for the students through working cooperatively with other

peers and teachers. In the classroom level, further, teachers should also encourage a friendly and stress-free learning environment by emphasizing the encouragement for the students to enhance their spirit of learning, as well as maximizing the use of collaborative activities to solidify the students' cooperativeness within the classroom.

Ultimately, this paper also provides several suggested directions for future research agendas in the field of foreign language anxiety in the EFL context. First, both the classroom English teachers and future researchers can explore further to what extent the suggested practical solutions in this paper, such as group work strategy and task-based language teaching can lower the secondary students' anxiety levels while learning English. Second, the future researchers can also examine the effects of students' cultural values emphasizing the sense of being compliant to the teachers toward the students' anxiety level in the classroom.

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