

**EXPLORING PERCEIVED IMPACT OF LANGUAGE ANXIETY ON
ENGLISH PROFICIENCY DEVELOPMENT AMONG EFL STUDENTS**

THESIS

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Among EFL Student**

adalah benar-benar karya saya, kecuali semua kutipan dan referensi yang disebutkan sumbernya.
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Saya yang membuat surat pernyataan



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ABSTRACT

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Language anxiety is often experienced by EFL students, especially during speaking activities. The impact and contributing factors may vary for each student depending on their individual experiences. Therefore, this study was conducted to investigate the perceived impact of language anxiety on English proficiency development and to identify the internal and external factors that contribute to it. Using purposive sampling, 8 students from the English Language Education Department at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh who had taken the Advanced Language Skill course were selected as participants. This research employed a qualitative method using semi-structured interviews as the data collection instrument. This study found that language anxiety affected students' English proficiency development, particularly in speaking. Emotional and behavioral symptoms such as nervousness, hesitation, mental block, and avoidance emerged during speaking tasks. These reactions limited their classroom participation and reduced opportunities for language practice. The internal factors contributing to anxiety included fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, negative self-perception, and lack of preparation. The external factors involved fear of negative evaluation, classroom atmosphere, teacher behavior, and the speaking task format. Most students reported that their anxiety increased when they were required to speak in front of others or when corrected directly by the teacher. These conditions hindered their ability to express themselves and slowed their language development. The findings highlight the need for supportive teaching strategies and a positive classroom environment to reduce students' anxiety and enhance their English proficiency.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study, the research questions, the research aims, the significance of the study, and the terminologies of the study.

A. Background of Study

Language is a means of communication. Language can be understood as a tool for communication among members of a community, expressed through sound symbols produced by the human speech organs. Another perspective defines language as a system of communication that employs speech sounds or vowel symbols used in an arbitrary manner (Keraf, 2004). According to Tseng (2018) Language is an organized system used to express thoughts or emotions through mutually agreed-upon symbols, sounds, gestures, or signs that carry clear and comprehensible meanings. Otten (2014) argues that language is a clear sign of good and bad personalities, a clear sign of family and nation, a clear sign of human dignity.

Prikhozhan (1996) explained that anxiety is an emotional discomfort arising from the anticipation of potential problems. It can be understood both as a temporary emotional state and as a stable personal characteristic, representing a trait of personality or temperament. Anxiety is a constant or a situationally manifested property of the individual to go into a state of heightened uneasiness, to have a feeling of dread and alarm in specific situations” Nemov 1994. Anxiety is defined

as the tress condition of unpleasant emotions such as sadness, tension and perception. Cüceloğlu (1999) defined anxiety as an emotional state that influences a less severe but longer period than fear. Anxious is a sadness, worrying thought, or sorrow. With respect to these definitions, it can be said that anxiety is an emotion which affects a long period of time of individual negatively. Therefore, it can be concluded that anxiety constitutes an emotional state marked by enduring feelings of unease, apprehension, and distress, originating from an anticipated sense of impending trouble or threat. This condition may manifest transiently in response to specific circumstances and persistently as a stable facet of one's personality or temperament. Anxiety entails experiencing unpleasant emotions such as sadness, tension, and concern, thereby exerting a prolonged adverse impact on the individual.

The effect of anxiety varies concerning severity. A low level of anxiety facilitates learning and guides the student to Study, while the high level of anxiety has a negative effect on many aspects of the human being. High levels of anxiety cause physiological changes such as low level of cognitive performance, mental confusion and tension (Bökeoğlu 2005).

Language anxiety refers to a specific type of anxiety that occurs in certain learning situations, where learners may repeatedly feel the same level of nervousness in similar contexts. In recent years, research on this topic has increasingly examined anxiety related to particular language skills, especially speaking (Öztürk, 2014). According to Horwitz and Cope (1986), language anxiety can be understood either as a unique emotional response that arises during the

process of learning a new language or as a reflection of more general forms of anxiety. For example, shy students might be afraid of public speaking in the target language, and test anxious students might experience the anxiety while being tested in the target language.

Language proficiency in English is increasingly recognized as a vital skill in today's interconnected world, serving as a primary medium for academic and professional communication. For students in English departments, achieving a high level of proficiency is not merely an academic requirement; it is a crucial factor influencing their future career opportunities and personal development. However, many students face significant barriers to language acquisition, with language anxiety being a prominent challenge. Language anxiety is defined as the apprehension experienced when communicating in a second language, which can impede the ability to engage effectively in speaking, listening, reading, and writing activities (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

This phenomenon is particularly evident among English learners who may feel intimidated by the expectations of fluency and accuracy in their communication. Studies have showed that language anxiety manifests in various forms, including communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz, 2001). These anxieties can lead to avoidance behaviours, diminished participation in classroom activities, and ultimately lower academic performance (Muneera, 2023). Specifically, students with high levels of anxiety may experience reduced motivation to participate in speaking exercises, fearing that

their language skills will be judged by peers and instructors, which can further entrench their anxiety.

The implications of language anxiety extend beyond immediate academic performance, influencing long-term language proficiency development. Students who avoid speaking opportunities often miss critical chances to practice and refine their skills, leading to stagnation in their language learning journey (Young, 1991). Moreover, anxiety can disrupt cognitive processes essential for language learning, such as memory recall and comprehension, thus creating a negative feedback loop where anxiety begets poor performance, which in turn exacerbates anxiety (Kleinmann, 1977).

Recognizing the significant impact of language anxiety on proficiency development, this research seeks to exploring the relationship between language anxiety and the English proficiency levels of students in the English department. By investigating this dynamic, the study aims to identify effective pedagogical strategies that educators can implement to alleviate anxiety and foster a more supportive learning environment. Dörnyei (2005) emphasizes the importance of adopting teaching methods that not only focus on language skills but also address the emotional and psychological aspects of language learning. This aligns with findings that suggest students benefit from low-anxiety environments where they feel safe to practice and make mistakes, ultimately leading to improved proficiency outcomes.

Muneera's (2023) study, *Anxiety in Speaking and Academic Performance*, explores how speaking-related anxiety affects English as a Second Language (ESL)

students' academic outcomes. It reveals that high levels of speaking anxiety reduce students' confidence and hinder their participation in language activities, slowing their progress in English proficiency. The study aligns with previous research, noting that communication apprehension leads many students to avoid speaking exercises, which limits practice and reinforces an anxiety cycle, further impeding language skill development. Additionally, high anxiety levels disrupt cognitive functions like memory and focus, negatively impacting academic performance.

To counteract these effects, Muneera suggests adopting anxiety-reducing teaching strategies, such as small-group discussions and low-stakes speaking exercises, to encourage student engagement in a supportive environment. These methods help students gradually build confidence and lessen anxiety, fostering both language proficiency and academic achievement. The study emphasizes the importance of addressing emotional aspect in ESL instruction, highlighting that supportive learning environments can enhance motivation, improve language skills, and lead to better academic outcomes overall.

Furthermore, the study explored the broader context of language anxiety within the framework of English proficiency development, including the input. In summary, understanding the role of language anxiety in English proficiency development is critical for educators aiming to enhance the learning experiences of their students. By exploring what are the impacts of language anxiety use and academic performance, this research contributed valuable insights into effective teaching practices that promote language acquisition and proficiency among EFL students. The findings not only advanced academic discourse on language learning

but also provided practical solutions for educators facing similar challenges in the classroom.

B. Research Questions

Based on the background of study above, the researcher formulates the research question as follow:

1. What are the impacts of English language anxiety on speaking skills among EFL students?
2. What factors influencing English language anxiety among EFL students?

C. Aims of Study

This study also aims to explore how such anxiety impacts the development of language skills, namely speaking. In addition, the purpose of this study is to determine the factors of language anxiety.

D. Significance of Study

1. For Teachers

This study offers valuable insights into the role of language anxiety in the classroom and its impact on students' English proficiency development. By understanding how anxiety affects learning, teachers can develop strategies to create a more supportive and low-stress environment. It highlights the need for teachers to be aware of students' emotional challenges and implement teaching methods that reduce anxiety, such as personalized feedback, stress-reducing

techniques, and interactive learning activities. Ultimately, it helps teachers enhance student performance and foster confidence in language use.

2. For Students

The findings of this study can help students recognize and address their own language anxiety. By understanding how anxiety influences their ability to learn and use English, students can take proactive steps to manage it, such as practicing relaxation techniques, participating in speaking exercises, and seeking support from peers or counselors. This awareness enables students to improve their English language proficiency more effectively and gain greater self-assurance in academic and real-life language situations.

3. For Society

In the context of a globalized world where English proficiency is often essential for professional and social success, reducing language anxiety among EFL students contributes to producing more confident and competent English speakers. This not only benefits the individuals themselves but also enhances the workforce's overall communication skills, leading to broader societal benefits such as improved cross-cultural communication, increased employability, and better integration into international environments.

4. For Researchers

This study provides a foundation for future research in the fields of language acquisition, educational psychology, and applied linguistics. It adds to the body of literature on how psychological factors, such as anxiety, influence language learning outcomes. Researchers can build upon this work by exploring new

interventions to mitigate language anxiety or by comparing its impact in different educational contexts. The study may also inspire research into the relationship between other affective variables and language learning, contributing to the development of more holistic language learning theories.

E. Terminologies

1. Language Anxiety

Language anxiety refers to the nervousness or apprehension experienced by individuals when using or learning a second or foreign language. It is particularly associated with situations requiring active language use, like speaking or listening in the target language. This type of anxiety is often considered a unique form of communication apprehension and is influenced by factors such as fear of negative evaluation, linguistic self-confidence, and unfamiliarity with the language context. Language anxiety encompasses both linguistic and social components, as it involves anxiety related to grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, as well as concerns about social or cultural appropriateness.

2. English Proficiency Development

English proficiency refers to an individual's ability to effectively utilize the English language across various contexts, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. This proficiency is typically assessed through standardized tests that evaluate communication skills. As noted by Bachman and Palmer (2022), it encompasses linguistic competence, which includes grammar and vocabulary knowledge, crucial for successful interaction in English-speaking scenarios.

3. English Speaking Proficiency Development

In this study, English speaking refers to the classroom discussion and presentation Proficiency Development student in advanced language skill class. In this course, there are 4 (four) skills taught, namely: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. The skill taken to be the object of research is speaking.

