



How Good EFL Learners Decrease Their Foreign Language Anxiety: A Solution for the EFL Students with High Anxiousness

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Abstract

This research is aimed to find out the solution of the anxiousness phenomenon that always attacks the EFL Learners particularly in Indonesia. In the future, this research is expected as main information for all students and lecturer or teachers of English to decrease the students' anxiety in performing speaking. In long time ago until now, it becomes a big problem for all beginner students of English. The implementation of this research starting by doing observation to all class in the sixth semester students to find out some good EFL Learners. Researchers then consulting with the lecturer in determining the students to be the subject of this research. After finding the subject, interview session will be conducted to find out several information about their anxiousness. The data will be collected until limit of saturation. The last step of this research is doing analysis of the data were taken from observation and interview. The researchers will apply data reduction for the first step, the second is data display and the last will be drawing conclusion and verification of the data. The conclusion that being made will be verify by triangulation to get the validity of the result of this research.

Keywords: good EFL learners; foreign language anxiety; EFL learners

Introduction

Mostly for Indonesian people English is not easy. The paradigm developed in long time ago. When we walk around this country visiting some schools and universities and asking the students about their interest of English, they may say that English is important but it's also difficult to be learned. The problem appears most frequent and once again that English never becomes the second language in this country at least until this research is written.

The problem above is not in line with the fact when English becoming more important in this early time. MEA has appeared as the result of global trading where English hold an important role. What is more is English nowadays become the main requirement for having job. TOEFL, TOEIC and IELTS are the biggest barriers for the fresh graduate to get a job, that is why too much of them looking for course place for that tests.

In some international forum for English teacher and lecturer, the problem above becoming the top issue to be solved very soon. There is no reason anymore to put English as a secondary needs and the paradigm must change. Teachers and students must work together where the teachers facilitate the students and the students sharpen their skills more often. The teacher must describe to the students about the importance of English.

The next step is going to the micro problem that makes the teachers confuse in breaking down the learning objective. The problem is the students' anxiety in showing up their English skill. Shy, worrying of mistakes and avoiding friends laugh become the biggest problem in teaching English. Sometimes we found students who just keep silent and do not want to showing up. There are also the students who can speak fluently alone but when speaking in front they got problem to focus.

The problem of anxiety related to the psychological aspect. The fact is, most of the psychological problems are hard to overcome. There are some reason for them to be afraid, is it of making mistakes, crowded place or of people justification. Besides the cause, the effect of anxiety also may vary from a student to others. There are some students who get pale, trembling and those makes students losing concentration and missing the concept particularly in speaking.

The difference between the good EFL students and other is when they got anxiety attack it will be easily overcome while other students got difficulty. Different with the low level students or the students who are not able to control their anxiety, they may directly show the effect of it.

The Concepts of Good EFL Learner

Good language learners are those who succeed in learning a language proved by their ability in mastering the language skills and language components. Good language learners perform much better results in their study compared to the average students in their level. They are often described as motivated, persistent, curious and autonomous learners who are always eager to learn the language and find their own ways to manage their learning.

Good language learners have received many attentions from researchers. Since the pioneering study entitled *what the "Good Language Learner" can teach us* by Rubin (1975), there have been a number of studies conducted on successful language learning. Most of those Studies reveal some characteristics shared by good language learners.

In an earlier study, Rubin (1975) found seven strategies associated with good language learners. In her further research Rubin with Thompson (1982) mentions the following characteristics for good language learners:

- 1) Good language learners find their own and take charge of their meaning. They determine the methods that are best for them as individual learners. They learn from others and experiment with different methods.
- 2) Good language learners organize their study of the language and they organize information about the language they study.
- 3) Good language learners are creative. They understand that language is creative. They experiment with the language and play with grammar, words and sounds.
- 4) Good language learners make their own opportunities for practicing the language inside and outside of the classroom.
- 5) Good language learners learn to live with uncertainty by focusing on the meaning of what they can understand, by not getting flustered, and by continuing to talk or listen without necessarily understanding every word.
- 6) Good language learners use mnemonics and other memory strategies to recall what they are learning.
- 7) Good language learners make errors work for them and not against them.
- 8) Good language learners use linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of their first language, in learning a second language.
- 9) Good language learners use contextual clues to aid their comprehension of the language. They maximize use of all potential contexts around the language attended to for enhancing comprehension.
- 10) Good language learners learn to make intelligent guesses
- 11) Good language learners learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform beyond their competence. For example, they may learn idioms, proverbs, or other phrases knowing what the whole phrase means without necessarily understanding each individual part
- 12) Good language learners learn certain tricks that keep conversation going
- 13) Good language learners learn certain production techniques that also fill in the gaps in their own competence
- 14) Good language learners learn different styles of speech or writing to learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation.

The Concept of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Foreign language anxiety is a complex and complicated enough, it covers the feeling of tension faced by the second language learners in terms of learning speaking and listening. Anxiety is a major obstacle to be overcome in learning to speak another language, and several recent approaches to foreign language teaching, such as community language learning and suggestopedia, are explicitly directed at reducing learner anxiety (Horwitz, 1986).

According to Trang et al (2012), the students' foreign language anxiety is caused by two big factors. The first is the awareness of the importance of English and the volition control and suggest informing the students about the importance

of English in the very first of the meeting. Furthermore, Awan et al. (2010) found that male students have bigger risk to be treated by the foreign language anxiety (FLA) than the female. Based on the several definition above, the researcher conclude that FLA is the feeling similar to pressure that the person or students got by several factors in learning language as a second language learners.

More recently researchers have attempted to quantify the effects of anxiety on foreign language learning, but these efforts have met with mixed results. While the pertinent studies have differed in the measures employed, they can generally be characterized by their comparison of students' self-reports of anxiety with their language proficiency ratings, obtained through a discrete skills task or a global measure such as final course grade. The more anxious student tends to avoid attempting difficult or personal messages in the target language. These findings are also consistent with research on other types of specific communication anxiety. Researchers studying writing in a native language have found that students with higher levels of writing anxiety write shorter compositions and qualify their writing less than their calmer counterparts do.

The subjective feelings, psycho-physiological symptoms, and behavioral responses of the anxious foreign language learner are essentially the same as for any specific anxiety. They experience apprehension, worry, even dread. They have difficulty concentrating, become forgetful, sweat, and have palpitations. They exhibit avoidance behavior such as missing class and postponing homework. Principally, counselors find that anxiety centers on the two basic task requirements of foreign language learning: listening and speaking. Difficulty in speaking in class is probably the most frequently cited concern of the anxious foreign language students seeking help. A female student speaks of the evenings in her dorm room spent rehearsing what she should have said in class the day before. Anxious language learners also complain of difficulties discriminating the sounds and structures of a target language message. One male student claims to hear only a loud buzz whenever his teacher speaks the foreign language. Anxious students may also have difficulty grasping the content of a target language message.

Because foreign language anxiety concerns performance evaluation within an academic and social context, it is useful to draw parallels between it and three related performance anxieties: 1) communication apprehension; 2) test anxiety; and 3) fear of negative evaluation. According to (Aydin: 2008), communication apprehension occurs in cases where learners lack mature communication skills although they have mature ideas and thoughts. It refers to a fear of getting into real communication with others. Test anxiety, on the other hand, is an apprehension towards academic evaluation. It could be defined as a fear of failing in tests and an unpleasant experience held either consciously or unconsciously by learners in many situations. This type of anxiety concerns apprehension towards academic evaluation which is based on a fear of failure (Horwitz & Young: 1991). Finally, fear of negative evaluation is observed when foreign language learners feel incapable of making the proper social impression and it is an apprehension towards evaluations by others and avoidance of evaluative situations. Due to its emphasis on interpersonal interactions, the construct of communication apprehension is quite relevant to the conceptualization of foreign

language anxiety. Communication apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people. Difficulty in speaking in dyads or groups (oral communication anxiety) or in public ("stage fright"), or in listening to or learning a spoken message (receiver anxiety) are all manifestations of communication apprehension. Communication apprehension or some similar reaction obviously plays a large role in foreign language anxiety. People who typically have trouble speaking in groups are likely to experience even greater difficulty speaking in a foreign language class where they have little control of the communicative situation and their performance is constantly monitored.

Moreover, in addition to all the usual concerns about oral communication, the foreign language class requires the student to communicate via a medium in which only limited facility is possessed. The special communication apprehension permeating foreign language learning derives from the personal knowledge that one will almost certainly have difficulty understanding others and making oneself understood. Possibly because of this knowledge, many otherwise talkative people are silent in a foreign language class. And yet, the converse also seems to be true. Ordinarily self-conscious and inhibited speakers may find that communicating in a foreign language makes them feel as if someone else is speaking and they therefore feel less anxious. This phenomenon may be similar to stutterers who are sometimes able to enunciate normally when singing or acting.

Since performance evaluation is an ongoing feature of most foreign language classes, test anxiety is also relevant to a discussion of foreign language anxiety. Test-anxiety refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure. Test-anxious students often put unrealistic demands on themselves and feel that anything less than a perfect test performance is a failure. Students who are test-anxious in foreign language class probably experience considerable difficulty since tests and quizzes are frequent and even the brightest and most prepared students often make errors. Oral tests have the potential of provoking both test and oral communication anxiety simultaneously in susceptible students. Fear of negative evaluation, defined as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively," is a third anxiety related to foreign language learning.

Another found that majority of the students have high anxiety level with 58.93 percent. This indicates that most of the students are having problems in dealing with evaluation from others in class such as from peers and language lecturer. A possible explanation is that the students are worried about others' perception towards their performance in class. In certain situations, students tend to perceive themselves as less intelligent or smart as compared to the others in class. Therefore, they are most likely to feel scared and reluctant to get involved in any activities in class that has the potential to show how much they know about the language.

Effect of anxiety on language learning

According to Horwitz et al, foreign language anxiety can affect the language learning in the two big aspects:

1) Second language studies

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2) Clinical experience

The subjective feelings, psycho-physiological symptoms, and behavioral responses of the anxious foreign language learner are essentially the same as for any specific anxiety. They experience apprehension, worry, even dread. They have difficulty concentrating, become forgetful, sweat, and have palpitations. They exhibit avoidance behavior such as missing class and postponing homework. Principally, counselors find that anxiety centers on the two basic task requirements of foreign language learning: listening and speaking. Difficulty in speaking in class is probably the most frequently cited concern of the anxious foreign language students seeking help. A female student speaks of the evenings in her dorm room spent rehearsing what she should have said in class the day before. Anxious language learners also complain of difficulties discriminating the sounds and structures of a target language message. One male student claims to hear only a loud buzz whenever his teacher speaks the foreign language. Anxious students may also have difficulty grasping the content of a target language message.

Research Method

This research bounded as qualitative research that is case study. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006:15) Case study research sometimes focuses on an individual representative of a group (e.g., a female principal), more often it addresses a phenomenon (e.g., a particular event, situation, program, or activity). This research focuses on a group of students who are able to overcome their anxiety in expressing their idea particularly by speaking. This study will explore deeply about the way they do it.

Research Subject

The subject of this research will be the good EFL students especially on speaking skill. They will be determined by some steps. The steps are investigating them by classroom observation, checking their track records and

consulting with others lecturers about their performance in the classroom. The classification of good EFL will be elaborated by giving a certain questionnaire of Good English Language Learners.

Data Collection

As we know that in qualitative research, the researcher becomes the only instrument. As the main instrument, the researcher will use three techniques in collecting the data:

1. Non-participant observation where the researcher entering the classroom and observing whole activity of a students.
2. Interview, where the chosen students as good EFL learners will be interviewed about the way they decrease their anxiety while speaking. Semi-structured interview will be used in this step. The researcher will determine some core questions and it may develop based on the data needed.
3. Documentation, all of the research activity will be recording as audio and video file. It will help the researchers to flash back when something missing or forgotten in a step of this research.

Technique of Data Analysis

The data analysis of qualitative research is varied and there is no particular technique to be claimed as well. In this research, the data analysis technique will adopted the Miles & Huberman data analysis as described in the diagram below:

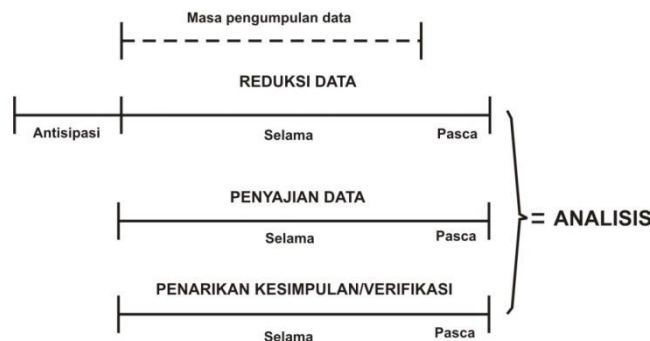


Figure 1. Flow Models of Miles And Huberman in Sugiyono (2009:246)

1. Data Reduction

All of the data that have been collected through some techniques will be reduced. It reduced based on the importance of the data. All the data will be elaborated one by one and then it simplified in a number of category.

2. Data Display

In the data display, the data that have been reduced will be categorized further in a similar group. The presentation of data was done using tables, graphs, pictograms, and so on. Through the presentation of data, then the data was organized and arranged in the relationship, so it was more easily understood. Unlike the case in qualitative research, the presentation of data used the form of

a short description, chart, among categories, relationships. According to Miles & Huberman, most often used to present the data in a qualitative study is a narrative text.

3. *Drawing Conclusion and Verification*

After those steps are already done, the last step of this data analysis is drawing conclusion and verification. In this step, the researchers will take look on the diagram or chart in the data display and reach some conclusion based on the relationship on the data and the problem statements in the first chapter. Verification is also needed to make sure that the conclusion drawn is match with the research objectives.

Data Validity

Triangulation is a technique for data validity in qualitative research. It is aimed to check the data by different point of view such as manner and time. There are three types of triangulation that have been used in this research. The first is source data triangulation where the data of this research not only taken by the subject itself but also her colleague, her friends and her students. The second is triangulation of technique of data collection where the data were collected by interview, observation and document study. The last is time triangulation where the research not only conducted in the morning or in certain time but also in the afternoon and whenever the researcher needed to get the data.

Findings

This study is essentially implemented to see two important things related to the FLA, the first is to see what type of FLA is often perceived by the Good EFL Learners. Then based on the findings, this study is also directed to see how they deal with the FLA so that they can show a good performance in classroom learning.

The process of observation and interview are two techniques used in this study. Both techniques become important to be implemented because the researcher started by doing observations in the classroom to see how the ability of the students in learning, especially on their verbal skills. The researcher made two observations at the same class in the course of speaking. The first observation was conducted to see how the students' activity in interacting with the lecturers in the form of question submission. While the second observation to see how their performance when practicing their speaking skills in front of the class in a monologue. The subject of this study is determined based on the results of observations conducted for two times. Therefore, the researcher selected five students who are considered to be a representation of Good EFL Learners.

Furthermore, to answer the two questions from this study, the researcher then conducted an interview in the form of semi-structured interview. The researcher has determined several items of question to be asked to the informants. Each question is representative of FLA related items. From the interviews, the researcher obtained the data used in answering the problem statement of this study.

Types of FLA that mostly appear to the Good EFL Learners

One thing that is agreed by all informants is that they are not able to wipe out the anxiety in learning foreign language. Interviews were conducted at different times and places to all informants. To find the data in answering the first question, the researcher gave some questions. The first question is to see what courses do they like more and vice versa.

- St 1 : "Speaking I feel confident when I speak in front of my friend."
St 2 : "I think that I feel confident if I reading something. It means I feel confident in reading."
St 3 : "Reading"
St 4 : "I think, it comes from myself if I'm thinking that I can do it. I may confident of those 4 skills if I really can handle four of them."
St 5 : "I think speaking, because I enjoy when I learn speaking skill. Even my speaking skill not really good, but I like to learn about it."

Overall, the participants have a favorite course based on some language skill in English. Two of the five participants chose Speaking as their favorite subject. Two others chose reading and there was one optimistic participant who liked the four skills as his favorite course. The answers given are actually based on the experience during their college days as well as the effect of how a lecturer taught the course. The next question given to the participants is the reverse of the previous question which is about the subjects that they consider less interesting. The researcher obtained the data as follows:

- St 1 : "writing skill. I never feel confident in that skill. I always feel that of I write something it will have many mistake, like now."
St 2 : "Writing and speaking."
St 3 : "I feel nervous in speaking."
St 4 : "I may feel nervous in those skills. But, I think, I have different nervous in speaking because at the time, I talked in front of people"
St 5 : "Honestly listening, because I'm not really good in listening and it's make me nervous when I do listening test."

For the less interesting subjects according to the participants, the data obtained from the question is varied where two of five participants chose writing subject because of grammar reasons. The other two chose speaking because when they felt afraid to speak in front of the crowd. While the rest chose listening as a difficult subject because he did not master the native speaker accents.

The next question is designed in such a way to find the data related to the first problem statement. To get more in-depth data about the type of FLA the participant felt, researcher first asked about whether they had ever felt anxiety in learning English or not. All the participants interviewed agreed that they also felt anxiety in certain conditions or circumstances. Related to these statements, the researcher then asked questions about in what conditions they felt anxiety and what the causes were. Therefore, the data obtained from all informants is described as follows:

- St 1 : "when I in Debate. When i try to delivery my opinion, I always feel anxious and not confident with it."
- St 2 : "when I stand up in front of many people, I mean the strange people or when the material or my speaking is not good, I am afraid about the grammar, I am afraid if people laughing on me and I am afraid if people can't understand what I say."
- St 3 : "when I attend/stand in front of all of people and my friend looked at me, because I don't know why my body shaking when some people looked at me. I'm afraid if someone laughing at me or there is something wrong with my grammar."
- St 4 : "When i just met with some new people which I never meet before then i have to speak up or expressing my English in front of them. I think I'm too shy, exactly. Then, it will make me feel anxious because I'm shy if I have to speak up in front of people which i know if they have better English than me."
- St 5 : "Sometimes I feel anxious when I have to speak in front of people that I haven't known before."

The data obtained during the interviews showed that all the informants showed anxiety in some conditions that tended to be the same. They have problems when they perform in front of the crowd. They were afraid of those who see and laugh when they speak. Furthermore they lose confidence thereby impacting to the quality of their appearance. Another anxiety lies in the grammar that can lead to misunderstanding.

How They Overcome the FLA

Based on the performance shown by the five informants in this study, the researcher assumed that they have a good confidence so that they can be categorized as good EFL learner. One of the main indicators is that the informants are able to reduce their anxiety when interacting or doing speaking tests.

The data that has been obtained in the first problem statement directs this research to trace further. Due to the fact, they have a fairly high level of anxiety but in practice, they are able to perform it very well. Therefore, in the next question, the researcher tried to explore how they cope or cultivate their anxiety feelings so quickly. In the interview, the researcher asked that if they have an anxiety, then how they handle it. The data is obtained as follows:

- St 1 : "I think before we start we have to take a deep breath first then think that what will we do is the best."
- St 2 : "just shake my hand and take a deep breath and think that I can do this and I can finish what should I finish."
- St 3 : "I just shake my hand and hold my finger and then I talk to myself this is just my friends and then I keep talking in front of them."
- St 4 : "Without thinking of it, i may do some movement or body language to solve my anxiety. I'm a person who can't stay or calm in my place when I'm speaking in front of people. So, with do those movements, seems like move to the right/left or swing my hand to the air, it may overcome my anxiety without I realize it before."
- St 5 : "When my anxiety comes to me I try to calm down, pretend as usual, talk to myself that "this to will passed", and try to do my best."

The data obtained for this question showed different reactions from each informant. Some of them have their own way, for example: deep breathing and then move the limbs to motivate themselves with motivational sentences. There were also some informants who ignore it and tried not to care about the conditions

they faced. One thing for sure is that anxiety does not make them lose and then stop doing something. In the next question, the researcher asked whether the anxiety will come back to the same condition or not. The data obtained from the informants showed that under the same conditions and circumstances, the feelings of anxiety will still come and it is difficult for them to eliminate them.

At the end of the interview session, the researcher asked the question as closing statements from the informants. The questions related to the suggestions and solutions they want to provide to students who are experiencing barriers in relation to the FLA. They believe that FLA is a severe obstacle faced by some students so that they provide constructive feedback as a solution to the problem. The data obtained are as follows.

- St 1 : "before we start we have to take a deep breath first then think that what will we do is the best."
- St 2 : "you should take a deep breath before you start and if you feel your anxiety comes just shake your hand or think positive, think that you can do and you can finish all of your what should you do and don't think grammar or the rules of English."
- St 3 : "You have to add more your vocabulary, learn more about grammar so you don't feel afraid when you say something in front of people and take a long breath first before you start your speaking and shake your hands just for five time and then you my start your English/speaking."
- St 4 : "From my own opinion, i was taking this from myself in the past when expressing my English at the first time. I think, the students may not think if their English is still bad or something like that, they have to erase it and make some brand new things to help them in expressing their English. The point is the students don't have to have perfect grammar to speak to other people. The most important is those people understand what you say or you understand what they say, it's just as simple as like that. Also, you don't have to had a good pronunciation on it. More, if the other problem is vocabularies, just find another easy word to use."
- St 5 : "I suggest you to find your own way to overcome your high anxiousness in expressing your English, or you may try to follow my way. Actually the most reason that caused you feel anxious is you are thinking a lot. You are so shy and afraid if you make mistakes. Forget it, don't think all about that. The most important thing is you have to be brave and confident, just speak up."

There are various suggestions provided by informants that will be a great benefit to those who have problems with FLA. Furthermore, the section of this study will be discussed further in the discussion and conclusion.

Conclusion

Based on the findings in the previous section on the type of FLA that informants have, it can be interpreted that the three types described in the previous section are owned by the informants. Although there is a small portion of the informants residing in the type of communication apprehension and anxiety test, it is generally based on the notion that the fear of negative evaluation is observed when the foreign social learners feel incapable of making the proper social impression and it is an apprehension towards evaluations by others and Avoidance of evaluative situations (Aydin: 2008). It is very clear that most informants reported that they experienced the FLA when they wanted to appear publicly to talk and fear of getting negative predicates in the eyes of the audience and fearing when laughed at. This is also in line with opinion (Horwitz & Young: 1991) that Communication Apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people. Difficulty in speaking in dyads

or groups (oral communication anxiety) or in public ("stage fright"), or in listening to or learning a spoken message (receiver anxiety) are all manifestations of communication apprehension. In addition a study conducted by (Rafek et al) found that a possible explanation is that the students are worried about others' perception towards their performance in class. In certain situations, students tend to perceive themselves as less intelligent or smart as compared to the others in class.

In principle, the FLA will be perceived by everyone who begins to learn a foreign language primarily through the formal situation. According to Horwitz et al, any foreign language learners will find themselves in an uncomfortable state such as worry; even dread. They have difficulty in concentrating, becoming forgetful, sweat, and have palpitations. But all the problems that exist certainly have such a way to overcome. There are some interpretations from the informants, for example: moving the limbs to deep breathing and beginning to give positive suggestions to him. In addition, they have a good spirit to show a great performance in each of their class performances.

On the other hand, they fully understand that the FLA will continue to appear in the same conditions at different places and times. Therefore, it is difficult for them to avoid it. For that reason, they claim that there is no other way to eliminate the feeling of anxiety but must be dealt with is that the feeling can be reduced at the lowest point.

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