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Investigating Hospitality Students' Level of Anxiety in English Class and Oral Exam Performance

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Abstract

This study reports on a correlation analysis between the level of foreign language anxiety (FLA) of hotel business students and their oral exam performance. The participants of this study were 103 first-year hotel business students of a private university in Jakarta, Indonesia. Using Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire, it was found that most business students (45%) have medium anxiety. It was also found that fear of negative evaluation is the main source of the anxiety among students. A two-tailed t-test analysis shows no statistical difference between male and female students in 90% of the questionnaire items. A Spearman-rank correlation coefficient analysis shows a significant negative moderate relationship between students' oral exam performance with FLCAS results.

Keywords: FLCAS, foreign language learning, anxiety, hospitality, English for Specific Purposes

INTRODUCTION

For Indonesian students in public universities, other than limitations of vocabulary or grammar, things that may affect their English performance are low confidence, nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and limited ideas (Sayuri, 2016). This is almost similar for Indonesian students of hospitality or hotel management in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). English speaking skills are important for these future hoteliers because The Tourism Ministry of Indonesian government (2013) has set English language as the minimum standard of hotel employees' foreign language ability. Because of the nature of their tasks in the industry, the focus of language skills required in hospitality industry will be mainly listening and speaking (Bury, 2017).

One affective variable affecting students' performance that has been studied rigorously since the 1980s is anxiety in foreign language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) mentioned that anxiety is related to communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Among these three related aspects, Horwitz, et. al. found that the correlation with test anxiety is moderate and significant. Anxiety that occurs during foreign language learning has been found to be apprehensive and greatly related to oral performance (Phillips, 1992). In another study of EFL context for Korean students, Poupore (2013) found that being anxious during language learning can make students reluctant to join activities in the class. The negative correlation between English oral test performance and anxiety are significant in other several studies (Cakici, 2016; Philips, 1992; Said & Weda, 2018; Teimori, Goetze, & Plonsky, 2019).

Some studies have shed different perspectives about anxiety in foreign language classroom. Kleinmann (1977) in Horwitz (2010), for instance, mentioned that students with 'facilitating' anxiety would tend to use more English structures than those who had 'debilitating' anxiety. Spielman and Radnofsky (2001) described that 'tension' can be euphoric (causing excitement) or dysphoric (causing stress or frustration). Further, they argued that students will most likely develop their skills not because of stress-free language class, but because of good quality of learning materials.

Some studies investigating students' anxiety have been conducted in ESP field. One example from Indonesia is Aeni, Jabu, Rahman, & Strid, (2017), who investigated foreign language anxiety (FLA) level of Indonesian Maritime Students and found that most students felt anxious because they feared of negative evaluations. Another study is by Amengual-Pizarro

(2018), which investigated of two groups of philology and biology classes and found strong and significant negative correlation between self-perceived English proficiency, especially listening and speaking, with their FLA level. This later study differs from Aeni et al. (2017) in that the communication apprehension was the main source of anxiety. These two studies are among the latest in finding FLA level among ESP students in two different contexts, but there has not been many studies investigating the foreign language anxiety (FLA) in English classes of hospitality students in Indonesia and calculating its correlation with students' speaking performance.

To contribute to the field of ESP, this research aims to find the FLA level of hospitality students when attending English class, and to find which anxiety category affects them the most. This study also aims to find whether there is a difference between gender in terms of FLA. At the end, this study also calculates the correlation of the FLA with students' performance in oral examination. By doing this study, the gap of studies about FLA in ESP classes will be filled and hopefully will invite other ESP researchers to delve into this understudied group of students.

METHODOLOGY

This study involved 162 students of batch 2018 of Hotel Business Study Program attending English for Hospitality run by a private university in Indonesia. These students were invited to fill in an online Qualtrics questionnaire distributed through a single reusable weblink sent through their emails at the last week of their course. As many as 103 students (75 females, 28 males) responded to the questionnaire, and most of them are eighteen years old. Most of students responded to the questionnaire (83.7%) claimed that they have never taken a standardized English test, and only four students reported that they had done IELTS test (scored 7, 6.5, 4.5, and 6), and their grammar pre-test resulted in average score of 62%. Therefore, this concludes that most of the students are of elementary and low-intermediate level in terms of English grammar proficiency.

A questionnaire named FLCAS (Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale), which was originally developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was administered to the participants. FLCAS have also been used to investigate the level of anxiety which further is correlated to language achievements (Cakici, 2016; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2017; Philips, 1992; Teimori et al. 2019). The reliability calculation of this scale using Cronbach Alpha achieved .93 and test-retest

resulted in .83. Instead of five-point questionnaire, the answer was modified into four-point to avoid neutral answer ('neither agree nor disagree'). This modification is also suggested by Panayides and Walker (2013) who found that the four-point Likert scale will be 'psychometrically optimal.' There are 33 items in the four-point Likert questionnaire rated from 1 ('strongly disagree') to 4 ('strongly agree') with the exceptions of reverse value for 8 items (number 2, 5, 8, 11, 18, 22, 28 and 32). The questionnaire items were also translated into Indonesian to avoid confusions and uncertainty of sentence meaning among elementary and low-intermediate students.

As Horwitz et al. (1986) explained, the statements in the FLCAS were mostly negative statements about language learning which are related with communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Amengual-Pizarro (2018) further described the categorization of the questionnaire items into three: communication apprehension (items 1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30 and 32), test anxiety (items 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26 and 28) and fear of negative evaluation (items 2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31 and 33). For the purpose of simplicity and avoid confusion, the current study has made item number 14 as negative statement. The categorization of the items has made it easier to find which anxiety category has the highest average. The Cronbach Alpha coefficient of the questionnaire used in this study was .911, which indicates a high degree of consistency of the current study (n=103).

After the overall scores of FLCAS were obtained, the next step is to calculate the correlation between FLCAS scores and the students' oral final examination score. This was done by using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20. The oral final examination score was obtained by scores given in a mock-up interview test in which the students were interviewed by real human resources managers or hotel advisors using English language. To administer the test more easily and to make it more time efficient, the students were divided into eight groups. The speaking score of each student was given by the interviewer and the researcher based on a rubric which includes grammar mastery, fluency, answer's quality, confidence, and gesture (which includes grooming and eye contact). The average score given by the interviewer and the researcher is the final score of each student. Because the examination rubric also includes non-language factor such as confidence and overall grooming, the correlation analysis only included the rating collected from English language mastery category. This rating evaluates the students' sentence accuracy in standard English. On the other hand, fluency was not included

in the correlation analysis because some students are fluent in speaking but they were not using standardized English.

In order to find the inter-rater reliability between the two raters (the researcher and the interview), non-parametric correlation calculation using Spearman-rank test was conducted. The test resulted significant in all groups (Average $r_s = .756$; $p < .05$). Thus, this study confidently used the students' speaking test scores as data for correlation calculation.

Furthermore, because the study also aims to see the difference of FLA between male and female students, an independent two-tailed t-test was also conducted to see if there are items whose difference between groups are significant.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

1. The level of Foreign Language Anxiety based on FLCAS scores

The calculation results of FLA are based on the sum of FLCAS questionnaire score, which are categorized into three groups: low anxiety, medium anxiety, and high anxiety group (Amengual-Pizzaro, 2018; Arnaiz & Guillén, 2012). Thus, scores lower than 76 are identified as low anxiety, scores of 76 to 90 are regarded as medium anxiety, and scores from 91 to 145 are included as high anxiety. Figure 1 shows the percentage of each category based on the questionnaire results.

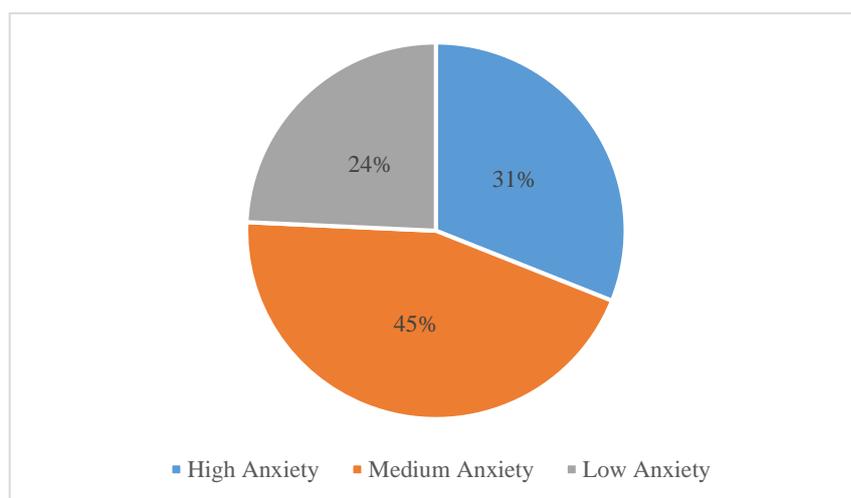


Figure 1. Categorization of FLCAS Scores

The pie chart in Figure 1 shows that most students (45%) are categorized into medium anxiety group, the second largest group is high anxiety group (31%), while the smallest group

is the low anxiety (24%). The large number of students that belong to the medium anxiety shows that most students of batch 2018 are not highly anxious when attending English class. In addition, the result of descriptive statistics of all items show that the average responds' value of all items is 2.54, which indicates a medium level of anxiety from scale of one (least anxious) to four (most anxious). Also, item with the highest mean is number 23 ('I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do') with $\bar{x} = 3.29$; $SD = .68$, while the lowest is item number 17 ('I often feel like not going to my language class.') with $\bar{x} = 1.94$; $SD = .79$.

2. Comparison of the three anxiety categories

As it is indicated previously, low scores of means indicate all times high anxiety level. The first is the communication apprehension aspect (items 1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30 and 32); $\bar{x} = 2.54$, $SD = .23$, which indicates that most students are moderately anxious in terms of communication apprehension. In the communication apprehension aspect, the highest mean of all is item number 1, $\bar{x} = 2.81$, $SD = .70$; while the lowest mean is number 14, $\bar{x} = 2.01$, $SD = .83$ ('I would be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers').

Next, test anxiety aspect has the average mean of 2.40. Its highest average of response is item number 10 ('I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class', $\bar{x} = 3.01$). On the other hand, the lowest average is item number 17 ('I often feel like not going to my language class.') with mean score of 1.94. The second highest mean score ($\bar{x} = 1.97$) is item number 28 ('When I am on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.'), whose statement is closely related to motivation to attend the language class. In addition, a Spearman's rank-order calculation found that there was a moderate negative significant correlation between test anxiety and the students' language mastery ($r_s = -.355$).

The last anxiety category investigated in this study is fear of negative evaluations. Items in this category have overall mean of 2.78, which is the highest among other anxiety categories. This score, which is more than the scale median 2.5. The two highest average is item 23 ('I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do') and item 7 ('I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am'). On the other hand, item 19 ('I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make') has the lowest mean ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 0.76$).

Finally, a one-way ANOVA calculation of three anxiety source groups' means was conducted to see the statistical significance. There was a significant anxiety level difference at the $p < .05$ level for the three sources of anxiety, $F(2, 30) = 3.82, p = .033$.

3. Comparison of FLCAS scores between male and female students

In order to calculate the statistical significance FLA means between male and female students, an independent samples two-tailed t-test was conducted. The calculation resulted in 10 items which are statistically significant (Item 9, 27, 31, 13, 1, 18, 20, 11, 2, 6). Items with the highest difference are number 9 ('I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class'), 31 ('I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language'), and 27 ('I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class'), in which the female students are more anxious than the male students. On the other hand, the only statistically significant item with positive difference ($\bar{x}_1 > \bar{x}_2$) is item 6 ('During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course').

4. Correlation analysis between students' foreign language class anxiety levels and final oral examination scores

A non-parametric correlation analysis using Spearman's rho was conducted to see if the correlation between foreign language class anxiety levels and language mastery is significant. The result shows that there is a moderate, significant negative relationship between foreign language class anxiety score with students' English language mastery ($r_s = -.336, p = .001$).

Discussion

1. Students' level of anxiety in English language class and its main source

The percentage of FLCAS total scores indicate that almost half of the respondents have medium level of anxiety. The description of item's highest and lowest score further indicates that most students are anxious when comparing their speaking skill with their peers, but still manage to encourage themselves to attend language class. The fact that most students' English grammar mastery are of low or intermediate level may have also contributed to their anxiety level because more proficient students will probably have lesser anxiety (Liu, 2006). A considerable percentage of the students who have high anxiety also indicates that English language class may generally give students a substantial amount of pressure.

The result of the FLCAS also shows that most students are quite anxious when their English language skills are compared to their peers. Furthermore, in terms of aspects related to communication apprehension, students feel mostly moderately anxious when they do not understand their teacher's feedback. Despite of this, most students indicate that they can manage their apprehension while talking to native speakers, thus the low score. This result is almost similar with Amengual-Pizzaro (2018) who found that ESP students are mostly comfortable speaking to native speakers. The students' low level of anxiety when communicating with native speakers may be relatable to several exposure and opportunity to communicate with native speakers who attended some events held by the university. This might also the result of their exposure with native speakers during high schools or English courses, yet further investigation is necessary.

Item 10 as the highest level of anxiety indicates that most students feel highly anxious of failing the class. This anxiety may largely result from the speaking test that they had for final examination in which they had to be interviewed one-by-one in English. The low mean score of item 17 may indicate that most students are almost most of the time motivated to go the English class. Based on this result, it can be concluded that most students are motivated to attend English language class to avoid failing the class, which is quite understandable since the English class in this university bears four credits, one of the highest among other subjects.

The fact that the average score in test anxiety category as the lowest among other sources of anxiety has been surprising. There is a possibility that the students are more anxious about their peer's negative comments or better language skills. This may be related to why some students did not perform maximally during the final oral exam. Aydin (2009) also mentioned that test anxiety is closely related to failing in tests, which may explain why item number 10 has the highest anxiety.

Among other sources of anxiety, it was indicated that fear of negative evaluations has the highest score, so it is indeed the main source of anxiety in using English among hospitality students in this study. The survey also indicated that most students are not confident when their speaking skills are compared to their peers. The result regarding negative evaluation items in this study is different from Amengual-pizarro (2018), who found that item number 33 ('I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance') as one thing that makes students mostly anxious about. This indicates that most students have low

anxiety when it comes to accepting teachers' correction. Therefore, it can be concluded that teachers' direct feedback or correction do not make most students shy or too anxious.

Based on the questionnaire result in items describing fear of negative evaluations, the students in this study have considerable amount of peer pressure when talking in English. Regarding to this finding, Walker and Panayides (2014) even suggested to add an item stated 'peer pressure / other students' reaction' and 'Being mocked if they make serious mistakes' to their modified FLCAS, which indicates a significant effect of peer pressure towards language learning anxiety. Therefore, a further investigation is needed to observe class activities to see to what extent peer pressure affects students' speaking performance.

Because the difference between has been found to be statistically significant, it can be concluded that when attending English language class, students are mostly anxious about negative evaluations they must receive and how peers are perceived as better learners.

2. The difference of anxiety level between male and female students

The finding signifies that the female students are more likely to get panic and confused when speaking in front of their peers than the male students. The male students seem to be more relaxed and confident while delivering speech in English in front of their peers. In addition, although the findings indicate that both male and female students' minds would wander about matters unrelated to the class, the male students are more significantly easier to be distracted by things unrelated to the course. Thus, when attending English language class, the female students will be likely more focused than their male classmates.

In addition, these only ten items with statistical significance also shows that for most items, the difference of FLA between male and female students are not significant. This result shows consistency with Amengual-Pizzaro (2018) and some other research findings (Aida, 1994; Park & French, 2013).

Furthermore, another two-tailed t-test was conducted by categorizing the sources of anxiety. The result shows that there is a significant difference between male and female students for fear of negative evaluation, but not in test anxiety and communication apprehension. This result may indicate that when it comes to negative evaluations received by both male and female students, the female students are more likely to be slightly more anxious. A further investigation is still needed to delve into the factors that affect the students' fear of negative evaluations.

3. Correlation between students' anxiety level and their oral exam performance

The moderate negative relationship indicates that some students who admit that they experienced anxiety while attending English class may have trouble performing at their best during the final oral examination, but at a moderate level. This modest relationship is like some other studies of correlations between FLCAS and oral exam performance (Phillips, 1992; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012). Other factors may also have affected their performance rather more significantly, such as their level of grammatical mastery and their preparation. However, this still needs a further investigation as interviewers sometimes also asked various questions that cannot be anticipated by the students.

Other non-language factors which are also evaluated, such as grooming and gesture, may also have affected the students' confidence during the oral examination. Some students who came to the test wearing full make up and good grooming may also have made the interviewer impressed and thus affecting the judgement of language mastery. Grooming standard and professional image has been seen to be one of important knowledge in hospitality (Tesone and Ricci, 2008). Therefore, students who showed up with good grooming and better professional image were preferable. However, a further investigation to validate about how grooming affects the interviewers' judgement is still needed.

The fact that most students are of low or low-intermediate may have affected how they answered questions during the interview. Students with limited linguistic skills may have difficulties expressing their true self, especially when they are not familiar with the accepted linguistic standards (Horwitz et. al., 1986 & Phillips, 1991). Thus, more proficient students are more likely to express their authentic-self during the interview.

CONCLUSION

This present study suggests that foreign language anxiety is moderately correlated negatively with hospitality students' language performance especially in terms of facing negative evaluations received by peers. Also, among items in the FLCAS, items that are statistically different between male and female students are those related to negative evaluations.

Future studies may investigate the students' anxiety level while attending oral examination, and how a face-to-face interview differs from a class presentation. Another possibility is also to see how pressure from peers or test anxiety may positively facilitate

foreign language performance. Thus, it will create a more thorough investigation on how the right amount of pressure can bring facilitating anxiety that enhance foreign language learning (Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012; Kleinmann, 1977; Phillips, 1991)

It can be concluded that the implications of peer pressure or negative evaluations are significant in affecting students' speaking performance. Thus, in order to create more encouraging environment, the English lecturer needs to ensure that every student has the same positive attitude when a student is speaking in front of the class. It may also be necessary to discourage negative or mockery during speaking activities to foster students' motivation to speak confidently. The awareness of creating positive learning environment can facilitate the importance of mastering English for hospitality students in general.

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