

## THE ATTRIBUTION ON STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY IN EFL CLASSROOM

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**Abstract:** Anxiety has been considered as negative influence in learning a language. In speaking, it is also reported to be debilitating for the students' performance and achievement. This study examined the attribution of students' speaking anxiety in EFL speaking class. The attribution itself refers to explanation or reason someone made toward an event or experience happened to them in the past. Descriptive qualitative case study design were employed. The participants were twenty nine students of EFL program in a University in Bandung, West Java. The participants were categorized based on their anxiety level by using Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Mostly, the students were in mildly anxious level. Only nine anxious students were found and became the focus of the research. They were administered an open-ended questionnaire contained 3 item questions. The result of the study was shown that anxious students of EFL speaking class proposed lack of confidence as major attribution. The co-related attribution were also commonly mentioned: grammar mastery; and negative encouragement from friends; were also related to lack of confidence, which all of them tend to blame for the students themselves. It is suggested for the student to do a self-assessing activity which help them know their own skill, so they can have more confidence. It is also suggested for the lecturer to build good connection with the students in order to help them maintain their anxieties.

**Keywords:** *attribution, speaking, language anxiety*

### Introduction

Nowadays, English has transformed into a global language which became pre-requirement for many academic, career, and social needs, including in Indonesia. Somehow, the acquisition of the foreign language requires efforts and hard work. In mastering English, there are four skills to be learned: *listening; speaking; reading; and writing*. Brown (1994) asserted that speaking is rather difficult to acquire than the other three.

One factor which is believed causing English as foreign language (EFL) difficult to master is language anxiety. Language anxiety is considered to be an affective hindrance toward second language acquisition (Na, 2007).

In general, anxiety is defined as disturbance for self-efficacy due to a mental threat (Papamihel, 2002) or uneasy feeling due to something threatening (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2006). Psychologists differentiate anxiety into three types of anxiety: *trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety*.

Trait anxiety is personal tendency to feel anxious for every situation they are exposed (Papamihiel, 2002). State anxiety is a transient anxiety, a response to a particular anxiety-provoking stimulus (Spielberg, 1983). As for situation-specific anxiety refers to the constantly and multi-faceted nature of some anxieties (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

It is believed that the anxiety towards foreign language can be very debilitating for the students. In language learning context, anxiety is conceptualized as a specific anxiety responses toward language learning situation (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Anxiety interfere with behavior instrumental to language learning, and are more intense in people who are having high level of language anxiety (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2006). It is consistently associated with problems in language learning such as deficits in listening comprehension, reduced word production, impaired vocabulary learning, lower grades in language courses, and lower scores on standardized tests (Horwitz and Young, 1991).

Over the other three, speaking is often considered as the most “anxiety-provoking aspect in a second language learning situation” (Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert, 1999, *p.* 420). Anxiety experienced in communication in English can be debilitating and can influence

students' adaptation to the target environment and ultimately the achievement of their educational goals (Woodrow, 2006).

The need to overcome anxiety emerges into something important. In order to cope with it, we need to understand “*why is it happening anyway?*” And in order to do that, we need a theory to answer it. One of the theory which might suitable to be used in investigating the understanding on speaking anxiety is attribution theory. Generally, it is a theory to make someone describe the cause of event happening to him in the past. Asonibare, (1986) describes attribution as “a cognitive process by which a person perceives the cause of what happened to him, either it is caused by himself or by others”. Attribution theory demands someone to understand and explain the reasons and factors causing an event happening to him in the past, since it possibly help them attain better strategy and expectation to solve the problem with better output (Gray, 2005; Lei, 2009; Mali, 2015; Weiner, 1985).

In educational context, the attribution on students learning process is considered to be an essential factor contributing to their motivation and achievement in learning (Weiner, 1985). It can significantly impact on their future performance (Banks and Wolfson, 2008).

Beside to identify the attribution, it is also possible to classify them into internal and external factors (Horwitz et al., 1986). It enables us to give pedagogical suggestion for the teacher and better learning strategy for the students.

Previous research on language anxiety which measured level of students' foreign language anxiety had conducted by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). This research presented that students with high anxiety level tend to be afraid to speak in foreign language, they also feared being less competent than other students and also being negatively evaluated by other students (Horwitz et al., 1986). Keramida (2009) confirmed that some students in the research were unwilling to participate in speaking activity due to their anxiety of making mistake and being laughed by their friends. In another study, Liu and Jackson (2008) performed research with Chinese participants. The result reported one third of participants are feeling anxious, though most of them were willing to communicate using English freely outside the classroom, they remained silence in classroom activities. Therefore, the issue of speaking anxiety is important to be researched.

Meanwhile to investigate students' attribution in EFL, several studies have been conducted (Gobel, Thang, Sidhu, Oon, & Chan, 2013; Mali, 2015; Yilmaz, 2012). Gobel et al., (2013), conducted a

study comparing urban and rural undergraduate students' attribution to success and failure ESL learning in Malaysia. The study involving 1,156 Malaysian undergraduate students found out that urban students are more willing to attribute their success to their skills and effort than rural group. It gives the picture of how urban group are more confident in their ability to control the outcome. Another study by Yilmaz (2012) specifically tried to explore the attribution on students' reading comprehension in Turkey. The study involving 91 undergraduate students and 17 EFL teachers found out that reading strategy is the major factor contributing to their success, while lack of interest in reading became the strongest factor contributing to their failure.

In the context of EFL speaking, Mali (2015) investigated the students' attribution of college students studying EFL in Indonesia. In his research, Mali deployed questionnaire and interview to find out students attribution for their English-speaking enhancement. It involves eighteen college students learning EFL in Indonesia and finds out that clear purpose of doing particular English speaking activities, strategy, and positive encouragement from friends and teachers are major attribution on their English speaking enhancement.

So far, researches had been made in order to gain more wisdom concerning students' attribution. Somehow, only few studies of students' attribution toward their failure in EFL learning had been conducted, specifically in speaking anxiety. Thus, it is suitable for this study to investigate the attribution on students' speaking anxiety in EFL class as it is believed that speaking anxiety is one major problem resulting negative achievement in students' EFL-speaking learning process (Horwitz et al., 1986; Keramida, 2009; Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2006; Tseng, 2012).

To give clarity, this study formulate the problem into two research question to answer:

[1] What are students anxiety level in EFL classroom?; and [2] What are students' attributions on their speaking anxiety in EFL classroom? Based on research question, suitable research methodology had been developed.

## **Methodology**

This study employed case study which concerned with meaning rather than generalization. This study described and provided detailed analysis based on data collection (Creswell, 2012, p.16). Case study allows study to be conducted in small and single case (Stake, 1985).

Case study had been considered relevant with the purpose of study to

investigate the attribution on students' speaking anxiety in EFL classroom. The study dealt with small amount of respondents and single case.

### **• Participants**

The research participants were 29 fourth semester students learning EFL in a university in Bandung. One of English program in the university level was chosen as the participants in this study. The fourth semester students was chosen considering their experiences and adaptation to the language had been enough to share their attribution on their speaking anxiety. Participants then were categorized based on their anxiety level by using Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz & Young (1991). The items on FLCAS which related to speaking anxiety were used to measure the score of students who experienced language anxiety in speaking English. Nine students then were selected to be the focus of the study.

### **• Instruments**

This study used two steps data collection method. First, this study administered an open-ended questionnaire called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz and Young (1991). Second an

adopted open-ended questionnaire allowing unlimited possible response from the participants (Neuman, 2006, cited in Mali, 2015) was developed and administered to the students with higher anxiety level to collect data about attribution on their speaking anxiety. In order to make the students gain better insight on the questions found in questionnaires, both FLCAS and open-ended questionnaire were translated into *Bahasa Indonesia*. The aim was to help the students in giving better responses toward the instruments.

- **FLCAS**

There are 33 question-items in FLCAS. The students' response on this 5-point Likert scale ranged from "Strongly Agree" (SA), "Agree" (A), "Neither Agree nor Disagree" (NA), "Disagree" (D), and "Strongly Disagree" (SD). The range score of this study was from 33 to 165. Nevertheless, there are 14 items related to speaking anxiety: 1, 3, 7, 9, 13, 14, 18, 20, 23, 24, 27, 30, 31, and 33. It was used to measure the student anxiety level to categorize the participant into five categories: Very Anxious, Anxious, Mildly Anxious, Relaxed, and Very Relaxed. The students who were categorized as anxious and very anxious in language anxiety also gained higher score in speaking anxiety.

- **The Open-ended Questionnaire**

After being categorized, the chosen anxious participants were asked to write a response to an open-ended questionnaire which was adopted from Mali (2015), consisted of three items of open-ended question. The questions are:

1. Until now, I feel anxious when I am going to speak a monologue in English, the main reasons are...
2. Until now, I feel anxious when I am going to ask a question using English, the main reasons are...
3. Until now, I feel anxious when I am going to answer a question using English, the main reasons are...

The aim of the questionnaire was to answer the research question which was in order to investigate students' attribution on their speaking anxiety in EFL class. The data found were analyzed and described through descriptive case study analysis. The response from students were transcribed and categorized by adopting the categorization based on Williams, Burden, Poulet, and Maun (2004).

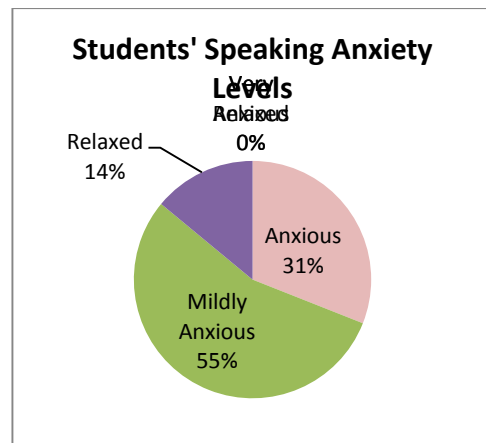
### **Data Presentation and Discussion**

The following is the data found which are categorized manually by

following Oetting's scale (1983). The students are categorized into very anxious, anxious, mildly anxious, relaxed and very relaxed. Based on FLCAS, from 29 students, most of students were feeling mildly anxious (55%) level. There were also students who felt relaxed (14%) level and none of the students were feeling very relaxed (0%) level. Further, the students who should be chosen for the next step of the study are from Very anxious and Anxious levels. From 29 participants, it was found that some students were in anxious (14%) level and none of the students were in very anxious (0%) level.

Figure 4.1 displays the distribution of language anxiety levels of the students. There are 14 items related to speaking anxiety. As discussed in the previous chapter, the items number 1, 3, 7, 9, 13, 14, 18, 20, 23, 24, 27, 30, 31, and 33 related to speaking anxiety.

**Figure 1 The Result of FLCAS**



Based on the findings, there were 9 students who were in anxious state and 0 students were in very anxious state. It was also found out that the students who were in higher anxiety levels were scored high scores too in the speaking items. Thus, they were chosen to be the respondents in the open-ended questionnaire in order to answer the research question. To protect their identity, researcher also called the chosen students as student 1, student 2, student 3, student 4, student 5, student 6, student 7, student 8 and student 9. Table 1 shows the scores of each chosen students the items relating to their speaking skill.

**Table 1. The Open-Ended Questionnaire Participants' Level of Speaking Anxiety Adapted from FLCAS**

Participants	Questionnaire items													Total Score	Level of Anxiety	
	1	3	7	9	13	14	18	20	23	24	27	30	31			33
<b>Student 1</b>	4	5	4	5	2	4	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	4	54	Anxious
<b>Student 2</b>	4	4	3	4	3	3	2	4	3	4	4	3	4	3	48	Anxious
<b>Student 3</b>	4	5	5	4	2	2	1	4	5	3	4	4	4	4	51	Anxious
<b>Student 4</b>	3	4	5	3	2	4	3	4	5	3	3	3	4	4	50	Anxious
<b>Student 5</b>	3	4	4	5	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	2	3	47	Anxious
<b>Student 6</b>	3	3	3	4	2	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	3	5	43	Anxious
<b>Student 7</b>	3	3	4	3	3	3	2	3	4	3	3	4	3	3	44	Anxious
<b>Student 8</b>	2	4	4	4	3	3	3	4	4	3	4	4	4	4	50	Anxious
<b>Student 9</b>	4	3	4	5	2	4	3	3	4	4	4	3	3	3	49	Anxious

According to the results of the FLCAS questionnaire, students from EFL speaking classroom program in the university were mostly categorized as mildly anxious students. Somehow, in this study, there were nine students who were categorized as anxious. They experienced language anxiety particularly in speaking English. Those students from anxious level of speaking anxiety were the focus on this study.

Further, the researcher would describe the data found into categories per indicator. The categories found in the tables were adopted from Williams, et al. (2004); Yilmaz (2012); Mali (2015). The result would be the answer of the research question of this study. It is also discussed the categorize of the statements from

students whether it is internal or external factors become attribution.

- **The Students' Attribution on Their Speaking Anxiety in Doing Monologue Using English Actively**

According to the research analysis result on the questionnaire, there were found five attributions the students had for their anxiety in performing monologue using English in EFL classroom. Table 2 shown the five attributions into ranked order.

**Table 2. The students' attribution on their speaking anxiety  
in doing monologue using English actively**

Attributions	Number	Percentage
<b>Lack of self confidence</b>	7	41,2%
<b>Lack of grammar mastery</b>	6	35,3%
<b>Negative encouragement from friends</b>	2	11,8%
<b>Negative encouragement from lecturer</b>	1	5,9%
<b>Strategy</b>	1	5,9%
<b>Total</b>	17	100%

As displayed in table 4.2. Lack of confidence (41,2%) was the major attribution. The category consisted of statements such as *"I am afraid of running out of idea in the middle of monologue"*, *"I am not confident to arrange the words into statement"*, *"I am experiencing nervous and fear oftenly"*, and *"I am having lack of self-confidence"*.

The statements given by the students shown how students prefer to make attribution on their anxiety in performing monologue mainly came from their internal factor, their own responsibility.

Another attribution from the respondents was lack of grammar mastery (35.3%). It included a statement *"I am afraid to make grammatical mistakes"*.

The statement from the student also made attribution as their own responsibility, for having lack of grammar mastery.

Negative encouragement from friends (11.8%) also became students' attribution on their speaking anxiety when doing monologue. The statement found was *"I am afraid of being laughed by friends"*.

In the statement *"I am afraid of being laughed by friends"* shown that besides internal factor, students also made external factor as their attribution.

Negative encouragement from lecturer (5.9%) became minor attribution. It embodied a statement of *"I am afraid to be scolded by the lecturer"*. And another minor attribution was strategy (5.9%) which consisted of a statement *"I am lacking of preparation"*.at

The statements above shown that internal and external factors became shared main attributions from the students.

Those five were the recent attribution found in the questionnaire which the students had for feeling anxious



when they were performing monologue

using English actively.

- **The Students Attribution on Their Speaking Anxiety in Asking A Question Using English Actively**

There were two attributions categories found in the analysis result. They are being reviewed in table 3.

**Table 3. The students' attribution on their speaking anxiety in asking a question using English actively**

Attributions	Number	Percentage
Lack of self confidence	7	63,6%
Grammar mastery	4	36,4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>100%</b>

The main attribution pointed out by the students was lack of self-confidence which involved two statements “*I am afraid the question was not appropriate*” and “*I am having lack of confidence*”. The second attribution was grammar mastery, it included a statement “*I am afraid of making grammatical mistake*”. Those two were the attributions found on students speaking anxiety in asking a question using English actively.

Both shown internal factors are the shared attribution on students’ anxiety in asking a question using English actively. This enhances the internal factor as the most frequent factor which is made attribution by the students. It shows that the students either didn’t have supportive learning environment or the environment

had been supportive, but they still failing anyway.

- **The Students Attribution on Their Speaking Anxiety in Answering A Question Using English Actively**

As for the last indicator, there were six attribution categories found from the research analysis result on students speaking anxiety in answering a question using English actively. Tabel 4 provided the lists of the attributions in ranked order.

**Table 4. The students' attribution on their speaking anxiety in answering a question using English actively**

Attributions	Number	Percentage
<b>Clarity of the questions</b>	5	38,5%
<b>Negative encouragement from friends</b>	2	15,4%
<b>Lack of grammar mastery</b>	2	15,4%
<b>Lack of vocabulary mastery</b>	2	15,4%
<b>Lack of self confidence</b>	1	7,7%
<b>Strategy</b>	1	7,7%
<b>Total</b>	13	100%

As stated in the table, clarity of the questions (38,5%) became the main attribution category. It consisted of a statement *"I am afraid to have misperception toward the question"*.

Negative encouragement from friends (15.4%) had been the second attribution category which included a statement *"I am afraid to be debated harshly by my friends"*.

The two highest attributions of students speaking anxiety revealed the external factor had been the major attribution.

The third attribution category was lack of grammar mastery (15.4%). It contained a statement *"I am afraid of making grammatical mistake"*. Similarly, it was followed by lack of vocabulary mastery (15.4%) which included a statement *"I am afraid that I am lacking of vocabularies"*.

The two statements above concealed that internal factors was also being addressed as the attribution on students' speaking anxiety in answering a question using English actively.

The last two less frequent attribution categories were lack of self-confidence (7.7%) and strategy (7.7%). Lack of self-confidence consisted of a statement *"I am ashamed to go doing monologue"*, as for strategy contained a statement *"I am lacking in preparation"*. Those six attributions categories mentioned above were the attribution categories found in the students' speaking anxiety in answering a question using English actively.

Again, two of statements above shown that internal factors still became most frequent attribution proposed by the students.

Williams, et al. (2004) as cited in Mali (2015) stated that strategy was most frequent attribution category found in his research of attribution on speaking enhancement. Somehow, it didn't occur in this study. The possible reason is this study focus on researching the students' negative achievement in EFL speaking classroom instead of achievement, specifically the speaking anxiety experienced by the students.

Most recent attribution category found in this study was the *lack of self-confidence*. Furthermore, *lack of grammatical mastery* and *negative encouragement* from friends became common attributions found.

Moreover, based on the analysis, internal factors became more dominant factors than external factors proposed in students' attribution on their speaking anxiety in EFL classroom.

## Conclusions

This research mainly investigated the students' attribution on their speaking anxiety in EFL classroom. The aim was to find out the attribution proposed by the students toward their speaking anxiety during EFL classroom which were defined into three specific indicators, they were: (1) anxiety in doing monologue using English actively; (2) anxiety in asking their friend using English actively; (3) and

anxiety in answering the questions proposed by their friend using English actively. According to the data gathered in FLCAS questionnaire and open-ended questionnaire allowing unlimited responses, some conclusions were drawn.

First, according FLCAS questionnaire, the students from EFL speaking class were mostly categorized into mildly anxious. Further, there were nine students who were in anxious level, who were experiencing anxiety in speaking English. They became the focus of this study.

Second, from the open-ended questionnaire, it was found out that most recent attributions proposed by the participants were lack of confidence, as for lack of grammar mastery and negative encouragement from friends also became common attribution of the students.

Further, from the discussion of the data found, it was found out that internal factors was more dominant attribution than external attribution. Based on this study, it is suggested that the students' able to identify their internal attribution on their speaking anxiety. It is important for them to know their own skills well so they can have better expectation and confidence in speaking English. Perhaps by joining clubs or certified assessment will help them realize their ability so they can have more motivation and confidence. Finally, it is

also suggested that the lecturer create a situation where the other students are not allowed to make any negative encouragement when their anxious friend performs speaking in classroom.

It is highly suggested for future researchers to use better methodology and add interview as research instrument to give a better results and findings. In questionnaire, the use of Likert scale in which Neutral option is involved seems less reliable too.

Finally, the learners are suggested to get to know their own ability by joining speaking club or entering speaking assessment test to measure their ability. It is also suggested the lecturers of EFL speaking class to create closer relationship with the students, so the students could share their problems when encountering language anxiety experience in learning process, instead of blaming and feeling responsible alone for their anxiety problem.

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