

The Anxiety of English Learning: Students' Perception in a Foreign Language Acquisition

Indah Sari, Doni Efrizah

Abstract

This study aimed to describe about students 'anxiety in learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia. This study applied the descriptive quantitative method. and the respondents of this study were 51 students of second semester at Institut Teknologi Kelapa Sawit Indonesia (ITSI) Medan majoring Information System intake 2024/2025. The instrument of collecting data was a questionnaire and it was taken from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Then, the technique of data analysis was conducted by using Likert scale formula. The results showed that most students were mildly anxious in learning English as a foreign language caused by low English proficiency, lack of familiarity task, lack of confidence, fear of making misapprehensions, ungraspable inputs, lack of vocabulary, fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, lack of preparation and shyness.

Keywords: Anxiety, English, Learning, Language, Acquisition.

Indah Sari

Electrical Engineering Study Program, Universitas Pembangunan Panca Budi, Indonesia

e-mail: indahsari@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id

Doni Efrizah

e-mail: doniefrizah@dosen.pancabudi.ac.id

2nd International Conference on Islamic Community Studies (ICICS)

Theme: History of Malay Civilisation and Islamic Human Capacity and Halal Hub in the Globalization Era

Introduction

Acquiring a new language, especially English, has become a vital ability in our interconnected world. Nonetheless, numerous learners frequently experience considerable stress during this journey. This issue, referred to as foreign language anxiety (FLA), can obstruct successful communication and disrupt the entire learning process. This introduction examines the intricate link between anxiety related to language and students' views, emphasizing the way that fear and unease affect the learning of English as a second language. By comprehending these viewpoints, teachers can more effectively adjust their instructional methods to foster a more encouraging and efficient learning atmosphere, which will ultimately boost students' confidence and skill in English.

Anxiety is an incredibly intricate phenomenon that should be recognized as a mix of emotional connections, emotional state, and personality characteristics [1]. In research, there are two distinct types of variations in anxiety: trait and state. The condition of anxiety corresponds with a relatively stable personality trait. As a result, the individual experiences feelings of anxiety across different situations. State anxiety is a temporary experience with specific physical symptoms present at a given moment. Anxiety that is specific to particular situations tends to reflect and reoccur in those scenarios. Language anxiety is an example of situation-specific anxiety. Such anxiety is understood as a trait anxiety confined to a specific area [2]. Anxiety related to speaking English is viewed as one of the most significant challenges within the learning process, and many educators and researchers have conducted extensive investigations into the causes and factors contributing to speaking anxiety. Additionally, there are various internal and external influences that affect the level or severity of speaking anxiety [3].

Additionally, the elements that lead to anxiety can be categorized into two distinct categories: Internal and External factors. In addition to this, a variety of elements may contribute to the onset of anxiety. Some of the factors identified in this research include aspects related to language, ABC and pronunciation, peer influence, fear of public speaking, low self-esteem, and shyness. As noted by [4] the processes involved in L1 and L2 acquisition can be influenced by apprehension, which is closely linked to language functioning. Beyond student-related factors, several external influences also contribute to language anxiety, such as inadequate support from instructors, students' less-sensitive personalities, and lack of individualized attention.

Literature Review

2.1 The Nature of Anxiety

Anxiety comprises a combination of physiological, behavioral, and psychological responses, and in terms of physiological aspects, it may manifest through bodily symptoms like increased heart rate, tense muscles, nausea, dry throat, or perspiration. Additionally, it pertains to an individual's sensations of discomfort and worry regarding circumstances because they are uncertain about the result [5]. Then, it as an undesirable emotional state marked by feelings of stress and worry and consequently, it stands out as a significant factor in all types of learning, often accompanied by negative repercussions. The process of acquiring foreign language skills is heavily influenced by emotional aspects. For this reason, anxiety can be linked to foreign language acquisition, which leads to the emergence of the term foreign language anxiety that foreign language anxiety is a complicated and multifaceted phenomenon [6]

Furthermore, the internal sensation of stress and unease particularly linked to settings involving foreign languages, which encompass speaking, listening, and the process of learning [2]. outlined that anxiety related to foreign languages is a unique blend of emotions, perceptions, and actions that emerge within a language learning environment, resulting from the individuality of the language acquisition experience [7]. They proposed a framework

regarding language anxiety that includes three interconnected elements: communication apprehension, identified as a form of shyness manifested in fear or worry about interacting with others, fear of negative evaluation, which involves concern over feedback from others, and test anxiety, described as a kind of performance-related anxiety arising from the dread of not succeeding.

discovered that students who experienced high levels of anxiety attained lower grades in their courses compared to those with minimal anxiety [4]. Subsequently, demonstrated that anxiety about foreign languages can adversely affect learners' achievement inversely related to foreign language proficiency [8] indicated that foreign language anxiety is. Besides, students suffering from high degrees of language anxiety tend to produce less continuous speech in a foreign language [9]. Over time, the researchers developed an interest in examining anxiety and language skills, focusing on the explanatory strength of this model of foreign language anxiety, particularly in relation to speaking abilities, which garnered the most interest.

Moreover, a significant barrier that students encounter in language learning courses is anxiety [10]. This issue typically arises when individuals believe their spoken skills are inadequate, foolish, or difficult to understand [11]. [7] who were the pioneers in examining anxiety within language learning, investigate speaking anxiety as it relates to foreign language anxiety, which is characterized as a unique mix of feelings, perceptions, and behaviors connected to language learning in a classroom setting, stemming from the overall process of learning a new language. Based on a variety of empirical research and foundational evidence, they propose a theory regarding anxiety in language learning. This theory of foreign language anxiety consists of three interconnected elements: fear of communication, concern about negative judgment, and anxiety related to testing.

Additionally, communication apprehension is as a form of shyness linked to the fear or anxiety associated with interacting with others. Fear of negative evaluation refers to the worry about being judged by others, evading situations where evaluation happens, and the expectation that others will have a negative view of oneself [7]. Finally, test anxiety pertains to the pressures of tests and assessments in language learning and can be seen as a form of performance anxiety arising from the dread of failing. Moreover, two significant types of anxiety are often identified in literature: salutary/uplifting and inhibitory/draining anxiety [10]. As indicated by their labels, salutary anxiety motivates action and enthusiasm, leading to success, while inhibitory anxiety creates obstacles to achieving successful outcomes..

Furthermore, anxiety typically arises when individuals must give a public presentation or engage with strangers because of the fear of being evaluated or diminished by others. Although individuals recognize that this discomfort is irrational, they remain unable to control their anxiety, which can lead to feelings of depression, torment, and frustration [12]. Speaking anxiety, a significant emotional factor affecting foreign language competence, often has a disruptive impact on students' oral execution of English [13]. This anxiety can range from mild discomfort to intense fear. Common manifestations of speaking anxiety include shaking hands, trembling, sweating, fearfulness, disorientation, emptiness, nervous butterflies, a dry mouth and throat, rapid heartbeat, and a shaky voice. The level of anxiety varies among individuals based on their physical and mental state as well as specific situational pressures.

2.2 The Factors of Anxiety

Several reasons for reluctance (anxiety regarding speaking English [14] including:

a. Limited English skills.

Limited English skills are identified in the current study as a significant factor that prevents students from conversing with peers in English during lessons. As a result, students may perceive their speaking abilities as inadequate, believe their English is subpar, and feel that others are more adept than they are.

b. Unfamiliarity with tasks.

The term familiar indicates something that is well-recognized, regularly seen or heard, possessing comprehensive knowledge, or being closely acquainted with a subject. Engagement plays a crucial role in encouraging students' participation in classroom activities. In essence, students are more likely to engage in discussions about a topic if they have an interest in it, are familiar with it, have encountered it often, possess a solid understanding, or have a strong connection to the subject matter.

c. Lack of self-assurance.

This refers to having strong convictions, deep trust, or certain expectations, feeling confident and secure, and not experiencing failure, among other aspects. Some students may be proficient in pronunciation and have advanced skills, yet still choose to remain silent due to a deficiency in self-confidence.

d. Anxiety about making mistakes

Students worry about losing reputation in oral language classes. They tend to remain silent and only speak English when prompted because they feel anxious and embarrassed about the possibility of making errors.

e. Incomprehensible input

Language input is presented through teacher explanations, listening activities, reading passages, and outside exposure to language, providing students with the resources they need to start producing language on their own..

The anxiety can be classified into three parts namely trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety [15].

a. Trait anxiety is presented as an enduring inclination to feel anxious. It is seen as a fashionable personality trait. Additionally, anxiety encompasses a person's propensity to feel nervous or anxious regardless of the circumstances they are in. In fact, this type of anxiety is inherently part of an individual's character, making it persistent and challenging, if not impossible, to alleviate. An individual characterized by anxiety tends to experience it across a wide range of scenarios. When anxiety becomes defined, it can impede language skills. Similarly, anxiety as an individual's predisposition to feel anxious in any context.

b. State anxiety is described as anxiety that a person feels at the present moment as a reaction to a specific situation. It represents a blend of personality traits and situational anxiety. anxiety relates to anxiety that is connected to a particular situation. As indicated by its name, this kind of anxiety arises in response to a specific scenario and is not perpetual. It is discomfort or tension at this moment due to outside stimuli. This occurs when learners find themselves in a scenario or occurrence that they find stressful.

c. Situation-specific anxiety highlights the complex and varied nature of certain anxieties. It is triggered by particular situations or events, such as delivering speeches, taking exams, or engaging in classroom discussions. Conversely, the situation-specific anxiety is regarded as an individual propensity to feel anxious in a specific context and at a particular moment. This type of anxiety can be seen as a subset of anxiety experienced in different environments. Therefore, language anxiety can be classified under situation-specific anxiety.

Learning anxiety is linked to various elements, which, in the context of foreign language proficiency, can cause learners to experience unease due to issues associated with three types of anxiety. The first type involves apprehension about communication. The second is the fear of receiving negative assessments. The third includes a general state of anxiety. Outlining these aspects will establish a basis for understanding foreign language anxiety, providing insight into its origins. Given that this research emphasizes speaking skills, the following section will elaborate on these factors:

a. Communication apprehension

Communication apprehension refers to the nervousness or fear regarding actual or anticipated interactions with others, and it is a behavioral characteristic associated with mental constructs like shyness and hesitation [16]. Additionally, communication apprehension as “a form of shyness marked by fear or anxiety concerning interaction with others.” Supporting this statement, contends that communication apprehension can manifest in most commonplace communication situations or may also represent a broader pattern of anxiety that surfaces in various aspects of an individual’s life [17]. Personality traits of learners, such as shyness, reserve, and reluctance, are seen as continual triggers for this type of apprehension.

b. Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation is an extension of the second component of foreign language anxiety, as it is not confined to situations involving tests; rather, it can occur in any social context where evaluation takes place, such as interviewing for a job or participating in a foreign language class [7]. It is also common in the sense that it relates not only to the assessment by teachers regarding students but also to the perceived reactions of fellow students [17].

c. Test anxiety

Grasping the concept of test anxiety is also significant in the discussion surrounding foreign language anxiety. Test anxiety describes a specific type of performance anxiety that arises from the fear of failing. This form of anxiety is quite common in language classrooms because of the continuous evaluative nature of performance. Since test anxiety is approached differently when addressing oral communication, attention can be directed towards the other two factors for analyzing sentiments within English oral communication classes.

Furthermore, [18] identifies several prevalent factors that lead to anxiety among students, such as insufficient vocabulary, low self-esteem, the apprehension of making mistakes and being ridiculed, a lack of preparation, and shyness. Inadequate vocabulary knowledge can result in challenges for students during language activities and hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English. It can be concluded that insufficient vocabulary is a primary contributor to students’ anxiety in oral English settings. Another factor related to anxiety in speaking English is the students’ inability to articulate their thoughts due to a lack of confidence. Students typically experience low self-esteem when they notice that their peers do not comprehend their contributions during discussions. In such situations, they are more inclined to remain silent instead of continuing to speak English.

In this regard, [19] posits that the self-doubt students feel regarding their English speaking abilities adversely affects both their speaking skills and listening comprehension. The anxiety stemming from the fear of making mistakes while speaking English is a frequent problem, particularly in English as a Foreign Language environments like Indonesia. Students express apprehension about making errors and the possibility of being laughed at, which contributes to their heightened anxiety when speaking English in class. Moreover, the fear of making errors is a key reason for students’ reluctance to communicate in English within the classroom.

Subsequently, [20] emphasize that students feel anxious about the prospect of making mistakes due to concerns that their classmates will mock them and provide negative assessments if errors occur while speaking. Consequently, they become preoccupied with how they are perceived, leading them to withdraw from participating in speaking activities. Similarly, a lack of preparation also contributes to significant anxiety for many students when they speak English in class. [21] noted that students attribute their anxiety to inadequate preparation and have stated that they would feel less anxious and more self-assured about speaking English if they were better prepared. Thus, it is evident that adequate preparation can

bolster students' confidence in their English speaking abilities, although it may not completely alleviate anxiety. Another contributing factor to the anxiety many students face is shyness.

Furthermore, shyness is a challenge that all learners confront when acquiring a new language, and it is an aspect that can make students reluctant to communicate during English classes [22]. This suggests that shyness can be a significant issue for students, particularly in speaking-focused classes. Further elaboration is provided by [23], who contends that speaking in front of an audience is one of the most common fears faced by students, where feelings of shyness can lead to blanking out or forgetting their words. Moreover, shyness can stem from low self-esteem and an accompanying fear of rejection, making it crucial to address this aspect in order to assist students in performing their best during speaking activities in the classroom.

Research Methodology

This study applied the descriptive quantitative method which is basically applied to the collection of data that is structured, and which could be represented numerically. The respondents of this study were 51 students of second semester at Institut Teknologi Kelapa Sawit Indonesia (ITSI) Medan majoring Information System intake 2022/2023. The instrument of collecting data was a questionnaire and it was taken from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by [7]. The questionnaire consisted of 18 out of 33 items with four - point scale. The points scales were SA (strongly agree), A (agree), D (disagree), and SD (strongly disagree). Then, the technique of data analysis was conducted by using Likert scale formula.

Results

The data were taken by administering the questionnaire to 51 students and the result of is described as follows:

1. *I never feel sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.*

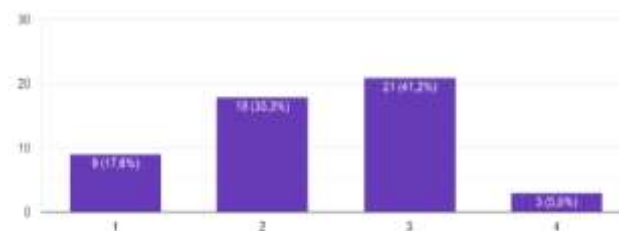


Figure 1. Worry of Speaking in Foreign Language

The figure1 showed that 9 students (17.6%) strongly disagree, 18 students (35.3%) disagree, 21 students (41.2%) agree, and 3 students (5.9%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I never feel sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class*”.

2. *I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.*



Figure 2. Worry of Making Mistakes

The figure 2 showed that 8 students (15.7%) strongly disagree, 17 students (33.3%) disagree, 21 students (41.2%) agree, and 5 students (9.8%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.*”

3. *I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.*

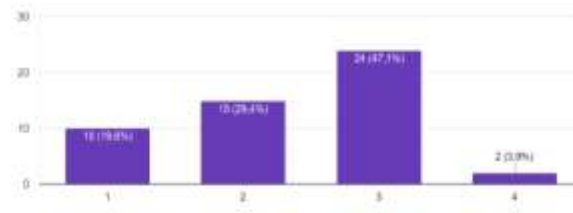


Figure 3. Worry of Being Called in the Class

The figure 3 showed that 10 students (19.6%) strongly disagree, 15 students (29.4%) disagree, 24 students (47.1%) agree, and 2 students (3.9%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.*”

4. *It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.*

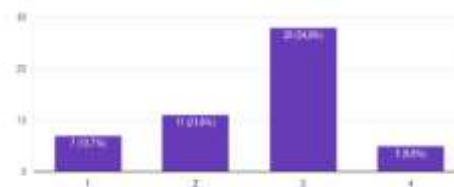


Figure 4. Worry of not understanding the topic

The figure 4 showed that 7 students (13.7%) strongly disagree, 11 students (21.6%) disagree, 28 students (54.9%) agree, and 5 students (9.8%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.*”

5. *During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.*

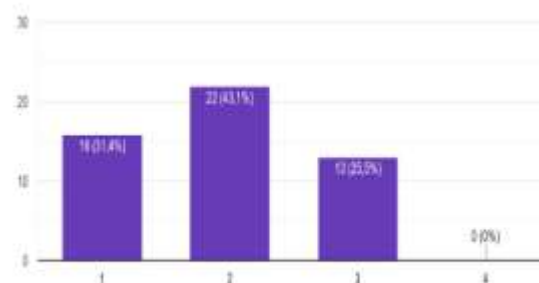


Figure 5. Not Focus in Learning

The figure 5 showed that 16 students (31.4%) strongly disagree, 22 students (43.1%) disagree, and 13 students (25.5%) agree, in the questionnaire item “*During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.*”

6. *I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.*

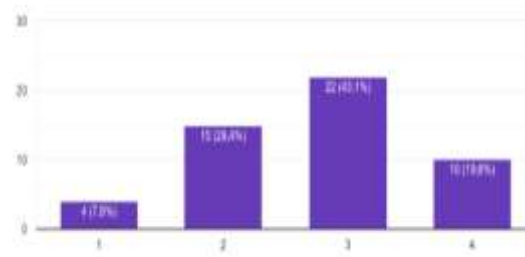


Figure 6.Thiinking of other sudentts'skill

The figure 6 showed that 4 students (7.8%) strongly disagree, 15 students (29.4%) disagree, 22 students (43.1%) agree, and 10 students (19.6%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.*”

7. *I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.*

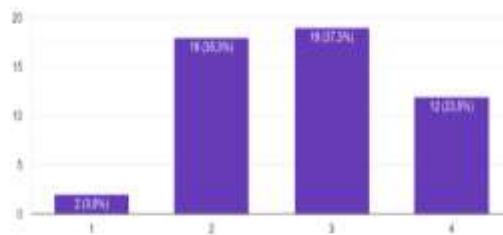


Figure 7.Feeling of doing the test

The figure 7 showed that 2 students (3.9%) strongly disagree, 18 students (35.3%) disagree, 19 students (37.3%) agree, and 12 students (23.5%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.*”

8. *I start to panic when I must speak without preparation in language class.*

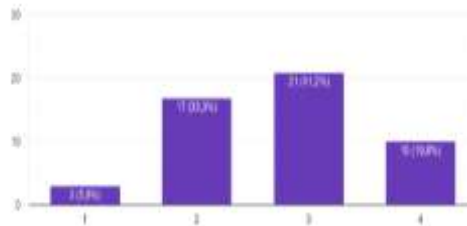


Figure 8.Worry of not have preparation

The figure 8 showed that 3 students (5.9%) strongly disagree, 17 students (33.3%) disagree, 21 students (41.2%) agree, and 10 students (19.6%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I start to panic when I must speak without preparation in language class.*”

9. *I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.*

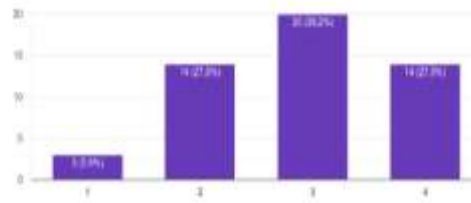


Figure 9. Worry of being failed

The figure 9 showed that 3 students (5.9%) strongly disagree, 14 students (27.5%) disagree, 20 students (39.2%) agree, and 14 students (27.5%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.*”

10. *In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.*

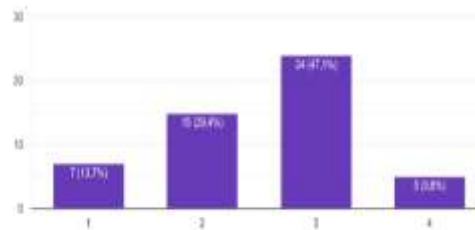


Figure 10. Feeling nervous

The figure 10 showed that 7 students (13.7%) strongly disagree, 15 students (29.4%) disagree, 24 students (47.1%) agree, and 5 students (9.5%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.*”

11. *It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.*

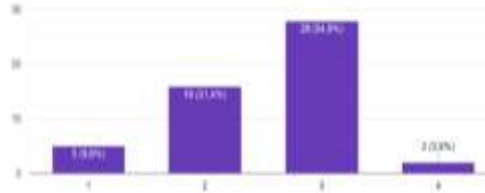


Figure 11. Feeling embarrassed

The figure 11 showed that 5 students (9.4%) strongly disagree, 16 students (31.4%) disagree, 28 students (54.9%) agree, and 2 students (3.9%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.*”

12. *Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.*

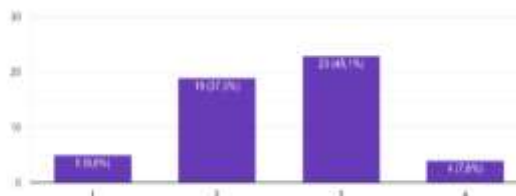


Figure 12. Feeling anxious

The figure 12 showed that 5 students (9.5%) strongly disagree, 19 students (37.3%) disagree, 28 students (45.1%) agree, and 4 students (7.8%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.*”

13. *I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.*

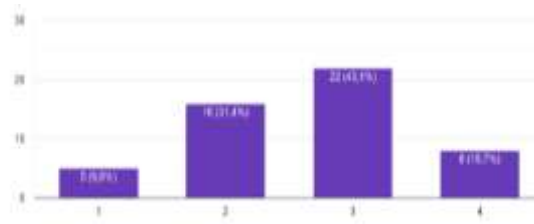


Figure 13. Feeling confident

The figure 13 showed that 5 students (9.5%) strongly disagree, 16 students (31.4%) disagree, 22 students (43.19%) agree, and 8 students (5.7%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.*”

14. *I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.*

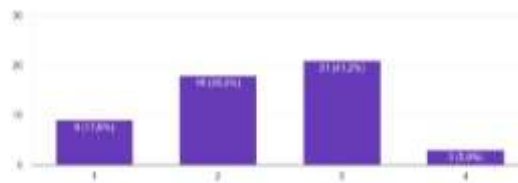


Figure 14. Feeling afraid

The figure 14 showed that 9 students (7.6%) strongly disagree, 18 students (35.3%) disagree, 21 students (41.2%) agree, and 3 students (5.9%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.*”

15. *I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.*

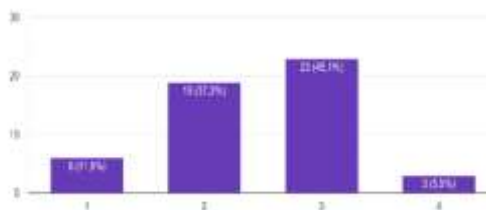


Figure 15. Feeling pounded

The figure 15 showed that 6 students (11.8%) strongly disagree, 19 students (37.3%) disagree, 23 students (45.1%) agree, and 3 students (5.9%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.*”

16. *The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.*

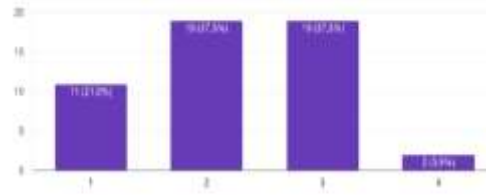


Figure 16. Feeling confused

The figure 16 showed that 11 students (21.8%) strongly disagree, 19 students (37.31%) disagree, 19 students (37.3%) agree, and 2 students (3.9%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.*”

17. *I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.*

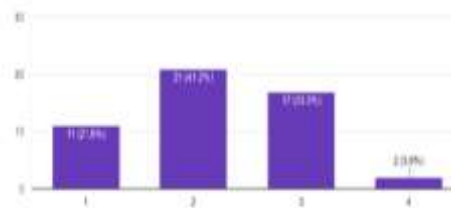


Figure 17. Feeling tense

The figure 17 showed that 11 students (21.6%) strongly disagree, 21 students (41.2%) disagree, 17 students (33.3%) agree, and 2 students (3.9%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.*”

18. *I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.*

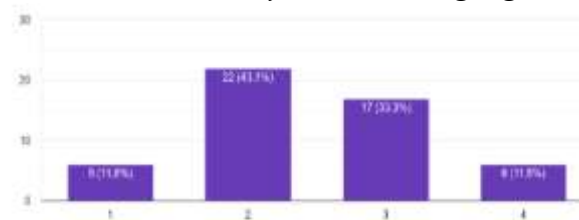


Figure 18. Feeling nervous

The figure 18 showed that 5 students (11.8%) strongly disagree, 22 students (43.1%) disagree, 17 students (33.3%) agree, and 6 students (11.8%) strongly agree in the questionnaire item “*I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.*”

According to data analysis, it was figured out that most students were mildly-anxious in learning English as a foreign language that described in the items of questionnaires such as 41.2% students agreed in the question “*I never feel sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class*”, then, 33.3% students disagreed in the question “*I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.*” Moreover, 47.1% students agreed in the question “*I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class*”, and 54.9% students agreed in the question “*It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.*” Then, 43.1% students disagreed in the question “*During language*

class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course”, and 43.1% students agreed in the question “I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.” Furthermore, 35.3% students disagreed in the question “I am usually at ease during tests in my language class”, and 41.2% students agreed in the question “I start to panic when I must speak without preparation in language class.”.

Moreover, 39.2% students agreed in the question *“I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class”, and 47.1% students agreed in the question “In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.” Then, 54.9% students agreed in the question “It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class”, and 45.1% students agreed in the question “Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.” Then, 31.4% students disagreed in the question “I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class”, and 41.2% students agreed in the question “I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.” Furthermore, 45.1% students agreed in the question “I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class”, and 37.3% students agreed in the question “The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.” Furthermore, 33.3% students agreed in the question item “I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes”, and 33.3% students agreed in the question item “I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.”*

Therefore, the finding of students' anxiety in English learning caused by low English proficiency, lack of familiarity task, lack of confidence, fear of making misapprehensions, and ungraspable inputs (Liu, 2006). Moreover, other common factors causing scholars such as anxiety includes lack of vocabulary, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, lack of preparation and shyness. Furthermore, the students' anxiety included into trait anxiety, state anxiety and situation-specific anxiety [15].

Conclusion

According to the result, it concluded that students' anxiety refers to the private feeling of pressure and apprehension specifically associated with foreign language surrounds caused by low English proficiency, lack of familiarity task, lack of confidence, fear of making misapprehensions, and ungraspable inputs. Moreover, the factors include lack of vocabulary, lack of confidence, fear of making miscalculations and being laughed at, lack of medication and shyness. Therefore, the teachers are suggested to minimize the students' anxiety by providing the enjoyable environment of learning, encouraging them to be more self-confident, supporting their efforts in accomplishing the tasks, and always appreciating their performance in the classroom. The finding has the implication to educational institutions to provide in-house teachers' training to up- grade teachers' skills in teaching English as a foreign language and to minimize the students' anxiety in English learning

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