ENGLISH LINGUISTICS, LITERATURE, AND LANGUAGE TEACHING IN A CHANGING ERA

Edited by
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Factors influencing anxiety of non-native English as Second Language (ESL) teachers in compulsory schooling

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ABSTRACT: Following a qualitative method approach, this study investigated the anxiety factors of non-native English as Second Language (ESL) teachers in compulsory schools (elementary school, junior high school and senior/vocational high school). This study involved four teachers as participants working at four different levels of school, and the data was collected through the qualitative method. The data collection instrument consisted of interviews, which were then transcribed. The findings derived from the qualitative data reveal that factors that make the teachers feel anxious are both teachers’ and students’ factors, including the students’ language background, classroom management, teaching experience, student numbers and, most importantly, the teachers’ physical condition. Teachers feel anxious in conditions such as when their physical condition is not good and when students are not competent enough to understand English material. All participants, especially the teacher at the elementary school, mostly used the Indonesian language instead of English as the medium of instruction.

Keywords: Factor, anxiety, ESL Teacher, compulsory schooling

1 INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language has become one of the compulsory subjects taught in Indonesian schools, especially in secondary-level education such as junior and senior high schools. Having been taught the English language subject for at least six years, students are expected to master the four English skills, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, various researches show that English mastery among students after they graduate from secondary schools is regarded as inadequate [1]. There are various reasons why Indonesian students’ ability in the English language is low, and one of these is due to teachers’ low competence in teaching English [1]. As teachers who are responsible for teaching English as Second Language (ESL), they are required to be professional [2] by having adequate knowledge and proficiency in English, including having sufficient speaking skills. However, many of these teachers feel anxious when they speak English for real communication such as in the classroom. This situation will affect students’ learning in the classroom. In fact, Brown [3] stated that this self-anxiety will exacerbate many difficulties for learners in responding in speaking activities. In other words, if teachers experience anxiety in their teaching, they will not be able to teach English well.

A study conducted by Kim and Kim [4] about teachers’ instruction in teaching a foreign language in the classroom showed that teachers’ anxiety will affect their instruction. When students get incorrect information from their teacher, they will get confused and it will also affect their understanding of the lesson. Teachers can get nervous, anxious and even lose self-confidence if they are not well prepared for classroom activities and do not have the appropriate teaching material. Another study, conducted by Klanrit and Sroinam [5] in Thailand, about ESL teachers’ anxiety in using English in their teaching reported that the source of teachers’ anxiety was the students’ attitude toward learning English. They noted that
a language learner was always anxious about error correction in the classroom. As a teacher instructing in a non-native language, such as the English language, teaching causes anxiety. Stress will appear when they have difficulty using the English language.

Anxiety is a feeling of being tense, disturbed, and either feeling faintly threatened or feeling agitated [6]. The tendency of people with this feeling is that they mostly respond to such a situation with negative perceptions of themselves. They perceive that they do not have ideas to resolve the situation. Moreover, they worry about what they share, give, do and think because of the situation. According to Yoon [7], anxiety is a normal feeling that a person has when he or she suffers from either internal or external states, emotional feeling or uncertain conditions. When a person experiences something unexpected, he or she will usually feel nervous and tense. This kind of feeling is what psychologists consider as anxiety.

In this case, foreign-language anxiety affects non-native English teachers as well. Horwitz [8], as cited in Yoon [7], claimed that many non-native language teachers will feel anxious in their target-language classroom. Even though language teachers are supposed to be high-level speakers of their target language, their language mastery is still an ongoing work, and this is why most non-native language teachers are likely to have uncomfortable moments, particularly in speaking in the target language. In fact, before they began to teach the target language, they were language learners themselves. It showed that students were affected by language anxiety. Non-native language teachers might also be influenced by language anxiety because they have been language learners as well. Teachers used to be learners and their experience is the same as when they learned a foreign language. They learn how to perform standard English in front of their peers. This situation may cause a feeling of anxiety as they feel fear, apprehension, nervousness and lose self-confidence from a fear of making mistakes. Fear of negative evaluation is an apprehension that is based on the inability to make a proper social impression [9]. This is called a negative perception toward language evaluation, since they respond to themselves with negative feelings about the assessment.

Anxiety in teachers' language teaching can appear from various sources. It sometimes comes from the method, teachers' perspective toward the material, personality, lack of self-confidence or poorly prepared teaching procedures. There are a number of studies showing the factors or sources of teachers' anxiety in the classroom. Merc [10] reinvestigated the sources of Foreign-Language Teachers' Anxiety (FLTA) among ESL student teachers. The results showed that there were six sources of teaching anxiety: students and class profiles, classroom management, teaching procedures and being observed, mentors and miscellaneous. Merc [10] explained that anxieties related to student teachers are supposed to deal with lesson delivery. The number of students in a classroom was considered as a source of anxiety as well. Merc [10] also added that maintaining discipline has the second highest frequency among the anxieties of students and teachers when communication units are computed. Furthermore, some students and teachers indicated that they were stressful about how to reduce the noise in the classroom. Teaching procedures were an important source of foreign-language teachers' anxiety. It can be assumed that people may feel threatened when they encounter something that has never happened to them before.

2 RESEARCH METHOD

2.1 Research design

This study was intended to identify ESL teachers' anxiety in more depth in different levels of compulsory schooling. This is a descriptive qualitative research using individual interviews for data collection. Because this study aimed to investigate ESL teachers' experience regarding their anxiety in a naturalistic and situated concern as the basis of the inquiry [11], a descriptive qualitative design was chosen. In addition, a descriptive qualitative design was employed in order to study the phenomena through the ESL teachers' perspectives about their anxiety, paying attention to the context in which they emerge [11]. Thus, the descriptive qualitative study is found in direct (not disengaged or abstracted) experience, referring to experience as a direct value [12].
2.2 Research participants

Four ESL teachers, where one teacher represented each compulsory level of schooling (elementary school, junior high school, and senior or vocational high school) from various cities were chosen. In selecting the participants, purposive sampling was used and several criteria were applied. Purposive sampling is a sampling technique in which researchers apply their own judgment when choosing participants for the study [13]. The criteria employed to select the participants were, firstly, location of the author, secondly, the age of the participants, and thirdly, the level of schools in which they taught. The participants having these criteria were chosen in this study in order to answer the research questions appropriately.

2.3 Data collection technique

In this study, an individual interview was used as the data collection technique in order to collect information from the participants who discussed their interpretations in their particular environment in their lives through their own point of view [14]. In addition, this study used standardized open-ended interviews in which the participants were asked a similar number of questions in the same order using an open-ended format [14] in order to get maximum information about the detailed views and experiences of the participants. Besides, this kind of interview allowed the researcher to ask further questions. Following interviewing of the participants and transcription of the interview results, member checking, which is also known as informant feedback or respondent validation [15], was conducted as a way of ensuring the trustworthiness of the study. In the process of member checking, the participants were given the interview transcriptions to check the account of the interview. The four participants read the transcriptions, and agreed with the transcription accounts, meaning that the data transcribed was correct. This way, the credibility of the study was maintained.

2.4 Data collection instrument

In order to assist the interview sessions, semi-structured questions were developed as interview guidelines with the topics shown in Table 1, which gives information about the questions used in the interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Class preparation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Classroom management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Teaching procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Teaching and learning management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Less knowledge of the material</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Students and classroom profile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. The number of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Students’ attitude toward learning English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Lack of self-confidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Worry about making mistakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Fear of English speech in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Lack of teaching experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Low level of language proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. They use both FL &amp; L1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Spend more time on structuring activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Focus on textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Physical condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Teacher in a poor health condition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2. List of codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors contributing to anxiety</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AF: Classroom Management</td>
<td>AF-CM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF: Teaching Procedures</td>
<td>AF-TP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF: Teaching and Learning Management</td>
<td>AF-TLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF: Less Knowledge of Subject Matter</td>
<td>AF-LK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF: Students' Attitude Towards Learning English</td>
<td>AF-SAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF: Lack of Self-Confidence</td>
<td>AF-SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF: Teaching Experience</td>
<td>AF-TE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF: Number of Students</td>
<td>AF-NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF: Low Level Language Proficiency</td>
<td>AF-LLP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AF: Physical Condition</td>
<td>AF-PC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.5 Data analysis technique

In this phase, data selection became a major issue and therefore only relevant data was selected and analyzed for categorization. In this coding process, the mass of the data was simplified, and the relevant data was selected, which was then categorized using big letters, small letters and numbers, and all irrelevant information was discarded [16].

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results in this study showed that the participants had many factors that made them feel anxious while teaching. The teachers felt anxious speaking in English because they were afraid that their students would not understand well what they said. The students did not have good English backgrounds from their families, so they became confused when the teachers gave them instructions in full English.

Based on Table 3, teachers' anxiety stemmed from many factors, but the dominant ones were the students' lack of discipline, inadequate preparation for teaching, teaching and learning management, students' minimum knowledge, the number of students in the classroom, and also the teachers' own factors such as teaching experience and physical condition.

3.1 Anxiety factor: classroom management

Three of the participants responded that they felt uneasy when they found their classrooms were not in order. It became stressful for them if they were not well prepared to enter the classroom. If the participants were not ready, the classroom activity would not be well-structured. The factor that played the greatest role in contributing to the participants' anxiety in class preparation was teaching procedures.

Table 3. Factors that contributed to anxiety.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Participants' answers/Anxiety Factors [AF]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Students' discipline [AF-CM], teaching procedure [AF-TP], teaching and learning management [AF-TLM], teaching experience [AF-TE], difficulty in handling a big class [AF-NS], physical condition [AF-PC]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>Students' discipline [AF-CM], preparing the procedure of teaching [AF-TP], worry of making mistakes [AF-SC], teaching experience [AF-TE], physical condition [AF-PC]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Teaching procedure [AF-TP], teaching and learning management [AF-TLM], small class is better [AF-NS], physical condition [AF-PC]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Students' discipline [AF-CM], teaching procedure [AF-TP], teaching and learning management [AF-TLM], worry of making mistakes [AF-SC], not conducive class [AF-NS], physical condition [AF-PC]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Of course, students who have discipline can follow the class easily. [ES (Elementary School)
Teacher]

I think yes, because the classroom becomes quiet and both of us, teacher and students, can be more focused. [JHS (Junior High School) Teacher]

Success in teaching procedure is absolutely important. [VHS (Vocational High School)
Teacher]

Although some students were busy talking to each other, the teachers kept questioning them. Some students also ignored the teachers’ explanation while the teacher wrote on the white board and explained the lessons. There were only a few students who responded to the teachers while the others just laid down their heads on the desk and slept. One of the teacher’s problems in making his students focus on the lesson was also experienced by the participants of Merc’s study (2011). Merc [10] reported that the teacher participants were stressed by getting students’ attention. This demonstrates that poor classroom management can cause anxiety to teachers.

3.2 Anxiety factor: class size

Based on the interview, the large number of students caused teachers anxiety in using English in their teaching because the large classes had a tendency to produce uncontrollable noise. Three participants said that the number of students can affect their teaching performance:

I think yes, because in a large class you almost do not have time for real teaching, but have to handle the class. As I said before, my students are still young. [ES Teacher]

Yes, many students, too much anxiety. [SHS Teacher]

Yes, because that is not conducive. When the teacher explains the material, other students make noise, so they can’t hear well and can’t understand well. I think the best number of students is about 20 students. [VHS Teacher]

The number of students in a class affects the psychological conditions, such as the anxiety of the learners [17,18,19,20]. Furthermore, Coates and Thoresen [17] suggested that, at some level, anxiety in classroom teachers may become detrimental both to the teachers themselves and to their pupils. They indicated that anxiety may be correlated with inappropriate student and teacher performance. Yoon [7] noted that foreign-language anxiety is a complex psychological factor for both teacher and learner.

3.3 Anxiety factor: lack of self-confidence

Based on the interviews, the students experienced difficulty in understanding the lessons when the teachers repeatedly made mistakes in using the target language. Students did not get what they expected from the materials they learned:

Some of my students sometimes correct me when I mispronounce words. [JHS Teacher]

My students who joined the English course always update their knowledge, and they sometimes protest to me when the material or the contents of the subject are not the same as what they learned at their English courses. [SHS Teacher]

Of course, they are still young so I always give them Indonesian instructions. [ES Teacher]

Yes. Because my students are not good in English. [SHS Teacher]

In contrast, some of the participants responded that they did not feel confident in using English as a medium of instruction in the classroom. Yoon’s study [7] indicated that many teachers reported that they did not feel confident when teaching English through the English language. There was no practice among English teachers for using English in their daily conversations outside the classroom. Consequently, English was rarely used by them in a school environment.
3.4 Anxiety factor: physical condition

The factor of physical condition was the most important cause of anxiety for teachers, as they said that this factor could influence their performance and increase their anxiety.

Yes, because basically they are so noisy, if I got sick, I am afraid if I can’t explain well to them. [ES Teacher]
Yes, absolutely yes. Because my students are unruly, so if I get sick I will be very anxious about them, my voice is very quiet because of course I cannot speak loudly, so they do not understand at all. [VHS Teacher]
Absolutely yes, because we become weak, so I feel anxiety because the students do not understand what I said. [SHS Teacher]
Of course, because if we got sick, our voice is not loud, and we walk around in class less, and do not talk actively. [VHS Teacher]

The interviews revealed that physical condition played an important role in teaching activity. The respondents reported that the older their age, the more tired the teachers are. Furthermore, teachers had the responsibility to perform administrative tasks as well. Hence, they became exhausted when they had to teach their English classes. Coates and Thoresen [17] indicated that physical condition became the source of teachers’ anxiety. As Pratolo [21] stated, the feeling of anxiety affects both physical and psychological conditions. Coates and Thoresen [17] also reported that many educators would agree that teachers’ personality and mental health as they are reflected in classroom behavior are important. This showed that physical condition would influence both the teaching and learning processes.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

While much research into foreign-language teaching focuses on ability in the language itself, this present study focuses on the teachers’ attitude in using English in the classroom. Our study reveals evidence of the source of anxiety among compulsory schooling teachers. Based on the data analysis, there are four primary factors causing teachers’ anxiety: poor classroom management, large class size, lack of self-confidence and teachers’ poor physical state. The findings show that teachers’ anxiety comes from their personal states, their students and the classroom atmosphere. The findings of our study can provide important information about teachers’ anxiety factors: having more awareness of teachers’ anxiety means they can anticipate the problems in advance and resolve them accordingly.

REFERENCES