

# IMPROVISATION TECHNIQUE TOWARDS STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY

## (A Case Study on Students' Perception in an English Course for Adult)

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### Abstract

Adult learners are believed to have a greater tension as they learn something new. They tend to have high anxiety in learning foreign language. This study examined the level of adult students' speaking anxiety and explored their perception towards the use of improvisation technique in an English course designed by the government in Kulon Progo district in preparation of workplace situation. This was a case study which involved 10 participants. The instruments used in this study were questionnaire and interview. The questionnaire was used to determine students' speaking anxiety level. Meanwhile, the questionnaire confirmed the result of the anxiety test. The result showed that the participants had high anxiety and they thought that improvisation technique did not work on them.

**Keywords:** anxiety, improvisation, adult

### Abstrak

*Siswa dewasa diyakini memiliki tingkat kecemasan yang lebih besar ketika mereka belajar sesuatu yang baru. Mereka cenderung memiliki kecemasan yang tinggi dalam belajar bahasa asing. Studi ini menguji tingkat kecemasan berbicara siswa dewasa dan mengeksplorasi persepsi mereka terhadap penggunaan teknik improvisasi dalam kursus bahasa Inggris yang dirancang oleh pemerintah di Kulon Progo dalam rangka persiapan dunia kerja. Studi ini adalah studi kasus yang melibatkan 10 peserta. Instrumen yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah kuesioner dan wawancara. Kuesioner digunakan untuk menentukan tingkat kecemasan berbicara siswa. Sementara itu, kuesioner mengkonfirmasi hasil tes kecemasan tersebut. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa para peserta cenderung memiliki kecemasan yang tinggi dan mereka beranggapan bahwa teknik improvisasi bukan untuk mereka.*

**.Kata Kunci:** kecemasan, improvisasi, siswa dewasa

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term lingua franca has been widely used to define English that is used by most people throughout the world. English is used to communicate with people across the world. As a result, many people start to learn English, including Indonesian who learn English as a second language.

English can be learned for many purposes (Paltridge, 2013). Paltridge defines English for Specific Purposes (ESP) as the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language

where the goal of the learners is to use English in a particular domain. One of the areas of ESP is English in the workplace.

In line with the opinion above, the local government in Kulon Progo district established an English course aiming for adults in order to prepare them working in the airport around them. The course is a non-formal education which has participants with diversity in background and age. The purpose of this program is to enable them communicate effectively in the workplace.

To achieve the goal of this program, it focused on learning speaking skill. Speaking is believed to be the key of a successful communication. The course has been applying improvisation technique to teach speaking. Improvisation is the strategy of teaching where students are given roles to perform dialogues or conversation using their own word or sentences based on the conversation situation/topics on cue cards given. Berlinger (2000) states that improvisation technique motivates the students to generate imaginative and detailed ideas, greatly expands students' vocabulary, actively practices language skills and attains far greater fluency. It also provides a setting in which the students can explore the social values of a different culture.

However, as the participants of this program are adults, they faced a number of difficulties during the class. The researcher discovered that participants who were above the age of 20 found it hard to learn English as they were rarely willing to speak up during the class. This was due to the anxiety they held that they might make errors. They also assumed that speaking without any preparation brought them nervousness and anxiety.

The objective of this research was to excavate students' perception on how the improvisation technique affecting their speaking anxiety during the English class. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope cited in Prsic (2013: 14), anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system. Besides that, language anxiety is widely used to describe the feeling of tension and apprehension, which is specifically associated with foreign language learning contexts, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Mesri, 2012). As reviewed by MacIntyre (1994; 2002), Horwitz (2001), and Dorney (2002; 2005), anxiety has established itself as one of the important variables responsible for individual differences in the success or failure of second-language learning.

Based on the problems above, two research questions were formulated: (1) What is the level of students' speaking anxiety after the course? ; and (2) How did students perceive on the use of improvisation technique in their English class?

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is a case study where 10 participants were included. They were participants of the English course in the age above 20. To collect the data, the researcher used a questionnaire adapted from Park (2014) about foreign language anxiety scale. The score of questionnaire was stated based on the types of statement (positive or negative statement). For positive statement, the score was from 5 to 1: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The scores of negative statement were the opposite of positive statement. The score is from 1 to 5; Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Undecided (3), Disagree (4), and Strongly Disagree (5). To determine the students' levels of anxiety, the researcher decided to

take Krinis's, (2007) classification because this division is found very clear and basically similar with others. According to Krinis the FLCAS scores were divided into five levels of anxiety: very low anxiety(X=33-82), moderately low anxiety(X=83-89), moderate anxiety(X=90-98), moderately high anxiety(X=99-108) and high anxiety(X=109-165).

To validate the findings of the self-report questionnaire (FLCAS), especially for the most potential causes of English language anxiety of the participants, interviews were conducted. The themes of the interviews were developed in a way that students could describe their perception whether English language classes were anxiety provoking or not, to mention their possible causes of anxiety, and to state their most potential cause of anxiety when they learn English in their classroom. Therefore, the data obtained from the interview was intended to triangulate the result obtained through questionnaire, especially the most potential causes of anxiety. The interviewees were selected related to the level of their anxiety. Students with high anxiety were determined to be the interviewees.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1 The Condition of Students' Speaking Anxiety

Below is presented the result of students' speaking anxiety level.

Table 1.

Students Number	Score	Classification
1.	99	Moderately high anxiety
2.	100	Moderately high anxiety
3.	102	Moderately high anxiety
4.	125	High anxiety
5.	116	High anxiety
6.	103	Moderately high anxiety
7.	120	High anxiety
8.	70	Very low anxiety
9.	100	Moderately high anxiety
10.	108	Moderately high anxiety

Based on Table 1, the anxiety level of the participants was classified as very low anxiety, moderately high anxiety, and high anxiety. There was only one student who had low speaking anxiety. Meanwhile, 6 of the participants (60%) were categorized as moderately high anxiety. The rest of them were labeled as high anxiety.

Regarding to the results of the test, one of the interviewees emphasized that he encountered nervousness when it came to speaking in English. He further stated that even when he was already fully prepared, he still felt nervous to deliver his speech. Another interviewee said that she was afraid of making mistakes when she spoke English. The feeling of embarrassment was the factor that might cause her anxiety in English class. It is in line with Jones (2004) statement which claims that learners feel afraid and even panic because of the fear of committing mistakes or errors in front of others that make them unable to communicate well.

One of the questions in the questionnaire was asking about learners' confidence of their English. Most of the participants felt that their friends could speak better in English than they could. The lack of confidence also appeared to be one of the causes of their speaking anxiety. In a study conducted by Shufeng Tseng in 2012 also mentions that lack of confidence belongs to the important cause of anxiety among language learners.

Moreover, the participants felt more anxious when the teacher was about to call out a name unknowingly. They felt terrified that their name would be shouted and they had to say a speech without any preparation. Similar to this situation, Ferdous's research in 2012 states that lack of preparation and inability to express idea may cause foreign language anxiety.

Related to high anxiety, all interviewees agreed that age plays a vital role in this phenomenon. As they are adult who are above 20, they believed that it was hard for them to learn something new. This phenomenon also occurred in some researches including Robinson (2005) who claims that adult learners have greater cognitive and linguistic capabilities and conceptual complexity than younger learners. This factor also leads to the assumption that adults are aware of the things they are expected to know at certain age and if they feel like they have not reached that level, it is probable that they shy away from using language in order to protect their ego (Harley, 1986).

The participants also assumed that English has a set of complex and overwhelming rules that should be complied with. Around 60% of the participants agreed that they felt devastated with grammar in English. This resulted on their anxiety during their spontaneous speech. They had to think about the rules that English had as they spoke. Further, related to the grammar, the participants had a deep thought on the correction that they might get from the teacher after the speech. They always felt sure that they would get a lot of correction from the teacher. Krashen (1980) cited in Young (1991) says that people with low self-esteem worry about what others think. They are concerned with pleasing others.

To sum up, most of the students in this course are considered to be having high anxiety which is caused by feelings of low proficiency, lack of confidence, feeling afraid of making mistakes and getting corrections. All these causes are broken down into three main sources by Ferdous (2012): learner characteristics, teacher characteristics, and classroom procedure.

### ***3.2 Students' Perception towards The Use of Improvisation Technique***

The use of improvisation technique in this course was believed to be the technique that enabled learners to express their ideas freely. As stated by Berlinger (2000) that improvisation technique motivates the students to generate imaginative and detailed ideas, greatly expands students' vocabulary, actively practices language skills and attains far greater fluency.

Based on the result of the interview, most of the interviewees agreed that they felt more anxious when they had to speak in front of the class without any preparation. One of the interviewees said, "I found it stressful when the teacher randomly picked a student to tell a story without any preparation". Another student added "My English is poor, that's why I am scared to speak in English without a preparation before". Regarding to this, it could be seen that adult learners needed more preparation for their performance. Besides, they thought they would perform at ease when they were fully prepared.

However, they stated that improvisation technique allowed them to give speech in any topic based on their knowledge. They did not have to express something that they did not have any knowledge on it. Student with the highest anxiety level in this study declared that he needed a step by step speaking class so that he would feel at ease.

Related to the grammar in English, a student said that he felt afraid that teacher would give him many corrections as he spoke in front of the class. Without any preparation, he believed that he would make many mistakes and get correction from those.

The interviewees mentioned that there was a time when they had to tell a story in front of the class with a preparation beforehand. However, they had to answer questions from their friends related to the story. They recalled that it was more comfortable knowing they would not get any correction from the teacher and they had already prepared the speech though they were still unsure if the speech was grammatically correct.

One of the interviewees thought that it was hard for him to cope with something new as they are older. He thought that his anxiety might have relation with age. This assumption is not entirely wrong as Harley (1986) states that adults' previous knowledge of languages, rules, and linguistic systems can prove pernicious when trying to learn an entirely new language, since in their heads they have an image of how a language should be and behave this hampers with their ability to face language as it is, no presumption attached.

In brief, students found that they felt more anxious when they had to speak in front of the class without any preparation. They thought that their linguistic knowledge was not good enough to deliver a speech without any preparation beforehand. Technique used in this course may be classified as one of the classroom activities that trigger anxiety as explained by Young (1990). He compiled a list of classroom activities that can produce anxiety: (1) spontaneous role play in front of the class; (2) speaking in front of the class; (3) oral presentation or skits in front of the class; (4) presenting a prepared dialogue in front of the class; (5) and writing work on the board.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

It was found that most of the participants of this study, adult students who are above the age of 20, were considered to have high foreign language anxiety. This is due to the feelings of low proficiency, lack of confidence, feeling afraid of making mistakes and getting corrections. They were not able to convey their speech very well without a preparation. They prefer to have a step by step learning. They assumed that improvisation technique was hard to cope with. It can be concluded that improvisation technique in this course was increasing anxiety level of adult learners.

It is recommended for other researchers to try to implement other technique of teaching speaking for adult students in order to ease their anxious feeling.

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