

## STUDENTS' ANXIETY IN LEARNING ENGLISH AT PRIVATE ISLAMIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

**Rahmaniyah,**

English Education Department, STAI Rasidiyah Khalidiyah (RAKHA) Amuntai,  
South of Kalimantan, Indonesia

**Email:**

[rahmaniyah1108tbi@gmail.com](mailto:rahmaniyah1108tbi@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

*Learning anxiety refers to a mixture of feelings, anxiety, fear in learning and worry and it becomes one factor that contributes to students' difficulties and low learning achievement in English. This study aims to explore students' anxiety and factors that contribute to students' anxiety in learning English at MTs Al-Ukhuwah. Mix method research was employed to gather data about students' anxiety. The observation, interview, and questionnaire were the instruments. The results show that 43% of students have mildly anxious in learning English. Then, some students show anxiety mostly in the aspect of communication apprehension which they feel anxious and nervous when they want to speak or communicate using English in the class. The source of the students' anxiety comes from readiness, family, and community. These results suggests English teacher to provide more relax atmosphere in English learning and supports students to cope their communication apprehension.*

**Keywords:** *anxiety, learning English, junior high school*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Anxiety is one of the factors that contribute to students' learning achievement especially in English. In Indonesia, English is introduced at the junior high school level and it often perceived as a challenging subject due to the lack of foundational exposure at the primary school level. This condition creates anxiety among students that can hinder their motivation, participation, and performance in learning English. As Brown (2014) said that anxiety is one of affective factors in second language acquisition. Here, students experience anxiety in many ways such as difficult lessons, oriented to get high grades, teachers are firm in teaching and anxious when facing exams, and anxiety itself

Chaplin (as quoted by Kusumastuti, 2020) says that learning anxiety in psychology is defined as a mixture of feelings, anxiety, fear of learning, and worrying about the future without a specific cause that an individual has. Horwitz (1986) identified specific components of foreign language anxiety, including communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. In addition, anxiety can arise from a variety of sources, sometimes anxiety comes from classroom activities and methods as well as from the students themselves. Student anxiety in learning can be caused by internal and external factors. Internal factors that affect students' anxiety in

learning English are physical health, body condition, interest and readiness in learning. Meanwhile, external factors that affect students' anxiety in learning are family factors, school factors and community factors.

Several studies have explored the relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning. For instance, Siregar and Perwana (2020) examined learning anxiety among eighth-grade students and found that most students experienced high levels of anxiety that negatively affected their academic performance. Similarly, Agustina et al. (2023) investigated anxiety in junior high school students and identified seven factors that contributed to students' anxiety such as teachers' personality, fear of negative evaluation, perception about difficulties in English, peer ridicule, lack of preparation, and low self-esteem as significant contributor to classroom anxiety.

Anxiety refers to feeling threatened, frightened, tense, or worried. There are several definitions of anxiety. First, anxiety is "a feeling of fear or doom accompanied by certain physiological reactions, such as a speeding heart rate, sweaty palms, and tightness in the stomach (Carlson & Buskist, 1997). It also appears in response to a specific situation. Second, define anxiety as a state of tension and fear as a natural response to a perceived threat. It means that people naturally feel anxious when they are threatened (Passer & Smith, 2009). Third, According to, anxiety is a feeling of discomfort and fear about a situation with an uncertain outcome (Ormrod, 2011).

Although anxiety and fear sound similar, they are actually different. Halgin and Whitbourne (2007) explain the difference between fear and anxiety, fear is a natural alarm response to a dangerous situation whereas anxiety is more future-oriented, a feeling of worry and discomfort towards the possibility of something bad happening .

According to Barlow as quoted in Passer and Smith (2009) the anxiety response consists of an emotional component, a feeling of tension; cognitive component, worry; physiological response, increased heart rate and blood pressure; and behavioral responses, avoidance of certain situations." From the definitions described above, it can be concluded that anxiety is a feeling of threat, worry, tension, and worry in response to a certain situation or something that may happen in the future.

Horwitz (1986) said that language anxiety consists of several component sources, especially those related to the different types of activities that students do in class . Anxiety components that occur such as fear of communicating, fear of negative evaluations, anxiety tests and anxiety English classes. Communication worries, communication fears are characterized by fear and anxiety in communicating with others. Communication anxiety indicates difficulty in public speaking, listening to or learning spoken speech are all types of communication fears (Apriani, et al., 2021). Furthermore, students who feel anxious in exams often place unrealistic demands on themselves. Exam anxiety is considered one of the most important aspects of negative motivation that will affect learning. Watson in Ganesh (as cited by Sadiq, 2017) defines fear of evaluation as "fear of the evaluation of others, distress over their negative evaluation, and the expectation that others will evaluate themselves negatively".

Anxiety in English classes includes how students learn their English classes in general. English classroom anxiety is anxiety experienced in the classroom (Horwitz, 1986).

### ***Categories of Anxiety***

Three main categories of anxiety can be distinguished as trait anxiety, situation-specific anxiety, and state anxiety. More explanation about these types will be defined below by some experts.

#### **a. Trait Anxiety**

According to Speilberger trait anxiety refers to a stable inclination to become nervous in a variety of situations. People who have high level of trait anxiety are commonly nervous people; they lack of emotional stability. Furthermore, Speilberger defined that student who has anxious trait is possibly felt anxious in any condition. On the other hand, people with low anxiety are disposed to be calm and relax and more emotionally stable.

#### **b. Situation-specific Anxiety**

Anxiety in language learning is categorized into situation-specific anxiety. It refers to the persistent and multi-faceted nature of some anxieties. It is occurs in specific type of situation or event such as public speaking, test- taking. or class participation. Each situation is different, therefore, a person may be nervous in one situation but not in others.

#### **c. State Anxiety**

MacIntyre defines state anxiety as "moment-to-moment experience of anxiety. This anxiety is the transient emotional state of feeling nervous that can fluctuate over time and vary in intensity". It has an effect on learners emotion, cognition, and behavior. In terms of cognition, when people experience state anxiety, they are more sensitive to what other people are thinking of them.

Meanwhile, to make it easier to group anxiety within a person, anxiety is grouped into several categories including the following:

#### **a. Mild Anxiety**

In this condition the individual has a mild relationship of tension, becomes more alert to something and has an increased field of perception. Mild anxiety can make individuals motivated to learn and increase creativity.

#### **b. Moderate Anxiety**

In this condition the individual feels focused on something and does not care about other things. This anxiety begins to narrow your perspective and results in you not being selective about something, but focusing more on one goal.

#### **c. Severe Anxiety**

In this condition the individual greatly reduces his perspective. Focus more on structured things and don't think about anything else. All attitudes are shown in order to reduce tension, so that conditions of severe anxiety require direction to be able to focus again.

d. Panic Anxiety

The individual feels terrorized and afraid. Panic permeates the personality and causes increased motor activity, decreased relationships with people, undirected perspective and an inability to think rationally.

***Anxiety in Learning English***

The influence of anxiety on learning English among Junior High School students in Indonesia is both significant and multifaceted. Research consistently shows that anxiety can hinder language acquisition, leading to decreased participation and performance in English classes. For example, Mahmuda (2023) notes that students often experience communication apprehension, which negatively impacts their willingness to engage in speaking activities. This apprehension can create a cycle where students' fear of making mistakes inhibits their participation, thereby limiting their opportunities to practice and improve their language skills.

Similarly, Syahrani et al. (2024) found that high levels of anxiety are associated with lower self-efficacy in language learning. This suggests that anxious students may doubt their abilities, leading them to avoid challenging tasks that are crucial for language development. This avoidance behavior can further impede their progress, as they miss out on important learning experiences that could help them build confidence and competence in English.

Moreover, the sources of anxiety in language learning are varied and can include factors such as fear of negative evaluation and peer pressure. Marlia et al (2023) emphasize that these factors can exacerbate students' reluctance to practice English, particularly in a classroom setting where they may feel judged by their peers. Such environmental pressures can significantly contribute to the overall anxiety experienced by students, making it even more difficult for them to engage fully in the learning process.

Conversely, research by Yusuf et al. (2023) suggests that creating a supportive classroom environment can mitigate anxiety and foster a more conducive atmosphere for learning. When teachers actively work to reduce anxiety by offering encouragement and creating a non-judgmental space, students are more likely to participate and take risks in their language learning. This kind of positive intervention can help alleviate the barriers posed by anxiety, leading to better educational outcomes for students.

This study aims to explore the anxiety experienced by students in junior high school located in rural area. The primary objectives of this study are to determine the extent of students' anxiety in learning English and to analyze the factors that contribute to this anxiety.

## **B. METHOD**

This study uses a mix method research with qualitative and quantitative descriptive approach. According to Mukhtar, qualitative descriptive is a method used in research or observation to produce knowledge and theories for a research. Qualitative research is a type of research that explores and understands the meaning of a number of individuals or groups of people who come from social problems. Therefore, the qualitative data taken in this study was students' anxiety in learning English. Additionally, quantitative descriptive used to describe characteristics of a population being studies which the data were collected using questionnaires or tests. Creswell (2012) said that descriptive research designs help the researcher describe trends and characteristics of a population by using quantitative data and statistical analysis. Quantitative descriptive used to examine the level of students' anxiety in learning English.

25 students in class VII A of MTs Al-Ukhuwah was chosen to be participant under the study by using purposive sampling. Several considerations of taking this class as the sample were these students were in a transitional phase from elementary school to high school environment where there was no English subject in their elementary school. Their condition was expected to contribute to their anxiety when learning English. Also, their English skill is generally basic and they don't have many English vocabularies that make them difficult in learning English. Furthermore, students in this class have more tense in learning English than the other classes. Because of these reason, class VII A of MTs Al-Ukhuwah became the participants of this study to investigate students' anxiety as well as the factors that contribute to their anxiety in learning English.

To gather the data, the researcher employed three main instruments: observation, interview, and questionnaire. All of the instruments were conducted in February 2024. In observation phase, the researchers acted as a passive participant to gather data. The researcher joined the class and observed the learning activities one time by using observation guidance. The observation was carried out passively without any involvement in the classroom learning process. The researcher observed students' anxiety as well as the factors that influenced it during the teaching and learning activities in the class. For the anxiety, the aspects that were observed were communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and English classroom anxiety. Meanwhile, for the factors, the researcher only investigated internal factors which were good health, body condition, interest, and readiness of the students. The decision to focus on internal factors was made because they could be observed through students' behavior during the class. Then, the researcher conducted interviews with the English teacher and nine students from class VII A to gather more information related to students' anxiety in learning English. Each interview with the students and teacher lasted for 5-10 minutes. All interviews were recorded using mobile phones and notes were taken.

Moreover, the researcher distributed anxiety questionnaire that used to gain the data about students' anxiety in learning English. The researcher adopted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) from Horwitz. It consisted of 33 statements that divided into communication apprehension (8 statements); fear of negative evaluation (9 statements), test anxiety (5 statements); and anxiety in English classes (11 statements). The questionnaire was in Likert-scale from 1-5 (Strongly Disagree (STS), Disagree (TS), Neutral (N), Agree (S), and Strongly Agree (SS). This questionnaire was distributed to 25 students in class VII A Mts Al-Ukhuwah on February 2024. However, 4 students were absent at the time so that the total number that filled anxiety questionnaire in only 21 students. After the data was collected, the researchers did two kinds of data analysis. First is reducing data, displaying data, and taking concluding or verifying data for observation and interview result. Second is scoring and interpreting for questionnaire score

### C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION.

#### 1. Students' Anxiety in Learning English

The result of students' anxiety in learning English at MTs Al-Ukhuwah are gathered from questionnaire. The result are presented in the following table:

No	Anxiety Level	Range	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Very Anxious	124 – 165	0	0 %
2	Anxious	108 – 123	3	14 %
3	Mildly Anxious	87 – 107	9	43 %
4	Relaxed	66 – 86	5	24 %
5	Very Relaxed	33 - 65	4	19 %
Total			21	100 %

Based on the table, the anxiety level starts from “very relaxed” with 4 students, “relaxed” with 5 students, “mildly anxious” with 9 students, “anxious” with 3 students, and “very anxious” with 0 students. Students have moderate anxiety with a total percentage of 43%. Thus, it can be said that the level of students' anxiety is in “middle anxious”.

Then, this result was confirmed by classroom observations. Some students showed anxious and nervous when they want to speak or communicate using English at the class. This condition belongs to communication apprehension. On the other hand, students did not show fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and English classroom anxiety. They tended to be laughed together in the class and participate actively in answering teachers' questions. They also seemed comfortable doing exercises or short test that the teacher delivered when learning English. (Observation, 2024)

Additionally, the results of interview to the teacher confirm the communication apprehension that the students had.

*"... some male students showed fear and worry to come forward in front of the class..."*

*"...several anxiety students tend to be quiet...."*

However, majority of students said that they didn't feel the anxiety in learning English and some students said that they felt a little anxiety.

*"no worry"* (students 3, 5, 7)

*"just little"* (1, 8)

*"just relaxed"* (2, 9)

Based on the findings of questionnaires, observations, and interviews, the students enjoyed learning English but they tend to avoid communication in English since they have issue about that. The communication apprehension that the students have is contributed to the level of their anxiety in learning English which is in the moderate category.

## **2. Factors Contributes to Students' Anxiety**

Based on the observation, the students had good health and free from disease. Students who have this condition will easily feel tired, lethargic, and not enthusiastic and dizzy that indirectly contributed to their learning at class. They also have an interest and enthusiastic in learning English. However, only few students bring English dictionary and English textbook to facilitate them in learning so that their readiness in learning is still low. Readiness in learning is the very important for students to support the continuity of the learning process.

In interview, the teacher also mentioned the readiness as one factor that influence students' anxiety. She said:

*"“I think the factor that influences student anxiety is the readiness factor. Children nowadays, only some carry dictionaries and Alfalinks to translate. They prefer to translate via cellphone rather than translate through a dictionary, but at school they cannot use cellphones....”"*

Furthermore, the teacher gave opinion that family factor can influence students' anxiety if they were in village or city:

*"Because this school is located in the village, so for English, the family factor is not paying attention to English lessons, in contrast to the city where parents may provide English courses to their children...."*

She also said that due to the absence of English community outside the classroom, the anxiety can occurs. As she said:

*"Furthermore, the community factor, here there is no community or extracurricular specifically for English"*

From interviews, researcher can conclude that the factors that influence students' anxiety in learning English are readiness, family and community factors. Family factors are motivated by villagers who do not pay attention to English lessons and trust the school enough. In addition, community factors also influence students' anxiety in learning English. Students do not have a community outside of school to increase their knowledge of English and only research during English class hours at school.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

From the results of the study, it can be concluded that the level of anxiety in the school is mildly anxious. The aspect that is most experienced by students is from the aspect of understanding communication. Some students are anxious, nervous, and scared when they want to speak English. Additionally, the most influential internal factor is the readiness factor which only a few students have and carry an English dictionary. Meanwhile, the most influential external factor is family and the community factor. Students have no community outside of school to improve their knowledge of English and only study during English lesson hours at school.

Based on the results of this study, there are several suggestions that can be given. First, students should develop the confidence to speak in English to eliminate communication concerns. In addition, students are expected to be able to better prepare themselves in learning English by bringing an English dictionary to facilitate the translation process. Students are also expected to create groups with classmates to facilitate learning English together. The second suggestion is for English teachers, teachers are expected to be able to make the classroom atmosphere more comfortable to avoid anxiety in students when learning English.

#### **E. REFERENCE**

- Agustina, B.N., Hanafi, N., Nurtaat, L., & Sujana, I.M. (2023). Students' anxiety in learning English (A study at the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade of SMPN 6 Mataram). *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan*, 8(3), 1583-1588. <https://doi.org/10.29303/jipp.v8i3.1508>
- Apriani, Aryani, F. & Saman, A. (2011). Hubungan antara kecemasan belajar, motivasi belajar, dengan hasil belajar siswa sekolah menengah kejuruan selama study from home di Kabupaten Bantaeng. *Pinisi Journal of Education*, 1(2), 92-103.
- Brown, H.D. (2014). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*, 6<sup>th</sup> Edition. Longman: Pearson Education.
- Carlson, N. & Buskist, W. (1997). *Psychology: The Science of Behavior*. Needham Height: Viacom Company.

- Creswell, J.W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: Pearson.
- Halgin, R.P. & Whitbourne, S.K. (2007). *Abnormal Psychology: Clinical Perspectives on Psychological Disorder*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Boston: McGraw-Hill.
- Horwitz. (1986). *Foreign Language Anxiety; The Modern Language* (Vol. 70).
- Kusumastuti, D. (2020). Kecemasan dan prestasi akademik pada mahasiswa. *Analitika: Jurnal Magister Psikologi UMA*, 12(1), 22-33.
- Mahmuda, T. I. (2023). Students' anxiety in learning speaking. *English Language Study and Teaching Journal, ELASTE*, 4(2), 63-67.
- Marlia, Akbal, F.A., Nur, S., & McDonald, D. (2023). EFL students' speaking anxiety in Indonesian senior high school. *Lingua Didaktika*, 17(1), 71-81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.24036/ld.v17i1.121085>.
- Ormrod, J.E. (2011). *Educational Psychology: Developing Learner*. Boston: Pearson Education.
- Passer, M. & Ronald, S. (2009). *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behavior*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Sadiq, J.M. (2017). Anxiety in English language learning: A case study of English language learners in Saudi Arabia. *English Language Teaching*, 10(7), <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n7p1>.
- Siregar, F.R. & Perwana, W.S. (2020). Students' learning anxiety. *ENGLISH EDUCATION: English Journal for Teaching and Learning*, 8(1), 57-66.
- Syahrani, A., Mastiyah, I., Martina, M., Asfar, D.A., Cahranegara, P.A., Lubna, S., & Anwar, S. (2024). Students anxiety in speaking a foreign language: The case of eleventh graders. *The Journal of Education Culture and Society*, (1), 202-212.
- Yusuf, N.Y.C., Yulianto, S.W. & Maulida, I. (2023). Students' English speaking anxiety: Levels and Causes. *TLEMC: Teaching and Learning English in Multicultural Contexts*, 7(2), 141-150. <http://dx.doi.org/10.37058/tlemc.v7i2.8059>.