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## **FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY: AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT'S PERSPECTIVE ON INDONESIAN LANGUAGE LEARNING**

**Ukhtie Nantika Mena**

*Educational Psychology study program, SPs Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung,  
Indonesia*  
[utinantika@upi.edu](mailto:utinantika@upi.edu)

**Ahmad Juntika Nurihsan**

*Educational Psychology study program, SPs Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung,  
Indonesia*  
[juntikanurihsan@upi.edu](mailto:juntikanurihsan@upi.edu)

**Ilfiandra**

*Educational Psychology study program, SPs Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung,  
Indonesia*  
[ilfiandra@upi.edu](mailto:ilfiandra@upi.edu)

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### **Abstract**

*This study aims to explore the perspective on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) of an International student. A descriptive narrative is used to discover written and spoken responses from the student. An online survey was employed as secondary data to identify the level of FLCA among six UPI international students. A student with the highest score volunteered to be interviewed. Several symptoms were found; lack of concentration, excessive worry, fear, unwanted thoughts, and sweating. The results showed that difficulties to understand lecturers' correction, presentation, and fear of getting left behind are three major causes of his*

*anxiety. For further research, the interactions between international students and materials, lecturers, and peers will be valuable findings in the scope of the study.*

### **Keywords**

FLCA, Language Anxiety, International Students

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## **1. Introduction**

The number of scholarships given by the Indonesian government for the exchange program is increasing. Not only for Indonesian students but also for students from other countries who want to study in Indonesia. As one of the public universities in Indonesia, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI) supports the government by facilitating International students. By 2019, 126 international students were listed as active students. They are coming from various countries taking various program from short courses to doctoral program. (Ridha, 2019).

The critical problem found in international students studying in UPI is a complex challenge in classroom interaction which use Bahasa as the language of instruction. Gap after gap is faced by international students. Located in West Java, not only Bahasa Indonesia, Sundanese as the local language frequently appears in classroom interaction. The gap is even further due to the low level of English language proficiency of native Indonesian. In the English Proficiency Index, Indonesia was categorized as a low proficiency band category with a score of 52.15, lower than the average regional score. (Valentina: 2017).

Thus, it can be said that language is one of the significant predictors in ethnic group membership, acculturation, or assimilation level. In the academic world, language skills determine the success of a student in interacting in the classroom. Conversely, language deficiency and language gaps are causes of failure of students in interacting and socializing. (Rosa & Flores: 2015, Male: 2018, Galmiche: 2017, Gamlichie: 2018).

The language gap has a significant potency to lead students to classroom anxiety. (Dewaele, 2017; Bensalem, 2019; Rosa & Flores; 2015). From educational and psychological perspectives, Anxiety has long been found as a major obstacle in learning. Horwitz et al (1986) have developed a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) that helps researchers to examine the anxiety levels of students in the foreign language classroom. Foreign language anxiety is defined as “the feelings of tension and apprehension specifically associated with

second language context.” (MacIntyre and Gardner: 1991). When it comes to speaking anxiety, students have a higher risk to be accounted for academic failure due to their inability to convey their ideas appropriately. In a less extreme case, classroom anxiety can be a paramount obstacle for students to gain academic achievements. (Tuncer & Dogan, 2015)

A study on FLCA in English as a foreign language has reached a sufficient number. The majority of previous related studies have discussed factors, symptoms, impacts until strategies to deal with foreign language classroom anxiety in general, where students are all non-native speakers. The deficiency was found in the context of other foreign languages, where the student was the only non-native speaker and was dealing with local students. Besides, to support multicultural education, other languages should be taken into account to avoid *language supremacy* – a condition where a language is considered more superior than other languages (Alim & Django; 2015).

Therefore, this study focuses on Bahasa Indonesia as a foreign language for an International student in UPI. A list of active international students was gained from the Office of International Education and Relations UPI. Six students participated in a survey and the student with the highest score in anxiety level agreed to volunteer in the in-depth interview. He was considered as the most suitable participant due to the high level of anxiety and the fact that he is taking the Indonesian Language Education study program.

## **2. Literature Review**

The current of globalization that is getting stronger has an impact not only on economic or political aspects but also in the scope of universities. Higher education internationalization can be interpreted as a condition in which the goals, functions, and delivery of education are globally integrated. Important aspects of the internationalization process include curriculum development and innovation, student and lecturer exchanges, development of international standard learning facilities, and infrastructure to research and publications carried out by research teams between countries (Seliana, 2019).

Amidst numerous challenges faced to accommodate the internalization, the writers focused on challenges faced by international students. Some challenges are commonly felt by international students. Khanal & Gaulee (2019) divided these challenges into three categories; pre-departure, post-departure, and post-study.

After arriving, the challenges encountered by international students are language, financial and cultural adjustments. The uncertainty of the future and paperwork became the main challenges after they graduated from university. Similar results were found by Chetanath et al. (2016) which states that language, financial problems, assimilation, issues of religion, and identity are challenges for international students.

This finding was confirmed by Cooper (2015) who studied Asian international students in New Zealand. Socio-cultural differences have a psychological impact on Asian international students who have collective cultural patterns and traditional family-centered patterns. Cooper said that it takes international students about 6 months to adapt to cultural differences. Language is found as a paramount challenge faced by international students. In Indonesia, with the situation that English is used as a foreign language, not a second language and the level of English proficiency in the low band category (Valentina 2018), the language gap created is even greater for international students who also come from non-English speaking countries such as China and the European Union.

As explained by Zhu (2016) who examined Chinese students studying in Germany. Of the Chinese students he studied, Zhu shared that whenever asked about the difficulty they felt most felt, they would answer very confidently and quickly that it was German. Lack of German language proficiency leads Chinese students to communication difficulties and academic adjustment, difficulty understanding terminology, and difficulty relating newly acquired knowledge to what they already have.

Horwitz, et al. (1986) has found the symptoms of foreign language anxiety and formulated them into the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety scale. Worries about being left behind, fear when speaking a foreign language in class, to trembling when appointed to answer without preparation. The symptoms described by Horwitz include physical and cognitive symptoms that can arise in international students where they have to listen to and speak foreign languages in the classroom.

### **3. Purpose and Method**

This study aims to describe the level of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among UPI international students and to explore student's perspectives towards it. This research was carried out using a qualitative design, as explained in Creswell (2012) that the central

phenomenon becomes the main concept. It relies on the research problem of language shame-anxiety that requires exploration and understanding of the complexity of the problem under the study. Using the constructivist paradigm, the research is carried out to understand personal perspectives.

An online survey was employed to identify the level of FLCA among SPs UPI international students. An in-depth interview then was conducted to clarify student's responses on the survey, explore sources of anxiety, experiences, feelings, and thoughts. A student with the highest score volunteered to be interviewed. The interview was conducted to explore his responses to the survey, experiences, feelings, and thoughts about FLCA. A descriptive narrative is used to discover his written and spoken responses. Informed consent including an explanation of procedure and confidentiality had signed before conducting the in-depth interview.

The interview was conducted within one and a half hours through a zoom meeting. Face to face meeting was canceled due to quarantine of COVID-19, so it had to be done in distance. The guidelines and questions were screens shared so the participant can get the message or question. The researcher took notes on the same page so that participants can see on the screen and directly clarify when it was needed. There were four parts including the participant's background, clarification on the previous survey, open-ended questions related to his experience in FLCA and the last part was an exploration of the most anxious moment and additional thoughts and ideas related to the language gap and FLCA.

#### **4. Data Collection and Analysis**

Primary data was collected by doing an in-depth interview with one international student who got the highest score in the FLCA survey. A semi-structured interview protocol was constructed as a guideline. The secondary data were collected using the adapted questionnaire from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al (1986). The responses were given by the respondent then were explored in the interview session to clarify the truthfulness and discover the situation that was experienced by the international students more deeply. The data then were analyzed through a set of procedures; data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusion.

#### **4.1 Participants**

Six international students studying in the various major of the School of Postgraduate studies UPI volunteered for participating in FLCA online survey. The students are taking Art Education, Education Administration, English Language Education, and Indonesian Language Education. The participants are coming from different countries; Ukraine, Morocco, China, Afghanistan, Thailand, and the Philippines. For the in-depth interview, the student with the highest score was invited. N (initial) volunteered to be interviewed. He comes from China and is taking the Indonesian Language Education study program.

#### **5. Ethical Code and Truthfulness**

Before conducting the in-depth interview, informed consent was provided to make sure the informant gained sufficient information about the research including procedure and confidentiality. S/he can make the voluntary decision “to” or “not to” participate in the research study. The interview was done through a zoom meeting and the researcher was sharing the screen of interview protocol so that the interviewee can see the questions. The answers given were directly written in the form that was being screen shared so the interviewee can clarify if s/he found an information gap. After the interview, the researcher let the interviewee read the form and make sure that there was no misinformation.

#### **6. Findings**

##### **6.1 Symptoms**

N (Initial), the Student with the highest score on the survey of anxiety level was interviewed. There are three parts of the in-depth interview, the first part includes N’s profile background; educational background, Indonesia and English language proficiencies, why N chose UPI, and other related information about his study experiences. The second part is clarification on the previous online survey, additional explanation and stories were added to further exploration. The third part consists of clarification on his statement about what makes him most anxious; what he felt, how the lecturer and peers responded to that moment, how he overcome the situation, and additional thoughts on overall study experience.

Having a dream to teach the Indonesian language in China, N (initial) came to Indonesia to study Indonesian Language. N has many experiences in Indonesia before starting study at UPI.

He first came to Indonesia for an exchange program in 2012. Even before coming to Indonesia, he has been familiar with the Indonesian language since he worked as a staff at University and dealt with administrations for Indonesian students studying in China. The Indonesian language proficiency was also strengthened after taking Indonesian Language and Literature before continuing his study at UPI. It can be said that he is an active user of Bahasa. Also, in answering the questions in an in-depth interview, Bahasa Indonesia frequently appeared. Knowing the background, it seems reasonable to assume N has no serious problem with his study. Turns out, it is not easy to cope with the language gap he finds in classroom interactions. He got the highest score (4.06 out of 5) among the other respondents.

Based on the fact gained, some questions arise. What makes him got a high level of FLCA despite his proficiency and lot of experience, how his surroundings act upon him until how he copes with the situation. There is a misalignment since it was found that there are several symptoms that were extremely felt and felt by N, which are:

**A. The Extremely Felt Symptoms:**

1. Keep thinking that other students are better than him
2. Getting upset when he does not understand lecturers' correction or feedback
3. Often find difficulties during tests
4. Getting so nervous that he forgot things he learned
5. Feeling worried to be left behind
6. Getting nervous when he does not understand every word the lecture says.
7. Feeling anxious even if he is well prepared for the class
8. Feeling not confident when speaking in the Indonesian language
9. Feeling more confused the more he studies for the test

**B. The Felt Symptoms:**

1. Getting nervous when lecturers ask questions which he has not prepared in advance
2. Feeling worried about making mistakes in class
3. Finding himself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course during the class
4. Feeling worried about the consequences of failing the course
5. Start to panic when he has to speak without preparation in class
6. Feeling pressure to prepare very well for the class

7. Feeling not sure and not relax in class
8. Trembling when going to be called on in class
9. Feeling embarrassed to volunteer answers in class
10. Heart pounding when called on in class
11. Getting nervous and confuse when speaking in class

In the clarification part, N explained that he realized that he was in the local class so the other students were supposed to be better for they are all native Indonesians. He got supportive classmates, they always try to help. But the language gap is far, N sometimes still cannot understand what they are trying to say. It is caused by the fact that his classmates cannot speak the Chinese language at all and most have low proficiency in the English language.

## **6.2 Major Factors**

The previous survey provides information on what are the causes of FLCA and the symptoms that are felt and felt by the International students. These are the top five statements from the responses:

1. I get upset when I don't understand what the lecturer is correcting.
2. It would bother me to take more classes.
3. I usually at hardships during tests.
4. I understand why other international students get so upset over the classes.
5. I got nervous when the lecturer asks a question that I haven't prepared in advance.

The respondents were also given an open-ended question in the last part of the survey.

### **What makes you most anxious in the classroom?**

*"When the lecturer starts using Sundanese"*

*"Presenting assignments for the class"*

*"Presentation"*

*"When they keep speaking Bahasa Indonesia inside the classroom from A to Z..."*

#### **6.2.1 Lecture's Correction and Explanation**

N can understand lecturers' explanations in general, especially when they explain theories. The theories are more likely understandable and he can refer to textbooks. What makes him confuse usually the stories or examples given by the lecturers.

*"They explain a little bit of theory and continued by stories to elaborate the explanation. It makes me hard to absorb the most important information. I cannot fully understand each word"*



*because it is not delivered by my first language. Sometimes keywords are missed and it is hard to catch specific words.”*

The fact that N felt hard to absorb the most important information, cannot fully understand, and miss some keywords can be categorized as symptoms of a stressful situation where he cannot set aside worry and restlessness for he tried to catch all words and translate it one by one to his first language. This may cause a problem in the cognitive process that leads to a lack of concentration, racing, or unwanted thoughts. The process of understanding requires more effort when it comes to Sundanese language that frequently appears in class. N needs more steps to translate the Sundanese into the Indonesian language before his brain can catch the meaning of his first language.

### **6.2.2 Presentation**

Another biggest challenge for N is presentation. There was a moment when the presentation brought N to his most anxious condition. It was when he delivered a presentation and found lecturers or some students were not attentively listened to him. Then some negative thoughts popped up, *“am I making myself unclear?”*, *“Are they not interested in my presentation?”*. Again, racing and unwanted thoughts frequently appear at the moment. The situation sometimes leads N to some physical reaction like a faster heartbeat or sweating. In presenting, what made N had negative thoughts was finding his classmates or lecture did not pay full attention to him. He started to assume and put more unwanted thoughts about his presentation. N said that usually when his classmates or lecturer start to look away, see their phones laptops, or window, keep being busy on themselves, he started to think that his presentation was not interesting.

### **6.2.3 The Fear of Getting Left Behind**

It was even harder to face the following situation when he could not answer some questions and he was compared by another Chinese student who studied before him.

*“Yes, I have my own target to finish study on time. It somehow gives a burden to keep being told about another Chinese student who finished his study in 3 years. It makes me feel pressure to prepare very well for the class.”*

From this sentence, it can be seen that N not only has the fear of getting left behind by the existing classmates, but also another Chinese student that was being compared with him. Even if he has his target, but being told that someone is faster or better than he somehow gave him

pressure. It actually needs a further observation to see the interaction in a real context; how was the lecture's intonation and choice of words as well as facial expression to interpret the message.

#### **6.2.4 Different Styles of Language**

In speaking, he is unconfident to use Bahasa because he feels he speaks too formal. He learned more about formal than informal language. Meanwhile, classroom interaction is not fully conducted in formal language. As he stated, often lecturers elaborate the theory with stories or jokes that contain much informal language or strange words that cannot be found in the dictionary. Not to mention outside classroom interaction which is more casual, slang expressions and Sundanese language frequently appear. It is hard for him to keep up with the conversation and he feels people speak faster. In the classroom, even formal language is used more frequently, N still finds himself not sure and not relax. Dealing with a spontaneous question and answer session, different cultures and systems lead N to feel anxious.

#### **6.2.5 N's Coping Strategy**

Despite the anxious moments he experienced, N could handle the situation. He was embarrassed but let go of the feelings afterward. He perceived himself as a foreign language learner among native Indonesians so he tried to accept mistakes as a normal thing in the process of learning. Mistakes give opportunities to learn more. When he starts to panic, smile or laugh can help him ease the negative feelings in the classroom where the possibility to release the emotions is limited.

## **7. Discussion**

The findings reveal that difficulties to understand lecturers' correction, presentation, and fear of getting left behind are three major causes of N's anxiety. Not only in N's case, from the result of the FLCA survey, but the presentation is also on the top list among the other international students. No wonder, even doing a presentation with the first language has long been many people's fear. According to a study conducted by Dwyer & Davidson (2012), public speaking was selected more often as a common fear than any other fear, including death.

The fact arises another issue on what makes public speaking -in this case, presentation becomes so frightening. Urban (2015) sees the fear of public speaking as a normal condition, knowing the fact that humans are obsessed with what other people think of themselves. It makes sense that in the classroom situation, presentation becomes students' collective fear.

The findings also highlight that social support is a complex phenomenon. At some points, words can effectively help one to feel motivated. But at some other points, even with the same good intention, words can decrease one's motivation. Even worse, it may cause negative feelings such as shame, embarrassment, or anxiety. It depends on specific situations and sources. In N's context, being told about another Chinese student who finished his study in 3 years by his lecturer led N's to interpret that he was being compared and gave him pressure.

Lecturers' correction is also placed as a major source of foreign language classroom anxiety. Several previous studies have brought up corrective feedback to be investigated. Rassaei (2015) found that for high-anxiety learners, recasts corrective feedback gives more significant benefit rather than metalinguistic corrective feedback. Recasts is defined as reformulates all part of the incorrect word or phrase, to show the correct form without explicitly identifying error (Lee in Bing-Jie, 2016). In learning language elements, recasts can be used as one of the strategies to treat high-anxiety learners. But in non-linguistic subjects such as pedagogy and other subjects, both lecturers and students need to find a suitable way to bridge the language gap.

## **8. Conclusion**

Based on the results, difficulties to understand lecturers' correction, presentation and the fear of getting left behind might be significantly related to international students. Therefore, universities especially technical service units for international students should be more aware to assist them in dealing with the language gap. It is important to check prospective international students' language proficiency in both English and Indonesian language to make sure they can do basic survival needs to interact in and outside class. Lecturers and other students should be encouraged to respect and give recognition to the presence of international students by using expressions that can be understood by everyone in the classroom. The fact that this study is limited to the foreign language anxiety of an international student, the writers recommend further studies to discover other predictors of anxiety. Other psychological aspects such as shame or disappointment will be beneficial to be investigated.

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