

## Students' anxiety in learning English and their attitude towards English language

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to find the correlation students' anxiety in learning English and their attitude towards English language, the simultaneous effect of the factors of anxiety (i.e. communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and anxiety of English classes) on attitude, and which factors of anxiety best predicted attitude. A combination of anxiety and attitude questionnaire consisted of 39 items were distributed to 168 students of 11th grade in a selected SMAN Balikpapan. Based on statistical analysis, the results were: (1) there was a significant negative correlation between the two variables, (2) communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and anxiety of English classes did not affect attitude simultaneously, and (3) none of the factors of anxiety best predicted attitude. It is concluded that there are other anxiety factors that affect attitude; therefore, it is recommended that further studies be conducted to see other factors that may affect attitude toward English language.

Keywords: Anxiety, attitude

### Introduction

Anxiety is one of the problems felt by almost all human beings in every aspect of life. It never chooses certain people. In general term, Čiček (2014) defined anxiety as the "widespread concept, a phenomenon which affects people universally, no matter what age, gender or race" (p. 7). As anxiety is generally defined as a widespread concept; it may emerge in every situation the people face in life. One of them is academic anxiety. Cassidy (as cited in Trang, 2012) stated that academic anxiety is a set of anxieties as the result of formula integration that the students encounter in school. Beside the many types of anxiety that the students face, foreign language anxiety can be considered one of the most dominant types of anxiety—specifically, the students' anxiety in learning English as a foreign language in the classroom. Park (2012) divided foreign language anxiety based on Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) theory into four components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and anxiety of English classes.

The first is communication apprehension. Communication apprehension is an issue in communicating with others. Horwitz et al.

stated that "the special communication apprehension permeating foreign language learning derives from the personal knowledge that one will almost certainly have difficulty understanding others and making oneself understood" (p. 127). The second one is test anxiety. Test anxiety is the anxiety that the students experience when taking an academic test. Joy (2013) classified test anxiety into three: pre-test, during test, and post-test. The third factor is fear of negative evaluation. Oktaviani, Radjab, and Ardi (2013) stated that "in a foreign language context, negative evaluation may come from teachers and peers because in FL learning, continuously [sic] evaluation is needed" (p. 54). The last is anxiety of English classes. Anxiety of English classes is about the students' feeling or thoughts about English classroom generally.

Generally, attitude is a reflection of the thoughts or feelings of someone. However, İnal et al. (as cited in Alkaff, 2013) stated that "attitude refers to . . . feelings and shapes . . . behaviors towards learning" (p. 107). This means that attitude plays an important role in learning context. Dweik, Nofal, and Qawasmeh (2014) in their study implied that attitude can be positive or negative. In order to be successful in English language learning, students should have more

positive attitude because “a positive attitude brings out greater overall effort on the part of language learners and typically results in greater success in terms of global language proficiency and competence in specific language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing” (Bilash, 2009, para. 3).

Anxiety and attitude may be considered a big issue in learning English especially for the countries where English is not the main language. One issue with anxiety is that it can be a main hurdle in language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). In addition to that, Demir (2015) believed that in learning new language, most of the students suffer from a great anxiety. That is why in English as a foreign language country, many students may be burdened with anxiety. It is reported that students with language anxiety is increasing because “second/foreign language learning can sometimes be a traumatic experience” (Zheng, 2008, p. 1). In terms of attitude, people can show different attitude depending on the nature, such as foreign or second language (Al Mamun, Rahman, Rahman, & Hossain, 2012). Moreover, Baker, as cited in Al Mansour (2016), stated that attitude is a complicated concept. Language situations may have both positive and negative attitudes which is difficult to determine. For that reason, many researchers from second or foreign language countries made anxiety and attitude their research variables.

There were several studies conducted to find the correlation between anxiety in learning English and attitude towards English language. Most of those studies found that the correlation was significantly negative. However, in Turkey, Büyükkarcı (2016) found a different result. It is shown that high level of anxiety did not necessarily make the students have low level of attitude. Further, several studies aimed to find which of the anxiety factors was the most anxiety-provoking factor among the English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners. The results were different. Hassani and Rajab (2012), Javid (2014), and Tsiplakides and Keramida as cited in Batiha, Noor, and Mustaffa (2014) found that communication apprehension was the factor that provoked anxiety the most. While, Zhao as also cited in Batiha et al. found that fear of negative evaluation was the most anxiety-provoking factor. In Indonesia, Pramuktiyono and

Wardhono (2016) found that the students who had communication apprehension and test anxiety were likely to consider that English language was hard.

Although there were several studies conducted to find the correlation between anxiety in learning English and attitude towards English language and which anxiety factors best predicted attitude, the results were still conflicting. Hence, more studies regarding these variables are needed. This study aimed to find the correlation between students’ anxiety in learning English and their attitude towards English language, the simultaneous effect of communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and anxiety of English classes on attitude, and the variable best predicts attitude.

## **Method**

This study was a quantitative study using descriptive, correlational, and causal designs.

## **Respondents**

By using convenience sampling method, a number of 168 students were selected. They were 11th grade students who were enrolled in a selected Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri in Balikpapan. The respondents were divided into seven classes: three science classes (XI IPA 2, XI IPA 3, XI IPA 4) and four social classes (XI IPS 2, XI IPS 4, XI IPS 5, XI IPS 6).

## **Instrument**

To measure the anxiety of the students, a questionnaire by Park (2012) was adapted. Park’s questionnaire was developed based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986). The original scale consists of 33 items and is comprised of three constructs: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Later, Park added anxiety of English classes because he attempted to “determine the underlying constructs that best represent the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986)” (p. 210). The original questionnaire consists of 15 communication apprehension items, 3 test anxiety items, 6 fear of negative evaluation

items, and 9 anxiety of English classes items. To meet the purpose of the study, the term language and foreign language class appearing in the original FLCAS were consistently replaced with the word English and English class by the researchers based on Park (2012). The reliability of Park's questionnaire was .941 which is higher than the accepted coefficient score  $\alpha = .70$ .

To measure the attitude of the students, a 12-item questionnaire of Dweik et al. (2014) was adapted. In this questionnaire, the word first language was replaced with the word Bahasa Indonesia to suit the context.

The questionnaire was translated into Bahasa Indonesia. Three English Department lecturers were asked to validate the translation. The validation showed that there were some items that had to be split and removed. The final result of this content validation was 35 items in total for anxiety questionnaire containing 15 items of communication apprehension, 3 items of test anxiety, 6 items of fear of negative evaluation, and 11 items of anxiety of English classes, while there were 10 items left for the attitude questionnaire. A total of 45 items were used for this study.

## Results

The correlation between both variables was computed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The result showed that  $r = -.203$  with a  $p = .008 < \alpha = .05$  which means that there was a negative significant correlation between the students' anxiety in learning English and their attitude towards English language.

This study had passed three tests before doing multiple regression for the last two questions. The first test was assumption test to find whether this study fits the standard number of distribution. According to Central Limit Theorem in Mordkoff (2016), "as long as the sample is based on 30 or more observations, the sampling distribution of the mean can be safely assumed to be normal" (p. 3). The statements above prove that if the number of respondents of the study is 30 or more, the sampling distribution is considered normal. This study involved a

number of 168 respondents, so it can be confirmed that this study passed the assumption test for sampling distribution. The second test is multicollinearity test. The result showed that all the factors of anxiety (i.e. communication apprehension = 3.525, test anxiety = 2.132, fear of negative evaluation = 2.327, and anxiety of English classes = 2.800) belonged to the standard score of  $VIF < 10$  (O'Brien, 2007). Therefore, this study is eligible for regression analysis. And the last test was heteroscedasticity test. Gelfand (2015) stated "when the condition of homoscedasticity is satisfied, the residuals should be randomly and uniformly scattered around the horizontal line at 0" (p. 6). Figure 1 shows that the plots are not forming a shape or randomly yet evenly distributed around 0. This means that homoscedasticity is present, and the regression analysis can be used.

Next result regarding the simultaneous effect of communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and anxiety of English classes on attitude. The model summary showed that the  $R^2 = .044$ . The closer the score to 1, the stronger its correlation is. However, the result shows that the score was .044. It means that the correlation between communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, anxiety of English classes and attitude was very weak (Moore, Notz, & Flinger as cited in Mindrila & Balentyne, 2017). If the score is converted into percentage, the result shows that the  $R^2$  score was 4.4%. This implies that communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and anxiety of English classes accounted only for 4.4% on the attitude. The rest of 95.6% was accounted by other variables other than the mentioned variables.

The ANOVA test showed that the significant value was  $.120 > \alpha = .05$ . It means that communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and anxiety of English classes did not have simultaneous effect on attitude.

The last result is showed in Table 1. It is found that all values of anxiety factors were above  $\alpha = .05$  (.878, .533, .640, and .299) which means that they were not significant. Thus, none of the anxiety factors best predicted attitude toward English language.

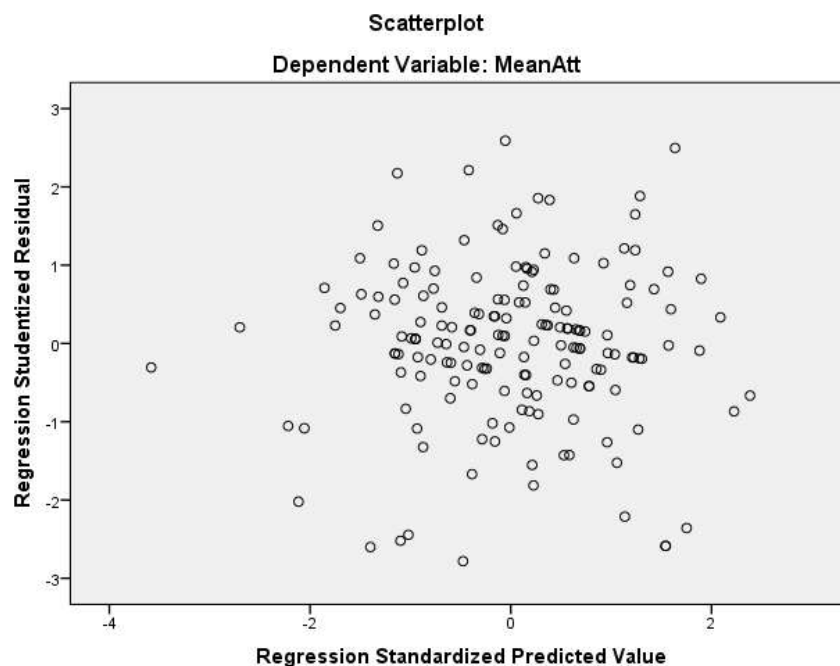


Table 1 Best Predictor

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients t		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	3.865	.254		15.216	.000
Communication	.022	.140	.022	.153	.878
Apprehension	.022	.140	.022	.153	.878
1 Fear of Negative Evaluation	-.071	.113	-.073	-.625	.533
Test Anxiety	-.047	.099	-.052	-.469	.640
Anxiety of English Classes	-.133	.128	-.134	-1.042	.299

## Discussion

In 2011, Hussain et al. studied the same variables to 720 of 10th grade students in Pakistan. The result showed that there was a negative significant correlation between the two variables. Two years after this study, Liu and Chen (2013) conducted a study with the same variables to students in Taiwan. The result showed that anxiety had a negative and significant relationship with attitude. In the same year in Malaysia, Jain and Sidhu (2013) tried to find the relationship between anxiety and attitude. Unsurprisingly, the result was the same with the previous studies. The relationship between anxiety and attitude was significant but negative. But recently in 2016, Büyükkarcı

investigated the same variables. The result was different with the other studies. He found that in 107 students in Turkey, there was no significant correlation. He stated that if the students have high level of foreign language anxiety, it does not mean that they have low level of attitude towards English. Therefore, he recommended the researchers or future researchers study more about these variables in different context or circumstances.

Lastly, the question about the simultaneous effect of anxiety factors on attitude and the best predictor. The result showed that there was no best predictor determine. The reason that there was no best predictor of anxiety factors on attitude may be due to the limited number of the

factors provided. This study used four anxiety factors (i.e. communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and anxiety of English classes). Dravone (2009) stated that the predictors can be significant if more variables are added. In doing regression, the minimum number suggested for the independent variables is two (Austin & Steyerberg, 2015). Even so, Grotenhuis and Thijs (2015) suggested that adding more variables may result in more interactions between variables. This suggestion can be applied to any researches using regression.

### Conclusions and suggestions

The results showed that there was a significant negative correlation between anxiety and attitude. When the students feel anxious in learning English, they will produce an unfavorable, and vice versa. It can be concluded that this is a good kind of correlation. Further, the result showed that the anxiety factors (i.e. communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and anxiety of English classes) did not affect the attitude simultaneously. It can be concluded that even though anxiety had a significant negative correlation with attitude, the factors of anxiety did not significantly affect attitude. Lastly, the result showed that the best predictor of attitude could not be determined. It can be concluded that there may be other anxiety-related factors not part in this study that may have possible effect on attitude.

One of the limitation of this study was the limited number of the respondents. It is recommended for other researchers to add more respondents to have more significant results. Lastly, none of the anxiety factors (i.e. communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and anxiety of English classes) best predicted attitude. The recommendation is that further research be done with other anxiety-related factors that may have effect on attitude beside the ones mentioned in this study.

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