



# Students' Anxiety in Learning English (A Case Study at Eleventh Grade of SMK Al Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru)

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate types of anxiety experienced by the students in learning English and factors that contribute to students' anxiety in learning English in the Eleventh grade of SMK Al Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru. This is a qualitative descriptive research with a case study. The study was employed through observations, interviews, and documentation in data collecting. The data was analyzed through descriptive analysis. The result of the research showed that there were two types of anxiety were experienced by the students of Eleventh grade of SMK Al Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru in learning English, that were state anxiety and state anxiety. In term of causes there were three causes that contribute to students' anxiety in learning English; firstly, was communication apprehension. Secondly was fear of negative evaluation. Thirdly is lack of vocabulary and grammar.

**Keywords:** Students' Anxiety, Learning English

## INTRODUCTION

According to LeDoux (2015), the term "anxiety" in English, along with its counterparts in European languages (e.g., *angoisse* in French, *angoscia* in Italian, *angustia* in Spanish, *angst* in German, and *angst* in Danish), originates from the Latin word *anxietas*. This Latin term, in turn, finds its roots in the ancient Greek term *angh*. While the Greeks occasionally used *angh* to convey a sense of being burdened or troubled (i.e., anguished), its primary usage pertained to physical sensations, such as tightness, constriction, or discomfort. For instance, the medical condition "*angina*," characterized by chest pains related to heart disease, is derived from the Greek term *angh*. Anxiety is derived from the word "anxious". The term anxious is an adjective that denotes a sense of being apprehensive or nervous about something, according to the 9th edition of the Oxford Dictionary. Naturally, the word anxiety has a negative connotation when seen in this explanation. On the other hand, the term anxious has a positive connotation, since it denotes a strong desire for something or a strong want to do something.

LeDoux (2015) asserts that anxiety is a commonplace aspect of existence; there is consistently something to be concerned about, anticipate with unease, feel uneasy over, or experience stress about. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that not all instances of anxiety carry the same level of intensity. According to Csóti (2003), anxiety can be a beneficial aspect of a student's development. Mild anxiety can motivate her to reach her maximum potential by making her feel threatened by rivals and afraid of failure. Adrenaline and the stress hormone can help the students perform well in tests by activating her brain to function at top speed. Nevertheless, heightened levels of anxiety are likely to exert an epiphenomenal impact on academic performance by disrupting the information processing system (Nelson & Harwood, 2010).

The use of English as a communication means in the international community has risen at a rapid pace. This has a significant impact on how English is taught at schools. Teaching English has become a fad in Indonesia, with pupils required to study the language. English teachers begin to use a variety of teaching strategies to give pupils a variety of basic language skills, such as the capacity to listen, speak, read, and write. However, mastering English is a difficult task. The capacity to communicate in English is a difficult skill to master. Students must be able to master specific criteria in order to master it. These criteria include language knowledge as well as basic knowledge, as well as speaking skills in a variety of contexts and scenarios in which pupils must have self-confidence, self-respect, and self-motivation.

Horwitz et.al. (1986) posit that the process of acquiring proficiency in the English language is distinctive, as students are compelled to communicate in a language, they have not fully mastered. Horwitz identifies three components of foreign language anxiety, which include communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Those experiencing communication apprehension feel uneasy expressing themselves in the target language, particularly in speaking, due to limited language proficiency. Students with a fear of negative evaluation perceive language errors as a threat to their image, potentially leading to negative judgments from teachers or peers, rather than viewing mistakes as a natural part of the learning process. Consequently, they tend to be reserved and hesitant to participate in language activities (Ely, 1986). Students grappling with test anxiety perceive the foreign language learning process, especially oral production, as a test scenario rather than an opportunity for skill enhancement and improved communication. The self-confidence, anxiety, and mastery of the subject matter when speaking in front of the class were among the non-linguistic elements that were

considered as speaking performance barriers (Amrullah, 2015).

According to Li, et.al. (2023), cognitive as well as affective capacities influence basic English skills, like speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Krashen (in Mahdalena & Muslem, 2021) also stated that affective can help slow down the process of mastering students' English skills in the course of acquiring English as a second language. Students who possess lower levels of negative affective states tend to acquire more language knowledge than their counterparts with elevated negative affective levels. Consequently, the success of students in learning is significantly influenced by affective factors. Recent mental health surveys indicate that today's teenagers and young adults are experiencing unprecedented levels of anxiety (Prasad, et.al., 2023). Surveys reveal that 70 percent of teenagers identify anxiety and depression as a major problem among their peers, with an additional 26 percent considering it a minor issue (Flannery, 2018). In Indonesia, data from *Riskedas (riset kesehatan dasar)* 2018 in Rokom (2021) showed that more than 19 million people aged over 15 years experienced mental emotional disorders, and more than 12 million people aged over 15 years experienced depression.

The symptoms experienced by anxious students learning English are essentially identical to those associated with any specific anxiety. They encounter feelings of apprehension, concern, and even intense fear. Their ability to focus becomes compromised, they may become forgetful, experience sweating, and have palpitations. Additionally, they engage in avoidance actions such as skipping classes and delaying completion of homework (Horwitz et.al., 1986). They discovered that students who were anxious attempted fewer interpretative messages than students who were comfortable. Horwitz further mentioned that learners experiencing anxiety frequently encounter difficulties in discerning the sounds and structures embedded in the message of the target language. Furthermore, he said that many students didn't understand of what the teacher is explaining in extended English spoken. Researchers who conduct their studies in their native language have discovered that students who experience greater levels of anxiety when writing shorter compositions tend to write and perform less effectively than their less anxious peers (Horwitz et.al., 1986). In the context of extended use of a second language, the phenomenon of foreign language anxiety frequently manifests itself, in particular during testing situations. Students often demonstrate a familiarity with specific grammar points when discussing them with counselors or while preparing for a test or an oral exercise. However, students tend to "forget" these points when they are required to recall and apply multiple grammar rules simultaneously. This issue can also manifest as persistent "careless" errors in spelling or syntax. It is typically after the test that the student realizes they knew the correct answer but were hindered by nervousness. If the student becomes aware that they made preventable errors during the test despite knowing the correct answers, it can lead to a cycle where anxiety and errors reinforce each other.

Additionally, excessive studying is a connected occurrence. Students who excessively worry about their

performance might experience heightened anxiety when they make mistakes, leading them to try to compensate by increasing their study time. It's understandable that they feel irritated when their compulsive attempts do not result in increased grades. On the other hand, anxious students may adopt the opposite approach by avoiding studying altogether and, in certain instances, even skipping classes in an attempt to alleviate their anxiety (Horwitz et.al., 1986). He also stated that the student's tension and frustration in the classroom can be influenced by specific beliefs about language learning. It is worth mentioning that some students hold the belief that nothing should be uttered in the foreign language unless it can be said accurately, and that it is unacceptable to guess the meaning of an unfamiliar foreign word. These beliefs can create anxiety because students are required to communicate in the second language before achieving complete fluency. Additionally, even exceptional language learners make mistakes or encounter instances where they forget words, necessitating occasional guessing. Such beliefs are likely to generate anxiety due to the perceived expectations and challenges associated with language learning.

The researcher wants to know what makes students of eleventh grade in SMK Al-Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru feel anxiety in learning English, based on the following reason that has been explained above. To follow up such phenomena, the researcher would like to conduct research entitled: "Students' anxiety in Learning English (A Case Study at the 11<sup>th</sup> Grade of SMK Al- Istiqomah NWDI Mamben Baru)".

## RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a qualitative research method, recognizing the two fundamental types of research – qualitative and quantitative. The choice of a qualitative approach was based on the nature of the phenomena under investigation, which required qualitative data. In qualitative research, investigators explore phenomena in their natural settings, aiming to comprehend and interpret the observed occurrences (Creswell as cited in Sugiyono, 2017). In this study, the data were subjected to descriptive analysis, a fundamental technique in qualitative research. Descriptive analysis involves summarizing and interpreting data to attain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The researcher employed this technique to collect, organize, and present the data. It's important to note that qualitative methods, including descriptive analysis, do not involve calculations or statistical procedures. The data analysis process in this study encompassed data reduction, data display, and data verification, as illustrated in the outlined scheme.

The researcher employed purposive sampling techniques to select participants for this study, intending to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling is 'used to select respondents that are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information' (Kelly in Campbell et.al., 2020) and is a way of identifying and selecting cases that will use limited research resources effectively (Palinkas et.al., 2015). The study's population comprised all eleventh-grade students at SMK Al-Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru. In this class, there

were 10 students which consisted of 4 men and 6 women. Ten students in the eleventh grade were selected to participate in this study as respondents. This study utilized three types of techniques of data collection. They were observations, interview and documentation.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the observation, the researcher discovered that when required to speak in front of the class, most of the students experienced anxiety. The students still appear nervous and scared to speak when they step forward to do so in front of the class. Some of them appear anxious and have forgotten what they were about to say.

The researcher makes a table of the aspects that cause students' anxiety in learning English.

**Table 1.** Aspects caused students' anxiety

Aspects caused to anxiety	Sign
Communication Apprehensions	Lowering the face while speaking, lowering the voice, lack of eye contact, and stammering.
Fear of Negative Evaluation	Students avoid making eye contact with teachers and disregard their instructions to practice.
Ridiculed by others	The students start losing concentration, wriggling, lowering their voices, trembling, sweating, and either smiling or laughing to cover their anxiety
Lack of vocabulary and grammar	The students still remain silent when the teacher asks them using English. They don't understand the teacher's explanation.

As indicated in the table above, it is evident that students experience anxiety in specific situations. Particularly, they express apprehension when the teacher initiates speaking activities, such as speaking in front of the class or responding to questions.

Observations reveal that students often display nervousness while speaking in front of others. Some employ strategies such as lowering their voices or reading quickly to evade potential reprimands from the teacher. Additionally, a few students may pretend to be engrossed in reading or writing notes as a means to avoid the teacher's attention. In extreme cases, some students actively resist participating in speaking activities to circumvent the potential humiliation or embarrassment associated with public speaking.

**Table .2** Kinds of Anxiety

Kinds of Anxiety	Sign
State Anxiety	Students exhibited signs of worry and panic when tasked with speaking in front of the class. The anxiety heightened when the teacher directed questions to them. Additionally, students consistently maintained silence and appeared confused when the teacher explained the material in English.
Trait Anxiety	When the teacher explained in English, students often appeared confused. Additionally, some students resorted to strategies such as pretending to be busy with writing or reading a book to avoid direct interaction with the teacher.

From the table above, it shows that students felt anxious in particular situations. The students felt uneasy when the teacher asked them to speak in front of the class. The students also felt bothered when the teacher explained the material too fast. They got panicked when the teacher asked them to answer the question. They kept silent when the teacher asked them to answer the question about the material that they don't understand yet. Therefore, the researcher concluded that students with the feature like that belong to State Anxiety.

Furthermore, the other features that were shown by the students during the observation are students looked confused when the teacher explained the material in English. To avoid their teacher, the students pretend to be busy by doing something while the teacher explains things, like writing something or reading a book, and it can be concluded as the Trait Anxiety.

**Data Based on Interviews**

Based on students' opinions, the researcher sought to understand the factors influencing speaking anxiety in students. The students who were thought to be anxious in English class were interviewed by unstructured interviews to acquire the data. the researcher discovered that speaking activities and unclear explanations were the aspects of English classes that disturbed participants the most. They also said that they become nervous when their peers are getting attention when they speak in front of the class. Because they are scared if they make a mistake, their peers will mock them. When the researcher asked why they feel so nervous, the participants responded that they get anxious because they haven't studied the topic thoroughly and don't understand what the teacher is saying. The students also said they got nervous because they had limited grammar and vocabulary. According to Amrullah, et.al. (2021), he stated that students continue to face challenges in comprehending unfamiliar vocabulary and selecting appropriate words for specific situations in English. Additionally, the length of English words poses difficulties for them in terms of memorization and pronunciation of vocabulary. They also figured out that their peers are better than them.

When the researcher asked how the other students would react if their friend or classmate made a mistake, some of them said that their peers would laugh. The researcher also examined the participants' beliefs about the English language. They thought that English is difficult to learn, they need to know about every word to understand.

Furthermore, the students also questioned how the teacher influenced their feelings. They responded that the teacher might cause anxiety through their actions and behavior such as forcing students to practice, using a harsh and intimidating approach, and speaking too quickly. The respondents also stated that the teacher could teach more clearly and slowly by utilizing English only occasionally.

**Data Based on Documentation**

According to Komariah & Satori (2014), a document is a record of past events that is written or printed, and can take the form of anecdotal notes, letters, diaries, and other documents in visual, audio, or audiovisual formats. To

answer the research question, the researcher used pictures and video as the data of documentation. Additionally, the result of the student examination is also used to support the data.

Based on the students' examination results, most of them indicated that they failed in the examination. That is demonstrated by the score that they got in the examination, which most of the students got below the standard. The students also often did not submit the task that was given by the teacher. The students thought that English is a complicated subject and difficult to master. It is supported by Horwitz et.al. (1986) that stated, students skipped the class or did not submit the task because the students believe that how hard they try to study English, they will always fail.

## CONCLUSION

According to the findings of the study, there are various forms of student's anxiety in learning English, in particular for students in the SMK Al-Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru eleventh grade. Therefore, the conclusion is; The Eleventh-grade students at SMK Al-Istiqomah NW Mamben Baru indicated two different types of anxiety: trait anxiety and state anxiety. Trait anxiety is the fear of not understanding all the language input, which increases the likelihood of failure. State anxiety is the stress of having to speak in front of the class.

According to the students, there are three factors that may contribute to their anxiety. The first factor is communication apprehensions. Students feel anxious when they are asked to speak, either in front of individual peers or in front of the class. The second factor is fear of negative evaluation. The students feel anxious about receiving a negative evaluation from their teacher or peers, which could highlight their faults. The third factor is lack of vocabulary and grammar. The students feel anxious when they don't understand what the teacher says in English. It's because they have limited mastery in vocabulary and grammar.

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