



STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN CLASSROOM-
INTERACTION: A STUDY AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDY PROGRAM
UNIVERSITAS JAMBI

by

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Abstract:

This study investigates students' FLA in classroom interactions, why they felt anxious about speaking English, and how they coped with the anxiety. It also looks at a gender difference in the anxiety phenomenon and sees if females are more anxious than males in their interactions. The data were collected through electronic questionnaires to 100 selected students at the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP), Faculty of Education, Jambi University. Adapting the models from Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) and Woodrow (2006), the results displayed three dominant factors contributing to students' English-speaking FLA, regardless of the gender aspect, were: (1) Fear of making errors or mistakes because of inadequate English mastery or proficiency (such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary); (2) Fear of inability to create and organize ideas in English; and (3) Fear of having negative responses or corrections from the lecturers with the ratio of (73:71:64) respectively. There was a noticeable gender difference in the students' anxiety, where females were likely to be more anxious than males, with a ratio of (171:131). Pretending to do something such as reading or writing was the most frequent strategy by males and females in dealing with their anxiety. The lecturers were expected to respond to the students' FLA effectively and encourage them to do their best in the classroom.

Key Words: *classroom interaction; English, foreign language anxiety (FLA); gender,*

Abstrak

Studi ini menyelidiki FLA mahasiswa dalam interaksi kelas dan alasan mengapa mereka merasa cemas berbicara bahasa Inggris di kelas dan bagaimana mereka mengatasi kecemasan tersebut. Penelitian ini juga melihat perbedaan gender dalam fenomena kecemasan dan melihat apakah perempuan lebih cemas daripada laki-laki dalam interaksi mereka. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner elektronik yang disampaikan kepada 100 mahasiswa terpilih pada Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris (ELESP) Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Universitas Jambi. Mengadaptasi model dari Zhiping dan Paramasivam (2013) dan Woodrow (2006), hasilnya menunjukkan tiga faktor dominan yang berkontribusi terhadap FLA berbahasa Inggris siswa, terlepas dari aspek gender, adalah: (1) Takut membuat kesalahan karena

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penguasaan atau kemahiran bahasa Inggris yang tidak memadai (seperti tata bahasa, pengucapan, dan kosa kata); (2) Takut ketidakmampuan untuk membuat dan mengatur ide-ide dalam bahasa Inggris; dan (3) Takut mendapat tanggapan negatif atau koreksi dari dosen dengan rasio (73:71:64) masing-masing. Ada perbedaan gender yang nyata dalam kecemasan mahasiswa, di mana perempuan cenderung lebih cemas daripada laki-laki dengan rasio (171: 131). Berpura-pura melakukan sesuatu seperti membaca atau menulis adalah strategi yang paling sering dilakukan oleh pria dan wanita dalam mengatasi kecemasan mereka. Para dosen diharapkan dapat merespon FLA mahasiswa secara efektif dan mendorong mahasiswa untuk melakukan yang terbaik di kelas.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggris, kecemasan bahasa asing (FLA), gender, interaksi kelas

INTRODUCTION

Studies on students' anxiety in learning English as a foreign or a second language have proliferated in the last few decades. Oteir and Al-Otaibi (2019) claim that such studies have raised growing concerns and provoked fundamental issues in applied linguistics, especially in EFL contexts. They add that FLA is viewed as a critical challenge to language learners and frequently undermines their performance and outcomes. Toyama and Yamazaki (2022) state that FLA has been investigated across many countries and regions. However, as stressed by Lim (2009) and Horwitz (2016), the results may vary from country to country depending on the level and context and the variables being investigated. This is so because anxiety is a fundamental human behavior and part of a sociocultural phenomenon that may differ from one to another in terms of its nature (Lim, 2009). FLA is a complex nature of the student's behavior (Horwitz, 2001; Oxford, 2017) and is concerned with emotional and cognitive aspects affecting various aspects of student learning (Botes et al., 2020; MacIntyre, 2017; Zhang, 2019). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), feelings such as shyness, Fear, worry, upset, and panic are common in students' foreign language learning. They are both said to be situational and specific.

A recent study by Taqwa et al. (2022) reports that students' FLA significantly affects their participation in speaking English. They found that students' FLA occurred due to emotional and unexpected behaviors, such as Fear of making mistakes, lack of preparation, low motivation, confidence, and low English proficiency. Teachers' attitude was also found to be one of the factors which affected the students' FLA. Four categories of students' anxiety levels were analyzed (relaxed, mild, anxious, and very anxious), and all types were found to have an impact on their willingness to use English in the classroom.

Toyama and Yamazaki (2022) report that FLA had something to do with the type of

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students' culture. Using Hofstede et al. (2010) division of culture (individualism and collectivism), they found that students' FLA has a noticeable connection with the type of their cultural dimension (individualism and collectivism). They claim that students of a more robust collectivist culture tended to have higher FLA, especially in higher education.

Since Horwitz et al. (1986) investigated three main factors related to Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), many studies have come up with more issues to look at other variables contributing to the students' anxiety in EFL/ESL contexts. The three factors described by Horwitz (1986) embrace communication comprehension, Fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety - and they have been further studied to see how these variables affect the students' learning along with perspectives from both students and teachers. Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) investigated international students' anxiety about speaking English at a Malaysian University, suggesting that students' anxiety and their cultures of origin are interrelated and have been regarded as distinctive features in their performance and academic achievement.

Much research has addressed why students are anxious about speaking English in EFL teaching and learning contexts. Amiri and Ghosooly (2015), cited in Gumartifa and Saputri (2020: 1), suggest that anxiety in second language learning is one of the most significant factors affecting students' learning outcomes. A few studies have proven that anxiety is strongly linked to students' academic achievement (Singh & Thukral, 2009; Shibli et al. (2014). Sabbah (2018) finds that Fear of text anxiety was dominant in the English classroom, while Balta (2018) finds that there was a subtle effect of students' anxiety on their scores on English tests. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) argue that students' anxiety in English speaking is constantly evident and generally due to the student's lack of motivation and low performance. They claim that foreign language speaking anxiety has long characterized most EFL or ESL teaching and learning contexts. Thus, educators need to employ effective and adaptive strategies to reduce students' anxiety.

Abu-Rubia (2004) investigated the relationship between students' FLA and language achievement. It is reported that there was a negative and significant correlation between students' FLA and their achievement in foreign languages. The achievement test results of the students indicated this. They also found that gender and teachers' attitudes were the only significant predictors of the students' FLA. Aguila and Harjanto (2016) report a study investigating the impact

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of students' FLA on their speaking competency. They found an inverse relationship between the students' FLA level and their speaking scores, and students' FLA had an impact on their communicative and interactive skills, covering the aspects of vocabulary, grammar, communicative ability, pronunciation, and intonation.

Jones (2004): Since anxiety is known to hurt language learning and performance, a good deal of research has been devoted to it in recent years. However, very few studies have referred to culture as a causal factor in language anxiety. This inquiry proposes an association between low proficiency and Fear of negative evaluation as an immediate cause of language anxiety in many learners. It argues that it is a threat to face that makes such negative evaluation hard to endure, 'face' being a cultural concept. The article concludes by reaffirming contemporary approaches as a general treatment for language anxiety.

A study by Young (1991) describes that there are a few factors that affect students' anxiety. These include individual and social behaviors, teachers' teaching approaches or methods, and the learning environment. Salehi (2014) further classifies a few dominant factors that can potentially affect students' anxiety in learning. These include language contact and belief, the feeling of inferiority or superiority, nationality, social status, and gender. Among prior studies, little information has been provided on gender differences in students' FLA, querying whether females are more anxious than males in their interactions. Woodrow (2006) suggests that students' anxiety and their speaking performance in SLA are interrelated and found that anxiety affects the students' oral performance significantly both inside and outside the classroom.

This research is conducted to investigate the potential causes or factors that contribute to students' English FLA during class interactions and find if there is a gender-specific difference in their FLA rates. Three research questions are posed: (1) What factors contribute to students' FLA in classroom interactions? (2) How do they cope with the anxiety?; and (3) Is there any gender-specific difference in the students' anxiety?

FLA is a common phenomenon in the classroom (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; MacIntyre, 2017). Horwitz et al. (1986: 28) define FLA as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process." According to Horwitz et al. (1986), FLA cannot be separated from

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second or foreign language learning as both are interrelated, and many teachers and students perceive that it is one of the obstacles that needs to be overcome to maximize students' performance. A phenomenal instrument for measuring the student FLA called FLCAS (Foreign et al.) was proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986). This instrument has been further used to measure students' FLA in general English and specific skills such as speaking, writing, and listening (Zhang, 2011; MacIntyre and Gardner (1994). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) define FLA as a feeling of pressure or apprehension arising from the language learning process in speaking, listening, and writing".

Horwitz et al. (1986) mention that student anxiety is not only linked to the students' psychological factors but also to academic and social aspects. They state that there are three main factors related to student anxiety: (a) communication apprehension, test anxiety, and Fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is described as a psychological condition of the students in which they feel shy and reluctant to communicate with people due to their inability to control their feelings over the control of other people. They claim that communication apprehension plays a critical role in foreign or second language learning contexts as it gets the students in trouble or makes them insecure about communication in the target language. Such a feeling may also link to the student's Fear of being negatively evaluated, responded to, perceived, or tested, which all influence their anxiety in communications. The three types of anxiety described by Horwitz are inseparable and are often simultaneous in foreign or second-language learning contexts.

Studies of the effects of FLA on the students' achievement have also been addressed, suggesting various results depending on the contexts and particular language skills being investigated. These include studies from (Cheng, 2004; Hassan, 2001, Horwitz et 1986; Horwitz, 2001; and MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Most of these studies concluded a negative correlation between FLA and students' achievement; the effect of FLA on the student's grades was subtle, depending on the contexts and areas of investigation (Zhang, 2011).

In their study on EFL, Chinese learners, Liu and Jackson (2008) suggest that at least four factors trigger students' FLA. These include being afraid of using English, being afraid of negative evaluation, low English proficiency and access to English, and students' low interest in learning

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English. They argue that students' anxiety can be affected by mental or psychological conditions due to the feeling of embarrassment and humiliation from their surrounding environment. The cultural origins of the students are also believed to affect the students' anxiety (Jones, 2004; Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013), and the syndrome may range from mild to severe, depending on the student's mental or psychological states and cultural origins. That is why Zhang (2011) claims that FLA is multifaceted and complex.

Cheng (2002) notes students' FLA in writing and comes up with a belief that there are several factors contributing to the students' anxiety. These include sociocultural, contextual, and the learner's characteristics. Other factors such as institutional requirements, parental or social expectations, teaching and evaluation procedures, motivation, personality, self-confidence, learner's belief, and language proficiency are also influential. According to Cheng (2002), gender and the length of a student's learning can also potentially affect the student's FLA. Overall, the reasons why students are anxious about learning are complex and multiple, depending on the above factors. Cheng (2002) further claims that classroom activities and teaching methods can also affect the students' FLA. Arnold (1999) supports the claim by suggesting that the learners' general levels and profiles of language ability are also essential factors contributing to students' FLA. Teachers' negative feedback, correction, or response, particularly in evaluative situations, affect students' FLA (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Regarding how teachers or educators respond to the students' FLA, Horwitz et al. (1986) provide a few suggestions. They suggest two options when dealing with anxious students; "help them to cope with the existing anxiety-provoking situation, and the other is to make the learning contexts less stressful" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 18). They propose specific techniques that educators can implement to reduce students' FLA. These include relaxation exercises, advice on effective language learning strategies, behavioral contracting, and journal keeping. Implementing a process-oriented approach to teaching can be an effective way for educators to reduce the students' FLA (Nunan, 1995, p. 86). Cheng (2002) suggested that optimistic, realistic, and motivating perceptions or attention from educators can also help manage students' anxiety. Three research questions are posed in this study:

1. Why do students feel anxious in classroom interaction?

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2. Is there any difference between male and female students in their anxiety phenomena?
3. How do they cope with the anxiety?

METHOD

Design

A qualitative-descriptive type of method was employed in the present study. It follows Creswell and Creswell (2018), who state that qualitative-descriptive research can be employed to gain information from respondents that are associated with human life and social phenomena - in this case, the student's responses towards their FLA in classroom interactions, embodying the factors that cause the anxiety and the strategies used to cope with the anxiety. They add that the qualitative method represents information, facts, or evidence about social phenomena along with the researcher's interpretation, description, and rationalization following the data displays and representations. Referring partly to Miles et al. (2018), this study used the participants' responses as the primary data, which needed to be transcribed, analyzed, interpreted, tabulated, identified, and classified before concluding. The study, in particular, follows Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) and Woodrow (2006) with a few modifications based on the purposes and the scope of the study.

Participant

The study involved 100 students (50 males and 50 females) from the English Language Education Study Program, faculty of education, and University Jambi, enrolling in odd semesters (3, 5, 7, and 9). Students from the first semester were omitted as they were just beginners and needed more experience studying at the department. The respondents were selected using a purposive random sampling technique, considering they represented students from all four-semester groups. Crossman (2020) and Palys (2008) suggest that purposive random sampling can accommodate the researcher's aim and orientation.

Instrument

Adapting the models from Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) and Woodrow (2006), this study used electronic questionnaires to collect data from the selected 100 respondents. The

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questionnaires were sent through their emails using Google Forms. The students were informed about the research aim before deciding their willingness to be selected as respondents. They were free to withdraw without notice, and their information was treated as confidential. Two questionnaires (5 items each), with "Yes" and "No" options, asking about the reasons or causes contributing to their anxiety and strategies to deal with the anxiety were delivered through their emails.

Data collection

The data were collected through electronic questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent to the participants' emails, and they were requested to complete the items (10 items) with "Yes" or "No" options. All items were written in English, asking their reasons or causes contributing to their FLA and strategies they adopted in dealing with their anxiety in the classroom. The completed answers were gained in the form of numbers and frequency. Then, they were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively (see below).

Data Analysis

The data were then analyzed by calculating the frequency or rate of occurrence in each item (causes and strategies) to see the trend both in male and female data distributions. The analysis used simple calculations such as total sum and frequency in each column. In short, the analysis covered the procedures: (a) grouping and tabulating, (b) calculating, and (c) displaying. It follows Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) and Woodrow (2006). Simultaneously, the citing system employs model of "Manual system by coping reference sources from Scholar Google" (Turmudi, 2020, p.59).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Regardless of gender variable, the trend of students' FLA in five selected causes shows that 302 (around 60 %) of the students suffered from anxiety in their interactions in the classroom settings, and the rest (198 or around 40 %) displayed the reverse phenomenon. It is also apparent in Table 1 that females were more anxious than males, with a ratio of (171: 131). Fear of making errors or mistakes because of inadequate English mastery or proficiency (grammar, pronunciation,

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and vocabulary) was the most frequent reason or cause contributing to students' FLA with a total rate of 73 (73 %) in total for both males and females, followed by Fear of inability to create and organize ideas in English with the rate of (71) and Fear of having negative responses, corrections, perceptions, or evaluations from the lecturers with the rate of (64) in the data. Other causes or reasons were Fear of being negatively evaluated by friends and Fear of being nervous, shy, and demotivated. All were relatively moderate, with the rates of (48) and (46), respectively, signaling that these two causes did not contribute much to the students' anxiety. The number of "No" options in these two aspects was slightly higher than that of "Yes" in the table (52 and 54).

1. Fear of being negatively evaluated by friends

There is a non-symmetric trend in male and female data in this aspect of FLA. The option "Yes" in females far outnumbers that in males with a ratio of (32: 16), confirming that females were more likely to be more anxious than males in their classroom interactions in English. Conversely, the number of options "No" in males is remarkably higher than in females, with a ratio of (34: 16) in the table.

2. Fear of having negative responses, corrections, perceptions, or evaluations from the lecturers

Unlike the above aspect, Fear of having negative responses, corrections, perceptions, or evaluations from the lecturers shows a different phenomenon. In this aspect of FLA, both males and females showed a higher rate of "Yes" in their responses than option "No" with a ratio of (33: 17) in males and (31: 19) in females, signaling that both males and females were likely to be anxious in this aspect.

3. Fear of being nervous, shy, and demotivated

In this aspect of FLA, there is a gender variation in the data distribution. Females were likely to be more anxious than males in their interactions. The rate of option "Yes" in female data far outweighs the number of that in male data with a ratio of (34: 12), confirming the trend about the anxiety level of males and females in their English interactions in the classroom.

4. Fear of making errors or mistakes because of inadequate English mastery or proficiency (such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary)

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As stated earlier, this aspect represents the highest rate of the causes or reasons why the students felt anxious in their English interactions in the classroom. Both males and females were likely to show a similar trend in this aspect, confirming the fact that the students' Fear of making mistakes and errors due to their incomplete mastery of English in three areas such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary, played an essential role in the students' FLA. The data posture in Table 1 shows a peak difference in options "Yes" and "No" in both male and female data, with a ratio of (37: 13) in males and (36: 14) in females.

5. Fear of inability to create and organize ideas in English

This aspect of students' FLA shows a similar trend to the above previously described (as in 3.4.). It represents the second highest rate of the causes or reasons contributing to the students' anxiety. Both males and females provided a significantly higher rate of anxiety in this area, confirming the fact that they were reluctant to use English in the classroom due to their inability to create and organize ideas in English. It is evident in the data that the difference in rates of "Yes" and "No" options between males and females is remarkably high (71: 29).

Table 1: The Factors Contributing to Students' FLA in Speaking English

Factors (Reasons)	Male (N=50)		Female(N=50)		Total	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Fear of being negatively evaluated by friends	16	34	32	18	48	52
Fear of having negative responses, corrections, perceptions, or evaluations from the lecturers	33	17	31	19	64	36
Fear of being nervous, shy, and demotivated	12	38	34	16	46	54
Fear of making errors or mistakes because of inadequate English mastery or proficiency (such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary)	37	13	36	14	73	27
Fear of inability to create and organize ideas in English	33	17	38	12	71	29
TOTAL	131	119	171	79	302	198

6. Students' Strategies in Coping FLA

Regarding students' strategies in coping with their FLA, it appears that pretending to do something (reading or writing) was the highest trend in the data, representing the total rate of 75 % of option "Yes" with only 25 % of option "No" as shown in Table 2. Other strategies were avoiding

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eye contact with lecturers or friends and keeping silent. All were also high in rate, representing 69 % and 67 % of option "Yes" in the data distribution. The rate of asking permission to go out for a while was relatively low, with only 22 % of option "Yes."

When the gender variable is considered, there seems to be an unnoticeable difference in male and female data distribution in all five strategies. In general, both males and females share a similar trend in their strategies for dealing with their FLA. Also, a slight gender difference is noticeable in asking for permission to go out for a while as their attempts to avoid their anxiety.

Table 2: *The trend of students' strategies in coping with their FLA*

Strategies	Male (N=50)		Female(N=50)		Total	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Keep silent	32	18	35	15	67	33
Avoiding eye contact with lecturers or friends	37	13	32	18	69	31
Being with friends	28	22	30	20	58	42
Pretending to do something (reading or writing)	39	11	36	14	75	25
Asking for permission to go out for a while	9	41	13	37	22	78
Total	145	105	146	104	291	209

Discussion

The data distribution of the causes or the reasons for students' FLA in Table 1 above reveals a few noteworthy trends. First, regardless of gender variable, all five items regarding the causes or reasons why students felt anxious in their English interactions in the classroom settings were worthily evident, supporting the previous claim by Woodrow (2006) and Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) that students' anxiety and their speaking performance are interrelated and reflect a common characteristic in EFL and ESL teaching and learning contexts. Students generally feel anxious because they are not confident and comfortable participating in English during the lessons or lecturing. Lack of motivation, low performance, and proficiency in English are said to be dominant factors, along with the Fear of being negatively evaluated, responded to, or perceived by either friends or lecturers, which cause anxiety. These aspects are evident in the present study, even though the students' inability to create and organize ideas in English was also a potential and frequent cause of anxiety.

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Another important characteristic in the findings of the present study was the fact that males and females show a slightly different trend in their English-speaking anxiety. It is evident in the data that females were likely to be more anxious than males in their FLA. Although the difference was not statistically measured through the use of relevant quantitative formulas, it is enough to conclude that a gender-specific variation in students' English-speaking anxiety was noticeable and worth following up for further investigations in many other contexts. Previous research focusing on the gender-specific variations in the students' English-speaking FLA needs to be more extensive in the literature. A study by Soim (2015) on Elementary School EFL students in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, found that both males and females shared a similar trend in their English-speaking anxiety, suggesting that there was no gender-significant difference in their FLA phenomenon. Although the result of the present study does not comply with Soim's (2015) study concerning gender difference, the contexts in which the study was conducted, such as their age, educational level, and the characteristics of the objects of the study, might be the factors contributing to the difference.

In terms of strategies for dealing with anxiety, there seems to be an exciting phenomenon. The present study reveals that pretending to write or read, avoiding eye contact with friends or lecturers, and keeping silent were frequently common. This phenomenon will likely support Zhiping and Paramasivam's (2013) finding that anxiety and cultural background are interconnected. Different cultural origins may result in different types of FLA and the ways the students deal with their anxiety. However, denying that such a characteristic may also be psychologically and personally dependent is hard.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

Ultimately, the findings and discussion demonstrate that students' English-speaking anxiety is a unique and complex phenomenon. Its existence in EFL or SLA is evident and reflects the students' unwillingness to participate in speaking English as they feel uncomfortable and less confident due to various factors. Fear of being negatively evaluated, lack of motivation, and low

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English proficiency have been proven to be the most frequent aspects contributing to students' anxiety in EFL or ESL contexts. Despite other cultural, personal, and psychological aspects, students' English-speaking FLA provides valuable information for teachers and lecturers to find practical, adaptive, reflective strategies to reduce the students' FLA.

Limitation

The present study is deemed limited to a few aspects. These include the number of participants, data collection coverage, and data analysis technique. First, the researcher realizes that a more significant number of participants might be better to increase the generalizability of the study. Furthermore, the use of other methods of data collection techniques, such as interviews and classroom observation, might add to the complexity of the study and shed more light on the field of research. Finally, to get more comprehensive results, using a mixed-method analysis, combining both qualitative and quantitative analysis, might enhance the study coverage and provide a broader scope of the research.

Implication

It is recommended that teachers and lecturers respond wisely to any anxiety their students have to accelerate their learning outcomes and goals. Students' FLA should be wisely responded to and treated so that their learning motivation and interest would not be disturbed. Providing positive responses and reinforcement towards students' anxiety might be two of many possibilities that can be considered by lecturers or tutors to handle students' FLA.

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BIO-PROFILE

Adefiza is a senior lecturer at the English Language Education Study Program (ELESP), the Faculty of Education (FKIP) - Universitas Jambi. Majoring in TEFL, he completed her MA and PhD in the field of TESOL from the University of Canberra, Australia. Apart from his extended experience as an Educational Consultant and a secretary of the Provincial Accreditation Board for Schools and Madrasah (Jambi et al.), he was also appointed as the Head of the Language Centre (2012-2018) and the Head of the Division of Teaching Development and Quality Assurance (LPPPM) – (2018-2022), at Jambi University. His research interests cover TEFL, Sociolinguistics, Pragmatics, and Applied Linguistics. His corresponding email: adefiza@unja.ac.id

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