
THE ANALYSIS OF THE STUDENTS' ANXIETIES IN LEARNING ENGLISH: THE CASE OF A PRIVATE ISLAMIC JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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ABSTRACT

The present study analyzed the students' anxieties in learning English. The study was conducted in a case study involving 44 respondents of a privately funded Islamic junior high school located in Tangerang. The respondents were recruited purposively. Due to the application of no physical contact during the class, a questionnaire was the only instrument used in the present study. The finding indicated that the primary cause of the students' anxieties was their learning problem. In addition, the students' problems were mainly caused by the students' inability to cope with some learning materials. The finding also indicated that speaking and writing were the most problematic skills that could generate anxieties. Lastly, the students also considered that their teachers and the way they taught were the main factors that could trigger anxieties in learning English. Some suggestions are given to overcome this matter.

Key words: *The analysis, the students' anxieties, learning, English*



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Anxieties and the impact on language learning

Scholars confirmed that there are some psychological factors which can possibly affect the students' learning process. These factors are thought to be intelligence, motivation, attitudes and anxiety (See e.g., Cook, 2008; Lightbown, & Spada, 2001; Johnson, 2008). Among these factors, anxiety is considered as one of the influential factors affecting both the students and their language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). The word anxiety is derived from Latin word "angere," meaning to cause distress (Sharma & Sharma, 2015 as cited in Bisson, 2017, p. 8).

In language learning context, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986, p 128) define foreign language anxiety 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." Specifically, Ewald (2007 as cited in Sadiq, 2017, p. 2) found that high

levels of anxiety usually caused a negative effect on the language acquisition process. Language learners who experienced language anxiety, for instance, will usually feel worried of failing. Further, Omrod (2011) exemplifies that students who are anxious can possibly fail in some aspects, such as failing to pay attention to the teacher's explanation, failing to do the task, and so forth.

The present study was conducted based on the stakeholders' concern (i.e., Islamic junior high school management located in Tangerang) on the students' English performance which was considered less satisfactory. Specifically, the study attempted to identify the students' anxieties along with potential determinants affecting the students' learning process.

1.2 Research questions

1. How do the students describe their anxieties when learning English?
2. How do the students describe factors that can possibly trigger their anxieties?
3. How do the students describe the English skills that contribute to their anxieties?
4. How do the students describe their English teachers and the other pedagogical factors that contribute to their anxieties?

1.3 Significance of the study

As one of the psychological constructs, anxiety can be considered as one of the potent factors which can possibly affect the students' motivation to learn English (See e.g., Cayli, 2020). Therefore, identifying students' anxiety in a formal education context, despite its limited scope, can possibly provide those involved in education sectors, with genuine picture on how anxiety affects the students' learning process. Further, the determinants identified in the present study can also help educators to identify some influential factors affecting their students' learning process.

1.4. Limitation of the study

1.4.1 Since the present study only focuses on the concept of anxiety offered by Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128), the other concepts of psychology/social psychology such as motivation and attitudes, which are naturally intertwined, are not discussed.

1.4.2 The present study was conducted in suburban area, thus typically representing the ones with relatively lower-middle income brackets. The participants of this class might have their own anxieties, which were different from higher income brackets.

1.4.3 Given the policy "no –physical contact" adopted in school compound, the present study relied only to one instrument to elicit the students' anxieties (i.e., questionnaire). This instrument might have limited the participants' attempts in describing their anxieties as well

as the other relevant aspects. Further studies should be done in more complex method involving more instruments in order to capture more vivid and more genuine description of the participants' anxieties.

2. METHOD

2.1. Research Design

According to Yin (as cited in Sutrisno, 2014), a case study is “an empirical inquiry which investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and within its real-world context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (p. 92). Further, he elaborates that the conceptualization of the phenomenon can either be more tangible such as individuals or organizations, or intangible one such as the relationship and process (Sutrisno, 2014, p. 92).

The above conceptualization is certainly suitable with the nature of the present study, which investigates the students' anxiety toward learning English within the context of their learning period in their school. As part of social process, language learning develops through social interaction (Lin, 2013, p. 42) therefore capturing such complex phenomena should be conducted through a case study.

2.2 Data collection procedure

- a. The researchers reported the plan of the study to the head master in order to gain prior approval to conduct their study.
- b. Due to the “absence of physical contact” set up in school area, the researchers did not physically contact the students, yet, they were only permitted to brief the students through virtual meeting (i.e. Google meet).
- c. The briefing was given to the students for approximately 20 minutes to enable the students to have sufficient information regarding the study as well as its importance for the students.
- d. Of the 68 students of the 7th grade of Junior high schools, 44 students were recruited voluntarily.
- e. The researchers also confirmed that the whole participants were guaranteed to remain anonymous when participating in the study.
- f. In the commencement of the research, the researcher distributed the written questionnaire through Google formats. The questionnaire, which was written in Indonesian language, was shared through the students' Whatsapp media.
- g. The students were also given the chance to ask questions in case they have difficulties to understand the items stated in the questionnaire.

2.3 Samples/Participants

The participants in the study were recruited purposively. Frankel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) confirmed that “purposive sampling is different from convenient sampling in that the researchers do not simply study whoever is available but rather they use their judgment to select the sample that they believe, based on prior information that this sample will provide the data that they need” (p. 101). The decision for taking the respondents purposively was due to the consideration that the present study needed respondents who fulfill certain criteria: 1) Willing to participate in the study, and 2) willing to be open or to tell his or her anxieties honestly to the researcher. Although purposive sampling might not “be generalizable” (see e.g., Silverman, 2005, p. 129). This kind of sampling enabled the researchers to choose a case which could provide the researcher with some features or processes that was considered important.

2.4 Instruments

The instrument used in the present study was written questionnaire and was given after they conducted their virtual learning/on-line learning activity. The use of questionnaire was in line with the school policy adopting “no physical contact” to prevent the spread of Covid 19. Despite being frequently used for survey research (Creswell, 2012, p. 382), questionnaire was also deemed relevant to the study of perception since the participants could easily respond to the statements based on what they had in mind easily (See e.g., Sinno, 2008). Specifically, each statement was accompanied with the choices indicating the potential responses expressed by the participants, such as Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Doubted, Agree, and Strongly Agree.

TABLE 1. Questionnaire administered to the students

SELF-EVALUATION ITEMS	SD	D	D	A	SA
Students' description on their anxieties when learning English					
I think anxiety makes me unable to learn well.					
If I am anxious I cannot think well.					
If I am anxious I feel depressed.					
If I am anxious I cannot focus on what the teacher explains to me.					
I think it is common to have anxiety.					
I think our anxiety will diminish when we can do our assignment.					
I think anxiety drives me to study.					
Students' descriptions on the factors triggering their anxieties					
I am always anxious when speaking in English.					
I am always anxious when I don't understand to my teacher's explanation.					
I am always anxious when I am called to do the task in front of the class.					

I am not anxious when I am called to speak English.					
I am not anxious when I do the task in front of the class.					
I am not anxious if I don't understand my teacher's explanation.					
Students' descriptions on the English skills contributing to their anxieties					
Writing makes me anxious more frequently.					
Listening makes me anxious more frequently.					
Reading makes me anxious more frequently.					
Speaking makes me anxious more frequently.					
Students' descriptions on their teachers and other pedagogical factors contributing to their anxieties					
My English teacher makes me anxious more frequently.					
Thinking about possible bad grade makes me anxious.					
My teacher's anger makes me anxious.					
I am anxious when my teacher corrects every error I make.					
I am not anxious as my teacher is kindhearted.					
The way my teacher teaches me doesn't make me anxious.					
I am not anxious when my teacher corrects every error I make.					

It should be noted that the above self-evaluative statement is a translated version. The one given to the students was the one written in Indonesian language in order to ensure that the students could fully understand the meaning, thus resulting better confidence in expressing their thinking.

2.5 Sources and research data

The sources of data collected in the present study were the participants' written responses, which indicated their anxieties or the other relevant aspects resulting to their anxieties. These written responses were elicited from the written instrument (i.e., questionnaire) given to them.

2.6 Data analysis

Just like the other psychological constructs (e.g., attitudes, motivation, etc.), analyzing students' anxieties should also be inferred from evaluative responses (Soomro, 2016, p. 37). Specifically, the data were analyzed based on the participants' description/responses indicating their anxieties and other relevant aspects to anxieties. Given the limited choices of the questionnaire in describing the participant's anxieties, the researchers suggest that further study eliciting students' perceptions on their anxieties be conducted in more instruments (See e.g., Yu, 2010; Frankel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings

3.1.1 The students' descriptions on their anxieties when learning English

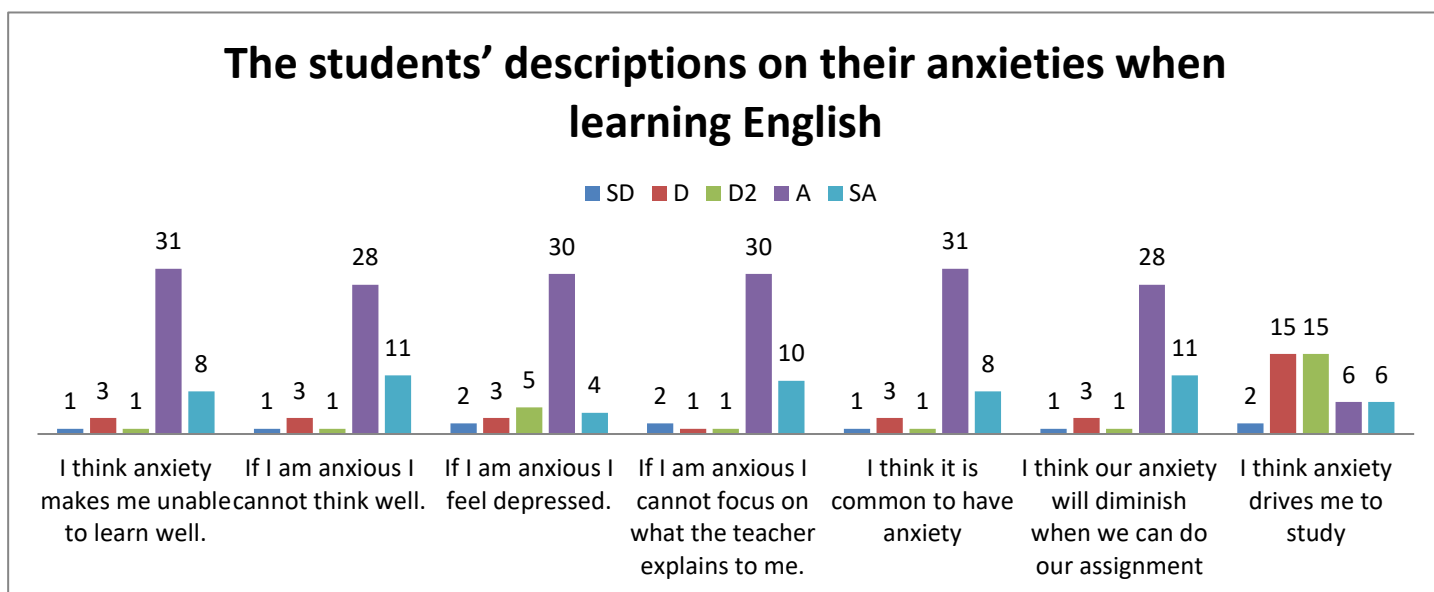
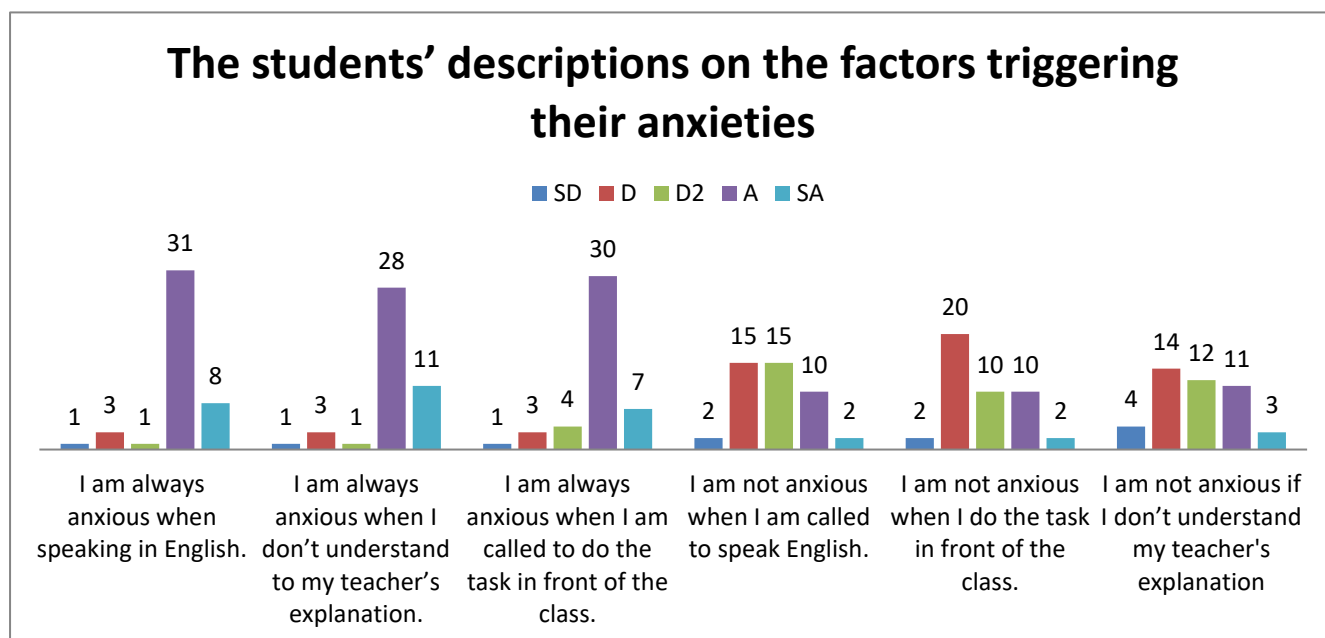


TABLE 2.

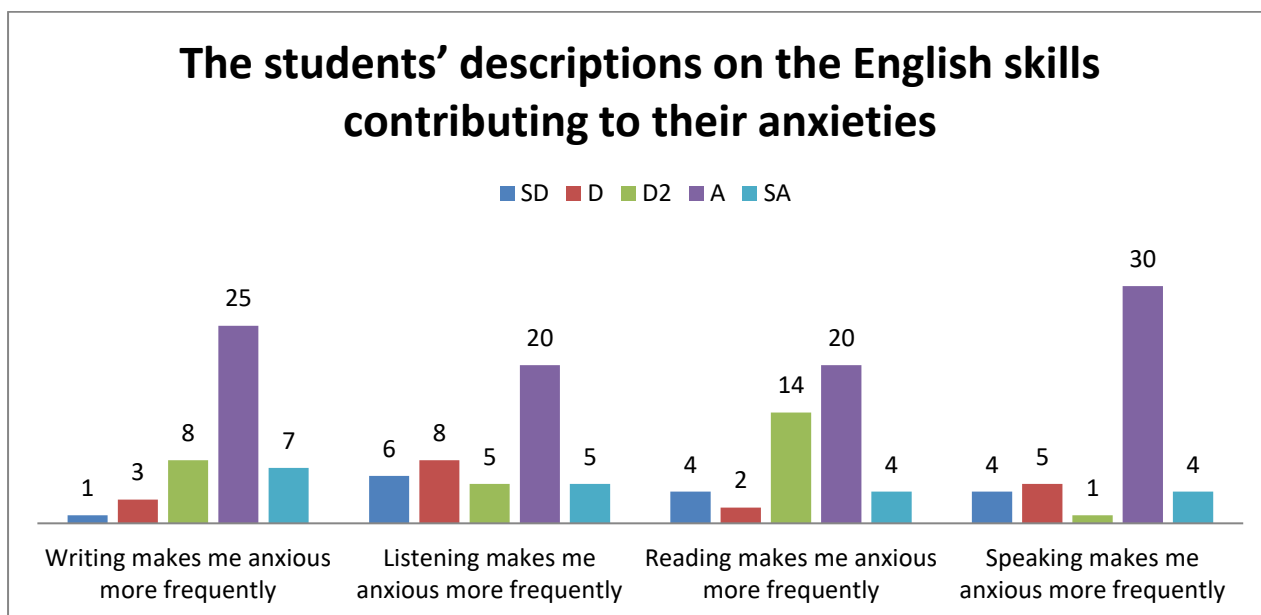
3.1.2 The students' descriptions on potential determinants triggering their anxieties

TABLE 3.



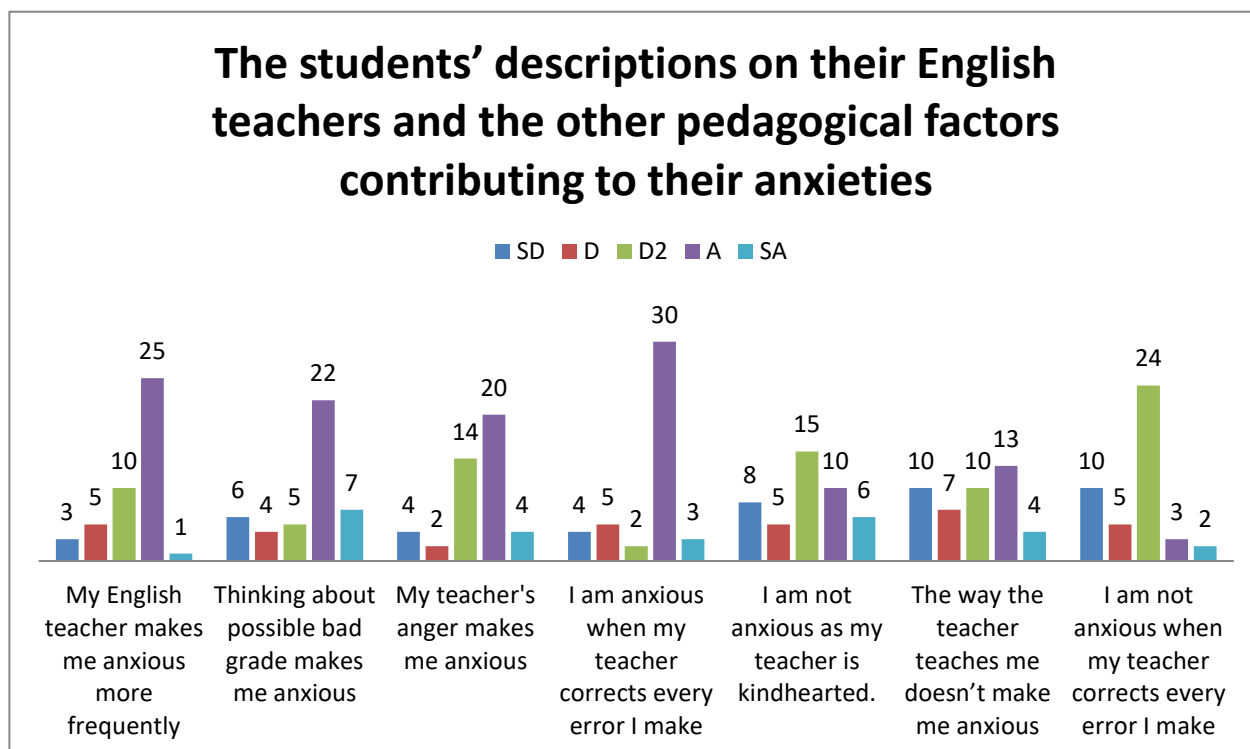
3.1.3 The students descriptions on the English skill practices contributing to their anxieties

TABLE 4.



3.1.4 The students' descriptions on their English teachers and the other pedagogical factors contributing to their anxieties

TABLE 5.



3.2. Discussion

3.2.1 *The impact of the students' anxieties toward their learning process*

Based on the finding of the first research question, it can be found that the students' anxieties constitute harmful and influential factors affecting the students' learning process. It confirms the other studies which analyzed students' anxieties in learning English (Mahmud, Sultana, & Adhikary, 2016; Mustachim, 2014; Cayli, 2020). This finding slightly disconfirms Mirawdali, Morrissey, and Ball's argument (2018) indicating that manageable anxiety could actually arouse the students' motivation (See Mirawdali, Morrissey, & Ball, 2018). Further study needs to be conducted so that the students can possibly manage their anxieties in relation to their academic activities.

Due to the impact of anxieties, the teacher should be well aware that the students will probably face difficulties to learn and may experience some failures due to these anxieties. Harmer (2001) strongly suggested that the teacher not only perform as a model during the class but also as a facilitator, which means that the teacher should also be willing to reduce the problem or the burden which the students experience during the class.

3.2.2 *The students' anxieties are mainly caused by the students' problem faced when learning English*

Further, finding also indicates that basically the students' anxieties are commonly caused by the students' problem when learning English. This finding is also relevant to what Mustachim (2014) has researched. Harmer (2001) previously has also warned the teacher in order not to burden the students with the academic workload which is beyond the students' limit. This is because providing an academic activity which is more than the students' capacity will tend to put the students on embarrassment or disbelief since the students will tend to be worried about the learning process and will probably cause the anxieties to emerge.

3.2.3 *Writing and speaking as the English skills which worry the students most*

Just like other findings (Mahmud, Sultana, & Adhikary, 2016; Torkey, 2006; Aghajani, & Amanzadeh, 2017), this finding indicates that writing and speaking belong to the most serious problem which can affect the students' anxieties to be more intense. Some scholars have confirmed that speaking and writing are the most complicated skills that the teachers should put extra effort to make their students able to grasp them. In the case of writing skill, linguists have long considered that writing is difficult skill to acquire and is dreaded by the

students. According to Daly (1978 as cited in Onwuegbuzie & Anthony, 2009, p. 1) writing can incur anxiety and those having writing anxiety will generally feel in a situation which is unfavourable and make them approach or avoid writing.

In terms of speaking, the research conducted on some students of English department indicated several factors which might have contributed to their anxieties, such as classroom procedure, language testing, personal – interpersonal issue, instructor – learner interaction, learner beliefs about language learning and instructor beliefs about language learning (Handayani, Rozimela, & Fatimah, 2020, p. 590). Given the complex process of human communication, the teachers should cautiously create the communicative atmosphere which is conducive for the students. Specifically, the teachers should understand their students' interests, adopting more suitable teaching method, and ensure that their students can “engage” in their speaking practice evenly (See e.g., Harmer, 2007, p. 123; Leong, & Ahmadi, 2017; Ur, 2000).

3.2.4 The teacher as the most influential figure affecting the student' learning process

Just like the other studies, the present finding also indicates that basically the teacher is the most influential figure who can motivate and demotivate the students. The finding indicates that most of the students consider that their teacher can generate anxieties if they do things unfavorably to the students, such as criticizing the students' English, exposing the students in front of the class without sufficient preparation, etc. Some scholars such as Harmer (2001), Brown (2001), and Ur (2000) believe that the roles of teachers in foreign language teaching are very important.

Further, they consider that ideal teachers should be the ones who are able to assume some important roles such as a model, a manager, a facilitator, and a motivator (Harmer, 2001; Brown, 2001). Besides, Ur (2000), and Harmer (2007) also emphasize the importance of making good relationship with the students. This is because the attitudes of teachers who are not really positive when teaching English may generate various problems which lead to the emergence of anxieties. Chou (2006), further, postulates that “teacher's positive energy” corroborates the students' belief in that they could possibly experience a more comfortable atmosphere in their learning process, thus leading to a more successful learning environment (p. 30).

Firwana (as citing Khan & Weiss, Alexander & Strain), alike, confirms that teachers could provide an important influence on the students' attitudes which will lead to the improvement of the students' academic performance (2010, p. 57). Lastly, Murtiningsih

(2014) confirms that among the important factors affecting teaching and learning process, teacher might be considered as one of the most influential factors, due to the fact that teacher is the one who is in charge with the planning of the learning process (curriculum), and its application (p. 19).

Based on the above findings, it can be concluded that basically it is the teacher who can possibly create or generate good learning atmosphere so that the students can be more confident and more comfortable to learn. The pressure, workload of the syllabus will not bother the students so much when the teacher can facilitate the learning process well. Besides, it should also be remembered that the students come from different learning background, thus resulting in different accomplishment. The role of the teacher in respecting and appreciating such differences is certainly very useful in making the class more comfortable and making the students' anxieties down all the time.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1. Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that basically it is the students' problems that generate anxieties. The students' problem, in this case, is considered as the most important factor that can affect the student's comfort and confidence in learning English. It is therefore important for the teachers to always pose him or herself as a facilitator as well as a conductor in teaching and learning process. It is certainly impossible for the students to feel more comfortable in learning English if the teacher continuously burdens the students with heavy workloads, which are beyond the students' ability to bear. The necessity of being a facilitator is also due to the consideration that not all students in the same class will usually have the same capacities to learn.

It is also important to identify the students' potential problem before the students are given some learning materials. The so called pre-test is very helpful in that it can help the teachers to provide more objective pictures on the students' learning capacity as well as potential hurdles that they may face during the class. In sum, the teacher should also be well aware that the students come from various learning backgrounds, different upbringings, as well as varied intelligence capacity. These learning diversities will probably create more learning disparity which arouses students' anxieties and the other psychological disorder. Identifying the students' potential problem through pre-test or the other instruments may help teachers in solving this matter.

4.2. Suggestions

The teacher should wisely consider the differences of the student's ability so that the teacher can figure out more objectively about the teaching standard that he or she has to do as well as the students' ability to participate in the teaching or learning process. The teacher should also analyze the students' ability in terms of their previous English skills and possible differences in their weaknesses, e.g., differences in grammatical capacity, speaking skill/ability, etc. These differences may require the teachers to specifically tailor their English teaching activities in order that the class of varied capacities can be accommodated.

Enforcing the same and rigid teaching method/strategies may lead to wide gap of the students' accomplishment, thus creating more anxieties to those having low academic accomplishment. In the latest paradigm of pedagogy, where the students become the most important factor in determining the learning process, identifying and catering potentially academic differences is very important so that the whole students will relatively access their learning materials as well as their basic right, which is actually protected by constitution.

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