

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings and discussions presented in the previous chapter, some conclusions and recommendations are formulated. It is expected that observing the two important variables of the present study (i.e. the students' test anxiety and their academic performance) gives useful contributions to the teachers and others who concern with education, especially the area of students' test anxiety and their academic performance.

5.1 Conclusions

Based on data from a battery of self report measures (comprising of Spielberger's Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) 1980 and a Test Anxiety Inventory retrieved and adapted from Academic Centers for Excellence) and a semi-structured interview, some conclusions can be drawn.

To answer the first research question: *What test anxiety levels are experienced by EFL students?*, based on the scores the respondents gained through TAI, it was found that the students experienced low test anxiety level (49 out of 93 students or 52.69 % of the total of respondents), moderate test anxiety level (42 out of 93 students or 45.16% of the total of respondents), and high test anxiety level (2 out of 93 students or 5.88 % of the total of respondents). Even though their test anxiety levels varied across different items of TAI, there was no student that had no test anxiety. It is in line with Horwitz et al.'s statement (1986, pp. 127-128) that test anxiety is a distinct phenomenon particularly to language learning.

The majority of the students (52.69%) experienced low anxiety. It could be argued that a number of reasons, such as test preparation (Damer and Melendres, 2011; Jaradat, 2004, p. 8; Zeidner, 1998), students' familiarity with testing condition (Putwain, 2008; Birjandi and Alemi, 2010), and maturity in terms of ages (Zeidner, 1998) accounted for the students' low test anxiety.

More importantly, test anxiety does affect the performance of students on a high-stakes test (Chang and Read, 2008, p. 2). In other words, the percentages reflect the fact that the tests were low-stakes tests for most students. Then, it sounds to reason that as a whole, the students experienced low anxiety.

To answer the second research question: *What factors have caused EFL students' test anxiety?*, from the data of Test Anxiety Inventory retrieved and adapted from Academic Centers for Excellence, it was found that most of students stated that their cause of feeling anxious was concerning self-image (28.11%). Then, it was followed by concerning other people's view (26.92%), preparation (23.86%), and future security (21.11%). This finding is in line with Raof and Nasir's (2010) statement that test anxiety occurs when the students are to do with other people's view, self-image, future security, and preparation.

Meanwhile, from the data of interview, factors that have caused the students' test anxiety are also to do with other people's view, self-image, and preparation. Besides, there were situational and subjective determinants of test anxiety (as revealed by Jaradat (2004)). They were also anxious because of testing situation factors (as stated by Chen (2004)). In addition, they were anxious when they wanted to get a high score (in line with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) statement) and when they faced personal problems (as identified by Busari and Osiki (2002)).

Aside from those causal factors of students' test anxiety mentioned above, based on the data of interview, the researcher found other factors that have caused the EFL students to feel anxious, specifically in terms of test characteristics. Those were item type, time pressure, length of the test, item difficulty sequencing, and test taking information. All the five test characteristics had an effect on students' test anxiety level – as investigated by Xiaoping (2009), Young (cited in Aydin, 2009), and Chen (2004). However, not all of them would have the same effects on different interviewees as test takers in terms of test anxiety. The anxiety levels of most interviewees (5 out of 6) have been affected by time pressure. Meanwhile, length of test, followed by test taking information given, item type, and item difficulty sequencing had an effect on most interviewees, 66.67%, 66.67%, 50%, and 50% of the total interviewees respectively.

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To answer the third research question: *Is there any correlation between students' test anxiety and their academic performance?*, it was found that the Spearman correlation coefficient between students' test anxiety and their academic performance was -0.192 . It indicated that both variables were negatively correlated. The negative correlation between both variables meant that the highest the students' test anxiety was, the lowest their academic performance was. Besides, those two variables had a small correlation – based on Cohen's suggestion (1988, pp. 79–81).

Henceforth, since the p-value (0.065) was larger than 0.05, the students' test anxiety had no statistically significant correlation with their academic performance. Therefore, the null hypothesis of this study was accepted. It meant that there was lack of test anxiety on students when they did the tests. Furthermore, the lack of test anxiety showed that for the students, the tests were not considered as a problem that could make them anxious. This phenomenon could have two meanings. Firstly, the students were already well-prepared in doing the tests and they did not face constraints in learning. Secondly, they neglected the significance of the tests to assess their academic performance. This case needs more specific concern and further research.

The finding of this study confirmed some studies showing non-significant correlation between test anxiety and students' achievement statistically (e.g. Birjandi and Alemi (2010), Ndirangu et al. (2009), Zimmer and Hocevar (1994)). Going with them, Yuen and Chu (n.d.) find that there is a negative, but not significant relationship between oral test performance in English and anxiety. In'nami (2006) also finds that test anxiety does not influence the students' performance in a listening test.

Nevertheless, the finding of this study contrasted with some other studies reporting the existence of relationship between students' test anxiety and their academic performance (e. g. Yousefi et al. (2010, p. 100); Aydin et al. (2006, p. 145); Lowe et al. (2011, p. 504); Rezazadeh and Tavakoli (2009, p. 68); Rana and Mahmood (2010, p. 63); Chapell et al. (2005, p. 268)). That this study had different finding from those studies might be because of several factors, such as

the lack of instrument of this study that was less able to distinguish between students with high anxiety and the ones with low anxiety, the lack of amount of samples involved in this study, and the data for the students' academic performance that was too general and less specific. It was indeed that the data for students' academic performance in this study was taken from the total number of subjects. The researcher did not specify to take one of subjects, for instance the most challenging subject like speaking. This goes with Chang and Read's statement (2008, p. 2) that test anxiety does affect the performance of students on a high-stakes test.

As to the result of hypothesis of this study, whether or not the students' test anxiety had statistically significant correlation with their academic performance, reducing the discomfort that some highly anxious test takers experienced would seem to be a laudable undertaking in an academic setting.

5.2 Recommendations

Information about the relationship between students' test anxiety and their academic performance could be important for educators who develop educational programs and implement teaching strategies. Particularly for teachers, it is wise for them to be aware of the phenomenon that happens to their students and try to find what aspect that really affects the students' academic performance, instead of test anxiety. In line with the assumption issued related to the third finding of this study, it is necessary to investigate preparation as one of aspects that may affect the students' academic performance.

Meanwhile, in accordance with the second finding of this study (i.e. factors affecting students' test anxiety, specifically in terms of test characteristics), it is necessary for further researchers to design a test while paying special attention to the five characteristics of item type, time pressure, length of the test, item difficulty sequencing, and test taking information in the same time. Henceforth, the researchers are required to test the controlled test, so that they can confirm the claim that the change of test characteristics will result in the change of students' test anxiety, which in return will affect their test results.

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Like every other study, this study had certain limitations. The first possible limitation was regarding the sample size. All the participants were the undergraduate students at a private higher education institution in Bandung with English as their major. Thus, generalizability of the results would be limited with this sample. Leaving from this limitation, further studies should use a large sample for the desired results. The second limitation was consideration that this study was still a pilot or mini-scale study. Hence, there is need for further studies in this area by using the different methods, instruments, and subjects of the study. Therefore, those studies can enhance the richness of aspects related to the students' test anxiety.

Furthermore, as test-anxious responses do not manifest until high stakes tests, further researchers should specify the data for students' academic performance by taking the data from one of subjects, which is the most challenging subject, for instance speaking. By doing such way, it is expected that the desired affect can be gained.