

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

This chapter covers the introduction of the study. It involves the background of the study, research question, research objectives, the significance of the study, the scope of study, clarifications of key terms and the thesis organization.

1.1 Background of the Study

In Indonesian context, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) rather than as a second language (ESL). The process of EFL teaching and learning somehow creates a phenomenon which is called as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). This phenomenon is considered as one of the factors that may affect students' attitude and achievement in their EFL classroom. It is often experienced by some students in EFL classroom.

The FLA is one of the widely explored subjects in the area of language learning and teaching (Horwitz, 2001; Hedge, 2011). For years, a main discussion has been on whether anxiety affects language learning. In this regard, many researchers have found a strong link between anxiety and foreign language learning (Horwitz, 2001; Bless & Fielder, 2006; Yule, 2006). It is proven that one-third of all foreign language learners experience some levels of language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001).

Foreign Language Anxiety may occur if students are exposed to several negative experiences in a foreign language context (Sparks *et al.*, 2000; Chen & Chang, 2004; Sparks & Ganschow, 2007; Saadi, 2009; Horwitz *et al.*, 2010; Hewitt & Stephenson, 2012). Furthermore, FLA is

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different from a general feeling of anxiety (Horwitz, 2001). It is because language anxiety is situation-specific anxiety, which is an unusual and typical phenomenon which is caused by the unique contexts of language learning, and thus distinguishable from other forms of anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986 as cited in Cha, 2006). It is commonly perceived that anxiety stands as the main block in succeeding foreign language learning, especially when it comes to speaking in the foreign language (Minghe & Yuan, 2013). In addition, anxiety is regarded as one of the major obstacles to foreign language learning that learners need to overcome (Zheng, 2008; Wu, 2010).

In line with the aforementioned explanation, it is stated that the levels of foreign language anxiety can affect learners' achievement levels in foreign language learning (Dordinejad & Ahmadabad, 2014). It can impede learners from reaching their goals (Horwitz, 2001), and prevents foreign language learners from successful performance in the target language (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013). In addition, it can make learners get discouraged, be not confident with their abilities, reluctant from participating in classroom activities, and even give up the effort to learn a language well (Na, 2007). As a prominent impediment to be responded, foreign language anxiety has become an interesting concern of many research (Ellis, 2008) and of this current study as well.

In the L2 teaching context, one of the greatest challenges for ESL/EFL teachers is to deliver students with a learner-centered, low-anxiety, and comfortable classroom environment (Ohata, 2005). In their efforts to create such an environment, the issue of student anxiety and its

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negative effects on L2 learning and performance seems to pose a challenge to all language teachers. Thus, first and foremost important task for ESL/EFL teachers is to have a better understanding of the nature of student anxiety in terms of when, where, how, and why students feel anxious, before addressing effective ways of anxiety reduction (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001).

However, the degree and the causes of foreign language anxiety can be very different according to the context and other influencing variables such as motivation, age, gender, level of study and etc. For example, the study in European context reported that inability to comprehend the material, speaking activities, pedagogical and instructional practices and, error correction and native speakers were the factors which contribute to the students' anxiety in EFL classroom (Wörde, 2003). In Chinese context, a study revealed that low English proficiency, lack of practice, difficulty of the task, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and incomprehensible input were the factors causing students' anxiety in EFL classroom (Liu, 2006). Another study found that the anxiety causes in EFL class of university students in Japan were associated with the processing and the output-related tasks (William & Andrade 2008).

Students' anxiety was also caused by the fear of making mistakes and about teachers' correcting their mistakes in the classes; they felt nervousness about failing the exams; and then it was also found that the students' poor socio-economic backgrounds developed a sense of marginalization among them in relation with foreign language use, study in Pakistani context by Khattak, *et al.*, (2011). In addition, a study in junior

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high school level in Indonesia revealed that the possible causes of foreign language anxiety were lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes, teaching activities and learners' personality (Kusumawaty, 2016). However, those studies showed that the causes of anxiety can be different according to the context of study, the level of school even though there were also some similarities.

As stated before that after knowing the causes of students' learning anxiety, ESL/EFL teachers can do certain activities to help the students to reduce their learning anxiety in ESL/EFL classroom. A study revealed several factors which were believed by students that they could reduce their foreign language anxiety. A sense of community (students interaction with peers), pedagogical practices and classroom environment (how teacher manages the class) and role of teacher (teacher builds a supportive and understanding environment) were believed that they can reduce FLA (Wörde, 2003). In addition, another study reported quite similar findings to Wörde's study that teacher and classroom environment can be the factors that reduce foreign language anxiety and students anxiety itself can be reduced by coming prepared to the class, being positive thinking, and seeking for helping from teacher and peer (Lababidi, 2015).

As mentioned before that there are several influencing variables related to foreign language anxiety. One of influencing variables to students' foreign language anxiety is gender. It can affect students' belief related to foreign language classroom anxiety including the anxiety causes and the anxiety- reducing factors. However, study on gender as one of the factors affecting the language learning process and the level of anxiety

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among foreign language learners, showed contradictory results (Aydin, *et al.*, 2017).

Several studies reported that gender had correlation to foreign language anxiety (Na, 2007; Khattak, 2011; Ezzi, 2012; Hogskola, 2013; Rafek, *et al.*, 2014; Fariadian, *et al.*, 2014; Gandhimathi, 2016; Dewaele, *et al.*, 2016; Gerencheal, 2016; Fei & Ali, 2016; Razak, *et al.*, 2017). Although those studies had their own contexts and their own results but the main point was that they shared the same idea that there was correlation between gender and foreign language anxiety. On the contrary, there were studies reported that there was no correlation between gender and foreign language anxiety (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2012; Loo & Kitjaroonchai, 2015).

Based on the aforementioned arguments, several reasons lead to conduct the current study. First, to the best of researcher's knowledge, the numbers of studies on the anxiety causes and anxiety-reducing factors in its relation to gender both in the global and Indonesian EFL contexts regarding senior high school students are fairly limited because most of research concerning university students as subjects of the research. Second, since the findings obtained from prior studies do not reach a consensus on whether gender really contributes to students' learning anxiety in EFL classroom, thus, this present study is still worth to be conducted to give more insights related to the issue of foreign language anxiety in different context. Third, it seems necessary to explore whether there is a relationship between foreign language anxiety causes, and anxiety-reducing factors, and certain variable such as gender.

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Considering all aforementioned evidences, the current study attempts to investigate students' learning anxiety in An EFL classroom mainly focuses on the levels of anxiety, factors contributing to students' learning anxiety and the anxiety-reducing factors in its relation with the gender. This present study is conducted at senior high school level in an Islamic boarding school in a region of Central Java, Indonesia.

1.2 Research Questions

In line with the background of study which is mentioned above this study finds out the answers of these following research questions.

1. What are the levels of anxiety experienced by male and female students in an EFL classroom?
2. What are the factors contributing to the foreign language anxiety experienced by male and female students in an EFL classroom based on their levels of anxiety?
3. What are the anticipated anxiety-reducing factors in an EFL classroom as perceived by male and female students based on their levels of anxiety?

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the research questions, the objectives of this study are formulated as follow:

1. To find out what levels of anxiety of male and female students emerge in an EFL classroom

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2. To investigate the factors contributing to students' foreign language anxiety according to male and female students in an EFL classroom regarding their anxiety levels.
3. To explore the anticipated anxiety-reducing factors in an EFL classroom as perceived by male and female students based on their anxiety levels.

1.4 Research Significance

Theoretically, this research results may enrich information about the students' foreign language anxiety in Indonesian context especially the levels of anxiety, the causes of anxiety and the anxiety-reducing factors and its relation to the gender. Furthermore, practically this study may give insights for English teachers related to the levels of anxiety, anxiety causes in an EFL classroom and the anxiety-reducing factors in an EFL classroom, particularly in Indonesia context based on students' experiences.

Hopefully, after knowing the levels of anxiety, the causes of learning anxiety in an EFL classroom and the factors that can reduce learning anxiety level perceived by the students, teachers may create an appropriate EFL classroom environment as well as a classroom instruction that make students feel comfortable and willingly engage in EFL classroom.

1.5 Clarification of Key Terms

Anxiety is defined as a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of autonomic nervous system.

English as Foreign Language (EFL) is the term that is used when English language is studied by people who live in places where English is

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not as first language. An EFL classroom may provide a place where learners or students can learn as well as to acquire new language.

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the (foreign) language learning process.

Gender is socially constructed definition of men and women. Gender is determined by the conception of the tasks, functions, and roles attributed to men and women in society and public and private life.

1.6 Scope of The Research

This study is conducted to senior high school students in a private Islamic boarding school in Semarang regency, Central Java, Indonesia. It is aimed to investigate the levels of foreign learning anxiety that are experienced by senior high school students in EFL classroom, some causes of foreign language anxiety, and the factors that can reduce learning anxiety in EFL classroom.

1.7 Thesis Organization

This thesis is organized into five chapters. It starts from chapter one until chapter five.

Chapter I presents to give a general description deal with the research topic. This chapter examines the background of the study, the research questions, the research objective, the significance of the study, the clarification of key terms, and the organization of the thesis.

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Chapter II presents the theories which underlie the study. This involves the related theory and related studies to the the study. Chapter III describes research methodology. This includes research design, research subjects, research site, data collection, and data analysis. Chapter IV presents both of results and analysis based on the data collected from the questionnaire, the observation and the semi-structured interview. Chapter V summarizes the results of study along with some recommendation.

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