

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AMONG DBK 1C STUDENTS AND THEIR COPING STRATEGIES: PRELIMINARY STUDY

Rabiatul Adawiyah bt Abdullah Zawawi

General Studies Department,  
Politeknik Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah.

rabiatuladawiyahaz@gmail.com

### Abstract

In Malaysian polytechnics, English is a compulsory subject. In order for students to enter the premier polytechnics, The Students Intake Division of Department of Polytechnic Education outlined that the students have to obtain at least E for English in their SPM. In this case, some students who enter the premier polytechnic might find Communicative English classroom as anxiety provoking. This research could offer valuable information for the lecturers to device useful teaching materials and approach and create a supportive, cooperative and low-anxiety classroom atmosphere for Communicative English classroom. This is a preliminary study which will focus on Semester 1 Diploma in Wood Based Technology students from Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah Polytechnic to identify anxious students and their coping strategies.

**Keywords:** anxiety, coping strategies, anxiety provoking

### 1.0 Introduction

Conforming to its status as a second language in Malaysia, English is a mandatory subject in all schools in Malaysia, both primary and secondary level. The Curriculum Development Centre of the Ministry of Education (2001) highlights that the Integrated Curriculum for Primary Schools is designed to provide learners with a solid foundation to use the language correctly in both speech and writing. It is also aimed towards enabling the students to speak internationally intelligible English.

Later in 2011, the curriculum shifted from the Integrated Curriculum for Primary School to Standard Curriculum for Primary School which aims towards creating a fun English language

learning environment using interactive activities (drama, role-play, debates, language games and songs) in the lessons while ensuring that language acquisition takes place accordingly. In a stress free and more relaxed classroom, students will find the lessons more meaningful and they will feel more enthused to learn and use English.

Furthermore, it is also highlighted by the Ministry of Education in the Integrated Curriculum for Secondary School (2000) that the curriculum aims towards capacitating all school-leavers to use English confidently every day in all situations which will also allow the students to pursue higher education in the English medium.

Having learned English for at least eleven years under the Malaysian Education system, students are expected to be able to use all the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) well. In the polytechnic system, Communicative English is being taught and it puts emphasis on the speaking skills. Aiming towards promoting interaction among students in the target language, the syllabus focuses on providing the students with useful expressions that can be used in a wide variety of social interactions and situations (Abdullah & Abd Majid, 2013).

### 2.0 Problem statement

Conversely, the Students Intake Division of Department of Polytechnic Education has stated that the entry requirement for diploma programme in premier polytechnics only requires the students to obtain at least an E for English. In this case, some students who enter the premier polytechnic might find Communicative English classroom as anxiety provoking. In the classroom, a variation of English speaking activities such as discussion, problem-solving, and role-playing are used to motivate the students to learn (Oradee, 2012).

As they are required to participate actively in the classroom, these speaking activities could cause them high anxiety level and trigger negative feeling and emotions. Having to speak up in class causes insecurity and discomfort to them (Toth, 2011). Many students may find the classroom particularly stressful and feel that something hinders their ability to perform successfully in the Communicative English classroom. However, in other subjects, they could be among the excellent students, performing well and highly motivated (Horwitz, et al. 1986).

Basically, this study is purposely driven in order to investigate students' anxiety level in the Communicative English classroom. The expected result would be intended to answer the ensuing research questions:

- Do Malaysian premier polytechnics' students experience English language anxiety?

- What kind of contexts do students perceive as anxiety provoking?
- What coping strategies do anxious students use to reduce their level of anxiety in the Communicative English classroom?
- Do students at different levels of language anxiety (low, moderate, and high) differ in the number and types of anxiety coping strategies?

### 3.0 Study objective

The objectives of this study are:

- i. To identify anxious students in the Communicative English Classroom.
- ii. To find out the contexts perceived by students as anxiety provoking.
- iii. To determine the strategies used by students to cope with their anxiety.
- iv. To investigate whether students of different levels of language anxiety (low, moderate, and high) differ in the number and types of anxiety coping strategies.

This research could offer valuable information for the lecturers to device useful teaching materials and approach and create a supportive, cooperative and low-anxiety classroom atmosphere for Communicative English classroom. Horwitz, et al. (1986) suggested that teachers have the options of whether they want to help the students to learn to cope with the existing anxiety provoking situation; or the teachers can make the learning context less stressful. It is also crucial to understand the frustration and discomfort endured when learning a second language. (Horwitz, 2001) As for the students, it could offer a platform for the students to develop their own learner community which can help them to find possible solutions to resort to positive coping strategies.

### 4.0 Literature Review

#### 4.1 English Language Anxiety

Language anxiety, as suggested by Horwitz, et al. (1986), is a major obstacle in learning to speak another language. It can have negative effect on the language learning process (Yasin Nuranifar, 2014). MacIntyre and Gardner, (1989) suggested that language anxiety tended to be negatively related to second language achievement.

Horwitz, et al. (1986) suggested that language anxiety is caused by three factors which are communication comprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Zhiping and Shamala, (2013) highlighted that fear of being in public, shyness, and

inaccuracy when speaking are some of the signs of anxiety in relation to communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation.

In acquiring English language as a second language, self-confidence plays a very important role. Introverted and reserved students tend to be quieter and less willing to communicate (Zhiping & Shamala, 2013). Students get nervous and feel different levels of anxiety during classes when they have to cope with the demands of being able to sustain communications in a language they are not familiar with (Kostić-Bobanović, 2009.)

According to Horwitz, et al. (1986), when required to speak in their second language, individuals who feel they are competent in their mother tongue can feel degraded. Furthermore, students who suffer from communication comprehension usually do not feel easy communicating in English, especially if they are needed to use their listening and speaking abilities (Zhiping & Shamala, 2013).

In order to deal with this issue, a delighted, lively, friendly and pleasant classroom atmosphere can help students overcome their physical barrier, and lower their anxiety (Du, 2009). It is important for teachers to provide clear explanation to help learners manage their anxiety (Iizuka, 2010). Du, (2009) stressed that the ignorance of the relationship between the students' affective factors and their learning will have negative influence on the teaching and learning effect.

#### 4.2 ANXIOUS STUDENTS

In learning English as a second language, even a student who excels in other classes might experience anxiety when using the language.

Horwitz et al (1986) emphasized that in other classes, these students are free to use their native language to communicate with their lecturers and friends. This allows them to express their ideas and thought clearly. However, in the English language classroom, as they are expected to use English a means of communication, they might become frustrated or anxious because they have difficulties in conveying their message because of their limited abilities in using the language. Because of this, these students created a self-concept of their abilities and feel embarrassed if they do not pronounce words exactly like the native speaker and this increases their anxiety (as cited in Partridge and Eamoraphan, 2015).

Krashen, (1981, 1982, 1985) supports the idea and illustrated that anxious students were found to have difficulty understanding the language, and to be less motivated to use the language (as cited in Tran, Baldauf & Moni, 2012).

As cited in Gregersen and MacIntyre (2013), Sellers, (2000) highlighted that more anxious students in reading tend to recall less passage content, and experience more off-task, interfering thoughts than their less anxious counterparts, while (Djigunovic, 2006) explained that high anxiety students in speaking produce longer texts and smaller amounts of continuous speech, have longer mid-clause pauses, make fewer repetitions, and make more false starts.

#### 4.3 COPING STRATEGIES

In coping with English language anxiety, Kondo and Yang (2004) proposed that the basic tactics used by students can be positive and negative and can be divided into five main categories: 1) Preparation: e.g. studying hard, trying to obtain good summaries of lecture notes, 2) Relaxation: e.g. taking a deep breath, trying to calm down, 3) Positive Thinking: e.g. imagining oneself giving a great performance, trying to enjoy the tension, 4) Peer Seeking: e.g. looking for others who are having difficulty controlling their anxiety, asking other students if they understand the class, 5) Resignation: e.g. giving up, sleeping in class. However, according to Iizuka, (2010), one strategy that can be considered both considered as positive and negative is the strategy of using L1.

### 5.0 Methodology

#### 5.1 Participants

This is a case study involving 36 students from Sultan Salahuddin Abdul Aziz Shah from Civil Engineering Department. They are chosen using purposive sampling.

#### 5.2 Material

A questionnaire adapted from Horwitz's (1983) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) will be used to identify anxious students. Once they have been identified, they are asked to answer an open-ended questionnaire (adapted from Iizuka, 2010).

#### 5.3 Procedure

The responses will be categorized using Affinity diagram or also known as KJ method developed by Kawakita Jiro. It is an inductive approach used to systematically analyse qualitative data which consists of 4 phases: card making, grouping and naming, chart making and explanation.

The affinity diagram organizes ideas with following steps:

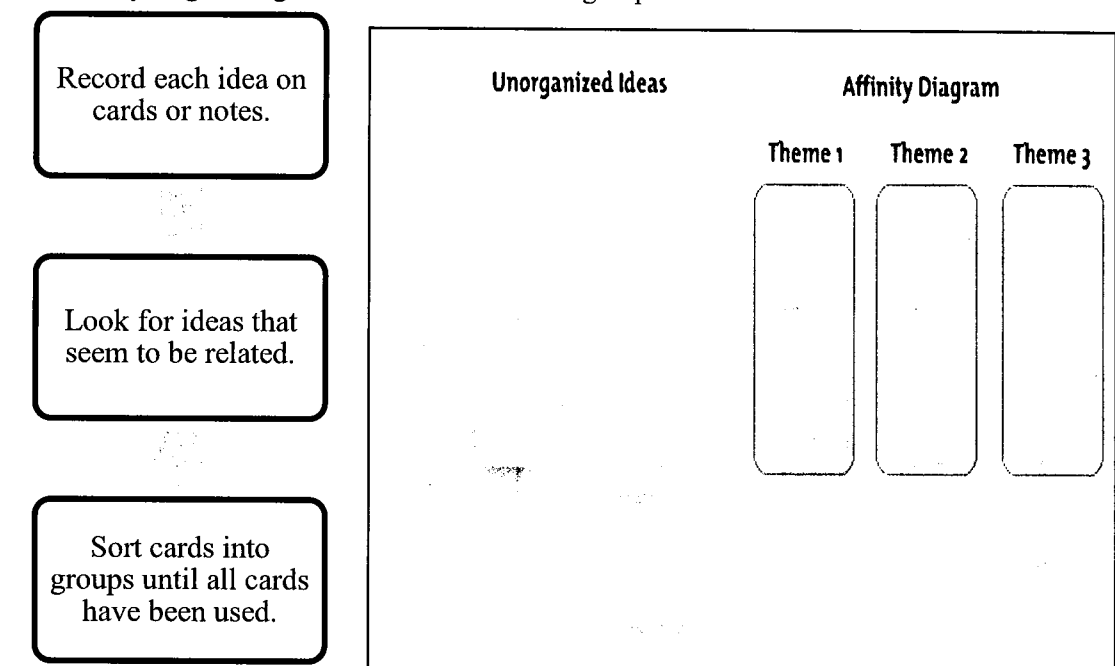


Figure 1: Affinity diagram (Jiro, 1982)

### 5.4 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework is undergirded by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's Theory of Foreign Language Anxiety (1986). This theory suggests that foreign language anxiety is one such unique type of anxiety. It refers to a phenomenon related to but different from other specific anxieties. Horwitz, et al. (1986) defined anxiety as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system.

In this study, by using this theory as a framework, the students' experience in learning English are investigated to determine whether they experience English language classroom anxiety or not, and if so, how do they cope with their anxiety.

## 6.0 Conclusion

Despite the fact that English is a second language in Malaysia, most Malaysian graduates are still lacking awareness and readiness towards meeting the industry's demands (Zarina, Faridah, Nor. H, Azizah, Rozmel, Harieza, Abdul. W, & Saran. K 2011) and their ability of using the English language is reported low, regardless of the type of workplace or level of study (Ahmad Yasruddin, Wan Mohd Haniff, Afiddah Mardziah, Noor Izma, & Farawaheeda, 2010). By pursuing this preliminary study, it is hoped that the outcome can be used towards tackling those issues.

Polytechnic as a higher learning institution is regarded as the hub for producing more semi-professionals in the engineering, commerce and service sectors. By reinforcing the knowledge and usage of English among the students, the vision towards becoming a learning institution that is at par with the universities can come into realization.

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**Appendix 1** - Questionnaire [adapted from Horwitz's (1983) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)]

*The purpose of this survey is to study the English Language classroom anxiety among polytechnic students. Answering the questionnaire is voluntary and the data collected is strictly confidential. All participants will NOT be identified. The data collected will be analyzed and used to identify any educational needs which can then be implemented as appropriate.*

**ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY**

Department: JKA Course: DIPLOMA IN WOOD BASED TECHNOLOGY Semester: 1  
 Gender: M/F Race: Malay/ Chinese/ Indian/ Others (Please state: \_\_\_\_\_)  
 Language spoken at home: Malay/ Chinese/ Tamil/ Others (Please state : \_\_\_\_\_)

**Please circle the number below that indicates how much you agree or disagree with each statement. Circle one number for each statement.**

ITEMS	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NUETRAL	DISAGRE E	STRON GLY DISAG REE
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English language class.	5	4	3	2	
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.	5	4	3	2	
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.	5	4	3	2	
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the lecturer is saying in the English language.	5	4	3	2	
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes.	5	4	3	2	
6. During English class, I find myself thinking about things th at have nothing to do with the course.	5	4	3	2	
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at English language than I am.	5	4	3	2	
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my English class.	5	4	3	2	
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	5	4	3	2	
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my English module.	5	4	3	2	
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over English classes.	5	4	3	2	
12. In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	5	4	3	2	
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English classes.	5	4	3	2	
14. I would not be nervous speaking the English language with native speakers.	5	4	3	2	

15. I get upset when I don't understand what the lecturer is correcting.	5	4	3	2	1
16. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.	5	4	3	2	1
17. I often feel like not going to my English class.	5	4	3	2	1
18. I feel confident when I speak in English language class.	5	4	3	2	1
19. I am afraid that my English lecturer is ready to correct every mistake I make.	5	4	3	2	1
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.	5	4	3	2	1
21. The more I read notes in English, the more confused I get.	5	4	3	2	1
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.	5	4	3	2	1
23. I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.	5	4	3	2	1
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking in English in front of other students.	5	4	3	2	1
25. English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	5	4	3	2	1
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.	5	4	3	2	1
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.	5	4	3	2	1
28. When I'm on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	5	4	3	2	1
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English lecturer says.	5	4	3	2	1
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English.	5	4	3	2	1
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak in English.	5	4	3	2	1
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the English language.	5	4	3	2	1
33. I get nervous when my English lecturer asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	5	4	3	2	1

**Appendix 2** - Questionnaire (adapted from Iizuka, 2010).

When do you experience anxiety in EC classes and how do you cope with such anxiety?  
Please describe your answers concretely, in as much detail as possible.

Anxiety-provoking contexts	Coping strategies for such anxiety

**TAHAP KEPUASAN PELANGGAN TERHADAP KUALITI  
PERKHIDMATAN KAFETARIA DI KAFETARIA KOLEJ KOMUNITI  
LEDANG**

**Rusnani binti Yahya<sup>1</sup>, Faridah Shariyah binti Sharuddin<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Jabatan Kejuruteraan & Kemahiran  
Kolej Komuniti Ledang Johor

<sup>2</sup>Jabatan Kejuruteraan & Kemahiran  
Kolej Komuniti Ledang Johor

rusnani@kklej.edu.my, faridah@kklej.edu.my

**Abstrak**

Kajian ini bertujuan menilai tahap kepuasan pelanggan terhadap kualiti perkhidmatan di kafetaria Kolej Komuniti Ledang. Aspek kualiti perkhidmatan kafetaria yang dikaji adalah dari segi kepelbagaian menu, kebersihan makanan dan persekitaran, harga makanan dan layanan pekerja kafetaria. Seramai 80 orang pensyarah dan staf yang dipilih sebagai responden dalam kajian ini. Data diperolehi dengan mengedarkan satu set soal selidik kepada responden yang telah dipilih dan dianalisis secara statistik deskriptif. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa tahap kepuasan responden terhadap kualiti perkhidmatan kafetaria dari aspek kepelbagaian menu kebersihan makanan, harga makanan dan layanan pekerja kafetaria berada di tahap yang sederhana. Melalui dapatan kajian dan beberapa cadangan penambahbaikan daripada penyelidik mampu membantu pihak pengusaha kafetaria untuk membuat penambahbaikan dalam meningkatkan tahap kepuasan pelanggan.

**Kata kunci:** kepuasan pelanggan, kualiti perkhidmatan