

# **Chapter I**

## **Introduction**

### **Background of the Study**

There are various factors that affect the process of foreign language learning, such as personality, motivation, physical and affective factors, etc. In the classrooms, most students face challenges in their language learning, including the affective factor of feeling anxious. According to Hu and Wang (2014), anxiety is one of the emotions that affect language learning. The type of anxiety that is associated with learning a second or foreign language is termed as ‘second/foreign language anxiety’ (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013). Language anxiety, according to MacIntyre and Gardner (1989), is the feeling of tension and apprehension experienced by learners in the foreign

language classroom. Horwitz et al. (1986) define foreign language anxiety or 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”. Many foreign language learners normally experience this feeling as it may occur in any stage of learning process.

The anxiety level of the learners is most likely to determine the learners’ performance. Learners who feel anxious in their foreign language learning may find their study less enjoyable (Gregersen, 2005). When this happens to a student, there is no sufficient motivation for learning. Horwitz (2001) has reiterated that the issue of understanding the relationship between anxiety and achievement remains unresolved. However, there are studies reporting that anxiety causes negative impact on

learners' ability to assimilate. When feeling anxious, learners may have problems such as reduced word production and difficulty in understanding spoken instructions (Chen & Chang, 2004). The correlation studies showed that high language anxiety is related to low achievement in language learning (Budin, 2014). Students with high anxiety performed worse than those who have low anxiety. Furthermore, Crookall and Oxford (1991) reported that serious language anxiety may cause other related problems with self-esteem, self-confidence, and risk-taking ability, and ultimately hampers proficiency in the second language.

Even though some researchers reported that there is no significant relationship between language anxiety and students' performance, recently, Horwitz (2001) has reiterated that the issue of understanding the relationship

between anxiety and achievement remains unresolved. Some other second language researchers stated that anxiety can also facilitate the learning of the target language (Liu & Huang, 2011; Trang, Moni, & Baldauf, 2012). Perhaps, the reason for these mixed results is, as stated by Phillips (1992, p. 14) that “anxiety is a complex, multi-faceted construct.” Anxiety, which may debilitate or facilitate learning, serves simultaneously to motivate and to warn the learner. Facilitating anxiety triggers the learner to “fight” in performing the provided task; it pushes the learner emotionally for approach behavior. Debilitating anxiety, in contrast, impels the learner to “flee” the given task, stimulating the learner to assume the avoidance behavior.

There are many factors that cause anxiety, and one of them is the student’s personality (Tanveer, 2007).

This matter is closely related to the self-esteem and motivation of the students. They lack self-confidence, unsure of their own capability, afraid to be humiliated or committing mistakes, lack support from parents or teachers, and many other possible reasons. Another factor to be considered is the learner's attitude in language learning. The attitude of the learners refers to the perception towards the target language. A negative perception towards the target language will most likely create a barrier between the language and the learner (Tanveer, 2007).

The teacher's attitude and the teaching strategies employed also have direct influence on students' learning. According to Tanveer (2007), a teacher who has a pleasant personality and attitude will motivate students to learn better. In the language class, many of

the anxiety-provoking factors reported by the participants of a study appeared to be generated by various speaking activities (Wörde, 2003). Other several anxiety-producing factors include social and cultural environments, and many others.

According to Hashemi and Abbasi (2013), teachers play a vital role in the language classrooms, in relation to students' language anxiety. It is important for the teachers to be aware of the presence of language anxiety in their students, as this condition may affect the learners' ability to learn. Teachers have significant roles in promoting healthy and effective learning environment, alleviating anxiety as much as possible by employing the appropriate teaching methods or strategies.

In Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, many students may experience anxiety in the

language learning process. Thus, this academic situation imposes its challenges towards English teachers on how to alleviate the anxiety of the students in order to promote effective and maximum language learning. In this context, teachers hold a highly crucial role in students' learning process.

In attempting to solve this concern, it is necessary for the teachers to determine first the different anxiety producing factors, and then to recognize the manifestations of anxiety during the learning process (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013). By identifying students' anxiety in the classroom, it will be helpful for teachers to make adjustments in their teaching strategies in order to promote effective learning process. Horwitz, et. al. (1986, p. 131) state: "In general, educators have two options when dealing with anxious students, (1) they can

help them learn to cope with the existing anxiety provoking situation; and (2) they can make the learning context less stressful”.

Afterwards, teachers need to employ the appropriate teaching approach or strategy while considering their students’ anxiety level. Identified anxiety factors and manifestations will then serve as a basis information for teachers to choose or develop teaching strategies that will help students cope with the anxiety and be more motivated to learn.

In the past, some studies have explored different perspectives regarding language anxiety. Most studies on language anxiety concentrate on understanding the mechanism of anxiety in the process of language learning either in foreign language or second language settings (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) and many also



focus on looking at the approaches used to help students reduce their language anxiety (Kondo & Ling, 2004). In their research, Kondo & Ling (2004) identified specific strategies mentioned by the students to cope with language anxiety, namely: preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer seeking and resignation. The first category, preparation, is students' efforts to overcome their feeling of anxiety or threat by improving their learning and study strategies. The second, relaxation, deals with ways to minimize the symptoms of anxiety. The third, positive thinking, refers to the efforts of the students to divert attention from stressful situation to positive and pleasant cues and bring relief to oneself. The fourth, peer seeking, is the attempt to find other students who also feel anxious in their language class as consolation to give them ease. The fifth, resignation,

refers to the unwillingness of students to alleviate their language anxiety.

Given that language anxiety can lead to detrimental influence on second/foreign language learning and communication in the target language, Hashemi & Abbasi (2013) concluded that it is important that language instructors not only recognize anxiety as a major cause of students' lack of success in L2/FL communication but also assist them to overcome their feelings of unease and discomfort. Many other studies focused on determining the contributing factors and learners' coping strategy to overcome the anxiety (Marwan, 2007), while Liauw (2012) suggested some strategies teachers can do to alleviate anxiety of their students.

Meanwhile, some other researchers have examined the effects of language anxiety on students' performances (Salehi & Marefat, 2014) and suggest that anxiety has debilitating effects on students' performance. Tanveer (2007) also investigated its effects on speaking skills. His study shows that the most anxiety provoking skill in learning English as a second language or foreign language is speaking skill. The participants mostly expressed many difficulties in learning English in terms of grammar, pronunciation, English word-class system, etc. These factors even reinforce learners' lack of confidence and would cause debilitating level of anxiety, which hinders their communication abilities. A major cause of facing these difficulties was discovered to be the lack of sufficient input and opportunities to practice the speaking skills. According to Tanveer (2007), many

students reported that they know some vocabularies and the correct sentence structures, however they do not come out right and spontaneously when needed in any communicative situation.

On the other hand, Wörde (2003) studied the students' perspectives regarding foreign language anxiety. The primary goal of her research was to identify the factors, as perceived by students, which may contribute to anxiety, and those factors that may reduce anxiety in an attempt to understand more fully the role that anxiety may play in learning a foreign or second language.

Many among English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners, even English as Second Language (ESL) learners, often express their anxiety in some situations while learning English, and this phenomenon was also

observed by Tanveer (2007) in University of Glasgow, United Kingdom. This language anxiety is caused by several factors. Mostly, students have negative attitude toward learning a foreign language due to the feeling of intimidation. Since they perceive English as a difficult language to learn due to language interference, they tend to have low level of motivation as well.

According to Krashen's (1984) theory of Affective Filter Hypothesis, anxiety is one of the factors that lead to the closing of a 'filter' in our brain. When this occurs, the learners will not be able to gain any comprehensible input, halting the process of learning. This explains the reason why language anxiety tends to cause a debilitating effect on students' performance in the language class.

It is important for the teachers to be aware of the presence of language anxiety in their students, as this condition may affect the learners' ability to learn. Thus, appropriate language teaching strategies to help alleviate students' anxiety will maximize their language learning. Teachers need to determine and employ effective teaching strategies that will promote optimal language learning and conducive learning environment for the students, with the aim of helping students cope with their anxiety. However, teachers are sometimes unaware of the presence of language anxiety in their students. Even though they might have realized, not much intervention or action is taken to help them cope with the anxiety. The anxiety is usually taken for granted as an inevitable condition that is difficult to control.

Many of the previous studies focused on exploring the anxiety-inducing factors and the learning strategies students use to cope with their condition (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013; Hu & Wang, 2011; Iizuka, 2010; Lu & Liu, 2011; Tanveer, 2007; Wu, 2010). There were also many previous studies that focused on the effects of FLA on students' performance in general. Different from the previous studies, this study is intended to focus more particularly on investigating the effects of FLA on students' speaking competence since there are not much researches conducted about it. The selected participants are those who have higher level of English knowledge, and thus, this research took the cases of university students. In addition to that, the English Conversation Class (ECC) was chosen specifically

because there are more opportunities to observe speaking performances inside the classroom.

Many previous studies on the impacts of anxiety either on learning process or on students' performance have applied experimental research. This study employs qualitative research method since it involves the investigation of anxiety factors, perceptions, attitudes and behavior of EFL students towards language anxiety. These factors of anxiety either have negative or positive impacts on students' performance, and this study emphasizes on its negative impacts on students' speaking competence. There are five particular aspects of speaking competence which are being focused on, namely: (1) vocabularies and expressions, (2) grammar, (3) communication, (4) interaction, (5) pronunciation and intonation.



## **Research Questions**

This qualitative research aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that contribute to the students' Foreign Language Anxiety?

2. How does foreign language anxiety affect students' speaking competence in the language class?

2.1. To what extent is the impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on the students' vocabularies and expressions?

2.2. To what extent is the impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on the students' sentence structure or grammar?

2.3. To what extent is the impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on the students' communicative ability?

2.4. To what extent is the impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on the students' interactive ability?

2.5. To what extent is the impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on the students' pronunciation and intonation?

### **Research Objectives**

This study is intended to investigate the factors that contribute to the students' language anxiety. It also aims to explore the debilitating effects of foreign language anxiety on students' performance in the language class. It focuses on the English speaking skills dealing with speaking competence, particularly on five aspects: (1) vocabularies and expressions, (2) sentence

structure or grammar, (3) communicative ability, (4) interactive ability and (5) pronunciation and intonation.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Pekrun's Expectancy-Value Theory of Anxiety**

#### **(EVTA) Model**

This theory basically claims that the feeling of anxiety is related to the appraisals of situations as threatening or not and also to the learner's ability in dealing with the situation (Pekrun, 1992). With this, he introduced the terms situation-outcome expectancies (appraisals of a situation as being threatening or not) and action-control expectancies (appraisals about one's ability to initiate and carry out an effective solution). Anxiety is produced when an individual experiences

potentially harmful events in which he is unable to effectively control or to solve.

### **Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy**

Almost similar concept with Pekrun's EVTA Model, this theory of self-efficacy by Bandura (1991) asserts that anxiety depends on the individual's perception of his ability to deal positively with the potential threatening situation. Bandura argues that self-esteem is considered as a mitigating factor to the anxiety of learners. When a learner perceives a situation as threatening, there could be a possible adverse effect on the learning process. This usually hampers the ability of students to concentrate on fulfilling a task due to the divided attentional resources.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study is expected to have theoretical and practical contribution. Theoretically, this study is intended to give insights regarding students' experience on foreign language anxiety and its effects on their speaking performance. It is possible that many teachers do not recognize the presence of anxiety among their students, or perhaps even the different factors or situations that provoke it. Therefore, the inputs from this study are expected to be of benefits for the knowledge of English teachers to be more aware of the existence of FLA in their own classrooms as well as the potential factors causing it.

In the practical aspect, the results of this study are hoped to be helpful for teachers to try to improve and to address the perceived stressful circumstances in their

classrooms. By knowing the possible anxiety-provoking situations inside the classroom, will be able to provide appropriate assistance and help for the students. Thus, the results of the study are expected to render possible practical solutions that teachers can apply in accordance to their classrooms' situations.

### **Scope and Limitation**

The content of this qualitative study is focused on foreign language anxiety in the light of its debilitating effects. It investigated the anxiety-contributing factors, as well as its impacts on students' spoken performance in their language class, emphasizing on the negative ones. The focus is on the spoken performance because there have not been many researches that focused on the impact of anxiety on students' speaking skills. Most

previous studies have investigated on the factors contributing to anxiety, the impact of anxiety on students' classroom achievement, students coping strategies and teachers' techniques in alleviating anxiety.

Since this study is focused on the speaking skills, it is preferable that the target participants are students from an English conversation class. This kind of setting is suitable to the need of the study, because there will be more opportunities to observe students' speaking performances. The target participants chosen are college students because they already have basic knowledge in English, and they are more capable in producing spoken output. They are students from English Conversation Class level II, and the study was conducted covering the first three out of their seven meetings of a new semester. According to the teacher, this class is equally distributed

in terms of performance, which means that there are more or less equal number of students who are considered to be academically good, moderate and challenged. In general, students are described to be open and enthusiastic in learning and practicing English. They show interest in the class discussion by participating and responding to the teacher accordingly.

### **Definition/Clarification of the Key Terms**

#### **Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)**

It is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. It is the transient emotional state of feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness that can fluctuate over time and vary in intensity, which would



interrupt the normal operation of the mental and physical constitution, including the process of foreign language learning.

### **Factors Causing Foreign Language Anxiety**

The factors contributing to FLA may either be internal or external factors. The internal factors relate to the learners' sense of "self" which encompasses one's self-esteem, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, etc. As for the external, factors that are involved pertain to the learning environment, teacher factors, classroom procedures and teacher-learner interactions, socio-cultural factors and other more.

## **Speaking Competence**

Speaking competence is a complex cognitive skill which involves the use of language in consideration of the areas of knowledge such as the grammatical and phonological system, vocabulary, and the practice of appropriate social functions in accordance to the discourse setting. In summary, it basically encompasses five aspects: (1) vocabulary and expressions, (2) sentence structure or grammar, (3) communicative ability, (4) interaction and (5) pronunciation and intonation.

## **Language Learning**

It is a cognitive process wherein learners are consciously making efforts in obtaining knowledge and

skills of a language. It is a result of reinforced practice and direct instruction in the rules of language.

### **Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)**

This five-point Likert Scale is a tool that consists of 33 items in order to measure the anxiety level of learners in a classroom setting, particularly in foreign language classroom. The answers to each item can be one of these: strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree and strongly disagree. The FLCAS is based on an analysis of potential sources of anxiety in a language classroom, integrating three related anxieties (communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation) as posited by Horwitz, et. al. (1986). This scale has been used in many studies of

anxiety in foreign language learning and found to be a highly reliable measure (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), and therefore this study will also adopt and utilize it in the process of data collection.

### **Thesis Organization**

This research is divided into 5 chapters. The first chapter of this research discusses the background of the study, the research questions and its research objectives, the theoretical framework involved, the significance of the study, its scope and limitation as well as the definition of the key terms.

As for chapter two, the different theories and hypothesis that are related to the topic are elaborated. Previous researches are explored and discussed to support the researcher's claims, as this chapter dwells

into the different aspects about language anxiety, such as the factors causing language anxiety, its effects on students' performance and the strategies in alleviating students' language anxiety.

The research method is explained in the chapter three. It includes the research design, the participants, the research instruments used, the data resources & unit of analysis, the data collection and data analysis procedure, as well as the triangulation. Chapter four presents the findings of the study, followed by the discussion. Lastly, conclusion was drawn and suggestions for further studies were made in the chapter five.