

## The Influence of Anxiety in Learning English for Specific Purposes for Non-English Department Students

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### ABSTRACT

*Many students in the non-English Department feel anxious while speaking in front of the classroom and it has become a never-ending issue up to now. Therefore, this research focuses on investigating how anxiety factors affect students' behavior during EFL instruction and how non-English-speaking students' beliefs contribute to the development of anxiety. Descriptive qualitative case study method was employed with the subject of the research were 32 students from the 4<sup>th</sup> semester of Arabic Language Education and Islamic Education study program at the non-English Department of Walisongo Islamic State University of Semarang. The instruments were field observation, interview, questionnaire, and Focus Group Discussion. The research revealed that non-English students learning ESP English commonly experience two primary types of anxiety: confusion and sweating. These feelings often arise due to a lack of preparation before attending English classes. Anxiety is heightened when students feel unprepared in three key areas: grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary mastery. In conclusion, students tend to feel anxious when they overthink the instructions or have to speak English in front of many peers. However, they feel more comfortable and engaged when lecturers create a joyful and positive classroom atmosphere. It is recommended that ESP students adopt strategies to manage their anxiety, including thorough preparation, relaxation techniques, positive thinking, seeking support from peers, and developing acceptance. Additionally, teachers should play an active role in reducing students' anxiety by fostering a supportive and encouraging learning environment.*

*Keywords: anxiety; English for Specific Purposes; influence; non-English department*

### INTRODUCTION

Studying English for Specific Purposes (hereafter ESP) in a foreign language context requires attention to both language skills and the practical objectives behind learning English. As Haycraft (1986) noted, understanding the purpose and goals of learning English can significantly enhance students' ability to improve their language proficiency. He also believes that there are multiple talents in terms of language instruction and mastery of a single language. One of the English competencies that must be taught to non-English students is ESP. As a specialized branch of language instruction, it is designed to meet the specific needs of learners in targeted contexts, often related to their academic or professional goals. It is like any other type of language classroom instruction, is first and foremost based on the process of learning,

a process that nonetheless addresses the requirements of communities of learners, namely participants interested in acquiring some key expertise and performing job-related procedures. The process involves not only the acquisition of general language skills but also addressing the specific linguistic demands of the learners' fields.

Despite the structured nature of ESP, many students face challenges that hinder their learning. Language anxiety might have arisen in a variety of contexts. According to MacIntyre & Gardner (1989) Socio-educational model, language anxiety can arise in two primary contexts: within the classroom and in real-world situations where the language is used. Over the past three decades, research has consistently highlighted the negative impact of anxiety on language learning. For non-English students, especially those studying ESP, anxiety can manifest as confusion, physical symptoms such as sweating, or stage fright, particularly when faced with speaking tasks. These challenges often stem from fears of grammatical errors, lack of vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties, as well as the absence of a supportive and collaborative learning environment. Speaking ability is highly valued by many individuals, particularly those majoring in English, because it is required of them in that degree. It is also required for non-English students who want to study English because acquiring speaking abilities would give them an advantage. Furthermore, job seekers must have speaking skills if they want to apply for a position in a foreign business since it is a specific demand for the firm because a foreign company has major relationships, particularly with other foreign companies whose employees come from other nations.

Handayani (2009) classified challenges into two categories: linguistic and non-linguistic. Linguistic issues include limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and pronunciation difficulties, while non-linguistic challenges involve insufficient practice opportunities, lack of exposure to native speakers, and fear of criticism. At Walisongo Islamic State University, non-English students frequently struggle with these issues, despite recognizing the importance of English for their academic and professional futures. The absence of collaborative learning and positive reinforcement further exacerbates their anxiety, affecting their motivation and confidence. Many students have finished their undergraduate studies at Walisongo Islamic State University; thus, they are uncomfortable while speaking and writing outside of the ESP materials in the classroom. Even though they are aware that English is critical to their careers, many are uninterested in learning the language. The challenge experienced by non-English pupils is stage fright, which impedes regional learning by non-English learners. Non-English learners, on the other hand, are afraid of grammatical faults such as tenses and inappropriate sentences. In a few circumstances, students are eager to speak up in class, but their peers will criticize and discourage them. In their class, there is no collaborative setting. Learners feel pleased when they communicate in English in their neighborhood, and they are not afraid to speak up while they are in undergraduate school. Learners who are studying English in a language other than their native tongue may frequently have a lot of expertise in a variety of fields. The language issues in speaking class were restricted to vocabulary, grammatical errors, difficulty pronouncing the words, and the use of the student's native tongue. Then there were non-linguistic challenges, such as restricted time in practicing English, reduced frequency in studying English, never having a companion in learning English, never having the opportunity to speak English with a native speaker, simply humiliation, and no habit in practicing English. These findings demonstrated that students at Walisongo Islamic State University continue to struggle with their English skills.

The importance of needs analysis in designing effective English for Specific Purposes courses has been widely highlighted in the literature. Basturkmen (2010) emphasizes that conducting a needs analysis allows curriculum developers to identify learners' specific requirements, ensuring that courses are tailored to meet these needs effectively. This process prevents the development of programs that are either too broad or too limited in scope, which

can hinder learning outcomes. Supporting this perspective, Coskun and Arslan (2014) align with Long's (2005) assertion that ESP courses lacking a thorough needs analysis often fail to achieve their intended goals, leading to inefficiencies in instruction. A targeted curriculum, informed by a comprehensive needs analysis, is crucial for equipping learners with the skills they require for academic and professional success.

Research on English as a Foreign Language learning has also delved into innovations and challenges faced by students. (Faridi, 2009; Rukmini & Sutopo, 2013; Bharati, 2016; Utami & Nurkamto, 2017) highlights the transformative role of Information and Communication Technology in enhancing education quality, noting that modern technologies provide students with greater access to language learning resources both at school and at home. Similarly, Lovihandrie et al. (2018) observe that multilingual schools influence early language development by fostering an interlanguage—a unique linguistic system that learners develop as they gradually acquire the target language. At Walisongo Islamic State University, non-English major EFL students face both linguistic and non-linguistic challenges. Handayani (2009) categorizes these difficulties into two areas: linguistic issues, including limited vocabulary, grammatical errors, and pronunciation struggles, and non-linguistic barriers, such as insufficient practice opportunities, lack of exposure to native speakers, and fear of criticism. These challenges significantly impact students' ability to progress in their language learning journey. So, there is a need to have a teaching design that copes with the challenges as the language is a part of the construction of reflective space (Rudi, 2024).

Language anxiety is another critical factor influencing language acquisition. According to MacIntyre and Gardner's (1989) Socio-Educational Model, anxiety can manifest both within the classroom and in real-world situations where the language is used. This anxiety has been shown to interfere with students' progress and motivation. Khodaday and Khajavy (2013) report that high levels of anxiety correlate with decreased academic performance and diminished willingness to participate in learning activities. Similarly, Azher et al. (2010) found that severe anxiety can lead to avoidance behaviors, such as skipping classes or avoiding speaking tasks, and may even cause students to withdraw from language learning entirely. Na (2017) further highlights that prolonged anxiety can erode confidence and motivation, posing significant challenges to language acquisition.

Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) has been a focus of numerous studies (Çağatay, 2015; Cui, 2011; Fariadian et al., 2014; Luo et al., 2014; Muhaisen & Al-Haq, 2012; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013; Qaddomi, 2013; Shi & Liu, 2006; Tercan & Dikilitaş, 2015; Zhao & Whitchurch, 2011). While some researchers have suggested that anxiety can occasionally have a facilitative effect on learning (Bailey & Gattrell, 1995; Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001), most findings point to its detrimental impact. (Cheng et al., 1999; E. Horwitz, 2001) argue that anxiety hinders learning by inducing avoidance behaviors, such as arriving late, skipping classes, or avoiding participation, as well as causing physical symptoms like sweating and headaches (Gregersen, 2002; Horwitz & Young, 1991). These effects can significantly impair the efficiency of language learning, making anxiety a crucial factor to address in educational contexts (Onwuegbuzie, 2000).

This study builds on Basturkmen's (2010) theoretical framework, emphasizing the necessity of needs analysis in ESP curriculum design, and integrates insights from research on EFL and language anxiety. By examining the specific anxiety factors affecting ESP students at Walisongo Islamic State University, this study aims to contribute to existing literature and propose strategies for reducing anxiety to enhance learning outcomes. Based on the explanation above, the writers choose this research due to the influence of anxiety by non-English students in occupying ESP as their complementary competence in accomplishing their undergraduate school at Walisongo Islamic State University through descriptive qualitative research design. The research problems focus on investigating how anxiety factors affect students' behavior

during EFL instruction and how non-English-speaking students' beliefs contribute to the development of anxiety. The objectives of the study are to examine the anxiety factors that shape students' behavior in EFL instruction and to explore how students' beliefs play a role in creating this anxiety. The expected results of this study include identifying the specific factors contributing to students' anxiety during EFL instruction, such as fear of making mistakes, lack of preparation, or fear of criticism, and analyzing how these factors influence classroom behaviors like reluctance to participate or avoidance of speaking tasks. It also aims to explore the role of students' beliefs about their abilities and language learning expectations in shaping their anxiety levels. The study is expected to provide practical recommendations for educators to mitigate anxiety through supportive learning environments and confidence-building strategies while contributing to the academic discussion on the psychological factors affecting EFL learning. Ultimately, these insights could inform teaching practices that improve student engagement, reduce stress, and enhance overall language acquisition outcomes.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a descriptive qualitative case study approach, which focuses on describing and interpreting current phenomena or situations. Descriptive research aims to explore occurrences in detail, while qualitative research relies on post-positivism and the naturalist perspective. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is designed to investigate complex phenomena by interpreting participants' perspectives and experiences in their natural environment, making it ideal for this study. The qualitative approach is characterized by: (1) observing processes and values as the primary objects; (2) using words as the main data; (3) direct and assertive communication with data sources during collection; (4) employing inductive data analysis; (5) producing findings that are not generalizable; and (6) maintaining a subjective and value-linked perspective.

The research was conducted at Walisongo State Islamic University, Semarang, Indonesia, during the 2023/2024 academic year. The study focuses on undergraduate Non-English Department students of the 4<sup>th</sup> semester from the Arabic Language Education and Islamic Education study programs as many as 32 students. These programs were chosen due to: (1) the presence of ESP courses in their curriculum; (2) the unique socio-cultural setting of the university, which emphasizes Islamic values; and (3) pre-survey findings indicating that, despite the effective teaching processes, students' English competence remained below average.

The research used purposive sampling to select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives. According to Bungin, (2011), purposive sampling is a strategy that is most commonly used in qualitative research to determine the group of participants who become informants selected based on criteria that are relevant to specific research problems. The primary subjects included non-English students and English lecturers, with the data collected through observation, in-depth interview, and questionnaire.

Observations were systematically planned and directly linked to the research objectives. Observations were documented through detailed notes to ensure accuracy and validity. According to Burns in Aziz (2013), observation is defined as "regular conscious notice of classroom action and occurrences that are particularly relevant to the issues or topics under investigation." In-depth interviews were conducted to explore participants' thoughts, attitudes, and experiences in depth. The interviews aimed to fill gaps in the data and were guided by the research questions, focusing on anxiety experiences among non-English students. Questionnaire was used to validate the findings from interviews and observations, providing additional evidence of the students' anxiety experiences.

Data were collected through a combination of classroom observation, in-depth interview, and questionnaire. Initially, classroom activities were observed to identify behavioral indicators of anxiety, such as avoidance, nervousness, or hesitation in engaging with English-related tasks. Following the observation, participants were interviewed to gain deeper insights into their experiences, with a focus on how anxiety influenced their behavior and learning outcomes. Finally, a questionnaire was distributed to both students and lecturers to gather additional perspectives and validate the findings from the observations and interviews. This multi-method approach ensured a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to language anxiety in the ESP learning context.

The collected data were analyzed through a three-step process. First, data reduction involved identifying, summarizing, and categorizing relevant information based on the research objectives, while excluding data unrelated to language anxiety or ESP learning. Next, data display involves presenting the organized data in charts, tables, or thematic descriptions to identify trends and patterns. Finally, conclusion drawing was used to interpret the findings and determine the types, causes, and effects of language anxiety on students' learning behaviors. The analysis led to drawing conclusions that highlighted significant insights and informed recommendations for mitigating anxiety in ESP settings.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research aims to explore how anxiety factors influence students' behavior during EFL instruction and how the beliefs of non-English-speaking students contribute to the development of this anxiety. The following are the results from the researchers' study.

The first result revealed the question "Do you feel confident speaking English instead of your local language and presenting in front of the class?" A significant number of students reported feeling insecure about speaking English compared to their local language, Javanese. Approximately 87.5% of these students experienced anxiety during English lessons, highlighting that fear remains a significant barrier to learning English. This anxiety prevents many students from improving their English communication skills and using specific vocabulary during conversations. In English lessons, certain topics require students to actively engage in questioning and responding in English. However, anxiety often leaves them unable to articulate even a single word. Since English is not their primary subject, most students feel apprehensive about participating in lessons. They perceive speaking and learning English grammar as particularly challenging. Additionally, they fear being mocked or shamed by their peers for making mistakes, which further discourages them from practicing English. Students reported feeling dizzy when speaking English, despite receiving education and theoretical instruction on the subject. The findings indicate that nearly all students struggle to manage these dizzy sensations during English conversations. This may stem from overthinking, as they worry about feeling embarrassed if their vocabulary or grammar is incorrect or if they make mistakes. The data reveals that 87.5% of students experienced twitching, highlighting the negative impact of this condition on English teaching and learning. Twitching appears to result from a combination of emotional and physical reactions to the students' feelings. It may be attributed to their lack of preparedness for the lesson or their inability to fully engage with the class at that moment.

The second result was based on the question, "Do you feel twitchy when speaking English in class?" The results indicated that students may experience twitching sensations if their heart rate is not properly regulated. In response to anxiety, the body activates the fight-or-flight mechanism, leading to shortness of breath and other physical symptoms. While students are not in life-threatening situations, their bodies react as if preparing to flee,

delivering more oxygen to their muscles. This response can cause chest tightness, shortness of breath, and rapid breathing. Teachers noted that eye contact plays a significant role in effective teacher-student interaction. Teacher gaze, a form of nonverbal communication, reflects the relationship between teachers and students. Students tend to prefer teachers who maintain eye contact while listening to them rather than while speaking. However, 84.4% of students reported that teachers' eye contact contributes significantly to their anxiety when speaking English in class.

The third result was derived from the question, "Does the lecturer's eye contact or your peers' gazes make you feel nervous when speaking?" Speaking is taught at the undergraduate level to help students express their thoughts and communicate with others. However, many students struggle with this task. They often find it difficult to develop their ideas to the point where their message is clear in their speech. As a result, recounting information becomes challenging. This indicates that the teaching-learning process is not achieving its intended goal. The fact that 90.6% of students experience anxiety points to a significant issue in the English teaching process at the university level. If students are constantly anxious when they begin speaking, they will not be able to master English comprehension. Teaching English to students in Arabic language education and Islamic education seems to be different from teaching other students, given their varying levels of English proficiency. Some students experience intense sweating when called upon to present their assignments in English, which heightens their anxiety during the process. This feeling arises because they have not been trained in public speaking and often fail to adequately prepare their English material, leading to concerns about disorganized presentations. Breathing difficulties, which refer to the discomfort of not being able to take a full breath, can also occur. These issues may develop gradually or suddenly and are often linked to stress and anxiety, though they do not include mild breathing problems, such as those experienced after physical exercise.

The fourth result was based on the question, "Does your body sweat when asked to present material in English in front of the class?" Non-English students' beliefs contribute to their anxiety. They feel that practicing English at home is the best option, as they believe no one will correct their pronunciation, regardless of whether their vocabulary or grammar is accurate. This allows them to avoid being judged for their English-speaking skills. However, students also feel comfortable speaking English in various environments, such as in their bedrooms while practicing with friends, on campus when they can join a community to practice, in the campus park where they enjoy practicing, and in college when they meet friends who also want to improve their English skills. Additionally, they feel at ease practicing English during their lessons in class.

The fifth result was derived from the statement, "I find it difficult to understand the learning material on my own at home." Students rarely use English in everyday situations. The authors also want to highlight that English lessons for Arabic and Islamic study programs are not unique, as these students do not need to practice their English regularly. Some students report speaking English only when answering professors' quizzes or attending English classes, as there is no other choice, while others believe they only practice English on campus or in the classroom. EFL students, however, have a different attitude toward improving their speaking skills. They actively speak English and strive to excel in English class. They are more likely to speak English if the teacher asks them to answer quizzes in English, believing that speaking the language helps them succeed. However, some students even refuse to speak English during English lessons, which is detrimental to the language learning process.

Non-English learners believe they are capable of understanding people who speak English to them. According to the research, students can grasp what their teachers and classmates are saying in English, but they struggle to respond in English. When others speak English, they understand the message but often respond with non-verbal cues such as nodding

or facial expressions. Some students even claim they have difficulty understanding English speakers, failing to comprehend any of the sentences spoken by the teacher or their classmates, and displaying blank facial expressions.

Students feel nervous when speaking English in front of a large group of peers. They attribute this anxiety to their perceived lack of grammatical proficiency and feel embarrassed if they make grammar mistakes. Additionally, they believe their pronunciation does not align with Western norms, leading to fear of making multiple errors. They are also anxious about the possibility of misspelling words or disarranging their sentences. Furthermore, they lack confidence in performing English in front of the class. Finally, students mention that their nervousness is partly due to not understanding some of the phrases spoken by others. Students claim that they require a tutor to assist them in improving their speaking English, that they require teacher guidance to assist them in mastering English vocabulary and grammar, that they require grammar knowledge to support their English mastery, that they require assistance in learning and practicing their English written and oral activities, and that they require teacher guidance in developing confidence in producing English in any single activity.

Several factors influence students' behavior, causing anxiety during the process of ESP instruction. These include: students' lack of confidence when reading ESP materials; their fear when performing dialogues to practice speaking; their nervousness; dizziness when participating in English and grammar lessons; anxiety when asked by the teacher to respond to questions; rapid breathing when required to answer a question; trembling due to the teacher's difficulty maintaining eye contact; anxiety when they do not understand the instructions; sweating during a direct quiz; unstable breathing when providing an incorrect answer; and uncertainty when they do not comprehend the meaning of the questions.

The second aim of the study was to investigate how the beliefs of non-English-speaking students contribute to the development of anxiety during the English language learning process. The findings indicate that students' personal beliefs and perceptions about their abilities and the learning environment significantly heighten their anxiety. Many students hold the belief that making mistakes in English, whether in pronunciation, vocabulary, or grammar, will lead to ridicule or embarrassment. This fear of error often prevents them from speaking or participating confidently in class. In particular, students may feel that their English is not "good enough" compared to native speakers or more proficient peers, which creates a sense of inferiority and self-doubt. These beliefs cause them to avoid using English in situations where they may be judged, such as when answering questions in class or engaging in conversations with peers. Moreover, students often view English as a difficult language to master, which amplifies their anxiety. They may feel overwhelmed by the complexity of grammar rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation, leading them to perceive English as an insurmountable challenge. This belief fuels a cycle of anxiety, as students become more stressed and less confident the more they struggle with the language. Another important factor contributing to anxiety is the students' belief that they are not fully prepared to speak or understand English in real-world contexts. Some students may feel that their skills are inadequate for effective communication, which makes them nervous about participating in class or engaging in English-speaking scenarios outside the classroom. They may worry that their lack of fluency will result in misunderstandings or negative evaluations from others, which further reinforces their anxiety. Additionally, there is a belief among many non-English-speaking students that they need to be perfect in their English usage, which adds pressure and fear of failure. This perception often leads to excessive self-monitoring, where students become overly concerned with avoiding mistakes rather than focusing on communicating effectively. As a result, they may freeze up or experience physical symptoms of anxiety, such as sweating, trembling, or shortness of breath, when asked to speak in English. These beliefs—ranging from fear of judgment and perfectionism to perceptions of English as an insurmountable challenge—

contribute significantly to the development of anxiety among non-English-speaking students. These anxieties not only hinder their willingness to practice and use English but also affect their overall language learning experience, creating barriers to their confidence and progress.

The novelty of this research lies in its integration of Basturkmen's (2010) theoretical framework on needs analysis in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum design, while also incorporating valuable insights from existing research on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and language anxiety. This study uniquely combines these perspectives to explore how anxiety factors influence students' behavior in EFL instruction and how non-English-speaking students' beliefs contribute to the development of this anxiety. By bridging these two important areas—ESP curriculum needs and the psychological aspects of language learning—this research provides a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by non-English-speaking students in the learning process, offering new directions for improving both curriculum design and teaching strategies.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This research has highlighted the significant role anxiety plays in shaping the behavior of non-English-speaking students during English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction. The study reveals that anxiety, driven by various factors such as fear of judgment, fear of making mistakes, and the perception of English as a difficult language, significantly hinders students' ability to participate effectively in English lessons. A high percentage of students reported feeling insecure about speaking English, especially when compared to their native language, and expressed physical symptoms of anxiety such as sweating, trembling, and difficulty breathing. These anxieties are further intensified by students' beliefs that their English proficiency is inadequate and that they will be mocked or ridiculed for making errors. This fear prevents them from engaging in conversations, practicing speaking, and improving their language skills. Moreover, students' lack of confidence and their difficulty in understanding learning materials further exacerbate their anxiety, leading to a cycle of stress and disengagement with the learning process.

The findings also highlight the distinct challenges faced by non-English students in Arabic language education and Islamic studies, where the need to practice English is less frequent compared to other disciplines. This lack of regular practice, combined with students' perceptions of English as an insurmountable challenge, further discourages their participation and development in the language.

This study suggests that addressing the anxiety factors affecting non-English-speaking students is crucial for improving their experience in EFL instruction. To better support students, it is recommended that educators create a more supportive and less judgmental environment in the classroom, where students feel comfortable making mistakes and engaging with the language. Teachers should be mindful of their non-verbal cues, such as eye contact, which may contribute to students' anxiety, and try to reduce pressure by promoting a more relaxed atmosphere. Additionally, it is important for teachers to acknowledge the unique challenges faced by students from non-English backgrounds, particularly those in Arabic and Islamic education programs, and to adapt teaching methods accordingly.

Furthermore, the study suggests that curriculum design should be aligned with the needs and expectations of students, with a particular emphasis on practical, real-world language use. By integrating needs analysis into the curriculum, educators can ensure that the content is relevant and engaging for students, which may help reduce anxiety related to speaking and understanding English. The research also highlights the importance of addressing students' beliefs about language learning, as these perceptions significantly contribute to the



development of anxiety. Encouraging students to see English as a skill to be developed rather than a perfect system to be mastered could help shift their focus from fear of mistakes to confidence in communication. Finally, providing additional support, such as peer mentoring, language practice groups, and more opportunities for informal English use outside of the classroom, can further alleviate anxiety and promote a more positive learning experience.

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