

## **The Influence of Peer Groups on Students' Anxiety in Efl Learning**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research aimed to identify the factors in peer groups which can reduce and increase the students' anxiety in learning English and determine which peer groups have more effect to the students' anxiety in terms of grouping division by the teacher or by the students. The researcher applied descriptive qualitative research method. The data collection was done through observation and interview. The participants of the research were the second grade students of SMAN 2 Parepare. They were selected by using purposive sampling referring to the English teachers who provide their classrooms in grouping teaching method and also referring to the students who were involved in peer groups. The result of data analysis showed that some factors which can reduce the students' anxiety in learning English consist of communication skill development, sharing diverse assumption, and collaborative learning. Meanwhile, students' self-perception, low language proficiency, and peer rejection are factors which can increase their anxiety. Besides, competitiveness becomes one factor in peer group which can both reduce and also increase the students' anxiety in learning English. Furthermore, grouping division by the teacher which created heterogeneous grouping gave better impact to the students' anxiety in learning than by the students which created homogeneous grouping. Therefore, it is suggested to the English teacher to know how to create a good condition in teaching and learning environment among the students in order that they can do some methods or teaching strategies that provide students to work in a group. They can be more concerned with some factors that cause students' anxiety and help them to reduce their anxiety in EFL learning.

**Keywords:** *peer group, anxiety*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The students' development in learning a language is different with one another in terms of their ability which influenced by some factors. When students try to learn and use English as a foreign language to communicate their differences in terms of ability will be occurred. Some factors that can influence are their feeling in learn the language and the influence from their surroundings. Students cannot learn if they feel uncomfortable, nervous and afraid. It can be influenced by their first language. Students still follow the rule of their first language grammar which can be different with the foreign language that they want to learn. In addition, they also feel anxious in making mistakes in the language they are still in the process of learning, such as the structure and vocabularies.

Students' anxiety and the influence of peers are some problems that commonly found in learning English as a foreign language. Foreign language anxiety can affect performance of the students and decrease their willingness to participate in learning activities. According to Cowden (2009), students who have high level of anxiety are afraid to speak. Students with social anxiety tend to avoid social situations even though it is normal to feel anxious in social situation. For example, students feel anxious when they have to speak in front of their friends. When students feel that they are alone and there is not support from their surrounding, it can increase their level of anxiety.

Peer groups has the important role in influencing students' behavior in taking decision (Mapesa, 2013). Peer groups can give a negative impact to students related to peer pressure because it is the key part of an individual's development process (Korir, 2014). In contrast, they are attracted to join with their peer groups for providing them with sources of information needed academically, vocationally, psychologically, and give them feedback related with their emotions when they feel stressful and need someone to share their feelings. The support and pressure from peer groups can determine the level of their anxiety in academic performance.

Based on the previous illustration, the aims of this research are to:

1. Identify the factors in peer group which can reduce the students' anxiety in learning English.
2. Identify the factors in peer group which can increase the students' anxiety in learning English.
3. Determine which peer groups give more impact to the students' anxiety in terms of grouping division by the teacher or by themselves.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been some previous research findings about peer groups' influence on students' anxiety students in the field of education. Tillfors et al. (2012) entitled *Prospective Links between Social Anxiety and Adolescent Peer Relations*. In this research, they examined relationship between social anxiety and some aspects of peer relations, namely peer acceptance, peer victimization, and relationship quality. It showed that peer rejection predicted the increases of social anxiety; males got lower support than females, meanwhile females got higher victimization. It can be concluded that peer relations play an important role for students related to their social anxiety.

The other research was conducted by Huang et al. (2010) entitled *The Relationship between Teacher and Peer Support and English-Language Learners' Anxiety* concluded that language learning anxiety and support from teachers and the other students were related each other. When they receive more academic support from the teacher and peers, it can decrease their experience of feeling anxious and fear of negative evaluation. In addition, peer academic and personal supports learning English had positive correlation.

Based on the some studies above, the writer concludes that peer groups can influence the students' anxiety in EFL learning. The researcher proposes the difference among the

mentioned researchers. This study focuses to know the influence that the students get from their peer groups which can affect to their level of anxiety in EFL learning and also to know the way teachers provide students in groups in terms of students' ability.

## METHOD

This research used qualitative research. The purpose of the research deals with promoting a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon such as, environment, a process, and belief. Thus, this research used qualitative method to know the influence of peer groups on students' anxiety in EFL learning. Then, the explanation of the result was in descriptive form in order to give complete information for the readers about the result of this research. The participants of this research were the second grade students at SMAN 2 Parepare. The researcher used purposive sampling technique to determine the sample. The subject was selected purposively referring to the English teachers who provide their classrooms in grouping teaching method, such as work in pairs and cooperative learning and also refer to the students who were involved in peer group. However, EFL teachers and students of the classroom were engaged in this research to get some information about the relationship between students and their peers.

This research used observation and interview as the instrument. The researcher used direct observation to get the data in the classroom and acted as non-participant observer which observed the interactions among students with their peers supported by video recorder to identify the students' behavior and their interactions that appear during the teaching and learning process. In conducting interview, the researcher used semi-structured interview which the interviewer and respondents engage in a formal interview which participants can respond the questions as how they would like to answer. Open-ended questions allow the participant to interpretate and it is commonly used in qualitative research (Dicicco-bloom & Crabtree, 2006). It can give an opportunity for the participants to share their true thoughts and feelings. In analyzing data from data observation, the researcher used qualitative data analysis based on Miles & Huberman (1994) which consist of three stages. They are data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Factors in Peer Group which Can Reduce the Students' Anxiety

#### a. Communication Skill Development

##### Extract 1

This extract was taken from the first observation and interview by recording. The interviewee of this recording was student A of classs IPA 4 in the eleventh grade of SMAN 2 Parepare.. This recording was taken on Friday, November 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, at 9:30 a. m.

Kalau saya itu kak lebih suka kalau belajar berkelompok karena bisa ki keluarkan aspirasi, pendapat sama-sama, dan bisa ki sharing. Paling itu perbedaannya antara individu dengan kelompok paling dari tingkat pemahaman biasanya sama kayak Bahasa Inggris nya begitu. Kalau di individu kan kita lebih tau apa tentang diri ta dan bagaimana.

*[I prefer to study group because I can convey the aspiration, opinion, and sharing together. That is the different between study individually and work in group, maybe it is the same in understanding of English. If individually, we can more understand about ourself].*

Extract 1 shows that the student A preferred to study in a group than study individually. By studying in group, he can share his opinion and aspiration together with the other members or groups. This activity is communication skill development that the teacher used in teaching by grouping discussion in order that the students can learn about how to speak and share their aspiration and opinion with others. Besides, the students can learn how to work in a group or team which consist of some opinions and different assumption in order to create a good relation. Slavin (1980) stated that students can learn and communicate better when they use cooperative learning than individual learning. When the students have a good communication skill, it can decrease their anxiety to speak and have interaction with other peers.

### **b. Sharing Diverse Assumption**

#### **Extract 2**

Extract 2 was also taken from the first observation and interview by recording. The interviewee of this recording was student B of class IPA 4 in the eleventh grade of SMAN 2 Parepare.. This recording was taken on Friday, November 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, at 9:40 a. m.

Lebih baik belajar kelompok karena lebih seru karena lebih banyak pendapat yang bisa diterima daripada belajar sendiri. Perbedaananya lagi...ee... ditambah kaya anu. Enaknya belajar sendiri karena pendapat ta sendiri diikuti, tapi nda enakya itu mungkin ada pendapat yang lebih baik nda ditau.

*[It is better if study group because it is more fun because many opinions that can be gotten than study individually. The other difference is it is good because I can decide based on my opinion but in contrast, maybe there is a better opinion which I do not know].*

Extract 2 shows that student B felt more fun when he studied in a group than individually. It also shows that peer group can reduce anxiety when he can share opinion and also get the other opinion, ideas, and assumption from the other members. The diverse assumption made them easier to find the best information and result of their discussion than study individually. Through peer group, the students can express their own assumption, discuss, and share information by interacting with one another (Larson et al., 1984). When the students discuss the information with other members of their group, they can learn better because discussions can give benefit to understand the knowledge if they share each other (Jonassen, 2001).

### **c. Collaborative Learning**

#### **Extract 3**

This extract was also taken from the second interview by recording. The interviewee of this recording was student C of class IPA 4 in the eleventh grade of SMAN 2 Parepare.. This recording was taken on Friday, November 24<sup>th</sup> 2017, at 9:30 a. m.

Belajar kelompok kak lebih banyak yang bisa bantu ki kak, bisa ki juga kerja sama kalau berkelompok daripada individu.

*[There are many friends who can help me, work together if I study group than study individually].*

Extract 3 shows that collaborative learning can also be one of factors which can reduce the students' anxiety in learning English. The students can help each other when they find some difficulties and from the other members of their groups. Students can solve their difficulties by study group when they can share and discuss each other (Sari, 2016). Collaborative learning can be a good habits when the students can learn together and help each other. It can engage the students about school life and have a good relation by helping and make interaction with others and not only focus with their personal but also their society. It also shows that every students sometimes need help from others when they less of information or knowledge. It was supported by Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) of Vygotsky which stated that there is cognitive level when the students cannot do anything alone, but they need guidance to solve their problems from adult or collaborate with their peers (Moreno, 2010).

## **2. Factors in Peer Group which Can Increase the Students' Anxiety**

### **a. Students' Self-Perception**

#### **Extract 4**

Extract 4 was also taken from the second interview by recording. The interviewee of this recording was student C of classs IPA 4 in the eleventh grade of SMAN 2 Parepare. This recording was taken on Friday, November 24<sup>th</sup> 2017, at 9:30 a. m.

Bangga, semangat juga karena bisa ki dipilih wakili kelompok ta. Tapi yang biasa kasi anu ki karena apa, takutnya jawaban ta anui..tidak..tidak tepat.

*[I am proud and also excited because I can be choosen to represent my group. But sometimes I am afraid if my answer is not appropriate].*

Extract 4 shows that the student C did not believe with his own ability because she has low self- perception. It shows that she has low self-perception about herself when she measured her ability is lower than other peers. This feeling might cause the other possibility which became the increase of the student's level of anxiety in learning. Self-perception is one of factors which can increase the students' anxiety in learning English. Data on the findings shows that some students have low self-perception because of some reasons. Some of them felt unconfidence because they thought that the other peers are better in English. Besides, they always think that the other peers might notice their mistakes when they perform their speaking in fornt of the classroom. Self-perception is not only about what people think about themselves, but also about what the others think about them as Young (1991) stated that one of the factors which cause anxiety is the students self-perception about what others think about him/her and also negative evaluation from others. This condition makes them afraid of making mistakes that would increase their level of anxiety in learning English. When their peers gave negative attitude by shouting and blaming when they made some mistakes, it could be one of anxiety-provoking factors which can also decrease the other students' self- perception.

## b. Low Language Proficiency

### Extract 5

This extract was also taken from the first observation and interview by recording. The interviewee of this recording was student B of class IPA 4 in the eleventh grade of SMAN 2 Parepare.. This recording was taken on Friday, November 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, at 9:40 a. m.

Pernah merasa takut kalau belajar Bahasa Inggris karena tidak ditau artinya kak, Bahasa Inggris nya.

*[I ever feel afraid when learn English because I do not know the meaning, the English].*

Extract 5 shows the other reason of students' anxiety which came from the student itself. When the students have lower ability or English language proficiency, it can increase their level of anxiety in learning. The student B felt anxious when he studied English because he realized that he was difficult in translating because he was lack of vocabulary. It is supported by the idea of Syarifuddin (2006) stated that linguistic factors such as lack of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, etc. become the reasons of students' anxiety in speaking by using English as a foreign language. It shows that the students were difficult in translating and pronunciation as Yu-ching Chan & Guo-cheng (2004) who stated that low language proficiency is one of factors which can determine the students' anxiety in learning. The lower the students' English proficiency is, the higher the anxiety level will be occurred.

## c. Peer Rejection

### Extract 6

Extract 6 was taken from the second interview by recording. The interviewee of this recording was student D of class IPA 4 in the eleventh grade at SMAN 2 Parepare.. This recording was taken on Friday, November 24<sup>th</sup> 2017, at 9:40 a.m.

Biasa ada yang tidak dipilih kak kalau pilih sendiri. Solusinya dikasi masuk saja di kelompok yang kurang atau bagaimana. Mungkin karena tidak disukai atau tidak baku anui jadi tidak dipilih.

*[Sometimes, there are students who are not choosen to join in a group if we choose by ourself. The solution is they just join in group which are less of members. Maybe because they are not liked or something wrong, so they are not chosen].*

### Extract 7

The student A was also stated the other statement except he was mentioned in the previous extract. The result of interview is showed below.

Cewek kadang ada begitu waktu pilih sendiri, ada tidak ada temannya.

*[The girls sometimes when they have to choose members of group by theirself, there is girl who does not have friends/group].*

Extract 6 and 7 shows that problem which occurred in peer groups was peer rejection. When the students were asked to make some groups, sometimes there were some students who did not have their own groups because no one from their peers want to take him/her to join in their groups. One of the reasons is internal problems. When the problem occurred in the classroom, the teacher just asked the students who did not have a group to join with the groups who less of members. Extract 7 also shows that mostly girls had their own criterias and very selective in choosing their members of their groups as Greca & Lopez (1998) stated that girls and boys are different in making friends, girls with higher levels of social anxiety showed fewer friendships and less relationship with others. They felt anxious in learning process because they get pressure which is come from teachers and their classmates or peers. Huang et al. (2010) stated that when they receive more academic support from the teacher and peers, it can decrease their experience of speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

### 3. Competitiveness (Can Both Reduce and also Increase the Students' Anxiety)

#### Extract 8

This extract 8 was taken from the first observation and interview by recording. The interviewee of this recording was student A of classs IPA 4 in the eleventh grade of SMAN 2 Parepare.. This recording was taken on Friday, November 17<sup>th</sup> 2017, at 9:30 a. m.

kalau kelompok ku menurut saya kalau kelompok ku itu bisa satu pikirannya, jadi misalkan ada pendapat dikeluarkan, dia juga mengeluarkan pendapat dan dimusyawarahkan mi mana yang mau diambil. Tapi kalau kelompok lain itu saya lihat ada yang biasa tidak kerja menurut saya.

*[According to me, my group can have the same opinion. For example, there is an opinion and the other has also opinion and we discuss which one that we are going to choose. But the other group, there is sometimes student who is not involved in the group].*

Extract 9 was also taken from the second observation and interview by recording. The interviewee of this recording was student F of classs IPA 4 in the eleventh grade of SMAN 2 Parepare. This recording was taken on Friday, November 24<sup>th</sup> 2017, at 9:30 a. m.

Kadang nyaman, kadang tidak. Kaya biasa ada pendapat ta tapi lebih dominan itu na ambil pendapatnya daripada pendapat ta karena menurutnya itu pendapatnya lebih benar daripada pendapat ta.

*[Sometimes I feel comfortable and not, such as I sometimes have an opinion, but mostly, they just take their opinions than my opinion because they think that their opinion is better than my opinion].*

Extract 8 shows that competitiveness can reduce the students' anxiety in learning. When different opinion from different ability of the students which showed competitiveness among them in giving aspiration made them become more active and tried to show better perspective in order to find the best result of their disussion. Meanwhile, extract 9 shows that competitiveness is not only among the groups, but also among the members in one group. It proves that there is also competitiveness among students in each group when she

felt that her opinion is not accepted by the other members of her group. It can also increase the students' anxiety in learning when dominantly, they accepted only a certain opinion from the members who are better in English.

There are two parts which can increase the students' anxiety in learning, namely competitiveness among the groups and competitiveness in a group with the other members. The students might compare their ability with their friends to determine their grade. Some students tried to compare the ability of their members of the group with the other groups as Bailey (1983) stated that competitiveness could increase the students' anxiety when they tried to differentiate between their ability with the other peers. Besides, the students thought that their groups are lower than the others, so they preferred not to be active because they always think that their skills are not as good as their peers as Cardenas et al. (2015) stated that student with low performance preferred to reduce their participation in learning process. Their feeling can increase their level of anxiety when they felt worried and full of tense.

#### **4. Grouping Division in Peer Groups**

Grouping division by the students and the teacher showed different impact to the students' level of anxiety which affect the way they learned in the classroom. Grouping division by the teacher which created heterogeneous grouping gave better impact for the students than grouping division by the students which created mostly homogeneous grouping based on their ability. The performance of students with heterogeneous ability partners was better than students with homogeneous partners (Wang, 2013) because the students with lower ability can get advantage from heterogeneous grouping because they can get help from other members during discussions (Tutty & Klein, 2008). Actually homogeneous grouping can also positively influence the students who have high and average ability in learning, but it does not affect for the students who have lower ability (Baer, 2010). It is good for the groups with smart members, but it is not fair for the groups which consist of low ability students.

#### **CONCLUSION**

The findings of this research showed that there are three factors which can reduce the students' anxiety in learning English, namely communication skill development, sharing diverse assumption, and collaborative learning. Besides, there are also three factors which can increase the students' anxiety in learning English, namely students' self-perception, low language proficiency, and peer rejection. From the result of analysis, competitiveness becomes one factor in peer group which can both reduce and also increase the students' anxiety in EFL learning. Furthermore, the result of data analysis showed that grouping division by the teacher gave better impact to the students' level of anxiety than grouping division by the students.



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