

A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF LANGUAGE LEARNING ANXIETY FOR INDONESIAN STUDENTS STUDYING OVERSEAS

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ABSTRACT: By using a narrative inquiry approach, this research will analyze students' stories or experiences in facing challenges or anxiety in mastering a foreign language while abroad and how much anxiety can affect their language learning process and identify strategies or efforts made by students to overcome anxiety in learning a foreign language. Two Indonesian students who have studied abroad participated in this study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using narrative analysis, to collect narrative data in the form of stories or narratives about the experience of anxiety in language learning as well as the factors that influence anxiety in graduate students who are studying abroad. These findings revealed the significant impact of anxiety on students' language learning, such as inconsistent use of English by lecturers, fear of mistakes, difficulties in grammar, and different accents. Anxiety affects comprehension, presentation and writing, leading to overthinking, reduced motivation and low self-confidence. A supportive social environment and university are essential for reducing anxiety, while technology can help with language learning. Effective strategies include various learning techniques, building confidence, maintaining a supportive network, and overcoming psychological barriers. Overall, continuous learning, support and risk-taking are essential for managing and reducing language learning anxiety.

Keywords: narrative inquiry; language learning anxiety; international students.

Introduction

Studying overseas offers students a fantastic chance to extend their perspectives, enhance their comprehension of different cultures, and acquire invaluable life experiences. According to Furotun et al. (2023), language is more than simply a body of words; it is something that may bind a person to their ancestry, way of life, beliefs, and knowledge. Most people view English as essential to getting a better job in the era of globalization (Hidayanti & Azami, 2023). Historians and policymakers generally agree that foreign education experiences have a transformative impact on students, helping them move from being language learners to multilingual users and

improving their international orientation and openness to different cultures (Mitchell et al., 2020). In this context, language acquisition is crucial because it helps pupils adjust to new situations and participate successfully in social, intellectual, and everyday activities.

Language learning anxiety is a significant challenge for students studying abroad, affecting their ability to learn the target language, academic success, self-esteem, and attitudes towards the language and culture (Sorguli et al., 2021; Gkonou et al., 2017). This anxiety impacts motivation, performance, and the overall learning experience. Effective strategies are essential to reduce anxiety and improve English language proficiency, comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition (Ubaidillah, 2018). Curriculum developers and policymakers must create a supportive learning environment to facilitate successful language learning (Muslimin & Suhartoyo, 2023). Additional factors that influence student achievement in English language learning include technology, learning environment, community, and personal conditions (Ismiatun et al., 2019).

Therefore, the main reason aims to explore why language learning anxiety is prevalent among students studying abroad. Ali and Anwar (2021) also investigated how language learning anxiety impacts student achievement. Factors such as diverse cultural backgrounds, different learning styles, and disparities in the education system can increase anxiety due to uncertainty and fear of failure. This research focuses on Indonesian students studying in non-English speaking countries, particularly Taiwan, using a narrative inquiry approach to understand their experiences with language learning anxiety through semi-structured interviews and narrative analysis.

Many studies have examined language learning anxiety among students studying abroad. Wang (1998) investigated foreign language anxiety and students' beliefs about language learning among university students in mainland China. Ali and Anwar (2021) explored the factors affecting language learning anxiety at a private university in Erbil. Abrar (2019) analyzed the speaking challenges and strategies of Indonesian postgraduate students in an academic environment in the UK. Thompson and Lee (2014) studied the influence of study abroad experience and second language proficiency on foreign language anxiety in the classroom. Wang (2009) examined Taiwanese EFL learners' anxiety during short-term study abroad programs, including causes, impacts, and perceptions. In addition, Zakiya et al. (2022) reported on the anxiety experienced by Thai international students learning English in Indonesia.

From these previous studies, the researcher wants to develop existing theories and research related to the topic of this study, namely language learning anxiety for international students. However, some differences arise from previous studies, this study focuses more on analyzing students' stories or experiences in facing anxiety in mastering a foreign language while abroad

and how much anxiety can affect the language learning process. In the study, we can also identify strategies or efforts made by students to overcome anxiety in learning a foreign language by using more than two instruments and using more subjects to be interviewed with multiple interviews to achieve more valid data.

Research Question:

1. What are the challenges or anxieties in mastering a foreign language while abroad and how much can these anxieties affect their language learning process?
2. What contextual factors, such as cultural, social and educational influences, contribute to the development and intensification of language learning anxiety among Indonesian students studying abroad?
3. How do Indonesian students cope with language learning anxiety while studying abroad, and what strategies do they employ to manage or overcome it.

Method

The Narrative Inquiry method is a research approach that pays particular attention to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of personal stories to understand human experience, the construction of meaning, and individual identity in different contexts. A qualitative approach can capture the personal and human side of life experience and present it narratively (Abrar, 2019), by making the experience a narrative phenomenon that can understand the context more deeply (Trainor & Graue, 2017). In Narrative Inquiry, the power of narrative in shaping perception, informing experience, and connecting individuals to the world around them, i.e. education, experience, and life are intertwined (Dewey, 1938). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) said that narrative inquiry is the study of how humans experience the world. Benson et al., (2012) also said that narrative research is used as a research design on the disclosure of life history, language learning history, language learning experience, language biography, autobiography, and autoethnography. Thus, in Narrative Inquiry, narratives are considered to be the interwoven stories of research participants, which include details of experiences, significant events, emotions, conflicts, as well as individual reflections on those experiences. according to Moen (2006), the narrative approach focuses on the meaning and value that individuals add to their experiences through the stories they share. As well, according to Clandinin et al. (2007) narrative inquiry is the study of experience as story.

Two Indonesian students who were and had been studying at a university in Taiwan at the time of the research were purposely selected to participate in this narrative inquiry. The

researcher prioritized the eligibility of the participants and required that they had previously participated in classroom-based learning for more than one semester before being selected. This was significant since the study's goal was to investigate the speaking experiences of participants in academic settings, both within and outside of the classroom. The willingness of the subjects to participate in the study was another factor used in selection. Livy is a pseudonym in this study. Livy is a double-degree graduate student at the National Pingtung University of Science and Technology (NPUST) in Taiwan, majoring in biological science and technology, and at Brawijaya University in Indonesia, majoring in food science. She has been studying in Taiwan for one and a half years and has graduated in January 2022. The second participant is named Sisca. She is a student at National Pingtung University, majoring in College of Education in Taiwan. She has been studying in Taiwan for one semester.

The data collection method used in this research is semi-structured interviews by collecting statements from questions that have been asked to participants in narrative form. Researchers conducted several interviews using Zoom in two meetings, and each interview meeting took approximately 30 minutes. The interview method was chosen due to the distance that made it impossible to meet in person. Interviews were conducted using the participants' national language (Indonesian) so that participants could express their experiences without language barriers and reduce the occurrence of misunderstandings between writers and researchers. This method was chosen because the researcher wanted participants to express their thoughts and experiences freely without leaving out important aspects to be researched, and also wanted to find holistic experiences, analyze words, and report detailed views of information about the results that have been found.

Data analysis in this study will involve collecting narrative data in the form of stories or narratives about students' experiences and challenges in mastering a foreign language while studying abroad, specifically focusing on anxiety that impacts the language learning process. This analysis also aims to identify strategies or efforts made by students to overcome anxiety in learning a foreign language. In this study, to analyze the data, the researcher will generally focus more on the grounded theory coding scheme, i.e. the researcher will develop concepts from the data sources (interviews) and the researcher's observation field notes by: 1. obtaining consent from the participants, 2. recording their stories using zoom media for approximately 30 minutes in two sessions, 3. transcribing the zoom recordings by listening to the recordings several times, then transcribing the recordings into narrative texts, 4. eliciting concepts from the narrative texts and integrating the observation notes; e) conceptualizing the participants' experiences; and f)

presenting them as final conceptualizations to be verified and modified if needed (Ostovar-Namaghi et al., 2015).

Findings

The study asked about how the participants dealt with his anxiety while studying abroad and how he was able to overcome the problem. As a result, in this investigation, the researcher uncovered three themes based on stories from participants experiences: student challenges, contributing factors, and strategies in coping with problems.

Students Challenges

1. *Have you experienced anxiety about classroom learning during your study abroad? If yes, please describe it!*

Livy: "Yes, sometimes the obstacle is when the lecturer forgets to use English thoroughly (English mixed with Chinese). Sometimes, students wait until the break time arrives to convey to the lecturer if they cannot understand the material explained because they do not use English thoroughly. In addition, I feel anxious when discussing with classmates (group learning) because I worry they will not understand what I am saying and vice versa. I am worried that I will not be able to grasp the meaning of their explanations, which will hinder the smooth running of the discussion."

Sisca: "Yes, I have. When I study in class, I experience anxiety, especially when the lecturer asks questions to foreign students. To be able to answer the question correctly is not easy because I not only combine understanding but I also have to organize the words how to convey the answer according to the rules of good and correct English."

Students studying abroad experience significant anxiety due to various challenges in their learning environment. Among them are lecturers mixing English with Chinese, causing comprehension difficulties, anxiety during group discussions for fear of misunderstanding, and nervousness when answering lecturer questions that require organization of thoughts and correct use of grammar. These issues interfered with their understanding and collaborative learning, thus negatively impacting their overall learning experience.

2. *Have you ever experienced difficulties in understanding materials, presentations, and writing assignments in learning? If yes, please describe it!*

Livy: "Yes, using English as a non-native language often makes understanding the material and completing assignments challenging. Factors include lecturers speaking too fast, accents that are difficult to understand, and course material that is much different from my undergraduate major. Presentations were initially difficult for fear of making mistakes due to poor English, but careful preparation helped. Writing assignments were also challenging, as I struggled to express my ideas clearly and use proper grammar and structure."

Sisca: "Yes, that is right. There are always difficulties with lecture material, such as finding the meaning of words, understanding certain chapters, and understanding teaching methods. Initially, I struggled with presentations because of the foreign accent and adapting to a new environment. Therefore, during presentations, I had difficulty explaining the meaning of the sentences that I would convey in front of the class. Writing was also difficult due to limited vocabulary. However, as I spent more time here, these difficulties lessened, and my vocabulary and comprehension improved."

The difficulties participants experienced in understanding the lectures, presentations and writing assignments were due to a variety of factors. These included fast-paced explanations, different accents, unfamiliar material, and challenges in finding word meanings and understanding specific chapters and teaching methods. Language barriers and fear of making mistakes initially hinder presentations, but careful preparation helps to overcome this. Writing tasks are challenging due to the need to express ideas coherently with proper grammar and structure. However, as students adapt and expand their vocabulary, these challenges gradually diminish, thus improving language skills.

3. *What are the impacts that can occur when you experience anxiety in the learning process?*

Livy: "The impact of anxiety can result in my learning process not being optimal. This is because when I am anxious, I tend to experience overthinking, lose my enthusiasm for learning, and have a decreased willingness to socialize. The emergence of bad thoughts if I do something that makes me have no enthusiasm for doing anything and lazy (loss of motivation) so that the feeling of anxiety must be eliminated."

Sisca: "The impact that occurs when I experience anxiety in the learning process is that I will stay silent, brooding without any action, thinking too long about things that I consider difficult even though I have not lived."

Anxiety significantly impedes the language learning process, causing students to overthink, lowering their enthusiasm for learning, and decreasing their willingness to socialize. This anxiety

leads to negative thoughts, lack of motivation, laziness and reluctance to engage in productive activities. As a result, students often stay silent and brood over perceived difficulties, further inhibiting their ability to take action and engage effectively in the learning process.

4. *Does learning anxiety affect your confidence in using the language in an academic or social environment abroad? If yes, please describe it!*

Livy: "Yes. When I am anxious, my brain cannot think clearly, which affects my speaking and socialization. The words that come out of my mouth become unclear because they are not neatly structured, and the pronunciation is stuttered. This leads to a decreased willingness to meet and socialize with people because of the fear of misspeaking."

Sisca: "Yes, of course. Language learning anxiety greatly affected my confidence in using the language in an academic or social setting. In addition, I became awkward, shy, and unconfident in my efforts, and I found it difficult to mingle with my friends in class. Because of these things, I find it difficult to explore and socialize with other friends, especially if there is a group assignment with other students."

Language learning anxiety significantly impacts students' confidence in academic and social settings. Anxiety interferes with clear thinking, resulting in unclear, unstructured speech and stammering. This leads to fear of misspeaking, reduced willingness to interact with others, as well as feelings of awkwardness, embarrassment and lack of confidence. As a result, students struggle to relate to classmates and participate in group work, further hindering their ability to explore and socialize effectively.

Contributing Factors

5. *How does the role of the social environment around you, such as classmates or study partners, affect your level of learning anxiety?*

Livy: "My social environment has an important impact on my social anxiety. They can make my anxiety increase or decrease. This is due to their supportive or unsupportive contributions to me during my studies. Their supportive contributions, such as providing support to me or giving advice, will certainly reduce my social anxiety. Conversely, some friends make me more anxious, such as when they criticize and underestimate my abilities."

Sisca: "The social environment around me, such as classmates or study buddies, is very helpful in relieving my anxiety. My roommates' role was also very important in boosting

my spirits and easing my anxiety. They gave me support that I can do well as long as I have strong determination.”

Social environment has a significant effect on students' level of learning anxiety. Support from classmates, study buddies and roommates, such as encouragement and advice, helps to reduce anxiety and increase self-confidence. Positive reinforcement builds morale and reassures students of their potential. Conversely, criticism and underestimation from friends increase anxiety. Therefore, choosing friends who provide positive influences and inspire progress is crucial. Overall, a supportive social environment reduces anxiety and increases confidence during learning.

6. *Do the university or institution and lecturers/teachers/instructors play a role in helping to reduce learning anxiety for you? If yes, how do they help reduce anxiety?*

Livy: “During my study abroad, the university I studied at had a special section to monitor and help students with their academics as well as their mental and physical health. The department thoroughly contacts each student to ensure that they are not experiencing any problems in their studies and that they are healthy physically and mentally. They also ask students to be responsive and contact them directly if they encounter any problems.”

Sisca: “Yes, the university and lecturers were very helpful in reducing my anxiety in learning. One of the lecturers shared his experience of anxiety as a student and offered solutions such as efficient learning strategies, increasing self-confidence, and not being afraid to make mistakes because it is part of the learning process. Hearing such stories reduced my anxiety, making me realize that experiencing anxiety is normal for all knowledge seekers.”

Universities play an important role in reducing students' anxiety while studying abroad by actively monitoring and supporting their academic, mental and physical well-being through specialized departments. Open communication about issues is encouraged, and lecturers can help students by sharing personal experiences and offering practical solutions to managing study anxiety.

7. *How does the use of technology, such as language learning apps, online learning platforms, or even social media help you reduce anxiety levels in your learning process?*

Livy: "The use of language-based technology, such as online learning platforms like YouTube, translator applications (Google Translate, DeepL, and Microsoft Translator), Duolingo or even social media, really helps me in the learning process so that my skills and knowledge increase. This decreases my anxiety and increases my confidence because the knowledge I have becomes extensive and useful for my daily social life."

Sisca: "Language learning apps, online learning platforms and social media help reduce anxiety in my learning process by using online dictionary apps; for example, I no longer worry about vocabulary I don't know the meaning of and can shorten my learning time. Apps also help me to expand my knowledge so that I can understand the material more flexibly. Social media also often features motivational words that help reduce my anxiety in the learning process."

Technology plays an important role in reducing learning anxiety by providing access to language-based tools such as online learning platforms, translator apps, language learning apps and social media. These technologies offer resources such as dictionaries, educational materials and motivational content, which facilitate language learning and boost confidence. By using these tools, individuals can easily access information, expand their knowledge, and improve their language skills, thereby reducing anxiety and increasing confidence in their abilities.

Strategies in Coping with Problems

8. *Do you use any specific strategies to overcome anxiety in learning? If so, what strategies do you use?*

Livy: "My study strategies vary based on the situation. For certain courses, I read, summarize, and repeat the material, which helps me absorb it effectively. When learning a foreign language, I read, write, repeat, and practice, especially with native speakers, which significantly improves my language skills."

Sisca: "Yes, I have some special strategies, such as approaching my friends in class first so I don't miss and understand the material. The most often I use is that I try to calm my own mind and remember advice or motivation from lecturers or people around me."

Based on participants' experiences, several strategies are used to overcome language learning anxiety. Among them are reading, summarizing, and repeating to absorb the material quickly. For foreign language learning, methods such as reading, writing, repeating, practicing and interacting with native speakers are used to improve skills. In

addition, adapting to classmates and recalling advice or motivation from lecturers or peers helps ensure comprehension of the material and calms the mind.

9. *Do you have any recommendations or advice for other Indonesian students who are or will be studying abroad in managing and overcoming anxiety in learning?*

Livy: "Anxiety can stem from feeling lonely in a foreign place due to differences in language, culture and society. To overcome this, it is important to connect with yourself by thinking clearly and believing in your abilities. In addition, having a support system, such as a group or individual to call home," is essential. These supportive individuals should have positive traits to help encourage and motivate you. Maintaining good relationships and regularly communicating with them can prevent loneliness and provide inner motivation."

Sisca: "My advice, to cope with anxiety while studying abroad, is to express your feelings to the people closest to you to find peace and solutions. Listen to other people's life experiences and struggles to understand that anxiety is natural and learn how they manage it. Master as many vocabulary words as possible to help you understand lectures and reduce anxiety. Finally, be brave enough to try new things and take risks, because the fear of failure is the real failure. Seize opportunities and make the most of them."

To manage and reduce anxiety during study abroad, participants suggested building self-connection and support systems. Self-connection involves clear thinking and self-confidence, while a support system includes people who provide emotional support and encouragement. Sharing stories and experiences with those closest to you can provide reassurance and solutions. Learning from others' experiences, mastering vocabulary, and being open to trying new things without fear of failure are also recommended. Overall, overcoming anxiety involves self-connection, support from others, continuous learning, and a willingness to take risks.

Discussion

This research explains the significant impact of anxiety on students' language learning process. Sources of anxiety include inconsistent use of English by lecturers, fear of making mistakes in group discussions, and difficulty answering questions in grammatically correct English. Zakiya et al. (2022) identified lack of confidence, fear of mistakes, formal classroom environment, social status, self-identity, cultural differences, individual presentation, and

answering teacher questions as the main reasons for language anxiety. Broader challenges include fast-paced lectures, different accents, understanding the meaning of certain words and chapters, and expressing ideas with proper grammar. Abrar (2019) noted pronunciation, grammar, fluency, vocabulary and accent as the main issues contributing to speaking anxiety. As a result, this anxiety hinders comprehension, presentation and writing assignments, leading to overthinking, reduced motivation, decreased social interaction and reduced self-confidence, ultimately affecting academic performance and social engagement.

This research shows that various factors can help reduce students' learning anxiety during study abroad. A supportive social environment with encouragement and motivation from peers is essential for reducing anxiety and increasing self-confidence, whereas criticism from friends can exacerbate anxiety. Universities also play an important role by providing specialized departments to monitor and support student well-being and offer practical solutions and advice from lecturers. Abrar (2019) noted that students feel more comfortable communicating with university lecturers and staff due to their clear and slow speech, which is facilitated by university training. In addition, language-based technologies such as online learning platforms, translator apps and social media facilitate access to information, expand knowledge and improve language skills, thereby reducing anxiety.

The study also describes effective strategies to manage and overcome language learning anxiety abroad based on participants' experiences. They used various techniques such as reading, writing, summarizing, repeating, practicing with native speakers, and adapting to the local environment. Participants emphasized the importance of building self-confidence, maintaining a supportive social network, sharing experiences, mastering vocabulary, and being open to new experiences without fear of failure. Ali and Anwar (2021) also emphasized the importance of overcoming psychological barriers for better language learning outcomes. Overall, appropriate learning methods, continuous learning, support from others, and risk-taking are essential in managing and reducing language learning anxiety.

Conclusion

Language learning anxiety has a significant impact on students studying abroad, affecting comprehension, presentations, and writing assignments. Its main sources include inconsistent language use by lecturers, fear of making mistakes, and communication difficulties that lead to overthinking, reduced motivation, and decreased social interaction. However, anxiety can be reduced through a supportive social environment with encouragement from peers and assistance from the university. Language-based technologies also facilitate access to information and

improve skills. Effective strategies to manage anxiety include using customized learning techniques, building self-connection, maintaining a supportive network, sharing experiences, mastering vocabulary, and accepting risk. Combining appropriate learning methods, sustained effort and support is essential to reducing language learning anxiety.

To overcome language learning anxiety, lecturers should consistently use English, speak clearly, and create a supportive environment to reduce confusion and increase students' confidence. Providing feedback and sharing personal experiences can help students improve their skills. Students should seek support from classmates and communicate openly about their challenges. Self-reflection, trying new things, and using personalized learning strategies, such as reading and practicing with native speakers, are essential. Utilizing language-based technologies can also help reduce anxiety. Further research is needed to explore language learning anxiety in-depth, and this study can serve as a reference for future research on similar topics.

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