

The Relationship between Fixed Mindset and English as a Second Language (ESL) Speaking Anxiety among Secondary School Students (Hubungan Pemikiran Tetap dan Kebimbangan Bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Kedua (ESL) dalam Kalangan Pelajar Sekolah Menengah)

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ABSTRACT

There is a belief that one of the causes of English as a second language (ESL) speaking anxiety is having a fixed mindset, which is the students' belief in their inability to improve. This study determined the relationship between fixed mindset and ESL speaking anxiety among secondary school Malay students. A questionnaire containing Dweck Mindset Instrument (DMI) and Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) scale was used as instrument. Findings show that the participants have a very high levels of speaking anxiety and low levels of fixed mindset, and there is a significant weak negative relationship between their levels of speaking anxiety and fixed mindset. In conclusion, the participants believe that their low level of fixed mindset have a weak relationship with their very high level of speaking anxiety. The findings have some practical implications. Teachers should incorporate some strategies and approaches that would provide safe space for the students to practice their speaking skills and would lower down their speaking anxiety, such as letting them know that making mistakes in speaking is acceptable and part of the learning process, reward the process of speaking instead of the outcome of speaking, provide feedback on students' speaking progress, and encourage the students to get out of their comfort zones and taking more risk.

Key Words: Fixed mindset; Language anxiety; Speaking anxiety; Malay students; Secondary school; English as a second language

ABSTRAK

Terdapat kepercayaan bahawa salah satu punca kebimbangan bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (ESL) adalah mempunyai pemikiran yang tetap, iaitu kepercayaan pelajar terhadap ketidakupayaan mereka untuk bertambah baik. Kajian ini menentukan hubungan antara pemikiran tetap dengan kebimbangan bertutur dalam ESL dalam kalangan pelajar Melayu sekolah menengah. Soal selidik yang mengandungi Dweck Mindset Instrument (DMI) dan skala Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA) digunakan sebagai instrumen. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa peserta kajian mempunyai tahap kebimbangan bertutur yang sangat tinggi dan tahap pemikiran tetap yang rendah, dan terdapat hubungan signifikan negatif yang lemah antara tahap kebimbangan bertutur dan pemikiran tetap. Kesimpulannya, peserta percaya bahawa tahap pemikiran tetap mereka yang rendah mempunyai hubungan yang lemah dengan tahap kebimbangan bertutur mereka yang sangat tinggi. Penemuan ini mempunyai beberapa implikasi praktikal. Guru harus menggabungkan beberapa strategi dan pendekatan yang akan menyediakan ruang selamat kepada pelajar untuk mempraktikkan kemahiran bertutur mereka dan akan mengurangkan kebimbangan bertutur mereka, seperti memberitahu mereka bahawa membuat kesilapan dalam bertutur adalah boleh diterima dan sebahagian daripada proses pembelajaran, memberi ganjaran kepada proses bertutur dan bukannya hasil bertutur, berikan maklum balas tentang kemajuan pengucapan pelajar, dan galakkan pelajar keluar dari zon selesa mereka dan mengambil lebih banyak risiko.

Key Words: Pemikiran tetap; Kebimbangan bahasa; Kebimbangan bertutur; pelajar Melayu; Sekolah Menengah; Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua

INTRODUCTION

In the learning of a second language (L2), speaking skill is deemed to be the hardest skill to master, according to a few studies (Zakaria et al. 2019; Leong

& Ahmadi 2017). Speaking anxiety is a condition in which a person feels nervous in a situation in which they must communicate (Woodrow 2006). When students are required to present in front of the class, for example, they often experience anxiety. Research

suggested that anxiety in public speaking is mostly not caused by students' low proficiency in the L2, but by the gap between their self-perception of their language proficiency and the expected level of performance (Rajitha & Alamelu 2020).

Based on a study conducted by Nazifullah et al. (2019), there are many physical factors that influence how well Malaysian primary school students speak English. Firstly, students lack self-confidence in speaking because they are unwilling to make mistakes publicly and are anxious of their peers' and teachers' perception and reaction towards said mistake. Secondly, they believe that they are not understood when speaking the L2, which puts them at risk of being embarrassed by their peers. From this study, it can be justified that the students that experience high level of speaking anxiety in L2 believe that they are unable to improve from their current level of proficiency and the social risk that they are facing when trying to speak the L2 will further detriment their self-confidence, and thus, motivation to learn the L2.

According to Ebuta (2008), self-confidence provides learners with motivation and energy to become positive about their own learning process and experience authentic communication, which is needed in improving their communicative skill in the L2. It is considered that if a student develops self-confidence, he or she will be able to communicate effectively in English. One of the characteristics of gaining self-confidence, according to Kosterlitz (2015), is mental development.

According to Dweck (2000), an individual's inner fundamental views about whether their personal characteristics are fixed (fixed mindset) or fluid (fluid mindset) are defined by their mindset. Students with fixed mentality assume that their intelligence, talents, and abilities are relatively unchangeable. For instance, they believe that regardless of how hard they strive, they will never be able to speak English fluently. Students who lacked trust in their ability to communicate can be seen in this situation, as they choose to remain quiet or silent while others talk (Farianto & Harmaini 2017). Students who believe their speaking skills abilities are inadequate and immutable (fixed mentality) will experience more anxiety when doing speaking tasks, which will likely end in failure and embarrassment. Students with fluid mindset, on the other hand, believe that intelligence and talent are qualities that can be developed over time. Hence, through the belief, constant effort will be put into improving their speaking ability and they will be more prone to embrace lifelong learning. Lowering anxiety, increasing confidence, and increasing effort and persistence in learning are all benefits of a growth mindset (Wilkins 2014). One common misconception about complex cognitive and communicative processes is that they necessitate natural aptitude or

attributes that are out of our control. These abilities can, in fact, be created, trained, or improved (Ericsson 2014).

Shamsuddin (2017) stated that there were many Malaysian students who were unable to speak English effectively after completing high school, and this lack of ability is one of the major factors contributing to Malaysia's rising unemployment rate. According to Miriam (2014), high school is a crucial period in determining students' academic achievement and deciding on a future career. As studies have shown that speaking anxiety as one of the factors that could hinder students' learning of English, there is a need to look into the potential factors that contribute to speaking anxiety, so that future actions can be put to tackle the problem.

The objective of this study is to determine the relationship between fixed mindset and level of anxiety in speaking English among Malay students in secondary schools. The research questions for this study are:

1. What is the level of ESL speaking anxiety among Malay secondary school students?
2. What is the level of fixed mindset among Malay secondary school students?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of fixed mindset and the level of ESL speaking anxiety among Malay secondary school students?

The hypothesis for this study is:

- H₀: There is no significant relationship between the level of fixed mindset and the level of anxiety in speaking English among Malay students in secondary school

ANXIETY IN SPEAKING ENGLISH

There is an abundant of studies on anxiety in language learning done by researchers globally. According to a study conducted by Al-Khresheh (2020), 71 percent of the Saudi English Foreign Language (EFL) learners who participated in the study agreed that speaking anxiety has the greatest impact on their English learning abilities. The study also revealed that fear of negative judgement was one of the key factors influencing speaking anxiety among them. Nurmansyah et al. (2018) determined the factors that affect speaking anxiety among low-proficient Indonesian EFL students and discovered five factors: i) Lack of vocabulary (52.6%), ii) lack of planning (50.5%), iii) fear of making errors (49.7%), iv) lack of practise (48.5%), v) students' inability to articulate their ideas (45.0%). Some of the factors stated in the

study (lack of preparation and practice) is contrary with a study finding conducted by Yalçın & İnceçay (2014), which found out that the integration of spontaneous speech in an activity will reduce students' anxiety in speaking English. The results of the interview revealed that being unprepared in speech can help people feel less anxious. Mulyani (2018), through a semi-structured interview with 20 Indonesian students found that there were 3 factors that can cause speaking anxiety: i) Psychological factors and linguistic factors that comprise of formal environment and classroom procedure, ii) Individual motivation and lack of practise, iii) Socio-cultural factors which includes social atmosphere and limited exposure to the language.

Oteir and Al-Otaibi (2019) has classified the effects of language anxiety into five categories of effects, which are: i) Academic effect, ii) Social effect, iii) Cognitive effect; iv) Affective effect, and v) Personal effect. Academically, high language anxiety can lead to poor academic performance, which may lead to dropout (Damayanti & Listyani 2020; Oflaz 2019). Socially, when in a social situation that requires the students to speak a target language, anxiety may cause them to refrain from social interactions, which detriment their social experience (Salehi et al. 2020; Liu 2019; Ibrahim & Devesh 2019). Cognitively, anxiety acts like an affective filter (Krashen 1982) that prevents information in the target language to reach the learner's cognitive processing system. Affectively, anxiety may negatively influence other affective factors such as motivation and attitude since anxiety is one of the affective factors in language acquisition (Guo et al. 2018). Personally, experiencing speaking anxiety may cause other physical, emotional and mental issues, such as depression, forgetfulness, hyper-ventilation, sweatiness, and other symptoms (Liu 2019; Ibrahim & Devesh 2019).

FIXED MINDSET AND SPEAKING ANXIETY

What impact does a student's self-perception, particularly their perception of their own intelligence, have in their learning success? Numerous psychological studies indicate that these self-theoretical ideas have a major impact on academic success. According to psychologist Dweck (2015), most people's perceptions generally favour one of two hypotheses to various degrees: either they assume intelligence is fixed (fixed mindset) or they think intelligence is fluid (growth mindset). People who have a fixed mindset believe that intelligence is predetermined at birth and that there isn't much you can do to improve it. Those who have a growth mentality, however, think that intelligence may be increased via perseverance and hard work. People with

fixed mindset, according to Dweck (2015), assume that their basic attributes are simply fixed traits. They prefer to spend their time acknowledging their intelligence and talent rather than developing them. Furthermore, they tend to believe that only talent, not effort, can lead to success.

Candy (2019) in her interactions with adult students who are studying for the General Education Development (GED) test in the United States of America, observed that the students were not motivated to study even though they show the ability to succeed, compared to her international high school students, who were highly motivated to study English in order to gain admission to an American university. When the adult students got less-than-passing score on the GED test, she heard comments such as, "I failed," or "I'm too stupid to get this." This study shows that because of a fixed mindset, many adolescents protect themselves by putting forth a minimum of effort for something in which they don't feel they can be successful (Dweck 2015).

In an attempt to link between mindsets and anxiety, Schleider and Weisz (2016) examined psychological distress and mindsets of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours in a sample of 59 teenagers (ages 11 to 14) at three time points during a nine-month period. They discovered that psychological distress predicts more fixed mindsets endorsement. In addition, Kneeland et al. (2016) and Miu and Yeager (2015) claimed that programmes that promote growth mindset could lessen anxiety and other psychological distress, which suggested that there is a link between the two independent variables.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PARTICIPANTS

This quantitative study used descriptive correlational design. Correlational design aim to provide static pictures of situations and allows the identification of relationships between variables to understand and predict a phenomenon (Coon & Mitterer 2006; White & McBurney 2012). The independent variables in this study are students' level of fixed mindset and students' level of anxiety in speaking English. A total of 150 Malay secondary school students from three public schools in Johor, Malaysia participated in this study through stratified random sampling, where a sample of 50 students was obtained from each school. Out of all 150, 41 of the participants were male and 112 of them were female. This study has obtained ethical approval from the Malaysian Ministry of Education, the Johor State Education Office, as well as the schools in which this study was conducted. The students were informed on the details of the study, and informed that their

involvement was completely voluntary and that their identities would be kept private. Consent to participate was obtained from the students before they participated in this study.

DATA COLLECTION METHOD/INSTRUMENTATION

In this research, two different instruments were used to obtain data on the two independent variables. These two instruments were compiled together in a digital questionnaire in the form of Google Form, which made available in two languages, which were English and Bahasa Malaysia.

The first instrument is Personal Report of Public Speaking Anxiety (PRPSA), a 10-item scale developed by McCroskey (1970) that measures the level of public speaking fear. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1: Strongly Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly Agree). Cronbach's Alpha of the scale has been shown to range from 0.84 to 0.94 (McCroskey 1970; Hsu 2012). Four items (#1, #2, #5, and #10) were items that measure the subscale of speaking anxiety.

The second instrument used is Dweck Mindset Instrument (DMI). The DMI is used to determine the amount of state mentality that students have gained. The DMI was thought to be well-equipped and more detailed in terms of the student's perception about their own intellect and talent based on their own speaking. This instrument is capable of determining the student's individual attitude in relation to their overall speaking anxiety. The DMI encompasses 16 separate item statements rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1: Strongly Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly Agree). Four items (#1, #2, #6 and #9) were items that measure the subscale of fixed mindset.

DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

The data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse participants' responses on the instruments. Table 1 shows the interpretation for the mean scores. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the linear correlation between the two independent variables of students' level of fixed mindset and students' level of ESL speaking anxiety. Pearson's correlation coefficient returns a value between -1 and 1. If the correlation coefficient is -1, it indicates a strong negative relationship. If the

correlation coefficient is 0, it indicates no relationship. If the correlation coefficient is 1, it indicates a strong positive relationship. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 was used to analyse the data.

TABLE 1. Mean score interpretation

Mean score	Interpretation
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low
1.81 – 2.60	Low
2.61 – 3.20	Medium
3.21 – 4.20	High
4.21 – 5.00	Very High

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

LEVEL OF ESL SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG MALAY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Table 2 shows the students responses for items measuring speaking anxiety. The findings indicate that the participants have a very high level of anxiety in speaking English, as all four items scored above average mean values ($M=4.45$) based on the analysis: Item 1 ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .668$), Item 2 ($M = 4.50$, $SD = .753$), Item 5 ($M = 4.38$, $SD = .851$), and Item 10 ($M = 4.35$, $SD = .899$).

The result corroborated with a study conducted by Parnabas et al. (2018), which investigated the relationship between ethnicity and anxiety levels. Based on the results, Malay ethnics have a higher level of cognitive anxiety than other ethnic groups, which causes them to have difficulty uttering English words, especially in the classroom. The findings from the first research questions concern that most Malay students might encounter more trouble and experience more struggle in speaking English. Teachers play a critical role in reducing student anxiety when it comes to speaking English, especially in the classroom (Atas 2015). The provision of trust in speaking English among secondary school students is affected by a high level of anxiety. As a result, efforts aimed at lowering language anxiety among students should be focused on ESL teacher trainees, the learning environment, and the support offered to students. Curriculum developer and academic institutions should regularly assess their curricula, learning environment, and support available to students.

TABLE 2. Students' level of speaking anxiety

No	Items	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	While preparing for giving a speech in English, I feel tense and nervous	-	1 (0.7%)	12 (7.8%)	41 (26.8%)	99 (64.7%)	4.56	.668
2	My thoughts become confused and jumbled when I am giving a speech in English.	1 (0.7%)	2 (1.3%)	12 (7.8%)	42 (27.5%)	96 (62.7%)	4.50	.753
5	My hands tremble when I am giving a speech in English	1 (0.7%)	4 (2.6%)	19 (12.4%)	41 (26.8%)	88 (57.5%)	4.38	.851
10	While giving a speech in English, I get so nervous I forget facts I really know	2 (1.3%)	5 (3.3%)	17 (11.1%)	42 (27.5%)	87 (56.9%)	4.35	.899

TABLE 3. Students' level of fixed mindset

No	Items	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1	I have a certain amount of intelligence, and I can't really do much to change it	68 (44.4%)	33 (21.6%)	16 (10.5%)	16 (10.5%)	20 (13.1%)	2.26	1.445
2	My intelligence is something about me that I can't change very much	72 (47.1%)	32 (20.9%)	14 (9.2%)	17 (11.1%)	18 (11.8%)	2.20	1.428
6	I can learn new things, but I can't really change my basic intelligence	73 (47.4%)	34 (22.2%)	10 (6.5%)	17 (11.1%)	19 (12.9%)	2.18	1.444
9	I have a certain amount of talents and I can't really do too much to change it	73 (47.4%)	37 (24.2%)	14 (9.2%)	16 (10.5%)	13 (8.5%)	2.08	1.326

TABLE 4. Correlation between level of fixed mindset and level of anxiety

		Anxiety Level	Fixed Mindset Level
Anxiety Level	Pearson Correlation	1	-.303**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	153	153
Fixed Mindset Level	Pearson Correlation	-.303**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	153	153

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

LEVEL OF FIXED MINDSET AMONG MALAY STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOL

Table 3 shows the students responses for items measuring level of fixed mindset. Finding shows that the Malay secondary school students have a low level of fixed mindset as all four items scored below average mean values ($M=2.18$) based on the analysis: Item 1 ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.445$), Item 2 ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.428$), Item 6 ($M = 2.18$, $SD = 1.444$), and Item 9 ($M = 2.08$, $SD= 1.326$).

Findings show that a large number of participants in this study necessitated a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset. Most of the Malay students were conscious of their fear of speaking English, but at the

same time committed to developing their speaking skills so that they could speak English confidently in the future. Following this, teachers and teacher trainees must be able to understand the needs of students and build a teaching model that will help them overcome their fear of speaking and motivate them to learn from their mistakes. The goal of language instruction is for students to be able to communicate in English more confident. According to Dweck et al. (2014), by expressing praises for students' commitment and perseverance, teachers would promote deeper learning rather than quick learning. Furthermore, developing a curriculum that encourages growth mindset activities is an important step in realizing the true potential of growth mindset.

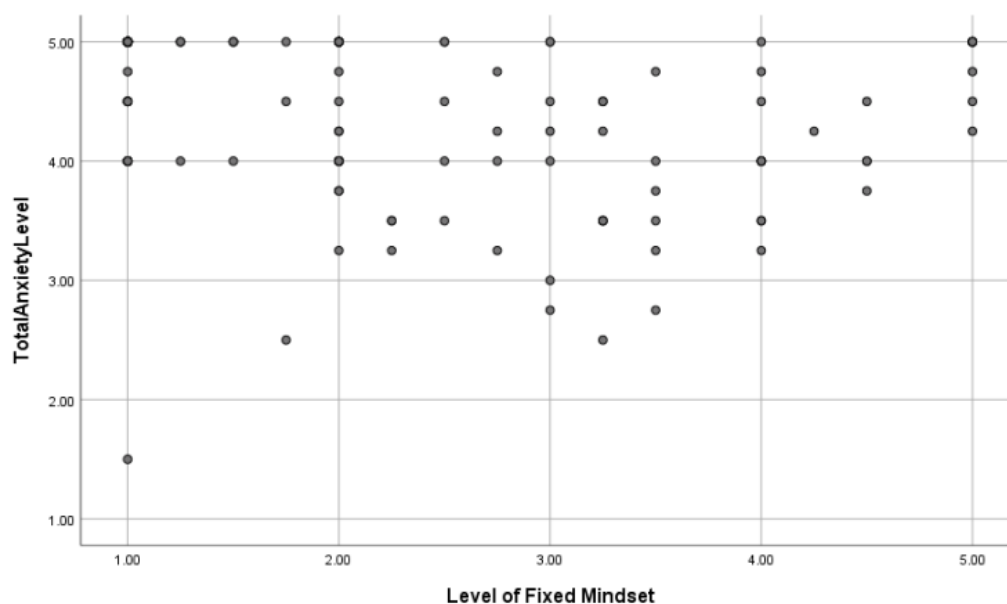


FIGURE 1. Correlation test between level of fixed mindset and level of anxiety

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LEVEL OF FIXED MINDSET AND THE LEVEL OF ESL SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG MALAY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

Table 4 shows the result of the Pearson correlation analysis of the relationship between the level of fixed mindset and level of anxiety. Findings show that there is a weak significant negative correlation between the level of fixed mindset and level of anxiety ($r = -.303$, $p = .000$). Hence, H_0 is rejected. This shows that the lower the students' level of fixed mindset, the higher their speaking anxiety level, even though the relationship is weak. Figure 1 illustrates the correlation plots. It can be observed that there is no discernible pattern, and the points appeared to be dispersed. The graph depicts the unavailability of a linear relationship. That is, there is no predictable straight-line relationship between the high and low measurements for the two variables.

Speaking abilities are unquestionably important in learning a language. However, despite their high levels of anxiety, Malay secondary school students believe that they have the ability to develop their speaking skills. These findings determined the importance of developing anxiety coping strategies in language learning. Jones et al. (2021) highlighted that anxiety lowers students' performance in speaking; hence, teachers should consider implementing lessons that include anxiety-coping strategies.

CONCLUSION

This correlational study determined Malay secondary school students' levels of speaking anxiety, levels of fixed mindset, and the relationship between both. Findings show that the participants have very high levels of speaking anxiety and low levels of fixed mindset, and there is a significant weak negative relationship between their levels of speaking anxiety and levels of fixed mindset. In conclusion, the participants believe that their low level of fixed mindset have a weak relationship with their very high level of speaking anxiety. The findings have some practical implications. Teachers should incorporate some strategies and approaches that would provide safe space for the students to practice their speaking skills and would lower down their speaking anxiety, such as letting them know that making mistakes in speaking is acceptable and part of the learning process, reward the process of speaking instead of the outcome of speaking, provide feedback on students' speaking progress, and encourage the students to get out of their comfort zones and taking more risk. This study has some limitations. Firstly, it is only involve Malay students in Johor; therefore, it cannot be generalized to the whole student population in Malaysia. Further studies that would overcome this limitation is suggested.

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