

## **EFL Learners' Speaking Anxiety in an EOP Program**

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This paper aimed at investigating English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) students' speaking anxiety levels, their sources of anxiety, and their coping strategies to reduce it. This paper involved eight students from two classes with different English abilities and employed a case study conducted in a company in Indonesia. Three kinds of instruments were applied for this study: classroom observation, FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) questionnaires by Horwitz (1986), and semi-structured interview. The study revealed that the students with anxious and mildly anxious levels had the highest percentage (each of them was 37%), while those categorized as relaxed and very relaxed levels had lower percentage (each of them was 17%). Moreover, the participants who belonged to anxious and mildly anxious levels stated that FLA (Foreign Language Anxiety) sources included communication apprehension, test anxiety, and a fear of negative evaluation with similar percentages (each of them 33.34%). Lastly, coping strategies that all anxious students used in this study were compromise behaviors.

*Keywords:* EOP, speaking anxiety levels, speaking anxiety sources, coping strategies to reduce speaking anxiety

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi kecemasan berbicara Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing siswa di kelas EOP dan strategi mengatasinya. Penelitian ini melibatkan delapan siswa dari dua kelas yang berbeda kemampuan Bahasa Inggrisnya dengan menggunakan desain penelitian studi kasus yang dilakukan di sebuah perusahaan di Bekasi. Tiga jenis instrumen diterapkan untuk penelitian ini: observasi kelas, kuesioner (diadaptasi dari Skala Kecemasan Kelas Bahasa Asing oleh Horwitz) dan wawancara semi terstruktur. Data dikumpulkan dengan cara*

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*merekam audio dan video untuk menangkap sumber kecemasan siswa dan strategi mengatasinya. Data-data tersebut ditranskrip dan dikodekan dengan menggunakan kategorisasi dari strategi pengkodean Alwasilah (2002). Data juga diperoleh dengan mengkuantifikasi data kuesioner untuk mengetahui tingkat kecemasan siswa. Temuan pertama mengungkapkan bahwa siswa yang dikategorikan sebagai siswa yang cemas dan agak cemas dalam berbicara Bahasa Inggris memiliki persentase tertinggi (masing-masing 37%), sedangkan mereka yang dikategorikan sebagai siswa yang santai dan sangat santai memiliki persentase yang lebih rendah (masing-masing 17%). Kedua, peserta penelitian yang dikategorikan sebagai siswa yang cemas dan agak cemas menyatakan bahwa semua sumber kecemasan berbicara Bahasa Inggris yaitu kekhawatiran berkomunikasi, kecemasan akan tes, dan ketakutan akan evaluasi negatif memiliki persentase yang sama (masing-masing 33.34%). Terakhir, strategi penanggulangan yang digunakan semua siswa yang mengalami kecemasan dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris dalam penelitian ini adalah berkompromi.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

As an international language, English is widely used by professionals around the world in various fields. The ability to communicate in English becomes one of the main requirements for various professional affairs including for the profession of contractor and supplier. These jobs deal with activities of supplying goods and services to clients and involve a lot communication. No wonder, in their working activities, they often meet foreigners as their vendors or clients. In this case, English should be used to communicate effectively. In order to support their communication skills, employees working in this field can take a particular English program called English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Through the EOP program, students are expected to be able to communicate fluently in English, make their clients impressed, and create understanding by explaining the company's products related to their clients' needs.

A preliminary observation conducted by the researcher in a company in Jakarta showed that employees, despite their frequency in interacting with foreigners, admitted that they felt shortness of breath, clammy sweat, irregularities in heartbeats when facing foreigners. Instead of speaking and trying to communicate with them, they were found to blush, become highly embarrassed and escape from them. This situation triggered the company to hold an EOP program to teach the employees how to speak English well.

In fact, the EOP students strongly believed that English was important in their work activities; moreover, they realized that they were expected by the company to have abilities to communicate using English. If they had good English language skills especially speaking skill, the company would earn profits. One of the profits was their foreign clients would be comfortable to communicate with them. As a result, the employees would get more confidence when speaking and create a good relation to cooperate with the foreign vendors in the next project. However, the students found tremendous problems in delivering a non-prepared speech and they tended to 'freeze' in a role-play activity. This situation was often repeated in every speaking activity. Moreover, some other students complained about difficulties in grasping sounds and structures' discrimination of a Target Language (TL) message. Another adult learner claimed to hear only a 'loud buzz' whenever the teacher talked in the foreign language (FL). According to Sellam (2016), students with this situation are referred to as anxious students. While doing a test, some EOP students lost many points

because of several situations. They became forgetful about vocabularies and grammar points although they knew them. These were due to their nervousness generated by the constraints and threatening exam atmosphere and circumstances. Anxiety and errors may escalate if the student realizes she/he is making preventable errors during the test (Horwitz as cited in Sellam, 2016).

One of the reasons why the EOP students lacked speaking skill was that they felt anxious when communicating in English in a real situation, especially with foreigners. When talking with a native speaker in English, the EFL students tended to get difficulties in understanding him/her and would stammer in speaking the language or even kept silent in the conversation (Qunying, 2007). They faced a great problem of acquiring the target language, especially when they had to speak in the target language. This emphasizes an oral aspect of language, and it means that they had to learn understanding what people spoke and to try speaking out what they wanted to express in a foreign language class. It happened because there is students' assumption that nothing should be said correctly (Horwitz et al., 1986).

A number of studies on anxiety and its effects on speaking ability have been conducted and showed that anxiety played an important role in students' speaking ability; the higher students' anxiety in EFL, the more they tended to gain low speaking proficiency (Mukminin et al., 2015). However, most of the studies focus on either elementary (Chan & Wu, 2004; Alshahrani & Alshahrani, 2015; Dobson, 2012), high school (Gkonou, 2013; Mukminin, 2015; Ganschow and Sparks, 1996) and college level (Yugafiati, 2015; Aling, 2016; Woodrow, 2006; Wang, 2009).

In an elementary school level, a study conducted by Daniel Yu-Ching Chan & Guo-Cheng Wu (2004) revealed correlation between students' anxiety level and English achievement, and five sources of language anxiety; low proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, the competition of games, anxious personality, and pressure from students themselves and their parents. Moreover, tests, speaking in front of others, spelling, incomprehensible input, and speaking to native speakers were revealed as five anxiety-provoking situations. Even though the research showed that teachers' awareness of foreign language anxiety is insufficient, both teachers and students thought that the balance of instructional languages helped lower foreign language anxiety.

In High School level, Mukminin (2015), using semi-structured interviews as data collecting technique, revealed that five major themes were related to students' English language speaking anxiety, including (1) low speaking skill due to lack of vocabulary and grammar, (2) fear of negative responses from others, (3) low self-esteem to speak in English, (4) fear of being evaluated by teachers, and (5) cultural influences to speak English due to a more teacher-centered style. Suggestions and policy implications are also discussed.

In the college level, Yugafiati (2015) conducted a study which is concerned with the anxiety levels experienced by the students of vocational schools in Sukabumi, the sources of their anxiety, and their strategies to reduce the anxiety. The research is mainly qualitative with some descriptive statistics which employed some data collection techniques: two questionnaires, interview, classroom observation, and document analysis. The data were analyzed by ways of reducing, displaying, and interpreting data. The results of the research showed that (1) most of the students experienced a high level of test anxiety, (2) the sources of anxiety came from people's view, preparation, procrastination, expectation, negative

consequences/ negative thinking, personal problem, time pressure, format usage, students' age, students' familiarity with the testing condition, testing situation factors, not mastering the skill, and the students' coping strategies such as active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, seeking social support for instrumental reasons, seeking social support for emotional reasons, positive reinterpretation & grow, acceptance, turning to religion, focus on & venting of emotions, denial, behavioral disengagement, and mental disengagement.

The previous studies on speaking anxiety as discussed earlier are generally intended to explore EFL students' anxiety level, sources, and coping strategy to reduce it, but they focused mainly on high school and university levels. This research attempts to touch upon different subject which is a group of EOP students with different ages, backgrounds of education, jobs and English levels. Furthermore, this research investigates the Indonesian EOP learners' anxiety and their strategies to overcome it. Furthermore, this research is intended to find out the different levels of students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) of an Indonesian EOP students, identify the sources of EOP students' speaking anxiety in English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, and to investigate EOP students' coping strategies to reduce their foreign language anxiety in their learning situation.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This was a case study, which applied a qualitative approach with observation, FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) questionnaire proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and semi-structure interview. A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system, which means the case is separated out for research in terms of time, place, or some physical boundaries based on extensive data collection (Creswell, 2012). To make the description clearer, some qualitative data were quantified to show the number, percentage, and distribution of students' foreign language anxiety. Thus, this research gave a description of how students experienced speaking anxiety, the source of such an experience, and students' coping strategies toward speaking anxiety.

A qualitative approach in this research offered a deep insight to the phenomenon and valuable information that provided a way to see the issue from the view of the subject (Alwasilah, 2008). This method was also considered to be appropriate because it could 'make sense' to the students' perceptions of the phenomenon (Maxwell, 1996). Therefore, the research used a case study to reveal the phenomenon of speaking anxiety of English Foreign Language (EFL) in English for Occupational Purposes (EOP).

### **Setting and Participants**

The study was conducted in a company in which the researcher had been teaching an EOP program. Through a preliminary observation, it was found that some students were very anxious to speak English. The participants included eight employees, and all of them were male. Their ages ranged from 23 up to 28 year old with education backgrounds of senior high school up to bachelor. They worked in different departments in the company which included delivery staff, drafter, and 3D staff, workshop administrator, human resource department, project manager, HSE (health, safety and environment), Supply Chain Management, and IT department.

## Data Analysis

This research employed an observational strategy much closer to non-participant observation than participant observation. The non-participant observation occurs when the researcher does not take part in the situation being studied, but may well exist in the environment (Fraenkel & Wallen as cited in Cha, 2006). Similarly, the researcher attempts to observe people without interacting with them and often without their knowledge that they are being observed (Creswell, 2012). Less-structured observation was chosen as the research aimed at exploring the social meanings that underpin behavior in natural social settings. Specifically, it tried to capture the students' source of anxiety and coping strategies to reduce it. However, some guidance to the observation was adapted from Merriam (as cited in Cha, 2006) which included four elements: the participants, activities and interaction, conversation, and subtle factors.

The data from observation (audio and video recording) were transcribed, coded, categorized, described, and analyzed to reveal the different types of language anxiety source and coping strategies. In addition, data from the questionnaires adapted from FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) were analyzed quantitatively to find the students' anxiety scales which ranged from 33 to 165. The higher the total score is, the more anxious the respondent is. The data from interview were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. The interview data were analyzed to collaborate and confirm the findings from observation and questionnaire in answering the second and third research question. In analyzing the data, the researcher carried out several steps. First, data from interview were transcribed. Second, the transcribed data were coded by following Alwasilah's coding strategy (2002) by categorizing the data based on the responses given by the teacher. Third, the result of coding was condensed to confirm or contradict the findings obtained from observation and questionnaire.

In supporting the findings from observation, the findings from interview were cited in the analysis following Creswell's (2003) suggestion to use the wordings from participants to give a detailed descriptive portrait. The wordings from interview were also compared and contrasted with the data from observation, theories, and previous studies on language anxiety.

Considering the guidelines for interview data, in categorizing this result, the researcher used Horwitz's et al. (1986) categories for language anxiety sources (communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation) in order to answer the second research question. Besides, Ehrman's (1996) defense mechanism categories for students' coping strategies of language anxiety (flight behavior, aggressive behavior, group manipulation behavior, and compromise behavior) were used to answer the third research question.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Different Levels of Students' Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA)*

The FLCAS minimum score was 46, which means that the student with this score was very relaxed in speaking English. On the other hand, the maximum score was 119 which means that the student who got this score felt shortness of breath, clammy sweat, and irregularities in heartbeats when delivering a speech. The mean of all participants' score of the FLCAS in this research was 92.50. This is in line with the findings of some previous studies. Using the same questionnaire developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to examine learners' foreign language anxiety at elementary, high school, and college level, Chan & Wu (2004), Liao (1999), and Chang (1999) revealed 97.57, 97.79, and 97.78 respectively for the mean of their participants' score for foreign language anxiety. This indicates that foreign language anxiety

of EFL adult learners in EOP classroom context in Indonesia get almost similar to the other academic levels in a different context. In other words, the tendency of foreign language anxiety of the EOP students in Indonesia is real.

The anxiety level of the students who had lower English level this research was higher compared to the anxiety in higher level. This finding is similar to the previous research by Chan and Wu (2004) which claimed that foreign language anxiety level and English learning achievement had a significant negative correlation. It means there is an inverse relationship between two variables; foreign language anxiety and English learning achievement. When foreign language anxiety decreases, the English learning achievement increases, and vice versa. For this reason, the English intermediate level students have the range of anxiety level from mildly anxious to very relaxed.

### **The Sources of EOP Students' Speaking Anxiety in English Foreign Language (EFL) Classroom**

This study indicated that 37% students were anxious, and 37 % were mildly anxious when speaking English in EOP conversation course. The students who were anxious and mildly anxious had various sources of anxiety. From six students who were both anxious and mildly anxious, all three sources; test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension had similar percentage (33.34% each). 33.34% of anxious students stated that they lacked mature communication skills although they had mature ideas and thoughts. Most of them admitted that making errors either in grammar or in pronunciation was something that made them afraid of speaking English.

In addition, both test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation were also the anxiety sources got by the EOP students. 33.34% students were anxious when facing the test, and the rest were anxious because of evaluation by other students. The details of anxiety sources are shown in the following table.

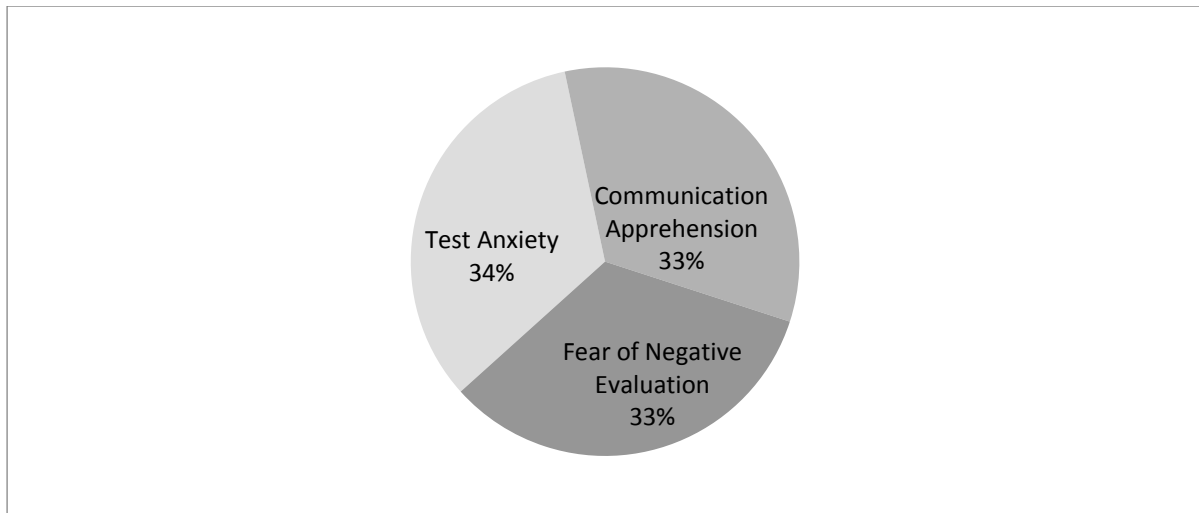
*Table 1: The anxiety sources of EOP students*

Students	The Anxiety Level	The Anxiety Source
Student A1	Mildly Anxious	Communication Apprehension
Student A2	Anxious	Fear of Negative Evaluation
Student A3	Anxious	Fear of Negative Evaluation
Student B1	Mildly Anxious	Test Anxiety
Student B4	Anxious	Communication Apprehension
Student B5	Mildly Anxious	Test Anxiety

Chan and Wu (2004) show that the elementary students' FLA sources are low proficiency, fear of negative evaluation, competition of games, anxious personality, and pressure from students themselves and their parents. In addition, the FLA sources of senior high school students are low speaking skill due to the lack of vocabulary and grammar, fear of negative responses from others, low self-esteem to speak in English, fear of being evaluated by teachers, and cultural influences to speak English due to a more teacher-

centered style (Mukminin et al. 2015). Moreover, Muhtar (2014) states the anxious students at the university have various sources of speaking anxiety. They are communication apprehension (41.52 %), test anxiety (32.81%), and fear of negative evaluation (25.67%). On the other hand, the frequency of the anxiety sources of the EOP students in this research can be seen in the following figure.

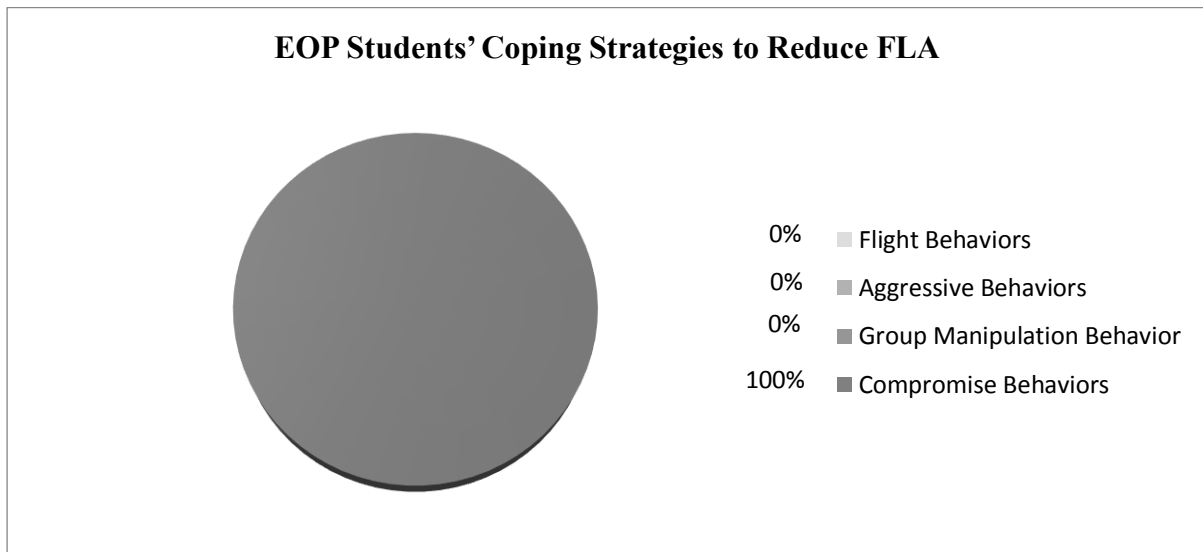
Figure 1: The frequency of EOP students' anxiety sources



### **EOP Students' Coping Strategies to Reduce Their Foreign Language Anxiety in Learning Situation**

This study indicated that different students' academic levels had different coping strategies to reduce anxiety. In the previous studies, elementary students had flight behavior by mental escaping the English lesson in their school as the most frequent strategy to reduce FLA (Dadang, 2014). For senior high school, the strategies that they applied to overcome their anxiety were preparation (43.75%), resignation (25%), relaxation (15.625%), positive thinking (12.5%) and peer seeking (9.375%) In addition, Muhtar (2014,) stated that the most common coping strategies exhibited by the university students were the flight behaviors such as avoidance, rationalization, and withdrawal. Relating to compromise behavior, a kind of defense mechanism that could be seen in this study was only anticipation behavior. However, as the previously stated by Ehrman (as cited in Cha, 2006), the mature students used compromise behaviors as a constructive response to language anxiety. This is in line with the finding of this study. As can be seen in figure 2, the anxious students in the EOP conversation course did not use aggressive behavior, flight behavior, or group manipulation behavior; on the other hand, all EOP students used compromise behaviors to reduce their FLA in the learning situation.

Figure 2: The Frequency of EOP Students' Coping Strategies to Reduce Anxiety



The compromise behaviors to reduce their FLA are demonstrated in various strategies as can be seen in the following table.

Table 2: EOP student's coping strategies and actions

Students	The Coping Strategies	Actions
Student A1	Compromise Behavior	needing a few minutes to make calming down and to motivate his self by going outside EOP classroom
Student A2	Compromise Behavior	keeping confidence while speaking
Student A3	Compromise Behavior	keeping practicing and studying hard to increase his confidence in speaking English
Student B1	Compromise Behavior	preparing well before speaking performance and using positive feedback
Student B4	Compromise Behavior	preparing everything well before performing his speaking such as brainstorming some expressions that wanted to be performed
Student B5	Compromise Behavior	discussing something that was outside the main topic to catch the audiences' attention before presenting the main presentation topic

## CONCLUSIONS

This research reports language anxiety levels of students in EOP classroom context, their anxiety sources, and their coping strategies. The research was conducted in a company in Bekasi with observation, questionnaire, and semi-structured interview as the data collecting techniques. According to the result of the FLCAS questionnaire, the EOP students had various levels of a language anxiety in EFL classroom. The students who were categorized as



having an anxious and a mildly anxious level had the highest percentage (each of them was 37%), while those who were categorized as a relaxed and a very relaxed level had the lower percentage (each of them was 17%). Moreover, it can be inferred from the finding of this research that not all students in EOP adult level are relaxed when speaking English. On the other hand, some students belong to mildly anxious and anxious students. With regards to the subject of this study which are students of EOP program, the results of this study contributes to the development of FLA theories which have been focusing on FLA in the elementary, high school, and college level.

According to the data obtained from the interview and classroom observation, the research participants who belonged to anxious and mildly anxious levels stated that all FLA sources covered communication apprehension, test anxiety, and a fear of negative evaluation with similar percentages (each of them 33.34%). A communication apprehension made the students particularly anxious when they had to speak a foreign language in front of their class or to communicate with native speakers. Then, an anxiety test really had effects on the EOP students' performance while doing a test even though they had a good enough speaking ability when communicating in daily activities. Moreover, a fear of negative evaluation made the students afraid of others' evaluations, even distress over others' negative evaluations. In conclusion, the sources of speaking anxiety among the EOP adult learners were various and they were similar to those of elementary, high school, and college students. These sources are communication apprehension, test anxiety, and negative evaluation.

Data obtained also from interview and classroom observation showed that coping strategy that all anxious students used in this research was compromise behaviors. In other words, all anxious EOP students stated that compromise behavior was the defense mechanism they used. They did something that could reduce FLA such as anticipation by simply studying harder and having more preparation for their class. Moreover, making themselves calm and motivating themselves by going outside EOP classroom before speaking and keeping confidence during speaking were the other findings related to compromise behavior they used. For these reasons, compromise behavior was the most frequently-used strategy and was perceived as the most effective strategy to reduce the EFL speaking anxiety, especially for the EOP students. When someone uses this strategy, his/her mind only thinks about how to improve his/her speaking skills; moreover, it will motivate him/her to be an autonomous learner who can learn English anytime and anywhere without depending on the teacher.

The findings of this study can be beneficial for English teacher in enhancing the knowledge on the speaking anxiety that students face in their speaking performance. The teacher should recognize that anxiety is one of the reasons why the students have difficulties in learning process especially in speaking. By discovering what obstacles the students face when speaking English, it is also expected that teacher can create some different methods in teaching and learning activity that would reduce students' speaking anxiety. The teacher could build a more supportive and friendly environment which can reduce the tense during the teaching and learning process. For the EOP student in Indonesia, it is important to understand that anxiety is the hindering factor in mastering English. They have to be aware of it and find the sources and strategy to reduce it in order to improve their speaking performance in both classroom and work situation.

With regards to the findings of this study, future research can explore other possible factors that may influence the foreign language anxiety of EOP adult learners. Such variables as the students' environment background, the teaching-learning settings, curriculum design, and EFL instructors' teaching styles will be interesting to investigate. Moreover, it is necessary to conduct more studies to examine how teachers' methodology reduce or enhance the amount of Foreign Language Anxiety experienced by EFL learners, especially in the EOP adult learner level.

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