

EXPLORING THE FACTORS INFLUENCING ANXIETY IN ESL TEACHING INTERNS ACROSS DIFFERENT EDUCATION LEVELS

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Abstract

This study examines the anxiety experienced by ESL teacher-interns in Indonesia, specifically those teaching English in primary and secondary schools, and how this anxiety impacts their teaching. As they are still in the process of learning to teach, many teacher-interns feel nervous using English in the classroom. This anxiety can hinder their ability to deliver lessons effectively and engage students. Using a qualitative research approach, the study collected data through interviews with four teacher-interns from different school levels. The findings reveal that anxiety stems from four key factors: lesson preparation, classroom conditions, lack of confidence, and physical health. Many teacher-interns struggle with managing students, planning lessons, and maintaining confidence in their English skills. Large class sizes and student behavior further contribute to their stress. Additionally, some interns fear making mistakes, and teaching becomes even more challenging when they are tired or unwell. The study underscores the importance of improved training, mentorship, and emotional support to help teacher-interns build confidence and enhance their teaching effectiveness.

Keywords: *classroom challenges, ESL teacher-intern, lesson preparation, teaching anxiety, teacher confidence*

Introduction

The global use of English as a tool for communication has grown rapidly, making it a vital skill in education, business, and everyday life. In countries where English is a foreign language, both teachers and students are expected to use it clearly, fluently, and confidently. However, anxiety can impede effective communication. Horwitz (2001) explains that anxiety can hinder learners' ability to participate in speaking activities. This challenge is not limited to students; it can also affect ESL teacher-interns, who are still developing their teaching skills while managing classroom interactions. Understanding how anxiety affects teacher-interns is essential, as it can

impact their confidence, teaching effectiveness, and classroom dynamics.

Formal education refers to the period when children are legally required to attend school. The structure and duration of formal education vary by country, but it generally includes primary and secondary levels. In Indonesia, formal education spans 12 years, consisting of six years of elementary school, three years of junior high school, and three years of senior high school, including vocational schools. Since English is a mandatory subject throughout these years, ESL teacher-interns play a crucial role in helping students develop strong language skills. However, teaching at different educational levels presents unique challenges that may contribute to teacher anxiety.

Research has shown that teaching anxiety is a significant factor that affects both the learning and teaching processes. Trigueros et al. (2021) found that high levels of anxiety in teachers can impair their ability to deliver lessons effectively, reducing overall teaching performance. This is particularly concerning for ESL teaching interns, as they are still developing their instructional skills while managing classroom dynamics. Furthermore, teacher anxiety can negatively impact student learning outcomes. Dicke et al. (2022) explain that when teachers struggle with confidence, it can create a stressful classroom environment, making it harder for students to stay engaged and absorb new information. Therefore, understanding and addressing teacher anxiety is essential to ensuring a positive and productive learning experience for both educators and students.

In Indonesia, English is not a native language, but it is a required subject in schools and universities. Many students learn English at school, in courses, or at college, but they face challenges due to differences between English and their native language. ESL teaching interns, who are still learning how to teach, may feel anxious about their own language skills and teaching abilities. This anxiety can affect their confidence in the classroom and influence the way they interact with students. If teachers feel nervous, they may not communicate effectively, leading to misunderstandings and a lack of student engagement.

Studies have shown that teacher anxiety can impact the way lessons are taught. Kim and Kim (2004) found that anxious teachers may struggle to give clear instructions, which can confuse students. When students receive unclear or incorrect information, their learning experience is affected. Teaching interns may feel pressure to speak perfectly, which can make them even more nervous. This anxiety can cause them to avoid speaking or become overly focused on avoiding mistakes rather than engaging with their students naturally. Klanrit and Sroinam (2012) also found that students' attitudes towards learning English can contribute to teacher anxiety. If students seem uninterested or critical, teachers may feel discouraged or stressed.

Anxiety is a natural human response to situations that feel uncertain or threatening. It can cause feelings of worry, nervousness, and tension. Headly (2013) explains that anxiety disorders are among the most common mental health issues worldwide. Yoon (2012) describes anxiety as a normal reaction to new or unfamiliar situations. People often feel nervous when they face something they are not used to, such as speaking in front of a class or teaching in a foreign language. Passer and Smith (2009) define anxiety as a response to perceived threats, while Wilt (2011) describes it as a mix of stress and discomfort. When teachers feel anxious about speaking English, they may struggle to concentrate and make more mistakes.

Foreign language anxiety is not just a problem for students—it also affects teachers, especially those who are non-native English speakers. Horwitz (1996) explains that even though non-native teachers are expected to be proficient in English, they still experience anxiety when speaking. Learning a language is a lifelong process, and even teachers continue to improve their skills. Because of this, many non-native teachers feel self-conscious about their English ability, especially when speaking in front of students. Teaching interns, who are still developing their teaching methods, may feel even more pressure to perform well.

As teachers, they must use English confidently in front of their students. However, the fear of making mistakes can make them nervous. Aydin (2008) calls this "fear of negative evaluation," where people worry

about how others will judge them. Teachers who are anxious about their English skills may hesitate to speak, avoid difficult topics, or feel embarrassed when they make mistakes. Lalonde and Gardner, in MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), found that anxiety can affect motivation and attitude in language learning. If teachers feel anxious, it can affect their enthusiasm for teaching, which may influence how students feel about learning English.

There are many reasons why ESL teaching interns may feel anxious. It can come from teaching methods, personal insecurities, lack of preparation, or fear of losing control in the classroom. Bilali (2015) points out that teachers often experience anxiety while teaching, which can make it harder for them to focus on their lessons. Horwitz, Cope, and Horwitz (1986) argue that foreign language anxiety has a negative effect on learning, meaning that anxious teachers may struggle to engage their students effectively.

Research has identified several key sources of teacher anxiety. Merç (2011) found that teaching interns often feel stressed about student behavior, managing the classroom, giving clear instructions, being observed, and meeting expectations from mentors. Among these, teaching procedures were found to be a major cause of anxiety. Öztürk (2016) also found that teacher anxiety can affect the classroom atmosphere. If a teacher feels nervous, students may sense it, which can make learning more difficult. When teaching interns experience high levels of anxiety, they may find it hard to stay calm and confident in front of their students, making the learning environment less effective.

In conclusion, anxiety is a well-documented issue that affects both students and teachers in foreign language classrooms. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety can manifest in both learners and instructors, impacting communication, confidence, and overall classroom effectiveness. While students often feel nervous about making mistakes, ESL teaching interns may experience anxiety related to their teaching skills, linguistic competence, and classroom management. The Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (FLTA) framework suggests that teaching in a foreign language requires confidence, fluency, and strong communication skills, yet

anxiety can hinder these abilities (Kim & Kim, 2004). If teaching interns feel anxious, it can negatively affect their instructional strategies, classroom presence, and students' engagement with the material. Recognizing and addressing the causes of teacher anxiety is essential in helping new teachers build confidence. By providing targeted training, mentorship programs, and emotional support, institutions can help ESL teaching interns manage their anxiety more effectively, ultimately fostering a more productive and positive learning environment for both teachers and students.

Methods

This study falls under the category of qualitative research. The researcher chose this approach to gain a deeper understanding of the anxiety experienced by ESL teaching interns at different levels of education. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe qualitative research as a method that explores phenomena through individuals' perspectives, emphasizing the context in which they occur. Similarly, Sherman (2005) highlights that qualitative research is rooted in direct experience rather than abstract or detached observation. This approach allows for a more comprehensive exploration of the emotional and psychological aspects of teaching anxiety.

Participants

This study involved four English teachers from different levels of education: one from an elementary school in Purbalingga, one from a junior high school in Cilacap, one from a senior high school in Purwokerto, and one from a vocational high school in Songgom. While the sample size is small, qualitative research prioritizes depth over breadth, allowing for a detailed exploration of individual experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher selected participants using **purposive sampling**, a technique in which individuals are chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives.

Participants were selected based on different school levels and locations to observe how varying educational environments shape teaching experiences. Additionally, the study considers whether the internship stage influences the interns' teaching experiences.

Participants represent different levels of education, as teaching anxiety may manifest differently across various school settings. For example, elementary school teachers may face challenges related to classroom management and basic language instruction, whereas vocational high school teachers may experience anxiety about teaching specialized English for specific industries. By including teachers from multiple educational levels, the study aims to capture a broader range of teaching experiences and challenges, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how anxiety affects ESL teaching interns in diverse contexts. Creswell (2012) explains that purposeful sampling is commonly used to ensure that selected participants can provide meaningful insights into the phenomenon under investigation.

Research Instrument

The primary tool used for data collection in this study was **interviews**, as they offer direct and detailed insights into participants' experiences. According to Sugiyono (2016), research instruments include observation, interviews, documentation, and questionnaires. The researcher chose interviews because they allow for a deeper understanding of participants' thoughts, emotions, and challenges. Through this method, the study explored the specific factors contributing to ESL teaching interns' anxiety and how they cope with these challenges in their classrooms.

While interviews provide **rich qualitative data**, relying on a single method may limit the study's depth. To address this, the researcher ensured **in-depth discussions** during interviews and encouraged participants to share detailed experiences. Future studies could benefit from combining interviews with **observations or questionnaires** to strengthen the findings.

Indicator

The questions focused on language anxiety. The following indicators were used for the first interview:

Figure 1
Indicators and Instruments of Interview

No	Indicators
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1	Class preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Classroom management b. Teaching procedures c. Teaching and learning management d. Less knowledge of the matter
2	Students and classroom profile <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The number of the students b. Students attitude towards learning English
3	Lack of self-confidence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Worry about making mistakes b. Fear of English speech in the classroom c. Teaching experience
4	Low level language proficiency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The use both FL & L1 b. Spend more time on structuring activities c. Focus on textbook
5	Physical condition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Teacher in a bad health

The researcher used interviews to collect data, specifically semi-structured interviews, which are a type of in-depth interview. This method allows participants to openly share their thoughts, opinions, and ideas.

Data Reduction

At this stage, the researcher sorted and structured the data gathered from interviews. This process involved identifying and refining relevant information from the interview transcripts. Key points were assigned specific codes, which were later recorded in Figure 2. The purpose of data reduction was to streamline the information by organizing it into categories using letters or numbers while eliminating any unnecessary details (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Figure 2
List of Codes

Factors Contribute to Anxiety	Codes
AF : Classroom Management	AF-CM
AF : Teaching Procedures	AF-TP
AF : Teaching and Learning Management	AF-TLM
AF : The Number of The Students	AF-NS
AF : Students Attitude Towards Learning English	AF-SAE
AF : Lack of Self-Confidence	AF-SC
AF : Teaching Experience	AF-TE
AF : Physical Condition	AF-PC

Findings and Discussions

The results of this study indicate that ESL teachers-interns experience various factors that contribute to their anxiety while teaching. One major source of anxiety is speaking in English, as teachers worry that their students

may not fully understand what they are saying. Since most students do not have a strong English background at home, they often feel confused when teachers give instructions entirely in English.

**The Result of Interview
Figure 3
Factors Contribute Anxiety**

Interview	Participants Answers/Factors Contribute to Anxiety [AF]
1 st Interview	Students' discipline [AF-CM], teaching procedure [AF-TP], teaching and Learning Management [AF-TLM], teaching experience [AF-TE], difficult to handle big class [AF-NS], physical condition [AF-PC]
2 nd Interview	Students' discipline [AF-CM], prepare the procedure of teaching [AF-TP], worry make mistake [AF-SC], teaching experience [AF-TE], physical condition [AF-PC].
3 rd Interview	Teaching procedure [AF-TP], teaching and Learning Management [AF-TLM], small class is better [AF-NS], physical condition [AF-PC]
4 th Interview	Students' discipline [AF-CM], teaching procedure [AF-TP], teaching and Learning Management [AF-TLM], wrong make mistake [AF-SC], not conducive class [AF-NS], physical condition [AF-PC]

The findings in Figure 3 highlight that teacher-interns experience anxiety due to several factors, including *student indiscipline, lesson preparation difficulties, classroom management challenges, students' limited English proficiency, and large class sizes*. Additionally, *teacher-related factors* such as limited teaching experience and physical health issues also contribute to their anxiety. Since teacher-interns are still developing their skills, these challenges can impact their confidence and effectiveness in the classroom. Therefore, providing proper mentorship, training, and emotional support is crucial to helping them manage anxiety and improve their teaching performance.

Anxiety Factors: Classroom Preparation

Many teacher-interns experience anxiety when dealing with undisciplined students, especially when they are not fully prepared for the lesson. Without proper planning, classroom activities can become disorganized, making it difficult to keep students engaged. One of the biggest challenges for teacher-interns is managing the teaching process itself—many students do not pay attention, and only a few actively respond to questions, while others remain silent.

Based on the interviews, the researcher concluded that classroom management is a key factor in teacher-intern anxiety. Three out of four teachers shared similar views:

"Of course, disciplined students can follow the lesson more easily."
(Elementary School Teacher)

"Yes, because a quiet classroom helps both teachers and students stay focused." (Junior High School Teacher)

"Absolutely, yes." (Vocational High School Teacher)

Despite efforts to engage students by asking questions, some students become distracted, talk to their peers, or ignore the lesson entirely. Others lose focus when the teacher writes on the board, and some even rest their heads on their desks instead of participating.

This challenge aligns with Merç's (2011) research, which found that teachers often feel stressed when struggling to maintain students' attention. For teacher-interns, who are still developing their teaching skills, these difficulties can be overwhelming. Therefore, proper mentorship, classroom management training, and emotional support are essential in helping them build confidence and effectively handle classroom challenges.

Anxiety Factors: Students and Classroom Profile

For teacher-interns, classroom size and student behavior can significantly contribute to anxiety. Teaching in a large classroom with many students can be overwhelming, especially for those still developing their classroom management skills. Anxiety is not only caused by personal factors but also by the overall classroom atmosphere. This aligns with Coates and Thoresen's (1976) study, which found that teacher anxiety can negatively impact both their performance and students' learning experiences. Similarly, Yoon (2012) highlighted that foreign language anxiety affects both teachers and learners.

Interviews revealed that teacher-interns often feel anxious about using English in large classes. A bigger class usually leads to more noise, making it difficult to maintain order. Three teachers shared their experiences:

"I think so, because in a large class, I spend more time managing the students than actually teaching. My students are still young."
(Elementary School Teacher)

"Yes, too many students make me more anxious." (Senior High School

Teacher)

"Yes, because it's not a good learning environment. When I explain the material, some students make noise, making it hard for others to understand. I think 20 students would be ideal." (Vocational High School Teacher)

Participants noted that teaching in classrooms with 30 to 45 students made them feel anxious. While group discussions were a possible strategy, managing such large groups was difficult due to high noise levels and time constraints in reviewing results.

In contrast, a medium-sized class (around 25 students) was easier to manage. Teacher-interns felt more comfortable in these settings, as the classroom was more organized, lessons flowed smoothly, and they could better observe individual student progress.

These findings highlight the need for proper training and support for teacher-interns, especially in classroom management strategies for large groups. Schools can help by providing mentorship and guidance, allowing interns to gradually build confidence in handling different classroom settings.

Anxiety Factors: Self-Confidence

For teacher-interns, confidence in using English is a major challenge. Many feel anxious about making mistakes while teaching, as errors in pronunciation or grammar can confuse students. During interviews, teachers shared that when they made mistakes, students sometimes misunderstood the lesson, which affected learning outcomes. However, some teachers were open to feedback and willing to admit their mistakes. This is similar to Kim and Kim's (2004) study in Korea, where many teachers hesitated to acknowledge their mistakes due to fear of being judged.

"Some of my students correct me when I mispronounce words."

(Junior High School Teacher)

"Students who attend English courses often update their knowledge, and they sometimes question me when my teaching content differs from what they learned elsewhere." (Senior High School Teacher)

On the other hand, some teacher-interns lacked confidence in speaking

English during lessons. Yoon (2012) found that many teachers felt insecure about using English in the classroom because they had little practice outside of teaching. Since English was rarely used in daily school activities, they did not get enough exposure to improve their speaking skills. As a result, some teachers preferred to use Indonesian when giving instructions.

"Since my students are still young, I always use Indonesian instructions." (Elementary School Teacher)

"Yes, because my students are not proficient in English." (Senior High School Teacher)

Teacher-interns often worry that if they make mistakes, students will copy them, leading to incorrect learning. This fear makes them hesitant to speak English fluently in class.

"I feel guilty because if I make a mistake, my students might repeat it." (Junior High School Teacher)

"Of course, because if we teach incorrectly, students will follow what we say." (Vocational High School Teacher)

These findings highlight the importance of teacher training programs that focus on building confidence in using English. Schools and mentors should provide teacher-interns with opportunities to practice speaking English in real classroom settings, offer constructive feedback, and encourage a supportive learning environment. By doing so, teacher-interns can gradually improve their English proficiency and feel more confident in delivering lessons effectively

Anxiety Factor: Physical Condition in Teacher-Intern

For teacher-interns, maintaining good physical health is essential for effective teaching. Interviews revealed that teachers often feel physically exhausted, which increases their anxiety in the classroom. Interns, who are still adjusting to the demands of teaching, may find it challenging to balance lesson preparation, classroom management, and administrative tasks.

Research by Coates and Thoresen (1976) highlights that a teacher's well-being and personality impact their teaching style and students' learning outcomes. Fatigue, illness, or physical discomfort can make it harder for

interns to control the classroom, deliver lessons effectively, and engage with students.

"Yes, because my students are very noisy. If I'm sick, I worry that I won't be able to explain the lesson properly." (Elementary School Teacher)

"Absolutely, yes. My students are difficult to manage, so when I'm sick, it makes me even more anxious. My voice becomes weak, and they don't understand me at all." (Vocational High School Teacher)

"Yes, when we are physically weak, we feel anxious about whether students understand what we are saying." (Senior High School Teacher)

"Of course, when we are sick, our voice becomes softer, we move around less, and we aren't as active in class." (Vocational High School Teacher)

For teacher-interns, managing student behaviour can be even more challenging when they are not feeling well. Since students come from diverse backgrounds, moods, and learning levels, interns may struggle with maintaining discipline, especially if they lack prior experience. Additionally, some teacher-interns feel insecure about their English proficiency, leading to even greater anxiety when teaching students with a stronger command of the language.

Conclusion

While many studies on foreign language learning focus on students' language proficiency, this research explores teacher-interns' experiences in using English during lessons. The study identifies four key sources of anxiety among teachers: lesson preparation, classroom dynamics, self-confidence, and physical condition. These findings show that anxiety is influenced not only by the teacher but also by student behavior and the overall classroom environment.

For teacher-interns, these challenges can be even more overwhelming as they are still developing their teaching skills. Lack of confidence in English, difficulty managing large or noisy classrooms, and

the stress of lesson preparation can contribute to their anxiety. Physical exhaustion, especially when handling multiple responsibilities, further impacts their ability to teach effectively.

Understanding these anxiety factors allows teacher-interns to identify and address their challenges early in their careers. Schools and mentor teachers can support interns by providing classroom management training, stress management strategies, and opportunities to practice English in a supportive environment. By recognizing and addressing these issues, teacher-interns can gain confidence, reduce stress, and create a more engaging learning experience for their students.

This study highlights the importance of preparing and supporting teacher-interns as they transition into professional teaching roles. By fostering a positive and supportive environment, schools can help interns develop strong teaching skills and overcome anxiety, ultimately improving both their experience and student learning outcomes

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