Fear of Negative Evaluation Factors from Ought-to L2 Self among Indonesian High School EFL Learners

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to investigate Indonesian high school English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' views on factors originating from Ought to L2 Self (OL2S), a second language (L2) motivation construct, affecting their Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE), L2 anxiety construct. Six learner participants were involved in the study. It employed online semi-structured interviews to obtain the data. Through Thematic Analysis, the present study found three main findings. First, the desire to study abroad lessened the learners' FNE. Secondly, a realization of possible future negative impacts of not learning English and the obligation to avoid these impacts made the learners have less FNE. Third, their perceived obligation to have 'correct' English pronunciation instills higher FNE. Pedagogical implications include promoting study abroad aspiration among learners, introducing Global Englishes prioritizing intelligibility over attaining native speakers' ability, and designing more activities mirroring future practical uses of English. Suggestive directions for future studies are also stated concerning the limitations and findings of the present study.

Keywords: *anxiety; fear of negative evaluation (FNE); motivation; ought to L2 Self (OL2S); thematic analysis*

INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language (L2) may not be easy for many. It involves a long, tedious, and painstaking process (Subekti, 2021), during which they encounter numerous difficulties (Kim & Kim, 2016). During this tedious process, learners' language attainment may be different from one to another. These differences in language attainment are attributed to their individual differences (IDs) (Dornyei, 2005). Two of probably the most widely known IDs factors in L2 learning are anxiety and motivation.

Regarding anxiety, language classes are believed to be the most anxiety-provoking compared to other classes (Trang, 2012), let alone learning English as Foreign Language (EFL). In a canon work in L2 anxiety literature, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined anxiety in L2 learning as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128), suggesting the uniqueness of this type of anxiety differentiating it from any other types of anxieties. Horwitz et al. (1986) further identified three sub-components of L2 anxiety, one of which is Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE). FNE is learners' fear of obtaining negative judgments from others, such as teachers or friends. For example, a study in an Indonesian university context reported that learners were reluctant to talk in English in front of the class because they were afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers

and teachers (Subekti, 2018a). In an old yet still relevant publication, Oxford (1999) mentioned that such anxiety might harm learners' language performance by directly reducing language performance and indirectly by instilling learners' self-doubt. In another early, yet relevant publication, Arnold and Brown (1999) argued that anxiety has a down spiraling effect on learners. That is it makes learners feel afraid, causing poor performance. This poor performance, making an unpleasant learning experience, in turn, produces a higher anxiety level and an even poorer performance. In the case of Asian contexts such as Indonesia, furthermore, this negative feeling could hamper learners' progress more because Asian cultures, including Indonesia, generally consider 'face' very important. Hence, Indonesian learners may be reluctant to take the risk of making mistakes in front of peers even if it is a part of learning (Subekti, 2018a).

Another IDs factor is L2 motivation, the research of which is arguably one of the most developed subfield in L2 literature (Marton & MacIntyre, 2022). Different from anxiety often seen as a factor negatively affecting L2 learning, motivation is often regarded as "the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process" (Dornyei, 2005, p. 65). Dornyei (2009) conceptualised L2 motivation into a framework known as L2 Motivational Self System (L2MSS) focusing on identifying the future version of the self. It consists of three sub-components, one of which is Ought to L2 Self (OL2S) (Dornyei, 2009). Dornyei

(2005) defined OL2S as "the attributes that one believes one ought to possess" (p. 105). It arises from learners' perceived obligation or responsibility. This perceived obligation comes from people around learners, such as parents, significant others, and local authorities like teachers (Lamb, 2012). Kormos et al. (2011) mentioned that OL2S may influence L2 learners' learning more in Asian context where parents or other family members play a bigger role in affecting learners' motivational thinking. A study in an Indonesian university context involving 56 learner participants, for example, found that the participants had a high level of OL2S, indicating that Indonesian learners may have a high perceived obligation to perform well in L2 learning (Subekti, 2018b).

Regarding previous studies on FNE and OL2S, though to the best of our knowledge, there have not been previous studies explicitly investigating learners' FNE and OL2S, several studies have been conducted on anxiety factors that may be related to OL2S (Alsowat, 2016; Clement & Murugavel, 2018; Heriansyah, 2012; Javid, 2014). A study by Javid (2014) involving 216 university learner participants in Saudi Arabia, for instance, found that class environments such as interactions among teachers and learners or fellow learners affected learners' anxiety. They may also have an indirect sense of wanting to be acknowledged in a class by always being active and obtaining good grades (Javid, 2014). A study by Heriansyah (2012) involving Indonesian English department

students found that the participants were anxious because they considered themselves having 'poor' pronunciation. The anxiety may stem from the belief that they had to produce 'correct' English pronunciation resembling that of native speakers of English. Another study in a Saudi Arabian university context by Alsowat (2016) found that learners' family also affected their L2 learning. An example was having a family member able to speak an L2 (Alsowat, 2016). Learners whose families could speak an L2 may feel obliged to learn it. Corporate employees in a study by Clement and Murugavel (2018) in India reported that poor English communication skills hampered career advancement, indirectly suggesting the obligation to master English communication skills to avoid negative outcomes of stagnation in the future career. In addition to that, in the academic field, Nishanthi (2018) stated that a large number of books are written in English and the language is also used as a medium of communication in many international universities in the world. In line with that, a narrative inquiry study in Japan by Sato (2014) involving three participants reported that these Japanese participants regarded English mastery as essential for studying abroad success. This could add a reason for having to learn the language.

As observed in the previous review of literature, literature in the field of L2 anxiety and motivation, especially on FNE and OL2S have thus far predominantly investigated university contexts, not to

mention that studies investigating FNE factors associated specifically with OL2S are quite rare. Hence, conducting an empirical study involving high school learners in this topic is important to provide insights to literature in the field about this relatively under-research setting. In addition, Rosalina (2014) arguably mentioned that high school learners in science stream generally have a high level of motivation to learn English, which may affect their anxiety. Hence, investigating FNE and ought-to L2 self of Indonesian science-stream high school EFL learners can be worthwhile.

Considering the aforementioned rationales, the present study aims to answer this research question: What are Ought-to L2 Self (OL2S) factors affecting Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) among Indonesian high school science-stream EFL learners in learning English?

METHOD

The present qualitative study was the continuation of our quantitative study (Glory & Subekti, 2021) involving 190 high school EFL learners of science stream at a private university in a big city in Java, Indonesia. In that previous study, an online questionnaire was distributed to investigate their FNE and OL2S levels as well as the association between them (Glory & Subekti, 2021). Through data analysis in SPSS 25, the FNE and OL2S levels of all of the participants in that previous study could be categorically differentiated into low FNE, medium FNE, and high FNE.

The present study employed online interviews via *Google Meet* to collect data to answer the research question. From the previous study by Glory and Subekti (2021), six participants (three male and three female) were selected and invited for interviews. Two participants were from the high FNE category, two from the medium FNE category, and the other two from the low FNE category. The *Google Meet* interviews were conducted from 23 February 2021 to 27 February 2021 in the Indonesian language. The use of the Indonesian language for interviews was intended to ensure that the participants could share their experiences in depth without any language barrier considering that they were all proficient in the Indonesian language. It was also to ensure there was no misunderstanding.

After all the interviews were conducted, the interview data were fully transcribed, translated into English, and analysed using Thematic Analysis. Thematic Analysis is a method for interpreting and identifying patterns of meaning across the qualitative data set (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The first step was to be familiar with the data. Secondly, preliminary codes were used to describe contents. Thirdly, from the codes, recurring themes were obtained. These themes were then reviewed and revised as necessary to ensure that the formulated themes represented the recurring statements (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In terms of ethical practices, the

present study employed the principles of voluntary participation and confidentiality (Gray, 2014). Before interviews were conducted, the invited learners were asked to review an online consent form detailing the purposes of the study and what they were expected to do if they decided to participate (Creswell, 2014). Interviews were conducted only after they agreed to participate by filling out the form, thus maintaining the participants' voluntary participation. Secondly, pseudonyms were used in this study to protect the participants' real identities (Allen & Wiles, 2016). For the same reason, the real name of the private high school becoming the setting of the study was concealed.

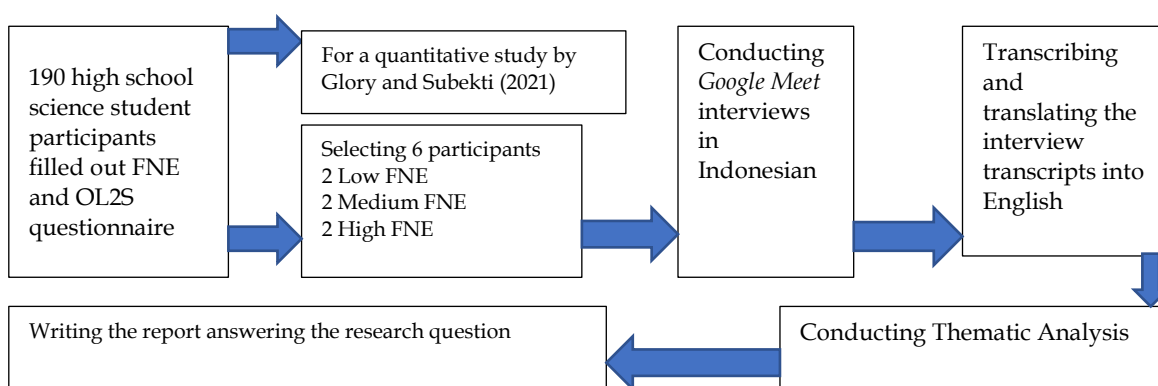The steps of data collection and analysis can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Steps of data collection and analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pseudonyms of the six participants are as follows: Mella (Female/F), Bagas (Male/M), Sindi (F), Boy (M), John (M), and Cley (F). To facilitate reference-tracing, the following codes are used: L_FNE = Low FNE, H_FNE = High FNE, and M_FNE = Medium FNE. For example, "(Bagas, H_FNE/M)" written after an interview excerpt means the excerpt is from Bagas, a male learner with a high FNE.

Through Thematic Analysis, the present study found three themes answering the research question. These themes could be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. FNE Factors from Learners' Ought-to L2 self

Theme 1. Lower FNE was attributed to a future desire to study abroad.
Theme 2. Lower FNE was attributed to a perceived obligation to avoid possible future negative impacts of not learning English.
Theme 3. Higher FNE was attributed to their perceived obligation to have 'correct' English pronunciation.

Theme 1. Lower FNE was attributed to a future desire to study abroad.

All of the six participants admitted that they needed to learn English to accomplish future goals of pursuing further studies at universities abroad. The participants argued that English was a widely spoken global language. Even in countries where English was not the primary language, they communicated with foreigners in English. They stated:

"I want to be able to speak English fluently because I have a goal to study abroad, I need to learn English more." (Mella, H_FNE/F)

"I want to go abroad for study and after that to work abroad, of course, I need English, and I need to learn English." (Bagas, H_FNE/M)

"I need to improve my English… My goal is to study abroad in the Information Technology (IT) department." (Boy, M_FNE/M)

"The goal is to be able to talk to people abroad. Then, I can study abroad, so I won't be afraid anymore to study abroad." (Della, M_FNE/F)

"I feel capable of speaking English. So, my goal is to study abroad, and of course, it needs excellent English because all of the books and communication will use English, so I have to learn English more." (Cley, L_FNE/F)

"I can speak English even though I am not so fluent yet, and my goal is to study abroad. In my opinion, English is important because it is used at international universities and almost all of their courses use English." (John, L_FNE/M)

As seen in the aforementioned excerpts, six participants uniformly aspired to study abroad and believed that English mastery was critical to achieving that dream. This finding was in line with a finding of a study by Sato (2014) in a Japanese context. Sato (2014) found that the Japanese participants considered English mastery important for communication success while studying abroad. The similarity between the two studies in the Asian EFL context may indicate that English occupied a very important position as a language of academic success among Indonesian and Japanese learners aspiring to study abroad. This finding of the present study was also per a statement by Nishanthi (2018) mentioning that international universities use English for communication. Learners from various countries and speaking various languages attending such universities typically communicate using English for communication (Nishanthi, 2018). English proficiency is critical because it enables learners to communicate easily with other global citizens (Nishanthi, 2018).

Theme 2. Lower FNE was attributed to a perceived obligation to avoid possible future negative impacts of not learning English.

Participants with high, medium and low FNE uniformly admitted that they pushed themselves to study English to

avoid possible negative consequences of not studying English in the future. They believed that by studying English consistently, they would gain more confidence in their English language skills. They stated:

"Even though I can speak English now, if I stop learning English, I won't be able to improve (my skills) surely, and the others will be more advanced (I will be lagging) because almost everyone uses English, especially in the world of work and at university later." (Mella, H_FNE/F)

"In my opinion, later (if I don't learn English), I will lack knowledge of English… because, at this time, everyone is using English… especially later if I enter university." (Bagas, H_FNE/M)

"Even though I am currently able to communicate in English, if I do not continue studying, it may be detrimental to my college success due to all of the materials being in English… also, in the workplace…particularly when communicating in English." (Boy, M_FNE/M)

"Even though I am brave enough to speak English, I will be distressed if I am unable to communicate in English in the future, when certain fields, such as workplaces and universities require it." (John, L_FNE/M)

"I believe there will be numerous negative consequences in the future for failing to learn English, although I am fluent in the language and am not afraid to speak it. For instance, if I cannot communicate in English at the workplace, I may not find work and a good university. Then making communication may become more difficult, as the majority of people (in the world) nowadays communicate in English." (Cley, L_FNE/F)

As seen in the aforementioned excerpts, all of these participants indicated that failing to communicate in English could negatively affect them in the future, namely difficulty communicating in English at the workplace or university. Though several participants considered their English proficiency adequate, they believed that if they stopped learning, they would possibly struggle in communication in the future. This finding was in line with a finding of a study by Clement and Murugavel (2018) involving corporate employees in Saudi Arabia. The study found that 86.7% of the respondents agreed that having communication skills in English, especially spoken, was paramount at the workplace. Poor English communication skills hindered one's chances of being hired during job interviews and cause havoc on the workplace communication process (Clement & Murugavel, 2018). Apart from workplace environments, universities in many countries use English in learning to make the material more accessible to international students (Nishanthi, 2018). Additionally, numerous books were written in the English language in colleges (Nishanthi, 2018). As a result, if learners do not master the English language, they may struggle in lectures due to all of the university activities using the English language.

Learners' perceived obligation to avoid negative impacts may also be inspired by their surroundings, such as family members. Della, for example, stated:

> *"I will feel embarrassed, especially at university later. My family is fluent in English, and they told me that more than 50% (of the students) would use English at university. I'll feel embarrassed if I do not understand English." (Della, M_FNE/F)*

As seen in the aforementioned excerpt, family members may play a role in instilling a certain degree of OL2S on learners. This finding may resonate with a finding of a study by Alsowat (2016) in a Saudi Arabian university context where it was found that having a family able to speak an L2 could motivate his participants to learn an L2. The similarity may suggest that family influenced learners' L2 learning regardless of the level of education. This influence could be due to self-comparison with family members or intensive interactions among family members.

Theme 3. Higher FNE was attributed to their perceived obligation to have 'correct' English pronunciation.

The study found that all of the learner participants perceived incompetence in pronunciation in English affected their confidence in speaking English. They believed their English pronunciation was inadequate, and they would at times become nervous when

asked to speak in English class by their teachers. Regarding this, they stated:

> *"When I was in the tenth grade and giving a presentation in front of a class, I was afraid that my pronunciation was incorrect."(Mella, H_FNE/F)*

> *"If I'm being honest, I'm occasionally afraid of my pronunciation when speaking in front of the class." (Bagas, H_FNE/M)*

> *"At times, when I speak English, I was afraid of mispronouncing words." (Della, M_FNE/F)*

> *"When it comes to speaking, I'm more afraid of mispronunciation (than making other errors)." (Boy, M_FNE/M)*

> *"Occasionally, when delivering a presentation, I was fearful of my pronunciation." (Cley, L_FNE/F)*

> *"Speaking of which, I can still read, write, and listen, but when it comes to speaking, it's as if it's difficult to think of the words I want to say in English." (John, L_FNE/M)*

As seen in the excerpts, all of these six participants seemed to feel concerned about their English pronunciation. Their FNE may stem from their perceived obligation to have 'correct' English pronunciation resembling that of English native speakers. Recurring L2 class instruction oriented towards native speaker countries could play a part in forming such beliefs. Besides, another factor at play could be classroom environments whereby learners wished to be acknowledged by

their peers and teachers (Javid, 2014) and tried to avoid embarrassment in front of them (Subekti, 2018a).

Furthermore, the excerpts revealing their fear of mispronouncing English utterances were interestingly almost identical to one another, suggesting that they were very straightforward in identifying their difficulty in learning English. This finding was in line with a finding of a study by Heriansyah (2012) in an Indonesian university context. Heriansyah (2012) found that most of the ten participants from the English Department had poor pronunciation. The similarity between the findings of both studies indicated that Indonesian learners, both at high school level and university level generally still struggled with English pronunciation. At the high school level, for example, they may only use the language during English class sessions, limitedly on top of that, considering the possible uses of other languages such as the Indonesian language and regional languages during an English class session. The extensive use of languages other than English in English classes likely impacted the intensity of learners using English. As a result, they had very limited opportunity to sharpen their English skills, especially spoken communication, including the pronunciation aspect.

Based on the aforementioned findings, the present study provides several pedagogical implications. Considering that aspiration to study abroad became a factor lessening the learner participants' FNE in

English, English teachers should increase Indonesian high school EFL learners' perspectives on studying abroad. Teachers can convey that learning English can be a provision for studying abroad in the future. Though not specifically related to English Language Teaching (ELT), it is important to note that there have been more and more fully-funded scholarship opportunities nowadays for Indonesian learners. English teachers could use this opportunity to instil learners' motivation to study abroad, and thus motivate them to study English, the language of global communication. Furthermore, to raise the learners' awareness of the importance of English in the workplace, English teachers can design learning activities facilitating learners to see the practical uses of English in their future. For example, they can ask learners to do a presentation of products to foreign investors in role-plays. If learners cannot communicate effectively in English, work's success could also be hampered, thus hampering their future careers. Last, considering that all of the learner participants uniformly reported a perceived obligation to have 'correct' pronunciation as a prominent 'spectre' in English learning, English teachers could introduce learners to the concept of Global Englishes where 'different' pronunciation is not something to laugh at when speaking English. Instead, it should be recognised as a result of cultural and linguistic differences of its speakers (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019). In so doing, learners' FNE could be reduced. Teachers could also raise

learners' awareness that intelligibility in conveying a message is more important than achieving native speakers' ability, including in pronunciation (Galloway & Numajiri, 2019).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present qualitative study found three main findings on Indonesian high school science-stream learners' L2 FNE factors of their OL2S. They had lower FNE in English realising that they needed higher proficiency to study abroad, necessitating them to be able to fluently communicate in English. That was to say that the realisation of the need to master English for studying abroad pushed them to overcome their fear associated with English learning. Secondly, they reported lower FNE when they realised failure to master the language could bring future negative consequences, related to communication challenges in academic life when studying abroad and at the future workplace. Thirdly, the participants uniformly reported higher FNE thinking that they had to have 'correct' pronunciation when speaking English.

The study contributes to the literature in the field of L2 anxiety and motivation, especially in the Indonesian high school context. Though the main findings of the present study may be quite limited, the study is generally able to provide unique and in-depth perspectives about Indonesian learners' FNE in English associated with their OL2S, an association that may not be extensively discussed previously in the Indonesian context. This study could also reveal several aspects of Indonesian learners' intertwined affective factors of anxiety and motivation affecting their English learning.

Despite the contributions in L2 instruction and anxiety and motivation literature, the present study also has a limitation related to the limited number of themes obtained through the online interviews. This could be related to time constraints requested by the participants and occasionally poor internet connectivity, which might result in less detailed information. This may, to a certain extent, compromise the quality of the interview data.

Future studies related to the findings and limitations of the present study are as follows. First, future studies could investigate aspects of L2 anxiety or L2 motivation among Indonesians who are currently preparing for their study abroad programs. Such studies could provide insights into the interplay of affective factors among Indonesians whose learning goals are more immediate. Secondly, conducting classroom action research studies where teacher-researchers implement activities mirroring learners' future use of English could also be worthwhile. Last but not the least, investigating how Indonesian learners see English pronunciation may also provide an insight as to why it seems to be a recurring reported challenge in English learning. Aspects involving Global Englishes could also be jointly investigated in such studies

to empirically see whether awareness of Global Englishes affects the Indonesian learners' English learning.

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