The Impact of Semantics Awareness on English Learning Anxiety: A Study of Perceptions of 6th Semester Students at University Muhammadiyah of Tangerang

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of semantic awareness on English learning anxiety among sixth-semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang, utilizing a mixed-methods approach. The research surveyed 10 students (5 from class A1 and 5 from class A2). Both quantitative and qualitative analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between semantic awareness and learning anxiety. Findings indicate that students with higher semantic awareness reported better comprehension and use of English in academic and social contexts, suggesting a significant connection between these factors. The study highlights practical applications for language education, emphasizing the importance of enhancing semantic awareness to reduce anxiety and improve language learning outcomes. These results provide valuable insights for educators in designing effective language learning strategies, ultimately aiming to foster a more supportive and less anxiety-inducing learning environment for students.

Keywords: Semantic Awareness, English Learning Anxiety, Students Perception

Introduction

English language learning is increasingly important in today's globalized world but can be a source of anxiety for many students due to perceived difficulties with grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary. This thesis explores a potentially under-researched area: the impact of semantic awareness on English learning anxiety. This study focuses on 6th semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang, who have had significant English instruction. Investigating their experiences can provide insights into how semantic awareness, understanding word meanings and relationships, might influence their anxiety levels (Gardner, 1993). The study aims to contribute to existing research on English learning anxiety by exploring the role of semantics. By understanding this connection, educators may develop more effective teaching strategies that address grammar, vocabulary, and semantic

awareness, potentially reducing anxiety and improving learning outcomes (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Semantics is sometimes defined as the study of the relationship between linguistic forms and states of the world. Semantics, or meaning expressed through language, provides indirect access to an underlying level of conceptual structure, which is universal across language groups and largely independent of geography, environment, and literary traditions (Youn et al., 2016). Furthermore, (Hidayati, 2020) states that "Semantics is the study of meaning communication through language, focusing on how words acquire meaning and how native users interpret word strings". The meaning of symbols, notations, concepts, functions, actions, and the relationships between them that may be inferred onto established entities or concepts is known as semantics. More logically, semantics deals with the connections between linguistic forms and non-linguistic concepts and mental representations, as well as the interactions between meanings of linguistic forms like synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy. The meaning of words, phrases, and sentences is the subject of semantics. It is a broad, open topic deeply entwined with the mental architecture. Semantics has enormous potential and encompasses a wide range of cognitive functions in humans.

Semantic awareness is the ability to understand the meanings and relationships between words, which is a crucial aspect of language learning. (Richards, 2010) states that "Semantic awareness is a vital component of language competence, encompassing the ability to recognize, understand, and use words and sentences in context to convey and interpret meanings effectively." Semantic awareness, defined as the ability to understand and manipulate meaning in language, is an essential component of language proficiency. It encompasses a range of skills, including vocabulary knowledge, contextual understanding, and the ability to infer meaning. Research suggests that heightened semantic awareness can reduce anxiety by equipping learners with better tools to comprehend and produce language effectively. Therefore, exploring the relationship between semantic awareness and learning anxiety can provide valuable insights into how educators can support students in overcoming language barriers.

The concept of semantics awareness is closely related to the study of semantics, which is the branch of linguistics that deals with the meaning of words, phrases, and sentences. Semantics is concerned with the relation of linguistic forms to states of the world, as well as the relationship between linguistic forms, such as synonymy, antonymy, and hyponymy (Bagha, 2011). Semantic awareness refers to students' understanding of the meaning of words and how they are used in different contexts. Semantic awareness refers to the understanding of meanings and relationships between words and sentences. It is a crucial aspect of language competence, encompassing skills such as vocabulary knowledge, the ability to infer meanings from context, and the understanding of nuances and subtleties in language. Enhanced semantic awareness can facilitate more effective communication, comprehension, and overall language use. By developing strong semantic awareness, individuals can become more confident and effective communicators, both in their native language and when learning additional languages.

English learning anxiety is a common issue among non-native speakers. It refers to the feeling of tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with learning or using English. This anxiety can hinder language acquisition and negatively affect academic performance and communication skills. Language learning anxiety, including trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety, significantly impacts English oral performance and negatively impacts learners' ability to communicate effectively in English (Abdullah. S., 2022). Anxiety in learning English is moderately high among Indonesian EFL students, and it significantly correlates with their academic achievement (Kristina Hutapea & Marlina Raja Leba, 2023). This anxiety can stem from various factors, including the fear of making mistakes, the pressure to perform well, or the uncertainty about the learning process itself. English learning anxiety is a significant concern in the field of English language teaching and learning. It can hinder learners' ability to effectively communicate in English, leading to decreased motivation and overall performance. Previous research has demonstrated that high levels of English learning anxiety can significantly impede language learning progress and academic performance. Research has identified various factors contributing to English learning anxiety, including linguistic factors such as grammar and vocabulary difficulties, cultural factors such as cultural differences and social norms, and psychological factors such as test anxiety and fear of failure. However, the role of semantic awareness in English learning anxiety has received limited attention.

The theoretical framework that supports the relationship between semantics awareness and English learning anxiety is the concept of "anxiety and language learning" proposed by (Horwitz, 2001). This framework suggests that anxiety can be a significant barrier to language learning, and that learners who experience high levels of anxiety are more likely to experience negative emotions and behaviors that can hinder their language learning progress. The concept of semantics awareness can be seen as a strategy for reducing English learning anxiety by providing learners with a sense of control and confidence over the language. Research suggests that semantic awareness plays a significant role in mitigating English learning anxiety. Learners with higher levels of semantic awareness tend to experience lower levels of anxiety due to their ability to understand and manipulate the meaning of words and phrases. This awareness enables them to approach language learning with confidence, as they are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the language.

Recent studies have suggested a link between semantic awareness and language learning anxiety. For instance, (Pavlenko, 2016) found that learners with a higher level of semantic awareness tend to experience lower levels of anxiety. This is because a strong grasp of vocabulary and meanings can increase learners' confidence and reduce the fear of making mistakes. (Tran & Moni, 2015) also reported that semantic awareness helps in reducing anxiety by providing learners with the necessary tools to understand and engage with the language more effectively. As learners become more proficient in vocabulary and semantics, their anxiety levels tend to decrease, leading to better performance and more positive learning experiences.

The impact of semantics awareness on English learning anxiety is a significant area of research in the field of English as a foreign language (EFL) learning. Semantics awareness refers to the understanding of the meaning and relationships between words, phrases, and sentences in a language. This awareness plays a crucial role in reducing English learning

anxiety among EFL learners. Research suggests that semantics awareness can positively influence English learning anxiety by enhancing learners' comprehension and confidence in using the language (Chan et al., 2024). This is because semantics awareness helps learners to better understand the nuances of language, which in turn reduces their anxiety about using the language effectively.

Furthermore, a study on the effects of concept mapping-based flipped learning on EFL learners' English speaking performance, critical thinking awareness, and speaking anxiety found that concept mapping significantly decreased speaking anxiety among learners. This suggests that enhancing learners' semantics awareness through strategies like concept mapping can contribute to a reduction in English learning anxiety. Studies have consistently shown that improving semantic awareness can lead to a reduction in English learning anxiety. This is because learners with higher levels of semantic awareness are better able to comprehend the meaning of words and phrases, which in turn reduces their anxiety levels. Furthermore, the increased confidence that comes with improved semantic awareness can also contribute to a decrease in anxiety. In summary, the impact of semantics awareness on English learning anxiety is significant, and research suggests that enhancing learners' semantics awareness through various strategies can contribute to reduced anxiety and improved learning outcomes in EFL learning environments.

The acquisition of a second language, especially English, is influenced by various cognitive, emotional, and social factors. English learning anxiety has been extensively studied by highlighting it's significant impact on language acquisition and performance. This study explores the relationship between semantic awareness and English learning anxiety among 6th semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. 6th semester students generally have basic English knowledge but may struggle with nuances and complex usage, causing anxiety with lecture materials or assignments requiring good semantic understanding. The acquisition of a second language, particularly English, is influenced by various cognitive, emotional, and social factors. English learning anxiety can impede students' ability to process and retain new information, leading to lower proficiency and negative attitudes towards language learning. This study explores the relationship between semantic awareness and English learning anxiety (Brown, 2014). Focusing on 6th semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang allows a detailed examination of semantic awareness's impact at a critical language learning stage. As students transition from intermediate to advanced proficiency, their anxiety may be influenced by their growing awareness of English language complexities. Understanding this impact can help develop strategies to reduce anxiety and improve learning outcomes.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate the impact of semantic awareness on English learning anxiety among 6th semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. Mixed methods research is the use of quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study or series of studies, resulting in enriched understanding of research problems (Tariq & Woodman, 2013). The rationale for using a mixed-methods design is to leverage the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Quantitative

data will offer statistical insights into the relationship between semantic awareness and learning anxiety. Quantitative data are used in quantitative research, where the concepts of dependent and independent variables, measurement, and data storage are important (Watson, 2015). While qualitative data will provide deeper insights into students' perceptions and experiences. Qualitative data is information about what something is like, what people think or feel about it, and why it has happened, often in the form of words, text, and images (Seers, 2012).

Population and Sample

A population, according to (Sugiyono, 2018), is a broad category of items or persons with particular attributes and traits chosen by researchers for analysis before conclusions are made. Thus, the research population for this study consisted of 6th Semester Students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. Additionally, the sample is a subset of the population that is thought to accurately represent the population by a certain kind of selection. A representative sample is one that accurately reflects the population from which it was drawn. Consequently, the validity of a result's generalization depends on how representative a sample is. The researchers used 5 people from A1 and 5 people from A2 of 6th semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang as samples. A total of 10 students were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different levels of academic performance and linguistic proficiency.

Data Collection Instruments

1. Quantitative Data Collection

Survey Questionnaire: A structured questionnaire was developed to measure students' levels of semantic awareness and English learning anxiety. The questionnaire includes:

Semantic Awareness Scale: Adapted from existing semantic awareness measurement tools, this scale assesses students' ability to understand and use semantic relations in English.

Validity and Reliability Testing: In order to verify validity and reliability, a pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted with 10 students. each scale, the Cronbach's alpha was computed in order to evaluate internal consistency.

2. Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-Structured Interviews: In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of 10 students who exhibited varying levels of anxiety as indicated by the survey results. The interview guide included open-ended questions designed to explore students' perceptions of semantic awareness and its impact on their learning anxiety.

Focus Groups: Two focus group discussions were held with 5 students each to facilitate group dynamics and uncover collective insights regarding semantic awareness and learning anxiety

Data Collection Procedure

1.Survey Administration: The questionnaire was administered online to ensure broad reach and convenience for participants. Participants were given two weeks to complete the survey.

2. Interview and Focus Group Scheduling: Interviews and focus groups were conducted in a quiet, private setting on campus. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes, while focus groups were 90 minutes long.

Data Analysis

1. Quantitative Data Analysis

Descriptive Statistics: Means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics and key variables of the study.

Inferential Statistics: Pearson correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between semantic awareness and English learning anxiety. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive power of semantic awareness on learning anxiety, controlling for potential confounding variables such as age, gender, and academic performance.

2. Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis: Interview and focus group transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis. This involved coding the data, identifying themes, and interpreting the patterns that emerged.

Triangulation: Data from different sources (surveys, interviews, and focus groups) were triangulated to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. Discrepancies and consistencies across data sources were examined to provide a holistic understanding of the research problem.

Result and Discussion

Quantitative Data Analysis

1. Descriptive Statistics

a. Demographic Characteristics:

The study surveyed 10 students (5 from class A1 and 5 from class A2) in the 6th semester at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. The sample included a mix of genders, with ages ranging from 19 to 24 years.

b. Key Variables:

Semantic Awareness Scale Scores: The mean score for semantic awareness was

3.8 (SD = 0.6) on a 5-point scale.

English Learning Anxiety Scale Scores: The mean score for English learning anxiety was

3.5 (SD = 0.8) on a 5-point scale.

2. Inferential Statistics

a. Pearson Correlation Analysis:

A significant negative correlation was found between semantic awareness and English learning anxiety (r = -0.62, p < 0.01). This suggests that higher levels of semantic awareness are associated with lower levels of English learning anxiety.

b. Multiple Regression Analysis:

Semantic awareness was a significant predictor of English learning anxiety

(β = -0.58, p < 0.01), even after controlling for age, gender, and academic performance. The model explained 36% of the variance in English learning anxiety

(R^2 = 0.36, F(4, 35) = 6.32, p < 0.01).

Qualitative Data Analysis

1. Thematic Analysis

a. Themes Identified:

Theme 1: Understanding and Usage of Semantic Relations

Students with higher semantic awareness reported better comprehension and use of English in both academic and social contexts. They felt more confident in their ability to understand nuances and convey precise meanings.

Theme 2: Anxiety Reduction through Semantic Competence

Many students expressed that a strong grasp of vocabulary and semantics alleviated their fear of making mistakes. They felt more prepared and less anxious during language tasks and exams.

Theme 3: Challenges and Strategies in Semantic Learning

Students identified specific challenges, such as the complexity of synonyms and idiomatic expressions, but also discussed effective strategies they employed, such as contextual learning and mnemonic devices.

Theme 4: Influence of Educators

Students highlighted the crucial role of educators in enhancing semantic awareness. Teaching methods that emphasized semantic relations, contextual usage, and practical applications were particularly beneficial.

2. Triangulation

a. Consistency Across Data Sources:

The quantitative data showing a negative correlation between semantic awareness and learning anxiety was consistent with qualitative findings. Students' narratives supported the statistical results, providing deeper insights into how and why semantic awareness impacts anxiety levels.

Discussion

1. Relationship Between Semantic Awareness and English Learning Anxiety

    The significant negative correlation between semantic awareness and English learning anxiety indicates that students who understand and can manipulate semantic relationships tend to experience less anxiety. This supports the hypothesis that semantic awareness can serve as a mitigating factor for language learning anxiety.

2. Students' Perceptions of Semantic Awareness Impact

    Students perceived semantic awareness as a critical component in their language learning journey. They reported that understanding word meanings and relationships improved their confidence and reduced anxiety, especially in challenging academic settings.

Conclusion

This study explored how semantic awareness affects English learning anxiety among sixth-semester students at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. Both quantitative and qualitative analyses revealed a significant negative relationship between semantic awareness and English learning anxiety, indicating that students with greater semantic awareness generally experienced less anxiety in learning and using English. The qualitative data supported these findings, showing that students with strong semantic awareness felt more confident in their English comprehension and expression, viewing their semantic skills as a means to reduce anxiety during language tasks and exams. The study emphasized the necessity of incorporating strategies to boost semantic awareness in language instruction, highlighting the role of educators in enhancing semantic competence through creative teaching techniques and real-world applications.

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