

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Mental health has been a concern among higher education students in recent years. World Health Organization (2004) revealed that mental health is "a state of individuals' well-being awareness of their abilities, the way of cope with daily stress, work productively and efficiently, and able to contribute to the community they're part of.". For the past years, mental health has concentrated focus on stress, which is considered to be a major factor that influences students' well-being (Oteir et al. 2017; Getie 2016; Voronova et al. 2020). Additionally, Pedrelli et al., (2014) mention that 11.9% of students suffer from anxiety. According to Boussif M et al. (2021), addressing students' mental health has always been a top priority for universities. They also stated most people still have anxiety about the achievement of academic goals, which indicates that maintaining students' good mental health has a great impact on academics and students' emotions. Hamilton et al. (2021) reported that students' social interaction and emotions decreased compared to two years before.

During the pandemic, university students were more likely to have mental health problems due to the pandemic's stressors and constraints, which may have had a negative impact on their ability to succeed in class, interact with others, and pursue their future professional and personal goals. Vala et al. (2020) stated that sudden isolation and social distancing can significantly affect the mental health of EFL students as they are removed from their extracurricular activities which makes them feel less connected with their friends and hobbies. The study revealed that 10.80% of the students suffer from depression, 15.60% from stress, and 17.20% from anxiety. Paisal et al. (2022) have proven that EFL students have multiple reasons for being behind their school that cause them to be stressed, including overloaded school tasks, lack of focus in class, and lack of interaction from both teachers and students. Nevertheless, Jeong (2017) stated that it is very important for students to realize that the English language is very important for their future, even with all the challenges they face.

English is considered the most important world language. It is the most commonly used international language of communication (Kunasaraphan 2015). English is the dominant language

in today's world; it is the language of science, technology, trade, and commerce. Ibnian (2017) stated that English is important for learners' futures. Being good at English is a precondition and a must for job seekers. Nevertheless, Ngo et al. (2017) stated that university students feel forced and pressured to learn English as a foreign language as known as EFL. Foreign language anxiety is believed to be a barrier for language learners to develop competent speaking abilities, even if students are always keen on communicating orally in foreign languages and increasing their communicative competence (Baissane 2023).

In addition to having an impact on first-year EFL undergraduate students learning English, mental health can also have an impact on teachers. It has been shown that mental health concerns affect students' learning abilities and educators' performance in the classroom. Kasap (2022) said students' high level of anxiety has proven to have a negative effect on students causing them to have difficulties learning foreign languages. Bruffaerts et al. (2018) also proved that first-year students with bad mental health show lower academic outcomes than students who have good mental health. The findings connect foreign language anxiety and mental health. Abdala & Elnadeef (2019) revealed that language anxiety appears to be the most important variable in language learning as many learners endure discomfort and frustration because of it. Foreign language anxiety is a barrier for students to learn a foreign language (Dewaele et al. 2008; Kruk 2018). Furthermore, Oteir & Al-Otaibi (2019) claimed that language educators also stressed that their students experience foreign language anxiety in language classes, which negatively influences their achievement and performance. On the other hand, students are afraid of making mistakes and feel uncomfortable about participating in English class, which causes them to avoid participating in English lessons because they are afraid of their classmates making fun of them, which makes them feel anxious (Abdala & Elnadeef 2019). First-year EFL undergraduate students tend to be able to adjust themselves mentally to be able to face daily university challenges (Aydin 2023)

First-year students tend to have difficulties transferring from high school to university life. According to Wasylikiw (2015), the challenge of making the switch from high school to a first-year university student increases students' anxiety about learning a foreign language in the university academy. Some challenges for first-year university students who are transferring from high school life to being university students, including finding new friends, being far away from families, adjusting to adult life, and learning in a new education system, are stated in Briggs et al.

(2012). Therefore, with all the burden students have to carry, they will be more alert about themselves with their academic performance. Abdala & Elnadeef (2019) mentioned causes of language anxiety are students getting anxious and scared when they make any mistake in English class, classmates making fun of them in front of the class, the lack of confidence in speaking English in both front class or with their mates, and scared making mistakes in writing anything related to assignments. After multiple tests done by Sabri et al. (2021), anxiety is very commonly shown by students that's not only learning other school subjects but also EFL. Wyatt et al. (2017) also proved that mental health such as anxiety affects student learning outcomes and academic success, by showing 56.1% of students studied. With all that being said, mental health affects students both academically and socially.

From the problems discussed above, it is evident that mental health has affected students' language learning and become an emerging issue. Kasap (2022) confirmed there's a bridge that connects foreign language anxiety, mental health, and the effects on students' academic goals and future. Baissane (2023) found out the challenges university students face in learning English as a foreign language by stating that students indeed feel anxious and scared, feel embarrassed for pronouncing words incorrectly, or when they have nothing prepared before participating in any oral activity that includes the English language in front of class. Sabri et al. (2021) also mentioned that future research should be focusing on how EFL students cope with their anxiety while learning English. This study will explore how students from first-year undergraduate English Language Education departments maintain their mental health when learning the English language.

1.1.2 Research Question

1. What are the mental health issues of first-year EFL undergraduate students in learning the English language?
2. How do first-year EFL undergraduate students manage their mental health in learning the English language?

1.1.3 Aims of the Study

1. To identify EFL undergraduate students' mental health issues in learning English

2. To reveal how undergraduate EFL students maintain their mental health when learning the English language

1.2 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this study will contribute to the everyday teaching and learning activity in the process, such as students understanding of how to manage their mental health to be able to learn and able to achieve their academic goals. In addition, students are able to understand ways to manage their mental health in a healthy way. The practical significance of this study is that the mental health of first-year EFL undergraduate students in learning the English language will be able to be understood by future researchers, and this will enable future researchers to dig deeper into the mental health of first-year EFL undergraduate students in English language learning.