



## **Students' Anxiety in Learning English as a Foreign Language: A Case from Indonesia**

**Erika Mae Lavarias Rodriguez**

National Teachers College

[erikamaelrodriguez@gmail.com](mailto:erikamaelrodriguez@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Although the study of students' anxiety in learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia has been conducted before, little attention is paid to whether gender or English level contributes more to the anxiety in learning. EFL students, particularly in Indonesia, find difficulty in learning the language because it has different rules from their own language. There is no such thing as gender-based personal pronouns or tenses in their verbs. It doesn't have the plural form which is equivalent to adding "s" in English. In Bahasa Indonesia, how you spell it is how you pronounce it. While the spelling in English does not correspond with its pronunciation. 242 Grade 10 students, male and female in three different English levels (Levels 1, 2, and 3) were included in the study. This study aims at researching the students' anxiety level in terms of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test-taking. Fear of negative evaluation shows the highest cause of students' anxiety followed by test-taking and communication apprehension. Students in English Level 1 and 2 show a significant relationship to the level of anxiety, while students in Level 3 have no relationship between anxiety and that level. Gender has shown some significance but it is very weak. Between gender and English level, it shows that gender, though has weaker significance, contributes more to anxiety compared to the English level. Further explication of each issue is discussed.

Keywords: communication apprehension, EFL, language anxiety, negative evaluation, test taking anxiety

### **Introduction,**

In most countries where English is not the native language, English has been a secondary foreign language to learn. However, English is not the most spoken language in the world. It only falls in the top 3. Chinese and Spanish are top 1 and 2. It may not be the most spoken language, but English is still considered the world's lingua franca. English equates to the word opportunity and a better quality of life (Lane, 2018).

English is not just learned through simple memorization; it is a skill developed over time. English becomes tricky because the set rules have exceptions to rules.

Word orders, pronunciation, idioms, spelling, and even slang language add difficulty to learning English ("Why Is English So Hard to Learn?", 2014).

Since English is held in such high standards that learners do not want to use it unless they are already proficient. Learners still adhere to the native-like competence that even though they can effectively communicate in English, the stigma of not being good enough is there (Rasman, 2017). Learning a foreign language is compared to dating, as according to Pavlenko (2016). On dating, a person gets so nervous that one experience being tongue tied in knots, being careful to what you say as it may cause a big price. The anxiety that a person feels during a date maybe helpful to keep one person from saying something that will make him look like a fool.

With different rules to learn and remember, English as Foreign Language students develop anxiety. The fear of being laughed at by friends is one factor for not wanting to practice speaking English (Azzam, 2012). EFL students would seldom ask questions if they didn't understand a certain lesson in English. This is because they are afraid that their teachers will give them comments or feedback. EFL students usually face difficulties in speaking because of their lack of motivation, low self-esteem, anxiety, first language interference, and the learning environment (Jiménez, 2015).

Classmates also affect their attitude in the class. When they ask questions, friends tend to laugh at them (Abrar et al., 2018). In a study by Pratiwi (2018), EFL students' highest factor for not being fluent in speaking is anxiety. In this study, the three factors of anxiety are taken as a whole. Students feel anxious as they fear what others will tell them, how others will see them, and how they feel awkward pronouncing words in a native like manner. However, it must be noted too that not all students who are quiet means that they do not have enough language skills. Some students may choose to be silent in class even though they have the knowledge of the language. They do this simply because they have no desire to stand out in the class. Thus they dislike any activities that will make them look too good in English (Carter & Henrichsen, 2015). These students acted in such a way because of their fear of performing well in the foreign language. Their anxiety makes them resistant to learning (Subekti, 2018). High school students are not exempted from this anxiety. In trying to fit in and trying to cope with all the

requirements, they have to submit to their school, and dealing with their anxiety in learning English is one more thing they have to worry about.

According to American Psychological Association (APA), anxiety is an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes like increased blood pressure (Anxiety, 2019). People experiencing anxiety may have repeated negative thoughts and might try to avoid a certain situation that triggers their anxiety. Anxiety is a term used for a situation that causes fear, worry, and apprehension. It is an important variable that affects learning in education in education (Saranraj and Meenakshi, 2016).

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is the feeling of tension, fear, and apprehension associated with such foreign language contexts as speaking, listening, and learning. (Richards, 2018). Language anxiety happens when a learner feels fear or apprehension when the learner is about to perform the language learning. The presence of anxiety in the classroom can affect the learner's confidence, communicative, competence, and exams. Anxiety can make a learner nervous and blank out (Hu and Wang, 2014).

Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope first presented foreign language anxiety in 1986. From their studies, multiple authors used it as a foundation to develop or tackle other issues regarding foreign language anxiety. They described anxiety as a distinct form of anxiety, separate from other forms of anxiety. This anxiety is experienced in any language-learning situation; no matter which language skill is used. This anxiety is considered situation-specific, not trait-specific anxiety (Landstrom, 2015).

Likewise, Horwitz categorized three types of language anxiety. 1) communication apprehension, 2) test anxiety, and 3) fear of negative evaluation to provide teachers with the nature of anxiety (Tercan & Dikilitaş, 2015).

Anxiety can be debilitating or facilitating. It is something that a learner cannot avoid; either remove it or manage it. Teachers and students agree that it is better to accept anxiety and use it as a motivational tool to make themselves better. Removing it entirely is not practical and illogical because anxiety has positive effects if managed correctly (Tran & Moni, 2014). Anxiety itself is not harmful if used to motivate a person to strive more. However, it can be

dysfunctional if a learner has a high level of anxiety that hinders the learner and negatively affects the learning process and behavior (Yahya, 2013).

Communication anxiety is also known as performance anxiety. People who experience this anxiety find it difficult to speak in a group or listen to the spoken message. Communication apprehension includes difficulty speaking in groups, stage fright, and receiver anxiety. Receiver anxiety arises when listening or reading (Landstrom, 2016).

Test-taking is another form of anxiety. According to the study made by Ahmad et al. (2018), both male and female students have similar anxiety tests, but female students perform better than male students. On the other hand, Wienanda et al. (2017) concluded that gender does not correlate with the type of anxiety or level of anxiety.

A negative evaluation is another form of anxiety. In the study of Mukminin et al. (2015) and Tzoannopoulou (2016), students are afraid to speak in English with their teacher for fear of making mistakes. They are worried that people will judge them, not like them, and have a bad impression of others.

In Indonesia, the official language used is Bahasa Indonesia. Aside from their official language, there are over 725 actively spoken languages. Bahasa Indonesia is used along with their native language, English, Chinese, Japanese and other foreign languages side by side (Language in Indonesia, 2015). The purpose of this research is to see the student's level of anxiety in learning English as Foreign Language (EFL) and to see how their anxiety can be reduced.

The study aims to determine the anxiety of English as foreign language students. More specifically, to answer the following questions: (1) What is the demographic profile of students in terms of English Level and Gender; (2) What is the anxiety level of the respondents in terms of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation test-taking (3) Is there a significant relationship between student's demographic profile and their anxiety level?; (4) Which demographic profile contributes more to students' anxiety in learning English?; Based on the findings of the study, what can be recommended that will benefit both students and teachers?

This study not only aims to answer whether gender or level affects anxiety and whether gender or anxiety contributes more to the anxiety. Other studies only

correlate gender to anxiety and English comprehension to anxiety, but few studies have been made to see which causes the higher anxiety between the two.

### **Research Methodology**

The design used for this study is a quantitative correlational study that measured variables, understood, assessed, and examined the relationships. The purpose of this study is to examine the anxiety level of students that may affect their view on learning English. This study focused on the Anxiety of English as Foreign Language Students of Grade 10 from UPH College during the Second Semester of the Academic Year 2018- 2019. The respondents of the study were composed of 242 students. The researcher conducted convenience sampling. During the sampling day, all Grade 10 students who were present in their English class were given the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale(FLCAS) was developed by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986). The FLCAS uses a 5-point Likert scale with 33 items. It should be answered by choosing from the strongly agree and strongly disagree range. The 24 positive worded items will be given a score of 5 for strongly agree, while the strongly disagree will be given a score of 1. For the negatively framed items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, 32), the option strongly agree given a score of 1, while strongly disagree given a score of 5. This instrument measures students' anxiety while learning a language inside the classroom.

To answer the statement of the problem, the percentage of the EFL anxiety level should be known. Their level of anxiety as a whole and in terms of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test-taking, are determined by using mean and standard deviation. To answer the statement of the problem of whether gender and English level has a significant relationship to anxiety, Multinomial Logistic Regression was used because there are three levels of a categorical variable (English level) and one continuous variable (Anxiety level). Point Biserial correlation was also used because there is a dichotomous categorical variable (Gender) and a continuous variable (Anxiety level).

## Findings and Discussion

### Findings

**Table 1:** Demographic Profile of students in term of their English Level and Gender

Level	Male		Female		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%
1	30	45.454	36	54.545	66	27.27
2	47	39.50	72	60.50	119	49.17
3	27	47.37	30	52.63	57	23.55
Overall	104	42.96	138	57.02	242	99.99

To determine the demographic profile of the respondents based on their English level and gender, frequency and percentage were used.

There are a total of 242 respondents from Grade 10. 104 are male students, and 138 are female students. Grade 10 students are divided into different levels of English. The highest level they can enter as a Grade 10 student is Level 3, and the lowest is Level 1. There are 66 Level 1 students, 119 Level 2 students, and 57 Level 3 students. It can be seen from the data that most students are in Level 2, which is considered the average level for English students. They have the basic knowledge of English compared to Level 1 students who have almost 0 English but skills are not yet fully developed compared to Level 3 students.

**Table 2:** Anxiety Level of the respondents

Anxiety Level	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. dev.	Interpretation
Communication	2.94	0.69	Fair
Apprehension			
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.16	0.82	Moderate
Test Taking	2.79	0.57	Fair
Overall	2.97	0.63	Fair

Interpretation scale: Low:1.00 – 1.99, Fair: 2.00 – 2.99, Moderate: 3.00 – 3.99, High: 4.00 – 4.99

To determine the anxiety level of the students based on the Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation and Test Taking, mean and standard deviation were used.

The respondents have a high anxiety level for fear of negative evaluation, given the average of 3.16 yet the distribution is widely dispersed noted by its corresponding standard deviation of 0.82. However, the respondents are most consistent to respond given a 0.57 standard deviation that they experience fair anxiety level during test-taking with an average of 2.79.

**Table 3:** Relationship between the Anxiety Level of the respondents and their English Level

English Level	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	Interpretation
One	0.686	0.023	1.985	Significant
Two	0.783	0.004	2.188	Significant

The reference category is Three

Multinomial Logistic Regression was used because there are three levels of a categorical variable (English level) and one continuous variable (Anxiety level).

This implies that the anxiety level is significantly associated with the two sections in English class, one and two, with anxiety level coefficients (B) equal to 0.686 and 0.783, respectively, with both  $\text{Exp}(B) > 1$ . Thus, this result shows that level three is the reference category which suggests that there is no relationship between the anxiety level to their class section.

Thus, the null hypothesis is not completed and accepted that there is no significant relationship between students' English level and their anxiety level as Level 1 and 2 show a significant relationship but not Level 3.

**Table 4:** Relationship between the Anxiety Level of the respondents and their Gender

		r	Strength	p	Interpretation
Gender	and	0.258	Weak	<0.001	Significant
Anxiety Level					

Using Point Biserial correlation, the results showed that correlation coefficient  $r$  equals 0.258 indicates that there is a weak significant relationship between gender and anxiety level of the respondents with  $p < 0.001$ . This does not

accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between gender and students' anxiety level. As seen in the result, there is though it is weak.

### **Discussion**

From the findings of the study, it is shown that from 242 students with females as a majority gender, Level 2 has the most number of students, followed by Level 1 and lastly Level 3. Grade 10 students are divided into different levels of English. The highest level they can enter as a Grade 10 student is Level 3, and the lowest is Level 1. There is a total of 66 Level 1 student, 119 Level 2 students, and 57 Level 3 students. It can be seen from the data that most students are in Level 2, which is considered the average level for English students. They have the basic knowledge of English compared to Level 1 students who have almost 0 English, but skills are not yet fully developed compared to Level 3 students.

The students experienced moderate anxiety in fear of Negative Evaluation, while they had a fair level of anxiety in Test Taking and Communication Apprehension. The overall anxiety of students is at a fair level. Most students are worried about what their classmates or peers will say if they ever commit a mistake when they answer during English class. The fear also comes from the thought that their answers might be wrong, their grammar might be incorrect, and their pronunciation might be wrong. With all these worries in their mind, the researcher has seen many times wherein a student prepares the answer in advance, but once the student is called, the student just blanks out and completely forgets the answer. In a study by Tzoannopoulou (2016), it was found that some of the sources of anxiety are the concern about making mistakes and fear of speaking out in class because they are afraid of people judging them and leaving a wrong impression on others.

The total anxiety level of students is considered fair and not high. This could be because English is not considered a core subject in school. A core subject can affect the student's promotion to the next grade. If a student fails a core subject, a student might be retained or repeat the same grade, for example, repeat Grade 10. English in UPHC is considered a core essential. It is almost equivalent to an elective subject. If the students fail English, they can still be promoted to the next grade level. From Grade 10, they can still go to Grade 11. However, they will



be retained at the same English level. For example, if a Grade 10 Level 2 student fail in English, the student will be Grade 11 Level 2 student.

Level 1 and 2 is significantly associated with anxiety but not Level 3. Gender shows a weak significant relationship. Level 1 and 2 students are the ones who struggle in English the most. They have 0 to basic knowledge of English. Students from these levels feel more anxious. Though some students can understand English, they feel more restricted in expressing themselves because of limited vocabulary. They haven't mastered or have limited knowledge about the basic grammar structure. This is evident in the way students talk or write. At times they express their frustrations when they can't form the ideas they want to express in English. Compared to Level 3 students who are more outspoken and more active in English because they have the necessary skills to engage in English communication. Level 1 and Level 2 students have a hard time understanding the lessons, unlike Level 3 students, who almost can immediately understand the concept.

Gender contributes more to language anxiety compared to English Level. Different studies have been done correlating gender and anxiety level, and there has always been an inconsistent result as to whether or not it is significant. In a study conducted by Gerencheal (2016), anxiety can vary significantly by gender. However, in Nurhaeni's (2019) and Soim (2014), the results said a significant difference between gender and anxiety. This proves the point made by Horwitz (1986) that there is no clear-cut answer concerning the sources of anxiety. The results of English level and gender being significant to language anxiety show that gender contributes more to the student's language anxiety. Unlike the English levels, where the association is only with two sections out of the three, gender shows more relationships though it is weak.

### **Conclusion and Suggestion**

This study examines the students' anxiety in learning English as a foreign language. Given the findings of the data analysis from the previous chapter, it can be summarized as follows:

There are 242 students, and the majority are female. Most students are in Level 2 English, followed by Level 1 and Level 3. Students experienced moderate

anxiety in fear of Negative Evaluation while they had a fair level of anxiety in Test Taking and Communication Apprehension. The overall anxiety of students is at a fair level. Level 1 and 2 is significantly associated with anxiety but not Level 3. Gender shows a weak significant relationship. Gender contributes more to language anxiety compared to English Level. Based on the study results, Teachers and school administration should be aware that language anxiety exists and not simply assume that students are lazy or shy.

Take time to know the students personally to have a glimpse of their background and understand where they are coming from. It is best to talk to the students to understand where their anxiety is coming from. Is it from the people around them or the lesson itself? Teachers should be generous with praise as well. Simple appreciation is enough to encourage students to make them feel safe in participating. The school should also evaluate the lessons used to see if the materials used are for the right level. With that, students should also be considered and reviewed if they are at the right level based on their English skills. Another important factor is for students to feel safe. They should understand that everyone in the classroom is not there to shame them but to learn together. To achieve this, peer learning would be helpful as well in building trust and relationships among students. Students should be encouraged to practice fluency instead of uptight grammar when speaking, especially Level 1 students. Let them talk freely without correcting every word to have confidence in speaking. Though take notes of the mistake they are committing so this can be discussed later on. One last thing is to use this study as a sample and to widen the scope of research to other grade levels.

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