

Research Article

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Foreign language anxiety and academic achievement: Is there any relationship in between?

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Abstract

Psychological factors can contribute to the devitalization or acceleration of foreign language learning. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is widely discussed in various studies, namely on Second Language Acquisition (SLA). This research aims to explore one of the psychological effects of learning a foreign language, specifically Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), and its effect and correlation on academic achievement. 43 undergraduate students from the Department of English were chosen as the participants of the study. To conduct the findings, this study adopts a quantitative approach with descriptive analysis and Pearson correlation. The findings of the study presented that the students encounter a moderately low level of foreign language anxiety ($M = 2.75$, $SD = .86$). The findings also reveal that the relationship between the students' foreign language anxiety level and academic achievement shows no correlation between one another ($r = -0.9$). The implication of this study is that language teachers should continuously encourage students to be more self-assured in their second language learning as well as alleviate their language anxiety level.

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety, academic achievement; psychological factors; language learning

1. Introduction

Second language learning expands and enhances the learners' perspectives on various customs of diverse groups of people and the way they perceive the world (Liu, 2021). The process of learning other languages, besides the native language, also escalates and broadens the learners' understanding and compassion regarding other cultures (Liu, 2021). Nevertheless, it must be noted that learning and acquiring new languages has its own set of challenges due to the sensation of unfamiliarity with the target language. Customarily, two factors that plausibly constrain the learner's proceeding in learning a new language consist of internal factors and external factors. Factors related to the learners' interactional situations while learning also contribute to the hindrance of language learning (Rubio, 2021).

The absence of time for learning and practice, the surroundings in which people are immersed, the effectiveness of the teacher's instruction, and the classroom dynamics learned are examples of external factors. Major factors that contribute to foreign language anxiety include the learner's personality, the target language being learned, the environment (primarily the classroom), and the foreign language learning process (Luo, 2013). Self-esteem, self-confidence, self-motivation, and self-consistency are a few examples of internal factors that potentially hinder a learner's learning process. It is argued that picking up new languages other than one's mother tongue or native language has a strong correlation with emotional factors (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021).

In line with this statement, psychological factors can contribute to the devitalization or acceleration of foreign language learning. Regarding the internal factors involved in learning a foreign language, anxiety is frequently mentioned in numerous studies as one of the factors that frequently arises as a hindrance to a learner. The inability to perform or communicate in a foreign language is significantly impacted by anxiety (Barlow, 2002). Anxiety is an individual's reaction to a stressful situation that causes them to feel afraid or uneasy (Spielberger, 1983). One of the most common medical disorders is anxiety, which is characterized by an involuntary, unpleasant, and persistent state of negative affect, heightened alertness, and tension in addition to a fear of the unknown (Horwitz, et al., 1986). Scovel (1978) in Horwitz (2001) argued that students who frequently experience foreign language anxiety (FLA) are thought to be experiencing situation-specific anxiety, which could result in negative emotional reactions in relation to their language learning process.

Foreign language anxiety has been the subject of numerous studies; one such study, (Liu, 2021), examined the negative effects that anxiety has on one's academic performance as well as cognitive, social, affective, and personal spheres. As demonstrated in Scovel (1978), anxiety related to learning a foreign language has a detrimental impact on the learning process and may also have an impact on academic performance. Academic achievement and a moderate level of foreign language anxiety were found to be significantly correlated in an earlier study such as Horwitz, et al., (1986) in university students. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), students who are more anxious about learning and performing a foreign language tend to receive worse grades than those who are less anxious. Language anxiety also has the effect of making one reluctant to practice speaking a foreign language outside of the classroom (Horwitz, 2010). People who experience anxiety when learning or acquiring a foreign language may experience psychological reactions like nausea and helplessness, as well as physiological reactions like sweating and an increase in heart rate (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019).

1.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

A psychological connection exists in learning a second or foreign language, for it involves both cognitive and emotional components. One of the side effects of learning a second language is frequently linked to the feeling of anxiety (Abu-Rabia, 2004). Despite their relative similarity to the anxiety component of uneasiness, anxiety related to foreign languages is distinct from anxiety in general (Al-Shboul, et al., 2013). The sensation of tension, unease, and nervousness when acquiring foreign language skills is known as "Foreign Language Anxiety" (Arnold, 2007). Language anxiety is a complex form of feeling that arises from the language learning process and is comprised of self-perception, self-assured, feelings, and classroom behaviors related to language learning (Horwitz, et al., 1986).

Language anxiety, according to MacIntyre & Gardner (1994), is characterized by tenseness and fear when speaking or listening, as well as unpleasant emotional reactions that occur while picking up or utilizing a foreign language. Language anxiety is also the feeling of unease and the incitement of unfavorable emotional reactions when learning and employing a second language (Mac Intyre & Gardner, 1989). When compared to second language learners, foreign language learners exhibit noticeably higher levels of anxiety (Spielberger, 1983). Academic anxiety is different from anxiety related to learning a foreign language, for it involves different modes of self-concepts and self-expression (Arnold, 2007). Anxiousness in a foreign language was discovered in Western countries in the early 1970s, and numerous studies were carried out by Razak et al. (2017) as shown in Chastain (1975) and Bailey (1983). As recent studies also carried out further concerning foreign language anxiety namely in Dewaele & Li (2022), Zhao (2022), and Oflaz (2019).

1.2 Foreign Language Anxiety and Academic Achievement

Numerous academics have looked into this account and found that students' performance was affected when they experienced anxiety related to learning a foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), (Horwitz, et al., 1986), (Phillips, 1992), and (Kamarulzaman, et al., 2013) in Razak et al.,

(2017). Anxiety is a prevalent occurrence among EFL learners that frequently affects their academic performance (Aida, 1994). According to Horwitz (2001), anxiety is one of the affective factors that plausibly influence how well students learn a foreign language. Previous studies on the effect or impact of foreign language anxiety on performance, as indicated by the studies (Kleinmann, 1977), (Chastain, 1975), and (Young, 1986) cited in Razak et al., (2017), revealed a variety of findings.

A study conducted by Li (2020) revealed a small to medium correlation between academic achievement and anxiety among Chinese students learning EFL, contrasting to the study examined by Botes et al., (2020) which showed a negative correlation between the two variables being tested. Anxiety levels among Indonesian students were discovered to have a strong positive correlation with academic achievement, particularly with regard to reading achievement (Nurul, et al., 2022). This indicates something quite different from other research findings that ideally the relationship between anxiety and academic achievement should be negative. Another study showed that people's performance is impacted by anxiety, leading them to develop coping mechanisms (Marwan, 2016). A systematic review that concentrated on the relationship between academic achievement and the FLA was also observed. Al-Shboul et al., (2013) present the research on the relationship between anxiety in learning a foreign language and academic success. The study provides a systematic review of the literature that takes into account various factors, including the academic disciplines being taught, the learners' stages, the settings, and the languages being learned (Al-Shboul, et al., 2013).

Numerous studies have been conducted by researchers regarding foreign language anxiety and academic performance. However, a study that is focused on third-year students, specifically students who had gone online learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic, needs to be done. As the main objective of this study is to investigate the relationship between foreign language anxiety with academic achievement in a closer look, the purpose of this study is also to enhance and expand the research perspectives focusing on anxiety in foreign language learning among Indonesian undergraduate students.

Previous studies revealed mixed results that sometimes language anxiety has positive and negative effects on language learning. Further studies are needed to explore this issue in an Indonesian EFL setting as this study proposes. This study serves as a fruitful reference for educators or researchers in exploring anxiety in the foreign language learning process in an Indonesian higher education setting. In more detail, this study addresses several research questions such as: (1) What is the level of language anxiety in English speaking skills?, (2) What is the level of language anxiety in English listening skills?, (3) What is the level of language anxiety in English reading skills?, (4) What is the level of language anxiety in English writing skills?, and (5) What is the relationship between language anxiety levels and academic performance between and across second language skills?

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

A quantitative survey design was used in this study so the survey numeric responses can be objectively quantified and measured (Sahiruddin, et al., 2021). A quantitative study was chosen to reveal the participants' anxiety levels in a numerical format and to support the results' findings. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics were used to quantify, summarize, and describe the findings obtained, as well as focusing on the summary values and graphs (Sahiruddin, et al., 2021). Pearson correlation was utilized to analyze the relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement.

2.2 Sample and Participants

Undergraduate students from the Department of English (third year) were chosen as the participants of this study. For three years, the participants have been learning and studying English as a foreign language and actively performing EFL in the classroom. The English Department has 161

enrolled third-year students, including 38 male students and 123 female students. This study's sample size is 27% of the population, or 43 individuals in total (19 male students and 24 female students), with ages ranging from 20 to 22. The questionnaire given as the data collection tool was filled out voluntarily by the participants.

2.3 Instruments

The data was obtained by using a questionnaire and was distributed online through Google Forms. This questionnaire that was adopted by Yassin (2017) consists of 48 questions which include the three scales used to discover the anxiety level in 4 basic skills namely reading, listening, writing, and speaking. The Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLAS) used in this study scored .087 in Cronbach Alpha reliability, meaning that this questionnaire has been approved with good consistency (Yassin, 2017). Three scales from Horwitz, et al., (1986), Saito, et al., (1999), and Cheng (2004) were combined into this FLAS adopted questionnaire. The participants of this study filled out 48 questions with 1 to 5 scales; strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), neutral (N), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA). This study has employed Nunnally & Bernstein's (1994) interpretation value for the mean score level. It states that a low-level interpretation is associated with a mean score between 1.00 and 2.00, a medium-low interpretation is with a mean score between 2.01 and 3.00, a medium-high interpretation is with a mean score between 3.01 and 4.00, and a high interpretation is with a mean score between 4.01 and 5.00.

The participants were requested for their consent in filling out the form and required to state their GPA as an indicator of academic achievement. The results of the questionnaire were used to gauge the level of foreign language anxiety among the participants and serve as the study's data source. The data for language skill performance including speaking, listening, reading, and writing were taken from the archive of their final scores for language skill subjects offered in the English program enrolled.

3. Results

This study scrutinizes the level of foreign language anxiety involving speaking anxiety, reading anxiety, listening anxiety, and writing anxiety, and how they are correlated with L2 academic performance in an Indonesian EFL tertiary education setting. The results of the study are presented from the perspective of overall language anxiety, followed by language skills more specifically, and finally the correlation study between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement.

3.1 Overall Language Anxiety

Based on Table 1 illustrates the descriptive statistics for mean scores of foreign language anxiety and the standard deviation and mean interpretation of the student's response ($M = 2.75$, $SD = .86$). This result indicates that the student's foreign language anxiety was at a moderately low level. Table 1 also provides the detail of the four basic English skills anxiety including speaking ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .63$), listening ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.19$), reading ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.01$), and writing ($M = 2.83$, $SD = .65$).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for mean scores of foreign language anxiety

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Speaking anxiety	43	2.00	4.00	2.74	.62	Moderately low
Listening anxiety	43	1.00	4.00	2.94	1.19	Moderately low
Reading anxiety	43	2.00	3.00	2.52	1.01	Moderately low
Writing anxiety	43	1.00	4.00	2.83	.65	Moderately low
Overall language anxiety	43	1.75	3.50	2.75	.86	Moderately low

The results of the study that discusses anxiety in each language skill such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing are also provided in descriptive statistics. Mean scores are presented in each section to convey a thorough view of the participants' attitudes toward foreign language anxiety.

3.1.1 Speaking Anxiety

From Table 2, it can be seen that the highest mean obtained for speaking anxiety was 3.25 (SD = 1.04) on the aspect of unpreparedness when the students were asked to speak in a foreign language without any preparation. The lowest mean obtained was 2.25 (SD = 1.09) in which the students are not afraid of being laughed at by their classmates while they are speaking in a foreign language. It suggested that, in general, the students have moderately low levels of speaking foreign language anxiety.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for mean scores of speaking anxiety.

Items	Mean	SD	Level
It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	2.86	1.01	Moderately low
I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in a foreign language.	3.25	1.04	Moderately high
It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	2.62	1.25	Moderately low
I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speaker.	2.79	1.05	Moderately low
I feel confident when I speak in foreign language.	2.83	.94	Moderately low
I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	2.30	1.30	Moderately low
I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of others.	3.09	.92	Moderately high
I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in English.	2.60	1.00	Moderately low
I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak a foreign language.	2.97	1.12	Moderately low
I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	2.25	1.09	Moderately low

3.1.2 Listening Anxiety

The highest mean obtained in listening anxiety was 3.13 (SD = 1.33) on the aspect of the worries when the students do not get what the teacher is trying to correct their mistakes. The lowest mean obtained was 2.67 (SD = 1.04) that is when students are unable to understand what the teacher is saying in a foreign language, they become fearful and anxious. Overall, the students are moderately anxious about listening to a foreign language.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for mean scores of listening anxiety

	Mean	SD	
It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	2.67	1.04	Moderately low
I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	3.13	1.33	Moderately high
I get nervous when I don't understand every word the other person says in English.	3.02	1.22	Moderately high

3.1.3 Reading Anxiety

Through Table 4, the highest mean obtained for reading anxiety was 3.44 (SD = 1.05) regarding the students' confusedness in comprehending what the author is trying to deliver while they

understand the words they read. The lowest mean obtained was 1.44 (SD = .58) in which the students have a positive attitude towards reading. It would not be difficult once an individual gets used to reading in English. Through Table 4, a moderately low level of speaking foreign language anxiety is seen among English students.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for mean scores of reading anxiety

Items	Mean	SD	
I get upset when I am not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English.	3.04	1.29	Moderately high
When reading English, I often understand the words but still can't quite understand what the author is saying.	3.44	1.05	Moderately high
I feel intimidated whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me.	1.69	.98	Moderately low
I am nervous when I am reading a passage in English when I am not familiar with the topic.	2.86	1.03	Moderately low
I get upset whenever I encounter unknown grammar when reading English.	2.79	.98	Moderately low
When reading English, I get nervous and confused when I don't understand every word.	2.72	1.11	Moderately low
It bothers me to encounter words I can't pronounce while reading English.	3.25	1.32	Moderately high
By the time you get past the funny letters and symbols in English, it's hard to remember what you're reading about.	2.72	.88	Moderately low
I usually end up translating word by word when I'm reading English.	2.23	1.30	Moderately low
I am worried about all the new symbols I have to learn in order to read English.	2.30	.80	Moderately low
English culture and ideas seem very foreign to me.	2.16	.94	Moderately low
You have to know so much about English history and culture in order to read English.	1.86	1.08	Moderately low
When I'm reading English, I get so confused I can't remember what I'm reading.	2.18	1.07	Moderately low
I enjoy reading English.	1.55	.58	Moderately low
I feel confident when I am reading in English.	1.90	.78	Moderately low
Once you get used to it, reading English is not so difficult.	1.44	.58	Moderately low
The hardest part of learning English is learning to read.	2.02	.93	Moderately low
I would be happy just to learn to speak English rather than having to learn to read as well.	2.51	1.29	Moderately low
I don't mind reading to myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read English aloud.	2.34	1.13	Moderately low
I am satisfied with the level of reading ability in English that I have achieved so far.	2.69	1.24	Moderately low

3.1.4 Writing Anxiety

Table 5 presented that the highest mean obtained for writing anxiety was 3.23 (SD = 1.19) which the students experienced some pressure having to write English compositions in a given time. The lowest mean obtained was 2.27 (SD = 1.16) regarding the rise of the students' heartbeat while writing English compositions. In general, it is exhibited that the students experience moderately low levels of writing anxiety.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics for mean scores of writing anxiety

Items	Mean	SD	
I feel my heart pounding when I write English.	2.27	1.16	Moderately low
My mind often goes blank when I start to work on an English composition.	2.76	1.06	Moderately low
I tremble or perspire when I write English compositions under time pressure.	2.97	1.31	Moderately low
My thoughts become jumbled when I write English compositions under time constraint.	3.23	1.19	Moderately high
I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint.	3.09	1.23	Moderately high
I freeze up when unexpectedly asked to write English compositions.	3.00	1.21	Moderately high
I usually feel my whole body rigid and tense when I write English compositions.	2.39	.95	Moderately low
I often choose to write down my thoughts in English.	2.93	1.33	Moderately low
I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.	2.58	1.13	Moderately low
Whenever possible, I would use English to write compositions.	2.44	1.18	Moderately low
I don't worry that my English compositions are a lot worse than others'.	2.88	1.11	Moderately low
I'm afraid that the other students would deride my English composition if they read it.	2.62	.95	Moderately low
I don't worry at all about what other people would think of my English compositions.	3.04	1.13	Moderately high
I'm afraid of my English composition being chosen as a sample for discussion in class.	3.13	1.22	Moderately high
I'm not afraid at all that my English compositions would be rated as very poor.	3.16	1.27	Moderately high

3.2 The Relationship Between Foreign Language Anxiety and Academic Achievement

The relationship between the student's foreign language anxiety and their academic achievement was calculated using Pearson's product moment correlation as provided in Table 6. The study revealed that the relationship between overall foreign language anxiety was very low, while the relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking performance was also at $r=.00$, listening anxiety and listening performance with $r=-.24$, reading anxiety and reading performance at $r=.06$, as well as writing anxiety level and writing performance at $r=-.02$.

Table 6. The relationship between language anxiety and academic performance

	Speaking performance	Listening performance	Reading performance	Writing performance	Academic performance
Speaking anxiety	.00				
Listening anxiety	.99				
Listening anxiety		-.24			
Reading anxiety		.11			
Reading anxiety			.06		
Writing anxiety			.67		
Writing anxiety				-.02	
Writing anxiety				.86	

Overall	
language	-.09
anxiety	.55

4. Discussion

The findings of the study presented that the level of the participants' anxiety level in overall foreign language anxiety reached a moderately low level ($M = 2.75$, $SD = .86$). The lack of correlation between foreign language anxiety and L2 academic achievement across language skills may be due to the fact that the students are at their last year (third year) of the undergraduate program where they have been fully engaged theoretically and practically in English learning so that they did not really worry about English. It is also depicted that the majority of the students' GPAs are nearly 4.00 value in a scale of 1.00 to 4.00.

The students' listening anxiety levels reached the highest score compared to other language skills, with ($M = 2.94$, $SD = 1.19$) that shows a moderately low level of anxiety, followed by writing ($M = 2.83$, $SD = .65$), speaking ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .63$), then reading ($M = 2.52$, $SD = 1.01$). The listening anxiety that the students are experiencing is specifically addressed in the aspect of the anxiousness when the students do not get what the teacher is trying to correct the mistakes they made. This is similar to Ismail et al. (2023) who discussed the participants' listening anxiety towards Arabic speech from a speaker at a rapid rate and his or her inability to comprehend it. Moreover, Tahsildar & Yusoff (2014) in Ismail et al. (2023) also found similar findings that mispronunciations and speed of delivering the speech can cause listening anxiety. Moreover, internal factors from the students themselves such as their background knowledge, poor self-confidence, and the ineffective use of listening strategies can also support listening anxiety (Ismail et al., 2023). The value of correlation is also similar to Weda & Sakti (2018) with the value score ($r = -.23$) although they have much more participants compared to the recent study.

The study reveals that the relationship between the students' foreign language anxiety level and academic achievement shows no correlation ($r = -0.9$). This can be inferred that the students' academic achievements were not influenced by their anxiety levels, as it can be seen that the students are experiencing moderately low levels of foreign-level anxiety. Besides the sense of familiarity in engaging and performing English as a foreign language in the classroom, the courses offered are also available in Indonesian, which is the mother tongue of the students, and this surely makes the L2 learning more relaxed. The language skills of students studying English as a foreign language may be facilitated by the significant similarities between Indonesian and English. According to Lewis, et. al., (2012) in Conteh (2018), translanguaging is the use of two languages in a single lesson as a cross-curricular learning and teaching strategy. In addition to acknowledging, validating, and performing Bahasa Indonesia—the official language of Indonesia—for the learning process, translanguaging classes enable students to perform in English, the official language of the department in which they are enrolled (Moghaddam, 2017). There is also a negative correlation between FLA and the students' accomplishments because several disciplines are offered in fully Bahasa Indonesia, which can support the student's final GPA. This study is in line with Dryden et al., (2021) that the use of translanguaging may function as an emotionally safe space to lessen these adverse FLA reactions.

There are also several disciplines offered in fully Bahasa Indonesia that can support the students' final GPA, making a negative correlation between FLA and the students' achievements. A similar study such as Alpert & Harper (1960) argued that students in the mother tongue classrooms tend to feel relaxed, contrasting in foreign language classrooms that conceivably cause foreign language anxiety. This fact is also discussed in (Liu, 2021) that the target language is one of the major causes of FLA. Studies conducted such as Horwitz (2001), Razak, et al., (2017), and Batumlu & Erden (2007) also reported a moderate negative correlation between FLA with academic achievement. The implication of this study is that language teachers should continuously encourage students to be more confident in their second language learning or to decrease their language anxiety level. For example, the classroom environment to establish a more enjoyable learning process.

5. Conclusions

As the purpose of the current study is to investigate one of the psychological effects of learning a foreign language, specifically Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), the study's findings show that the students have a moderately low level of foreign language anxiety. To break it down, the findings of the study presented that students experience a moderately low level of anxiety in speaking, a moderately high level of anxiety in listening, a moderately low level of anxiety in reading, and a moderately low level of anxiety in writing. Through this study, it is also pronounced that the anxiety that the students experience in learning English as a foreign language does not influence their academic achievement resulting in no correlation between the two variables. This study may be used to enhance and expand the research perspectives focusing on anxiety in foreign language learning among Indonesian undergraduate students. Further study could involve freshmen or first-year English students, for the participants of this study were bounded by involving the third-year students from the Department of English. Complementary studies on foreign language anxiety and academic accomplishment are required to complement the current findings.

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