

## An Exploration of Students' Foreign Language Anxiety in English Classroom

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**Abstract: An Exploration of Students' Foreign Language Anxiety in English Classroom.**

**Objectives:** This study aims to investigate students' foreign language anxiety in English class: students' anxiety levels, students' anxiety kinds, and students' attitudes toward English class. **Methods:** This study used a quantitative approach and a survey method with a descriptive research design. **Findings:** The findings of the study showed 62.5% of the students felt anxious in foreign language level sequenced from mildly anxious, anxious, and very anxious. Students' dominant kind of foreign language anxiety was fear of negative evaluation. Finally, more than half of the students had negative attitudes toward English class. Meanwhile, the rest of the students showed positive attitude. **Conclusion:** In conclusion, most of the students feel anxious in English class. They mostly experience anxiety due to the negative evaluation, and their attitudes toward English class could not completely determine their foreign language anxiety level.

**Keywords:** foreign language anxiety, English classroom, students' attitudes.

**Abstrak: Eksplorasi Kecemasan Bahasa Asing Siswa di Kelas Bahasa Inggris. Tujuan:** Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi kecemasan bahasa asing siswa di kelas bahasa Inggris. **Metode:** Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan metode survei dengan desain penelitian deskriptif. **Temuan:** Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa 62,5% siswa merasa cemas dalam tingkat bahasa asing yang diurutkan dari agak cemas, cemas, dan sangat cemas. Jenis kecemasan belajar bahasa asing siswa yang dominan adalah ketakutan akan evaluasi negatif. Akhirnya, lebih dari separuh siswa memiliki sikap negatif terhadap kelas bahasa Inggris. Sementara itu, siswa lainnya menunjukkan sikap positif. **Kesimpulan:** Kesimpulannya, sebagian besar siswa merasa cemas di kelas bahasa Inggris. Mereka sebagian besar mengalami kecemasan karena takut akan penilaian negatif, dan sikap mereka terhadap kelas bahasa Inggris tidak dapat sepenuhnya menentukan tingkat kecemasan bahasa asing mereka.

**Kata kunci:** kecemasan bahasa asing, kelas bahasa Inggris, sikap siswa.

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## ■ INTRODUCTION

Foreign language education has been implemented in most parts of the world. English has established its status either as a foreign language or second language that is most frequently taught worldwide. In Indonesia, English as a foreign language taught at formal schools was declared officially in 1955 in a teacher training conference. Based on the amendment of the 2013 curriculum, English is taught as a compulsory subject starting from the junior high school level (Hidayat, 2017; Panggabean, 2015)

Many variables are involved in the English teaching and learning process, and those variables may cause problems that sometimes interfere with the teaching-learning process itself. Foreign language anxiety is one of the problems coming internally from the students that can disturb students' English learning process. Foreign language anxiety is a particular apprehensive self-perception, feelings, and behaviors related to the process of foreign language teaching and learning (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Foreign language anxiety indeed affects students' English achievement since it appears when students perform English tasks and get disturbed by it. Salehi and Marefat (2014) argued that anxiety becomes an obstacle in language education, including an English classroom, because it will hinder students from mastering the foreign language. Students with a high anxiety level will experience more obstacles than students with lower anxiety levels. For instance, they are trembling in front of the class because of their nervousness, and they balk at answering questions using English or answering with short phrases and inaudible voices (Jing & Junying, 2016). Additionally, students' attitudes toward English class also influence students' foreign language anxiety levels.

In general, anxiety can be defined as a feeling of apprehension appearing due to an

internal specific reaction. Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that anxiety is a non-objective feeling that produces stress, dread, agitation, and worry linked to the awakening of the nervous system. They constructed a theoretical framework related to foreign language anxiety, consisting of three fundamental components; communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

The first component is communication apprehension. Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that "communication apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people" (p. 127). People who experience communication apprehension have trouble communicating orally in a group, especially using a foreign language, because they can hardly control the communicative situation and are aware that their communication is being observed. Test anxiety is the second component constructing foreign language anxiety. It is defined as anxiety derived from a fear of failure that commonly appears when faced with a test situation (Horwitz et al., 1986). Test anxiety arises and discourages students' foreign language performance when their teacher assesses their performance. The third component of foreign language anxiety is fear of negative evaluation. It refers to an anxious feeling of being evaluated, fear of a test-situation, and predict gaining negative feedback (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Regarding foreign language anxiety, the result of a relevant study confirmed that foreign language anxiety and students' attitudes have an interrelationship (Hussain, Shahid, & Zaman, 2011). Language attitude is defined as a person's belief, perception, and opinion of a language (Hanafiah, 2016). People's attitudes towards a language may vary, so it is an urgent step to identify students' attitudes towards the foreign language they learn because their attitude can influence their learning process. Along with the

statement, Gardner and Lambert (1972) claimed that students' process to master a language is not merely determined by their mental competence. Still, students' attitudes toward the target language also play an important role.

The emergence of anxiety in a foreign language learning process has invited many researchers to explore this issue more in-depth, including its factors, effects, levels, and so on. A case study conducted by Kruk (2021) examined the fluctuations of a student's foreign language anxiety level in the virtual world Second Life (SL) and the factors contributing to the changes. The study results show that the student's foreign language level has changed from one visit to Second Life with the next visits; all of the foreign language anxiety levels tested in every visit varied from one to another. It was found that there were some negative and positive factors affecting foreign language anxiety fluctuations. The negative factors were conversations with new people, inadequate language vocabulary, and negative experiences with the language. On the other hand, the positive factors accounting for the changes in anxiety levels were conversations with an intimate person, familiar topics, and language development.

Then, Male (2018) has conducted a study to determine students' language anxiety when they learn foreign language skills in the university level. The study revealed that the students dominantly felt anxious when they were in writing class, and the language skill that students experienced the lowest anxiety was listening. Next, Erdiana, Daud, Sari, and Dwitami (2020) have done a research study focused on the anxiety experienced by students in speaking performance. The data of students' anxiety levels were gathered from the tenth-items-questionnaire adapted from a questionnaire by Horwitz. K et al.. The findings obtained from 29 participants illustrated that 11 students, or 38% of the participants, had low-

level anxiety, 17 students (59%) experienced moderate-level anxiety, and a student (3.4%) had high-level anxiety.

A qualitative study that investigated the moment when students feel mostly anxious and how they cope with foreign language anxiety has been done and the findings show that some moments stimulate more anxiety than the other moments (Abdurrahman & Rizqi, 2020). The moments are the beginning of the performance and when students make mistakes. Then, the participants revealed some strategies to cope with their anxiety. The most common strategy used by the participants is having proper preparation at home. Then, the other strategies were being relaxed during the performance and the positive thinking strategy.

An investigation of adolescent students' foreign language anxiety has been carried out by Tuncel et al. (2020); they examined the effect of gender, class levels, and ages of the EFL students' on their foreign language anxiety level. This descriptive survey study revealed that gender affects students' anxiety levels. It was found that the average score of anxiety calculation for female students was 2.64, and the average score for male students was 2.57. In other words, female students had a higher level of foreign language anxiety than male students.

Overall, the issue of foreign language anxiety has received considerable critical continual attention, so the researcher is enticed to explore a similar topic with a different setting and a bigger sample. Although the previous studies have a similar issue with this recent study, the aspects of foreign language anxiety examined are different. Additionally, the instrument, data analysis procedures, and data descriptions techniques are also dissimilar. Therefore, this study aimed to determine eleventh-grade students' foreign language anxiety levels, the kinds of anxiety they mostly experience, and their attitudes toward the

English classroom. A questionnaire adapted from a questionnaire designed by Horwitz et al. named Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS, hereafter) was used to gather the data of students' anxiety.

## ■ METHODS

### **Research Design, Method, and Approach**

This study used a quantitative approach. Specifically, a descriptive research design and a survey method were chosen to conduct the study since it aimed to explore some characteristics of the respondents, namely anxiety levels, anxiety types, and students' attitudes toward English class. Descriptive research investigates a particular phenomenon and its characteristics and focuses on answering what question, not why or how (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). Additionally, observations and survey tools are commonly utilized to collect the data of the study.

Cresswell (2014) explained that the quantitative approach is employed when a study tends to result in numerical or statistical data, and the study instrument is closed-ended questions. Furthermore, survey research is mentioned as a research method that provides a numeric description of a population's features, trends, attitudes, or characteristics by investigating the sample of the research study. A close-ended question is commonly used, such as questionnaires or structured interviews (Young, 2016).

### **Research Population and Sample**

This study was conducted in the second semester at Islamic Senior High School Pembangunan UIN Jakarta. The population of the study was students of Islamic Senior High School Pembangunan UIN Jakarta. The sample of the study was the students in the eleventh grade. Finally, 64 students were randomly assigned as the sample of this study.

### **Instrument and Data Collection**

The instrument used to gather the data of students' foreign language anxiety levels, their kinds of foreign language anxiety, and their attitudes toward English class was a questionnaire. The questionnaire was adapted from a questionnaire designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) called FLCAS. The instrument was translated into Indonesian to make sure that the data valid and reliable since the sample of the study was Indonesian students. There were several stages that have been done in the process of instrument adaption namely forward translation, expert panel, back translation, pre-testing, and validity and reliability test. The result of reliability test was 0.941 which means that the questionnaire is reliable. An English teacher and two lecturers were involved in the process of validating content and construction of the instrument, there were several revision done during the process of it. Finally, the final result approved by the validators was administrated to the students virtually by using Google Form.

The first is communication apprehension which consists of 8 statements, the second is test anxiety which consists of 5 statements, the third is fear of negative evaluation which consists of 9 statements, and the last component is students' anxiety of foreign class which consists of 11 statements. Finally, all components of FLCAS were calculated to find out the students' foreign language anxiety levels.

### **Data Analysis**

The data of this study was analyzed using the Likert scale formula. Students' answers that range from strongly agree to strongly disagree strongly were converted into scores ranging from 1 to 5 for positive statements and 5 to 1 for negative statements. The whole scores were calculated manually to find out students' anxiety

**Table 1.** The categorization of the anxiety level

Range	Level
124-165	Very Anxious
108-123	Anxious
87-107	Mildly Anxious
66-86	Relaxed
33-65	Very Relaxed

level based on the level categorization proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986).

Meanwhile, the data of the most common anxiety experienced by students was obtained from comparing and interpreting the score of three components of FLCAS namely communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Finally, the analysis of the fourth component of FLCAS was done by calculating each students' score and categorized them as having positive or negative attitude based on their total score: 11 to 27 means negative attitude and 28 to 55 means positive attitude.

## ■ RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The data gathered from the questionnaire were calculated and then presented sequentially following the aims of this study; the students'

foreign language anxiety levels, their foreign language anxiety types, and their attitudes toward

### The Students' Foreign Language Anxiety Levels

The initial objective of this study was to find out students' foreign language anxiety levels. Students' anxiety levels were categorized into five levels of anxiety; very relaxed, relaxed, mildly anxious, anxious, and very anxious. After calculating and converting students' answers to FLCAS, students' foreign language anxiety levels were identified (See Table 1). More than a third of the students experienced foreign language anxiety in mildly anxious levels. 24 out of 64 students, or 37.5%, had this level of anxiety. The second level of foreign language anxiety that most of the students had was at a relaxed level. Slightly under a third (32.8%) of the sample or 21 students felt relaxed in the foreign language classroom.

Meanwhile, 11 students (17.2%) were identified to have an anxious level of foreign language anxiety. Then, 7.8% of the students (5 students) experienced the highest level of foreign language anxiety, called the very anxious level. Last, the least level of foreign language anxiety experienced by the students was very relaxed level. Only a small number of students (3 students) or 3.4% of total students indicated that they felt very relaxed in the English classroom.

**Table 2.** Foreign language anxiety levels

Anxiety		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very anxious	5	7.8	7.8	7.8
	Anxious	11	17.2	17.2	25.0
	Mildly anxious	24	37.5	37.5	62.5
	Relaxed	21	32.8	32.8	95.3
	Very relaxed	3	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total		64	100.0	100.0	

These findings further support the idea argued by Worde (as cited in Fitriah & Muna, 2019) that around half of foreign language students face a certain level of foreign language anxiety in the classroom. A similar result was also presented in AlNatour (2018) study, and it was found that most of the students experienced a high level of anxiety in learning English. The present study, supported by previous studies, proved anxiety undoubtedly exists in the foreign language classroom, which may affect students' foreign-language performances. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) explained that the students who tend to be more anxious in the foreign language classroom or have high anxiety levels might not enjoy their learning process, making them fail to perform their ability maximally.

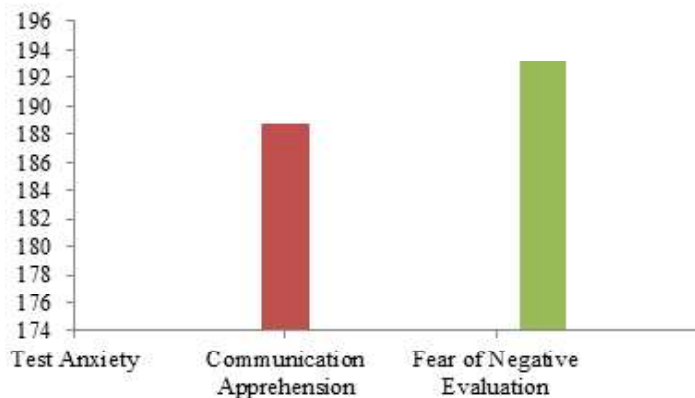
Furthermore, a possible explanation for this finding may be that the majority of the students experienced foreign language anxiety in the English classroom generally because they think that English is a difficult subject to be mastered with many language structures that are different from their native language. However, the students' internal factor is not the only cause that stimulates students to feel anxious in foreign language classrooms, and many factors are involved. Zhang and Zhong (2012) stated that foreign language anxiety might come from the students and other variables, such as environment, teachers,

classmates, learning activities, materials, etc. Therefore, many aspects supporting foreign language learning should be evaluated to identify the causes of students' anxiety before teachers and students can decide what strategies they can apply to control students' foreign language anxiety.

Amiri and Ghonsooly (2015), and Eddine (2016) have speculated that English language anxiety is an unavoidable phenomenon with an enervated impact on students' learning process. One of the issues emerging from the statement is the importance of regularly examining students' anxiety levels. By knowing students' anxiety levels, teachers and students can cooperate to find strategies to control students' anxiety levels in order to improve students' achievement in the English classroom.

### **The Students' Kinds of Foreign Language Anxiety**

The study's second objective sought to identify the dominant kinds of foreign language anxiety experienced by eleventh-grade students. FLCAS is used to identify four aspects of foreign language anxiety spread in 33 statements. Three aspects can be categorized as kinds of foreign language anxiety: test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. The data of students' foreign language anxiety kinds are presented in Graph 1 below.



**Figure 1.** Kinds of foreign language anxiety



As displayed in Graph 1, fear of negative evaluation was the kind of foreign language anxiety that obtained the highest average score (193.2). In other words, fear of negative evaluation is the most dominant kind of foreign language anxiety that students face in the English classroom. The second dominant kind of anxiety experienced by students in the foreign language classroom was communication apprehension, with an average score of 188.7. Last, the least prominent kind of foreign language anxiety was test anxiety, with an average score of 180.6.

The dominant kind of foreign language anxiety experienced by students was fear of negative evaluation. The greater part of the students agreed that they are afraid of making mistakes and being corrected by the teacher. Aydin (2009) stated that teachers correcting students' mistakes need to be considered wisely since it may cause students to feel anxious. Additionally, most of the students also stated that they are worried about their classmates' reactions when they watch their performance, and they do not want to be laughed at by other students. When they are thinking about the possibility of being laughed at while performing English tasks, they feel more anxious than before. Tanveer supports this finding (as cited in Hashemi, 2011), that the causes of foreign language anxiety are not only derived from teacher correction but also other students' reactions.

Communication apprehension is the second kind of foreign language anxiety that students dominantly experience. This finding suggests that many students still have immature communication skills, so they cannot express their thoughts and opinions through comprehensible words. The students concurred that they are unconfident to speak English with their classmates, and they start to panic when they do not understand the teachers' words. Along with that result, Casado and Dereshiwsky (as cited in Serraj & Noordin, 2013) stated that students might face anxiety in foreign language classrooms provoked by factors

related to communication apprehensions, such as difficulty in comprehending teachers' explanation and instruction.

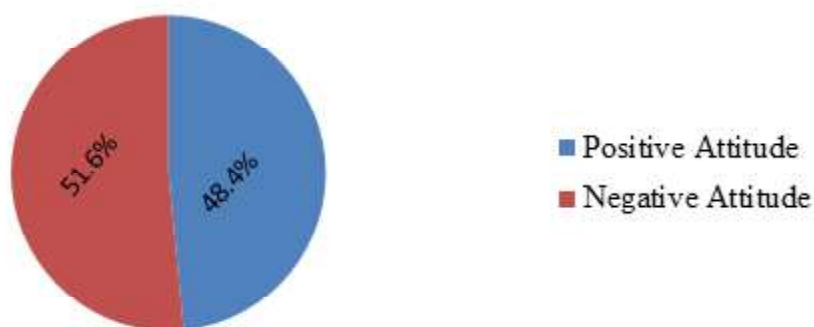
Test anxiety is the kind of foreign language anxiety that obtained the lowest average score among the three kinds of foreign language anxiety. The questionnaire data revealed that most of the students did not agree with the statement, which states that they are comfortable during a test in a foreign language class. In other words, they admitted that they are anxious during foreign language tests. Then, most of the students did not agree that the more they study for a test, the more confused they get. It means that the students feel that if they have prepared for the test well, their anxiety will be decreased. This finding is supported by a result of the study by (Agustina & Karlina, 2019), that lack of preparation becomes one of the factors contributing to students' foreign language anxiety.

To put it another way, students will be more confident and less anxious if they have enough preparation before the test. Regarding test anxiety, Chan and Wu (as cited in Al-Khasawneh, 2016) argued that students' failure or unsatisfied results in the previous test would evoke students' test anxiety because the students have developed a negative perception toward any kind of test. Additionally, test anxiety appears more often in students with low language ability than students with better language skills (Young, 1990). Therefore, improving students' ability can be a solutive way to overcome students' problems related to anxiety since it can help students boost their confidence and decrease their anxiety.

### **The Students' Attitudes toward English Class**

The last objective of this study was to find out students' attitudes toward English classes. The fourth component of FLCAS examined students' attitudes toward the English class. The attitudes were categorized into two; a positive attitude and a negative attitude. Here is the detail of students' attitudes toward English class:

### Students' Attitudes toward English Class



**Graph 2.** Students' attitudes toward english class

Graph 2 illustrates the students' attitudes toward English class. The blue part represents the students' positive attitudes. Meanwhile, the red part depicts the students' negative attitudes. Students who had negative attitudes and students who had positive attitudes towards English class are relatively balanced. More than half of the sample (51.6%), or 33 students of 64 students, had negative attitudes toward English class. By contrast, 31 students (48.4%) had positive attitudes toward the English class.

Hanafiah (2016) defined language attitude as one's belief, perception, and view of a language. The students' attitude can influence their anxiety in the foreign language class. The students who have a positive attitude toward English class commonly enjoy the learning activities in the class. In line with the statement, Dewaele et al. (as cited in Ibrahim & Abdullah, 2019) stated that students' perception is one of the fundamental causes of foreign language anxiety. Surprisingly, the data on Graph 2 depicts that the students with negative attitudes and positive attitudes were divided almost equally. It means that not all students with a high anxiety level negatively affect English class. The anxious learners are not always perform poorly in the classroom, they may perform as good as the non-anxious learners

when they have sufficient time to prepare and practice the tasks (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Some students agreed that they did not mind taking more English classes, but the other students refused. Then, some students admitted that they tended to be more nervous in English class than in other classes. At the same time, some of the students oppositely stated that they did not feel any difference between English class and other classes. Those findings show that students' attitude may not determine students' level of anxiety and vice versa. It is supported by a result of previous study that found that students' anxiety and their attitudes did not have a significant correlation which means that students' anxiety could not be used to predict students' attitudes toward English (Wahongan & Walintukan, 2018). However, another previous study implied a contrast idea, it was found that students with high anxiety levels in English learning tend to have negative attitudes towards English class. Simultaneously, students with negative attitudes toward English tend to be more anxious than those who have positive attitudes toward the English classroom (Hussain et al., 2011).

Baker (as cited in Yosintha, 2020) explained that attitudes could reflect someone's behavior, influencing his surroundings. It can be assumed



that someone's attitudes toward English class may reflect and influence their English achievement. This assumption is supported by Zeinivand, Azizifar, and Gowhary (2015), that have proved the effect of attitude on students' learning outcomes. It was confirmed that students with positive attitudes show more active involvement and less anxiety than students with negative attitudes toward the foreign language classroom. However, it was revealed that students' attitude could not perfectly predict their behavior because people often adjust their behaviour because of a particular condition (Sekiguchi & Nakamaru, 2011). Those statements can slightly explain why the findings of this study show that the percentage of students with negative attitudes is just under a half. Still, the total of students with high anxious levels is considerably more than a half.

## ■ CONCLUSIONS

This current study's main goals were to examine students' foreign language anxiety levels, their kinds of foreign language anxiety, and their attitudes toward English class. The findings of this study suggest three highlighted results based on the study's goals. First, less than two-thirds of the total felt anxious in the English classroom. Second, the three kinds of anxiety are experienced in a slightly equal way by the students. However, fear of negative evaluation was obtained. The highest average score indicated the most dominant kind of students' foreign language anxiety, followed by fear of communication apprehension in the second position, and test anxiety which gained the smallest score. Last, students' attitudes toward English class are not vastly different, and the number of students who have negative attitudes is slightly higher than students with positive attitudes.

One of the issues that emerge from these findings is that the students themselves do not solely cause foreign language anxiety experienced

by the students. Many variables are involved and related to each other. By identifying students' anxiety levels and their dominant kind of foreign language anxiety. Moreover, these findings may also help us confirm that not all students with positive attitudes toward English classes will experience lower anxiety levels.

Finally, this research study extends our knowledge that examining students' anxiety level and some components of it is an urgent step to do by English teachers regularly; once in a semester or once a year. The result can be used as the consideration to decide how to create a language learning process that can make students able to perform their best ability without interfered with by problems resulting from their anxiety. Furthermore, it is recommended to do more research investigating the variables contributing to students' foreign language anxiety. Further research is also needed to confirm the interrelation between students' attitudes and their foreign language anxiety level.

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