

Exploring the Local Language Students' Foreign Language Anxiety in EFL Online Class: Students' Genders and Speaking Performance

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Abstract

Students' anxiety, speaking performance and their relation to genders have been investigated extensively in the EFL context and most participants are English students, but most of the studies with the same variables were conducted in an offline setting. Thus, the purpose of this research is to describe the anxiety levels of students who studied another language than English in learning English and to investigate the relationship between their anxiety and performance in English-speaking classes. By employing a quantitative approach, 32 male and 66 female Sundanese Language and Culture Study Program students whose anxiety levels were assessed using Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) participated voluntarily in the research. Because the data were normally distributed and homogenous, the obtained data were analyzed using parametric statistical tools; independent t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The results imply that the majority of the participants' anxiety levels were moderate, and there was no statistical difference in students' anxiety levels between male and female students. Further exploration of the relationship between the anxiety levels of the students and their speaking performance was weak and negative ($r = -0.12$, $p > .68$). Thus, the online and offline foreign language classroom settings do not seem to differentiate students' anxiety levels for both male and female students.

Keywords: Foreign Language Anxiety, FLCAS, Genders, Speaking Performance

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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is regarded as the pinnacle of learning a foreign language by both teachers and students. Its importance also has been highlighted by language experts for years (Goh & Burns, 2012; Horverak et al., 2022; Richards, 2008). Despite its importance and status, speaking is often considered a challenging activity in the EFL context, and one factor that is often to blame for this difficulty is the students' anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Horverak et al., 2022). In a foreign language classroom, where speaking is one of the skills that the students need to master, they often feel threatened and anxious to deliver their messages orally, and Kim (2009) argued that students experienced higher anxiety in speaking courses than in reading courses. For this reason, some students avoid participating in classroom discussions by choosing to be silent, and other students are willing to overcome their anxiety. Anxiety experienced by the students seems to affect their communication strategies in the classroom (Horwitz et al., Foreign language classroom anxiety, 1986). It seems that different students in the classroom have different mechanisms for dealing with anxiety. Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi (2022) reported that both high and low-proficiency EFL students experienced anxious situations when they had to speak in front of a group of people, yet there were different sources of anxiety experienced by the students. Thus, not only low-proficiency students experience anxiety but also the more proficient students.

Even though anxiety has been defined differently by experts, anxiety can be defined as “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry” (Spielberger, 1983 cited in Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125). Krashen (1982) argued that anxiety can hinder students to activate their receptive ability to language input. When the occurrence of anxiety is limited in the foreign language classroom, it is labeled as foreign language anxiety, which is defined as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process (Horwitz et al., Foreign language classroom anxiety, 1986). Nonetheless, Sparks and Ganschow (2007) claimed that students’ performance was negatively correlated with the students’ language anxiety because foreign language anxiety is likely to be a result of students’ native language learning. However, MacIntyre (1995) argues that “language learning is a cognitive activity that relies on encoding, storage, and retrieval processes, and anxiety can interfere with each of these by creating a divided attention scenario for anxious students” (p. 96).

Research on students' language anxiety gained momentum in foreign language classrooms since Horwitz et al. (1986) published their seminal work on foreign language classroom anxiety and proposed Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to evaluate students’ anxiety levels, and FLCAS has been used as a research framework to investigate students' anxiety levels (Piniel & Zólyomi, 2022). The FLCAS comprises subscales of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. First, communication apprehension assessed students’ anxiety levels in communicating with other people which can be caused by shyness or fear either in small groups or in public (Horwitz et al., 1986). In a speaking foreign language classroom, this issue can be worsened by the fact that students are afraid that their delivered messages cannot be understood by others. Second, text anxiety denotes the students’ anxiety arising from fear of failure in a test, especially in a speaking test where they have to perform in front of the testers. Despite preparation prior to the test, they will likely experience nervousness during the test. The last scale is the fear of negative evaluation which refers to nervousness about evaluation from others, so students often avoid being in a position to be evaluated by their peers or teachers. One of these three anxieties might be higher than the others, but, in some cases, students might have high acute anxieties in the three aspects that cause anxiety.

Previous investigations of foreign language anxiety were conducted in various contexts such as anxiety and students’ achievement (Awan et al., 2010; Horwitz, 2001; Kim, 2009), anxiety and gender (Awan et al., 2010; Dewaele et al., 2016; Gerencheal, 2016; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013), and ways to ease speaking anxiety (Farokhipour et al., 2018; Galante, 2018; Mouhoubi-Messadh & Khaldi, 2022). Horwitz (2001) reported that some studies had yielded a consistent negative relationship between foreign language anxiety and achievement for students who learned English and French. Meanwhile, for anxiety and gender in the EFL context, even though female students were revealed that they had more fun than their counterparts, studies have also found a similar result that male students tended to experience lower anxiety compared to female students (Dewaele et al., 2016; Gerencheal, 2016; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013), but Awan et al. (2010) found that male students had more anxiety compared to female students. Thus, it seems that gender variables in foreign language anxiety produced different influences in varied contexts. Galante’s (2018) research displayed how using drama could lower students’ anxiety in L2-speaking classrooms because of comfort level in the performance. Farokhipour et al.’s (2018) investigation also reported that dynamic intervention could help students to relieve their anxiety levels and learning difficulties caused by anxiety to make the students perform better. Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi (2022) also unveiled teachers’ role in alleviating students’ anxiety in learning speaking skills by providing students with relevant vocabulary, boosting students’ confidence, and giving reassurance to anxious students. In the Indonesian context, foreign language anxiety and speaking skills have also been investigated extensively by different researchers in various contexts

focusing on students' levels of anxiety in speaking classroom (Ningsih & Fatimah, 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021; Aguila & Harjanto, 2016), anxiety and gender (Abrar et al., 2016; Wienanda & Widiati, 2017), and anxiety and speaking performance (Aguila & Harjanto, 2016; Erdiana et al., 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021; Wienanda & Widiati, 2017). Most studies in the Indonesian context constantly found that EFL students in Indonesia tended to have medium to high speaking anxiety. In terms of gender, even though the investigation also yielded consistent results that female students seemed to have higher anxiety compared to those male students, the statistical analysis did not show any significant differences (Ningsih & Fatimah, 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021; Aguila & Harjanto, 2016). Differently, Sahid et al. (2018) reported a significant statistical correlation between the levels of anxiety and students' gender in a seminar presentation. Similar fashions were also constructed in the relationship between the students' levels of anxiety and their speaking performance, which resulting a negative correlation between the two variables (Aguila & Harjanto, 2016; Erdiana et al., 2020; Nugroho et al., 2021; Wienanda & Widiati, 2017).

Even though studies on foreign language anxiety in English classrooms and other variables such as overall anxiety, gender, and speaking performance have been extensively conducted, it is important to note that most of the context of the studies were held in an offline setting, except that of Nugroho et al. (2021). In addition, most studies investigated the level of anxiety of EFL students. Thus, the purpose of this research is to examine the anxiety levels of students who studied the local language in learning English and the relationship between their anxiety levels and performance in speaking English, and to answer the following research questions:

1. Is there any statistical difference in anxiety levels between male and female students?
2. Is there any relationship between the students' anxiety level and their speaking performance?

METHOD

This research relied heavily upon a quantitative approach to examine the difference between male and female students' levels of anxiety is statistically different, the relationship between the student's anxiety levels and their speaking performance in the EFL context, and what factors could assist the students to ease their anxiety qualitatively. The combination of these research approaches is suitable for unveiling the students' anxiety levels and viewing different ways of reducing anxiety in foreign language classrooms.

There were 98 students out of 101 students voluntarily involved in this study consisting of 32 male and 66 female students majoring in Sundanese language education, with three participants withdrawing from the research because of personal reasons. The participants came from the second year of the Sundanese Language and Culture Study Program at a public university in Indonesia, and they had been studying Sundanese. Thus, they conducted a variety of speaking presentations both in Indonesian and Sundanese languages but not in English. Even though they were not English study program students, they had to take English subjects at least in their junior and senior high school levels, and a compulsory subject at the university level. The students' L1 might be in Sundanese or Indonesian languages.

To collect the data, there were two data collection techniques used. The first was the FLCAS questionnaire, which was used to assess students' anxiety levels, and the second data came from students' speaking scores. In the questionnaire, which was turned into a Google Form to ease the calculation, there are three types of anxiety assessed, and each type of anxiety is assessed through several statements (see Table 1). Besides, careful action needs to be taken when computing the results of the questionnaire because there are negated statements that need to be reversed; they are statements 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32. The overall score of the questionnaire is between 33-165 points.

Table 1 Types of Anxiety Assessed by FLCAS and Items on the Questionnaire

No.	Type of Anxiety	Items	N
1.	Communication Apprehension	1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, and 32	11
2.	Text Anxiety	3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, and 28	15
3.	Fear of Negative Evaluation	2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, and 33	7

Furthermore, before administering the questionnaire, the students had 16 online meetings on English subjects as part of the compulsory course in their major. In the teaching and learning process, each student created three videos consisting of introducing themselves, describing a table or figure, and making an argument on an issue. Even though the videos were created individually, during the course, they worked both individually and collaboratively. A consent form from the participants was retrieved orally and in the questionnaire.

To analyze the data, a descriptive analysis of the questionnaire was conducted to find the students' anxiety levels. The students' speaking grades were obtained after the students had their three video submissions. The assessment of the video comprised the content, delivery, pronunciation, and grammar with a maximum score of 100. Then, the results of the questionnaire were calculated with points for negated statements reversed, and the students' anxiety levels, following Bekleyen (2004, p. 53), were labeled as low (33-79), medium (80-117), and high (118-165). After the data were collected, the researcher calculated each questionnaire to see the levels of students' anxiety. When the calculation was completed, the normal distribution and the equality of variances were checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test using Levene's test were conducted. All statistical analysis was calculated using JASP. The result of the calculation is depicted in Table 2 and Table 3.

Table 2 Test of Normality (Shapiro-Wilk)

		W	p
FLCAS	Male	0.95	0.15
	Female	0.98	0.23

Table 3 Test of Equality of Variances (Levene's)

		F	df1	df2	p
FLCAS		0.08	1	96	0.78

As can be seen in Table 2 and Table 3, the p-value of the Shapiro-Wilk ($p = 0.15$ and $p = 0.23$) and Levene's tests ($p = 0.78$) exceeds 0.05. It implies that the data are distributed normally and have equal variance. Therefore, the parametric tests are applied to test the significant difference in anxiety levels attributed to gender using an independent t-test and to test the correlation between the student's anxiety levels and speaking performance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to find out the students' anxiety levels, an initial descriptive statistical analysis was computed, and the results are shown in Figure 1 and Table 4. Figure 1 displays the comparison of the anxiety levels of male and female students, and Table 4 presents students' minimum score, maximum score, standard deviation, and mean of male and female students' anxiety levels.

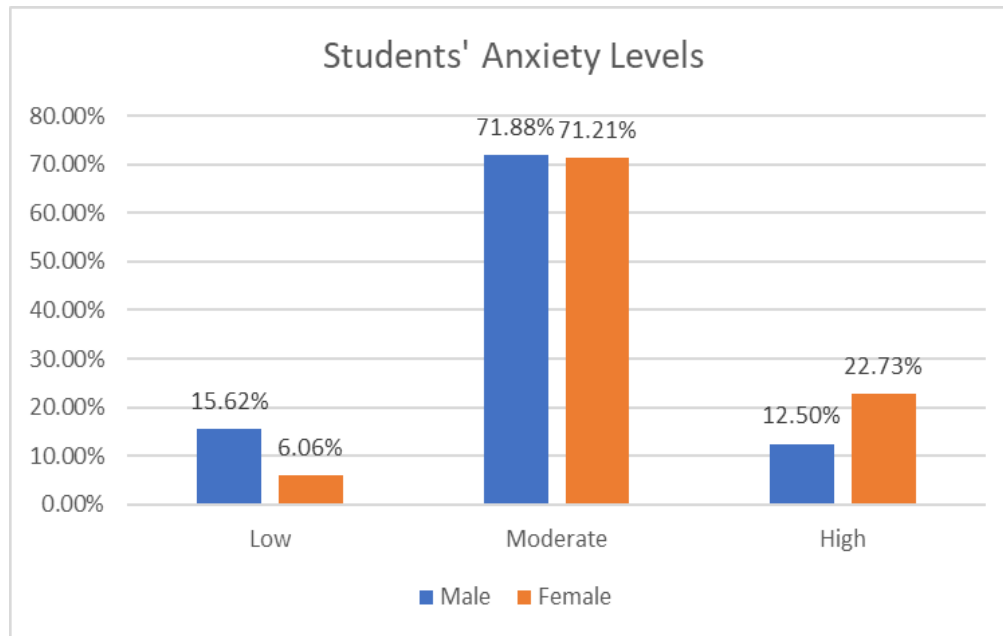


Figure 1 The Comparison of Anxiety Levels of the Male and Female Students

Table 4 Descriptive Statistics of the Students' Anxiety Level

Anxiety Levels	Male	Female
N	32	66
Min	72	60
Max	129	140
Standard Deviation	15.59	16.16
Mean	101.41	105.64

Figure 1 shows that the majority of both male (71.88%) and female (71.21%) students had a moderate level of anxiety. It is interesting to note that there were more male students (15.62%) who had low anxiety compared to female students (6.06%), and more female students experienced a high level of anxiety (22.73%) than male students (12.50%). In addition, as can be seen in Table 3, the average score of the FLCAS questionnaire shows that both female (105.64) and male (101.41) students' levels of anxiety fell in the category of medium level of anxiety. The variability of the students' levels of anxiety was considered small for both genders (male SD = 15.59 and female SD = 16.16). Table 5 also confirms that female students experienced more anxiety also occurred in each type of anxiety source. The finding of this research seems to support Dewaele et al., (2016), Gerencheal (2016), and Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) but is dissimilar to Awan et al's (2010) research that stated that

male students usually have higher levels of anxiety. This difference might be caused by other factors that are not the variables in the research. Therefore, this research might support that in online and offline classrooms female students presumably feel more anxious than male students.

Table 5 The Comparison of Types of Anxiety Sources between Male and Female Students

No.	Types of Anxiety Sources	Male	Female	Overall Means
1.	Communication Apprehension	3.18	3.29	3.24
2.	Text Anxiety	2.90	3.06	2.98
3.	Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.31	3.46	3.39

Furthermore, as can be seen from Table 5, the highest point of the three assessed aspects in FLCAS was the fear of negative evaluation (3.39), followed by communication apprehension (3.24) and test anxiety (2.98), and female students appear to have slightly higher anxiety level in three sources of anxiety types. The overall means of anxiety level for the three sources can be categorized as a moderate-level of anxiety. The low level of test anxiety might be caused by the fact that the students' speaking skills were assessed using three video recordings, and they were able to take and re-take the videos when they felt dissatisfied with the results. Thus, the submitted videos might be those the students felt comfortable and pleased with them. When the calculation from both genders was combined, the statement with the highest average of anxiety was statement 23 (3.90) "*I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do*" and the lowest statement was statement 17 (1.98) "*I often feel like not going to my language class*" implying that even the students were more anxious from others' negative evaluation compared to other anxiety sources. This finding seems to exceed Horwitz et al.'s (1986) study for the same statement where it only produced 2.86, but both numbers can be regarded as moderate levels. Despite their fear of others' evaluations, the students seemed to eagerly come to the English classroom. This might also cause the students to be passive in the classroom and reluctant to participate in classroom discussions or activities. To see whether there is a statistical difference between male and female students, an independent t-test was conducted using a JASP. The result of the calculation is presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Independent Samples T-Test

	T	df	p
FLCAS	-1.23	96	0.22

After the t-test was calculated, the difference in anxiety levels between the genders is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). This result is in line with what has been found by Abrar et al. (2016) in an offline English language classroom. Thus, gender does not seem to influence the students' levels of anxiety in the online or offline classroom. Both genders feel relatively anxious in foreign language classrooms. Although there was no statistical difference between the two genders, Sahid et al. (2018) believed that the sources of anxiety of female and male students were different. The different sources of the female students came from their feelings, and the male students' anxiety sources came from their thoughts. Moreover, to check the relationship between the students' anxiety levels (see Table 4) and speaking performance (Table 7), the researcher needs to calculate the students' speaking performance of the students' first.

Table 7 Students Speaking Score

Gender	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD.
Male	33	66	83	75.53	4.72
Female	66	66	84	77.20	4.57

As shown in Table 7, while the highest speaking score for female students exceeds the male students by 1 point, the smallest point for both male and female students is similar. The mean for male students' speaking performance is 75.53 (SD = 4.72) is lower than the mean for female students (77.20, SD = 4.57). The analysis of the normality, as indicated in Table 2, shows that overall participants' scores are normally distributed and homogenous. Thus, the parametric correlation, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation, is applied to check the relationship between the levels of students anxiety and speaking performance.

Table 8 Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Results

Variable	Pearson's r	p-value
Speaking Performance – Anxiety Value	-0.12	0.36

Based on Table 8, the relationship between speaking scores and students' anxiety levels, the relationship between the variables was weak ($r = -0.12$, $p > .68$). Even though the correlation results are in line with the previous studies (Awan et al., 2010; Horwitz, 2001), the produced r score is lower than the previous studies. It indicates that, as stated by Mouhoubi-Messadh and Khaldi (2022), both high-achiever and low-achiever students experienced anxiety, and it does not necessarily make their speaking performance poor, but their anxiety came from different sources, which might need different coping strategies. Although they had anxiety, the online classroom might also influence the students' level of anxiety. To reduce the students' anxiety, Awan et al. (2010) suggested teachers create a friendly environment and encourage students to take risks and actively participated in the classroom. This might also occur in this research because, as suggested in the questionnaire statement, only a few students do not want to join the classroom.

There are two factors that might cause a low correlation between the levels of students' anxiety and their speaking performance. First, this result could be attributed to the fact that the students did not speak in front of the classroom or other students. Their speaking assignments were uploaded to a website. Before creating the video, the students were taught how to create a script for their speaking video production. This activity was done in a cyclical and predicted fashion both in groups and individually. Since they created a recording of their speaking activity in an offline way, they could take and retake and submit only the video where they felt satisfied. Second, the students had experience in conducting the speaking activity in front of other people in other courses in their study program. Due to their experience, it seems that they were able to control their anxiety.

CONCLUSION

The purposes of this research are to describe and examine the statistical difference between the student's anxiety levels and their genders and the relationship between the Sundanese language students' anxiety levels, assessed by FLCAS, and their language performance in an online setting. The results indicated that the anxiety level of the students was mostly moderate levels, and female students

seem to have higher anxiety levels compared to male students. However, after a statistical analysis was conducted, this anxiety level discrepancy due to gender is not statistically significant. In addition to this, the correlation between anxiety levels and speaking scores shows a negative and weak relationship. The correlation is weaker than the previous studies because the students can retake the videos and only upload the best video in their opinion. In short, the anxiety levels of students are not affected by the mode of learning, and the students might feel anxious both in online and offline foreign language classroom learning.

It is important to note that there are limitations to this research. First, the collected data are drawn only from quantitative data, which might hinder a deeper understanding of students' anxiety in an online foreign language classroom. Second, although the number of participants in this research is quite big, the representation between male and female students is not equal. Thus, it is recommended for further research to also use qualitative data collection techniques to identify students' perceptions of their anxiety and to balance the number of genders of the participants.

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