# Factors Influencing Language Anxiety Among Indonesian EFL Learners: Student Perspectives

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## Abstract

This study delves into the multifaceted nature of language anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners, focusing on the intricate interplay of individual, classroom, and socio-cultural factors. Employing a mixed-method approach, data were gathered through comprehensive surveys and in-depth interviews with students from various educational backgrounds. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al., (1986) was utilized alongside thematic analysis to identify key anxiety-inducing elements. The findings reveal that individual factors, such as self-esteem, fear of negative evaluation, and previous language learning experiences, significantly impact learners' anxiety levels. The classroom environment, particularly the quality of teacher-student interactions, peer relationships, and teaching methods, also emerged as critical in shaping language anxiety. Furthermore, socio-cultural influences, including societal expectations, language-related stigma, and the perceived status of the English language in Indonesia, were found to intensify anxiety. This study underscores the necessity of fostering supportive and inclusive learning environments to mitigate anxiety and facilitate effective language acquisition. Ethical considerations were rigorously adhered to, ensuring participant anonymity and confidentiality. These insights offer valuable implications for educators and policymakers in crafting targeted interventions to address language anxiety.

*Keywords: Language Anxiety; EFL Learners; FLCAS; Socio-cultural Factors*

## INTRODUCTION

Acquiring a foreign language is inherently challenging, particularly for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. The effectiveness of language acquisition is often compromised by the absence of natural and interactive language learning environments (Rababah, 2005). This complexity is further influenced by individual, socio-demographic, and emotional factors such as anxiety, motivation, personality, and self-efficacy (Kim et al., 2015). Among these, anxiety has emerged as a significant barrier to successful language learning, garnering considerable attention from applied linguists due to its pervasive impact on learners' motivation and emotional well-being (Dörnyei, 2014).

Language anxiety, characterized by fear of failure, excessive self-evaluation, and negative self-perceptions, often manifests in educational settings (Peter D. MacIntyre, 1995). This phenomenon is especially common in foreign language classrooms and negatively impacts cognitive processing, self-esteem, motivation, communication, and academic achievement (Gkonou, 2017; Teimouri et al., 2019). Students experiencing high cognitive anxiety, especially related to speaking in class, may develop physical symptoms like trembling or behavioral responses, such as avoiding participation. Such anxiety is common among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, necessitating a reassessment of teaching and learning methodologies.

The impact of language anxiety on engagement and involvement in language learning is well-documented, indicating its significant role in both academic and psychological aspects of EFL education (P. D. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). As such, understanding the underlying factors contributing to language anxiety is crucial for educators aiming to create supportive learning environments that promote language development and alleviate anxiety.

This study aims to explore and analyze the factors contributing to language anxiety among Indonesian EFL learners. Through the lens of student perceptions, this research seeks to identify the individual, classroom, and socio-cultural factors influencing language anxiety. Utilizing the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) adapted from Horwitz et al., (1986), the study aims to uncover the key triggers of anxiety within the educational context. The insights gained will provide valuable guidance for educators and practitioners in developing effective strategies to address and mitigate language anxiety.

This research is driven by the need to address a gap in the current literature on language anxiety, particularly in the context of Indonesian EFL learners. While much has been explored about language anxiety, research on the perceptions of Indonesian EFL learners remains limited, leaving a gap in understanding how cultural and educational contexts shape their experiences. By highlighting these subjective experiences and investigating the factors influencing language anxiety, this study offers new perspectives and contributes to refining theoretical frameworks in the field. The findings are expected to inform the development of targeted interventions, ultimately enhancing language education practices and improving EFL students' overall language learning experience.

Language anxiety is the discomfort and fear individuals experience when learning or using a second language, impacting their performance and motivation (Peter D. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). It is recognized as a complex emotional state involving stress, nervousness, and apprehension about language use, which can hinder language proficiency, motivation, and self-esteem (Spielberger, 1972; Zheng & Cheng, 2018). Research identifies three key components of language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Communication apprehension refers to fear of interacting in the target language, fear of negative evaluation involves worry about others' judgments, and test anxiety relates to the stress associated with language assessments. Language anxiety is a situation-specific phenomenon affecting learners differently based on various factors, including their beliefs and learning context (P. MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Recent studies highlight that language anxiety adversely affects learners' academic performance, social interactions, cognitive processes, and personal well-being (Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). For instance, learners with high anxiety often show reduced academic performance and motivation (Zheng & Cheng, 2018). Investigations have used tools like the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure these effects (Horwitz, 1988), revealing that anxiety impedes language learning and proficiency (Botes et al., 2022).

Studies have consistently found that language anxiety negatively correlates with language achievement and performance (Demirdas & Bozdoğan, 2015). Horwitz (1987) emphasized the importance of learner beliefs in understanding language anxiety, noting that beliefs about language ability and giftedness can influence anxiety levels. Cheng (2001) found that Taiwanese students' anxiety was linked to their beliefs about language learning ability and self-efficacy. Recent research has examined various aspects of language anxiety, including speaking anxiety among Malaysian undergraduates (Miskam & Saidalvi, 2018) and strategies to cope with speaking anxiety in academic settings (Taly & Paramasivam, 2020). Additionally, studies have explored the role of self-efficacy and self-regulated learning in academic achievement (Ozer & Akçayoğlu, 2021) and the interplay between language anxiety and motivation (Alamer & Almulhim, 2021)

Individual factors such as fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety contribute significantly to language anxiety. Students often experience anxiety due to their fear of negative judgment, lack of language skills, and concerns about test performance (Horwitz et al., 1986). Personal traits, such as self-confidence and motivation, also play a critical role in shaping anxiety levels (P. D. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Piran, 2014). Classroom environment factors include test anxiety, fear of failure, and psychological pressure. Students may feel anxious about their performance and the evaluation process, which can negatively impact their classroom engagement and learning (Dawood et al., 2020; Horwitz et al., 1986). A supportive classroom environment can help mitigate these anxieties by fostering a positive learning atmosphere (P. MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Socio-cultural factors, such as cultural differences and social pressure, influence language anxiety. International students often face additional challenges related to cultural adaptation and social expectations, which can exacerbate their anxiety (Taly & Paramasivam, 2020; Yu & Wright, 2017). Social comparisons and perceived judgments from peers and teachers can further contribute to anxiety (Lucas et al., 2011). Addressing these individual, classroom, and socio-cultural factors is crucial for creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment that fosters both language development and emotional well-being.

## METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the factors influencing language anxiety among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Focusing on the students' perspectives, the research aims to provide a detailed understanding of their experiences, perceptions, and attitudes toward language anxiety. Qualitative methods are chosen to capture the nuanced insights of the

learners, which is crucial for exploring subjective phenomena like language anxiety. The participants in this study include 214 EFL learners from various universities in Indonesia. A purposive sampling technique ensures the inclusion of a diverse group of students, encompassing different ages, genders, language proficiency levels, and cultural backgrounds, provided they are EFL learners.

Data collection is carried out through two primary methods: surveys and interviews. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), measures language anxiety. This scale consists of 33 items related to communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, rated on a five-point Likert scale. The FLCAS is well-regarded for its reliability in assessing foreign language anxiety. However, it is noted that some items indicating lower anxiety should be reverse-scored to reflect higher levels of anxiety. The survey incorporates closed-ended questions to gather demographic information and assess language anxiety levels.

In addition to surveys, semi-structured interviews are conducted to gain deeper insights into the participants' experiences. Interviews are selected for their ability to reveal participants' internal experiences, such as emotions, thoughts, and beliefs. Participants are asked to provide detailed responses to questions about their language anxiety, including individual, classroom, and socio-cultural factors. Interviews are audio-recorded with consent, ensuring accurate transcription and analysis. Key interview questions explore the frequency of anxiety during classroom activities, individual and environmental factors influencing anxiety, specific aspects of language learning causing anxiety, and any coping strategies employed by the students.

The collected data from surveys and interviews are analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and organizing patterns and themes within the data. Transcripts and survey responses are coded and categorized based on emerging themes related to the research inquiries. This iterative process ensures the accuracy and validity of the findings, which are then presented in a narrative format supported by relevant participant quotes.

Ethical considerations are strictly followed throughout the research, including ensuring anonymity, confidentiality, and obtaining informed consent from all participants. The study received approval from the institutional review board prior to commencement. Data analysis is conducted using Nvivo software, and a phenomenological approach is employed to interpret participants' experiences with language anxiety. This approach aims to uncover critical themes and patterns concerning language anxiety, aligning with established research methodologies.

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is employed to evaluate the anxiety levels among university students in foreign language classrooms. The scale's reliability is confirmed with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.811 to 0.892, indicating its suitability for this research. The survey was administered electronically between February and June 2024, with a participation rate of 93%. The data collection process ensured a comprehensive and diverse sample of participants from various universities.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study gathered insights from 214 students, each sharing their experiences learning a foreign language. This extensive range of responses provides a comprehensive view of how students interact with and feel about their language classes. Examining their feedback reveals the challenges and concerns shaping their learning experiences.

The participants' responses revealed several key themes and categories, offering a nuanced understanding of their experiences. These themes are organized into three main areas: individual factors, classroom environment factors, and socio-cultural factors.

**Individual Factors**

Personal feelings and self-perceptions significantly influence students' language learning experiences. Many students reported experiencing heightened anxiety, particularly when faced with unpreparedness. Many participants (66.9% combined Agree and Strongly Agree) felt nervous when asked questions they had not prepared. Participant 47 expressed significant anxiety about speaking in class, saying, "I always feel my heart racing when the teacher calls on me. I'm afraid I'll make a mistake, and everyone will laugh." This fear of making mistakes in front of peers was frequently mentioned. This apprehension suggests that the pressure of being caught off guard contributes significantly to their stress levels during language classes.

Furthermore, there is a prevalent sense among students that their peers speak the foreign language more proficiently. This feeling of inadequacy is reflected in the data, where 59.4% of students either agree or strongly agree that they perceive others as more competent. Such perceptions can further exacerbate their anxiety, as they might feel their skills are not up to par compared to their classmates.

In contrast, students' comfort around native speakers varies widely. About 30.4% of participants feel comfortable, while others are less assured or remain neutral. This disparity highlights that confidence in interacting with native speakers is not uniform and is influenced by individual experiences and self-perception.

**Classroom Environment Factors**

The dynamics within the language classroom significantly impact students' experiences. One notable concern is the pace of the class. Many students, accounting for 65.0% of responses, worry about keeping up with the rapid progression of lessons. This concern about being left behind indicates that the pace can be overwhelming, adding to students' stress and potentially hindering their learning.

Another aspect of the classroom environment that students find challenging is the number of rules and structures involved in learning a language. About 66.0% of students feel overwhelmed by the complex grammatical and usage rules, making the learning process seem burdensome and complex. Participant 92 shared, "I find the number of grammar rules overwhelming. Sometimes it feels like no matter how much I study, I can't remember them all." This reflection was common among participants, indicating that the complexity of grammar rules contributes to their stress.

Students also expressed concern about the social dynamics within the classroom. Although a significant portion (36.7% Strongly Disagree and 21.0% Disagree) feels relatively secure from potential ridicule, a substantial number of students (42.3% combined Agree and Strongly Agree) worry about being judged or laughed at by their peers. Participant 65 shared, "I'm afraid that if I make mistakes while speaking, my classmates will judge me. This fear sometimes stops me from speaking up." This fear of social judgment can deter students from actively participating and engaging in learning.

**Socio-cultural Factors**

The broader socio-cultural context in which language learning occurs influences students' perceptions and experiences. Concerns about social judgment and peer perceptions are prominent. Many students, particularly those sensitive to social dynamics, worry about being laughed at when speaking the foreign language. This fear is significant, with 58.7% of students agreeing or strongly agreeing that this concern affects them. Participant 34 revealed, "I feel very self-conscious speaking the language in front of others. I'm constantly worried about how I sound and if I'm making mistakes." Cultural expectations and the social environment of the classroom shape such fears.

The comfort level with native speakers also varies, reflecting different socio-cultural experiences and levels of familiarity. While some students feel at ease (30.4% combined Agree and Strongly Agree), others remain neutral or uncomfortable. Participant 150 mentioned, "I feel more at ease when talking with native speakers in informal settings. It helps me practice without the pressure

of being graded." This variation underscores the impact of cultural and social contexts on students' confidence and comfort in using the foreign language with native speakers.

## Discussion

The findings from this study provide valuable insights into the various challenges and concerns students face in learning a foreign language. This discussion interprets these findings in relation to existing research and theoretical frameworks, aiming to provide a deeper understanding of the issues and potential strategies for improvement.

## Individual Factors

The data indicates that many students experience significant anxiety related to their language learning, particularly in scenarios where they feel unprepared. This insight aligns with previous research that highlights the impact of test anxiety and performance pressure on student outcomes (Horwitz, 2001). The high percentage of students who reported feeling nervous when faced with unexpected questions (66.9%) suggests that the fear of being unprepared is a substantial barrier to effective learning. Participant 138 noted, "I get really nervous when I'm asked questions I haven't prepared for. It's like a sudden spotlight on my weaknesses." This perspective highlights how being unprepared can increase students' anxiety.

Additionally, the perception that peers speak more proficiently than oneself is a common concern among language learners. This phenomenon, often called "peer comparison anxiety," can undermine students' confidence and motivation (Peter D. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). 59.4% of students feel that others are more competent, which highlights the need for strategies that enhance self-efficacy and reduce feelings of inadequacy. Participant 179 noted, "Constructive feedback from my teacher helps me understand my mistakes and improves my confidence. Without it, I feel lost." Encouraging self-assessment and providing positive feedback could be beneficial in addressing these concerns.

Students' varying comfort levels with native speakers further illustrate the complexities of language learning. The mixed responses regarding comfort around native speakers (30.4% feel comfortable) underscore the influence of personal experiences and the socio-cultural context on students' confidence. This variability suggests personalized support and exposure opportunities might be necessary to build confidence in real-world language use.

## Classroom Environment Factors

Classroom dynamics play a crucial role in shaping students' experiences and perceptions. The concern about the rapid pace of language classes, with 65.0% of students expressing worry, highlights a common issue in language education. Participant 56 commented, "The class moves so fast that I often feel like I'm left behind. I struggle to keep up with the new material." Previous studies have indicated that pacing issues can lead to cognitive overload and hinder language acquisition (Garcia & Skehan, 1999). To address this, educators might consider differentiating instruction and providing additional support to help students keep up with the material.

The complexity of language rules is another significant factor, with 66.0% of students feeling overwhelmed by the number of grammatical and usage rules. This finding aligns with research on cognitive load theory, which suggests that excessive demands on cognitive resources can impede learning (Sweller, 1988). Simplifying explanations, offering practical applications, and integrating rules gradually could help manage cognitive load and make learning more accessible.

Social dynamics within the classroom also affect students' willingness to participate. Despite a substantial portion feeling secure, 42.3% of students are concerned about potential peer ridicule. This fear can discourage active participation and hinder learning outcomes (Dörnyei, 2014). Creating a supportive and non-judgmental classroom environment, where mistakes are seen as part of the learning process, could help alleviate these concerns and promote more engagement.

## Socio-cultural Factors

Socio-cultural factors significantly influence students' language learning experiences. The fear of social judgment, with 58.7% of students expressing concerns about being laughed at, reflects the impact of cultural expectations and social norms on language use. This aligns with the concept of "language socialization," where learners' interactions and perceptions are shaped by cultural contexts (Corsaro et al., 1988). Participant 113 observed, "In classes where the teacher creates a supportive

environment, I feel more relaxed and willing to participate. It makes a big difference." Participant 21 said, "When the teacher expects us to know everything, it adds pressure. I wish there was more understanding that we're still learning." Educators should be mindful of these cultural dimensions and work to foster a classroom atmosphere that supports learners from diverse backgrounds.

The variation in comfort levels with native speakers also highlights the role of socio-cultural factors in language learning. Students' differing comfort levels can be attributed to their prior experiences and exposure to the language and its speakers. Providing more opportunities for students to interact with native speakers in low-pressure settings could enhance their comfort and confidence.

## CONCLUSION

This study sought to delve into students' various challenges in foreign language learning, focusing on personal anxieties, classroom dynamics, and socio-cultural influences. The aim was to paint a comprehensive picture of how these factors impact students' experiences and performance in language classes.

The findings highlight a complex and often challenging landscape for learners. Many students reported feeling unprepared and anxious about their performance, particularly when faced with unexpected questions or when comparing themselves to their peers. The fear of being judged or ridiculed by others significantly affects their confidence and willingness to participate actively in class. Additionally, the overwhelming grammatical rules and the fast-paced language instruction contribute to their stress and confusion.

From these insights, several practical implications emerge. First and foremost, educators need to be mindful of the diverse needs of their students. Providing additional support and resources for those struggling with the material's pace or complexity can help alleviate some of their anxieties. Formative assessments and regular feedback are vital in helping students feel more prepared and secure in their abilities.

Creating a supportive classroom environment is equally crucial. By fostering a culture where mistakes are seen as part of the learning process rather than failures, students are more likely to take risks and engage more fully in their learning. Promoting peer support and ensuring students feel comfortable expressing themselves without fear of judgment can significantly enhance their learning experience.

Moreover, simplifying the presentation of complex grammatical rules and integrating these concepts into practical, everyday contexts can make the learning process less daunting. This approach can help students manage and understand the material more effectively, reducing their sense of overwhelm.

Encouraging interaction with native speakers in low-pressure situations can also be beneficial. Such interactions can help build students' confidence and reduce their apprehension about using the language in real-life scenarios. Structured speaking practice and opportunities for cultural exchange are effective ways to support this goal.

### Suggestions for Further Research

Further research is needed to explore how individual, classroom and socio-cultural factors interact over time and their long-term effects on language learning. Longitudinal studies could offer deeper insights into how these challenges evolve and what strategies might most effectively address them. Additionally, investigating the success of specific interventions designed to reduce anxiety and improve teaching methods could provide valuable guidance for educators aiming to enhance language learning outcomes.

In summary, this study underscores the importance of understanding and addressing students' multifaceted challenges in language learning. By adopting targeted strategies and continuing to explore these issues, educators can create more effective and supportive learning environments, ultimately helping students achieve greater success in their language studies.

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