English Foreign Language Anxiety Among Undergraduate EFL Students in Indonesia: Looking at The Differences Between Gender and Achievement

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Abstract. One of the most common psychological factors, anxiety, is widely discussed in many studies on second language acquisition (SLA). The participants in this study are 43 third-year English Department students in one of universities in Indonesia. Focusing on anxiety in gender and its correlation with academic achievement, this study adopts a quantitative approach using the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLAS) questionnaire adopted by Yassin (2015) as the research method. The anxiety levels of the participants based on their gender are analyzed using an independent t-test, while the correlation between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement is analyzed with Pearson’s Moment Correlation Coefficient. The findings suggest that female students have higher anxiety levels compared to male students with significant differences. While the result between anxiety and academic achievement shows no correlation between the two variables being tested. This study may be used as a beneficial reference for researchers and educators interested in studying anxiety in foreign language learning, for it distinctively discusses anxiety in gender, as well as the correlation between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement. The implications of this study are discussed.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, gender, academic achievement

1 Introduction

Using second language as a tool to connect with each other is a prevalent thing nowadays, principally using English as a second language—as well as a foreign language—in daily communication. The process of learning a second language enables the learners broaden their point of view on different customs of various groups of people and how they think [39]. Learning other languages beside native language also increases the learners' understanding and compassion towards other cultures [39]. However, learning and acquiring new language customarily has its own obstacles as a consequence of the sense of unfamiliarity to the first language. Typically, there are two factors that conceivably hinder someone’s process in studying new language: internal factors and external factors—or any factors related to the
learners' interactional situations while learning [44]. The internal factors consist of self-confidence, self-motivation, self-consistency, self-esteem, and so forth. A systematic review stated that learning new languages beside the native language or mother tongue has high association with emotions [36]. The external factors comprise of lack of time to learn and practice, the environment in which the individuals surrounded with, the teacher’s performance in teaching, classroom dynamics, lack of the speakers or users to use the same language being learned, and so on. Major categories such as the environment (mainly the classroom), the learner’s personality, the target language, and the learning process of the foreign language contributed as a source of foreign language anxiety [1].

As previously stated, psychological aspects have a role in devitalizing or escalating the process of learning a second or foreign language. Remarking on the internal factors in learning foreign language, anxiety as one of the factors that commonly occur is also widely discussed in many studies. Anxiety plays a major role in affecting the performance of foreign language [2]. Anxiety is the feeling of fear or uneasiness that befall upon somebody as a response to a stressful situation [11]. Anxiety is one of the most prevalent medical conditions that are usually an uncontrollable, unpleasant, and persistent state of negative affect, designated by fear of unpredictable things and escorted by physiological symptoms of tension and rocketed alertness [3]. [4] in [5] suggested that foreign language anxiety (FLA) that students often experience is considered as a situation-specific anxiety that may cause negative emotional reactions to their language learning process.

Numerous studies have investigated the effects of foreign language anxiety, as [1] explored that foreign language anxiety takes a toll in academic, cognitive, social, affective, and personal effects. As depicted in [5] that foreign language anxiety caused a negative effect in the learning process, might as well affecting the academic achievement. Earlier study conducted in [2] showed that a remarkable correlation between moderate level of foreign language anxiety and the academic achievement [2]. The study found that the higher the students’ foreign language anxiety level, the more they are obtained lower grades compared to students with lower foreign language anxiety level. The unwillingness to perform foreign language outside classroom is also the effect of the language anxiety [6]. Individuals who experience anxiety in the process of learning or acquiring a foreign language might encounter psychological responses such as the nauseous feeling, helplessness, even physiological responses such as the rising of heartbeat and sweatiness [7].

There have been many studies conducted regarding foreign language anxiety on gender and its effect on academic achievement, in which the outcomes of the objects being examined are still debatable. Adopting from [8], this research aims to explore and examine the feelings of anxiety over learning English as a foreign language. The targeted participants in the present study are third-year English Department students in one of public universities in Indonesia. The researcher intended to explore deeper on this particular issue which is foreign language anxiety in gender and its effect in academic achievement, especially on the third-year students. The participants started their first-year of college in 2020 and went through online classes for 2 years due to COVID-19 pandemic. The current study was conducted to have a closer look regarding the students’ anxiety level on performing English as a foreign language in offline classroom situation.

This study may be used as a beneficial reference for researchers and educators interested in studying anxiety in foreign language learning, for it distinctively discusses anxiety in gender, as well as the correlation between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement. In more
details, this study addresses two research questions: (1) what is the level of English Foreign Language Anxiety of the third-year English Department undergraduate students between male and female?, and (2) what is the relationship between the level of English Foreign Language Anxiety and the academic achievement of third-year English Department undergraduate students?. For the latter question, it is hypothesized that H1: Based on the result, female students tend to feel more anxious compared to male students, and H2: there is no correlation between foreign language anxiety experienced by students with their academic achievements.

2 Review of Related Studies

2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety
Learning a second or foreign language has a connection in psychological aspects, for it does not only have cognitive factors but also emotional factor. Foreign language anxiety is often associated as one of the effects that occur in learning an additional language [9]. Foreign language anxiety differs from anxiety in general, regardless their comparatively relatedness to the components of anxiety that is the feeling of uneasiness [10]. ‘Foreign Language Anxiety’ is the feeling of tension, uneasiness, and nervousness in learning FL situations [2]. The anxiety level of foreign language learners is significantly higher compared to second language learners [11]. In western countries in the early 1970s, the efficacy of anxiousness in a foreign language was discovered and numerous studies were conducted [8], such as in [12] and [13]. Foreign language anxiety differs from academic anxiety, for the self-concepts and self-expression are not the same with other fields of academic study [2].

2.2 Foreign Language Anxiety in Gender
[15] stated that in a foreign language class, based on [16] and [17], female students tend to have higher anxiety levels contrasting to male students. It is also proved in [8] that females encounter higher anxiety level compared to males with no significant difference between both groups in Yemeni university EFL learners. Study conducted that involved a number of university students of lower and upper intermediate English level of college students in Indonesia, exhibited that male students were less anxious compared to female students in their FL learning and performing [18]. Another study conducted in Indonesia explored how females had significant anxiety level (66.7%) compared to males (33.3%) in educational environment during the COVID-19 pandemic [14]. In English writing competence, a study reported that female students had a significant level of anxiety compared to male students due to feeling of linguistic incompetencies [41]. In contrast to the previous studies stated, [19] in [15] reported that males are the ones who feel more anxious than females. In [20] and [40] both male and female students experience moderate level of foreign language anxiety in foreign language class. However, research [21] conducted among Japanese students, and research [22] suggested that there is no correlation between foreign language anxiety and gender.

2.3 Foreign Language Anxiety and Academic Achievement
It has been examined and investigated by many scholars and came to conclusion that foreign language anxiety takes a negative toll in students’ performance [23], [2], [24], and [25] in [8]. Among EFL learners, anxiety is a common phenomenon that often caused an effect to the students’ academic performance [21]. Previous studies such as [26], [12], and [27] mentioned in [8] showed various result investigating the effect of foreign language anxiety on performance. While study [42] exhibited a negative correlation between the two variables being tested, study
[43] showed small to medium correlation between anxiety and academic achievement among Chinese students in learning EFL. Indonesian students’ anxiety level showed a significantly correlation between the learners’ anxiety and their academic achievement, specifically in their reading achievement [45]. One of the studies conducted showed a positive correlation occurred with the Spanish language, a negative correlation occurred with the French, and correlated in German [12]. Another study exhibited that anxiousness affects their performance so that they use strategies to cope with it [18]. A systematic review also offered in focusing on the correlation between the FLA and academic achievement [10]. The systematic review of literature discussing foreign language anxiety with additional explication of the earlier works and reviews. Presenting the studies concerning foreign language anxiety and academic achievement, the study [10] illustrates the topic in a systematic review involving different things such as the settings, the languages being learned, the learners’ stages, and also the disciplines being taught.

3 Research Method

To examine the anxiety level and its relationship with the academic achievement of third-year English Department undergraduate students, independent t-test and Pearson correlation by SPSS Statistics version 25 were used. To confirm (i) the anxiety level of male and female students and (ii) their foreign language anxiety level with their academic achievements, this research explored the research questions stated by having the targeted participants to fill out a questionnaire. With reference to [2] that explores and investigates foreign language anxiety (FLA) in learning foreign language (FL) situations.

Research Design

This research adopts a quantitative study with survey design since the survey numeric responses can be objectively quantifiable and measurable [28]. Quantitative research seeks to prove theories, produce objective data with no bias, and obtain a prosperous description of complex phenomena. A quantitative study was selected to reveal the participants’ anxiety levels in numeric format and support the findings of the results. In order to discover the association between one variable and another (e.g., foreign language anxiety and academic achievement), correlational designs are used to determine the relevance of the data collected.

Participants

Third-year English Department undergraduate students are chosen as the research participants because they have been learning English as a foreign language in-depth for 3 years, as well as performing EFL in the classroom. There are 161 registered third-year students at English Department consisting 38 male students and 123 female students. The sample of this study is the 27% of the population or 43 participants in total (19 male students and 24 female students), age ranged from 20 to 22. The participants voluntarily filled out the questionnaire provided as the instrument to obtain the data.

Instruments

The researcher obtained the data by using a questionnaire that can be accessed via Google Form consisting 48 questions adopted from [29], including the three scales used to determine the level of anxiety in reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills. Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLAS) conducted has been approved as a questionnaire with very good consistency, which scores .087 in Cronbach Alpha reliability [29]. The questionnaire scale has combined the three scales from [2], [30], and [31]. The participants were required to fill 48 questions in total with
1 to 5 scales; strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), neutral (N), agree (A), and strongly agree (SA).

Procedures
The data collection method used in this quantitative research is a questionnaire. The researcher strives to explore an objective evaluation regarding the participants’ foreign language anxiety level. In collecting the data, the first step the researcher took is constructing the questionnaire adopted by [29] to seek the participants’ attitude towards reading, writing, or communicating in English with others. The researcher distributed the questionnaire towards the targeted participants—third-year English Department undergraduate students. To fill out the questionnaire form, the participants were requested for their consent. Participants were also required to state their GPA which later was used to compare and analyze its correlation with their anxiety level. The data source of the study is the questionnaire result that is used to measure the foreign language anxiety level of English Department students.

Data Analysis
In implementing the study being conducted, the step that the researcher took is analyzing the anxiety levels of the participants based on their gender using the independent t-test. To examine the correlation between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement, Pearson correlation was used to analyze the data. The result of the data that have been obtained were accumulated and processed by using SPSS. The last step to complete the data analysis is by drawing conclusion to pinpoint the study’s importance and present closure of the study.

4 Findings
To examine the level of anxiety between male students (n = 19) and female students (n = 24), an independent t-test was used to analyze the findings. The anxiety level was also tested with the students’ academic achievement to seek the correlation between the variables being tested.

4.1 The level of English Foreign Language Anxiety of the third-year English Department undergraduate students based on gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>T-value</th>
<th>Sig.(2-tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Score</td>
<td>Male 19</td>
<td>2.4353</td>
<td>0.45675</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>-2.576</td>
<td>.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Score</td>
<td>Female 24</td>
<td>2.7934</td>
<td>0.44956</td>
<td>38.483</td>
<td>-2.571</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An independent t-test was performed to compare the anxiety level between male and female students. Table 1 and Table 2 provide a significant difference that shown between male students (M = 2.4, SD = 0.4) and female students (M = 2.7, SD = 0.4) anxiety level; t(41) = 2.5, p = 0.14. The significance level of t-value shown is greater than the significance level of 0.05, resulting in a statistically significant difference between the gender being tested.
Table 2. Independent t-test between among male and female students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
<th>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td>t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
<td>.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>-2.571</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result then exhibits that between male and female third-year English Department undergraduate students, there is a statistically significant difference in the level of their foreign language anxiety scores. Specifically, female students had significantly higher score compared to male students, and this can be depicted in

Fig. 1. Anxiety level in male and female students.
4.2 The relationship between the level of English Foreign Language Anxiety and the academic achievement of third-year English Department undergraduate students

Table 3. Correlations between foreign language anxiety level and academic achievement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety Score</td>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To examine the correlation between third-year English Department undergraduate students’ foreign language anxiety levels and their academic achievement, Pearson correlation was used to calculate the findings obtained. Table 3 illustrates the correlation between the level of foreign language anxiety and the academic achievement of the participants of the study—third-year English Department undergraduate students. Table 3 reveals that the two variables being tested—academic achievement (GPA) and students’ foreign language anxiety score. Based on the statistical analysis, the table presents the number 0.509 which is greater than the significance level of 0.05. While the significance level must be below or smaller than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is no correlation between the students’ foreign language anxiety and their academic achievements. Therefore, the result of the H2 stated is accepted.

5 Discussion

Foreign language anxiety in gender may have various results in previous studies, and is still considered as a controversial topic, as well as the weight to be reviewed further in thorough. In the present study’s case, it can be argued that the between male and female students, the difference is relatively high due to the participants’ personalities. The highest score among female students is 3.46 with the lowest 1.48, indicating the possibility of the differences in personality and confidence level. The same case also proven in male students in which the highest score is 3.0, while the lowest is 1.5, marking a two times anxiety level differences between the individuals. This factor can be linked with [1] that the learner’s personality as one of the major causes in experiencing foreign language anxiety. Characteristics or personalities are the feeling of perfectionism, competitiveness, uneasiness of being evaluated or given feedbacks, low self-esteem or self-perceptions in learning the language [32]. Although female students exhibit greater anxiety level compared to male students, both genders have exposed to English as a foreign language before, resulting in familiarity in using English. Moreover, the number of female students in English Department is 123 students that is 3 times of male students’ number (38 in total). As seen in [8], female students tend to have shy nature as a result to their greater level of foreign language anxiety compared to male students.

Similar study conducted in [15] that explore the possible differences between male and female students in foreign language anxiety, especially in English. The researcher used Foreign
Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire, interview, and examination result as the instrument to assist the study. Consisting 28 female and 50 male third-year Ethiopian University students as the participants of the study, the findings exhibited that female students with mean 111.68 had higher anxiety level compared to the male students with 96.22 as the mean. The findings of this study illustrated a gender difference in foreign language anxiety. The researcher stated that this phenomenon may be linked with Ethiopian culture in which females’ silence is adored, resulting in female students’ limitation in their academical participation. Thus, female students tend to be wary in performing English in the classroom.

Study [20] also showed that university students in Malaysia, regardless the gender and their language proficiency, experience the feeling of anxiety in English as a foreign language classroom. The participants of the study experience moderate anxiety for they claimed that their language instructors and classmates have high expectation towards them. The students feel pressured to perform better, especially the students with higher proficiency level. To cope with their anxiousness, the students prone to work in teams and seek assistance from those with higher proficiency level. Similar case was found in study [18] in which both male and female students experience FLA with lack of preparation as the main reason. It is stated that female students tend to feel less confident compared to male students, which they often feel embarrassed to be called in class or to volunteer answers in English as foreign language class.

In Malaysian and Indonesian context, both [18] and [20] depicted different results in the current study, in which no remarkable difference between gender, but both studies are also elicited that female students are prone to be more anxious compared to male students. These studies such as [14], [18], and [20] also argued that male students feel more confident in foreign language situation compared to female students. The findings of the current study also contradicted to several previous studies, namely in [17] and [33], that found a noticeable gender difference in the foreign language anxiety level. Another showed that there could not be seen any significant correlation or association in gender and foreign language anxiety [21]. Future research regarding gender in foreign language anxiety needed to be done in such a thorough approach to grasp more details concerning this aspect.

The findings of this study also presented that there is no correlation between the two variables being tested can be seen due to the mother tongue of the students, that is Indonesian. Language between Indonesian and English have considerably similar between one another, which plausibly makes it easier for the students to learn English as a foreign language. Moreover, translanguaging classes are sometimes applied and delivered to help the students in their classrooms in understanding the target language better. [37] in [38] stated that translanguaging, as a cross-curricular learning and teaching strategy, is the use of two languages in one particular lesson. The application of translanguaging class offers the students to perform English—as the official language on the department they enrolled in—as well as acknowledging, validating, and performing Bahasa Indonesia—as the official language in Indonesia—for the learning process [35].

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. Similar study such as [34] argued that students in the mother tongue classrooms tend to feel relaxed, contrasting in foreign language classrooms that conceivably causing a foreign language anxiety. This fact is also discussed in [1] that the target language is one of the major causes in FLA. Studies such as [5], [8], and [22] also reported a moderate negative correlation between FLA with academic achievement.
Interesting discussion found in [8] that anxiety can be divided into two different kinds of anxiety: (i) debilitating anxiety, which motivates the individuals to ‘flight’ from the unfamiliar situation; and (ii) facilitating anxiety, which motivates the individuals to ‘fight’ for the unfamiliar situation [34]. This can be linked as one of the reasons in which FLA is not in a linear line with academic achievement as depicted in the present study, for the students—in their foreign language performance—can either face the anxiety or run from it.

6 Conclusion

The present study aimed to explore the psychological effect on learning a foreign language, that is the feeling of anxiousness in learning and performing a foreign language. The findings of the study presented that female students tend to feel more anxiety in the use of foreign language situation compared to male students. Although the anxiety level of the female students indicated higher, there is a significant difference with the male students. Through this study, it is also evident that the anxiousness that the students feel or experience does not affect their academic achievement. The finding of this study showed that there is no correlation between foreign language anxiety level with academic achievement. This study may be used as a beneficial reference for researchers and educators interested in studying anxiety in foreign language learning, for it distinctively discusses anxiety in gender, as well as the correlation between FLA and the students’ academic achievement.

The present study contains several limitations. The participants of this study were limited by involving the third-year English Department students from the same university, and a scale questionnaire as the sole instrument to obtain the data. To attain thorough and diverse result, involving more college participants using qualitative approach would be beneficial for the future research. For instance, the future research may use a questionnaire alongside interviews and documents analysis. Complementary studies are needed to support the present study focusing on foreign language anxiety in gender and academic achievement.

References


