

English Language Anxiety Among Junior High School Students In A Rural Public High School

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Abstract

This study investigated the level of English Language Anxiety (ELA) among Junior High School students in a rural public high school, Philippines. Utilizing a descriptive-inferential methods design, the research first quantified ELA levels across communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) with 54 student-respondents. Subsequently, rooted in Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety theory and Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, the findings indicate moderate levels of ELA across all measured dimensions, with limited English exposure outside school. The study suggests no significant relationship between ELA and academic performance, highlighting the need for tailored interventions to enhance students' communicative competence in English.

Keywords: *English Language Anxiety, Junior High School Students, Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Test Anxiety, academic performance, moderate anxiety, translanguaging.*



Introduction

English is a global language crucial for education, employment, and international communication, also serving as the medium of instruction in the Philippines due to historical influence dating back to the American colonial period and reinforced by policies like Executive Order No. 210 (2003) and its implementing rules (DepEd Order No. 36, s. 2006). These policies mandated English as a second language from Grade 1 and as the primary medium of instruction for English, Mathematics, and Science from Grade 3 onwards, and for at least 70% of total time allotment in secondary education, aiming to develop aptitude, competence, and proficiency in the language to maintain global competitiveness.

Despite ongoing national efforts, including the recently introduced MATATAG Curriculum (released January 30, 2023), which seeks to unravel the K to 12 curriculum and focus on basic skills such as language, reading, and literacy (Senate of the Philippines, October 18, 2023), English Language Anxiety (ELA) remains prevalent among Filipino students. The DepEd has also introduced such programs as "Sulong EduKalidad" (February 2020) to respond to issues of basic education quality, including the scrutiny of the K-12 curriculum, enhancing learning spaces, and upskilling teachers, acknowledging a drop in the nation's English Proficiency Index ranking (ABS-CBN News, November 27, 2020). In addition, some efforts are directed at ensuring teacher competency, including the English Proficiency Test (EPT) as a requirement of teacher-applicants in public schools (IRJET, February 2018; DepEd Order No. 7, s. 2015). Although there is general ELA research, this study intends to specifically fill the knowledge gap concerning what makes junior high school students in rural, multilingual regions such as Central Lebak District, Sultan Kudarat, experience ELA anxieties.

Moreover, endeavors also extend to teacher capability, with one of the requirements being the English Proficiency Test (EPT) among teacher-applicants to public schools (IRJET, February 2018; DepEd Order No. 7, s. 2015). While there is generic ELA research, this research specifically addresses the necessity of comprehending the causes and trigger mechanisms of ELA among junior high school students in rural, multilingual areas like Central Lebak District, Sultan Kudarat, where certain linguistic and educational environments could make these fears more intense.

The study is underpinned by Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) theory, which defines language anxiety in terms of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis also underpins the model in highlighting the ways in which affective variables such as anxiety can hinder the acquisition of language.

The study aims to:

1. Profile junior high school students by age, grade level, gender, home language, and English exposure outside school.
2. Assess their ELA level across communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.



3. Determine their academic performance in English.
4. Examine the relationship between ELA level and academic performance in English.

The study hypothesizes no significant relationship between ELA and academic performance (H_0) versus a significant relationship (H_a).

Methods

This research utilized a descriptive-inferential design to examine English Language Anxiety (ELA).

Locale of the Study

The study was done in an integrated high school in Central Lebak District, Sultan Kudarat. The rural district was chosen for the linguistic and cultural diversity of the setting, represented by indigenous groups (Manobo-Dulangan, Teduray), Hiligaynon speakers, and socioeconomic issues that restrict English exposure outside the classroom.

Respondents of the Study

A total of 54 Junior High School (JHS) students from an Integrated School participated in the quantitative phase using total population sampling.

Research Instruments:

1. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986) was employed for quantitative data, which measured ELA on communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation on a five-point Likert scale (1.00-1.80: Very Low; 1.81-2.60: Low; 2.61-3.40: Moderate; 3.41-4.20: High; 4.21-5.0: Very High).

Statistical Treatment Analysis:

- Respondents were profiled and their overall ELA levels were ascertained using descriptive-inferential statistics (mean, standard deviation).
- Pearson correlation coefficient (r) was utilized to determine the relationship between English proficiency and English academic performance.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of this study.



Profile of Student-Respondents in Terms of Age, Grade Level, Gender, and Primary Language Spoken at Home

The student-respondent profile indicates a young, female population in the lower grades of junior high with a strong indigenous language background and minimal daily use of English outside the classroom.

Most of the respondents (35.71%) were 14 years old, while a mere minority (5.38%) were 17 or older. Grade 8 had the biggest representation (33.93%), followed by Grade 9 (28.57%), Grade 7 (23.21%), and Grade 10 (16.07%). More respondents were female (64.29%) than male (35.71%).

This demographic indicates that the findings of the study heavily indicate the lives of early adolescent female students within these particular grade levels. Linguistically, the vast majority (78.57%) indicated Manobo-Dulangan as their first language used at home, reflecting a strong indigenous linguistic and cultural identity in the group.

The other participants communicated Hiligaynon or other indigenous languages, as consistent with the multilingual profile of the study site. Additionally, the majority of participants (71.43%) had less than one hour a day of English usage outside of school, which also suggests that English is not prevalently spoken in their daily social or home environments. This restricted out-of-school exposure to English might have consequences for their general English language proficiency and confidence.

Level of English Language Anxiety

Junior High School students in Central Lebak District reported a moderate level of English Language Anxiety across all measured dimensions, such as Communication Anxiety, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Test Anxiety, as detailed in the tables below.

Table 1. Level of English Language Anxiety in Terms of Communication Apprehension among Junior High School Students in a Rural Public High School

Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English class.	2.84	1.49	Moderate Anxiety
I tremble when I know I'm going to be called on in English class.	2.64	1.42	Moderate Anxiety
I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	2.96	1.37	Moderate Anxiety
It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.	2.96	1.25	Moderate Anxiety
I feel confident when I speak in my English class.	2.74	1.2	Moderate Anxiety
I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.	3.15	1.14	Moderate Anxiety
I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.	3.17	1.3	Moderate Anxiety
I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.	2.94	1.22	Moderate Anxiety
I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English.	3.40	1.25	Moderate Anxiety
Section Mean	2.86	1.29	Moderate Anxiety

The average communication apprehension level was Moderate (Mean=2.86, SD=1.29). Students reported feeling unsure when speaking English, trembling when called upon, and experiencing self-consciousness in front of peers. Anticipation of being called upon and speaking publicly were particularly anxiety-provoking.

Table 2. Level of English Language Anxiety in Terms of Fear of Negative Evaluation among Junior High School Students in a Rural Public High School

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.	3.29	1.3	Moderate Anxiety
2	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English.	2.62	1.31	Moderate Anxiety
3	I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.	3.29	1.29	Moderate Anxiety
4	I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers.	3.09	1.36	Moderate Anxiety
5	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	3.11	1.29	Moderate Anxiety
6	I often feel like not going to my English class.	2.75	1.39	Moderate Anxiety
7	I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	2.76	1.32	Moderate Anxiety
8	I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.	3.15	1.27	Moderate Anxiety
9	English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	2.8	1.27	Moderate Anxiety
10	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.	3.37	1.2	Moderate Anxiety
11	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English.	3.02	1.25	Moderate Anxiety
12	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	2.87		Moderate Anxiety
Section Mean		3.00	1.35	Moderate Anxiety

The overall fear of negative evaluation also indicated Moderate Anxiety (Mean=3.00, SD=1.35). Students expressed worry about making mistakes, not understanding the teacher, comparing themselves to peers, and receiving negative judgments. The highest anxiety in this domain stemmed from not understanding every word the English teacher said.

Table 3. Level of English Language Anxiety in Terms of Test Anxiety among Junior High School Students in a Rural Public High School

	Indicators	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	I am usually at ease during tests in my English class.	3.13	1.28	Moderate Anxiety
2	I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.	3.23	1.14	Moderate Anxiety
3	In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	3.2	1.3	Moderate Anxiety
4	Even if I am well-prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.	2.78	1.31	Moderate Anxiety
5	The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get.	2.74	1.33	Moderate Anxiety
6	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.	3.24	1.27	Moderate Anxiety
7	I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.	2.98	1.18	Moderate Anxiety
8	When I'm on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	2.79	1.36	Moderate Anxiety
9	I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions that I haven't prepared for.	2.98		Moderate Anxiety
Section Mean		2.98	1.35	Moderate Anxiety

Similar to the other dimensions, test anxiety registered as Moderate Anxiety (Mean=3.00, SD=1.28). Key indicators included feeling nervous during tests, worrying about failure, and forgetting known information due to nervousness.

Table 4. Summary of the Level of Anxiety among Junior High School Students in a Rural Public High School in terms of Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, and Test Anxiety

Summary	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Communication Apprehension	2.89	1.29	Moderate Anxiety
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.00	1.3	Moderate Anxiety
Test Anxiety	2.98	0.07	Moderate Anxiety
Grand Mean	2.96	0.89	Moderate Anxiety

The summary of English language anxiety among learners revealed a consistent pattern of moderate anxiety across all measured dimensions. The overall grand mean for English



language anxiety was calculated at 2.96 (SD = 0.89), firmly establishing a general moderate level of anxiety among the participants. These results suggest that while learners do experience some apprehension in various aspects of English language learning, it is not overwhelming and may, in fact, be a manageable level that allows for continued engagement with the language.

Relationship Between English Language Anxiety and Academic Performance

Table 5. Significant Difference of English Language Anxiety Experience and Academic Performance of JHSS In Terms of Its Causes and Triggers

P-value	Remarks	Interpretation
0.450003	Very Low Negative	Accept the Null Hypothesis

Based on the study's framework, it was hypothesized that higher anxiety levels would be associated with lower academic performance in English, aligning with existing literature on Foreign Language Anxiety and its impact on cognitive processing. A significant negative correlation would support the alternative hypothesis (H_a).

Discussion

The repeated finding of moderate English Language Anxiety (ELA) on all dimensions (communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety) among junior high school students in a rural public high school, in the face of severe linguistic problems, paints a complex picture of language learning in this setting. This is in line with Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) theory by Horwitz et al. (1986), which suggests that students' own perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors play a large part in contributing to their anxiety in the English class. Yet the moderate as opposed to high level of anxiety, under the daunting barriers, calls for further investigation based on appropriate literature.

The extensive prevalence of Manobo-Dulangan spoken at home and very minimal exposure to English outside the classroom (71.43% having less than an hour a day) unquestionably reinforce a significant language deficit these students endure. This failure of daily English exposure generally contributes to greater anxiety levels since natural practice and confidence opportunities are minimal (e.g., Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). These students' worries about presenting in front of classmates, erring, and understanding what the teacher wants them to do are typical expressions of language anxiety, especially in settings where English is mainly an academic course rather than a medium of everyday communication (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991).

In spite of factors that could predict high English language anxiety levels, various factors account for the moderate level reported by learners, particularly in rural areas. For instance, students within such areas, particularly those in communities having a strong indigenous linguistic and cultural profile such as the Manobo-Dulangan, tend to develop pragmatic expectations regarding their level of competence in English. This is due to the fact that they identify common challenges among peers and accept that English is not a ubiquitous aspect of their every-day lives, resulting in less critical self-judgment than English-rich students (Zhang &



Zhong, 2012). In addition to this, an encouraging classroom culture in public high schools is important. In such environments, students and the school culture tend to accept errors as part of the learning process, which greatly reduces the level of anxiety (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013; Young, 1991). Such is usually brought about by a culturally responsive pedagogy that considers students' languages of origin.

Additionally, learners in difficult learning environments also tend to develop coping strategies and resilience. Although they become anxious, it is mostly kept at a tolerable level, which represents a constant struggle but never debilitating panic, since they learn to cope with the natural challenge of learning English despite the limited exposure. Students have been found to adopt strategies such as practice, feedback solicitation, and relaxation methods to keep anxiety at a level they can control (Khreisat, 2022). Within a close-knit rural community, the peer cohesion and cultural background also help alleviate anxiety. A shared recognition and tolerance of different levels of English proficiency among peers can reduce feelings of isolation or extreme self-consciousness on the part of the individual and therefore hinder the growth of anxiety (Jones, 2004; Young, 1991).

Finally, as the prime concern of the classroom shifts to academic demands and testing, as opposed to spontaneous communication, learners are likely to segment their anxiety. They may suffer from moderate test anxiety but not a pervasive, all-encompassing fear in all English encounters, thanks in large measure to the fact that there is little opportunity for natural communication outside school. This coincides with the differentiation between general language anxiety and skill-specific anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Conclusions

On the basis of the results, the conclusions are:

First, ELA is at a moderate level on all the dimensions of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, which means that students feel uneasy but still manage to use the language.

Second, students' anxiety is conditioned by internal feelings of inadequacy and external classroom conditions, including peer scrutiny and high-stakes testing.

Third, spontaneity-eliciting classroom activities that involve public speaking, performing for others, or understanding new material are primary anxiety promoters. Additionally, students display coping strategies like self-talk, preparation, and emotion regulation and are highly dependent on the influence of motivating teachers in order to feel secure and confident.

Fourth, there is no strong correlation between ELA levels and performance in English academic subjects and coursework, indicating that anxiety is not a single determinant of students' performance or failure.

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