



## THE DYNAMICS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY EXPERIENCED BY INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS

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### Abstract

*Foreign language anxiety is known as one of the variables that negatively affect students' achievement. It may be influenced by many factors and therefore it is dynamics, not a stable variable. The objective of this study is to describe the dynamics of foreign language anxiety (FLA) of Indonesian students over a ten-week period. The level of anxiety was measured by using Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) administered in two-time points. 344 students from two senior high schools participated in the study. To examine the changes in students' FLA, repeated measures Manova, repeated measures Anova and one-way ANOVA were used. The results revealed that the students' foreign language anxiety level changed over time, with Fear of Failing the Class decrease while two other constructs, Communication Apprehension and Fear of Negative Evaluation showed an increase. Further study is suggested to examine factors that contribute to the dynamics of each construct.*

**Keywords:** Foreign Language Anxiety, Achievement, Dynamics

### 1 Introduction

In the second language acquisition (SLA) area, foreign language anxiety could be said as the most widely researched topic due to its frequent occurrence and intensity (McIntyre, 2017). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as a psychological construct with three sub-constructs namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

Communication apprehension refers to a condition where people feel shy and the shyness is caused by fear of talking to other people. It is manifested as both verbal communication anxiety, such as difficulty in talking in groups; and receptive anxiety, such as having trouble in listening to or learning spoken messages. This construct influences foreign language anxiety greatly because people who have problems speaking in groups are more likely to have serious problems in speaking in the foreign language classroom.

Fear of negative evaluation may be experienced by language learners in every activity in class. Students are not only worried about negative views from the teacher. They are also concerned about their peer's negative evaluation. Consequently, learners who are prone to others' bad reviews would experience difficulties in participating actively in the foreign language classroom. A diary study by Cohen and Norst (1989) investigating adults learning a foreign language corroborated this explanation and reported that "language and self are so closely bound, if not identical, an attack on one is an attack on the other" (p.61). Therefore, it is understandable why language learners fear negative evaluation from others.

Test anxiety is a part of foreign language anxiety because, in foreign language classes, students' performance is continuously examined and the worry of not passing a test result in anxiety associated with doing the test. Thus, Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed that foreign language anxiety is responsible for language learner's failure.

Since the emergence of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et.al (1986), designed to measure foreign language anxiety experienced by students in the foreign language classroom, an impressive body of research focusing on the link between foreign language anxiety and language learners' achievement has revealed consistent results that foreign language anxiety correlated inversely with achievement. In her review article, Horwitz (2001) included 15 research studies conducted between 1986 – 2000 involving learners of different languages including English, French, Japanese, Spanish, and Russian, and revealed that foreign language anxiety and achievement were inversely related. A current research study reviewing research on foreign language anxiety by Oteir and Al-Otaibi (2019) revealed a similar situation that FLA negatively affects students' achievement.

Foreign language anxiety as one of the effective factors is believed to be dynamics, not a stable one. Gregersen (2020) states that foreign language anxiety “forms part of an interconnected, constantly-in-flux system that changes unpredictably over multiple time scales.” While in general the dynamics of FLA have been established, very few studies examined the dynamics of each construct measured by FLCAS. This study aimed at exploring the changes in each construct of anxiety in foreign language classrooms experienced by Indonesian high school learners of English in the Indonesian high school context.

## 2 Literature Review

### Foreign Language Anxiety and Language Skills

Research on foreign language anxiety and its influence on language skills suggests that this affective variable affected students' mastery of the four language skills, speaking, listening, reading, and writing, with speaking activities identified as the most anxiety-provoking for students, especially when they were required to talk to the audience or were asked to speak on the spot. (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017; Chou, 2018; Horwitz, et. al, 1986; Woodrow, 2006; Worde, 2003).

A research study focused on the interconnection between anxiety and students' speaking skills or oral activities by Hewitt and Stephenson (2012) revealed that there was a negative connection between this psychological construct and speaking exam scores ( $r = -.49, p < .001$ ). Similarly, a study examining this anxiety in advanced English for Academic Purposes (EAP) classes in Australian higher education institutions prior to their university study revealed inverse relationships between foreign language anxiety and speaking ability (Woodrow, 2006). Participants in this study reported experiencing foreign language anxiety in speaking, not only within the classroom but also when they talked to native speakers outside the classrooms. A qualitative study investigating Indonesian learners of English in a context similar to that of Woodrow's study revealed similar findings in that participants' foreign language anxiety prevented them from speaking fluently in English (Hasan, 2007; Hasan & Fatimah, 2014).

Research on foreign language anxiety has developed with researchers not only targeting the impact of this variable on speaking. Since 2005, the investigations of foreign language anxiety have started to examine the effect of foreign language anxiety on students' achievement in language skills other than speaking. Few have directly focused on listening anxiety and achievement (Atasheneh & Izadi, 2012; Bekleyen, 2009; Golchi, 2012). Other studies on listening anxiety did not explore the relationships between listening anxiety and achievement but examined the impact upon listening tasks and listening anxiety (Melanlioglu, 2013). This experimental study reported that listening anxiety could be decreased by using authentic tasks.

As one of the receptive skills, reading seems to be the most resistant to the anxiety effect. However, this skill has attracted more attention from language researchers interested in the influence of foreign language anxiety than have listening skills, as indicated by more studies examining the association of anxiety and reading in a foreign language (Al-Shboul et.al, 2013; Jafarigohar & Behrooznia, 2012; Liu & Samimy; 2012; Zhao, Dynia & Guo, 2013).

Research conducted on the connection between writing anxiety and students' writing skills still showed perplexing findings. This is probably due to the use of different scales to measure students' writing anxiety levels. A study by Atay and Kurt (2006) although conducted quite recently, still used the Daly-Miller Writing Apprehension Test (Daly and Miller, 1975) to assess students' writing anxiety and reported there the absence of interconnection between students' anxiety in this skill and students' performance in writing. This study utilized SLWAI only to describe the level of students' writing anxiety, without relating the result of the measurements to students' writing achievement. To obtain a clear description between second and foreign language writing anxiety and students' writing performance, it is necessary to conduct further research using the same scale.

Considering the negative effect of this variable on students' mastery of the language, it is important to know the dynamics of foreign language anxiety over a certain time period to better understand at what point of study this variable affects most of the students' learning process.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Material

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was developed by Horwitz, et al. (1986) to measure students' foreign language (FL) anxiety in the context of classroom learning. It has 33 items with a 5-point Likert-type scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) strongly agree, and (5) strongly agree. Due to negatively-worded items, items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32 were reverse-coded.

The authors of the FLCAS did not state the fundamental constructs of the scale and despite its wide use, previous investigations have reported different findings in regard to its constituent factors. So far, there has been no published study using an Indonesian version of the FLCAS. Considering the absence of construct examination of an Indonesian version and the discrepancies in reporting of previous research regarding the constructs of the FLCAS, it was decided to conduct maximum likelihood (ML) exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with direct oblimin rotation to identify the fundamental structure of the 33 items of the FLCAS. This revealed three constructs of Indonesian students' foreign language anxiety labeled as Fear of Failing the Class, Communication Apprehension, and Fear of Negative Evaluation.

#### 3.2 Participants and setting.

344 senior high school students participated in this study. They were from two different senior high schools, in Padang, West Sumatra, Indonesia. They were between 16 and 17 years old (Year 10) and between 17 and 18 years old (Year 11). Selected characteristics of student participants at each time point of data collection are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Participants of the study at Time 1 and Time 2

#### *Characteristics of Participants at Time 1 and Time 2*

School	Grade		Gender	
	Year 10	Year 11	Male	Female
School 1	134	48	53	129
School 2	109	53	55	107
Total	243	101	108	236
Total participants	344		344	

3.3

#### Research Procedure

To examine if there were significant changes in students' foreign language anxiety repeated-measures MANOVA was used. Time was the within-subjects factor and school, grade (Year 10 and

Year 11), and gender were between-subjects factors. This provided a general picture of changes, and group differences, in students' foreign language anxiety across the semester. Univariate repeated-measures ANOVA(s) with Bonferroni correction identified specific factors on which significant change or group differences occurred. In cases where significant interaction effects were detected, two follow-up tests were performed: a repeated-measures ANOVA and one-way ANOVA. The further repeated-measures ANOVA probed whether changes on the scores of each sub-scale were significant for each between-subjects group of students; the further ANOVA investigated changes in students' scores per group.

## 4 Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Results

The descriptive statistics of the FLCAS revealed that students felt more worried and anxious about failing the class as indicated by the highest mean for the *fear of failing the class* factor. Generally, students experienced moderate anxiety levels across timepoints.

To investigate whether there were changes in students' FL anxiety over 10 weeks of learning English, a one-way repeated-measures MANOVA was conducted. The three FLCAS dimensions were the dependent variables, time was the within-subject factor, and school, grade, and gender were between-subject independent variables across the two-time points. Preliminary assumption testing was conducted and no serious violations were noted. The results revealed a statistically significant main effect for anxiety,  $F(2, 331) = 241.58, p < .001$ , Wilks' Lambda = .41, partially  $\eta^2 = .41$  suggesting different anxiety levels. However, there was no significant main effect for time detected.

There was a significant two-way interaction effect detected involving time and anxiety,  $F(2, 331) = 21.97, p < .001$ , Wilks' Lambda = .88,  $\eta^2 = .88$  indicating that overall students' anxiety scores changed over time. There were also two significant three-way interaction effects: between time x anxiety x school  $F(2, 331) = 5.61, p = .01$ , Wilks' Lambda = .97, partial  $\eta^2 = .97$  and between time x anxiety x grade  $F(2, 331) = 5.72$ , Wilks' Lambda = .97, partial  $\eta^2 = .97$ . This suggests that anxiety dimensions changed differentially for students from different schools and grades. Figure 1 shows the changes in students' mean scores on the three FLCAS subscales over time across the whole sample.

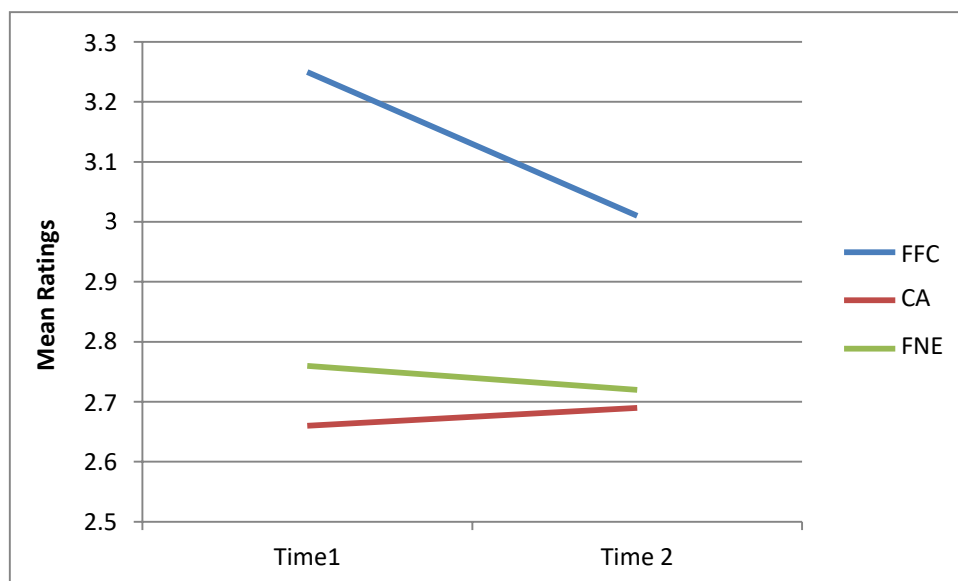


Figure 1. Students' mean scores on the FLCAS over time.

Note :

FFC = Fear of Failing the Class; CA = Communication Apprehension;

FNE = Fear of Negative Evaluation. Scale range is 1: Strongly agree to 7: strongly disagree.

Follow-up repeated measures ANOVAs were inspected for each of the three subscales of the FLCAS to examine the presence of significant differences across timepoints and whether the changes in students' FL anxiety were related to school, grade or gender. Bonferroni correction was utilised to address the number of dependent variables involved in these analyses. For the first subscale, *fear of failing the class*, there was a statistically significant main effect for time,  $F(1, 333) = 11.07, p = .001$ , Wilks' Lambda = .97, partial  $\eta^2 = .03$  implying that students' *fear of failing the class* significantly decreased from the first week ( $M = 3.25, SD = .66$ ) to the 10<sup>th</sup> week ( $M = 3.01, SD = .63$ ). There were no significant interaction effects revealed for this subscale indicating a general decrease.

For the second subscale, *communication apprehension*, there was a significant main effect for time,  $F(1, 334) = 5.28, p = .02$ , Wilks' Lambda = .98, partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . A two-way significant interaction effect between time and grade revealed that Year 10 and Year 11 students changed differently over time,  $F(1, 334) = 8.71, p < .01$  Wilks' Lambda = .98, partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Figure 2 presents this interaction. Year 10 students reported a similar *communication apprehension* level at each end of the 10 week period of study. Conversely *communication apprehension* increased for Year 11 students  $F(1, 100) = 6.65, p = .01$ , Wilks' Lambda = .94, partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ .

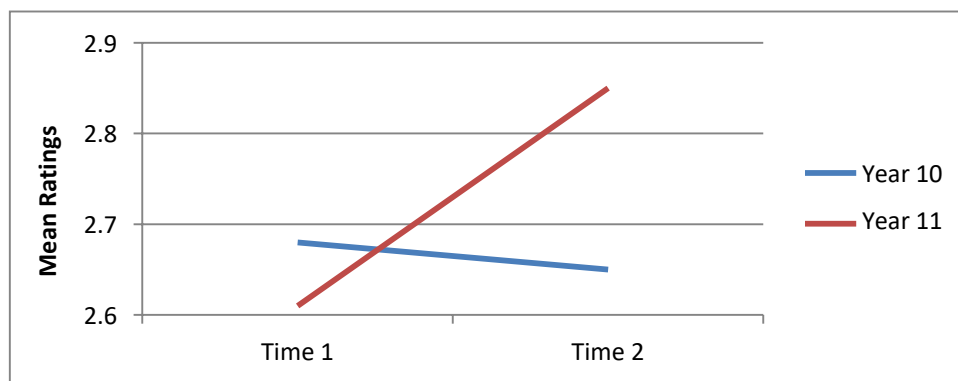


Figure 2. Interaction effect between time and grade for *communication apprehension*.

To examine whether there was a significant difference between Year 10 and Year 11 students' scores at each of Time 1 and Time 2, one-way ANOVA was conducted at each timepoint. The result indicated that the significant difference between the two grades was only at Time 2,  $F(1, 341) = 9.07, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Thus, although Year 10 and Year 11 students began with similar levels of *communication apprehension*, by the end of the 10 weeks, the Year 11 students' levels had significantly increased, whereas the Year 10 students had maintained a stable level.

For the third subscale, *fear of negative evaluation*, a non-significant main effect for time suggested that time did not change students' scores. However, this was not true for all groups, as revealed by a significant interaction effect between time and grade  $F(1, 333) = 3.97, p = .04$ , Wilks' Lambda = .99 and partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Figure 3 presents the interaction effect between time and grade for *fear of negative evaluation*.

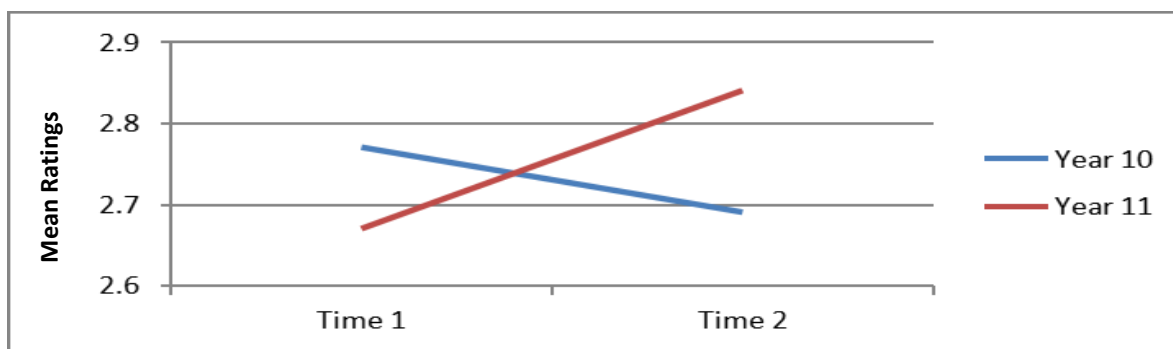


Figure 3. Interaction effect between time and grade for *fear of negative evaluation*.

Further repeated-measures ANOVAs were run to examine whether the changes in students' scores over time were significant within each grade. The results indicated these changes were not significant for either grade. To find out whether there was a significant difference between Year 10 and Year 11 students' scores at each of Time 1 and at Time 2, one-way ANOVA was conducted at each time point which revealed no significant difference between Year 10 and Year 11 students' scores at either timepoint. Thus despite the significant time x grade interaction effect, in fact, Year 10 and Year 11 students' scores remained similar and stable.

## 4.2 Discussion

Quantitative findings revealed that Indonesian high school students experience medium levels of foreign language anxiety during the process of learning English in the classroom. The highest of the three aspects of anxiety at the two time points was *fear of failing the class*, followed by *fear of negative evaluation*. Students felt least anxious about *communication apprehension*, as indicated by its lowest score among the three dimensions of the FLCAS. This finding was not in agreement with previous research (Frantzen & Magnan, 2005; Kim, 2009; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Woodrow, 2006) which found that the most commonly-cited anxiety was related to communication apprehension experienced by the students during oral performances, oral exams and speaking in and out of class. The discrepancy between the findings of the present study and those of previous research studies could be explained in relation to the different contexts. When one considers the Indonesian high school context, it is quite understandable why the students scored higher on *fear of failing the class* and *negative evaluation* dimensions than on *communication apprehension*.

*Communication apprehension* is a type of anxiety mostly experienced by students in relation to speaking activities. Previous research has reported that English classrooms in Indonesia were lacking in oral communicative activities (Kaluge, Setiasih, & Tjahyono, 2004) therefore, students did not experience *communication apprehension* as highly as the participants of the studies cited above. Since the introduction of English as a foreign language into the Indonesian curriculum in 1945, the approach used to teach it has been the grammar-translation method. This approach has been very dominant and, although this curriculum was replaced by the Communicative Approach in 1984, the textbooks developed to implement the new approach were still very structurally oriented. In other words, there was an incompatibility between the curriculum, being communicative, and the syllabus, which was structurally oriented (Lie, 2007). For example, the topic of pragmatics was not integrated into the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing), but presented in a separate chapter in the textbooks. Thus, the communicative approach was not fully implemented.

With respect to teaching methods, a teacher-centered approach is very commonly employed in the Indonesian context (Kaluge, Setiasih, & Tjahyono, 2004). There is a lack of individual interaction between the teacher and students, which is probably due to teachers' expectations of what it means to teach in Indonesia. To employ communicative activities in the classroom, teachers need to have a good command of English. Unfortunately, research has indicated that many English teachers in Indonesia are themselves, poor users of English (Hamied, 1997; Ridwan, Renandya, & Lie, 1996).

As a result, teachers have relied heavily on structurally-oriented textbooks focusing on grammar points rather than facilitating students to use English in communicative activities.

These occurrences were evident in the classroom observations conducted for the present study; activities requiring students to speak English in the classroom context were rare. Students mostly sat quietly and passively during the class, appearing familiar with these practices and this type of teaching process. It is likely the same practices have been experienced since the students started learning English at junior secondary school or, even, from primary school for those who attended private schools. Thus, students take for granted that, in English class, they will learn more grammar and complete more reading exercises than engage in speaking activities. It is not surprising, then, that students in this study exhibited the lowest levels of *communication apprehension* compared to the other two dimensions of the FLCAS across the two-time points. In other words, low *communication apprehension* did not mean that the participants in the present study were confident with their English capabilities in speaking but, rather that they expected to perform little speaking during the English class.

## 5 Conclusion

Foreign language anxiety appears to be a dynamic variable that fluctuates during a foreign language learning process. For foreign language teaching, it brings implications to raise teacher's awareness that different factors at a different time of the learning process may provoke students' anxiety. In addition, each construct of foreign language anxiety may be affected differently at different time points. This awareness may help teachers to prepare the language class, avoiding factors that may increase students' anxiety levels. Further research examines factors that influence each construct of foreign language anxiety is recommended.

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