

## **Foreign Language Learners' Anxiety in Language Skills Learning: A Case study at Universitas Kristen Indonesia**

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### **Abstract**

Anxiety has been a matter of substantial concern in foreign language (FL) learning setting for educators since it is a major obstacle learners need to overcome (Ellis, 2008; Wu, 2010). This study was aimed at finding out students' language anxiety in learning the four language skills at a university level in English as a FL context. The participants were 71 students of the English education Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia. Data was collected by administering a set of questionnaire. To support the data, interview was conducted to some of the respondents. Findings showed that the majority of the students were more anxious on writing skill, followed by reading, speaking and listening in their language learning process. It is highly recommended that the teachers or faculties be more creative in making the language skills classes atmosphere more fun and relaxing so that the students could achieve higher learning results.

**Keywords:** *anxiety, non-native learners, language learning process*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Many learners often complain about being anxious while learning a foreign language. They claim to have a mental block against learning the language. Horwitz (2001) asserted that one-third of all foreign language learners experience some level of such phenomenon, which is called language anxiety. That's why foreign language anxiety has been a topic of much interest and research in recent years. It is considered as one of the most important affective factors that Influence foreign language learning (Na, 2007). It keeps learners from reaching their goals (Horwitz, 2001) and prevents foreign language learners from successful performance in the target language (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013).

Learners may suffer from anxiety in relation to a number of aspects of the teaching-learning process, including the language complexity, about speaking in front of other learners, about the language class, about the behavior of their peers, about taking tests, about the speakers of the language they are learning, etc. Thus, foreign language anxiety could take place if learners are exposed to several negative experiences in a foreign language context (MacIntyre, 1999; Sparks and Ganschow, 2007; Horwitz *et al.*, 2010; Hewitt and Stephenson, 2012).

A number of researchers have defined the anxiety in relation to language anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning experience" (p.128). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) defined foreign language anxiety as "the feeling of

tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (p. 284). It is also defined as the worry and negative emotional reaction when using or learning a second or foreign language (MacIntyre, 1999). Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) state that individuals experience language anxiety when they are required to use the second language with which they are not fully proficient. Language anxiety is characterized by feelings of apprehension and physiological responses such as increased heart rate.

It is believed that anxiety can have negative impacts that may result in physiological and behavioral symptoms in learners. For example, it can change the learners’ behavior like unwilling to study, difficult in concentrating and etc. (Cooke, Bewick, Barkham, Bradley, & Audin, 2006). According to Duraku (2016) there are two main factors that can affect the learners’ anxiety i.e., academic and stress factors. The academic factor mostly deals with the learners’ academic activity. Erlauer (as cited in Duraku, 2016) stated that “the high pressure to achieve commendable results in exams has been recognized to negatively influence the students’ academic performance and to increase their level of stress”. Whereas the stress factor has to do with the learners’ psychological, financial and health problems or other personal aspect (see Goodman in Duraku, 2016).

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) stated that language anxiety has an influence on language acquisition, retention, and production; therefore, foreign language anxiety has a negative influence on the whole process of language learning. This is supported by the notion that anxiety is of the negative psychological effects that might impede learners from achieving the task of mastering a foreign language (Park & French 2013, Zhou 2016).

Recent studies have indicated that foreign language anxiety causes negative effects on foreign language learning performance and achievement. Several studies (Coulombe, 2000; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Kamarulzaman *et al*, 2013), revealed negative correlations between general foreign language anxiety and course grades. Horwitz (2010) found that speaking is the skill most affected by foreign language anxiety, because speaking in a foreign language is often sensed as a “threat to peoples’ self-concept, self-identity, and ego, which they have formed in their first language as reasonable and intelligent individuals” and the inability to present oneself according to one’s self-image can set a learner into the cycle of negative self-evaluation as language and the self are intimately bound. Other studies (MacIntyre, Noels, & Cle’ment, 1997; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991; Young, 1992; Sellers, 2000) showed negative correlations between foreign language anxiety and speaking grades. Other studies (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Bekleyen, 2009; Kim, 2000 and Yang, 2000) showed negative correlations between foreign language listening anxiety and listening course grades. Negative correlations were also found between foreign language reading anxiety and reading scores (Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Sellers, 2000; Zhao, 2009), and between foreign language writing anxiety and writing achievement (Daly, 1991; Cheng *et al.*, 1999; Chen & Lin, 2009).

Most researchers have paid much attention to foreign language anxiety sources (e.g. Young, 1994; Jackson, 2002; Alsowat, 2016), types of foreign language anxiety (e.g. Horwitz *et al.*, 1986), the influence of general foreign language anxiety on learners’ performance (e.g. Taha & Wong (2016), the relationship between anxiety and level of study (e.g. Cheng, 2002); Elkhafaifi, 2005) and correlation between anxiety and motivation (e.g. Liu & Chen, 2015; Liu & Huang, 2011). However, such studies are still

very limited in Indonesian context. Ariyanti's (2017) study in a university in Samarinda revealed that students anxiety in academic writing was caused by the big pressure they felt when they had writing assignment under time constraint and their lack of confidence due to their inadequate capability in English language proficiency and to relate ideas from experts' theories to support their essay content. Muhlis' (2017) study on 32 tenth graders in a senior high school in Bandung showed that most of the students perceived anxiety in medium level (71,9% students admitted) and there were two major potential factors of foreign language reading anxiety: text features (unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar topic, and unfamiliar culture) and personal factors (making errors and worry about reading effects). Abrar's (2017) study involving 72 second-year EFL students studying an English Teacher Training program at a public university in Jambi revealed that proficiency variable is the most significant factor for predicting the variation in speaking anxiety.

Almost all these studies focused on the causing factors of anxiety and the effect of anxiety on specific language skill. To the present researches, the only study conducted to investigate different effects of foreign language anxiety to the four language skills is Male's (2018) study involving 85 students of a private senior high school in Jakarta Timur. The study showed that the most dominant of the students' anxiety were found in speaking followed by reading, writing and listening in their language learning process. This study attempted to investigate university students' language anxiety in learning the four language skills.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

This research is a descriptive research which aims to describe the students' degree of foreign language anxiety and uses explanatory mixed method design, in which according to Creswell (2012) it enables the researchers to gather qualitative input, to explain and extend the quantitative results where its purpose is to obtain a comprehensive insight of the study. This study was conducted in November 2017 – February 2018 at the English Department, English Teaching Study Program, Faculty of Education and Teacher Training, Christian University of Indonesia in batch 2015-2017.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study is the whole students of the English education Department of Universitas Kristen Indonesia batch 2015- 2017. The sample was taken using purposive technique. The total number of the respondents was based on the whole number of the students of each batch. To get the interview data, a set of interview questions was also administered to a number of students who are randomly taken from each batch.

### **Instruments**

The data were collected administering a questionnaire and an interview. The questionnaire, consisting of 50 items (10 items of listening skill, 14 items of Speaking skill, 13 items reading skill, and 13 items writing skill) was adapted and modified from Muhaisen and Al-Haq (2012). The interview was administered to a number of students who were randomly taken from each batch. A recorded device was used to help the researcher interview the respondents. The questions of interview were taken from the statements written on the questionnaires.

To analyze the collected data, the researcher used the descriptive statistic technique by tabulating the data obtained through the questionnaire. The data obtained through the interview was transcribed, and analyzed and used to verify the data obtained through the questionnaire.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Data

As shown by Table 1, only a few of the participants were male, the participants were dominated by the female participants and their age varied from 18-21 years old. In this study the participants who participated were only three batches-batch 2015-2017 with the total number of the respondents is 71.

Table 1:  
*Participants Demographic Data (N= 71)*

No	Batch	Gender		Age (in years)				Total
		Male	Female	17-18	19-20	21-22	22-24	
1	2015	3	20		20	3		23
2	2016	1	23	20	4			24
3	2017	1	21	22				23

### Writing Skills Anxiety

Table 2 shows that among the 13 items of writing skills statements, 568 (61.54%) instances were found in *agree*, followed by 207 (22.43%) *undecided*, and 148 (16.03%) frequencies found in *disagree*. This indicated that the respondents were anxious with more than 61% of the aspects of writing skills learning. The data also revealed that the respondents were most anxious when they were asked to write in English. Almost 93% of the respondents stated “agree” that they were worried “*about being asked to write a composition.*” The aspect of writing skills learning receiving the lowest degree of anxiety (responded by 2 participants was their indifference to “*what others may think about my writing*”, which means that they were not worried what others think about their writing.

These findings were supported by data obtained from the interview. When asked whether they feel worried to write or not, all interviewees said they were worried with their writing. (R1) said, “Yes, I feel worried. I hardly express myself my thinking into a text or paragraph grammatically. It is hard to do.” (R3) said, “a little bit worried for the grammar when I write the text. I am afraid not make a good sentence that make the reader misunderstand.” Another interviewee (R12) stated similar response, “yes, I worry to write because not good enough in grammar.” In addition, when asked whether they feel better if they have prepared for the writing topic before class, interviewee (R10) responded, “Of course, if I have prepared the material I can easily write.” Interviewee (R13) said, “Yes, I feel better if I prepare.” Another interviewee (R15) said, “Yes. It can help me practice.”

Table 2:  
*Respondents' Writing Skill Anxiety*

No.	Statements	Responses (N=71)		
		Agree f (%)	Undecided f (%)	Disagree f (%)
1	I feel better if I have prepared for the writing topic before class	54 (76.1)	12 (16.9)	5 (7)
2	Interesting topics make me feel better in writing tasks	38 (53.5)	19 (26.8)	14 (19.7)
3	I do not care about what others may think about my writing	60 (84.5)	9 (12.7)	2 (2.8)
4	I feel comfortable when I am asked to write about topics that I am familiar with	42 (59.2)	26 (36.6)	3 (4.2)
5	I start to worry when I know I will be graded in writing	44 (62)	20 (28.2)	7 (9.8)
6	I feel frustrated if I fail to organize my ideas coherently	44 (62)	15 (21.1)	12 (16.9)
7	I worry about how to organize my thoughts and ideas in an English composition	43 (60.6)	16 (22.5)	12 (16.9)
8	I worry about writing even if my writing will not be graded	42 (59.2)	24 (33.8)	5 (7)
9	I worry about finding the appropriate expression to write a composition	27 (38)	14 (19.7)	30 (42.3)
10	I am worried about being asked to write a composition	66 (93)	2 (2.8)	3 (4.2)
11	I am worried about what others may think about my writing	39 (55)	22 (31)	10 (14)
12	I am afraid to ask my teacher for help in writing	37 (52.1)	14 (19.7)	20 (28.2)
13	I feel bashful to ask my classmate for help	32 (45.1)	14 (19.7)	25 (35.2)
Total of frequency		568	207	148

To sum up, the results showed that most of the respondents were worried about their writing skill among the other language skills and they also seemed to prefer preparing their material in advance before the class as their own way to reduce their anxiety in writing skill. In terms of the highest degree of language skills, the present finding confirms the study by Muhaisen and Al-Haq (2012).

Table 3 indicates that the respondents also had quite high anxiety with *reading*. Among the 12 items of writing skills statements, 513 (62.18%) instances were found in *agree*, followed by 158 (19.15%) *undecided*, and 154 (18.67%) frequencies found in *disagree*. Table 4 also showed the highest item of reading language skill experienced by the students was 59 (83.1) '*I feel comfortable when reading short texts.*' The lowest item was 4 (5.634), '*I become anxious when I have to read English loud in class.*' Which means that they were worried when they have to read out loud in class.

## Reading Skills Anxiety

Table 3:  
*Respondents' Reading Skill Anxiety*

No	Reading Skill	Respondents (N=71)		
		Agree	Undecided	Disagree
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
1	I feel comfortable when reading short texts activities	59 (83)	6 (8.5)	6 (8.5)
2	I feel comfortable when reading about interesting topics	52 (73.2)	13 (18.3)	6 (8.5)
3	I feel anxious about misinterpreting a written text	39 (54.9)	17 (24)	15 (21.1)
4	I get frustrated when I do not understand the main idea of what I read	48 (67.6)	18 (25.4)	5 (7)
5	I feel anxious about un familiar grammatical structures when reading something in English	43 (60.6)	12 (16.9)	16 (22.5)
6	I feel anxious about not understanding the meaning of every word	32(45.1)	15 (21.1)	24(33.8)
7	I become anxious when I have to read English loud in class	57 (80.3)	10 (14.1)	4 (5.6)
8	I become anxious when I have to answer questions in class about what I read	31 (43.7)	24 (33.8)	16 (22.5)
9	I feel worried to see a whole page of English words in front of my eyes	33 (46.5)	17 (23.9)	21 (29.6)
10	I feel worried about the teacher asking me questions after skimming reading tasks	39 (54.9)	13 (18.3)	19 (26.8)
11	I become anxious when I have to answer multiple choice questions about what I read in English	35 (49.3)	22 (31)	14 (19.7)
12	I get scared when I have to read lengthy texts in English as a home work	45 (63.4)	18 (25.3)	8 (11.3)
Total of frequency		513	185	154

The data were also supported by the respondents' interview result when the respondents were asked whether or not they feel worried to read. A number of the respondents said that they had no problem in reading. A respondent interviewed (R2) said, "No problem to me in reading because I like reading and *I want to be good in reading. Because I like some books.*" Another interviewee (R7) stated similar response, "*I don't feel worry because I love reading.*" However, few of them said that they were sometimes worried about reading. Interviewee (R4) stated that *Yes, sometimes, if the words are unfamiliar to me and if I should read in public and if I make a mistake in pronunciation.* Another interviewee (R14) '*Yes, sometimes I don't understand.*'

When asked whether they feel comfortable when reading short texts activities. The majority of the respondents showed that they preferred to read short text. As it is clearly stated in Table 4 that 59 (83.1%) instances of 12 items shows the highest among the rest. Interviewee (R10) said, "*Yes, I can focus more to the text. If it is too long it is complicated.*" Another similar response (R12) said, "*I prefer short text. If longer text it makes me confused.*"

In summary, a number of learners also felt worried on reading skill. In the study conducted by Muhaisen and Al-Haq (2012) revealed that the second degree of the learners' anxiety in reading skill was moderate. Therefore, it may be assumed that the present study also confirmed the study by Muhaisen and Al-Haq. The next discussion dealt with the respondents speaking skill anxiety as can be seen in Table 5.

### **Speaking Skills Anxiety**

Table 4 shows that the third language skills of anxiety occurred in Speaking. It is clearly seen in the total of occurrences of each frequency found in this study. 512 instances were found in *Agree*, followed by 318 instances were found in *Undecided*. Next, 235 instances were found in *Disagree*. The result also indicated that the respondents highest anxiety were found in statement number 10.53 (74.7%), they were worried when they are to be corrected by the teachers in front of their friends. The data were also supported by the respondents' interview result. When the respondents were asked whether they felt worried to speak, a number of respondents agreed that they were anxious, a respondent interviewed (R4) said, "yes, if my grammar or pronunciation is bad. And if someone is better than me I feel worry." Another interviewee (R6) said, "yes, because I am still bad in pronunciation and I am confused to make a sentence in English."

When asked whether they felt comfortable to speak to other in English. Interviewee (R12) said, "Sometimes I feel comfortable if I know the topic and grammar too." Interviewee (R10) said, "yes if the people better than me. No, if I can speak better than the people." The other interviewee (R17) said, "yes, to my friends. To teachers sometimes I feel worried because I am not sure with my speaking."

In the third rank, the degree of anxiety experienced by the learners found in this study is speaking. It is also clear that the foreign learners were not much anxious on speaking. They seem to show less anxious in the skill. In the study conducted by Muhaisen and Al-Haq (2012), the speaking skill was categorized as moderate which means that the students have little worries on such skill. Therefore, in Muhaisen and Al-Haq (2012) study is relevant to the present findings. Next, the writer discussed the anxiety found in listening skill as can be seen in Table 6.

Table 4:  
*Respondents' Speaking Skill Anxiety*

No	Speaking Skill	Respondents (N=71)		
		Agree	Undecided	Disagree
		f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
1	I feel worried when I have to speak to others in English.	43 (60,6)	15 (21,1)	13 (18,3)
2	I am worried about expressing myself clearly when I am talking in English.	40 (56,3)	21 (29,6)	10 (14,1)
3	I feel anxious when I have to make a presentation in English.	37 (52,1)	20 (28,2)	14 (19,7)
4	I do not care if my classmates laugh at my English language when I speak in class.	31 (43,6)	19 (26,8)	21 (29,6)
5	I feel anxious about oral tests.	35 (49,3)	28 (39,4)	8 (11,3)
6	I feel anxious when I have to speak to my teacher in English.	33 (46,5)	21 (29,6)	17 (23,9)
7	I am worried that others will laugh at my English.	30 (42,3)	18 (25,3)	23 (32,4)
8	I feel bashful when I speak in English in front of the class.	27 (38)	21 (29,6)	23 (32,4)
9	Oral tasks make me anxious more than other tasks.	34 (47,9)	28 (39,4)	9 (12,7)
10	I do not like to be corrected by my teacher in front of my classmates.	53 (74,7)	13 (18,3)	5 (7)
11	I feel worried about the possibility that the teacher may ask me a question.	19 (26,8)	23 (32,4)	29 (40,8)
12	I get embarrassed when I have to answer my teacher's questions orally.	30 (42,3)	24 (33,8)	17 (23,9)
13	I do not feel anxious when I speak to my classmates in English.	29 (40,9)	24 (33,8)	18 (25,3)
14	I feel better about speaking in English in a small – sized class.	43 (60,6)	23 (32,4)	5 (7)
15	I get embarrassed when I have to answer my teacher's questions	28 (39,4)	20 (28,2)	23 (32,4)
Total of Frequency		512	318	235

Table 5 describes that the last language skill anxiety of the respondents is *listening*. It is clearly seen in the total of occurrences of each frequency found in this study 359 instances were found in *Agree*, followed by 222 instances were found in *Undecided*. Next, 93 instances were found in *Disagree*. The result also indicates that the highest of respondents listening skill anxiety were found in statement number 10.51 (71.8%), *Listening to short dialogues/ conversations enables me to remember what I hear easily* which means that most of them agreed or have no worries if they have short dialogues/conversation.



## Listening Skill Anxiety

Table 5:  
*Respondents' Listening Skill Anxiety*

No	Listening Skill	Respondents (N=71)		
		Agree f (%)	Undecided f (%)	Disagree f (%)
1	I am worried when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in English class	41 (57.7)	17 (24)	13 (18.3)
2	I am worried when I do not understand every word I hear	44 (62)	17 (24)	10 (14)
3	I feel anxious when I do not understand English spoken with an unfamiliar accent	46 (64.8)	21 (29.6)	4 (5.6)
4	I feel anxious when someone speaks to me quickly	43 (60.6)	19 (26.7)	9 (12.7)
5	I feel anxious about listening tasks	31 (43.7)	24 (33.8)	16 (22.5)
6	I feel anxious when listening to intricate	44	21 (29.6)	6 (8.4)
7	I feel anxious when I listen to a long conversation	31 (43.7)	27 (38)	13 (18.3)
8	I feel anxious when someone speaks to me about a topic I am not familiar with	35 (49.3)	31 (43.7)	5 (7)
9	I feel anxious when I have to listen to a speech without any visual aids (e.g. drawings, pictures, notes...etc)	29 (40.8)	29 (40.8)	13 (18.4)
10	Listening to short dialogues/ conversations enables me to remember what I hear easily	51 (71.8)	16 (22.6)	4 (5.6)
Total of Frequency		395	222	93

The data were also supported by the respondents' interview result. When the respondents were asked whether they felt worried when they do not understand every word they hear, a respondent interviewed (R4) said, "yes, if I don't understand the word that I hear when someone ask me I don't understand what I should answer." Another interviewee (R17) said, "yes, because if I don't understand every word I hear, I feel like a stupid."

When asked whether listening to short dialogues/conversations enables them to remember what they hear easily. Interviewee (R5) said, "Yes it can help me remember with short dialogues or conversation. If it is long dialogue, it is a bit complicated." Another interviewee (R7) said, "Yes, because a short dialogue will be easier to me to memorize." The other interviewee (R20) said, "Yes, because short dialogues or conversation give a little meaning and I can easily remember what the topic about."

Even though listening skill is found to be the last in terms of the degree of language anxiety, it does not mean that the learners have no worry. They were little anxious in the skill. This present findings links to the study conducted by Brantmeier (2005) who pointed out that students have low anxiety in listening skill. Additionally, In comparison to the writer's previous study (see Male, 2018) In terms of its sequence of occurrences, the present findings did not confirm the study conducted.

### Overall Language Skills Anxiety

Table 6 shows that the majority of the respondents' anxiety was found in writing skill. It can be seen in the highest frequency of instances emerged in the study i.e., 568 instances found in *Agree* followed by, *Undecided* (207 instances), and *Disagree* (148 instances). It is found that the Reading skill in the second rank with the highest frequency was found in *Agree* (513 instances), followed by *Undecided* (185 instances), and *Disagree* (154 instances). The third rank is Speaking skill with the total frequency was found in *Agree* (512 instances), followed by *Undecided* (318 instances), and *Disagree* (235 instances). The last frequency of respondents' anxiety was found in Listening skill with the highest frequency was found in *Agree* (395 instances), followed by *Undecided* (222 instances), and *Disagree* (93 instances).

Table 6:  
*Respondents' Overall Language Skills Frequency of Anxiety*

No	Anxiety of Language Skills	Respondents (N=71)		
		Agree	Undecided	Disagree
		f	f	f
1	Listening	395	222	93
2	Speaking	512	318	235
3	Reading	513	185	154
4	Writing	568	207	148

In summary, among the four language skills, it is obvious that the majority of the respondents were worried much on the writing skill. The result also indicates that many students were not confident in writing that may result in a poor writing performance and it seems that the writing skill is more daunting. Therefore, the teachers or faculties need to consider and find out the effective ways to reduce or ease the anxiety that the students experience or may feel during their learning of writing as well as other language skills. As the result, this way can also help and support successful language learning in the context of English as a foreign language.

### CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The results of the study have shown the most dominant of undergraduate students anxiety of language skills was Writing, followed by Reading, Speaking and Listening. As the result of the writing skill was the highest among the other language skills, the teachers are hoped to pay a careful attention to the skill without ignoring the other language skills. The result also showed that the writing problem emerged may be due to the lack of various task of activities that should be given to the students dealing with the language skills. Another alternative that can be offered to the teachers is that to be more creative in their teaching and learning activities which is focused more on the student-student centered learning that the students may result in having less anxious and gain more confidence.

In addition, to reduce the language skills anxiety, it is highly suggested to the teachers to provide a more fun and joyful teaching and learning activities. By doing so, the students can minimize their anxiety and would have a better achievement in their study and for a further investigation is then highly recommended. In order to be better and develop more, a big scale study should be kept developing for future research. In other words, assessing the language anxiety in the context of EFL should give the teachers and faculties indication of how learning methods or new directions in the classroom should be accommodated for a betterment.

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