



## **Exploring the Relationship Between English Language Anxiety and Students' Grammatical Competence**

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DOI: 10.53103/cjess.v3i4.149

### **Abstract**

The exact strategy of this research is to find out the level of English language anxiety, the students' grammatical competence and the relationship between the two aforementioned variables. The respondents were the 33 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students of Saint Columban College for the Academic Year 2022-2023. A quantitative research was used to determine the relationship between English language anxiety and students' grammatical competence. The researchers conducted a survey of the respondents using a survey type questionnaire and rated using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) scale for their perceived view on their level of English language anxiety. Additionally, an English comprehensive exam was administered to measure the students' grammatical competence. The results revealed that the level of English language anxiety was deemed to be high based on the data gathered. Moreover, the students' level of grammatical competence was overall deemed to be low based on the scores gathered from the English comprehensive examination. However, Pearson - product Coefficient of Correlation results revealed that there is no significant relationship between English language anxiety and the students' grammatical competence based on the yielded P - value of  $p - \text{value} = 0.405$  which is more than the level of significance  $=0.05$ . Thus, the regular implementation of certain developmental strategies and methods by both the English instructors and the students was suggested to ensure continuous progress in reducing anxiety and improving grammatical competence.

Keywords: English Language Anxiety, Grammatical Competence

### **Introduction**

The Philippines has long been recognized as one of the biggest English-speaking countries, with a significant portion of the population demonstrating considerable fluency in the language. This propelled the Philippine constitution to recognize English as a second language (ESL), solidifying its prominent position in national progress. The English language was even considered an official language in the country according to the

provision of Article XIV Section 7 of the 1987 Constitution. Hence, Filipino learners are mandated to have English as one of the mediums for standard communication, albeit speaking and writing, to make Filipinos more globally productive and competitive citizens (Cabigon, 2015). Despite the continued efforts, certain factors create challenges in developing learners' communication skills. One of those is second language anxiety, specifically, English language anxiety. This type of anxiety has been somewhat of a challenge to students for the past decades. Specific findings show that it significantly affected the technicality of what they are trying to convey, i.e., how they construct their ideas and cohesion.

Learners' anxiety could be common during instructional procedural processes, especially if the subject, method, or teaching style is unfamiliar. The prevalence of language anxiety in an exceedingly second language classroom is more than enough to affect much harm in teaching and learning the four language skills, particularly the writing skill. Language anxiety within the classroom is further exacerbated by the worry or apprehension of second or foreign-language learners, which can significantly affect effective learning of the target language. Teachers play a significant role in enriching students' learning experiences, and they could trigger anxiety within the second language classroom without being attentive to it (Honggand, 2019).

### **Defining Second/English Language Anxiety**

Foreign/second language anxiety" is the term used to describe anxiety related to learning a second or foreign language (Hakim, 2019, p. 65). Furthermore, it is also stated that second/foreign language anxiety is described as the feeling of intense unease, worry, nervousness, and apprehension experienced in learning or using a second or foreign language (Tran & Moni, 2015). The leading causes of foreign language anxiety have been categorized into three main components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation (Csizer et al., 2015). Senel et al. (2018) found that language anxiety hindered language learning, particularly in developing the four skills. They advised that efforts should be made to identify the areas of ESL students' concerns, calm them down, and look into the causes of their anxiety. Acquiring the grammatical skills of a specific language needs a lot of practice and motivation to hit the goal. Language anxiety is just one of the hindrances in acquiring a foreign language; a lack of information about it makes it even harder. Many instructors teaching foreign languages acknowledge language-induced anxiety among students and demotivation in-class participation in acquiring the language (Dewey et al., 2018).

### **Effects of Second/English Language Anxiety**

Language anxiety affects language acquisition, retention, and production; as a result, it has a detrimental effect on the entire language-learning process. The idea that anxiety is one of the detrimental psychological impacts that could prevent students from successfully studying a second language, such as English, supports this. Language anxiety destroys learners' self-confidence, resulting in poor performance and low productive skills in communication. Language anxiety is a relevant issue, especially for those English foreign language learners. This anxiety stops them from expressing their thoughts and ideas and the chance to accumulate more knowledge. This will result in low self-esteem, poor classroom performance, and a lack of productive communication with the community (Sadiq, 2017). Anxiety will start to rise when speaking and doing a different activity in a foreign language, which is highly difficult and might be provoking to someone. For foreign language learners, being stuck in a situation where they have no idea what to do or say tortures their cognitive and emotional states, sometimes even destroying them (Mede & Karairmak, 2017).

The studies of Macayan (2015), Ali (2021), Tati (2016), Kartini (2017), and Kaur (2016) particularly discovered that second language anxiety had a significant effect on students' writing and speaking performance as well as with their overall communicative confidence. It is important to note that most of these studies primarily focus on the learners' general communicative abilities, such as writing and speaking, and do not usually intend to focus on the internal structure. This study explores how second language anxiety mainly affects the structural framework of language itself: grammar. It aims to fill the gap between SLA and internal and external inquiry into language and communication.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Within decades of psychological studies, the concept of anxiety is often linked to displaced physical grasp and disturbed mental harmony which then leads to unpleasant results. Anxiety in relation to a second language, most specifically English, is instigated by a certain type of situation. Second language anxiety is a measure of a person's language proficiency, with high levels of it resulting in unsatisfactory academic performance. Academic achievement and foreign language anxiety have been proven to have a detrimental association, according to studies (Horwitz, 2001). Using a foreign language fluently takes time and requires a lot of effort to master. In the process of achieving this, learners went through a lot of academic, emotional, and anxiety stress. Through this, a foreign language learner has difficulties using the language and loses focus. This phenomenon is very common in classroom settings, where the students learn to develop anxiety over matters like learning a foreign language. The pressure put on them makes them more anxious (Horwitz & Cope, 1986).

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study used the descriptive-correlational type of research design. This design describes the relationships that occur naturally between different variables as correlational designs typically examine if the changes that happen to one specific variable affect the other variable or variables included in the study (Walker, 2005). Monsen and Horn (2007) also stated that this study design would allow the researchers to quickly see the changes that happen in between the variables, such as the changes in the attitude or behavior of the participants, which determined the possible outcome that influenced the trend of changes in the future. This type of design has been vital for this study as it has helped determine the relationship between learners' English language anxiety and grammatical competence.

### **Research Environment**

The study was conducted in a private institution in the city center of Pagadian in the province of Zamboanga del Sur which offers courses related to the English language, specifically Bachelor of Secondary Education - Major in English.

### **Research Participants**

The participants in this study are the 2nd year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students for the School Year 2022-2023. They agreed to participate, and students assured that their responses will be kept anonymous. The researcher remained focused on the students and guided them in answering the comprehensive exam provided.

### **Instrument**

The researchers developed a questionnaire with Likert scales to gather the required information. The questionnaire was used to assess the students' perception of their level of English language anxiety. In popular terms, this questionnaire is known as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). An English grammatical comprehensive examination with questions taken from the Licensure Exam for Teachers Reviewer (LET) and University of the Philippines College Admission Test (UPCAT) designed to measure one's grammatical competence. This type of examination measured the students' syntax fluency, also mastery in morphology, Lexis, and semantics and resembled elements of known standardized English proficiency tests such as the Stanford English Language Proficiency Test (SELPT) and General English Proficiency Test (GEPT).

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

The research adviser and the school administration have first approved the data gathering through a survey questionnaire and the test sample. Next, a letter was signed and approved by the Department Dean regarding the application of the survey and test for the 2nd year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students. Then, the 33 selected 2nd Year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students first answered the given survey questionnaire using an anxiety scale in the classroom where they had a class. The respondents encircled the rating scales they think are very observable based on their views. After that, the students answered a test designed to measure their grammatical skills. This test was divided into four categories, measuring the student's syntax fluency, spelling proficiency, vocabulary, and word formation proficiency, which encompasses their grammatical competence. The Approval of the research adviser and validation of the survey questionnaire and test sample. A letter to conduct study is to be signed and approved by the Department Dean regarding the application of the survey and test. Students answer a given survey questionnaire. Students answer comprehensive tests.

### **Statistical Treatment**

To analyze and interpret data, descriptive statistics were utilized, such as percentages, weighted mean as a measure of average, standard Deviation as a measure of the variability of numerical observation, and ranks used to probe the learners' English language anxiety and its relation to the learners' grammatical competence. The Pearson-product Coefficient of Correlation was used to test the hypothesis of a significant correlation between the learners' English language anxiety and learners' grammatical competence. This measures the strength of the linear association/relationship between the two variables (Crammer, 1998). This statistical procedure uses the level of marginal statistical significance, p-value, for the rejection or acceptance of the null hypothesis. The decision rule states that if p–the value is less than or equal to the significance level, the null hypothesis is rejected, yielding a significant result. Otherwise, the null hypothesis is accepted. Furthermore, the null hypothesis was tested at  $\alpha = 0.05$  level of significance. Finally, the predictive analytic software Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics 2018) was used to carry out these statistical analyses.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The researcher is accountable for demonstrating ethical management and protecting against any harm or risk that study participants consented to. To prevent skewed input from other respondents, the insights and data that were gathered from the respondents will be kept confidential. As long as doing so does not jeopardize the empirical validity of the researchers' work, students in BSED have the choice to share or

not share their personal information with them. Researchers fully disclose the reason they were selected as target participants for the study in order to ensure that participants have a clear knowledge of its objective. The researchers take great care to prevent plagiarism and provide adequate evidence for the claims and arguments they plan to make to the corpus of knowledge. The scientists made a decision regarding what to do. Because participants in research provide their approval to be a part of a study and must be provided with adequate information to provide "informed" consent, they asked participants to sign an assent form.

### Findings

The findings of the study describe 2nd year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students for the School Year 2022-2023's perception of their own English language anxiety, their grammatical performance and how the aforementioned variables correlate to each other. It proves that the BSED Major in English students definitely have an issue with how they deal with their anxiety in facing various activities using the English language and how it now manifests to have a detrimental effect on their grammatical competence.

Table 1: Level of English language anxiety of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year bachelor of secondary education – Major in English students of Saint Columban College

Category	Mean	Standard Deviation	Description
Communication Apprehension	2.54	.60097	High
Test Anxiety	2.40	.55593	Low
Fear of Negative Evaluation	2.78	.52587	High
Overall Result	2.57	0.56092	High

*Hypothetical Mean Range:*

*1.00 – 1.74 = Very Low;*

*1.75 – 2.49 = Low;*

*2.50 – 3.24 = High;*

*3.25 – 4.00 = Very High*

The level of English Language Anxiety in terms of Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation as evaluated using the English comprehensive examination. As shown in the results, the first sub-variable,

Communication Apprehension, garnered an average mean of 2.5411. The second sub-variable, Test Anxiety, garnered a mean of 2.3970, and the third sub-variable, the Fear of Negative Evaluation, garnered a mean of 2.7818. Furthermore, the overall level of English Language Anxiety among the 2nd year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students of Saint Columban College was interpreted to be "High," as verified in the overall mean of 2.5733.

Table 2: Level of grammatical competence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> year bachelor of secondary education – Major in English students of Saint Columban College

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
Syntax	8.21	2.86	Fair
Semantics	8.61	2.70	Fair
Morphology	7.97	2.72	Low
Lexis	6.79	1.49	Low
N	33		

*Scale:*

*0.00-4.00 = Very Low;*

*4.01-8.00 = Low;*

*8.01-12.00 = Fair;*

*12.01-16.00 = High;*

*16.01-20.00 = Very High*

The level of grammatical competence among the 2nd year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students across all competencies is quite low. As revealed in the results, the mean score of students for Syntax is 8.2121 with a Standard Deviation of 2.85873 and is interpreted as Fair. The mean score of students for Semantics is 8.6061 with a Standard Deviation of 2.70346 and is interpreted as Fair. Meanwhile, the mean score of students for Morphology is 7.9697 with a Standard Deviation of 2.72127 and is interpreted as Low. Lastly, the mean score of students for Lexis is 6.7879 with a Standard Deviation of 1.49494, which is interpreted as Low. The total mean score for all competencies is 31.5758.

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Table 3: Test of significant relationship between English language anxiety and students' grammatical competence

	Findings
N	33
Pearson r	0.150
p – value	0.405
Decision	Accept Ho
Interpretation	Insignificant

<i>Correlation</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>.00-.20</i>	<i>Negligible to Low</i>
<i>.20-.40</i>	<i>Low</i>
<i>.40-.60</i>	<i>Moderate</i>
<i>.60-.80</i>	<i>High/Substantial</i>
<i>.80-1.00</i>	<i>Very High</i>

The null hypothesis, which stated that there was no significant correlation between English language anxiety and students' grammatical competence, was tested at 0.05 level of significance using a sample correlation coefficient  $r$ . As illustrated in the table, Pearson  $r = 0.150$  and  $p\text{-value} = 0.405$ .

Since  $p\text{-value}$  is greater than the significance level, the null hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is no significant correlation between English language anxiety and students' grammatical competence. The results show that even if high English language anxiety persists in the classroom, this is still not the deciding factor in students' overall grammatical competence.

### Discussion

#### Level of English Language Anxiety of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students of Saint Columban College

The results suggested that the 2nd year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students lack the confidence to express their ideas in English through various modes of communication, such as speaking to each other or writing essays, or any other communicative activities involving writing. A few maladaptive behaviors associated with high levels of Communication Apprehension that impede interpersonal connections and



everyday interactions are high levels of self-criticism, persistent social anxiety, melancholy, and mindfulness (Khajavy et al., 2018).

The data above demonstrates that the 2nd year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students still have great doubts about showing their skills in English, and they often get nervous showing it in fear of being perceived negatively by other peers. That is in various manifestations, like laughing, teasing, and verbal misconduct. The prospect of being evaluated negatively by peers or instructors is, to some extent, proposed to let students strive to hone their English competence. However, the onset brings an overwhelmingly negative impact on students' well-being, affecting oral and written performance. Concerning the fear of negative evaluation, anxiousness, compliance, and social prevention also can be seen as other effects of negative perception (Stephan et al., 2016).

### **Level of Grammatical Competence of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students of Saint Columban College**

The substance and grammatical difficulty of writing-related contents can impact text comprehension as well as other abilities. Because learning is the result of the interaction of specific cognitive skills and can be influenced by emotional conditions, affectivity can have a negative impact on a student's ability to retrieve and produce verbal information, as in the case of grammatical skill development (Bayliss and Raymond, 2004: 44). As a result, the intricacy of the topic of grammar gives both a challenge and a chance for pupils to build their own degree of skill.

### **The Relationship Between English Language Anxiety and Students' Grammatical Competence**

Communicating using the specific target language seems to be the most challenging aspect of second language learning, and the strong emphasis on developing communicative capability poses difficulty for the ones experiencing anxiety. (Horwitz, 1986). Moreover, findings also show that grammatical competence continues to be poor among the students surveyed, with a total mean score of 31.5758. English proficiency has become an important issue in Philippine higher education due in part to a heightened awareness of the role of English ability in employment outcomes (Musa et al., 2012). Increased recognition of language learning and English prowess has also been evident in universities over recent years.

Furthermore, students entering universities and colleges must have high grammatical competence and, generally, English proficiency to have a strong edge in employment and academic advances to cope with the ever-increasing globalization (Pawanchik, 2006). As mentioned earlier, the yielded result of the two variables having no

significant relationship means that the presence of English language anxiety does not fully determine the outcome of one's grammatical competence or proficiency in the English language. However, the constant issue of anxiety within the academic field is not to be ignored, as this paves the way for new problems to arise that may significantly affect students' learning outcomes (Sadiq, 2017).

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Based on the summary of findings, it was found out that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students of Saint Columban College has a high level of anxiety. This essential finding was substantiated by the three sub-variables namely Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation were entirely assessed as “High” with Fear of Negative Evaluation dominating numerically over the other sub-variables which signified that the students have strong distress over negative perception and assessment by peers over communicating in English which greatly affected their competency in the English language. Meanwhile, the study also found out that 2<sup>nd</sup> Year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students of Saint Columban College has poor grammatical competence. However, it was deduced that there is no significant relationship between the learners' English language anxiety and their grammatical competence which implied that even if high English language anxiety persists in the classroom, this is still not the deciding factor in students' overall grammatical competence. Still, the constant issue of anxiety within the academic field is not to be ignored, as this paves the way for new problems to arise that may significantly affect students' learning outcomes (Sadiq, 2017).

Since the English language anxiety among the 2<sup>nd</sup> year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major English students of Saint Columban College is high in the area of communication apprehension, certain developmental strategies and methods by both the English instructors and the students, such as short-term project works involving English, creating a supportive classroom atmosphere, and teacher immediacy (Macintyre, 1998) must be regularly implemented to ensure a steadier way for students to communicate their ideas in English through various mediums without having to go through multiple episodes of anxiousness, discomfort, and panic. The English language anxiety among the 2<sup>nd</sup> year Bachelor of Secondary Education – Major in English students of Saint Columban College is also high in fear of negative evaluation, which is the area where English language anxiety is highest. Since this is the case, students must always have adequate preparation for certain academic activities that will require English skills, such as essays, comprehensive exams, oratories, and speech activities, to ensure a satisfactory result in all of these activities. The study also found that the respondents have poor grammatical competence especially in the area of Lexis where the students scored the lowest. Strategies such as the easy use of direct

lexical resources in direct and indirect communication, adequate use of phraseological expressions, proverbs, words that are characteristic of the speech of native speakers are proposed to enhance the lexical competence of students (Cherevko, 2010).

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