

## AGE SEX AND GRADE ACROSS LEVEL OF EDUCATION EFFECT ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY

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### Abstract

Being designed in ex post facto, this research intends to seek the answer of the following research questions 1) is there a statistically significant effect of age, sex and grade difference on FL anxiety? 2) do females, older and lower grader participants score higher in foreign language anxiety? A research instrument, foreign language classroom anxiety scale, from Horwitz, Horwitz, Cope (1986) was distributed to collect the data about the level of FL anxiety which the participants have, the data then was analysed using independent t-test and Anova in SPSS 24. Performing independent t-test it was found that the t-value from age and sex group was 1,356 and 1,123 respectively, while sig. (two tailed) of the two group was .178 and .264 which was more than 0.05. This means that there was no significant difference of age and sex group in terms of foreign language anxiety. In other words, females and older participants are no more anxious than males and younger participants, and vice versa. Different patterns appeared in the result of data analysis of the effect of grade on foreign language anxiety using Anova. The mean difference of grade group was found to be statistically significant with F-value 3.847 and sig. 0.025 where .025 is less than 0.05. This computation implied that grade is a significant predictor for foreign language anxiety. In broader explanation, it was proved that lower grade students in junior high school tend to be more anxious than the upper ones in senior high school and university.

**Kata kunci:** foreign language anxiety, sex, age, grade

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### Introduction

Foreign language anxiety is not a new phenomenon in ESL/EFL context. Commonly foreign or second language learners must ever have encountered it in their learning stage. The statements such 'when I'm in my Spanish class I just freeze', 'I can't think of a thing when my teacher calls on me', 'my mind goes blank' (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986:125) are a few examples of FL anxiety which indirectly reflect that it has been frequently undergone by students notwithstanding sometimes being expressed in different ways. This matter is in line with Brown's statement (2000:150) that anxiety is generally recognized and experienced by people, yet it is difficult for them to define anxiety in a simple explanation.

In connection with the definition of FL anxiety, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986:128) defined FL anxiety as

"distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994:284) more specifically defined FL anxiety as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning". Moreover, Chi Kao, Craigie (2010:50) contended foreign language anxiety as an anxious feeling which learners could undergo when they learn foreign language.

According to Horwitz et al. (1986) FL anxiety has three elements; communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Brown (2000:151) elaborated further "communication apprehension arises from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas; fear

of negative social evaluation arises from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others; and test anxiety, or apprehension over academic evaluation". Meanwhile, anxiety in general is classified into two main categories by psychologists; trait anxiety and state anxiety (Horwitz 2001:113). "Trait anxiety is a part of people's character or an aspect of a more serious disorder....state anxiety, a social type of anxiety that occurs under certain conditions. For example, a person may not ordinarily be anxious but becomes so when asked to make a public address" (Papamihiel 2002:330).

The existence of FL anxiety in research has long been considered noteworthy, this is due to much of studies and findings examining anxiety suggested that FL anxiety negatively influences the process of learning second or foreign language (Horwitz 2001:115). She even asserted further that the higher the students have level of anxiety, the lower grade they will accept and expect. Chi Kao, Craigie (2010:51) subsequently maintained the acquisition's process of second language will be failed if the students encounter high level of anxiety. Furthermore, Oxford (1999:60) pointed that bad effect triggered by "harmful anxiety can be related to plummeting motivation, negative attitudes and belief, and language performance difficulties".

Studies investigating foreign language anxiety have already been conducted abundantly to examine the relationship and effect of certain variables and FL anxiety. For instance, the study to examine the relationship between FL anxiety and personality traits (MacIntyre and Charos 1996, Dewaele 2002, 2013, Dewaele and Al Saraj 2015, Gargalianou, Muehlfeld, Urbig, and Witteloostuijn 2015), the study to investigate the effect of socio-demographic variables such as sex, age

and grade on FL anxiety (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, Donovan 2002, Dewaele 2007, Dewaele, J.M, Petrides, K.V and Furnham, A. 2008, Arnaiz and Guillén 2012, Aydin, Harputlu, Celik, Ustuk and Güzel 2017), the study to examine the relationship between FL anxiety and language achievement, (MacIntyre and Gardner 1994, Horwitz 2001, Papamihiel 2002, Chi Kao, Craigie 2010), and so many others. However, in the form of findings resulted in, the effect of sex, age and grade on FL anxiety has not provided uniform conclusion due to conflicting findings presented by some researchers.

In the research carried out to investigate the effect of sex and FL anxiety, the findings fall into three categories. First, those stating females are more anxious than males, secondly, those indicating the opposite, and lastly, those claiming that sex does not provide significant effect on FL anxiety. Among the researchers that belong to the first category is one by Gargalianou, Muehlfeld, Urbig, and Witteloostuijn (2015), who investigated FL anxiety on 320 bilingual participants through a web-based survey administered at a major Dutch university. The result of their study revealed that females obtained average scores of 40.91, while males only got 33.50. The means difference of 7.41 between two average scores of male and female statistically has been considered significant based on two-sample t-test with unequal variances:  $t=5.07$ ,  $p<0.001$ , or in other word, female participants have inclination to have higher level of anxiety than males do. The other study by Hismanoglu (2013) who examined 132 English teacher candidates from a state university at Turkey also brought a concordant conclusion, furthermore he found males felt more confident when speaking in their foreign language class

than females. And last a study by Aydin, Harputlu, Celik, Ustuk and Güzel (2017) was also in a favor with the two previous findings, even more specifically they reported that fear of failure, teachers' corrections and negative evaluations and unpreparedness account for why females are more anxious than males.

But, the other studies, belonging to the second category, seem to weaken the above-mentioned finding by claiming the opposite, that is, actually males are more anxious than females. Such the studies, one of which was carried out by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Donovan (2002), after examining FL Anxiety on junior high school students at different grades level, they came up with the notion that anxiety remains constant on the boy across the grades level, while girls experienced decreased level of anxiety along with their higher grades level. They also maintained that the factor associated with it is the puberty which female encountered earlier than the male did. Moreover, Na (2007) also came up with not much different result. In her study, she argued that females had lower level of anxiety due to their adaptive characteristic in language learning and inclination to have higher score in English examination. However, between the two contradictory results of studies, the other surprising finding apparently emerged to attract attention for further investigation; the finding revealed that sex has no significant effect on FL anxiety. Such the study was conducted by Dewaele and Al Saraj (2015), Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (2008), Taghinezhad, Abdollahzadeh, Dastpak, Rezaei (2016), they all concluded that there was no significant effect of sex on foreign language anxiety, since the comparison of mean difference between male and female was not statistically significant.

Research examining the effect of Age on FL anxiety is also as interesting

as sex's in term of presenting inconclusive results. Hismanoglu (2013) found that younger participants scored higher on FL anxiety than the older ones. He also argued that younger participants tend to feel more tremble when knowing their teacher will call them, they were also reported to view other students as better language users, and lastly they tend to worry too much about failing their foreign language class. Dewaele and Al Saraj (2015) came up with not much different finding reporting that older participants experienced lower level of anxiety though they contended that even though age is a significant predictor for FL anxiety but the effect is small. The other finding was also found by Aydin, Harputlu, Celik, Ustuk and Güzel (2017), they examined the effect of age on FL anxiety among 494 Turkish children with age 7-12 who learn English as a foreign language at primary and secondary schools in Balikesir city centre in Turkey. The result of the study reported that of the three varieties of anxiety, communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, presented in 18 items of open-ended questionnaire, 10 items of the questionnaire regarding the age were found to be significant with FL anxiety under 0.05 significant values. They also come up with the same conclusion that younger students are more anxious than the older ones. However, the above-mentioned finding in fact was not in line with some studies conducted in the past. Dewaele (2007) found that the older students experienced more anxious than the younger counterpart did. He also asserted that the older group scored higher on FL anxiety not only in L2 but also in L3 as well. Moreover, Aydin (2013) reported negative condition undergone by older students who have higher level of anxiety such as more depressed, more restless and more afraid of failing the test than the younger ones.

The last variable which provides inconclusive finding is grade. In general, the study regarding to the effect of grade on FL anxiety has resulted two strong views among the researchers. The first view belongs to those stating that lower grades students have inclination to score higher on FL anxiety and the second one is those claiming that grade does not contribute significant effect on FL anxiety. Hismanoglu (2013) is one of the researchers who supported the first view with his result of the study revealing that lower grade participants tend to have higher level of anxiety than the upper ones. This is proven by his study on 132 candidates of english teacher at a state university in turkey. In term of grade, the participants are selected from four different grade level, they are the first-year (n=32), the second-year (n=38), the third-year (n=43), and the forth-year (n=19). Of the four grade levels, the forth-year participants were found to have the lowest level of anxiety, while the first-year participants shows the opposite pattern. Aydin et al. (2017) was also in a favor with the first view, which stated that lower graders are more anxious; they even asserted further that lower grade students suffer more from anxiety owing to examinations, unpreparedness and teachers' corrections.

Yet, the second view, grade giving no significant effect on FL anxiety, appears to contradict the above-mentioned research finding. Moreover, that was strengthened by other researchers who conducted similar research but coming up with different conclusion. Studies reporting that grades does not contribute significantly on FL anxiety were firstly done by MacIntyre, Baker, Clement Donovan (2002), in their study, participants coming up from grade 7,8 and 9 of junior high school in French are reported to show no significant

differences in term of L2 anxiety across the three grade levels above. Yassin and Razak (2017) are the other researchers who are in a favor with such the previous finding. They examine foreign language anxiety among 155 Yemeni students of English, Faculty of Arts, Ibb University. The participants are selected from four levels depending on stratified sampling as the students were divided into four groups: freshmen in first year, sophomore in second year, juniors in third year, and seniors in fourth year. Performing ANOVA to compare mean scores of the four different grades, they come up with finding that grade is not significant predictor for FL anxiety since the calculated F-value is 1.959 and it is not significant at 0.05.

In spite of the controversy among different findings in term of the effect of sex, age and grade on FL anxiety, such the study is still very worth doing to provide contribution in term of related literature in ELT context, especially in Indonesian context. Furthermore, to my best of knowledge, the research conducted to investigate the effect of sex, age and grade on FL anxiety in Indonesian context is hardly easy to find. The research on anxiety in Indonesian context mostly covers on the investigation towards following variables. For example, FL anxiety cause at the school or university (Mukminin, Masbirorotni, Noprival, Sutarno, Arif, Maimunah 2015, Marwan A 2008, Ariyanti 2017, Muhlis 2017), the relationship between FL anxiety and English achievement (Katemba 2013, Wienanda, [Widiati](#) (2018), Ningsih, Wisasongko, kusmaningputri 2015), and writing anxiety (Wahyuni and Umam 2017, Anggraini 2017). Due to the previous-outlined reasons, the researcher concludes to propose such the study. In sum, the present study is intended to answer the following research problem.

1. Is there a statistically significant effect of sex difference on FL anxiety? In other word, Do female participants score higher in FL anxiety than males?
2. Is there a statistically significant effect of age difference on FL anxiety? In other word, Do older participants score higher in FL anxiety than the younger ones?
3. Is there a statistically significant effect of grade difference on FL anxiety? In other word, Do lower grade participants score higher in FL anxiety than upper grade participants?

## Research Method

### a. Subject of the study

The participants in this study are 100 students from three different grades across different level of education. Thirty two participants are taken from eight graders of junior high school 4 Malang, thirty seven are chosen from eleventh grades students of senior high school Taman Harapan Malang and the last thirty one participants are selected from second semester students of Islamic university of Malang, academic year of 2017/2018. In term of sex, They consisted of 41 males and 59 females, while in the case of age, the youngest participants are 12 years old and the oldest counterparts are 20 years old.

### b. Research Instrument

For data collection, a research instrument, a questionnaire, is employed to collect the data about the level of FL anxiety which the participants may experience. The instrument is adopted from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale's (FLCAS) Horwitz et.al (1986). It consists of 33 items presented on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree nor disagree, 4=agree to 5=strongly agree. All of the items in the scale cover three types of FL anxiety

namely communication apprehension, test-anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. In term of instrument validity and reliability, foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) has been proved to have a very high validity and reliability with an alpha coefficient of .93 and eight-week test retest coefficient of .83 (Horwitz, Horwitz, Cope 1986). The instrument is also completed to collect basic information of the participants regarding to their sex, age and grade.

### c. Data Analysis

Two statistical analysis are performed to compute the collected data, they are independent T-test and ANOVA. The use of independent t-test is functioned to measure the effect of sex and age on FL anxiety. Furthermore the mean score of FL anxiety from males is compared with that from females and the mean score of participants aging 12-16 is compared with the participants aging 17-20. Meanwhile, Analysis of variance (ANOVA) is applied to measure the effect grade on FL anxiety and is used to compare the mean score of three groups of grade. They are eight graders of junior high school, eleventh graders of senior high school and fifth semester students of University.

## Findings and Discussion

### a. Findings

The findings of the research are presented to answer the following research problem:

1. *Is there a statistically significant effect of sex difference on FL anxiety? In other word, Do female participants score higher in FL anxiety than males?*

based on the table of independent T-test computation between female and male average score. Females obtained mean 112,64, males got mean 109,93. In a glance, it appears a pattern implying that females tend to be more anxious than males, yet the analyses on the

significance of the difference between the two means of males and females reflected t-values 1.050 with significant value .298 which is more than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). It means, despite having slight difference, in fact there is no significant difference in the case of foreign language anxiety between females and males.

2. Is there a statistically significant effect of age difference on FL anxiety? In other words, Do older participants score higher in FL anxiety than the younger ones?

The statistical finding of comparison between those aging 12-16 years old and 17-20 years old average score in table 4.2 showed that younger participants had mean score 113.50, in other hand older participants obtained 110.22. This 3.283 mean difference appears to raise a clue that younger participants are more anxious than the older ones. However based on the analysis of significant difference, the clue is not truly correct since it was found that the t-values was merely 1.356 with significant value .178 or more than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). In other words, though the younger participants appear to be more anxious than the older counterparts based on the mean difference, yet the difference was considered insignificant statistically.

3. Is there a statistically significant effect of grade difference on FL anxiety? In other words, Do lower grade participants score higher in FL anxiety than upper grade participants?

Referring to table 3, there seems a hint that eighth graders of junior high school have the highest level of anxiety and eleventh graders of senior high school score the lowest level of anxiety of the three grades. This inclination is based on the mean score of which three grades obtained, eighth graders of junior high school got 114.88, eleventh graders

of senior high school fetched 107.46 and second semester students had 112.94. Therefore to prove this temporary belief, the analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed. Based on the table of Anova computation, analyses on the significance of the differences among the three means in grade group found F-value 3.847 with significant value .025 or less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ), which means that grade difference provide any significant effect on foreign language anxiety.

## b. Discussion

Having hypothesis testing in the previous chapter, the present study has drawn three main findings which support and contradict the previous research relating to the effect of sex, age and grade on foreign language anxiety. The first finding is that sex was not proved statistically to provide significant effect on FL anxiety. In other words, the mean difference resulted in by males and females, did not infer that they are different in the case of foreign language anxiety. Furthermore, it means that males are not more anxious than females and vice-versa. Thus, the present study contradicts the study done by Hismanoglu (2013), Gargalianou, Muehlfeld, Urbig, and Witteloostuijn (2015), Aydin, Harputlu, Celik, Ustuk and Güzel (2017). All of whom fall into the conclusion that females are more anxious than males. Moreover, the present study also against the finding which inferred that males have higher level of anxiety than females, like studies conducted by MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan (2002) and Na (2007).

On the contrary, the present finding in fact supports the previous study carried out by Dewaele, Petrides, & Furnham (2008), Dewaele and Al Saraj (2015) and Taghinezhad,

Abdollahzadeh, Dastpak, Rezaei (2016). In this case, all of them found no significant effect of sex difference on foreign language anxiety. This is because the comparison of mean difference between males and females was not statistically significant. Thus, the caution addressed to this issue may not merely be focused on females but also on males as well.

The other finding which the present study brings is that age did not constitute a significant predictor on foreign language anxiety. It means that either the younger participants or the older counterparts did not experience foreign language anxiety in a different way, or in other word, the younger participants does not feel more anxious than the older ones, and vice-versa. This is truly not in line with all previous studies conducted by researchers who mostly claimed that older participants are more anxious than the younger ones (Dewaele 2007, Aydin 2013) or even those stating younger participants have higher level of anxiety than the older counterparts (Hismanoglu 2013, Dewaele and Al Saraj 2015, Aydin, Harputlu, Celik, Ustuk and Güzel 2017). However, this diverging pattern, age giving no significant effect on FL anxiety, in broader sense will contribute to the related literature of EFL globally since to my knowledge the finding which stated that age is not significant predictor for FL anxiety was hardly easy to find.

The last finding of the present study suggests that grade statistically contributes a significant effect on foreign language anxiety. In a further explanation, it has been identified that eight graders of junior high school are proved statistically to be more anxious than those in senior high school and university. This pattern absolutely differs from previous studies held by MacIntyre, Baker, Clement Donovan

(2002) and Yassin and Razak (2017) in which they assumed that age did not provide significant effect on foreign language anxiety. On the contrary, other researchers, Hismanoglu (2013) and Aydin et.al (2017) seem to strengthen this finding due to the same conclusion presented by, namely lower graders in fact tend to be more anxious than the upper ones. Aydin et.al (2017) even asserted further that lower grade students suffer more from anxiety due to examinations, unpreparedness and teachers' corrections.

### Conclusion

Six conclusions are drawn from this research and these become the answers of the statements of problem, the objectives of study and the hypothesis of this research. In detail, the six conclusions can be explicated as below: The first, sex does not contribute significant effect statistically on foreign language anxiety, since the analyses on the significance of the difference between the two means of males and females reflected t-values 1.050 with significant value .264 which is less than .05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). The second, Age is also found to give no significant effect on foreign language anxiety. 100 participants who were divided into two groups, group containing participants aging 12-16 and group consisting of 17-20, obtained average score 113.50 and 110.22 respectively. the 3.283 mean difference is stil not significant enough to infer that younger participants are more anxious than the older ones and vice-versa based on analysis of significance of difference. This is strengthened by the t-value which was merely 1.356 with significant value .178 where it was more than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). The third, grade is statistically proved to be significant predictor for foreign language anxiety. Analysis of significant difference found F-value 3.847 with

significant value .025 which was less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ). The fourth, due to the analysis of significant difference, it is known that females are not more anxious than males and vice-versa. This matter is strengthened by the result of the independent t-test which showed t-value 1.050 with significant value .264 which is less than .05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). The fifth, younger participants is not evidently more anxious than the older ones and vice-versa. The average scores obtained by both may appear that younger participants have higher mean score than the older ones, however after performing independent t-test, analysis of difference of significance found that no significant difference between younger and older participants with the t-value 1.356 and significant value .178 where it was more than 0.05 ( $p > 0.05$ ). The last, lower grade students tend to be more anxious than the upper graders. Performing Anova, it was confirmed that the mean difference among three grades of grade group was statistically significant based on analysis of difference of significance with the F-value 3.847 and significant value .025 which was less than 0.05 ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Several suggestions in this research can be valuable and helpful for the success of second language acquisition process. First, teachers should be more active and aware in identifying the students who experience FL anxiety. Otherwise, the process of language instruction will not run successfully. Second, knowledge on how to overcome and deal with foreign language anxiety needs to be developed by the teachers to provide safe and comfortable situation so that nervousness, worry and apprehension that may threaten them decreases. Third, Nothing is perfect and neither is this research. Other researchers who have the same interest in research regarding with foreign language anxiety may develop

the number of participants from this research into a larger sample. Besides the division of age group can be made more than two parts, for example participants aging 13-14, participants aging 15-17 and participants aging 18-20. The research finding of the present study can also be used as related literature in conducting similar research in the future, especially the new finding about the missing of age variable as a significant predictor for foreign language anxiety

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