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English Language Anxiety and Academic Performance of Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Language anxiety continues to challenge second-language English learners in the Philippines. This study examined how foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) predicts students' English performance in selected public secondary schools in Isabela, Philippines. It aimed to measure anxiety across three domains (i.e., communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation) and to determine how these predict English grades. A descriptive–predictive design was used on 346 Junior High School students who answered a standardized FLCA questionnaire. Data were analyzed through Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS v4. Results showed moderate anxiety across domains and generally very satisfactory English performance (M = 88.29, SD = 2.92). Test anxiety showed the strongest negative correlation with academic grades (r = –.25). Language anxiety also significantly predicted a decrease in overall performance (β = –0.265, R^2=7.5%) but with a weak effect size (f^2=0.02), potentially due to grade inflation practices in the country. The findings show that language anxiety remains a consistent factor influencing academic performance. The study recommends reducing external pressure on students' language assessments and promoting positive classroom

feedback that supports student confidence and participation in English learning.

Keywords: *academic performance, Foreign Classrom Language Anxiety, communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation*

Introduction

Anxiety affects learning across school settings. It shapes how students approach tasks that demand active communication. Students feel disturbed or intimidated. This happens when they speak English in class (Russell, 2020). In second language contexts, anxiety emerges. Learners use a language where they feel their ability is limited. Birenbaum and Pinku (1997) described it as an alert system. It influences performance specifically in evaluative situations. Language anxiety is documented in many ESL countries, and this includes the Philippines. Studies in Malaysia and other ESL countries attribute this factor to the teacher as they report limited learner autonomy in building proficiency (Adan & Hashim, 2021; Nasir et al., 2023). In the Philippines, proficiency continues to decline even though English serves as the current medium of instruction (Barrot, 2018; Santos et al., 2022).

International assessments report persistent literacy difficulties. Filipino students scored 355 (mathematics), 355 (science), and 347 (reading) in PISA 2022, which were all lower than OECD averages. These indicate persistent reading comprehension struggles (Rafanan & Raymundo, 2024; Tejida & Raymundo, 2024) and language difficulty despite mainstream exposures. These struggles connect directly to language learning anxieties (Haw et al., 2021; Banzuelo, 2022). Owing to its significant influences on communication and achievement, language anxiety has become a focal issue in applied linguistics. This sort of anxiety was introduced as a defining factor causing negative influences on language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986). Later studies only proved its negative impact on learners' confidence, motivation, and proficiency (Du, 2019; Es-Saikh, 2020; Naser & Nijr, 2019). It also affects academic results (Bakhtiar & Suwandi, 2022; Nijat et al., 2019; Prima et al., 2022; Qureshi et al., 2020). Furthermore, Alamer and Almulhim (2021) identified anxiety as a predictor of lower perceived competence along with reduced relatedness. All of these factors are vital for sustained engagement in learning English.

In the Philippines, anxiety is described as both emotional and situational. Students often hesitate to speak because they fear mistakes or ridicule (Ilustre et al., 2022; Tamco, 2021; Saet & Cabansag, 2024). Many, if not most, students view English as a graded requirement rather than a communication tool. This results in self-imposed limitations on opportunities for interaction, which could have been their means for effective and practical language learning (De Guzman & De Vera, 2018; Menozo, 2020). Teachers also report that fear of low scores or embarrassment heightens fear of recitations (Saet & Cabansag, 2024). All of these conditions shape performance and engagement in the country's English classes (Giray et al., 2022; Nicosia & Esmero, 2019).

This national concern is also reflected in the locale of the study. English is taught to students daily through textbooks, conversations in the classroom, and digital devices. Yet, exposure does not automatically translate into fluency or confidence. Teachers report that a large percentage of students are reluctant to communicate during spoken

activities (Pike & Raymundo, 2024), and many may not even participate. It is through such reluctance that engagement and learning are diminished.

Despite the number of descriptive and correlational studies on language anxiety, few examine its structural influence on academic performance, with the potential role of differences in developmental level. There is limited evidence on whether anxiety decreases or stabilizes as students advance. This gap indicates a need for further studies. Structural Equation Modeling permits evaluation of these relationships by estimating latent constructs and their predictive paths (Hair et al., 2017).

In an effort to address this problem, the current study aimed to explore the relationship between English Language Anxiety and the academic achievement of Junior secondary students as moderated by their grade level. It investigated how anxiety at varying levels influences their performance in English subjects. Specifically, it sought to: (a) measure the extent of students' anxiety across the three domains, (b) determine their academic performance in English, and (c) assess the structural relationship between language anxiety and academic performance while testing the moderating effect of grade level.

Methods

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive-predictive design. The predictive approach provides methodological guidance that permits the examination of patterns while estimating directional relationships among latent constructs (Legate et al., 2023). The descriptive component measured levels of language anxiety and academic performance. The predictive component assessed the influence of communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation on grades and tested grade level as a moderator of the link between Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and General Weighted Average. The study used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling because it supports prediction-oriented analysis, handles complex models with fewer distributional assumptions, and accommodates hierarchical constructs, which aligns with recommendations in Hair et al. (2017).

Locale and Respondents of the Study

The study was conducted in three public secondary schools in Isabela within the second legislative district: San Mariano National High School, Benito Soliven National High School, and Alibadabad National High School. These schools are among the densest mega-sized schools in the legislative district. Respondents were Junior High School students from Grades 7 to 10 during School Year 2023–2024. From a total population of 2,675 students, 346 were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table at a 5% margin of error and 95% confidence level. Stratified proportional random sampling ensured representation per grade level. Randomizer.org was used to identify the final set of respondents based on the students' list using the Learner Information System-generated Form 1. Table 1 shows the proportional respondent distribution.

Table 1. Respondents of the Study

	Grade Level	Population	Sample Size	Proportion (%)
ANHS	Grade 7	131	17	4.90%
	Grade 8	107	14	4.00%
	Grade 9	140	18	5.23%
	Grade 10	119	15	4.45%
	ANHS Total	497	64	18.58%
BSNHS	Grade 7	222	29	8.30%
	Grade 8	234	30	8.75%
	Grade 9	256	33	9.57%
	Grade 10	283	37	10.58%
	BSNHS Total	995	129	37.20%
SMNHS	Grade 7	219	28	8.19%
	Grade 8	287	37	10.73%
	Grade 9	301	39	11.25%
	Grade 10	376	49	14.06%
	SMNHS Total	1183	153	44.23%
Grand Total		**2675**	**346**	**100%**

Research Instrument

Data were collected using the 13-item version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), as adapted by Utami (2020). The instrument is a 4-point Likert scale with scores ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Sample items reflected nervousness during oral tasks (e.g., "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation"), test-related worry (e.g., "I can get so nervous I forget things I know"), and concern about peer evaluation (e.g., "I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak"). Pilot testing showed good reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 among 30 sample respondents. The three subscales, communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, represented the higher-order construct of FLCA. The interpretation for each subscale is as follows:

Table 2. Interpretation Table for FLCAS

Scale	Meaning Range	Anxiety Level	Score Range
1	Strongly Disagree	Very Low	1.00 – 1.49
2	Disagree	Low	1.50 – 2.49
3	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Average	2.50 – 3.49
4	Agree	High	3.50 – 4.49
5	Strongly Agree	Very High	4.50 – 5.00

Note: As adopted from Utami (2020)

Academic performance was measured using students' general averages as retrieved through official records from English teachers of the students. These were interpreted following the Department of Education Order No. 8, s. 2015: Outstanding (90–100%), Very Satisfactory (85–89%), Satisfactory (80–84%), Fairly Satisfactory (75–79%), and Did Not Meet Expectations (below 75%).

Data Gathering Procedure

The instrument was reviewed and validated by experts and pilot tested before data collection. The researcher obtained permission from the Central Graduate School, the Schools Division Office, and the school heads of the target schools. After approval and securing of free prior informed consent from respondents, along with an initial from their parents, guardians, or advisers, the questionnaires were distributed to the selected students. Responses were checked for completeness and accuracy, then encoded in Excel for tabulation. It was analyzed using SmartPLS software.

Analysis of Data

Descriptive statistics summarized levels of anxiety and academic performance. PLS-SEM tested the measurement and structural models. Reliability, validity, and path coefficients were examined. The moderating role of grade level between FLCA and academic performance was tested based on the procedures outlined by Hair et al. (2021).

Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted in compliance with all applicable national and international ethical considerations. The study was duly approved by the Central Graduate School for conduct and endorsed by the Schools Division Office and school heads of all participating schools. The researcher obtained written and free prior informed consent (FPIC) from all participants involved in the study, which included details of the aims and methods used in this research, the potential risks and discomforts, and their right to participate voluntarily or withdraw at any point without consequence. To ensure privacy and confidentiality, all responses were stored securely with access restricted to the researcher only.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study which are logically anchored on the research objectives. Each subtheme discusses the results and interpretations of the analyzed data.

Language Anxiety and Academic Performance of the Respondents

The levels of anxiety for the three domains are illustrated in Table 3. Levels of communication apprehension (CA) (M = 3.33, SD = 0.46), test anxiety (TA) (M = 3.32, SD = 0.46), and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) (M = 3.34, SD = 0.52) were all reflective of high levels of anxiety. Mean grade in English (GWA) (M = 88.29, SD = 2.92) reflected a very satisfactory academic performance overall.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N=346)

Construct	M	SD	Interpretation	1	2	3	4
1. CA	3.33	0.46	High	--			
2. TA	3.32	0.46	High	0.53	--		
3. FNE	3.34	0.52	High	0.45	0.53	--	
4. GWA	88.29	2.92	Very Satisfactory	-0.17	-0.25	-0.21	--

Note: 2.61-3.40 = High; 3.40-4.00 = Very High (Utami, 2020)
All correlations are significant at $p < .01$

All three domains of anxiety were negatively associated with grades in English. The highest negative relationship was found for the test anxiety (r = –. 25, p <. 01), and fear of negative evaluation (r = –. 21, p <. 01). Weakest relationship was found with communication apprehension (r = –. 17, p <. 01). This trend indicates that increased anxiety, in testing situations for example, is associated with moderately decreased levels of English achievement.

More anxious students appear to be prone to earning slightly lower marks. The inverse associations of anxiety domains with English grades are consistent with studies across different ESL contexts, which demonstrate that anxiety has a debilitative effect on performance, primarily due to disruptions in attention and confidence (Pike & Raymundo, 2024). Theoretically, Horwitz et al. (1986), as well as Du (2019), affirmed that high test anxiety restricts language output and recall. Both studies from Es-Saikh (2020) and Alamer and Almulhim (2021) also associated this phenomenon with lowered motivation and perceived competence.

In contrast, Qureshi et al. (2020) and Bakhtiar and Suwandi (2022) discovered that communicative anxiety weighs more heavily in oral tasks than writing, implying context-dependent influences. Even so, fear of negative evaluation is the most prevalent factor of difficulty in local studies (Barrot, 2018; Giray et al., 2022; Santos et al., 2022), not like in Malaysia and Indonesia, which are on test anxiety domains (Adan & Hashim, 2021; Prima et al., 2022). Nonetheless, these results demonstrating the most significant association with test anxiety on performance suggest that testing pressure is a continuing concern. This is still true in the Philippines, where Nicosia and Esmero (2019) found that higher language anxiety levels are associated with lower academic achievement among secondary learners at the University of Bohol.

This pattern in literature and studies internationally and locally indicates that the affective support in testing is as important as skill training and development for Filipino students to improve their English performance.

Hypothesized Model of the Relationship Between Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and Academic Performance

Model Measures

All constructs met the accepted reliability and validity criteria. Cronbach's α values exceeded 0.70, which means acceptable internal consistency. Composite reliabilities (ρ_c) ranged from 0.82 to 0.90, all showing acceptable consistency. Average variance extracted (AVE) values were also all above 0.50, meaning each latent variable explained more than half of the variance of its indicators. No collinearity issue was found as all VIFs were less than 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017).

The indicators, therefore, represent their intended constructs well, and the second-order latent variable "Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA)" can be interpreted as a reliable composite of its three domains. Table 4 summarizes the reliability and validity indices.

Table 4. Validity and Reliability of Constructs

Construct	Cronbach's α	ρ_a	ρ_c	AVE	VIF (range)
CA	0.78	0.79	0.84	0.56	1.07–1.33
TA	0.81	0.83	0.87	0.58	1.06–1.37
FNE	0.79	0.80	0.86	0.54	1.07–1.40
FLCA (2nd-order)	0.85	0.86	0.9	0.52	1.01–1.37

Structural Mode

Table 5 shows the path estimates and model summary. The beta values reflected herein are unstandardized since raw values were used as input in the model. Nevertheless, this does not affect the validity of the findings. The direct path from FLCA to GWA was negative and significant (β = –0.265, $p < .001$). Greater anxiety predicted slightly lower English grades. The effect of grade level on GWA was not significant (β = 0.010, p = 860). Likewise, the interaction of grade level × FLCA also did not have a significant moderating effect (β = –0.080, p = 155). The model had very low explanatory power for GWA (R^2 = 0.075; R^2_adj = 0.067). High coefficients for the subdomains of anxiety confirmed the strength of FLCA as a higher-order construct, predicting communication apprehension (β = 0.780, $p < .001$), test anxiety (β = 0.820, $p < .001$), and fear of negative evaluation (β = 0.869, $p < .001$). The effect sizes for these paths were large (f^2 = 1.556 to 3.097), while the effect of FLCA on GWA was small (f^2 = 0.075).

Model fit index using Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) indicates a borderline acceptable value of 0.086 (Hair et al., 2017). The model visualization is presented in Figure 1.

Table 5. Path Coefficients and Model Summary

Path	β (O)	*p*	R^2	R^2 adj	f^2	SRMR
FLCA → CA	0.780	0.000	0.609	0.608	1.556	0.086
FLCA → TA	0.820	0.000	0.756	0.755	3.097	
FLCA → FNE	0.869	0.000	0.673	0.672	2.059	
FLCA → GWA	–0.265	0.000	0.075	0.067	0.075	
GRLVL → GWA	0.01	0.860	--	--	0.000	
FLCA × GRLVL → GWA	–0.080	0.155	--	--	0.007	

The analysis reveals a significant but weak association between language anxiety and English performance. This finding diverges from established Southeast Asian ESL trends where anxiety typically predicts lower outcomes. But the weak predictive power likely reflects the systemic grade inflation in the education sector rather than an immediate presumption of a lack of psychometric impact. David et al. (2018) documented how academic ratings in the Philippines often outstrip demonstrated competencies. Mandap et al. (2022) corroborated this divergence between actual learning and recorded marks, especially during the pandemic. Reported grades remained high even as actual skills declined. This normative distortion masks the true academic effects of anxiety. This rampant practice has had very limited documentation in the Philippines, where high anxiety persists, yet students still receive "satisfactory" or "outstanding" marks (Lasco, 2024; Punongbayan, 2024). Radavoi et al. (2025) characterized this as a moral issue within grading cultures.

Beyond grading distortions, behavioral mechanisms also explain the sustained performance ratings. Students likely employ compensatory study strategies to mitigate deficits. They rely on peer support and specific teacher feedback to navigate assessments (Ilustre et al., 2022; Tamco, 2021). However, the internal cost remains high. Anxiety disrupts self-regulated learning processes (Alamer & Almulhim, 2021) and limits genuine competence in complex oral tasks (Du, 2019). In the Philippine classroom context, this exacerbates this internal tension where instruction remains largely teacher-centered (Barrot, 2018). These conditions inhibit spontaneous discourse, which could have been more beneficial to learners. Silence became a coping mechanism

(Nicosia & Esmero, 2019; Ilustre et al., 2022). Thus, anxiety functions as an enduring constraint on communication despite passing grades.

Furthermore, anxiety levels appeared consistent across both younger and older cohorts due to the lack of moderating effect of the grade level. This contradicts research findings suggesting older learners manage affect better due to maturity or exposure (Prima et al., 2022; Utami, 2020). Two analytical factors clarify this discrepancy. First, the absence of measurement invariance testing across grade levels limits the interpretation. This is a recognized limitation of the study. Additionally, differences in how age groups interpret survey items may have obscured the established trends. Second, the result supports the conceptualization of anxiety as a stable trait where even older demographics still possess high levels of language anxiety (Nicosia & Esmero, 2019; Saet & Cabansag, 2024). It is not merely a transient developmental phase. Consequently, interventions targeting specific year levels may prove inefficient. General anxiety management programs can likely offer better utility for the broader student population if streamlined, regardless of age group.

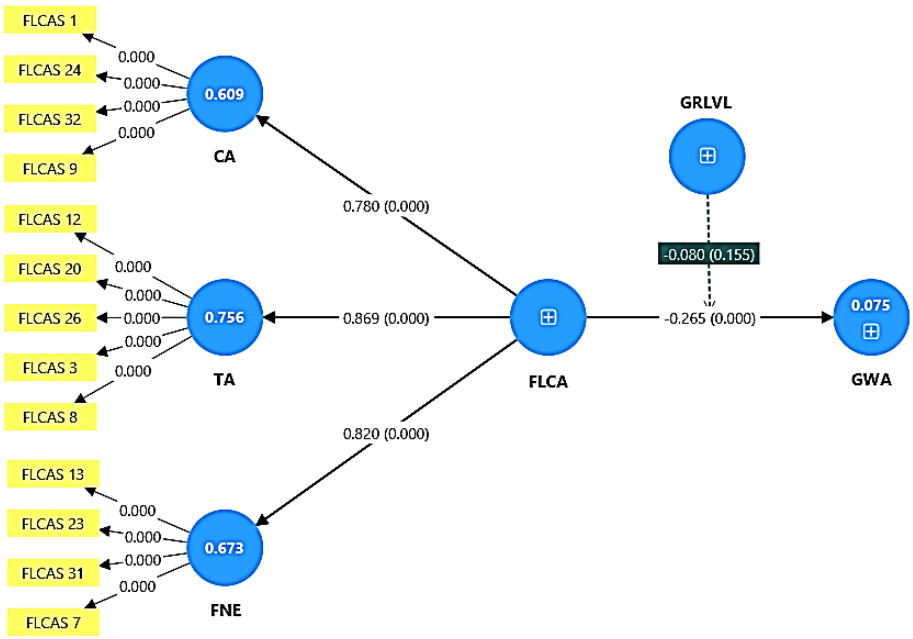

Figure 1. *The Structural Model of the Study*

Conclusion and Future Works

Conclusions

The evidence shows a small but dependable link between language anxiety and English performance. The weakness of the relationship does not diminish its significance. It reflects how structural features of schooling shape measurable outcomes more than affective states alone. Grades in many Philippine settings cluster within narrow bands and often fail to reflect actual competence, which reduces the observable effect of psychological variables. This grading culture compresses performance differences and conceals the academic costs of anxiety. Learners compensate through rehearsal, memorization, and reliance on teacher cues, which allows them to meet evaluation demands while avoiding communicative risk. Yet these strategies restrict deeper language use and suppress oral engagement. Anxiety, therefore, functions as a constraint that persists beneath stable grades. Instructional practices that minimize

public evaluation and use private, criterion-based feedback can counter this constraint. Such practices lower perceived threat, support steady participation, and create conditions where anxious learners can perform tasks without defensive withdrawal.

On the other hand, the cross-sectional design limits the study to correlational claims. Grade ranges were also limited to 4 years of the Junior High School Program, which could have reduced variance and restricted model fit. Measurement invariance across grade levels was also not tested, which limits the interpretation of the non-significant moderation. These limitations restrict the scope of the conclusions and indicate the need for methodological extensions.

Future research should address the limitations presented in this paper. Also, they may examine cognitive and motivational constructs such as self-efficacy and achievement goals because these mechanisms shape how anxiety influences effort and task regulation. Intervention studies, such as action research for DepEd teachers, that vary assessment formats or reduce evaluative demands can clarify whether anxiety has causal effects on performance. Longitudinal work can track how anxiety interacts with instructional practices across time and whether shifts in classroom climate weaken or intensify its role.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Declaration Statement

The researchers acknowledge the use of artificial intelligence tools in limited aspects of this study. *Elicit.org* was utilized solely for literature searching to locate relevant academic sources. *ChatGPT* was employed to assist in organizing the structure and layout of the Introduction section, but not in generating research content or analysis. *Grammarly* was used exclusively for grammar checking and proofreading to ensure linguistic accuracy. All AI-assisted outputs were thoroughly reviewed, verified, and manually edited by the researcher to maintain the integrity, originality, and scholarly quality of the manuscript.