



# Language Anxiety among the Online Learners: A Sample from the Kalinga State University Laboratory High School

Jinky Valdez-Mangad

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**Abstract**— Identifying and addressing factors that can hinder learners from achieving ultimate language acquisition access is vital for educators, especially during this online platform. This study utilized the mixed methods design to examine the levels of language anxiety among the online learners and to solicit their thoughts on online learning platform. It focused on the experiences of the Junior High of Kalinga State University Laboratory High School who experienced online learning rather than modular learning. The 33-item Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) adapted from Park (2014) was utilized as a questionnaire administered online through a google form. Results revealed that the most prevalent language anxiety experienced by the respondents is fear of negative evaluation. Both males and females have a very high level of language anxiety. Moreover, it was found out that there is a significant relationship between sex, year level and the language anxiety among the respondents. The students also shared that they become independent learners because of online learning. They also highlighted that teachers' feedback in their outputs can guide and help them to be on the right track. These suggest a need to improve the learning environment and the pedagogical approaches being employed by teachers in the online context.

**Keywords**— Language Anxiety, Online Learners, Junior High School, Online Learning Platform

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the onset of the worldwide pandemic, educational institutions adapted distance learning which has become a challenge to both teachers and students. Researchers continuously conducted studies to improve the teaching and learning process under this learning mode.

In the Philippines, schools under the Department of Education (DepEd) opted for modular learning to accommodate students from far-flung areas who struggle with connection. On the other hand, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) adapted the flexible learning mode.

At the Kalinga State University, the google classroom is used as an online platform for delivering instruction. While all the public schools under the Department of Education adopted modular learning, the Laboratory High School of Kalinga State University conformed with the tertiary students. They are faced with the sudden shift to a flexible mode of learning.

Many claims that anxiety has increased noticeably because of online learning. This may be due to increased pressure on them because they have to learn the concepts and lessons posted by the teacher and meet the due dates for each activity.

As a language teacher, it was also an observation that many students refuse to use the target language when communicating, even on the online platform. In the group chat alone, it was observed that students were not sending any messages when the teachers required them to speak in English whenever they had to say or ask something. However, many send private messages to ask for clarifications or favor regarding the subject matter rather than sending their queries in the group chat. Perhaps these students are experiencing language anxiety, specifically fear of negative evaluation. They refuse to ask in the group chat where their classmates can read what they will be sending.

According to Brown (1994), language anxiety is related to feelings of unease, dissatisfaction, self-doubt, trepidation, or worry. Similarly, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) claim that language anxiety is made up of a combination of communication anxiety, test anxiety, and dread of unfavorable evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to students' worry when they are unsure how to communicate with others in the target language. On the other hand, test anxiety is the dread of failing an examination, while fear of negative assessment is the worry of being misunderstood or poorly judged by their classmates.

Since anxiety plays a significant effect on the success or failure of learning (Mae & Berowa, n.d.), language educators have long been interested in researching language anxiety as it can also be a barrier to learning (Elaldi, 2016). However, these studies were conducted in a face-to-face setting.

Hence, this study was conceptualized to help identify the language anxieties among the students within the online learning context. Furthermore, it solicited the thoughts and sharing of the students regarding online learning.

## II. METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study employed a quantitative-qualitative research design. This method was used to investigate the levels of English language anxiety among the online learners in the Junior High of KSULHS for the school year 2020-2021. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was also employed to validate the results of the study.

### Locale and Participants of the Study

The students of the Junior High in Kalinga State Laboratory High School for the school year 2020-2021 were the respondents of this study. It consists of 10 sections in all from Grade 7 to grade 10. Said respondents were chosen because they were the first students who experienced online classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The investigation included 126 respondents who took part in the survey questionnaire. They were composed of 98 females and 28 males.

### Data Gathering Instrument

The 33-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire adapted from Park (2014) was used to gather data from the respondents. The researcher modified the said questionnaire with the first part intended to collect personal information of the respondents.

### Data Gathering Procedure

In pursuing this study, the following steps were undertaken:

1. Data were collected after the research project was approved by the Research Review Committee of the Kalinga State University;
2. The researchers sought consent from the respondents informing them that their responses in the questionnaire will be utilized in the study;
3. With the help of other language teachers, the questionnaire was administered online to the respondents through google form. A random conversation with teachers and students were also conducted;
5. The responses had undergone statistical analysis.

### Data Analysis

Descriptive statistical tools were used to determine the respondents' levels of English language anxiety. Moreover, Pearson r correlation was used to determine the significant relationship between English language anxiety and sex and year level of the respondents.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean was utilized in the statistical analysis of the data to establish the respondents' levels of English language anxiety. Adopted from (Mae & Berowa, n.d.) study, the following scheme was used to interpret the data.

Mean	Interpretation
4.20-5.0	Very high
3.40-4.19	High
2.60-3.39	Neutral
1.80-2.59	Low
1.0-1.79	Very Low

The mean was used to determine the most prevalent language anxiety among the learners. As shown in Table 1, fear of negative evaluation has the highest mean of 6.60 followed by communication anxiety with a mean of 5.08 revealing a level of very high language anxiety.

Table 1. Language Anxiety among Learners

English	Language	TOTAL
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<b>Anxiety</b>	<b>Mean</b>
<b>Communication Anxiety</b>	5.08
<b>Test Anxiety</b>	3.76
<b>Fear of Negative Evaluation</b>	6.60
<b>Total</b>	15.45

The result shows that students feel conscious of their teachers' and classmates' comments even in the online platform where they can just turn off their camera. This explains the researcher's observation that students opt to send their queries as private message to the subject teacher rather than sending them in the group chat. This means that they are afraid of what others will say especially that the teacher-researcher instructed them to speak in English as they communicate with the teacher or in the group chat.

The following accounts on the students' fear of negative evaluation:

*Student1: 'Mabutengakbakakatawaan dak nu agEnglishak.' (I'm afraid they might laugh at me when I speak in English.)*

*Student4: 'Agdillaw da met gamen nu agkamali ta ti English.' (They mock at me whenever I commit mistakes in speaking the language.)*

According to Elaldi (2016), students may experience fear of negative evaluation when the learning environment poses high expectations and standards. This implies that the teachers in KSULHS may have set high expectations that the students feel apprehensive that they may not be able to meet these expectations.

Therefore, teachers should strive to create a friendly learning environment in the online context where students feel unthreatened to express their selves. The activities given online should be encouraging to maintain an adequate level of anxiety. This idea is also supported by Na (2007) and Hashemi and Abbasi (2013). These authors asserted that the language learning environment should be friendly and not too formal. They state that "formal language classroom setting is a major source of stress and anxiety because of its demand to be more correct and clearer in using the target language".

During the Covid-19 pandemic in Chile, Paulina Sepu, Veda-Esoabar, and Astrid Morrison (2020) found that the absence of interaction with students is the most unfavorable and demanding element, which may impede their professional development. They may not be able to gain real-life experience because this is not a true learning experience. Moreover, weak internet connection can

further cause anxiety among learners because of the poor connection between the teacher and the students.

Looking back on this study, the researchers believe it is essential since the limitations of the online learning system might generate anxiety in students and delay their progress.

Table 2. Language Anxiety as to Sex

Sex	Total Mean	Interpretation
Female	19.10	Very high
Male	5.67	Very high

This finding corroborates with the study of (Mae & Berowa, n.d.) which also showed male and female respondents from learners of ESL in Davao del Norte having the same level of anxiety. This may be because they are provided with almost the same experience and knowledge about English, especially that all of them come from the same school.

On the other hand, one teacher from the Laboratory High School shared, *'Sabalilattatibabbaepiman. Napaspasnek da. Uraykitanyu puro lallakidagitatawtawagantayupanggepproblemati grades da.'* (Females are different when it come to their performance in learning. They are more focused. If you look at it, the males are the ones who have problems in their grades.) These statements support the investigation of Cui (2011) which states females are less anxious than the males because females have always been considered as more adept in language learning than males as they consistently outperform males in English exams. They are considered as more competent; thus, more confident in their ability in learning the language.

Table 3. Language Anxiety as to Grade Level

Grade Level	Total Mean	Interpretation
Grade 10	9.67	Very high
Grade 9	4.79	Very high
Grade 8	3.67	High
Grade 7	6.64	Very high

The table shows an increase in level of language anxiety from Grade 8 to Grade 10, with Grade 10 having the highest mean of 9.67 which is described as very high.

The Grade 7 students, with a mean of 6.64, which is also interpreted as very high, come next to Grade 10.

This result supports the findings of Kitano (2001) that the level of anxiety toward foreign language learning tends to increase as the students progress to higher level because they may be more afraid of being poorly rated by their teachers and peers than those in lower levels. Elaldi (2016) followed the same line of reasoning who revealed that language anxiety in foreign language of the students progressed from preparatory to grade four. According to these researchers, the increase in language anxiety among students as they proceed to higher year levels is linked to the notion that their increased English knowledge will heighten their chances of identifying their own speaking errors, which will make them more anxious.

Table 4. Language Anxiety by Sex

Sex	Pearson r	Interpretation	t-computed	t- tabulated	Result
Male	0.98	Strong Positive Correlation	25.11	2.052	Significant
Female	0.999	Strong Positive Correlation	217.56	2.00	Significant

This study maintains that sex of the learners determines their level of language anxiety. It was shown in the previous table that both male and female respondents have a very high level of language anxiety.

This finding contradicts the investigation made by Matsuda and Gobel (2004) who advocated that gender was not significant in relation to the language anxiety of the Japanese university respondents.

As mentioned by Cui (2011), females usually outperform males in English exams. As they are deemed to be better, teachers also tend to expect more from them;

Table 5. English Anxiety by Year Level

Year Level	Pearson r	Interpretation	t-computed	t-tabulated	Result
Grade 10	0.99	Strong Positive Correlation	48.99	2.021	Significant
Grade 9	0.98	Strong Positive Correlation	23.10	2.069	Significant
Grade 8	0.998	Strong Positive Correlation	66.53	2.110	Significant
Grade 7	0.996	Strong Positive Correlation	63.31	2.021	Significant

The study's findings revealed a strong positive correlation which means that the level of language anxiety increased as the students progressed through the grade levels. The significant relationship implies that the year level of the students has something to do with the level of their English language anxiety.

Similarly, Ewald (2007), Kitano (2001) and Saito and Samimy (1996) suggested that advanced students

*Student3: 'Bakbaketankaminkanuisungadapatket more responsible kaminti learning mi.'* (We are already old enough and we should be more responsible for our own learning.) This statement from one student attested their feeling of being anxious that their teachers may become less considerate as their teachers are expecting more from them as compared to when they were still in lower grades. These expectations result to higher level of anxiety among the students as they advance in higher grade level.

As to the Grade 7 students, as being in their adjustment period, it can be assumed that they still feel anxious because of the new environment that they are being exposed with. This can also be associated with their transition from face-to-face to online classes, with different teachers per subject.

hence, probably causing more pressure and anxiety on their part. On the other hand, male students may also feel less motivated, which may also result in their increased level of language anxiety.

This scenario implies that learners may have different levels of experience, exposure, and knowledge even though they are in the same class. It means that teachers may provide different opportunities, treatments, and attention to male and female students in the classroom thus causing different levels of anxiety to both sexes.

experienced higher anxiety than elementary-or intermediate level students.

This result, however contradicts the findings of (Mae & Berowa, n.d.) and Casado and Dereshiwsky (2001), who found that anxiety was not affected with the amount of language learning experience gained during the academic year. Some studies have also concluded that

foreign language anxiety is expected to decrease when experience and proficiency increase.

However, this study's result provides that as individuals proceed to an advanced level, his/her language anxiety also increases.

According to Na (2007), the true duty of English teachers is to provide students with just the proper amount of anxiety when learning the English language. An appropriate level of anxiety is important for students' motivation and effort in learning the target language. As a result, teachers should refrain from attempting to help students in overcoming their English anxiety entirely.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

From the findings, these conclusions are drawn:

Learners from the Kalinga State Laboratory High School under the online platform have a very high level of language anxiety with fear of negative evaluation as the most prevalent language anxiety experienced by them. It also showed that both male and female of the Junior High students of KSULHS have a very high level of language anxiety. It also revealed that the students' language anxiety increased from Grade 8 to 10, with Grade 10 having the highest mean followed by Grade 7. This creates the idea that the learning environment is not friendly and accommodating which causes the high level of anxiety among the learners.

#### V. RECOMMENDATION

The following are hereby recommended:

1. Teachers' online pedagogical approaches should create a friendly classroom and learning environment. Both male and female students should be given fair treatment and equal provision of learning opportunities.

2. Teachers should maintain an adequate level of expectation for both male and female and for each year level so as not to cause an increase in language anxiety among learners. Being generous with praise and appreciation may also help students overcome their fear of being negatively evaluated.

3. Since this study only looked at a few topics, a broader study shall be conducted that includes more issues in the online language learning context.

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