

The Relationship Between Students' Anxiety in Learning English and Their English Achievement

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Abstract. This study was to figure out the correlation between students' anxiety in learning English and their English achievement. This study used a quantitative design that was descriptive and correlational. The instrument of this study was adapted from Park (2012), based on Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), and the result of the English academic achievement was taken from the students' mid-semester grades in English class. This study was conducted on 41 students of grade XI in a private high school in North Sulawesi. The results showed that the students' anxiety in learning English was moderate ($M=3.17$), and their English academic achievement was categorized as failed ($M=71.34$). Finally, it was found that there was a significant correlation between students' anxiety in learning English and their English academic achievement as the result $p = .00 < 0.05$, $r = .98$. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers try to find more creative methods and strategies to support and help the students improve their English.

Keywords: students, anxiety, learning English, English academic achievement

1 Introduction

English is an international language used by people around the world. Some countries use it as their first language, and some use it as a second or foreign language. Gunantar (2016) explained that the demand for people to learn English is increasing as English is currently used for local communication and not only for global purposes. Because of this demand, English seems to be taught since primary school. Kirkpatrick (2010) discovered that English is considered a compulsory subject from elementary school and is used as a medium of instruction in all classes by several private institutions. Thus, English has become an important language that people worldwide want to learn more.

Learning a language, especially a foreign language, is a unique process because learners are required to communicate using a language that they have not mastered perfectly. There are four skills to be mastered in learning a language, including learning English. As Sadiku (2015) pointed out, recognized as the essential aspects, the four skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing, play a crucial part in language learning. These four skills are related to one another. Hence, students need to master the four skills of English to use them to achieve more and thus be able to compete internationally. However, learning English is challenging for students, which can be seen in their low proficiency. As Hamouda (2012) stated, students, are afraid and shy if they cannot speak and answer well during English class. This is due to their fear of being evaluated negatively, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence and preparation in learning English. Thus, this causes students to be anxious in English class, which could inhibit students from improving their English skills.

Anxiety seems to become a severe problem for students learning English, and it has been linked to poor academic performance. Owens, Stevenson, Hadwin, and Norgate (2012) stated that high levels of academic anxiety can negatively affect working memory. It is also associated with high levels of

worry that can affect academic performance. Language learners often face language anxiety in their language learning process. In many cases, this anxiety about learning English has planted and become a problem in students' minds, especially in Indonesia. As Daud et al. (2019) found, Indonesian learners have a poor foreign language level, especially in speaking English. This is reflected by some data showing that Indonesian learners' English proficiency was still at a very low level in 2018. Based on the English proficiency index released by English First, a world-leading English institution, it was reported that Indonesia ranked at number 51 out of 88 among non-English speaking countries in the world with very low adult English proficiency (Graddol, 2011). This low proficiency could be because the students feel afraid of learning English, especially when they have to use the language in front of the class or talk with their English teacher. Therefore, many of them often feel stressed and anxious in their learning.

Anxiety in learning English has been found among Indonesian students. For instance, in a study conducted by Oktaviani, Radjab, and Ardi (2013), they found that students' anxiety in learning English is bothering that it affects their achievement. If students' language anxiety gets higher, they cannot perform well in the classroom. Furthermore, according to Oktaviani et al., when they did an informal interview to an English training teacher and an English teacher at SMAN 7 Padang, it was found that most of the students were nervous when it came to speaking English or English tests. Thus, since anxiety is a problem that Indonesian students often experience in learning English, it is essential to solve or at least minimize this problem.

According to one of the researchers' real-life experiences while studying at a public high school in North Sulawesi, the students, including the researcher herself, were anxious about learning English. Conway (2007) stated that learning a foreign language can be frightful. This anxiety in learning English then somehow affects the students' performance in the school and thus makes them think that learning English is difficult. Zhao (2007) argued that students with high anxiety could feel discouraged and have low self-confidence, and they may even lose interest in learning the language well. It was also added that students with high anxiety usually have low achievement; this low achievement causes them to be more anxious in learning. In addition to that, Liu and Huang (2011) emphasized that language anxiety is considered the most influential factor affecting students' performance. Therefore, if students want to do well in English, they need to reduce their anxiety because it can alter their English academic achievement.

Studies on students' anxiety in learning English and their achievement or performance have been conducted previously. For instance, Hewitt and Stephenson (2012) found that the students who have high anxiety significantly in English obtain lower grades on the oral exam than those who have low anxiety. They found a significant negative relationship between English language anxiety and oral performance. Furthermore, it was found that there was an important negative relationship between total Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) scores and English scores (Ghorbandordinejad & Ahmadabad, 2016). Similarly, some studies found a significant moderate negative correlation between students' anxiety in English learning and English academic achievement (Atef-Vahid & Kashani, 2011). This result indicates that the more anxious the students are, the lower their achievement. However, a study conducted by Lian and Budin (2014) found a significant positive correlation between language anxiety and language achievement. The result of this study is interesting because it shows that as the level of anxiety increases, English language achievement may also increase.

This study attempted to find the levels of students' anxiety in learning English and their English academic achievement. Based on the results of the previous studies, it is essential to consider this issue as the results of the previous related studies are still debatable. Therefore, one of the researcher's personal experiences and the different results found by the earlier researchers motivated the researchers to study students' anxiety in learning English and their English academic achievement. Also, this study tried to see whether there is a positive or negative significant correlation between the two variables.

2 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study was a quantitative study with a descriptive and correlative design. The research design was descriptive because it attempted to determine the levels of students' anxiety in learning English and their English achievement. Moreover, it was a correlational design to determine the significant

relationship between students' anxiety in learning English and their English achievement. Johnson and Christensen (2012) pointed out that in "correlational research, the researcher studies the relationship between one or more quantitative independent variables and one or more quantitative dependent variables" (p. 44). Thus, the researchers used these designs to find the correlation between students' anxiety in learning English and their English academic achievement.

2.2 Respondents

The respondents of this study were the 11th grade students of a private high school located in North Sulawesi enrolled in the second semester of the school academic year 2019/2020. The respondents who were available and willing to participate during the online questionnaire distribution were 51, but because the data was not normally distributed; therefore the researchers removed some outliers, which led to only 41 respondents. According to Chang, Huang, and Wu (2006), "as a general rule, statisticians have found that for most population distributions, when the sample size is at least 30, the sampling distribution of the mean will be approximately normal" (p.32). Thus, the number of respondents is still acceptable.

2.3 Instruments

The instrument in collecting the data used a questionnaire to measure the students' anxiety in learning English. The questionnaire was adapted from Park (2012). Park's questionnaire was developed based on Horwitz et al. (1986), consisting of 33 items based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and comprises four factors: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation and anxiety of English class. In the questionnaire, communication apprehension has 15 items (1, 3, 4, 9, 13, 14, 15, 18, 20, 24, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33), test anxiety had 3 items (8, 10, 21), fear of negative evaluation has 6 items (2, 7, 19, 23, 25, 31) and anxiety of English classes has 9 items (5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 17, 22, 26, 28).

The questionnaire used 5-point Likert-scale items ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The rating scale included the following options: a value of 1 for strongly disagree, a value of 2 for disagree, a value of 3 for neutral, a value for 4 agree, and a value of 5 for strongly agree. The participants were asked to choose the option according to their experience or feel. Moreover, to measure the students' English achievement, the researchers used the students' Mid-semester grades.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The researchers used statistical software to analyze the data. For the first and second research questions, the researchers used the mean score to figure out the level of students' anxiety in learning English and their English achievement. For the third research question, the researchers used the *Pearson Product Moment Coefficient Correlation* analysis to find the correlation between the students' anxiety in learning English and their English achievement.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 The Level of Students' Anxiety in Learning English

The first research question that this research tried to figure out is the level of students' anxiety in learning English. Based on the finding of the level, the result showed that the mean score of the students' anxiety in learning English is 3.17 (see Table 1).

Table 1 The Level of Students' Anxiety in Learning English

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety	41	1.96	3.96	3.17	.48
Valid N (listwise)	41				

Based on the interpretation scale, the mean score of the students' anxiety in learning English fell between 2.50–3.49, which shows that the students' anxiety in learning English was at a *moderate level*. This finding indicates that the students were moderately anxious or somehow anxious about learning English. In other words, their anxiety about learning English was not high but not also low. The result of this study in which the students' anxiety in learning English was moderate is the same as the result found by Lian and Budin (2014). The study conducted on 200 students as participants in Malaysia showed that the participants' level of anxiety was 2.93, which fell in the moderate level also. This is probably because the distance between Malaysia with Indonesia is close, and English is considered a foreign language in both countries. In other words, Indonesian and Malaysia may have similarities in culture and language and thus, the students' characters could also be the same. Therefore, this might explain why the students' level of anxiety in learning English was the same.

Similarly, another result by Sadiq (2017), who conducted a study on Saudi Arabia learners, showed that the students' level of anxiety in learning English was at a moderate level. It indicates that students do not feel too anxious in learning English even though they may still feel anxious in other circumstances. Sadiq explained that because English in students' learning is usual, they often take English tests and are trained to speak in English. Thus, the students do not feel too anxious about learning English; in other words, they feel English is not something that they need to be afraid of because they are used to learning English every time in their school. Moreover, Latif (2015), who conducted a study in UTM SPACE in Malaysia, also found that students' anxiety in learning English was moderate. According to Latif, this is because the learners are more motivated and have high self-efficacy; hence, they can solve their problems in learning to be more independent and control feelings of nervousness. Therefore, being used to taking English tests, having been trained or being used to learning English, high motivation, and self-efficacy might also account for the result obtained in this study wherein the students were not very anxious about learning English.

3.2 *The Level of Students' English Academic Achievement*

The second research question tried to determine students' English academic achievement. Based on the finding, the result showed that the mean score of the students' English academic achievement was 71.34 (see table 2). Based on the scoring system of the high school understudy, the mean score was below 75, which was interpreted as *failed*. This indicates that the students did not perform well in their English class.

Table 2 The Level of Students' English Academic Achievement

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Achievement	41	60.00	85.00	71.34	11.12
Valid N (listwise)	41				

Anwar (2017) conducted a study about students' level of achievement in English in Bangladesh, and he found that 15 % of students failed in English and 57 % of students got poor marks in English. Moreover, the result of this study showed that the students' English academic achievement was categorized as failed or can be said poor could be because the respondents had difficulties in English based on their overall English class grade. This might be because they did not prepare well for the English class activities or tasks, including the test. In other words, the learners have poor performance in English examinations. Anwar commented that this is because they lack trained English language teachers, infrastructural facilities, and poor lesson instructions from the English teachers.

Moreover, according to El-Omari (2016), the factors that could explain the poor achievement of students are that some learners would skip the English class or hate the English teacher. Moreover, Tujuba and Davidson (2017) explained that one of the factors that caused this poor achievement was that the time to practice English is very short, and the less motivation of teachers to support students in learning English. Thus, the difficulties experienced in answering English tests, lack of trained English

language teachers and infrastructural facilities and students skipping English class or not liking the English teacher could be some of the reasons why students' English academic achievement was found to be failed. Additionally, the limited time to practice English and less motivation from teachers could also be other possible reasons why the students' English academic achievement in this study was found to be failed or in other words, poor.

3.3 The Correlation Between Students' Anxiety in Learning English and Their Academic Achievement

The last research question focused on whether there was a significant correlation between students' anxiety in learning English and their English achievement. Table 3 shows a significant correlation between the students' anxiety in learning English and their English academic achievement.

Table 3 The Correlation Between Students' Anxiety in Learning English and Their English Academic Achievement

		Achievement
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.98**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	41

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Based on the correlation between the two variables, the data showed $r = .98$ and $p = .00$. The researchers found that the students' anxiety significantly correlates with their English academic achievement based on the data analysis. Furthermore, the correlation between the two variables was found to be strong. The correlation is categorized strong because, according to Mindrila and Balentyne (2017), the relationship between two variables is generally considered vital when their r value is larger than 0.7. This finding indicates that the students' moderate level of anxiety significantly correlates with their English academic achievement, which was found to be failed or, in other words, poor. Moreover, the finding reveals that the significant correlation was positive. This means that the more anxious the students are, the better is their English academic achievement.

Weda and Sakti (2018) revealed a significant positive correlation between high-level anxiety with academic performance among English students at the Faculty of Languages and Literature Universitas Negeri Makassar, with a significant correlation ($p = 0.011$) and a correlation coefficient is $r = 0.235$. This finding is similar to the previous study conducted by Abuedfadl (2015), who found a significant positive correlation between students' anxiety in English and academic achievement with $r = .321$, $p < 0.05$. Moreover, another result found by Lian and Budin (2014) also showed a significant positive correlation between language anxiety and language achievement. This similar result is interesting because it shows that English language achievement also increases as anxiety increases. This indicates that the more anxious the students are, the higher their achievement. In other words, the students' anxiety could motivate or help them to perform better in English. Tsai and Chang (2013) proposed that students with anxious feelings in English can encourage language performance. Therefore, anxiety is not always a negative component of learning as the result obtained in this study found that high anxiety levels can positively contribute to students' English academic achievement.

4 Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that the students do not feel very anxious in learning English since a moderate level of anxiety was found in this study. Moreover, it can also be concluded that the students did not do well in their English class since they failed in their English academic achievement based on their mid-semester grades. Lastly, based on the findings obtained, it is concluded that the students' moderate level of anxiety in learning English has a significant correlation with their failure in their English academic achievement. It was found that the more anxious the students are, the

better is their English academic achievement. Thus, anxiety is a significant factor that can contribute positively to students' English academic achievement.

This study presents several recommendations. First, for the students, since they had a moderate level of anxiety in learning English, they need to change their perceptions about anxiety. Their understanding of anxiety needs to be broadened. They need to be aware that anxiety is not always a negative factor. Instead, they need to be taught to accept anxiety as something positive as it can motivate them to strive for improvement, especially in their English academic achievement. Furthermore, because the students failed in their English class or had poor performance in English academic achievement, they need to develop their knowledge of English. They should improve their ability to acquire English by listening to English music, watching English movies without subtitles, reading English books, and finding the new vocabulary to learn; they also need to motivate themselves to strive for better learning. Lastly, they need to change their habits in studying; for instance, if they only study when they have a test, most likely it will not work. They need to learn and practice English every day. In other words, they should practice their English everywhere and anytime they can.

The schools need to design attractive English programs so the students can join and feel more interested in learning English. Moreover, for English teachers, it is recommended to consider the level of students' English academic achievement by using more creative methods and strategies to support and motivate the students in learning English. In addition to that, teachers should tolerate the mistakes made by the students and inform them that making mistakes is inevitable in English learning, so the students should be provided with some strategies to cope with anxiety-provoking situations appropriately so that they would not avoid behavior and that anxiety will become something that will motivate them to perform better.

Furthermore, future researchers interested in conducting similar studies about students' anxiety in learning English and their English academic achievement can use the findings of this study as their basis. They may conduct other studies in different levels of class or different schools with more respondents to confirm the results found in this study and see whether the correlation is positive or negative. Also, it is recommended that future researchers try to find out how anxiety can positively affect students' English academic achievement.

5 References

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