

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN ONLINE LEARNING DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: THE CASE OF A MALAYSIAN PRIVATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the anxiety level in English usage and the factors causing the anxiety amongst undergraduates of a Malaysian private university using online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. It administers and adapts Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to 100 undergraduates of a Malaysian private university and uses an adapted set of Wörde's (2003) interview questions to support the quantitative data in the FLCAS. This study finds that Communication Apprehension is the factor with the highest influence on the undergraduates, with Test Anxiety being the least. From the three main nationalities of the undergraduates who participated in this study, it was found that the Chinese respondents recorded the highest mean for the level of anxiety, followed by the Indonesians, with Malaysians scoring the lowest.

Keywords: English language anxiety, online learning, communication apprehension, test anxiety

INTRODUCTION

The COVID -19 pandemic that began in early 2020 has resulted in a global shift from face-to-face classroom learning to online learning. According to Roxby (2020), The World Health Organisation declared the coronavirus as a 'Public Health Emergency of International Concern' on 30th January 2020. In Malaysia, the country started going into a Movement Control Order (MCO) on March 18, 2020 (Today, 2020). Due to the MCO, people were not able to go on with their daily lives as usual as they were afraid of being infected with the COVID - 19. They started adapting their lifestyles to abide by the restrictions of the lockdown, such as working from home and attending online classes.

According to the Malaysian Department of Statistics (2020), most educational institutions conducted online learning sessions and the survey finds that on average 67.5% of respondents took part in the online learning sessions for 1 to 5 hours daily throughout the MCO. Consequently, it is not only worthwhile but also important to explore the factors that cause English language anxiety in online learning.

There have been previous studies on foreign language anxiety in the online classroom environment. Examples include researches by Bolinger (2017), Jafarigohar and Behrooznia (2012), and Pichette (2009). Bolinger (2017) conducted a study regarding foreign language

anxiety in central Georgia, USA, and found that there were significant differences in foreign language anxiety scores of students between face-to-face and online teaching. Jafarigohar & Behrooznia (2012) researched the effects of foreign language anxiety on reading comprehension amongst Iranian undergraduates who were studying using online learning. However, he found that foreign language anxiety did not affect the undergraduates' reading comprehension in their online classes. Pichette (2009) who conducted a study on foreign language anxiety amongst undergraduates of a Canadian university which conducted lessons through online learning states that there were no significant differences in the language anxiety scores between the face-to-face learning and online learning. However, in the case of online learning, first semester undergraduates had a higher level of foreign language anxiety.

Although numerous studies have been carried out on foreign language anxiety, there are limited studies on it during the COVID -19 pandemic. The studies mentioned previously were all done before the COVID -19 pandemic started, when people could choose between face-to-face learning and online learning. In order to help stop the spread of the virus, most universities around the world have been using the online learning mode (Gallagher & Palmer, 2020).

Furthermore, especially in post-covid situations, online learning is considered a necessity, not just an option (Dhawan, 2020). This is evident in countries such as China which has been taking efforts in improving the quality of online education of their universities drastically. Education institutions will need to strive to provide innovative solutions and rapidly improve the quality of online education to benefit learners all over the world (Liguori and Winkler, 2020).

Studying online learning's impact on foreign language anxiety will add to the literature and knowledge even if online learning declines with the decline in the pandemic as it is now always available for use. The specific research questions for this study are: (1) What was the level of foreign language anxiety faced by undergraduates of a Malaysian private university in online classrooms?

(2) What were the factors affecting English language anxiety faced by undergraduates of a Malaysian private university in online classrooms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies have been done in the past providing definitions as to what foreign language anxiety is. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) defined language anxiety as "a feeling of tension and apprehension which is distinctly associated with speaking, listening and learning in second language contexts." Horwitz and Young (1991) described language anxiety as "a complex, multidimensional phenomenon that manifests itself in learners depending on ethnic background, prior language experience, learning personality and classroom atmosphere." Generally, foreign language anxiety refers to the feeling of fear and worry that one feels when speaking in a second or foreign language.

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety played a role in halting language acquisition due to the stress that it gave the learners of the language. As this type of anxiety was only triggered during specific situations, it was categorised as specific anxiety reactions. Howrwtiz et al. argued that foreign language anxiety could have an effect on the

communication strategies that students utilised in class. The more anxious a student was to speak the foreign language, the more the student would try to avoid communicating in the language (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Foreign Language Anxiety

This section presents the different studies that focus on the factors contributing to foreign language anxiety, aside from the study by Horwitz et al. (1986).

After a thorough scanning of the literature, it is apparent that there is an abundance of studies that have looked into foreign language anxiety in English learners, but few in learning other foreign languages. One prominent study done by Rodríguez and Abreu (2003) examined the differences in foreign language anxiety between English learners and French learners in a Spanish-speaking sample size. They found no significant statistical differences between the foreign language anxiety levels, especially when looking into Western languages. Furthermore, Daley et al. (1998) also found no significant difference in the anxiety level among Spanish, French, and German language learners in the United States. Shifting towards Eastern languages, Jin et al. (2015) compared English language and Japanese language learners in China and also found no significant difference between their anxiety levels. However, they cautioned that the actual causes were difficult to identify due to “a myriad of affective, cognitive, and demographic variables, or interactions among these variables.”

English Language Anxiety in Different Nationalities Compared

It is also pertinent to look at another factor that might affect the level of English language anxiety, which is the nationality and background of the learner. Tan et al. (2020) have inspected the level of willingness to communicate between three different Southeast Asian nationalities--Malaysian, Indonesian, and Thai. They investigated 1038 participants consisting of secondary school students from the three countries and their willingness to use English to communicate. They found Malaysian students to be the most willing to communicate using English inside the classroom and Indonesian students the most unwilling, suggesting that Indonesian students were more likely to have higher English language anxiety. In Javed et al.'s (2013) study, both Pakistani and Indonesian students had high English language anxiety, but Indonesian students generally had slightly lower anxiety. They also believed that Indonesian and Pakistani students needed more courses to improve their English to reduce their English language anxiety. In Oda et al.'s (2021) study that compared the English language anxiety of Indonesians and Japanese students, the Japanese students' English language anxiety has been found to be slightly higher than the Indonesian students' anxiety, with Japanese students having a mean of 3.37 and Indonesian students a mean of 3.22. Miskam and Saidalvi (2018) examined the English language anxiety of Malaysian undergraduates and found that the Malaysian undergraduates had a mean of 2.3 for their English language anxiety. In Liu's (2006) study, the English language anxiety level was at a mean score of 2.81 for Chinese students studying English in China. This then dropped in comparison with Wan's (2015) study of Chinese students based in the United Kingdom studying English, at an anxiety level 2.65. Wan (2015) noted that the drop was mainly due to the environment, i.e., the country where the students studied.

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) Model for Foreign Language Anxiety

Horwitz et al.'s (1986) "three-component model" described foreign language anxiety as having three components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. They defined communication apprehension as "a type of shyness characterised by the fear of or anxiety about communicating with people". This type of performance anxiety appears when people have oral communication anxiety (when they are scared to talk in groups) when speaking in a crowd or in public, or in listening to a spoken message where they are acting as the hearer. Communication apprehension contributes to the difficulty students face when talking in a foreign language as they do not have a lot of control over the situation. The second type of performance anxiety is test anxiety, which is anxiety from a fear of failure (Horwitz et al., 1986). The third type is fear of negative evaluation, which Horwitz et al., (1986) defined as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of negative evaluations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively." What makes it different from test anxiety is that test anxiety is specifically a fear that is brought on from test results, while fear of negative evaluation has a bigger range in the sense that it can be from any social, evaluative situation where the speaker is judged for his grasp on the foreign language. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), foreign language anxiety plays a role in halting language acquisition due to the stress that it gives the learners of the language. As this type of anxiety is only triggered during specific situations, it is categorised as specific anxiety reactions. They argued that foreign language anxiety could have an effect on the communication strategies that students utilised in class. The more anxious a student was when speaking the foreign language, the more the student would try to avoid communicating in the language.

In a study using Horwitz et al.'s ideas, Subekti (2018) found that, among Indonesian undergraduates, the two most influential factors of English language anxiety were communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation, with the two factors having a mean score of 2.9 and 2.95 respectively. Test anxiety had a 2.6 score. In contrast, Hassani and Rajab (2012) conducted a research to measure the level of English language anxiety among Iranian students against Horwitz et al.'s factors, and found the mean score for communication apprehension at 2.84, test anxiety at 3.35, and fear of negative evaluation at 2.93.

This study utilised Horwitz et al.'s theoretical framework but it would be employed for the first time on online learning, i.e., among Malaysian, Indonesian, and China students during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online Learning

With the advancement of more sophisticated communication technology, online learning is made easy for universities and learning institutions (McBrien et al., 2009). The term online learning is used when an instructor leads a class in a virtual platform (Singh & Thurman, 2019; Nguyen, 2015; Hoic-Bozic et al., 2009). Similarly, the term online learning is also used to refer to synchronous learning, where social interaction is not taken away but allowed as two-way or even multiple-way interaction between students of the class and the instructor in an online platform (McBrien et al., 2009).

Online Learning during Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID -19 pandemic has pushed universities into online learning with most countries adopting a full online learning method. (Gallagher & Palmer, 2020). In order to stop the spread of the virus, most universities around the world were in the mode of online learning (Gallagher & Palmer, 2020). Especially in post-covid situations, Dhawan (2020) has called online learning a necessity than merely an option, with countries such as China improving their universities' quality of online education drastically. Education institutions will need to strive to provide innovative solutions in hastily improving the quality of online education to benefit learners all over the world (Liguori & Winkler, 2020).

All in all, the literature on online learning is well-researched and provides different perspectives, especially the comparison between face-to-face learning and online learning. However, online learning now requires more attention than ever because of the pandemic, and there are many opportunities to help improve its quality. Foreign language anxiety is one aspect of the overall situation of online learning.

METHODOLOGY

The mixed method deployed in this study is an explanatory sequential design, which is defined by Creswell (2011) as a study that has an initial quantitative phase, followed by a qualitative data collection phase, where the data collected from the qualitative phase directly builds onto the initial data collected from the quantitative phase and is used to explain the quantitative data in greater detail. In order to achieve this, a semi-structured interview was carried out in order to strengthen the data collected from the FLCAS questionnaire.

Participants

This study did not require participants to be from a particular age group, gender, financial status, race and nationality. However, the sample size still consisted undergraduates from a private university in Malaysia comprising a variety of people from different genders, nationalities, and ethnicities. Majority of the undergraduates are young adults from age 18 years old to age 25 years old.

Through the adapted FLCAS questionnaire, this study was conducted on a total of 100 respondents in a Malaysian private university, comprising three different nationalities: Chinese, Indonesian and Malaysian. These respondents from the three countries were selected from 10 different faculties of the university.

Instruments

The first instrument that was utilised in this study is an adapted version of Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. The questionnaire was adapted in order to suit the purpose and aim of this study and has been validated by two educationalists. In the development of the questionnaire, Horwitz et al. (1986) categorised the 33 items listed on the questionnaire into three related performance anxieties that they conceptualised. These three anxieties are 1) communication apprehension; 2) test anxiety; and 3) fear of negative evaluation. Out of the 33 items listed in the questionnaire each item reflects at least one of the three anxieties in online English language classes.

The second instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview where factors that affect foreign language anxiety were further explored in order to enrich and consolidate the data obtained from the questionnaire employed in the first stage. The set of semi-structured interview questions was adapted from Wörde's (2003) study on foreign language anxiety in classroom environments.

Data Collection

In order to answer the first research question, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was used to test the English language anxiety of undergraduate students in a private university in Malaysia. The FLCAS questionnaire was adapted to focus on English language anxiety in online learning. For the second research question, a semi-structured interview was conducted to investigate the factors that affected the undergraduates' English language anxiety in online classes. Wörde's (2003) set of semi-structured interview questions was adapted to fit the purpose and needs of this study.

Data Analysis

In order to analyse the data derived from the quantitative strand of the study, SPSS was utilised to quantify and tabulate the findings. The minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation were tabulated for the data analysis. The mean and standard deviation of the questions pertaining to the 3 components of foreign language anxiety as theorised by Horwitz et al. (1986)—communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation—were tabulated and contrasted to see which component affects the sample size the most. This data would answer the first research question.

To strengthen and enrich the quantitative findings, the researcher supported the findings with the results of the semi-structured interview (qualitative method) which provided insights from the sample size to answer the second research question. To explore factors affecting English language anxiety in online classrooms, the interviews were transcribed and classified into themes based on the content of the interview. The results of the qualitative strand of the study would provide a deeper understanding of the level of foreign language anxiety that the respondents of the sample size possessed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings and discussion from the data collected to answer the research questions. It aims to present the level of foreign language anxiety faced by the 100 undergraduates of a Malaysian private university in online classrooms. From Horwitz et al.'s (1986) research, the extent of foreign language anxiety or level of anxiety, can be categorised using the mean of a respondent's overall result from the 33 items listed in the FLCAS.

Table 1: English Language Anxiety

English language anxiety level	Country			%
	China	Indonesia	Malaysia	
No Anxiety or Strongly Little Anxiety (Mean 1.00-1.49)	0%	2%	4%	6%
Little Anxiety (Mean 1.50-2.49)	2%	6%	20%	28%
Moderate Anxiety (Mean 2.50-3.49)	3%	17%	9%	29%
High Anxiety (Mean 3.50-4.49)	6%	13%	8%	27%
Strongly High Anxiety (Mean 4.50-5.00)	4%	5%	1%	10%
Total	15%	43%	42%	100%
Mean	3.88	3.31	2.53	3.24
Standard Deviation	0.25	0.35	0.24	

Table 1 compares the mean scores and standard deviation of all the respondents by their nationalities. It is apparent that the Chinese sample size registered the highest level of anxiety with a mean score of 3.88, followed by Indonesians with a mean score of 3.31. Malaysians had a relatively low mean score of 2.53.

When comparing the results of this study with other researches, the findings are in line with Tan et al.'s (2020) study which compared the willingness to communicate in English in the classroom among students from Indonesia, Thailand, and Malaysia. Tan et al. (2020) found that the Malaysian students were the most willing to communicate, while the Indonesian students were the most unwilling to communicate. In this study, Malaysians were found to have the lower English anxiety mean score than Indonesians.

With English being a forte for many Malaysians, it is no surprise that the foreign language anxiety level is much lower compared to the other nationalities in this study. English is used as a second language for many Malaysian undergraduates, with some even having it as their first language. This is coupled with the fact that English is the medium of instruction in Malaysian private universities. However, for the Chinese and Indonesian undergraduates, English is used as a foreign language, with the language not being given much emphasis in their education systems, unlike Malaysia.

The finding in this study about Indonesians' anxiety level at a mean score of 3.31 is consistent with that of Oda et al.'s (2021) study which found Indonesians at 3.32. In contrast, while this study found Chinese's anxiety level at a mean score of 3.88, Wan's (2015) research of Chinese undergraduates based in the United Kingdom was at only 2.65. Wan (2015) believed this was due to the environment, the country where Chinese students studied English.

English language anxiety levels are quite dependent on the individuals within the sample size. Even though there is a clear trend of anxiety levels amongst Malaysians and non-Malaysians in which many international undergraduates have higher anxiety levels compared to local (Malaysian) students, there are still respondents who fall within the little

anxiety categories in all nationalities. One likely contributing factor could also be the fact that 36% of the sample size were pursuing their studies in the Faculty of Social Sciences & Liberal Arts, which include courses within the field of Communications, which requires a reasonably stronger command of the English language compared to the other faculties.

In a nutshell, the English language anxiety levels within the sample size of 100 were mostly moderate to little anxiety. Thirty-four respondents had either “No Anxiety or Strongly Little Anxiety” or Little Anxiety, 29 respondents “Moderate Anxiety,” and 37 “High Anxiety” or “Strongly High Anxiety.” Thirty-six percent of the sample size displayed high anxiety, with Chinese showing higher levels at 3.88% compared to Malaysians at 2.53.

The next area of findings in this study addresses Horwitz et al.’s (1986) questionnaire to identify the levels of foreign language anxiety and factors affecting English language anxiety which corresponded to the individual questions of the 33 FLCAS, namely: (1) Communication Apprehension – where anxiety is rooted from the fears in making pronunciation and grammatical errors as well as limitations in vocabulary during communication; (2) Test Anxiety – deriving from the worry of performing badly in exams, tests, and assessments which potentially may lead to receiving negative results or grades (Horwitz et al., 1986); and (3) Fear of Negative Evaluation – where the sources of anxiety stem from the fear of stumbling and committing errors when using foreign language and potentially embarrassing ourselves.

Communication Apprehension

McCrosky (1987) argues that Communication Apprehension is a type of anxiety experienced when individuals have no control over the communicative situation in social settings. Daly (1991) adds that this is triggered because of “several characteristics of anxiety-provoking situation”. As a result, Mejias et al. (1991) indicates that students with higher levels of Communication Apprehension will likely remain quiet and be non-communicative during online classes.

Table 2 (see next page) shows the 11 questions from the FLCAS associated to the first factor that is used to map with the anxiety levels. Each question would be analysed closely using the 100 responses received from the sample size using quantitative data collection.

The findings of this study are similar to the findings in Subekti’s (2018) research, on English language anxiety among Indonesian students, in which he also found Communication Apprehension (with a mean value of 2.9) to be one of the factors that affected the students’ English language anxiety the most. In this study, Communication Apprehension at a mean score of 3.38 affects the students even more seriously.

Based on Table 2, the range of anxiety levels from the 11 questions are between 2.68 and 3.67 which indicates moderate anxiety levels with no extreme outlier. However, the two questions with the highest mean score – indicating higher anxiety levels – are at 3.67 and 3.65. The highest at 3.67 is the statement: “It frightens me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in English,” and the second highest statement: “I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English” at 3.65. In comparison with all 33 questions, the two questions with the highest anxiety level scores are the abovementioned two and both fall within Communication Apprehension. The ranges for the two other factors can be seen in the following two sub-sections below.

Table 2: Questionnaire Items Indicative of Sources of English Language Anxiety (Communication Apprehension)

No.	Source	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Communication Apprehension</i>				
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in my online classes.	1	3.22	0.89
2	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English.	4	3.67	0.88
3	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in online classes that use English.	9	3.40	1.17
4	I would be nervous speaking English with native speakers.	14	2.68	1.21
5	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting in online classes that use English.	15	2.78	1.11
6	I do not feel confident when I speak English in online classes.	18	3.05	0.90
7	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students in my online classes.	24	3.02	0.75
8	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English in online classes.	27	2.74	0.86
9	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the teacher says in my online classes that use English.	29	3.02	0.77
10	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English.	30	3.26	1.02
11	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English.	32	3.65	0.59
Overall Mean Score				3.38

Table 3: List of Coding

Types of data	Individual
IQ – Interview questions	IR1 – Interview Respondent 1 IR2 – Interview Respondent 2 IR3 – Interview Respondent 3

To elaborate further, the research will draw on the qualitative interviews that are conducted, where respondent 1 (IQ_IR1_14/07/2021I) mentioned that the lecturers would tend to point out English language errors, such as grammatical mistakes and the limited

command of vocabulary in class which affected confidence level and also increased anxiety for the students who were still trying to improve their English proficiency.

In a similar tone, Ganschow & Sparks (1996) found that undergraduates with high levels of anxiety exhibited poorer language skills. Making seemingly harmless statements by lecturers to motivate students such as, “they need to improve their English skills actually” does not help. Instead, it lowers their confidence and hence increases their English language anxiety level, as shown by respondent 1’s response:

...there are some lecturers that are quite brutal. For example, one of my lecturers once told me that [respondent name], your English still needs to improve. That made my level of confidence a little bit and I have to learn more because my lecturer said something about it. And one of the things I also feel worried about is lecturer comparing students with student. This student A is better than you, so you have to learn more.” Something like that. (IQ_IR1_14/07/2021)

Additionally, respondent 2 (IQ_IR2_14/07/2021) also pointed out that it was more complex when using English during online classes because English is not their native language, and it could sometimes take a while to think of the right words in English. The situation made students hold back from speaking or taking part in any online class interaction. Furthermore, respondent 2 found it difficult interacting with speakers with different accents as different nationalities tended to speak their own variety of English.

Moreover, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) believe that anxiety disturbs the processes of language encoding, storage, and retrieval, which explains why students with English language anxiety find it hard to look for the correct words (language retrieval), especially when they are put on the spot and have to present in front of the class. Not only is their English language anxiety level heightened due to being in the centre of attention, but they also must look for the appropriate words to say on top of behaving appropriately, such as using the right body language. This is shown by the responses from respondent 1 and respondent 2 regarding Communication Apprehension:

I think that since I’m not a native speaker sometimes when I have to speak in English, let’s say I can’t find the right terms to describe what I want to say, English makes it more complicated compared to when I’m using my native language. And sometimes because English is used by many people internationally, and each country has their own accent and sometimes if their accent influences their English it’s difficult for me to understand what they are trying to say. (IQ_IR2_14/07/2021)

Furthermore, respondent 2 (IQ_IR2_14/07/2021) also expressed the fact that it could be nerve-racking or intimidating when preparing to speak in online classes in English especially when the camera was turned on as students might feel as though they were being judged by the way they speak in English or how they looked when speaking on camera.

...in elaborating what we want to say it is more difficult when we use English, compared to our native language, and sometimes I feel more nervous when I feel like people are judging me behind the camera even though I know that they don’t feel that way, so actually I feel more nervous (IQ_IR2_14/07/2021)

Honestly, I feel nervous, because in online classes, we are so have to look at our time limitations and also look at our hand gestures, because if I speak English for example, I say something like this, but then my gestures or my body language is not directly the same then people will notice there is something wrong. (IQ_IR1_14/07/2021)

In addition, respondent 3 (IQ_IR3_14/07/2021) mentioned that lecturers talked too fast during online classes. The rate at which the lecturers talked and delivered their sessions made it very difficult (for IR3) to keep up with the sessions especially in an online setting where other factors played a part like volume and microphone issues, and internet connection problems which were beyond student control.

...sometimes they explain too fast, and I can't keep up...communication problem like you have to unmute to talk and you have to mute every time when lecturers are talking. It's just too distraction and it's taking too many time, too long to...I don't know...too many distractions, internet problems sometimes. That's one of the distractions. Probably...hmm...problem with keeping up while the lecturer...yeah. (IQ_IR3_14/07/2021)

Test Anxiety

Stober (2004) states that there are two main components of Test Anxiety: worry, and emotional status faced by students whenever they are evaluated. Additionally, Sansigiry and Sail (2006) highlight the fact that Test Anxiety can lead to irrelevant thoughts and might result in poor academic performance.

As can be seen from Table 4 (on next page), the mean anxiety level scores for the Test Anxiety factor that ranges between 2.15 and 3.36 is considerably moderate in anxiety levels. Compared to the other two factors, the Test Anxiety factor has the lowest anxiety level scores for the FLCAS questionnaire. According to Table 4, the lowest score is at 2.15 (“I often feel like not going to my online classes that use English”), followed by 2.36 (“It would bother me if I ever choose to pursue my postgraduate studies that have online classes that use English”). The two highest text anxiety level were derived from the items “I tremble when I know that I’m going to be called on in online classes that use English,” at 3.36 and “In online classes that use English, I can get so nervous and forget things I know,” at 3.34.

In this study, Test Anxiety factor documented the lowest mean out of the three anxiety factors at 3.12, which contrasts with a study by Hassani and Rajab (2012) on English language anxiety among Iranian students. They found that Test Anxiety is actually the factor with the highest mean out of the three anxiety factors, where the mean value for Test Anxiety is at 3.35, Communication Apprehension is at 2.84, and Fear of Negative Evaluation is at 2.93.

Table 4: Questionnaire Items Indicative of Sources of English Language Anxiety (Test Anxiety)

No.	Source	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation.
<i>Test Anxiety</i>				
1	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in online classes that use English.	3	3.36	0.53
2	It would bother me if I ever choose to pursue my postgraduate studies that have online classes that use English.	5	2.36	1.05
3	During my online classes, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course because I do not completely understand when my instructor uses English.	6	2.87	0.73
4	I am rarely at ease during tests in my online classes that use English.	8	2.85	0.69
5	I worry about the consequences of failing my online classes that use English.	10	3.12	0.50
6	I completely understand why some people get upset over online classes that use English.	11	3.10	0.78
7	In online classes that use English, I can get so nervous and forget things I know.	12	3.34	1.18
8	Even if I am well prepared for online classes that use English, I feel anxious about it.	16	2.69	0.88
9	I often feel like not going to my online classes that use English.	17	2.15	1.19
10	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in online classes that use English.	20	2.81	0.92
11	The more I study for a test for an online class that uses English, the more confused I get.	21	2.55	1.23
12	I feel pressure to prepare very well for online classes that use English.	22	2.75	0.95
13	I feel more tense and nervous in online classes that use English than my other online classes.	25	3.01	0.35
14	My online classes that use English moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	26	2.65	0.80
15	When I'm getting ready to go into my online classes that use English, I rarely feel sure and relaxed.	28	3.08	0.49
Overall Mean Score				3.12

Looking into the interview questions on the qualitative data collection, all the three respondents revealed their stress and anxiety when preparing and taking exams/tests. They had brought in valuable insights on the different reasons why they felt anxiety because of the tests. One obvious contributor would be the stress itself, as explained by respondent 1. For example, respondent 1 (IQ_IR1_14/07/2021) had exhibited high stress and anxiety level the day before an exam, especially with the exams being conducted online which brought in a new element of anxiety hurdles.

Similarly, in a study investigating stress and behavioural changes with online exams during the Covid-19 pandemic, Elsalem et al. (2020) found that 32% of undergraduates reported more stress with online exams compared to face-to-face exams. This is disclosed in the response given by respondent 1 regarding online Test Anxiety:

I'll feel so stressed out and so worried. One of the things is because of the time limitations and like, because of the connection also. So, even if it's online classes, but if we have mid-term exams for example, we have to turn on our cams. The day before I enter, I will have to study, and it's quite stressed out sometimes. (IQ_IR1_14/07/2021)

In addition, Respondent 2 (IQ_IR2_14/07/2021) pointed out and stressed on the factor of weak or poor comprehension of the exam questions due to the weak command and understanding of the English language:

...when I have an exam, what I'm worried is if I have an exam let's say if I have a, there is a question that I don't really understand, of course sometimes we cannot ask the lecturers so we have to find out by ourselves sometimes when we don't know the meaning of the question or if I'm going to answer the question and I don't know how to elaborate, but not because I don't know how to answer it but it's because I don't know how to find the right terms to answer the question. That's what I'm worried about. (IQ_IR2_14/07/2021)

Respondent 3 (IQ_IR3_14/07/2021) adds on by saying that when tests are in English, it would be more difficult because it is in a foreign language and the language barrier pushes them to put more effort into studying. Though anxiety is not emphasized but it is already an added anxiety:

...it's definitely harder than having your own language in the exam. I have to learn harder than the locals. (IQ_IR3_14/07/2021)

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of Negative Evaluation is the “apprehension about others’ evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively” as defined by Watson and Friend (1969). In addition, Young (1991) adds that one of the main effects of this anxiety factor is the fear of making verbal mistakes and, thus, the reluctance of participating in online class discussions. Meanwhile, Price (1991) also states that the fear of making mistake in pronunciation is a contributor, besides the fear of speaking or delivering a presentation in front of others (Koch and Terrell, 1991).

Referring to Table 5 (see next page), the range of anxiety level or mean score for the 7 questions is between 2.65 and 3.34, which again indicates moderate anxiety levels similar to the other two factors. It was noted that the 7 questions for the Fear of Negative Evaluation factor, all fall within the 33 questions of the FLCAS, where the highest levels of anxiety are manifested from Communication Apprehension while the lowest levels are revealed in the Test Anxiety factor. Nevertheless, this study also looked into the two questions with the highest anxiety levels for this factor, which are “I worry about making mistakes when using

English during online classes,” at an anxiety level of 3.34 and “I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do” at an anxiety level of 3.31.

Table 5: Questionnaire Items Indicative of Sources of English Language Anxiety (Fear of Negative Evaluation)

No.	Source	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Fear of Negative Evaluation</i>				
1	I worry about making mistakes when using English during online classes.	2	3.34	0.87
2	I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.	7	2.91	1.19
3	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my online classes that use English.	13	3.30	0.62
4	I am afraid that my teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make when I use English.	19	2.65	1.04
5	I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.	23	3.31	0.53
6	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	31	2.80	0.88
7	I get nervous when the teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance in my online classes that use English.	33	2.73	0.42
Overall Mean Score				3.29

The mean score of the anxiety level for the Fear of Negative Evaluation factor in this study is the second highest mean score out of the three anxiety factors. In contrast, Subekti (2018) found that Fear of Negative Evaluation factor is actually the anxiety factor with the highest mean with a score of 2.95 compared to Communication Apprehension and Test Anxiety, which are 2.9 and 2.6 respectively. However, the findings of this study regarding Fear of Negative Evaluation are similar to Hassani and Rajab's (2012) findings, where Fear of Negative Evaluation also recorded the second highest mean out of the three levels of anxieties, with a score of 2.93, while Communication Apprehension obtained a score of 2.84 with Test Anxiety scoring a mean of 3.3

One key question that was asked during the qualitative interview in relation to this factor is “How do you think people in your online classroom will react if you make mistakes in using English”? From the responses given by the three respondents, we can see that they did not feel offended, nor do they mind being corrected. The three respondents were quite open to making mistakes in their online classes when speaking English because of their supportive classmates.

According to Kalsoom et al. (2020), foreign language anxiety is directly impacted by social support from peers, classmates, and lecturers. In their research in Pakistan, they found that the biggest influencer in this context was the students' best friends in class. This explained why in this study the three respondents can accept making mistakes in their online classes because they knew that their classmates are supportive, as shown by the response from respondent 1:

...my classmates are not going to react because they also...uh...they are not into details. For example, if I say something wrong in the class, something wrong with my English, they won't notice. But maybe the lecturer will notice. They will say "[respondent name], this is not the right English, this is not the right grammar. (IQ_IR1_14/07/2021)

The only worry or slight anxiety respondent 1 would have seemed to be from the corrections given by the lecturers as referenced in the quote above. Apparently, from the response expressed by respondent 2 (IQ_IR2_14/07/2021), even when mistakes committed by the speakers were corrected by the classmates, they were appreciated.

I think most of them will understand, but I think sometimes they will correct me let's say I'm trying to say something and it doesn't make sense in English, they try to ask me or confirm what is the meaning of what I'm trying to say, yeah that's mostly how they react. (IQ_IR2_14/07/2021)

When probed on how respondent 2 would react when mistakes are corrected, the response is as follows:

I think actually it's quite helpful in helping me improve my English. But sometimes I feel ashamed because I can't speak English the correct way. (IQ_IR2_14/07/2021)

When respondent 3 was asked the same question, the response was also related to being open-minded:

I don't mind. Honestly, I don't really mind it. I will take it as an information.

Generally, the Fear of Negative Evaluation may not be the biggest concern, nor the biggest contributor to English language anxiety, but as aligned with Communication Apprehension, there are also some other factors which can contribute to anxiety, such as during presentations or when lecturers constantly correct English language mistakes in front of others which is considered a form of intimidation and very likely to result in embarrassment.

Overview

This section discusses the overall analysis of the three factors affecting English language anxiety from Horwitz et al.'s (1986) questionnaire. It addresses the general patterns taken from the findings of the questionnaire as well as the previous subsections addressing research question 2.

A deeper analysis of Table 6 (see next page) reveals that when all three anxiety factors are compared against the anxiety level, they all fall under the "moderate anxiety" category. It must be noted that the mean for anxiety level of Communication Apprehension is 3.38, it is 3.12 for Test Anxiety, and 3.29 for Fear of Negative Evaluation. These scores are categorised under "moderate anxiety" and this most evidently is another indication that Communication Apprehension is the factor that affects the other two factors of anxiety more out of the sample size of 100 respondents. This also reemphasises the point that was made previously where anxiety levels are around moderate levels and are not extremely high nor low.

Table 6: English Language Anxiety Indicator

Source	Country			Mean per Source	Anxiety Level
	China	Indonesia	Malaysia		
Communication Apprehension	4.02	3.51	2.61	3.38	Moderate Anxiety
Test Anxiety	3.84	3.12	2.39	3.12	Moderate Anxiety
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.76	3.43	2.69	3.29	Moderate Anxiety
Mean per Country	3.88	3.31	2.53		

When reiterating the comparison of anxiety levels of the undergraduates between countries, Chinese undergraduates are classified under high anxiety whereas, the Indonesian and Malaysian undergraduates are classified under moderate anxiety.

In summary, when comparing the three factors and sources of anxiety within the respondents and their responses to the 33 questions of the FLCAS, it is clear that Communication Comprehension is the factor which was accorded the highest anxiety level. However, the two other factors, Test Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation also played a role in causing English language anxiety for undergraduates. From the respondents' verbatims taken from the interviews, it is evident that Communication Apprehension is the higher driving factor for anxiety as the online lessons generally require a lot about speaking time and interactions as well as the fear of making communication mistakes.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study reveal that the level of English language anxiety faced by undergraduates in online classes during the COVID-19 pandemic fluctuate from person to person and differ depending on the nationality. In addition, the interviewees mentioned that speaking English in their online classes was a struggle and very inhibiting when finding the right words and getting the grammar right as well as being compared to their classmates.

This study is limited by using only one private university in Malaysia for sourcing undergraduate students. More research is recommended as the findings of this research may not be representative of undergraduates studying in Malaysia. Second, due to the COVID -19 pandemic, the researcher was not able to collect a large sample size to conduct the data collection. Therefore, it is recommended for future studies a larger sample size be selected to achieve more accurate analysis and results.

From the results of this research, it is recommended that the Malaysian private university reviews the online classes to identify opportunities to reduce the level of anxiety, and to avoid or prevent technical issues. Since Communication Apprehension is the main driving factor for English language anxiety, it is recommended that the university reviews the delivery and techniques used to impart the contents of the online lessons. Additionally, create a learning environment that is as stress-free as possible, and this includes aspects that would help improve language comprehension and use of language. As for the undergraduates who have high level of anxiety during online class, self-awareness is always the first step to

improvement. Finally, the last recommendation would be to conduct further research on the correlation between English language anxiety between students in face-to-face classroom setting and online classroom setting and explore further the different anxiety levels students face in the two mediums.

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