

### Short Paper

# Foreign Language Anxiety Experienced by AB English Language Students

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## Abstract

This study was conducted to assess the anxiety level of AB English Language students across the four foreign languages they have taken. Employing a quantitative approach, the study utilized a modified version of the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale and was administered to 101 students who have finished Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin. The results reveal that the students experience moderate levels of anxiety across the four foreign languages, with Mandarin receiving the highest and Korean receiving the lowest. Several factors were identified as reasons for the anxiety level of the respondents across the foreign languages such as the cultural aspect, and the difference in the script system of the languages. Finally, the results of the study are seen to benefit curriculum developers and language teachers to strengthen the foreign language curricula in the Philippines, particularly the efficacy of pursuing four (4) distinct foreign languages that come from different language families.

**Keywords** – foreign language, language learning, anxiety, language education



## INTRODUCTION

Defined by Spielberger (1983) as the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry, anxiety is largely considered the most well-documented psychological phenomenon. Scovel (1978) established early on that anxiety produced very inconsistent results, particularly its relationship with language learning achievement. He claims that a certain level of anxiety can be beneficial, a form of "facilitating" anxiety, while too much on the other hand can lead to inefficiency, a form of "debilitating" anxiety.

Horwitz et al. (1986), with their seminal work on foreign language anxiety as a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors about classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process", produced the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). With the FLCAS, a deluge of studies on the effects of anxiety on foreign language achievement soon followed. Studies that sprang explored the many facets of foreign language learning and anxiety; from the link between anxiety and speaking tasks (Horwitz, 2001), to reading anxiety (Sellers, 2000), and even listening anxiety (Elkhafaifi, 2005).

In the Philippine context, the country Locally speaking, the Philippines has long been a multi-lingual society, owing to this fact is the long history of colonial rule, divergence of linguistic communities, and convergence of communities facilitated by rapid technological advances. In fact, according to McFarland (2004), Filipinos are at the forefront of language convergence, marked by the high levels of borrowing from other languages. Capitalizing on this long-withstanding exposure of Filipinos to different cultures and languages, foreign language learning has long been part of tertiary-level education in the Philippines. Additionally, with the continued thrust of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) to produce globally competent graduates, several other foreign languages have since been incorporated into the curriculum of select educational programs.

The AB English Language (ABEL) program is one of the educational programs that offers several foreign languages as part of its curriculum. In the CHED Memorandum Order No. 24, series of 2017, CHED has set forth the policies, standards, and guidelines for the ABEL program, and has prescribed four (4) foreign language subjects for students taking the program. While there are varying factors that affect the attainment of foreign language proficiency, one important and crucial factor is the experienced anxiety during the language learning process (Jugo, 2020; Labicane, 2021; Camacho, et al., 2017). As such, this study looks into the role of anxiety in the case of AB English Language students of Pangasinan State University across the four (4) foreign languages that the students have taken, namely Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin, and in doing so, establish a baseline for future curricular developments.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Foreign Language Learning in the AB English Language Program***

Along with the advent of globalization came the plurilingualism and linguistic diversity in the Philippines, along with the rest of the world. With an interconnected world, it has become even more imperative to acquire foreign language skills to remain relevant in today's 21<sup>st</sup>-century society (Stein-Smith, 2017). To this end, the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority share in the responsibility for the teaching and learning of foreign languages in the country, albeit in their domains of responsibility – the DepEd does so by formulating and implementing language policies in the primary and secondary levels, the CHED through the monitoring and supervision of degree-granting programs in the tertiary and post-graduate levels, and finally the TESDA through the implementation of various technical-vocational education and training programs.

As part of the Commission on Higher Education (2017), in fulfillment of this mandate, released CHED Memorandum Order No. 24, series of 2017 entitled Policies, Standards and Guidelines for the Bachelor of Arts in English Language/Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies to implement an outcomes-based education that recognizes the importance of global communication in the twenty-first century. To this end, besides the theoretical and practical approaches to the use of the English language, students taking up Bachelor of Arts in English Language (ABEL) are also required to take four (4) foreign language electives.

### ***Anxiety in Language Learning***

Since Horwitz et al. (1986) defined language anxiety as a feeling of self-consciousness and fear, subsequent studies have been conducted to ascertain its effects on language learning across varying situations. Male (2018) studied the language anxiety experienced by 71 university students at the Universitas Kristen Indonesia, particularly their anxiety levels towards English across four language skills, namely Reading, Speaking, Listening, and Writing. Results of the study show that for the respondents, the highest anxiety level felt was in writing, followed by reading, speaking, and finally, listening. Male, based on the results of the study, forwarded that a larger scale of the study be administered to truly determine the role of language anxiety among university-level students in Indonesia.

Similarly, Labadidi (2016) administered an identical study on students across several higher education institutions in the United Arab Emirates. To better contextualize the results of the study, Labadidi (2016) also administered focus group interviews to correlate the results in the quantitative phase of the study. The findings of the study show that the majority of the 278 respondents experience moderate to high levels of anxiety in foreign language classrooms. Additionally, Labadidi (2016) also noted that the respondents also

disclosed the importance of effective, welcoming, and competent language teachers. To this end, the study recommended analyzing language anxiety across different contexts such as cultural and geographical implications.

Alnuzali (2020), on the other hand, assessed the effects of language anxiety among tertiary students in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but unlike Male's (2018) and Labadidi's (2016) studies, solely utilized qualitative techniques. The study reveals several causes of language anxiety among students, these being *test anxiety*, *strict classroom environment*, *cultural background*, *first language interference*, *fear of negative evaluation*, *perfectionist tendency*, *personality traits*, and *learners' linguistic capacity*. To this end, the study recommends that these identified factors be closely studied further to better understand their ramifications, particularly in the design and implementation of university-level instruction.

In the United States, Bollinger (2017) assessed the difference in language anxiety felt by community college students in Georgia, and how it differs between traditional and distance learning modalities, and finally, how it impacts student achievement. By administering a modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), the results show that there is indeed a correlation between the level of anxiety felt and the student's academic achievement. Also relevant is the result that students under the distance learning modality felt higher levels of language anxiety. Ultimately, the study affirmed Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis which states that high anxiety levels hinder effective language acquisition.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

The research employed the quantitative methodology in ascertaining sources and causes of foreign language anxiety across the four foreign language subjects taken by ABEL students, namely Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin. Descriptive statistics were applied on the five-point Likert scale of the questionnaire.

### ***Participants***

The participants of the study were 101 4th year AB English Language students who had already taken all the FL courses (Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin) by the 2nd Semester of Academic Year 2022-2023.

### ***Instruments of the Study***

The research utilized a Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLAS), which is a 30-item questionnaire that seeks to determine the language anxiety of respondents. The

questionnaire was originally inspired by Clément, Gardner & Smythe (1977), and was subsequently refined and utilized by Jugo (2020). These refinements included contextualization of the original FLAS into the Philippine context, particularly classroom activities like writing, error correction, negative self-perception, and noncomprehension. Additionally, seven (7) independent language experts tested the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Since the study covered their anxiety across the four (4) foreign languages they have taken, the questionnaire has 120 items in total.

### **Data Analysis**

The questionnaire was answered on a five-point Likert scale; 1 (not at all), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often), and 5 (always). The information and data collected were then processed using the appropriate statistical tools and methods, such as IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 20. Weighted means and standard deviation were used to describe the anxiety level experienced by the respondents.

## **RESULTS**

### **Foreign Language Anxiety Experienced by ABEL Students in Nihongo**

The overall language anxiety of the respondents in Nihongo is Moderate ( $M=3.21$ ,  $SD=0.904$ ). Of the six categories, speaking with native speakers ( $M=3.47$ ,  $SD=0.96$ ) is identified as the primary source of language anxiety for the respondents in Nihongo (Table 1). This indicates that for the respondents, Nihongo is a language that is not easily learned.

Table 1. Sources of Nihongo language anxiety

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
Speaking Activity	3.42	0.86	High
Writing Activity	3.14	0.88	Moderate
Error Correction	3.06	1.03	Moderate
Speaking with Native Speakers	3.47	0.96	High
Negative Self-Perception	3.03	0.86	Moderate
Non-comprehension	3.15	0.84	Moderate
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.21</b>	<b>0.90</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

### **Foreign Language Anxiety Experienced by ABEL Students in Spanish**

With regards to Spanish, the respondents' overall language anxiety is interpreted as Moderate ( $M=3.13$ ,  $SD=0.85$ ; Table 2). Additionally, it can also be noted that like with Nihongo, their highest source of language anxiety in Spanish is speaking with native speakers ( $M=3.29$ ,  $SD=0.87$ ) which is similar to the overall interpretation in Nihongo. While

all statements under the speaking with native speaker's category fall under Moderate interpretation, the range of their values is in the upper range of the scale ( $M=3.20-3.37$ ).

Table 2. Sources of Spanish language anxiety

Indicators	M	SD	Interpretation
Speaking Activity	3.25	0.88	Moderate
Writing Activity	3.10	0.87	Moderate
Error Correction	3.10	0.92	Moderate
Speaking with Native Speakers	3.29	0.87	Moderate
Negative Self-Perception	2.95	0.80	Moderate
Non-comprehension	3.11	0.77	Moderate
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.13</b>	<b>0.85</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

### **Foreign Language Anxiety Experienced by ABEL Students in Korean**

Compared to Nihongo and Spanish, Korean received a much lower overall value, though the interpretation is still Moderate ( $M=3.07$ ,  $SD=0.92$ ; Table 3). Additionally, the same pattern can also be observed as that in Nihongo and Spanish. Speaking with native speakers is also the highest source of language anxiety ( $M=3.24$ ,  $SD=0.90$ ).

Table 3. Sources of Korean language anxiety

Indicators	M	SD	Interpretation
Speaking Activity	3.08	0.97	Moderate
Writing Activity	3.03	0.91	Moderate
Error Correction	3.07	0.93	Moderate
Speaking with Native Speakers	3.24	0.90	Moderate
Negative Self-Perception	2.91	0.95	Moderate
Non-comprehension	3.11	0.85	Moderate
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.07</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

### **Foreign Language Anxiety Experienced by ABEL Students in Mandarin**

With Mandarin, the overall language anxiety is also interpreted as Moderate, though it received the highest overall value amongst the four foreign languages ( $M=3.22$ ,  $SD=0.96$ ; Table 4). The pattern is also repeated as with the three foreign languages discussed beforehand, that speaking with native speakers remains to be the highest source of language anxiety in Mandarin ( $M=3.38$ ,  $SD=0.98$ ).

Table 4. Sources of Mandarin language anxiety

Indicators	M	SD	Interpretation
Speaking Activity	3.34	1.00	Moderate
Writing Activity	3.32	0.94	Moderate
Error Correction	3.16	0.95	Moderate
Speaking with Native Speakers	3.38	0.98	Moderate
Negative Self-Perception	3.03	1.00	Moderate
Non-comprehension	3.13	0.90	Moderate
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.22</b>	<b>0.96</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

### **Overall Foreign Language Anxiety Experienced by ABEL Students**

Overall, the respondents feel moderate foreign language anxiety (M=3.16, SD=0.91; Table 5). The results of the study also reveal that the respondents feel the most anxiety in Mandarin (M=3.22, SD=0.96), while feeling the least in Korean (M=3.07, SD=0.92).

Table 5. Overall Foreign Language Anxiety

Language	M	SD	Interpretation
Nihongo	3.21	0.90	Moderate
Spanish	3.13	0.85	Moderate
Korean	3.07	0.92	Moderate
Mandarin	3.22	0.96	Moderate
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.16</b>	<b>0.91</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Foreign Language Anxiety Experienced by ABEL Students**

The presented results for sources of anxiety for Nihongo indicate that it is a language that is not easily learned. As illustrated by Quintos (2021), students do acknowledge the necessity of learning Nihongo to compete globally but the intricacies of the language and its features distinct from Filipino and English, make learning it extremely challenging. This also echoes the study of Xu (2020) in which he asserts that due to the difficulty of the language, most learners give up pursuing further pieces of training and education in the Nihongo language.

On closer analysis, three of the five statements in the said category received means higher than 3.41, indicating high anxiety. As with most learners of foreign languages, while speaking with native speakers is considered a very effective method of fostering interest

and building competence in learning foreign languages, it can also negatively impact the learners due to fear of correction and embarrassment (Dos Santos, 2020). The respondents also have very limited opportunities to engage with native Nihongo speakers due to the dearth of Japanese nationals in the locale, further reinforcing the thought that what they learn in class is not enough to properly engage with native Nihongo speakers.

As for the results for Spanish, Rodriguez-Ponga (2009) has noted that Spanish language education in the Philippines has been on a steady and steep decline since the Second World War. This is one of the reasons why there are fewer and fewer fluent Spanish speakers in the Philippines today compared to several decades before. As such, college-level learners have since found the once-official language of the Philippines either unnecessary, burdensome, or difficult, as is echoed by Manarpiis (2017). Additionally, speaking with native speakers received the highest mean and is attributed to the scarcity of fluent Spanish speakers in the locale of the research, a current trend on the national scale as opined by Galvan-Guijo (2005) and Rodriguez (2021). Another important consideration in the anxiety attributed to communicating with native Spanish speakers is the concept of othering, the reductive action of distancing and ostracizing anything different from the norm (Rodriguez, 2019)

For Korean however, the results yielded a Moderate interpretation, and as observed by Castillo (2022) and Maniego, Recinte & Aquino (2018), this can be attributed to the continuous rise in popularity and influence of Korean Pop (KPOP) culture in the Philippines. Similarly, this reduced level of anxiety amongst college-level learners runs parallel with even post-graduate-level learners, as concluded by Ancho (2019). Furthermore, compared to Nihongo and Spanish native speakers, the number of Korean native speakers in the Philippines has been on a steady increase since 2016 (Ariola & Talavera, 2018), which can also account for the significantly lower mean the anxiety derived from speaking with Korean native speakers. Finally, another important contributing factor to this seeming less anxiety of students towards the Korean language is the constant increase of home-grown local instructors capable of teaching the language (Bae & Igno, 2012).

In the case of Mandarin, as observed by Yang (2014), the contact between China and the Philippines can be traced back to ancient times but has suffered extreme strain and tension in recent years due to international issues such as territorial disputes. As such, the previously noted othering has a much is in a much greater effect on Mandarin as compared to that of the three other foreign languages. While there have been constant efforts to train local teachers capable of teaching Mandarin to better address the stigma of Mandarin as noted by Pamintuan (2021), there remains a severe shortage in the number of duly certified and capable Mandarin language teachers in the country. Also, *othering* for Mandarin is escalating even to the point of xenophobia in the case of Chinese in the most recent years, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This has been noted by similar researchers and even extends to other Asian nationalities (Hennebry & Hari, 2020; Khan, Zainuddin & Mahi, 2021).



When comparing the results of the anxiety felt by the respondents across the four (4) foreign languages, one important factor to consider for the highest anxiety felt towards the Mandarin language is the cultural aspect, particularly the dominantly negative perception of Filipinos towards Chinese as was commented heavily on by Valdez (2011). This, on the other hand, is the direct opposite of the Korean language, for which the lowest anxiety is felt by the respondents. As was previously mentioned, the popularity of Korean culture which has since been entrenched in the Philippines allows the friendly perception of most Filipinos towards Koreans. It is also important to note the proliferation or influence of Korean culture in the current media landscape of the Philippines, which again contributes to the positive perception towards anything related to Korean culture, language included.

Another contributing factor to the foreign language anxiety felt by the respondents is an important factor is the script system of the four foreign languages, which, apart from Spanish, the remaining three languages all have their own. The need for students to familiarize themselves with the characters and their corresponding rules for the languages' alphabet serves as a big impediment in easily familiarizing themselves with the target language. Mandarin, with its use of 8,105 characters, necessitates the most effort on the part of the students to master. Nihongo, on the other hand, uses three writing systems; the syllabic Hiragana and Katakana both have 46 characters are used to represent Japanese words and foreign words, respectively and the Chinese-inspired Kanji where each character stands for a word and a corresponding meaning. Finally, the Hangul writing system for Korean is phonetic and made up of 14 consonants and 10 vowels.

Based on the results of the study, of the three foreign language subjects with different script systems, the respondents experience the least anxiety in Korean. This is largely because the said foreign language is not tonal – meaning one tone, accent or pronunciation equals one meaning. Apart from this, the said foreign language has a logical writing system that is designed to help learners pronounce words with ease.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

As the current population of respondents are taking up Bachelor of Arts in English Language and the majority of the courses they have taken are in the field of linguistics, they are expected to be much more at ease in learning foreign languages. The results, however, point in a different direction, instead revealing that most Filipino learners at the collegiate level still encounter difficulties in learning foreign languages. Considering also that all four (4) foreign languages taken by ABEL students received Moderate overall anxiety levels, it is proof enough that anxiety does play a crucial role in foreign language education.

Of considerable note in the results of the study is the fact that speaking with native speakers of foreign languages is consistently the highest source of anxiety. This implies that the learners lack the necessary exposure to actual native speakers of the language,

hence their high level of anxiety with communicating with them. Additionally, negative self-perception is also consistently the lowest source of their language anxiety, indicating that the respondents exhibit an acceptable level of confidence in their capacity to learn foreign languages.

With regards to the utilization of the results of the study, the decision to offer four (4) distinct foreign languages should be revisited this is proving detrimental to the anxiety level being felt by the students. Instead, the option to offer two foreign languages at beginner and advanced levels should be assessed (Spanish 1, Spanish 2, Korean 1, and Korean 2, instead of Nihongo, Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin). Finally, educational institutions offering degree programs with foreign language components should invest considerably in the recruitment of duly licensed and certified instructors and immersion activities of students to better address the anxieties felt by students in learning said foreign languages.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

The findings of the research show that even with the rapid spread of cultural influence, and the long-standing multilingualism among Filipinos, anxiety towards foreign language learning remains to be a significant factor in foreign language classrooms. With the continuous strides in internationalization in the field of education, it is becoming even more apparent that the role of foreign language learning is an intrinsic part of national development. While studies are continuously being pursued on the factors that affect foreign language learning, there also exists a need to further compare the effect of these factors across different foreign languages being taught/learned.

Furthermore, the results of this study will provide valuable insights for education specialists, curriculum developers, and foreign language teachers on the role that anxiety plays in foreign language classrooms.

Finally, the need to study the efficacy of pursuing four (4) foreign languages vis-à-vis the actual language achievement of students also exists and can provide invaluable insights for further refinement of language curricula.

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## DECLARATIONS

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there has been no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

### **Informed Consent**

All participants in the study have been properly informed of the nature and purpose of the study, and have given their due consent before their participation.

### **Ethics Approval**

The conduct of this study is also in due conformance with the ethics standard set forth by the institution and has been duly cleared and approved.

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## Author's Biography

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