Assessing the Contributing Factors to Language Anxiety Among Pre-Service English Teachers

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Abstract

This study examined the contributing factors to language anxiety among pre-service English teachers at Northern Iloilo State University, Northern Iloilo, Philippines. Guided by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety Theory, the research sought to identify the level of anxiety experienced by pre-service teachers and determine whether significant differences exist when grouped according to sex, socio-economic status, and parents' educational attainment. Using a quantitative descriptive design, data were gathered from sixty respondents through the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Descriptive statistics and non-parametric tests, specifically the Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis H tests, were employed. Results revealed that respondents exhibited a moderate level of language anxiety, with fear of attending English classes and apprehension toward teacher correction identified as the most prominent sources. Findings also indicated no significant differences in anxiety levels across demographic variables. These results suggest that language anxiety is a common emotional experience among pre-service English teachers, primarily influenced by classroom climate and evaluative contexts rather than by demographic factors. The study highlights the need for teacher education programs to incorporate affective strategies that reduce anxiety and foster communicative confidence among future English educators.

Keywords: Language Anxiety, Pre-Service English Teachers, Affective Factors, Classroom Communication, Teacher Education

1. Introduction

Language learning is an inherently affective process in which anxiety often plays a crucial role in determining learners' success and confidence, particularly in speaking and classroom communication. Among English language learners, foreign language anxiety remains a significant psychological barrier that affects performance, motivation, and self-efficacy. For pre-service English teachers, this issue becomes more critical since their future professional competence relies heavily on their ability to communicate effectively and confidently in English. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (2019) defined foreign language anxiety as a distinct form of self-perception, belief, and behavior related to language learning in classroom settings, often characterized by tension, apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. Numerous studies have confirmed that this kind of anxiety influences pronunciation, fluency, participation, and willingness to communicate (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2020; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2020).

In the Philippine context, where English is both a medium of instruction and a marker of academic prestige, pre-service teachers are expected to demonstrate advanced linguistic proficiency and teaching readiness. However, many teacher education students still experience linguistic insecurity and communication apprehension when using English, especially in formal academic interactions. Studies by

Liu and Huang (2019) and Ely (2021) found that such anxiety is often linked to learners' self-esteem, perceived proficiency, and fear of making mistakes in public. Likewise, Zhang and Zhong (2019) emphasized that socioeconomic background and parental educational attainment may affect students' access to language support and their resulting confidence in English. These factors highlight that language anxiety is multidimensional, influenced by personal, social, and pedagogical conditions that shape learners' emotional experiences in language classrooms.

For pre-service English teachers, managing language anxiety is not only vital for academic performance but also for their professional identity formation. As future language educators, they must model confidence, clarity, and communicative competence for their students. Research by Chen and Lee (2020) and Gao and Li (2019) revealed that teacher trainees with high anxiety levels often struggle to engage in oral communication tasks and teaching demonstrations. Addressing such anxiety early in teacher education programs can therefore improve classroom performance and long-term teaching effectiveness. Despite extensive international research, there remains limited local evidence exploring how demographic and academic factors intersect with anxiety among Filipino pre-service English teachers.

Thus, this study aims to explore the contributing factors to language anxiety among pre-service English teachers at Northern Iloilo State University. By identifying the sources, levels, and manifestations of anxiety, the research seeks to provide insights into how teacher education institutions can develop pedagogical strategies that promote emotional well-being, communicative confidence, and linguistic competence among future educators.

Aim and Objectives

Aim:

This study aims to explore the contributing factors to language anxiety among pre-service English teachers and determine how demographic and academic variables influence their anxiety levels.

Specific Objectives:
   a. To identify the overall level of language anxiety among pre-service English teachers.
   b. To determine whether there are significant differences in language anxiety when grouped according to sex, socio-economic status, and parents' educational attainment.
   c. To examine the specific causes or sources of anxiety experienced by pre-service English teachers in English language learning.
   d. To analyze how classroom experiences, feedback, and communication practices contribute to students' anxiety.
   e. To propose strategies that can reduce language anxiety and promote confidence among pre-service English teachers in academic and teaching contexts.

Null Hypotheses

In line with the study's objectives, the following null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

   1. H_{01}: There is no significant difference in the level of language anxiety among pre-service English teachers when grouped according to sex.

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2. H_{02}: There is no significant difference in the level of language anxiety among pre-service English teachers when grouped according to socio-economic status.
3. H_{03}: There is no significant difference in the level of language anxiety among pre-service English teachers when grouped according to parents' educational attainment.
4. H_{04}: There is no significant relationship between students' perceived sources of anxiety and their overall level of language anxiety.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant value for teacher education, language instruction, and curriculum development in higher education. Understanding the factors that contribute to language anxiety among pre-service English teachers is essential for improving both linguistic competence and teaching readiness. As future educators, these students are expected to model communicative confidence and fluency in English, yet persistent anxiety can hinder their ability to teach effectively and engage learners (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2020). Identifying the underlying sources of anxiety provides valuable insights for teacher educators, who can design supportive classroom environments that emphasize positive feedback, authentic communication, and gradual exposure to speaking tasks. For curriculum developers, the findings can guide the inclusion of anxiety-reducing strategies such as reflective speaking, peer mentoring, and affective training within English language education programs. Pre-service teachers themselves may benefit from self-awareness about their linguistic apprehensions, helping them build coping mechanisms and resilience that enhance both performance and confidence (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2020). On a broader level, the study supports institutional goals of producing competent, communicatively adept teachers aligned with the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED, 2013) mandate for quality language education. By addressing the affective dimension of learning, this study contributes to a more holistic and sustainable model of teacher preparation that integrates linguistic proficiency with emotional well-being.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Foreign Language Anxiety Theory proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), which conceptualizes language anxiety as a unique and multifaceted phenomenon distinct from general anxiety. According to the theory, foreign language anxiety arises from learners' self-perceptions, beliefs, and emotions associated with the act of learning and using a new language. It manifests through three interrelated components: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to fear or discomfort when speaking in the target language, particularly in formal or evaluative contexts. Test anxiety involves fear of failure during assessment situations, while fear of negative evaluation pertains to learners' concern about being judged by teachers or peers (Horwitz et al., 2019). For pre-service English teachers, these dimensions of anxiety are particularly relevant, as they are expected not only to master the language but also to teach it confidently. The framework supports this study's examination of how demographic variables—such as sex, socio-economic background, and parental education—intersect with affective and situational factors that influence learners' anxiety. Moreover, the theory provides the foundation for interpreting how classroom interactions, instructional methods, and perceived linguistic competence contribute to emotional responses that affect language performance. Guided by this framework, the study seeks to identify the key contributors to language anxiety and offer insights for designing interventions that foster confidence, communicative competence, and emotional resilience among pre-service English teachers.
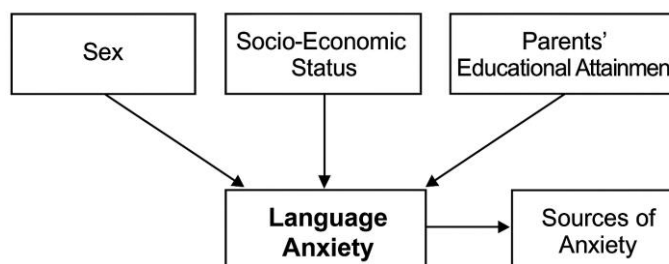
Conceptual Framework

Figure 1. Diagram of Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study, illustrating the relationship between the identified independent variables and the dependent variable. The Independent Variables include Sex, Socio-Economic Status, Parents' Educational Attainment, and Sources of Language Anxiety. These variables represent the demographic and experiential factors that may influence pre-service English teachers' emotional responses to language learning situations. The Dependent Variable is the Level of Language Anxiety Among Pre-Service English Teachers, which encompasses the degree of apprehension, nervousness, or fear experienced when using or learning English. The arrows indicate the hypothesized influence of each independent variable on the dependent variable, based on Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety Theory, which posits that anxiety arises from complex interactions among personal, social, and instructional elements. This framework therefore provides a visual representation of how various contextual and individual factors collectively contribute to the overall level of language anxiety, guiding both data analysis and interpretation of results in this study.

2. Review of Related Literature

Language anxiety has long been recognized as one of the most pervasive affective variables influencing language learning and performance. It is typically defined as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with foreign language use, often manifesting as tension, fear, or apprehension during communicative tasks (Horwitz et al., 2019). Researchers such as MacIntyre and Gregersen (2020) emphasized that language anxiety can inhibit participation, reduce willingness to communicate, and lower academic achievement. It is especially prevalent among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners who experience internal conflicts between linguistic competence and communicative performance. Studies further indicate that language anxiety is not limited to beginners but also affects advanced and pre-service language learners, including future teachers who are expected to display fluency and confidence (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2020). This highlights that emotional factors are integral to language learning and must be addressed in teacher preparation programs.

One major determinant of language anxiety is communication apprehension, which refers to the fear or nervousness associated with speaking in front of others or being evaluated during oral performance. According to Liu and Huang (2019), many pre-service English teachers exhibit anxiety due to a lack of spontaneous speaking practice and fear of negative judgment from peers and instructors. Ely (2021) similarly noted that female learners tend to report higher anxiety levels, often because of sociocultural expectations and self-consciousness in public speaking. Other studies, such as those by Zhang and Zhong (2019), revealed that learners from lower socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to experience linguistic insecurity due to limited access to quality educational resources and exposure to English-

speaking environments. These findings suggest that communication apprehension is not only psychological but also shaped by social and economic contexts.

Another factor contributing to language anxiety involves fear of negative evaluation, which emerges when learners anticipate criticism or disapproval from teachers and classmates. Chen and Lee (2020) found that pre-service teachers often perceive language errors as reflections of their professional competence, intensifying their anxiety during class recitations and teaching demonstrations. This aligns with Gao and Li (2019), who reported that students with lower self-efficacy are more prone to anxiety and less likely to participate in communicative activities. Studies also suggest that excessive teacher correction and rigid classroom norms can amplify fear of mistakes, limiting students' opportunities to take communicative risks (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2020). These patterns are consistent with Horwitz's (1986) theoretical assertion that language anxiety arises from perceived threats to self-esteem in academic and evaluative settings, making affective support and positive reinforcement essential for reducing anxiety levels.

Finally, research underscores the importance of creating an emotionally supportive classroom environment that minimizes stress and fosters confidence. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2020) proposed that balancing anxiety with enjoyment enhances motivation and resilience in language learning. Interventions such as collaborative learning, reflective journaling, and constructive feedback have been shown to decrease learners' anxiety and increase engagement (Li, 2021). For pre-service English teachers, this is particularly critical, as their classroom experiences shape their professional identity and teaching attitudes. Addressing affective barriers early in teacher education can enhance not only language proficiency but also pedagogical competence and confidence. Hence, exploring the factors contributing to language anxiety among pre-service English teachers provides valuable insights into how teacher training institutions can design programs that integrate emotional well-being with linguistic development.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative descriptive research design to determine the contributing factors to language anxiety among pre-service English teachers. The descriptive approach was appropriate because it allowed the researchers to gather measurable data regarding students' levels of anxiety and to analyze how demographic variables such as sex, socio-economic status, and parents' educational attainment relate to these anxiety levels. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), descriptive quantitative designs are effective for identifying patterns, relationships, and trends in naturally occurring phenomena without manipulating variables. This design also aligned with the study's goal of describing and interpreting existing conditions rather than establishing causality.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The study involved sixty (60) pre-service English teachers from the Northern Iloilo State University, Northern Iloilo, Philippines, during the Academic Year 2023–2024. Participants were selected through quota sampling, ensuring proportional representation across year levels (first to fourth year). Inclusion criteria required that participants were currently enrolled in English language education courses and had prior classroom experience in English communication tasks. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents before data collection. The sample size was deemed sufficient to ensure representativeness for statistical analysis and to reflect the population of English major students at the university.

Research Instrument

The study utilized the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) as the primary research instrument. The questionnaire consisted of 33 statements rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The items measured three components of foreign language anxiety: (1) communication apprehension, (2) test anxiety, and (3) fear of negative evaluation. To ensure contextual relevance, selected items were adapted to the pre-service teaching setting and validated by three language experts. The computed Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.89 indicated high internal consistency, confirming the instrument's suitability for this population (Taber, 2018). Demographic information such as sex, socio-economic status, and parents' educational attainment was also included in the survey.

Data Gathering Procedure

After securing approval from the university's research ethics committee, the researchers coordinated with the Department of Teacher Education to administer the questionnaire. Surveys were distributed both in printed form and digitally through secure links to ensure accessibility. Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and instructed to answer honestly. Data collection occurred over two weeks, allowing sufficient time for retrieval and verification of responses. Completed questionnaires were encoded, tallied, and organized for statistical processing.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and percentage) were used to determine the overall level of language anxiety and identify the most prevalent sources of anxiety. To examine differences in anxiety levels across demographic variables, Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis H tests were employed, as the data did not meet the assumption of normality. These non-parametric tests are appropriate for ordinal data and small sample sizes (Pallant, 2020). Results were interpreted at a 0.05 level of significance, with decisions made to accept or reject the null hypotheses accordingly.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards in educational research were strictly observed. The researchers ensured that participation was voluntary and that respondents were fully informed of their rights and the purpose of the study. Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection, and anonymity was maintained by assigning codes instead of names. The researchers upheld confidentiality by storing all records securely and limiting access to authorized personnel only. Furthermore, findings were presented objectively, with no manipulation of data, consistent with the principles of honesty, integrity, and respect for human participants (Resnik, 2020).

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1
Level of Language Anxiety Among Pre-Service English Teachers When Grouped by Sex

Sex	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Male	2.58	Moderate Anxiety

Sex	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Female	2.77	Moderate Anxiety
Overall Mean	**2.68**	**Moderate Anxiety**

Table 1 shows that both male (M = 2.58) and female (M = 2.77) respondents exhibited moderate levels of language anxiety, with females reporting slightly higher levels. This suggests that while both groups experience anxiety in language learning, female respondents may be more affected by emotional and self-evaluative aspects of communication. Ely (2021) explained that female learners often report higher anxiety due to heightened self-awareness and fear of committing linguistic errors in public contexts. However, the difference between groups was not statistically significant, indicating that both male and female pre-service English teachers encounter similar affective challenges in developing communicative confidence. These findings are consistent with Liu and Huang (2019), who reported comparable anxiety levels among male and female language learners, implying that anxiety is a shared experience across genders rather than one determined by sex alone.

Table 2
Level of Language Anxiety When Grouped by Socio-Economic Status

Socio-Economic Status	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Low Income	2.67	Moderate Anxiety
Middle Income	2.57	Moderate Anxiety
Overall Mean	**2.62**	**Moderate Anxiety**

As presented in Table 2, both low-income (M = 2.67) and middle-income (M = 2.57) respondents showed moderate anxiety levels. This indicates that socio-economic status, while a potential factor in access to educational resources, does not strongly differentiate the degree of anxiety among pre-service English teachers. Nevertheless, students from lower-income backgrounds displayed slightly higher anxiety, possibly due to limited exposure to English-speaking environments and fewer opportunities for confidence-building experiences. Zhang and Zhong (2019) found similar patterns, suggesting that learners from economically disadvantaged contexts often experience linguistic insecurity resulting from fewer authentic communication opportunities. These results highlight the need for universities to provide equitable access to language immersion activities regardless of economic background.

Table 3
Level of Language Anxiety When Grouped by Parents' Educational Attainment

Parents' Educational Attainment	Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Elementary	3.80	High Anxiety
High School	3.10	Moderate Anxiety
College	2.81	Moderate Anxiety
Overall Mean	**3.24**	**Moderate Anxiety**

Table 3 indicates that respondents whose parents attained only elementary education (M = 3.80) reported the highest levels of language anxiety, while those whose parents completed college showed lower anxiety (M = 2.81). This suggests that parental educational background significantly influences students' affective experiences in language learning. Chen and Lee (2020) explained that learners whose

parents have higher educational attainment often benefit from greater academic encouragement and exposure to English, thereby reducing anxiety and enhancing self-confidence. Conversely, students with limited parental academic support may perceive language learning as intimidating, particularly when faced with high performance expectations in teacher education programs. These findings echo those of Gao and Li (2019), who noted that home literacy environments strongly shape students' linguistic attitudes and emotional engagement in English learning.

Table 4
Major Sources of Language Anxiety Among Pre-Service English Teachers

Source of Anxiety	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Fear of attending English classes	3.70	High Anxiety	1
Apprehension toward teacher correction	3.40	High Anxiety	2
Nervousness when speaking without preparation	2.83	Moderate Anxiety	3
Fear of negative peer evaluation	2.75	Moderate Anxiety	4
Difficulty understanding lessons	2.60	Moderate Anxiety	5

As shown in Table 4, the primary causes of anxiety among pre-service English teachers were fear of attending English classes (M = 3.70) and apprehension toward teacher correction (M = 3.40), both rated as high anxiety factors. Respondents also reported moderate anxiety in speaking without preparation and in fear of peer evaluation. These results confirm that anxiety often stems from classroom interactions involving evaluation and linguistic performance. According to Horwitz et al. (2019), fear of negative evaluation is a core dimension of foreign language anxiety that affects learners' willingness to participate in communicative tasks. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2020) observed that performance pressure and fear of teacher feedback are among the most common sources of classroom anxiety. The findings suggest that pedagogical adjustments, such as supportive corrective feedback and low-stakes oral assessments, can help minimize affective barriers in language classrooms.

Table 5
Statistical Tests on the Differences in Language Anxiety Across Demographic Variables

Variable	Statistical Test	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Sex	Mann–Whitney U	0.274	Retain H_0	No Significant Difference
Socio-Economic Status	Kruskal–Wallis	0.416	Retain H_0	No Significant Difference
Parents' Educational Attainment	Kruskal–Wallis	0.502	Retain H_0	No Significant Difference

Table 5 presents the results of the Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis H tests, which revealed no significant differences (p > 0.05) in the level of language anxiety when respondents were grouped according to sex, socio-economic status, and parents' educational attainment. This indicates that language anxiety is a shared affective experience that cuts across demographic boundaries. Miu and MacIntyre (2019) explained that while personal and contextual factors may influence anxiety, its occurrence is largely driven by internal perceptions of competence and fear of failure rather than external variables. These results align with the findings of Gao and Li (2019), who reported that learners' anxiety levels are more strongly affected by classroom conditions and instructional approaches than by demographic factors. Therefore, interventions aimed at reducing anxiety should focus on pedagogical reform and emotional support rather than demographic segmentation.

Summary of Findings

The findings demonstrate that pre-service English teachers generally experience moderate levels of language anxiety, regardless of demographic characteristics. Although no significant differences were observed by sex, socio-economic status, or parental education, notable anxiety triggers include fear of attending English classes and apprehension toward teacher feedback. These results affirm Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety Theory, which posits that anxiety emerges from evaluative and communicative contexts where learners feel their competence is being judged. The study underscores the importance of creating emotionally supportive classrooms that promote linguistic confidence, positive teacher-student interactions, and balanced corrective feedback.

Implications of the Results

The results of this study reveal that language anxiety among pre-service English teachers is a common affective experience influenced by both internal and contextual factors. The finding that students exhibit moderate levels of anxiety regardless of sex, socio-economic background, or parental education suggests that anxiety is more deeply rooted in pedagogical and psychological elements than in demographic differences. This implies that language teacher education must address emotional readiness alongside linguistic competence. As MacIntyre and Gregersen (2020) emphasized, managing affective variables such as anxiety and motivation is essential for achieving balanced language learning outcomes. Since fear of teacher correction and anxiety in attending English classes were found to be major triggers, instructors must consider adopting supportive feedback practices and low-stress communicative environments. These findings also highlight the importance of emotional intelligence and empathy training for language educators to better recognize and manage students' affective responses in the classroom. On an institutional level, these results call for the integration of mental wellness and affective learning modules in pre-service teacher education curricula to promote confidence, self-regulation, and resilience in future English educators.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations
Conclusion

This study explored the contributing factors to language anxiety among pre-service English teachers at Northern Iloilo State University. The analysis revealed that while the overall level of anxiety was moderate, significant emotional challenges persist, particularly regarding fear of evaluation, teacher correction, and speaking without preparation. Although no significant differences were found across sex, socio-economic status, or parental education, these factors still contribute indirectly to students' confidence and learning experiences. The results affirm the applicability of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety Theory, which posits that anxiety arises from communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The study concludes that language anxiety is a multidimensional construct influenced by classroom climate, instructional methods, and learners' perceptions of competence rather than by their demographic characteristics. Addressing these affective aspects is critical in preparing pre-service teachers for communicative and pedagogical roles where confidence and linguistic proficiency are interdependent. Ultimately, fostering a supportive and reflective classroom atmosphere can transform anxiety from a debilitating factor into a manageable motivational force that enhances language learning and teaching preparedness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, this study recommends that teacher education institutions integrate affective learning and language anxiety management strategies into English and communication courses. Educators should adopt positive reinforcement and formative feedback techniques that reduce students' fear of making mistakes and encourage risk-taking in communication. The use of collaborative speaking tasks, peer mentoring, and reflective journals can help pre-service teachers process their emotions and monitor their progress. Curriculum developers should also include workshops on language confidence, public speaking, and error tolerance, ensuring that pre-service teachers gain both linguistic competence and affective resilience. Moreover, guidance offices should provide psychological counseling and language support services to assist students in managing stress and self-doubt. For researchers, further studies may explore intervention programs that combine emotional regulation strategies with language instruction, or examine the role of online and hybrid learning environments in shaping anxiety levels. Implementing these recommendations can help reduce the prevalence of language anxiety and build more confident, effective, and emotionally balanced English educators.

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