

**The Impact of EFL Learners'
Sociobiography on Language
Learning Anxiety**

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Indah Sulistiawati

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

Abd. Haris Sunubi

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

Magdahalena Tjalla

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

Zulfah Fakhruddin

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

Mujahidah

Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

Abstract

This study examined the effects of EFL learners' sociobiographical factors (age, gender, and multilingualism) on their language learning anxiety. The research employed a quantitative approach with comparative analysis methods to investigate how these sociobiographical variables influence anxiety levels among language learners. Data analysis through t-tests revealed statistically significant correlations between sociobiographical variables and language learning anxiety, with p-values less than 0.05. The findings provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between learners' backgrounds and their anxiety in language learning contexts. These results have important implications for developing targeted teaching strategies and support systems aimed at creating more inclusive and effective EFL learning environments. The study addresses existing gaps in the literature and offers guidance for future educational policy and practice.

Keywords

Language, Learning Anxiety, Sociobiography

Corresponding author:

Indah Sulistiawati, IAIN Parepare, Parepare, Indonesia

Email: indahsulistiawati@iainpare.ac.id

INTRODUCTION

Foreign language learning anxiety is a common phenomenon among EFL Learners. Affect has been shown to influence learning, with positive affect enhancing achievement and negative affect inhibiting it. Specifically in the field of foreign language learning, many authors agree that language learners' anxiety depends on each specific situation. Different from the general anxiety of the class (Sardi et al., 2017). Consolidating definitions and historical background is essential to creating a concise and impactful introduction for research. This process involves streamlining information by combining related concepts, summarizing historical developments, and focusing only on the most critical elements needed to understand the research context, according to the concept that foreign language learning anxiety (FLA) was first introduced by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) as a distinct complex of feelings and behaviors that hinder second language acquisition. Subsequent studies have reinforced its importance, linking it to challenges such as fear of speaking, criticism, and low motivation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

This type of anxiety, called foreign language anxiety (FLA), is considered to play an important role in foreign language learning. In 1986, Horwitz & Cope first introduced foreign language anxiety. Several authors have used their research as a basis for developing or treating other problems related to foreign language anxiety. They described fear as another form of fear. Anxiety plays an important role in language acquisition and can help facilitate and/or hinder the learning of an additional language.

Foreign language learning anxiety is defined as “feelings of tension and fear specifically associated with a second language context, including speaking, listening, and learning” (MacIntyre, P.D.; Gardner, 1994). The concept was first comprehensively introduced by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope in 1986, who described it as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors associated with language learning in the classroom that arise from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, 1986).

According to Horwitz (1986), foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a situation-specific anxiety experienced in response to learning and using a language, similar to stage fright or test anxiety. Horwitz define FLA as a complex of cognitions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviors related to language learning in the classroom that arise from the uniqueness of the language learning process. Various studies show that learners experience problems when learning a foreign language for reasons such as fear of making mistakes, fear of being criticized, not being able to say anything or participate, fear, poor pronunciation, and inadequate understanding of the foreign language, grammar, difficulty in oral expression, low motivation, and the influence of the local language/mother tongue.

Much research has been conducted on foreign language learning anxiety, there are still gaps in our understanding of how sociobiographical factors influence these anxiety levels (Ananda et al., 2024). However, there is still a lack of comprehensive studies examining the relationship between various sociobiographical factors and foreign language learning anxiety, especially in the context of EFL in Indonesia. Therefore, there is a need to investigate the effect of EFL learners' sociobiography on their language

learning anxiety. Understanding this relationship could provide valuable insights for developing more effective teaching strategies and support systems to address anxiety in diverse EFL classrooms. So therefore, this study aimed to know how the effect of EFL learners' sociobiography (age, gender, multilingualism) towards their language learning anxiety.

According to the concept that Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and its impact on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, gaps remain in fully understanding how sociobiographical factors (such as age, gender, and multilingualism) influence anxiety levels. While FLA has been widely studied in global contexts, particularly in Western and developed educational settings exploration within Indonesian EFL classrooms remains relatively underdeveloped. This research is urgency caused of primarily on general psychological or environmental factors contributing to language learning anxiety, such as classroom environment, teacher feedback, or peer pressure. Few delve into how an individual learner's background, such as age and prior exposure to multiple languages, uniquely shapes their anxiety levels during language acquisition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have explored the role of sociobiographical variables such as age, gender, and multilingualism in shaping language learning anxiety. Research by Dewaele (2022) revealed that age often correlates with increased anxiety, as older learners may experience heightened pressure to succeed or self-judgment when compared to younger learners. However, this finding contrasts with studies in Indonesian EFL settings, where younger learners sometimes report higher anxiety levels due to limited exposure to English outside the classroom. Gender has emerged as a significant variable. While studies like Liu (2021) suggest that female learners report higher FLA due to communication apprehension and societal expectations, findings by Chen (2023) in more egalitarian classroom environments indicate negligible differences in anxiety between male and female students. This highlights the importance of considering cultural context when evaluating the relationship between gender and FLA.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) established one of the earliest models of FLA, conceptualizing it as a situation-specific anxiety distinct from general anxiety types. Subsequent researchers expanded on this model by incorporating sociocultural and psychological factors. For example, Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis posits that anxiety acts as a mental barrier to successful language acquisition. However, critics like MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) argue that anxiety may not always hinder learning but could serve as motivation in controlled classroom environments.

The role of multilingualism in FLA remains debated. Dewaele (2022) found no significant effect of multilingualism on reducing anxiety, challenging the assumption that exposure to multiple languages naturally leads to lower anxiety levels. Conversely, Auerbach (2023) suggests that multilingual experiences enhance metalinguistic awareness, fostering confidence and reducing FLA. This discrepancy underscores a

research gap, particularly within Indonesia, where learners often navigate multiple local languages before learning English.

(MacIntyre, P.D.; Gardner, 1994) said that foreign language anxiety also known as xenophobia, is a feeling of discomfort, worry, tension, and anxiety that occurs when learning or using a second or foreign language. That emotion can come from any second language context, whether related to productive skills of speaking and writing or receptive skills of reading and writing. Spielberger (1979) explains that anxiety is one element of emotion caused by a feeling of discomfort or fear of danger without warning. Learning anxiety is an atmosphere, feeling, or syndrome characterized by a sense of fear of danger and threat. Theoretically, anxiety is understood as a state of worry that signals the anticipation of something negative about to happen. Anxiety becomes abnormal when its levels are disproportionate to the situation. Excessive anxiety can lead to psychosomatic symptoms, which may include feelings of anxiety, tension, fear, sleep disturbances, cognitive impairments, mood changes (such as irritability), somatic/physical symptoms (e.g., muscle tension), sensory disturbances, respiratory issues, digestive problems, and autonomic dysfunctions.

Literature on FLA and concluded that a moderate negative relationship exists between language anxiety and various measures of language achievement. Further studies have confirmed this trend (Altamimi, 2023); (Zhang, 2019); (Botes, E., Dewaele, J. M., & Greiff, 2020); (Hu et al., 2021); (Widyasari, 2023); (Han et al., 2022); (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2022). Interestingly, FLA does not disappear among more advanced learners. More experienced learners also seem to suffer more from FLA. However, an extended overseas experience in the target language (TL) country seems to increase self-confidence in it and, as a result, decrease foreign language classroom anxiety (Matsuda & Gobel).

(Misraniah Idrus, 2021) state that anxious learners have a negative impact on their performance, emotional reactions, and general attitude when learning the target language during spontaneous speaking activities. Additionally, they lack self-confidence, are less able to self-edit or recognize errors in their speech, and are more likely to use avoidance strategies such as skipping class. Anxious students also tend to forget previously learned material, volunteer less, and be more passive in class activities than their non-anxious classmates.

(Onwuegbuzie, 2000) explain that foreign language anxiety has been found to be related to a number of sociobiographical and affective factors. Onwuegbuzie identified eight variables that collectively accounted for 40% of FLA variance (i.e., age, academic achievement, prior history of visiting foreign countries, prior high school, experience with foreign languages, expected overall average for current perceived scholastic competence, and perceived self-worth). A further study by (Bailey, K. M., 2000) identified the same independent variables as being linked to higher levels of FLA, with the addition of perceived intellectual ability and perceived job competence.

Some studies have been conducted on foreign language anxiety (Jiang, Yan, 2020); (Elias Bensalem, 2018); (Ekstrom, 2013); (Bensalem, 2019); (Selami Aydin, 2017) those studies found that sociobiographical factors such as age, gender, and multilingualism have

a significant linked to FLA. A study by (Jean-Marc Dewaele, 2015) found that age have significant affect while multilinguism have no effect to FLA. And also the study of (Jean-Marc Dewaele, 2022) state that sociobiographical background variables such as age and multilingualism have no effect, while gender has a small effect on FLA.

RESEARCH METHOD

The comparative research design is used in this study to analyze the influence of socio-biographical variables (age, gender, and multilingualism) on language learning anxiety among learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This comparative research design allows the researcher to compare different groups of participants based on their socio-biographical characteristics. The researchers used independent sample t-test to test the existing hypotheses, such as whether there are significant differences in language learning anxiety levels based on the participants' age, gender, or level of multilingualism.

In this study, the population is English Foreign Language Learners who are studying English as a foreign language in schools, universities, or english course. This approach ensured that the study addressed how age, gender, and multilingualism influence FLA in varied contexts. The sample distribution across these characteristics supports robust comparisons and enhances the study's generalizability within the Indonesian EFL context. Sample were radomly taken from the relevant popuation and divided into groups based on the following characteristics: Age group (Teenagers 13-18years`and Adults 19-59years); Gender Group (Feemale & Male); Language Groups (Bilingual & Multilingual).

In this study, the data measurement technique used is the Likert scale through a closed questionnaire. This questionnaire is designed to collect information about the respondents' profiles, where the answers have been provided by the researcher. The use of a five-point Likert scale allows respondents to express their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements presented, thereby providing data that is more measurable and can be statistically analyzed. The main instrument used in this research phase is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope in 1986. FLCAS is a questionnaire consisting of 33 questions that uses a five-point Likert scale.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The comparative test in this study was conducted to analyze the presence or absence of differences between two groups for each variable of sociobiography towards their language learning anxiety. Below is the analysis table that explains it. The study identified significant differences in language learning anxiety based on socio-biographical factors such as age, gender, and multilingualism. The finding that teenage EFL learners exhibit higher anxiety levels compared to adults aligns who attributed this difference to developmental factors such as emotional maturity and learning strategies. Further support this, noting that adults' prior experiences in structured learning environments often reduce

anxiety. It highlights the complexity of this relationship by introducing motivational factors and prior learning experiences as moderating elements, calling for a contextual approach to understanding how age affects language anxiety.

This finding similarly discovery that female learners tend to have higher anxiety levels than their male counterparts is supported by Farhane-Medina et al. (2022), who attribute this to biological and psychological factors, including hormonal fluctuations and genetic predispositions. Contrasting perspectives, however, suggest personality traits, such as neuroticism and extraversion, have a more direct impact on language anxiety than gender alone (Qin & Li, 2024; Saracevic et al., 2021). These findings indicate the need for nuanced, individualized approaches in language anxiety research. The first table below presents the results of an Independent Samples Test of Age, which examines whether there are statistically significant differences in anxiety levels between teenagers and adults.

Table 1 Independent Samples Test of Age

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	t	Df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					One- Sided p	Two- Sided p			Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	,190	,665	2,576	38	,007	,014	15,00000	5,82280	3,21236	26,78764
Equal variances not assumed			2,576	37,639	,007	,014	15,00000	5,82280	3,20864	26,79136

According to table below that the Levene's Test for Equality of Variances shows that the F-statistic is 0.190 with 1 and 38 degrees of freedom, and the significance is 0.665. This indicates that the assumption of equal variances between the two age groups is met. The t-test results show that when equal variances are assumed, the t-statistic is 2.576 with 38 degrees of freedom, and the one-tailed significance is 0.007. The two-tailed significance is 0.014, which is less than the typical alpha level of 0.05.

Additionally, the 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference shows that the lower bound is 3.21236 and the upper bound is 26.78764. Since this interval does not include zero, it further confirms that there is a statistically significant difference in anxiety levels between teenagers and adults. When equal variances are not assumed, the t-statistic is 2.576 with 37.639 degrees of freedom, and the one-tailed significance is 0.007. The two-tailed significance is 0.014, which is also less than 0.05. This indicates that the conclusion regarding the significant difference between age groups does not depend on the assumption of homogeneity of variances. The 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference in this case shows a lower bound of 3.20864 and an upper bound of 26.79136, again indicating a significant difference in anxiety levels between the two age groups.

These results suggest that there is a meaningful and statistically significant difference in anxiety levels between teenagers and adults

The next table shows the results of the difference test between two independent sample groups, namely the difference in gender. In this test, there are two conditions being tested, namely assuming equal variances between the two groups (equal variances assumed) and unequal variances (equal variances not assumed).

Table 2 Independent Samples Test of Gender

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	5,690	,022	5,308	38	<,001	<,001	21,90000	4,12547	13,54843	30,25157
Equal variances not assumed			5,308	24,666	<,001	<,001	21,90000	4,12547	13,39761	30,40239

In the row "Equal variances assumed," it shows that the t-statistic value is 5.308 with a degree of freedom (df) of 38. The significance (Sig.) values for both the one-tailed and two-tailed tests are less than 0.001, indicating a highly statistically significant difference. This means that there is a significant difference in the dependent variable (language learning anxiety) between male and female groups.

Furthermore, in the row "Equal variances not assumed," similar testing results also show a significant difference with a t-statistic value of 5.308 and significance less than 0.001 for both one-tailed and two-tailed tests. This indicates that the conclusion regarding the significant difference between gender groups does not depend on the assumption of homogeneity of variances. Interpretation of the effect size and 95% confidence interval. The Mean Difference value of 21.90000 indicates the average score difference between the male and female groups. The 95% confidence interval ranges from 13.39761 to 30.40239, which does not include the value zero, reinforcing the conclusion that the difference is statistically significant.

The last table below shows the results of the difference test between two sample groups, specifically the difference in the multilingualism variable. Just like before, there are two conditions being tested, namely assuming equal variances between the two groups (equal variances assumed) and unequal variances (equal variances not assumed).

Table 3 Independent Samples Test of Multilingualism

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances				t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Significance		Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					One-Sided p	Two-Sided p			Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	,051	,823	4,661	38	<,001	<,001	20,65000	4,43009	11,68176	29,61824
Equal variances not assumed			4,661	37,292	<,001	<,001	20,65000	4,43009	11,67617	29,62383

According to the table In the row "Equal variances assumed," it is seen that the t-statistic value is 4.661 with a degree of freedom (df) of 38. The significance (Sig.) value

for both one-tailed and two-tailed tests is less than 0.001, indicating a statistically very significant difference.

This means that there is a significant difference in the multilingualism anxiety variable between the two groups. Furthermore, in the row "Equal variances not assumed," similar test results also show a significant difference with a t-statistic value of 4.661 and significance less than 0.001 for both one-tailed and two-tailed tests. This indicates that the conclusion regarding the existence of a significant difference between the groups does not depend on the assumption of homogeneity of variances.

Another interpretation that shown in the table is regarding the effect size and the 95% confidence interval. The Mean Difference value of 20.65000 indicates the average difference in language learning anxiety scores between the two groups. The 95% confidence interval ranges from 11.67617 to 29.62383, which does not include the value zero, reinforcing the conclusion that the difference is statistically significant.

Age has been shown to have a significant impact on language learning anxiety levels between teenager and adult EFL learners, where adult EFL learners have lower levels of anxiety compared to teenagers. The findings correlated with the research by (Zhang, Y., Wang, L., & Chen, 2020) and (Li, M., & Wang, H., 2022). A recent study by (Yinxing, L., Zhang, Q., & Dewaele, 2021), shows that the relationship between age and language anxiety may be more complex than previously believed. They found that factors such as motivation and prior learning experiences can moderate the effects of age on language anxiety. The latest meta-analysis by (Chen, J., Liu, H., & Zhang, 2024), reinforces this idea, concluding that the age-anxiety relationship is highly contextual, influenced by various factors such as educational background and language learning goals. In line with those findings, their results also indicate that motivation, previous learning experiences, educational background, and individual language learning goals significantly moderate the relationship between age and anxiety. This holistic perspective challenges traditional linear assumptions and calls for a more nuanced and personalized approach to understanding language learning anxiety.

The results show a statistically significant difference in language learning anxiety between female and male EFL learners, where female EFL learners have higher levels of anxiety compared to male EFL learners. (Farhane-Medina, N. Z., Luque, B., Tabernero, C., & Castillo-Mayén, 2022) suggest that gender differences in language anxiety may be related to women's biological factors, the potential influence of brain structures, genetic factors, and fluctuations in sexual hormones are pointed out as causes of greater anxiety in women than man. (Qin, F., & Li, 2024); (Saracevic, J., Dubravac, V., Celjo, A. B., & Becirovic, 2021); (Vural, 2019); investigate the interaction between personality and language anxiety. They found that personality traits such as neuroticism and extraversion have a stronger influence on language anxiety than gender itself, supporting a more individualistic approach. The results show a statistically significant difference in language learning anxiety between bilingual and multilingual EFL learners, where bilingual EFL learners have higher levels of anxiety compared to multilingual learners.

The exploration of multilingualism and language learning anxiety reveals a sophisticated and multifaceted relationship that extends beyond simple linguistic competence. Contemporary research consistently demonstrates that multilingual experiences contribute significantly to reducing foreign language anxiety, with underlying mechanisms rooted in enhanced metalinguistic awareness, cognitive flexibility, and neurological adaptability. (Auerbach, 2023) highlight that multilingual learners develop unique psychological and cognitive advantages, including increased tolerance for linguistic ambiguity, more effective coping strategies, and a refined ability to transfer skills across language systems. The neurological research by (Gorba, F., & Colom, 2021), coupled with the theoretical framework of multi-competence introduced by Cook, provides compelling evidence that multilingualism is not merely about the number of languages mastered, but about developing a complex, adaptive linguistic mindset. While contextual factors such as age of acquisition, proficiency levels, and language similarities continue to moderate this relationship, the emerging consensus suggests that multilingual experiences fundamentally transform learners' approaches to language learning, significantly mitigating anxiety and enhancing overall linguistic confidence.

CONCLUSION

Regarding the research findings, it can be concluded that the hypothesis there is a significant effect of EFL learners' sociobiography, specifically age, gender, and multilingualism on their language learning anxiety is supported. The results suggest that factors such as age, gender, and multilingualism play a crucial role in influencing the levels of anxiety experienced by EFL learners during the language learning process. These findings emphasize the importance of considering socio-biographical characteristics when addressing FLA in educational settings. Age-related differences highlight the need for targeted interventions that account for developmental stages, while gender differences suggest the potential benefits of incorporating gender-specific strategies to reduce anxiety. Additionally, the advantages of multilingualism point to the value of leveraging the cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness of multilingual learners to reduce anxiety in the language classroom.

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