

Language Anxiety and Its Impact on English Language Learners: Strategies for Reducing Anxiety in the Classroom Among JKLCI Nursing Students

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Abstract:

English proficiency is essential for academic success, career advancement, and global communication. However, for students learning English as a second language (ESL), affective barriers, especially language anxiety which can significantly hinder progress. This study explores the impact of language anxiety on English Language Learners (ELLs), focusing on nursing students enrolled in the English Plus program at Juanito K. La Viña Sr. Colleges Inc. (JKLCI). Grounded in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the research highlights how emotional well-being affects language acquisition.

Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with 18 nursing students and one English teacher. Results identified key anxiety triggers such as public speaking, impromptu responses, and fear of judgment. These anxieties often led to reduced participation, difficulty retaining vocabulary, and poor academic performance.

Despite these challenges, students employed coping strategies like self-study, positive self-talk, and seeking peer and teacher support. Teacher behaviors such as fostering a warm, non-judgmental classroom, using real-life communication tasks, and encouraging a growth-mindset, were seen as critical in reducing anxiety and enhancing confidence.

Thematic analysis revealed six core themes: language background, anxiety triggers, academic impact, coping strategies, perceived effectiveness of teaching methods, and learner reflections. Across all themes, emotional support was a decisive factor in improving motivation and learning outcomes.

The study concludes that addressing language anxiety is central to effective ESL instruction. It recommends incorporating affective teaching strategies, promoting emotional intelligence, and creating supportive learning environments. These findings offer valuable insights for educators, institutions, and future researchers seeking to enhance both the academic and emotional success of language learners.

Keywords — Language Anxiety, English Language Learners (ELLs), Affective Filter Hypothesis, Self-Determination Theory, Communicative Language Teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's increasingly complex and Language anxiety is a well-documented barrier in second language acquisition, significantly affecting the performance, motivation, and communicative competence of English language learners (ELLs) (Horwitz, 2016; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2018). Manifesting as apprehension in speaking, listening, reading, or writing, it is particularly pronounced among students from non-English-speaking backgrounds who face both

process. Inspired by the work of educational researchers including Adams (2013), Gillies (2021), linguistic and cultural challenges (Awan et al., 2017). In classroom settings, language anxiety is often intensified by peer pressure, fear of negative evaluation, and high-stakes assessments (Zhao & Whitchurch, 2020). These factors reduce learners' willingness to participate and limit opportunities for practice which is essential for language development (Liu & Jackson, 2016; Dörnyei, 2020). Consequently, anxiety can impede academic

achievement and slow the progress of English language acquisition.

Recent pedagogical research emphasizes the need for supportive, student-centered learning environments that lower the affective filter and promote risk-taking without fear of judgment (Krashen, 1982; Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2017). Strategies such as collaborative activities, growth mindset reinforcement, and communicative language teaching have shown promise in reducing anxiety and improving learner confidence.

This study investigates the impact of language anxiety on nursing students at JKLCI and explores classroom-based strategies to mitigate its effects. By examining both learner experiences and instructional practices, the research aims to inform more inclusive and effective approaches to ESL education.

II. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To deeply understand the emotional and academic impact of language anxiety on English language learners (ELLs), this study employed a **qualitative phenomenological research design**. This approach was chosen because it emphasizes participants lived experiences and allows the researchers to explore language anxiety from the learners' own perspectives, free from preconceived assumptions. Through this method, the study aimed to gain authentic insights into how anxiety manifests in the learning environment and how educators' strategies influence students' experiences.

The research was conducted at **Juanito K. La Viña Sr. Colleges Inc. (JKLCI)**, specifically in its **College of Nursing** located in Valencia City, Bukidnon. The college provides a diverse population of nursing students who are actively engaged in English language learning through the English Plus program. As such, it presented an ideal setting for examining the interplay between language anxiety and academic experiences. Furthermore, the classroom and other academic spaces within the college served as familiar and relevant contexts for data collection, enhancing the richness and relevance of the findings.

With regard to participant selection, the study used a **purposive sampling technique**, a non-probability method in which participants are selected based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. In total, **18 nursing students and**

1 English Instructor who participated in the study.

The students were chosen for their active involvement in English language learning, while the instructor was selected for their firsthand experience in implementing teaching strategies to manage language anxiety. This combination allowed for both learner and educator perspectives to be captured and analyzed.

To gather comprehensive data, the researchers utilized **semi-structured interviews** and **focus group discussions**. The interviews allowed participants to openly describe their personal encounters with language anxiety, while the focus group discussions fostered shared storytelling and group reflections. These two methods complemented each other by providing both individual depth and collective insight into the common triggers of anxiety and the classroom strategies perceived to mitigate them.

For instrumentation, the study employed a **modified version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)** originally developed by Horwitz and Cope (1986). The tool was adapted to include both **open-ended and close-ended questions** survey questionnaire was administered during the gathering of data making it more reflective of the nursing students' academic context. The modified FLCAS explored areas such as the emotional effects of anxiety, its influence on class participation, and the effectiveness of instructional strategies. An accompanying **interview guide** was also developed to probe deeper into students' personal experiences, including their coping mechanisms and reflections on the role of teacher support in reducing anxiety.

In terms of **validation**, the instruments underwent several steps to ensure their clarity and appropriateness. Initially, they were subjected to **expert review** by professionals in language education and psychology to assess content validity. Following this, a **pilot study** was conducted with a small group of nursing students to evaluate the comprehensibility and relevance of the items. Based on the pilot results, the researchers refined the language and structure of the instruments to improve question flow and eliminate ambiguities. This validation process ensured that the tools were both context-sensitive and capable of eliciting rich, meaningful data.

Lastly, the data gathering procedure adhered to ethical research practices. Prior to data collection,

formal permission was secured from school authorities. Participants were thoroughly informed about the study’s purpose, procedures, and their rights, including the right to withdraw at any point without consequence. Informed consent was obtained through signed forms that guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Data collection took place in **private**, safe environments to encourage open expression. Interviews and discussions were facilitated by trained researchers, and with participants' consent, sessions were audio-recorded to ensure accuracy. Field notes were also taken to capture non-verbal cues and environmental context. Upon completion, participants were debriefed, thanked for their participation, and given the opportunity to share final thoughts or ask questions about the study.

Through this structured and ethically guided methodology, the study sought to uncover meaningful insights into how language anxiety shapes the learning experiences of nursing students, and how teachers can support learners in overcoming this emotional barrier.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 2.1.1	Speaking in front of	4.0556	0.63914
Code 2.1.2	Answering questions in class increases my anxiety	4.1111	0.67640
Code 2.1.3	Group activities increase my anxiety	2.7222	1.12749
Code 2.1.4	Public speaking events increase my anxiety	4.5000	0.51450

This section presents the analyzed results and interprets them in line with the study's research questions.

The themes were derived from the responses of 18 nursing students and one English instructor through thematic coding and are discussed using both descriptive statistics and qualitative interpretation.

Research Question 1: What specific factors do English language learners identify as contributing to their language anxiety in the classroom?

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Research Question 1: What specific factors do English language learners identify as contributing to their language anxiety in the classroom?

Three main themes emerged related to anxiety triggers: **situational triggers, language skill difficulties, and peer/instructor interactions.**

Table 2. Factors Contributing to Language Anxiety

Theme 2.1: Situational Triggers of Anxiety

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 2.2.1	Grammar-related anxiety affects my performance	3.9444	0.72536
Code 2.2.2	Pronunciation-related anxiety affects my performance	2.7778	0.80845
Code 2.2.3	Vocabulary-related anxiety affects my performance	4.0556	0.63914
Code 2.2.4	I feel anxious about my general language skills	4.0000	0.0000

Situational Triggers (Theme 2.1) highlight how learners feel most anxious during public speaking, answering questions, and engaging in group activities. Notably, 100% of the participants agreed that public speaking increases their anxiety. Similarly, speaking in front of others and answering questions in class showed high cumulative anxiety levels (77.8% and 72.2%, respectively). These findings emphasize how performance-

Theme 2.2: Language Skills that Contribute to Anxiety

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based and evaluative contexts elevate anxiety, consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis.

Theme 2.2: Language Skills that Contribute to Anxiety

Language Skill Difficulties (Theme 2.2) were also significant contributors. All 18 participants (100%) reported feeling anxious about their general language skills. Grammar-related (77.8%) and vocabulary-related anxieties (77.8%) were prevalent, followed closely by pronunciation

(77.8%). These findings suggest that learners are self-conscious about correctness and clarity, which inhibits their willingness to speak.

Theme 2.3: Peer and Instructor Interactions

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 2.3.1	Peer interactions contribute to my language anxiety	3.5556	1.19913
Code 2.3.2	Instructor interactions contribute to my language anxiety	4.0000	0.59409
Code 2.3.3	Classroom dynamics contribute to my language anxiety	3.3333	0.7071

Peer and Instructor Interactions (Theme 2.3) further influenced anxiety. Instructor interactions contributed to anxiety for 83.3% of students, and 77.8% acknowledged that peer interactions also made them anxious. Importantly, 100% of students believed positive interactions with peers and instructors helped reduce their anxiety, pointing to the importance of classroom climate and interpersonal relationships.

Research Question 2: What ways do English language learners perceive that language anxiety affects their academic performance, participation, and language acquisition?

Under this question, three themes were explored: academic performance, vocabulary and concept acquisition, and confidence/participation.

Table 3. Impact of Language Anxiety on Learning

Theme 3.1: Impact on Academic Performance

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 3.1.1	Language anxiety negatively affects my test results	4.5000	0.5450
Code 3.1.2	Language anxiety negatively affects my assignments	3.0000	0.59409
Code 3.1.3	Language anxiety negatively affects my participation in class	4.0000	0.48507
Code 3.1.4	Language anxiety has no impact on my academic performance	1.8889	0.47140
Code 3.1.5	Language anxiety positively influences my academic performance	3.0556	1.14475

Academic Performance (Theme 3.1) showed that 100% of participants believed that anxiety negatively impacted their test performance and participation in class. Interestingly, while only 16.7% reported anxiety affecting assignments, 88.9% said anxiety hindered their class participation. This implies that real-time communication and oral tasks are more anxiety-inducing than written work, again aligning with Krashen's theory.

Theme 3.2: Impact on Vocabulary and Concept Acquisition

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 3.2.1	Anxiety impairs my ability to retain new vocabulary	2.6111	1.14475
Code 3.2.2	Anxiety impairs my ability to acquire new concepts	3.3333	0.90749
Code 3.2.3	Anxiety does not affect my ability to learn vocabulary or concepts	3.0000	0.97014

Vocabulary and Concept Acquisition (Theme 3.2) also suffered due to anxiety. Approximately 66.7% found it harder to retain vocabulary, and 61.1% had difficulty learning new concepts. However, 66.7% believed anxiety does not affect learning consistently, indicating that the impact varies based on context and support systems

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 3.3.1	Strategies I've used have improved my confidence using English	4.3333	0.48507
Code 3.3.2	Strategies I've used have had no impact on my confidence	1.6667	0.48507
Code 3.3.3	Strategies I've used have negatively affected my confidence	2.0000	0.59409

Theme 3.3: Impact on Confidence and Participation

Confidence and Participation (Theme 3.3) were severely impacted. While 66.7% of students said their strategies improved confidence, a notable 83.3% denied that strategies negatively affected them. These results highlight how language anxiety can diminish active participation unless mitigated by proper strategies.

Research Question 3: What strategies do educators implement to address language anxiety, and how do they perceive the effectiveness of these strategies?

Three themes responded to this question: **personal coping strategies, educator strategies, and effective classroom methods.**

Personal Coping Strategies (Theme 4.1) such as self-study (61.1%), emotional regulation (77.8%), and peer support (55.6%) were commonly employed. Avoidance, however, was less effective with 88.9% disagreeing with that it helped.

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 4.1.1	Self-study techniques (e.g., practice, vocabulary drills) help me manage anxiety.	4.3889	0.50163
Code 4.1.2	Emotional regulation strategies (e.g., relaxation, breathing exercises) help reduce my anxiety.	4.1111	0.58298
Code 4.1.3	Seeking help from peers or instructors helps me cope with anxiety.	4.4444	0.51131
Code 4.1.4	Avoidance or withdrawal from situations helps me manage anxiety.	2.1111	0.96338

Educator Strategies (Theme 4.2) proved impactful. Students overwhelmingly agreed that a supportive classroom environment (44.4% agree; 55.6% strongly agree), interactive teaching methods, and reduced emphasis on correctness helped them manage anxiety. This reflects principles of Communicative Language Teaching

(CLT), which advocates meaningful and low-pressure communication.

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 4.2.1	An encouraging reinforcement helps reduce my anxiety.	4.5656	0.51131
Code 4.2.2	Interactive teaching methods (e.g., group work, discussions) help alleviate my anxiety.	4.5000	0.51450
Code 4.2.3	Reducing emphasis on correctness or perfection in class helps me manage anxiety.	4.3389	0.60768

Effective Activities (Theme 4.3) such as group discussions (55.6%), pronunciation practice (66.7%), multimedia tools (72.2%), and real-life simulations (61.1%) helped reduce anxiety. These activities made learning more engaging and less intimidating, fostering a safer space for communication.

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 4.3.1	Group discussions and collaborative learning reduce my anxiety.	4.3889	0.60768
Code 4.3.2	Speaking or pronunciation exercises help me feel less anxious.	4.3333	0.48507
Code 4.3.3	The use of multimedia interactive tools	4.2778	0.46089
Code 4.3.4	Real-life applications (e.g., clinical scenarios, role-plays) help reduce my anxiety.	4.3889	0.50163

Research Question 4: How do English language learners describe the impact of these strategies on their confidence and overall learning outcomes?

Themes on **confidence and learning outcomes** directly addressed this question.

Theme 5.1: Impact on Confidence

Code	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 5.1.1	Strategies have improved my confidence in learning.	4.2222	0.42779
Code 5.1.2	Strategies have had no impact on my confidence.	1.7222	0.46089
Code 5.1.3	Strategies have negatively affected my confidence.	2.0000	0.48507

Impact on Confidence (Theme 5.1) was highly positive. 77.8% said strategies improved their confidence, and 88.9% disagreed that the strategies had a negative effect. This highlights the value of targeted interventions and an emotionally supportive classroom.

Theme 5.2: Impact on Academic Performance

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 5.2.1	Strategies have improved my understanding of lessons.	4.3889	0.50163
Code 5.2.2	Strategies have improved my academic performance.	4.1667	0.38348
Code 5.2.3	Strategies did not affect my performance.	4.0556	0.53930

Impact on Academic Performance (Theme 5.2) revealed that students seek further support. A majority desired more personalized strategies (77.8%), multimedia tools (88.9%), and real-world applications (88.9%)—pointing toward a preference for contextual, learner-centered approaches.

Reflections on Learning (Theme 6.1 & 6.2) showed that all students agreed that reducing anxiety could significantly improve their learning. A full 100% confirmed that anxiety occasionally hindered learning, and all agreed that reducing anxiety is crucial for academic success especially in a demanding field like nursing. The results clearly show that language anxiety is influenced by performance-based tasks, skill deficiencies, and classroom dynamics. Anxiety negatively affects test performance, participation, and retention. However, strategic interventions by

Educators and learners alike can significantly reduce anxiety and improve confidence and learning outcomes. These findings call for a holistic, learner-centered approach in ESL classrooms, as aligned with Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis, Self-Determination Theory, and the principles of Communicative Language

Teaching.

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Theme 6.1: Impact of Language Anxiety on Learning Outcomes

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 6.1.1	Language anxiety has a negative impact on my learning outcomes.	3.7778	0.73208
Code 6.1.2	Language anxiety has minimal or no impact on my learning outcomes.	7.0000	11.73732
Code 6.1.3	Language anxiety occasionally hinders my learning outcomes, but not consistently.	4.0000	0.0000

Theme 6.2: Role of Reducing Anxiety in Success

Student	Themes	Mean	Standard Deviation
Code 6.2.1	Reducing anxiety would improve my learning and success.	4.0000	0.0000
Code 6.2.2	Reducing anxiety would have a minimal effect on my success.	4.3333	0.48507
Code 6.2.3	Reducing anxiety is crucial for my success in nursing studies.	4.6667	0.48507

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