

Secondary School Students' Anxiety in Learning English as a Second Language: A Gender Analysis

R Vinodh Kumar and T Suresh

ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the general level of anxiety associated with learning English as a second language among secondary school students. The study also focused on determining whether there was any gender difference in secondary school students' anxiety about learning English as a second language. As a result, the descriptive survey method was used in this study. The present study's sample comprises 303 ninth-grade students drawn from six government secondary schools in the Dharmapuri District of Tamil Nadu State, India. The researchers developed the English language learning anxiety scale to collect data from students. The scale's validity and reliability have been confirmed using appropriate methods. The data were analyzed using statistical techniques, such as quartile deviation and the 't'-test. According to the findings, the majority of the students experienced moderate anxiety while learning English. In addition, boys reported higher levels of English language learning anxiety than girls.

Keywords: English language anxiety; foreign language anxiety; second language learning; secondary school students.

Introduction

English is taught as a second language in India, and it has become one of the most important subjects in the school curriculum. The primary goal of English instruction in India is to assist children in developing a practical command of the English language so that it may be useful to them in everyday life. However, acquiring an adequate level of proficiency in the English language by students is one of the most pressing issues in India today. The students encounter difficulties in all areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the English language, which results in an apprehensive feeling amongst them. This negative perception influences their understanding of the

language, which in turn affects their academic performance in English language and career opportunities.

Numerous factors influence learning a second or foreign language, and one of the most influential factors is foreign language anxiety. According to Horwitz (2001), one-third of all foreign language learners experience some level of language anxiety. Foreign language anxiety is defined as "the feeling of tension and apprehension associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (MacIntyre and Gardner 1994). The most visible manifestation of anxiety among foreign language learners is that they appear bothered, bodily uncertain, and unable to

engage in situational learning (Abu-Rabia 2004). Furthermore, it can “cause learners to become discouraged, lose faith in their abilities, avoid taking part in classroom activities, and even abandon the effort to learn a language” (Na 2007). As a result, foreign language anxiety affects one’s ability to learn a foreign language.

Review of Literature

Many researchers from all over the world have investigated the role of anxiety in learning a second or foreign language among students at all levels of education, from elementary school to university. Previous research on second or foreign language learning anxiety has been reviewed and classified into three categories:

- i) the general situation of second or foreign language learning anxiety;
- ii) gender differences in second or foreign language learning anxiety; and
- iii) the influence of second or foreign language learning anxiety on students’ achievement.

The General Situation of Second or Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

Idrus and Ab Hamid (2021) investigated English language learning anxiety among Malaysian secondary school students in rural areas. The findings revealed that students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety in the English language classroom. In Qatar, Sabbah (2018) investigated the sources of anxiety that English as a second language college students may experience when transitioning from secondary to tertiary

education. The findings revealed that students experienced a high level of anxiety when learning English as a second language. Similarly, Elaldi (2016) investigated Turkish students’ levels of foreign language anxiety in preparatory class and fourth grade. The findings show that the students’ levels of foreign language anxiety were moderate in both the preparatory class and the fourth grade.

Gopang, Bughio, and Pathan (2015) studied foreign language anxiety among Pakistani university students. According to the findings, students have moderate to high levels of anxiety about learning English as a Foreign Language. Atef-Vahid and Kashani (2011) investigated English language learning anxiety among Iranian high school students. According to the findings, one-third of the students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety while learning English in class. Cui (2011) investigated Chinese high school students’ English learning anxiety and discovered that students had a high level of anxiety when learning English. Kaur and Bhangu (2013) studied the effects of English language anxiety among engineering students in the Indian state of Punjab. According to the findings, engineering students experience anxiety and other concerns about learning English.

Gender Differences in Second or Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

Afrianti and Afna (2020) investigated gender differences in tertiary students’ English-speaking anxiety in Indonesia and discovered that the anxiety experienced by males and females was not significantly different. A study conducted by Gopang, Bughio, and

Pathan (2015) found no significant difference in foreign language anxiety between male and female students.

Razak, Yassin, and Maasum (2017) investigated gender differences in anxiety among English as second language students at a Yemeni university. The findings revealed that female students were more anxious than male students. Hwa and Peck (2017) conducted a study to investigate gender differences in speaking anxiety among English as second language learners in Malaysia. Female students have higher levels of speaking anxiety than their male counterparts, according to the findings. In the Iranian context, Dordinejad and Ahmadabad (2014) discovered that gender was related to anxiety and females had higher levels of anxiety than males.

Yih, Chin, and Ling (2017) investigated the role of gender in English language learning among Malaysian tertiary students. The findings revealed that male students were more concerned about learning English than female students. Similarly, Elaldi (2016) and Cui (2011) found that males were more anxious about English classes than females. Saini and Singh (2017) investigated the role of gender in English language anxiety among secondary school students in Punjab, India. Males were found to be more anxious than females, according to the findings.

The Influence of Second or Foreign Language Learning Anxiety on Students' Achievement

Dordinejad and Ahmadabad (2014) and Amiri and Ghonsooly (2015) investigated the relationship between students' foreign

language anxiety and achievement in Iran. The findings revealed a significant negative relationship between students' foreign language anxiety and academic achievement. Similarly, Shahnaz and Bhatti (2014) studied the relationship between English language anxiety and English language achievement among Pakistani undergraduate students. The findings revealed a negative relationship between English language anxiety and English language achievement.

In addition, Atef-Vahid and Kashani (2011) investigated the relationship between English language learning anxiety and English achievement among Iranian high school students. According to the findings, there was a moderate negative relationship between English learning anxiety and English language achievement. Vazalwar (2011) and Vanika and Sankhian (2018) have made significant efforts in the Indian context to investigate the relationship between students' English language anxiety and achievement. The findings of these studies revealed a negative relationship between students' English language anxiety and achievement.

Need for the Study

Previous research shows that students experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety while learning English and anxiety is a common phenomenon among second-language learners around the world. Previous studies have also shown that gender plays an important role in determining students' English language learning anxiety. Furthermore, the students' English language learning performance is strongly related to their English language

anxiety. Previous research has found that students' achievement is negatively correlated with their English language learning anxiety. However, most previous studies on second or foreign language anxiety have been conducted in foreign countries, with only a few studies conducted in the Indian context. It was also discovered that the subjects who took part in the majority of the previous studies were tertiary level students. School students who are in the critical stage of learning a second or foreign language and may experience more anxiety in this process are not given the attention they deserve. As a result, there is a strong need for research studies on the English language learning anxiety of students studying in Indian schools. The present study was conceived and developed in response to this need.

Objectives of the Study

The present study was undertaken with the following objectives in mind:

- i) To look into the general situation of secondary school students who are anxious about learning English as a second language; and
- ii) To determine whether there is a significant gender difference in secondary school students' anxiety about learning English as a second language.

Hypothesis of the Study

In this study, the following hypothesis was tested:

There is no significant gender difference in secondary school students' anxiety about learning English as a second language.

Research Methodology

Method

The purpose of this study was to look into the general state of anxiety associated with learning English as a second language among secondary school students. The study also sought to determine whether there was any gender difference in secondary school students' anxiety about learning English as a second language. As a result, the descriptive survey method was used in this study.

Sample

The present study's sample comprised 303 ninth-grade students drawn from six government secondary schools in the Dharmapuri District of Tamil Nadu State, India. The convenience sampling technique was used to select the sample students. There were 160 boys and 143 girls among the 303 students in the sample. The students' ages ranged from 14 to 15.

Research Instrument

The researchers developed "the English Language Learning Anxiety Scale" to better understand the direction of secondary school students' anxiety when learning English as a second language. It was a Likert scale with a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To begin the scale development process, the researchers first generated anxiety statements about learning English in secondary schools. These statements were derived from a variety of sources, including relevant literature and discussions with teachers and subject experts. As a result, a preliminary draft of 54 items was prepared and subjected to expert review. According to

the experts' recommendations, eight statements were removed from the draft scale and four were reworded. At this point, the draft anxiety scale consisted of 46 statements. The expert review of the items ensured the scale's content validity. Following that the scale was pilot-tested with 40 ninth-grade students at a secondary school to ensure its reliability. Six statements were removed from the draft anxiety scale based on the pilot test and student feedback. As a result, a final draft of the anxiety scale containing 40 statements was prepared. The Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the scale's reliability, which was found to be 0.78. It demonstrates that the prepared scale was a reliable research tool. Both positive and negative statements were included on the scale. The scale has a minimum score of 40 and a maximum score of 200.

Data Collection, Processing, and Analysis

After obtaining permission from the school administration, the necessary data was collected from the sample students using the developed scale. Before responding to the items on the scale, the students were told about the purpose of the data collection and given explicit instructions. Following the completion of data collection from the

students, all response sheets were carefully examined and scored using the Likert scoring method. Reverse scoring was used for the negative items. The higher the score on the scale, the more anxious the students are about learning English, and vice versa. Following that, the data was entered into computer-based data analysis software (SPSS, Version-25) for analysis. To analyse the data, statistical techniques such as quartile deviation and independent samples 't'-test were used.

Results and Discussion

The General Situation of Secondary School Students' Anxiety in Learning English as a Second Language

The present study's first aim was to discover the general situation of secondary school students' anxiety in learning English as a second language. To accomplish this aim, the total scores on the English language learning anxiety scale obtained by all the sample students were analyzed using quartile deviation. Based on their anxiety scores, the students were divided into three groups: high anxiety, moderate anxiety, and low anxiety. Tables 1 and 2 show the quartile deviation results.

Table - 1: Quartile Deviation Scores on Students' English Language Learning Anxiety (N = 303)

Variable	Quartile Deviation Score		
	Q ₁	Q ₂	Q ₃
English Language Learning Anxiety	103	116	129

Table 1 displays the quartile deviation scores of all sample students regarding their anxiety about learning English as a second language. Table 1 shows that the first and third quartiles of the sample students' English language learning anxiety scores were 103 and 129, respectively. These first and third quartile scores were used to divide the sample students into two

groups: low anxiety group (scores ranging from 1 to 103) and high anxiety group (scores ranging from 129 to 200). Students with scores ranging from 104 to 128 on the English language learning anxiety scale were classified as having moderate anxiety. Table 2 shows the number of students who fall into each of the three anxiety level categories.

Table - 2: Classification of Students based on their English Language Learning Anxiety Scores (N = 303)

Students' Anxiety Score	Anxiety Category	Frequency	Percentage
1 to 103	Low Anxiety	78	26
104 to 128	Moderate Anxiety	144	47
129 to 200	High Anxiety	81	27

According to Table 2, 78 students (26%) reported low anxiety in learning English as a second language, while 81 (27%) reported high anxiety. The percentage of students who experienced both low and high levels of anxiety while learning English was almost equal. Table 2 also shows that 144 (47%) students experienced moderate anxiety while learning English as a second language. That is, the majority of the students in the sample reported experiencing moderate levels of anxiety while learning English.

The present study's findings are consistent with those of previous studies. According to these studies, students experienced moderate levels of anxiety while learning English (Atef-Vahid & Kashani, 2011; Elaldi, 2016; Idrus & Ab Hamid, 2021). The present study's findings, however, are inconsistent with those

of other studies. According to these studies, students who were learning English as a second language experienced a high level of anxiety (Cui, 2011; Gopang, Bughio and Pathan, 2015; Kaur & Bhangu, 2013; Sabbah, 2018). Based on the findings of previous studies, it is possible to conclude that the present study's findings are valid and consistent.

Gender Differences in Secondary School Students' Anxiety in Learning English as a Second Language

Another major aim of the present research was to see if there was a gender difference in secondary school students' anxiety about learning English as a second language. According to the hypothesis, there is no significant gender difference in secondary school students' anxiety about learning

English as a second language. To test this null hypothesis, the independent samples 't'-test was used to see if there was a significant

difference in mean anxiety scores between boys and girls. Table 3 displays the results of the 't'-test.

Variable	Groups	N	M	SD	df	t - ratio	Result
Gender	Boys	160	118.20	18.51	301	2.74	Significant at 0.05 Level
	Girls	143	111.91	21.33			

According to Table 3, the obtained 't' value (2.74) was greater than the table value (1.96) and statistically significant at the 0.05 level. As a result, the stated null hypothesis, "there is no significant gender difference in secondary school students' anxiety about learning English as a second language," was rejected. Failure to accept the stated null hypothesis resulted in the conclusion that there was a significant gender difference in secondary school students' anxiety about learning English as a second language. A closer look at the mean anxiety scores of boys ($M = 118.20$) and girls ($M = 111.91$) reveals that boys experienced more English language learning anxiety than girls. This finding could be explained by the fact that boys were more likely to be anxious in the English language classroom and worried about making mistakes.

The present study's findings are consistent with previous research. According to Saini and Singh (2017), Yih, Chin, and Ling (2017), Elaldi (2016), and Cui (2011), male students were more anxious than female students about learning English as a second or foreign language. The present study's findings, however, are inconsistent with those of Hwa and Peck (2017), Razak, Yassin, and Maasum (2017), and Dordinejad and Ahmadabad (2014). According to the findings of these studies, female students had

a higher level of second or foreign language anxiety than their male counterparts. Furthermore, some studies in the literature show no significant difference in second or foreign language anxiety between male and female students (Afrianti & Afna, 2020; Gopang, Bughio and Pathan, 2015). Based on the findings of previous studies, it is possible to conclude that the present study's findings are valid and consistent.

Conclusion and Implications

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the general level of anxiety among secondary school students who were learning English as a second language. The study also sought to look into gender differences in students' anxiety about learning English. The findings revealed that the majority of the sampled students had experienced a moderate level of anxiety while learning English. Boys had higher levels of English language learning anxiety than girls, according to the findings. The present study concludes, based on the findings, that English language learning anxiety is common among secondary school students and gender plays a significant role in determining the students' English language learning anxiety.

Given the prevalence of anxiety in secondary school English language classrooms among students, teachers must pay closer attention to it. Apart from properly preparing for teaching, teachers should consider the affective factors of the students. To begin with, teachers can try to create a relaxed environment for their students, making them feel safe to take part in the process of English language learning. Second, teachers should refrain from providing negative feedback to students in the classroom. Finally, teachers can explicitly inform students about the inevitability of anxiety in English language learning and how anxiety can be reduced through self-regulation of their thinking and study.

A study like this is expected to be a useful reference in the future for English language teachers, teacher educators, educational researchers, and policymakers. The present study's findings will assist English language teachers in a variety of ways when teaching in their classrooms. This study will also help English language teachers better understand their students and help them overcome their language anxiety. Furthermore, this study may lead to additional research focusing on methods or techniques for overcoming this stressful feeling among students.

References

- Abu-Rabia, Salim. 2004. Teachers' Role, Learners' Gender Differences, and Foreign Language Anxiety among Seventh Grade Students Studying English as a Foreign Language. *Educational Psychology* 24 (5): 711-721. doi: 10.1080/0144341042000263006.
- Afrianti, Defira, and Mauloeddin Afna. 2020. Who is More Anxious in Learning a Foreign Language: Males or Females?. *INSPIRA: Indonesian Journal of Psychological Research* 1 (2): 49-56. doi:10.32505/inspira.v1i2.2877.
- Amiri, Mostafa, and Behzad Ghonsooly. 2015. The Relationship between English Learning Anxiety and the Students' Achievement on Examinations. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 6 (4): 855-865. doi:10.17507/jltr.0604.20.
- Atef-Vahid, Sara, and Alireza Fard Kashani. 2011. The Effect of English Learning Anxiety on Iranian High School Students' English Language Achievement. *Broad Research in Artificial Intelligence and Neuroscience* 2 (3): 29-44.
- Cui, Jingjing. 2011. Research on High School Students' English Learning Anxiety. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 2 (4): 875-880. DOI: 10.4304/jltr.2.4.875-880.
- Dordinejad, Farhad Ghorban, and Roghayyeh Moradian Ahmadabad. 2014. Examination of the Relationship between Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and English Achievement among Male and Female Iranian High School Students. *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World* 6 (4): 446-460. www.ijllalw.org.
- Elaldi, Senel. 2016. Foreign Language Anxiety of Students Studying English Language and Literature: A Sample from Turkey. *Educational Research and Reviews* 11 (6): 219-228. doi: 10.5897/ERR2015.2507.

- Gopang, Illahi Bux, Faraz Ali Bughio, and Habibullah Pathan. 2015. Investigating Foreign Language Learning Anxiety among Students Learning English in a Public Sector University, Pakistan. *The Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Science* 3 (4): 27-37. www.moj-es.net.
- Horwitz, Elaine K. 2001. Language Anxiety and Achievement. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 21: 112-127. DOI: 10.1017/S0267190501000071.
- Hwa, Siew Pei, and Wee Kim Peck. 2017. Gender Differences in Speaking Anxiety among English as a Second Language Learners in a Malaysian Tertiary Context. *International Journal for Studies on Children, Women, Elderly and Disabled* 2: 108-117.
- Idrus, Faizah, and Tuan Muhammad Hanif Tuan Ab Hamid. 2021. Profiling English Language Learning Anxiety among Selected Rural Area Secondary School Students in Malaysia: A Case Study. *International Journal of English Language Teaching* 9 (1): 1-20. https://ssrn.com/abstract=3776577.
- Kaur, Birinder, and Jap Preet Kaur Bhangu. 2013. Effects of Anxiety on Indian Engineering Students in the Foreign Language Classroom. *International Journal of English and Literature* 3 (4): 49-60.
- MacIntyre, Peter D, and R. C. Gardner. 1994. The Effects of Induced Anxiety on Three Stages of Cognitive Processing in Computerized Vocabulary Learning. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 16: 1-17. DOI: 10.1017/S0272263100012560.
- Na, Zhao. 2007. A Study of High School Students' English Learning Anxiety. *The Asian EFL Journal* 9 (3): 22-34. http://www.asian-efl-journal.com.
- Razak, Norizan Abdul, Amr Abdullatif Yassin, and Tengku Nor Rizan Bt Tengku Mohamad Maasum. 2017. Effect of Foreign Language Anxiety on Gender and Academic Achievement among Yemeni University EFL Students. *English Language Teaching* 10 (2): 73-85. doi:10.5539/elt.v10n2p73.
- Sabbah, Sabah Salman. 2018. Anxiety in Learning English as a Second Language at a Tertiary Stage: Causes and Solutions. *European Journal of English Language and Literature Studies* 6 (1): 14-33. www.eajournals.org.
- Saini, Manjinder Kaur, and Tirath Singh. 2017. English Language Anxiety among Secondary School Students: Role of Gender. *International Journal of Education* 7: 9-18. http://ijoe.vidyapublications.com.
- Shahnaz, Ambreen, and Komal Khalid Bhatti. 2014. An Analysis of Relationship between English Language Anxiety, English Language Interest and English Language Achievement. *International Journal of English and Education* 3 (1): 175-186. www.ijee.org.
- Vanika, and Anurag Sankhian. 2018. English Language Anxiety in Relation to Academic Achievement in English among VII Grade Students. *Shanlax International Journal of Education* 6 (2): 98-103.
- Vazalwar, Chandrashekhar. 2011. Effect of Anxiety on Reading Comprehension in English. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, 1 (7): 272-278.

www.zenithresearch.org.in.

Yih, Yeo Jiin, Vicky Chin, and Ting Hie Ling. 2017. The Role of Gender in English Language Learning Anxiety among Tertiary Students. *E-Academia Journal* 6 (2): 14-22. <http://journale-academiauitmt.uitm.edu.my/v2/index.php/home.html>.

Dr. R. Vinodh Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of Education, Periyar University, Salem, Tamil Nadu, India.

Email: vinodh_edu@periyaruniversity.ac.in

Mr. T. Suresh, Post-Graduate Teacher in English, Kalaimagal Matriculation Higher Secondary School, Dharmapuri, Tamil Nadu, India.

ELTAI READING CLUBS

ELTAI has launched Reading Clubs in educational institutions with the primary objective of creating a 'culture of reading' among school and college students. This initiative is based on a research-based framework that takes into account differences in age, gender, interests, and location.

Objectives of the Reading Club:

- ❑ To create a love for reading in students and enable them to become better, lifelong readers;
- ❑ To enable them to reflect on what they read in order to lead them to become effective writers and speakers;
- ❑ To familiarize them with different text types (genres) and enable them to engage in appropriate reading strategies; and
- ❑ To employ synchronous (both virtual and physical meetings) as well as asynchronous modes – Web tools, such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Blogs, Reading Logs, MOOCs (audios, videos, quotes, blurbs, reviews, etc.) to sustain their interest.

ELTAI would like to have MoUs with institutions that are willing to implement this initiative and help to achieve these objectives collaboratively. Institutions interested in this project may please write, expressing their interest, to: indiaelta@gmail.com with a copy (Cc) to Dr. Zuleiha Shakeel, the Coordinator of the project at: zoowasif@gmail.com.

For a brief description of this initiative, visit our website at: <http://elta.in/reading-clubs/>.

For an outline of the respective roles and responsibilities of the host institution and ELTAI, visit the website at: <http://elta.in/roles-and-responsibilities-of-the-host-institution-and-elta/>.