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ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AMONG MALAYSIAN  
SIAMESE STUDENTS: EXPLORING THE CONTRIBUTING  
FACTORS

Noormaizatul Akmar Muhamad Nasir<sup>1</sup>, Nurul Husna Yaacob<sup>2</sup>, Radzuwan Ab Rashid<sup>3\*</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup> Faculty of Management and Information Technology, Kolej Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Sultan Ismail Petra, Malaysia; Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia.

Email: maimaiza87@gmail.com, fantaghiro\_normi14@yahoo.com

<sup>1,3</sup> Faculty of Languages and Communication, Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin, Malaysia

Email: radzuwanrashid@unisza.edu.my

\* Corresponding Author

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**Abstract:**

This study examined the English language anxiety of Siamese students as one of the minority ethnicities in Malaysia. The consequences of untreated anxiety and depression among students cannot be underestimated, as they are vulnerable to various social and behavioral problems, compromised learning performance, and diminished self-esteem. To delve into this issue, a total of 113 Malaysian Siamese students attending national and national type-secondary schools with a minimum of seven years of experience learning English filled up the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a popularly used instrument to measure foreign language anxiety among learners. The findings revealed items categorised under the fear of negative evaluation as the most likely to provoke anxiety among the students, whereas components covering anxieties in English tests reported the lowest. The results generally indicate that minority Siamese students view evaluation by others as more anxious than being academically tested. Hence, teachers are recommended to be more particular in planning and designing English lessons in multiracial classrooms so the anxiety-provoking vibes can be handled appropriately.

**Keywords:**

Foreign Language Anxiety, Malaysian Siamese, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), Minority Learners

## Introduction

Language is an essential medium of communication, and most people usually have at least a minimum of two spoken languages. In our ever more connected and interdependent world, being proficient in multiple languages is crucial as it allows individuals to actively and meaningfully engage with the global community. English is one of the most used languages in the world, and in Malaysia, it is recognised as the second language of its multi-ethnic nation. However, it is not surprising to note that English fluency varies among people as it is influenced by several factors such as racial and family background and the locality framework.

According to Iber (2014), the position of English in the Malaysian school context is divided into three: 1) the first language for those who use English as their mother tongue; 2) the second language among those who learn English as their second language with maximum exposure to the language; and 3) foreign language for students who learn English as the language that comes after their native language and national language with limited exposure to English for various reasons. As for Malaysian Siamese, most of them fall under the third category because English is considered the language they learn in school after they have mastered their native Thai language and the Malay language. In terms of acquisition and performance, Duka and Aziz (2019) stood out that Malaysian pupils, especially those living on the outskirts, would not acquire an excellent grasp of other languages as excellent as they have done of their first language. This shortcoming, according to them, is equated to the interference of multilingualism in shaping their learning experiences. These students have no other options than getting completely immersed in a medium language different from their home language as a prerequisite to getting along in the classroom society.

Even though a language is held to be a robust identity marker among Malaysian multiracial citizens, English has a specific privilege. Therefore, it is not regarded as a menace to national unity (Yunus, Ang & Hashim, 2021). This can be seen from the broad use of English in educational institutions, especially at the tertiary level, where English serves as the medium language to teach most academic subjects. The importance of English in Malaysia is also evidenced by the strong position according to the language in its national school curriculum (Albury & Aye, 2016). Such liberty has subjugated Mandarin and Tamil despite the fact that these two are the native languages of the Chinese and Indian, who are recognised as the majority ethnic in the country (ibid, p.80).

Unfortunately, learning a new language is not without problems. Disorders like anxiety and depression are constantly being researched, and breakthroughs are being made every year as among the contributing factors that stay within the realm of possibility to trigger various problems in the language learning process. According to Idrus and Hamid (2021), studies on English language anxiety have been escalating recently for their high potential to impact learning performances tremendously. Back in the 1980s, studies on foreign language anxiety were broadly researched as Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1989) and Krashen (1982) put forward that students' language acquisition is impeded when their thoughts and emotions are negatively induced. In the 20th century, studies on foreign language anxiety have again become a renewed interest, and Malaysia is not spared. Ratnawati (2004) and Pandian (2008), for example, posited that English language anxieties induced a significant influence on learning, particularly in a setting where English is widely used (cited in Hamid and Idrus, 2021). This includes learning at the university level and most schools, especially ones which are located in urban areas.

In Malaysia, national schools are considered a melting pot where students of various ethnic backgrounds accumulate for their formal and informal education process. The minorities, however, are always back-sided, for they have to take up the challenge of learning English as a new language along with other additional languages like the national language, Bahasa Melayu, which is offered as a compulsory subject in all schools nationwide regardless of the status. The struggle is heightened for those who opted for vernacular schools, for they are compelled to master other mainstream ethnic languages like Mandarin and Tamil as these two ethnic languages are used as the medium of instruction in these, also known as national-type schools (Hung, 2013). In research by Duka and Aziz (2019), they discovered that their Iban indigenous students who speak Iban language at home learn Malay as their national language and English as another additional language in their day-to-day lives, demonstrating poor mastery of these languages, especially accuracy aspects. These students were said to be "dragging between the three languages" (p.60), and thus, their mastery is undermined in this way. The Siamese and the Iban students are said to be roaring the same boat in this case, for each has their ethnic language, which they honour as their national identity. Other languages, however, are a big must for them to learn and master so they can set themselves on par with the majority of others that would otherwise inculcate the sense of being discriminated against for their racial origins. These differences are likened to the indigenous students whom Wan Mahzan, Alias and Ismail (2020) classified as a highly disadvantaged position grounded on the hard fact of the challenges they would have to endure when setting foot in schools.

Even though studies of FLA have long been examined, the focus is mainly tailored to university students (e.g., Liao & Liang 202, Fei & Shabdin, 2019, and Yunus, Ang & Hasyim, 2021) and thus knowledge of anxiety at school levels, especially among minority students is therefore considered too scarce. Since many ethnic minorities have chosen various paths to pursue their education, acquiring a new language may set a different experience in their English language learning landscape. This process may end up into a quite disconcerting intellectual process should the problem not be adequately addressed. Therefore, this study is advantageous to provide insights into the gap in English language learning as we aim to explore the FLA encountered by Thai students attending national schools as a minority ethnic.

## Literature Review

### *Theoretical Underpinnings: Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) Theory*

Foreign language learning can be very challenging as many language learners struggle at some point in their journey to fluency. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), many people show anxiety response when learning a foreign language which prevents them from learning effectively. Anxiety is defined as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (Spielberger, 1983) as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986, p.125) and it is categorised into two types; trait anxiety and state anxiety. Trait anxiety is generally apprehension in various circumstances, while state anxiety emerges only in a particular or specific situation (Phillips, 1992). The anxiety associated with language learning is anxiety that develops within a particular condition; thus, it falls under the state anxiety group (Brown, 2000).

In 1986, Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the theory of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), which is conceived as distinct from general anxiety (Salehi & Fahimeh, 2014). FLA is defined as a particular FLA is characterised as a specific complex of beliefs about oneself, views,

opinions, and actions pertaining to learning a language in the classroom, and it consists of three components; 1) communication apprehension, 2) test anxiety, and 3) fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is anxiety or shyness when communicating with people, whereas test anxiety is the fear of failure in academic performance. On the other hand, fear of negative evaluation refers to the concern about how others evaluate them (Horwitz et al., 1986). However, according to Salehi et al. (2014), the learners' demand to have a positive social impression on others has always caused fear of negative evaluation to develop and negatively affect them over time. Perceiving FLA as distinct from general anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) thus developed a scale known as Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was specially designed to identify and measure anxiety associated with language learning.

FLA is reported to affect foreign language learning in many ways. In writing Kleinmann (1977) observed that there are differences in the grammatical constructions between highly anxious and less anxious students. The difference can also be seen in the less interpretative messages or writing of anxious students compared to those in a calm state (Steinberg, & Horwitz, 1986). Such behaviours of anxious students may result from the fear of making more mistakes, causing them to be extra cautious and thus preventing them from being more expressive with their writing in the target language. It is also reported that students with some nervousness issues experience greater difficulty to recall certain grammar contents during tests or oral exercises where various grammatical aspects and rules are being applied (Horwitz et al., 1986).

The effect of FLA can also be noticed on how students act in the classroom. Anxious students rarely volunteer or participate in oral classroom activities (Ely, 1986), high likely of playing truant and postpone doing homework (Argaman, & Abu Rabia, 2002), hardly initiate a conversation, and possess a minimal interaction with others (Gregersen, & Horwitz, 2002). All of these negative behaviours, according to Gregerson and Horwitz (2002), manifest the conditions that anxious students are likely to be inactive in the classroom, withdraw from activities, and may avoid class entirely. Hilleson (1996), Jackson (2002), Liu (2006), and Tsui (1996) in their study also contend that ESL and EFL learners with anxiety opt to be quiet and are unwilling to participate in communication. Consequently, their silence and reluctance to speak the language in the classroom cause them to eventually become more anxious. Such behaviours can affect language learning as such, avoidance and passive participation will hinder the improvement of language skills and demotivate students in their learning process.

Another clear indication of anxious students concerning language learning is evident in their manner of speaking the language in class. According to Liu & Huang (2011), students with high anxiety levels tend to have shorter breaths, resulting in less expressive speech and sometimes even faint utterances. They further explained that these symptoms might stem from a heightened sense of self-consciousness, causing learners to feel as if others are evaluating them constantly. This self-consciousness is often accompanied by trembling hands and legs and a tendency for the mind to go blank while speaking the language (ibid).

This finding aligns with the research by Horwitz et al. (1986), which revealed that learners in a state of anxiety might struggle to comprehend anything beyond the mere buzzing sounds when a teacher speaks a foreign language. This may be attributed to our natural inclination to shut down in intimidating situations mentally. The stressful atmosphere created by anxiety makes learners excessively self-conscious and further hinders the free flow of their thoughts.

Many FLA studies show that language anxiety impedes language learning (see Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986; Philips, 1992; Aida, 1994; Elkhafaifi, 2005). Horwitz (1990) contends that anxiety is likely to be debilitating in a language-learning environment and believes there is no such thing as facilitative anxiety. However, Brown (2000) believes that anxiety can also be facilitative, and this view has been proven by some studies showing the positive effect of anxiety on language learning (e.g., Kleinmann, 1977; Baily, 1983; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). Thus, anxiety is therefore categorised into two different types, which are 1) debilitating anxiety and 2) facilitative anxiety. Although facilitative anxiety is confirmed to exist, it is hardly mentioned in the literature (Kleinmann, 1977), and there is very little documentation on its effect (Phillips, 1992).

### ***Recent Studies on FLA among Minority Ethnic***

Research on foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been an interest for decades and remains relevant today in many disciplines, including education. For example, Toyama and Yamazaki (2022) used FLA to study individualism-collectivism culture at various levels of education. Their research findings reported a more significant correlation of cultural dimensions at the university level compared to schools. This finding serves as a wake-up call for lecturers to be extra vigilant and equip themselves with the necessary skills so they are ready to deal with various cultural-related issues that arise in higher learning institutions. Narrowing down to speaking foreign languages, Zhou and Lochtman (2020) have proven through their study that the willingness to communicate (WTC) in English among university students in China deteriorates when their FLA is high.

In contrast, Liao and Liang (2021) found the positive side of having high FLA. They discovered that learners who are aware of their FLA had a higher tendency to seek help improving their mastery of the target language. These adopting strategies include knocking around with English speakers and maintaining an excellent mental make-up of the language. The results urged the concerned parties to be more insightful about the learner's psychological learning viewpoint. Concerning language skills, Zhang (2019) classified FLA in listening as the most robust construct causing poor performances among learners, whereas FLA in reading and test anxiety, on the contrary, were identified as less impactful on their FL performances. Overall, Zhang called for FL teachers to always consider the FLA issue when designing a lesson regardless of their student's proficiency level in the target language.

In Malaysia, studies on FLA have been directed mainly at the influence of physical aspects like the institutional geography (see Idrus, 2021), learning facilities (Hamid & Idrus, 2021) and school climate (Elas, Majid & Narasuman, 2020). However, studies on FLA concerning specific racial groups are still scarce and predominantly accumulate at tertiary levels. For example, Fei and Shahbdin (2019) conducted a survey of FLA among Chinese International students in a public university. They reported that FLA has caused the students to opt for some debilitating approaches, like refusing participation in classroom activities and opting for back-row seating. Similar findings were reported by Miskam and Saidalvi (2019) on a group of undergraduates whom they claimed as intensely affected due to anxiety about their English mastery. Thus, in order to fill a void in this line of research, this study focuses on English language anxiety among the Siamese minority ethnic in school settings instead of universities. It serves as the first to examine how this small minority group values their anxiety in learning English alongside other ethnic groups. Therefore, this study will provide pieces of evidence that school students, especially the minority ethnic group, do experience language anxiety, and

more studies should be carried out in the school setting so that the necessary steps can be taken from the grassroots.

## Research Methodology

### Participants

The participants comprised 113 Malaysian Siamese secondary school students from the Tumpat district of Kelantan. This district was chosen because the Siamese Malaysian population is known to be the highest in Kelantan. According to the Tumpat District Education Office, 156 Siamese students attend national secondary schools in the district for 2022. In determining the sample size, the commonly employed method, which is Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining sample size, was used. Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table, for a given population of 156, a sample size of 113 would be needed to represent a cross-section of the people.

### Instruments

This study used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). Due to its comprehensiveness, the questionnaire is still widely used in recent studies (e.g., see Javed (2022); Almesaar (2022); Paneerselvam & Yamat (2021)). The Cronbach alpha values reported in these studies are considered highly reliable, with 0.729, 0.932 and 0.894, respectively, on the five-point Likert scale questionnaire covering 33 items. Every response is gauged on a numerical scale ranging from strongly agree up to strongly disagree, with scores ranging from 5 (for strongly agree) to 1 (for strongly disagree). However, the scoring for items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28 and 32 (see Table 1) was inverted, for they are negatively worded so that the lower score would accordingly indicate lower anxiety levels among the respondents (Aida, 1994). Aida's (1994) factor analysis lends support that showed high validity on the FLCAS for most of the items had high factor loadings except the other three related to testing anxiety. So, this questionnaire is considered justifiable to be used in this study.

**Table 1: FLA Components in FLCAS**

FLA Component	Item No	Total Item
Communication apprehension	1, 3, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 20, 27, 29, 30, 32, 33	13
Test anxiety	8, 10, 21, 22	4
Fear of negative evaluation	2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 24, 31	7
Fear of English class	5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 17, 25, 26, 28	9

In this study, items in the FLCAS are categorised into four components: 1) Communication apprehension; 2) Test anxiety; 3) Fear of negative evaluation; and 3) Fear of English class. Such categorisation was adopted from a study by Salim, Subramaniam, and Termizi (2017). Table 1 shows the components of FLA derived from the FLCAS and the item number for each element.

### ***Participants***

The participants consisted of 113 Malaysian Siamese secondary school students from the Tumpat district of Kelantan.

### ***Pilot Study***

A pilot test for the FLCAS items was conducted on 30 participants before the internal consistency reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The coefficient obtained was 0.84, indicating that the items have a high degree of internal consistency and, thus, the questionnaire is reliable to be used for this study.

### ***Procedures and Data Collection***

The questionnaires for this study were distributed through the WhatsApp messenger application to Malaysian Siamese students studying at secondary schools within the Tumpat district. The link for the form was generated from a Google form where all 33 items covering the FLCAS were imprinted as a set of questionnaires. It was described in the questionnaires that the students were participating in a research study, and their responses would be made anonymous. A total of 113 completed questionnaires were finally collected.

### ***Data Analysis***

The number of students who opted for the answer choices (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree) in each item was evaluated and assigned their respective scores as mentioned in the research methodology. Using descriptive statistics of the SPSS software, the mean and standard deviation for each item in the FLCAS were obtained to determine the anxiety level among the respondents.

### **Results**

The respondents comprised of 35 male students (31 %) and 78 female students (69 %). Using Cronbach's alpha, the internal reliability of the FLCAS questionnaire is obtained with  $\sigma = 0.908$  and has proven that the FLCAS used in this study is reliable. The mean score interpretation of the mean score was adapted from Alias (1997), as shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Interpretation Scale Mean Score**

<b>Score</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
1.0-1.80	Very low
1.81-2.60	Low
2.61-3.40	Average
3.41- 4.20	High
4.21-5.00	Very High

**Table 4: Students' Communication Apprehension**

	<b>Item Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English	3.69	0.90	High
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class	3.53	0.99	High

4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English	3.59	0.94	High
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class	3.75	0.98	High
14	I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers	3.01	1.05	Average
15	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting	3.58	0.88	High
18	I feel confident when I speak in my English class	3.02	1.03	Average
20	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in my English class	3.80	0.94	High
27	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class	3.69	0.90	High
29	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says	3.54	0.96	High
30	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English	3.58	0.91	High
32	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English	2.74	0.94	Average
33	I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance	3.84	0.93	High
<b>Total</b>		<b>3.49</b>	<b>0.95</b>	<b>Average</b>

Table 4 shows items indicative of communication apprehension. It was found that most of the items showed a high level of communication apprehension for the respondents. Item 33 "I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance" has the highest mean (mean = 3.84), followed by item 20 "I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in my English class" (mean = 3.80), item 9 "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class" (mean = 3.75), item 1 "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English" (mean = 3.69), item 27 "I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class" (mean = 3.69), item 4 "It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English" (mean = 3.59), item 15 "I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting" (mean = 3.58), item 30 "I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak English" (mean = 3.58), item 29 "I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says" (mean = 3.54), and item 3 "I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class" (mean = 3.53). Other items indicate the average level of communication apprehension, with item 32, "I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English" (mean = 2.74), having the lowest standard. This finding shows that students are most afraid to participate in impromptu tasks. However, communication apprehension among the respondents generally indicates an average level of anxiety (mean = 3.49).



**Table 5: Students' Test Anxiety**

	<b>Item Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
8	I am usually at ease during tests in my English class	3.10	0.98	Average
10	I worry about the consequences of failing my English class	3.83	1.00	High
21	The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get	3.41	0.99	Average
22	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class	2.93	0.95	Average
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3.32</b>	<b>0.98</b>	<b>Average</b>

Table 5 shows the test anxiety of respondents. It was found that the highest mean among the items is item 10, "I worry about the consequences of failing my English class" (mean = 3.83), indicating a high level of test anxiety among the respondents. Other items are item 8, "I am usually at ease during tests in my English class" (mean = 3.10), item 21, "The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get" (mean = 3.41) and item 22 "I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class" (mean = 2.93) indicate the average level of test anxiety with item 22 indicating the lowest mean. Respondents generally experience an intermediate level of test anxiety (mean = 3.32). From this data, respondents seemed to care about their English subject grades. This concern might be because exam grades reflect students' overall school performance. Contrastingly, they do not have a problem preparing well for the English class despite worrying about the result of their English test.

**Table 6: Students' Fear of Negative Evaluation**

	<b>Item Statement</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
2	I don't worry about making mistakes in English class	3.01	1.10	Average
7	I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am	3.71	1.02	High
13	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English class	3.57	1.01	High
19	I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make	3.20	0.93	Average
23	I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do	3.82	0.98	High
24	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students	3.65	0.93	High
31	I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak English	3.50	1.11	High
	<b>Total</b>	<b>3.49</b>	<b>1.01</b>	<b>Average</b>

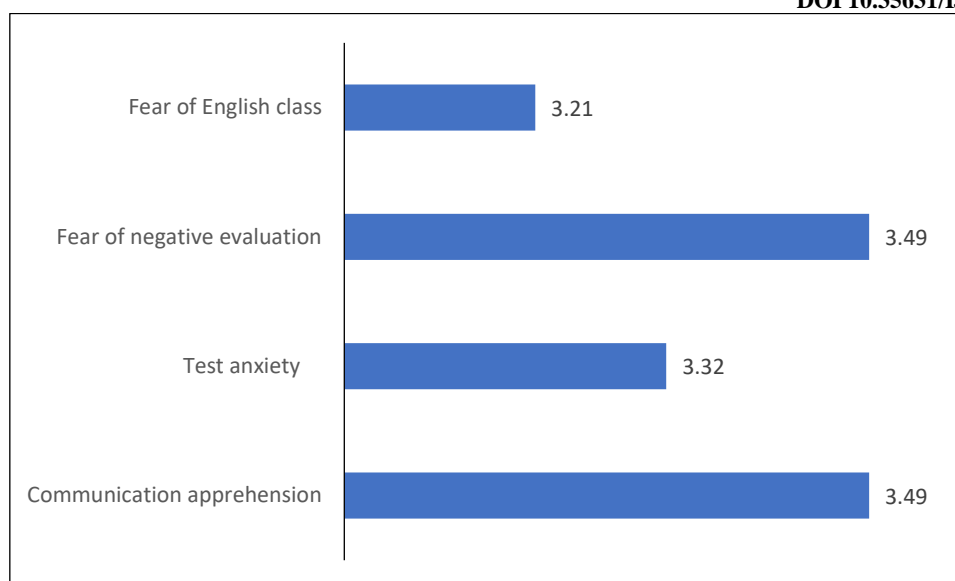
Table 6 reveals respondents' fear of negative evaluation. Item 23, "I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do" (mean = 3.82), shows the highest mean, followed by item 7, "I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am" (mean = 3.71), item 24 "I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am" (mean = 3.65), item 13 "It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English class" (mean = 3.57). Item 31 "I

am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak English" (mean = 3.50). These items show a high fear of negative evaluation among the respondents. The data also indicates respondents have low self-esteem and always seem inferior regarding their English proficiency. Item 19, "I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make" (mean = 3.20), and item 2 "I don't worry about making mistakes in English class" (mean = 3.01), show a moderate degree of fear of negative evaluation. Respondents seemed to have no concern about making mistakes in English class. Generally, the fear of negative evaluation among the respondents is at an average level (mean = 3.49).

**Table 7: Students' Fear of English Class**

Item	Item Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
5	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English language classes	2.74	1.09	Average
6	During English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course	3.14	1.03	Average
11	I don't understand why some people get so upset over English classes	2.89	1.04	Average
12	In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know	3.58	0.95	High
16	Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it	3.74	0.98	High
17	I often feel like not going to my English class	2.89	1.05	Average
25	English class moves so quickly that I worry about getting left behind	3.46	0.92	Average
26	I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes	3.53	0.95	High
28	When I'm on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed	2.94	0.88	Average
<b>Total</b>		<b>3.21</b>	<b>0.99</b>	<b>Average</b>

Table 7 reveals respondents' fear of English class. Among the items, three show a high degree of fear of English class among the respondents. The highest mean is item 16, "Even if I am well prepared for English class; I feel anxious about it" (mean = 3.74), and item 12, "In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know" (mean = 3.58), and item 26 "I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes" (mean = 3.53). Other items identified show an average level of fear of English class among the respondents, with item 5, "It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English language classes" (mean = 2.74), having the lowest mean. Generally, the data shows that respondents' fear of English class is at an average level.



**Figure 1: The Mean of FLA Factors in the FLCAS**

Figure 1 shows the mean for the components of FLA derived from FLCAS. Among the four, the respondents' fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension was the highest components classified to cause anxiety (mean= 3.49). This trend is followed by test anxiety (mean= 3.32) and fear of English class (mean=3.21) which were considered average.

## Discussion

### *Reasons for Having High Prevalence of English Language Anxieties Among Siamese Malaysian Students*

The higher prevalence of English language anxiety among Malaysian Siamese students is not fully provable through this research finding; however, some potential reasons for such discomforting feelings are worth to be addressed.

Tobias (1979, 1980, 1986 cited in MacIntyre, 1999) developed a model which describes anxiety as a filter that stands in the way of sending information to the student's mind. The student's performance will likely be affected once the anxiety has gained access to their cognitive system. Thus, it is not surprising to discover poorer accomplishments among these highly anxious students (Andrea, 2022), and the effect is worsened among people of a different culture (Spitalli, 2000, cited in Andrea, 2022).

In Malaysia, too much stress on correct grammar is always linked with poor English learning as it cost the students to view English as stressful and depletes their speaking skills (Salim, Subramaniam, & Termizi, 2017). Hence, even though they do well in tests, their confidence to converse verbally in the language is weakened by the anxiety of insufficient exposure to communication skills. If left untreated, these feelings of intense worry and nervousness can cause them to avoid situations where speaking in English opportunities may arise actively.

Another significant reason is the extra challenge that learners are burdened with some linguistic issues related to their native languages. For example, Engkasan and Yamat (2021) share their study on English learning among Iban pupils in the state of Sarawak, which has brought to light

some of these challenges. They put forth that these pupils are strained on the undertaking to balance their acquisition of three languages side by side; their native Iban language, Malay language and English language as the core problems in their way of becoming multilingual. This proposition is comparable to the Malaysian Siamese on the basis that English comes as a foreign language which is learnt after their native language and national language. However, the Iban pupils may be considered luckier in this case for some reasons; 1) they are recognised as the major ethnic in Sarawak (Jabatan Penerangan Malaysia, 2017, cited in Engkasan and Yamat, 2021), and thus they attend Iban-populated school where their native language is widely used through translanguaging teaching and learning process; 2) Iban language is offered as an elective subject and thus their native language is not just spoken at home but also formally learnt and tested in school. The Malaysian Siamese, on the contrary, attended either national or national-type schools as a minority ethnicity, and the Thai language is not used in any of these schools at all.

The findings of our study show that most of the items covered in FLACAS exceed half of the percentages, with items categorised under fear in negative evaluation and communication apprehension topping the chart. This situation is long in line Daly (1991), who attributes foreign language anxieties to five possible positions (see Andrea, 2022), including the sense of being judged by others when using (e.g., speaking) the language. Students are self-conscious and uncomfortably think that other people are negatively judging them. We argue that the anxiety symptoms may worsen if left unattended, and it will be more strenuous for the students to be aware of what is happening around them. Therefore, instructors should actively revisit their current teaching and learning approaches so learners' anxiousness can be negotiated judiciously.

As for communication apprehension, Shukor and Madzlan (2022) relate the self-negative thoughts triggered by learners' incompetency in the target language as central to their extreme anxiousness to speak the language. The learners, they added, regard speaking in a language they are not familiar with as a paralysing fear because of their self-confidence problem. In learning, it has been a hard fact that learners' poor confidence to speak the target language with others will be at greater difficulties in improving fluency and eventually ignite apprehension. Thus, teachers must consider more fun and alive learning in reshaping the students' view of English usage inside and outside the classroom. This includes giving way for more opportunities where students can exercise their speaking skills in various contexts. In this way, they would realise that their English proficiency is more or less the same as their peers and heightened the possibility of eliminating unnecessary inferiority from time to time.

Since the FLCAS questionnaire does not demonstrate the causality between their nervousness and how it directly affects their mastery of English, future research is therefore needed on the prospective study. Even though previous studies have proven the strong correlation between anxiety and academic performance (e.g., McCraty, 2007; McCraty, Dana, Mike, Pam, & Stephen, 2000), this present study is inclined to Andrea (2022) who reported that anxieties did not necessarily result in poor academic performances. This is proven through their responses indicating an average score in test anxiety items. It seems like the students did not put much thought into their English test compared to how they contemplate how others see them and how English is used for communication purposes. In this case, we believe that the reason could be pointed to the fact that the current Malaysian educational system which is considered less exam-oriented compared to the previous practice. This is justified through the abolishment of

Primary School Achievement Test (UPSR) effective 2021 and the cancellation of Form Three Assessment (PT3) as announced by the former Senior Minister (Education) Datuk Dr Mohd Radzi Md Jidin in 2021 (Radhi, 2021).

### Conclusion

Drawing Anxiety can be an entry point to a depressing episode in one's life, especially among learners who do not know how to handle anxiety issues effectively. As in other multiracial countries, our national education system should play an important role in providing equal education for all. Malaysian national schools serve as the core institution to foster a true spirit of unity. We also believe that the mother tongue languages of all majority and minority ethnic groups have to be offered in national schools. Hence, they feel that they are equally honoured regardless of which racial group they belong to. With this, teaching English can be strengthened as translingual to more languages is made possible here.

Since there are different kinds of anxiety, teachers should be trained to understand how to work effectively with each. The key to dealing with anxious minority ethnic students is to help them feel exposed to a healthy environment with lesser prejudice towards one another. Even though the teacher does not speak their minority students' mother tongue, at least they know that their classmates are always there to reduce their anxiety, knowing that their English mastery is roughly the same. In cases when the signs of foreign language anxiety are visible, the concerned parties, especially the subject teachers and classmates, should treat this as a warning sign that the minority students are doomed to the risk of losing interest and maybe failing the course. Hence, policymakers should be more heedful in designing the framework and curriculum for English subjects in schools to cater to Malaysia's multi-ethnic nature.

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