RESEARCH ARTICLE

English language anxiety (ELA) and academic success among undergraduates attending higher education institutions (HEIs) in Sulu

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship of English language anxiety on the academic performance of students in higher education institutions in Sulu during the 2024-2025 academic year. A descriptive-correlational study of 200 students, chosen based on specific criteria and analyzed via mean and standard deviation for descriptive statistics, and applied t-tests, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson correlation for inferential evaluation, revealed that most participants were female, aged 19-25, mainly in their second or third year of college, and had college-educated parents. The study found that moderate English language anxiety was prevalent among students and negatively affected their academic performance, classroom engagement, and confidence, with grades in English subjects often just passing. Moreover, students with more educated parents showed less anxiety and performed better academically, and year level also influenced achievement. Students with moderate anxiety tended to achieve marginal academic results, consistent with Horwitz et al.'s theory on the role of emotional and psychological factors in second language learning challenges. The study suggests that HEIs should implement strategies to reduce language anxiety and improve academic outcomes.

Keywords: English language; academic achievement; anxiety Sulu

1. Introduction

English proficiency is a key determinant of academic achievement, especially among Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines considering that English is predominantly utilized for instructional purposes[1]. Although students are supposed to acquire language proficiency, some suffer from English language anxiety (ELA) - an emotional obstacle hindering them from communicating, engaging in discussions, and performing in test[2]. ELA is a critical issue as it directly impacts not only academic achievement but also students' self-confidence and motivation in learning English.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [3] provide a comprehensive definition of English Language Anxiety (ELA), characterizing it as a distinct subtype of academic-related anxiety characterized by apprehension in communication, anxiety over negative assessments, and stress associated with exams. Affective Filter Hypothesis by Krashen's[4] further explains that anxiety acts as a mental block, preventing learners from fully acquiring and processing language input. Empirical studies support these theories, demonstrating that highly

anxious students tend to avoid classroom participation, exhibit lower engagement, and perform poorly in both oral and written assessments[5]

In the context of Sulu, a region characterized by its rich multilingual and multicultural fabric, English often serves as a third or even fourth language for many students, following their native regional languages. This distinctive linguistic environment, coupled with limited opportunities for English practice outside academic settings[6], creates a fertile ground for English Language Anxiety (ELA) to manifest significantly. For students in Sulu's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), where English is the primary medium of instruction and academic discourse, the presence of ELA can profoundly impede their academic progression, participation in classroom activities, and ultimately, their preparedness for globalized professional environments. This anxiety is particularly concerning in higher education, where English proficiency is crucial for academic engagement, research, and career preparedness[7]. Thus, situating this study in Sulu is not merely about exploring a rarely researched context, but critically examining how specific local linguistic and cultural dynamics intersect with and intensify the universal phenomenon of language anxiety.

Language learning strategies and proficiency levels are influenced by multiple learner-related factors, such as individual attitudes, personal beliefs, cultural background, academic discipline, gender, current proficiency, preferred learning styles, and the duration of language study. Language is an instrument or vehicle to transmit feeling or what a human experience and thinks. The author intuition in this case is that language wealth by virtue of style in delivery and exposition of concepts for it to be understood rightly is necessary[8]. Although a substantial amount of research has been conducted on foreign language anxiety, studies focusing on college students at public HEIs in Sulu remain scarce. Most of the current literature only studies junior and senior high school students, creating a gap in knowing how ELA influences students at the tertiary level, where there are higher expectations for language[9].

Moreover, while research has explored general factors contributing to language anxiety, the role of socio-demographic variables—such as gender, age, year level, course, and parental educational attainment—has been underexplored, particularly in resource-limited, multilingual settings. Knowing how these factors affect ELA can give us a good idea about the particular problems of college students[10].

This study explores English Language Anxiety (ELA) in Sulu by examining five socio-demographic variables: gender, age, year level, academic program, and parental educational attainment. These factors were selected based on prior psychological and sociolinguistic research suggesting their influence on language learning and anxiety. Gender differences, exposure levels (age/year level), discipline-specific demands (academic program), and the home environment (parental education) are all potential contributors to ELA. By focusing on students in public universities and colleges in Sulu, the study aims to identify trends linking these variables to language anxiety and academic performance. The findings will inform the development of inclusive curricula and support services to better address ELA and improve outcomes in English-medium instruction.

2. Research questions

This research endeavor sought to measure how severe English language anxiety is and its association with academic achievement among individuals pursuing higher education at public institutions in Sulu throughout the 2024–2025 academic year. The investigation focuses specifically answering the subsequent research inquiries:

1. What are the socio-demographic attributes of students pursuing studies in public tertiary institutions (HEIs) in the Sulu, with respect to the following factors:

    1.1 Sex

    1.2 Age

    1.3 Level of Study

    1.4 Degree Program

    1.5 Parents' Educational Background

2. Regarding students at public HEIs, what are their levels of English language anxiety concerning:

    2.1 Self-confidence in Speaking English

    2.2 Fear of Making Mistakes

    2.3 Nervousness During Class Activities

    2.4 Test Anxiety

3. How does the academic achievement of students at public HEIs, indicated by their GPA in English-related subjects (including English Communication and Literature), manifest?

4. Does English language anxiety among students at public HEIs significantly vary based on their socio-demographic profile:

    4.1 Gender Differences

    4.2 Age Group

    4.3 Year of Study

    4.4 Academic Course

    4.5 Parental Education Level

5. Does the academic performance of students at public HEIs significantly differ when analyzed by their socio-demographic characteristics:

    5.1 Sex

    5.2 Age

    5.3 Year Level

    5.4 Academic Program, and

    5.5 Parents' Educational Background

Does a notable statistical relationship exists involving English language anxiety and academic performance among students at public HEIs?

3. Literature

3.1. Introduction to ELA

English Language Anxiety (ELA) is an acknowledged hurdle in second language acquisition, especially in speaking and academic achievement[11]. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope[3] first defined ELA as a specific form of apprehension linked to language learning. In the Philippine context, Jugo[12] and Ojanola[13] found high anxiety levels among college students, especially during oral communication tasks. Jugo emphasized concerns over error correction and native speaker interactions, while Ojanola reported that 60% of learners experienced moderate to high anxiety[13]. Ojanola[13] revealed similarly high levels of language anxiety, their study focused on Grade 12 senior high school students and their speaking proficiency in English within the context of Nueva Ecija. This differs from the current research's focus on tertiary-level students in Sulu, highlighting the need for context-specific research to validate such findings across different educational levels and distinct multilingual environments. Both studies noted that anxiety often leads to avoidance behaviors and reduced class participation.

Abel and Velasco[14] extended the discussion to real-world settings, assessing students' anxiety about being judged and their lack of self-assurance as significant contributors to ELA. These findings underscore the socio-cultural dimension of anxiety in the Philippines, where fear of judgment from fluent speakers exacerbates communication difficulties.

3.2. Types and causes of linguistic anxiety

Anxiety about speaking is consistently identified as the most prominent form, especially in public speaking or spontaneous responses[12,15]. Fear of negative evaluation is another dominant factor, both in classroom and social contexts[15,14]. While test anxiety is less prominent in some studies[13], it remains relevant, particularly in high-stakes settings[16]. Popon[17] highlights that general classroom anxiety can stem from cumulative negative experiences and low self-confidence.

Jugo[12], suggests that psychological issues, including the fear of making errors, low self-confidence, and a negative self-image —are key contributors to language learning difficulties. Classroom practices such as public correction and rigid lesson plans can heighten these anxieties[17]. Abel and Velasco[14] also point to limited English exposure as a factor, especially in multilingual, resource-limited regions. Moreover, beliefs about language learning influence anxiety levels—students with a growth mindset and high self-efficacy show greater resilience[18].

3.3. Impact on academic achievement

ELA negatively correlates with academic performance and classroom engagement. Nicosia and Esmero[19] found that Grade 11 students with high anxiety struggled in English subjects, a finding echoed by Zheng and Cheng[20] and Chen[21]. Jugo[12] and Gatcho and Hajan[15] observed that fear of evaluation reduces participation in oral tasks, hindering language development. Ojanola[13] noted that many students prefer written tasks to avoid speaking-related stress.

Physiological symptoms such as trembling and rapid heartbeat[14] and withdrawal behaviors are common. In multilingual regions, accent sensitivity and linguistic diversity further intensify anxiety[22]. In contrast, Giray et al.[23] identified that students suffering from high anxiety often disengage from both oral and written assessments, negatively impacting performance.

3.4. Strategies to mitigate English language anxiety

Several studies recommend holistic strategies to reduce ELA. Self-directed learning[24] and supportive classroom environments that minimize public error correction[19,17] are effective. Communicative Language Teaching[15] fosters peer interaction and lowers anxiety in speaking tasks. Technology-based solutions, including language apps and virtual simulations, offer low-pressure practice[14], though access issues remain in rural areas like Sulu.

Extracurricular engagement, such as debate clubs or peer-led discussions, can also reduce anxiety by offering informal, low-stakes language use[19,24]. However, their success depends on students' willingness to participate and cultural context.

3.5. Local Studies in diverse contexts

Language anxiety exists even in first-language settings. Anxiety in speaking Filipino among high school students during class assignments, indicating that anxiety is not exclusive to foreign language learning[25]. In digital learning contexts, Valdez-Mangad[26] found that online classes heightened ELA due to reduced interaction and delayed feedback. Anliwan, Mangulon, and Monteza[27] highlighted self-confidence and social influences—not demographic variables—as primary anxiety contributors.

Although Julhamid[28] did not focus on anxiety, his findings suggest that learning attitudes and strategies alone may not ensure proficiency, which implies a need to consider emotional and psychological barriers like ELA.

Despite the growing body of research on English Language Anxiety (ELA), a critical gap remains in understanding how this phenomenon relates to specific socio-demographic factors—namely gender, age, year level, academic program, and parental educational attainment—within culturally and linguistically distinct regions such as Sulu. Existing studies often emphasize general trends or isolated anxiety types, leaving the nuanced interactions between these variables and their influence on students' academic experiences underexplored. This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how these socio-demographic characteristics relate to both ELA levels and academic performance among students in public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Sulu. To guide this inquiry, the study tests the following null hypotheses: (1) there is no significant difference in the level of English Language Anxiety when data are grouped according to gender, age, year level, academic program, and parental educational attainment; (2) there is no significant difference in academic achievement based on gender, year level, academic program, and parental educational attainment; and (3) there is no significant correlation between English Language Anxiety and academic achievement among college students. Through this, the study seeks to generate empirical insights that can support the development of targeted and culturally responsive teaching strategies.

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

The extent of the connection between anxiety in learning English and academic success among university students in public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Sulu were investigated using a descriptive-correlational research design. This design was suitable for examining naturally occurring variables and identifying potential patterns or correlations between English language anxiety and academic outcomes, considering socio-demographic characteristics such as sex, age, academic year, academic program, and parents' educational attainment[29,30]. This design also permitted the examination of specific anxiety components—Confidence while speaking English and concern over mistakes, nervousness during class activities, and test anxiety—without any intervention in the participants' environments or behaviors [29,31].

1. *Research Locale*

HEIs in the public sector within Sulu were selected as the research sites for this investigation. The diverse student populations and central role in provincial tertiary education made these institutions a strategic choice for the study. Given that English is a fundamental subject across these colleges, they offered a relevant and suitable setting for evaluating language-related anxiety among the student population. The socio-demographic heterogeneity of learners in these HEIs also provided an optimal environment for exploring the determinants of English language anxiety and analyzing their influence on academic outcomes, as intended by this research. **Figure 1** presents map of Sulu in which the study was conducted.
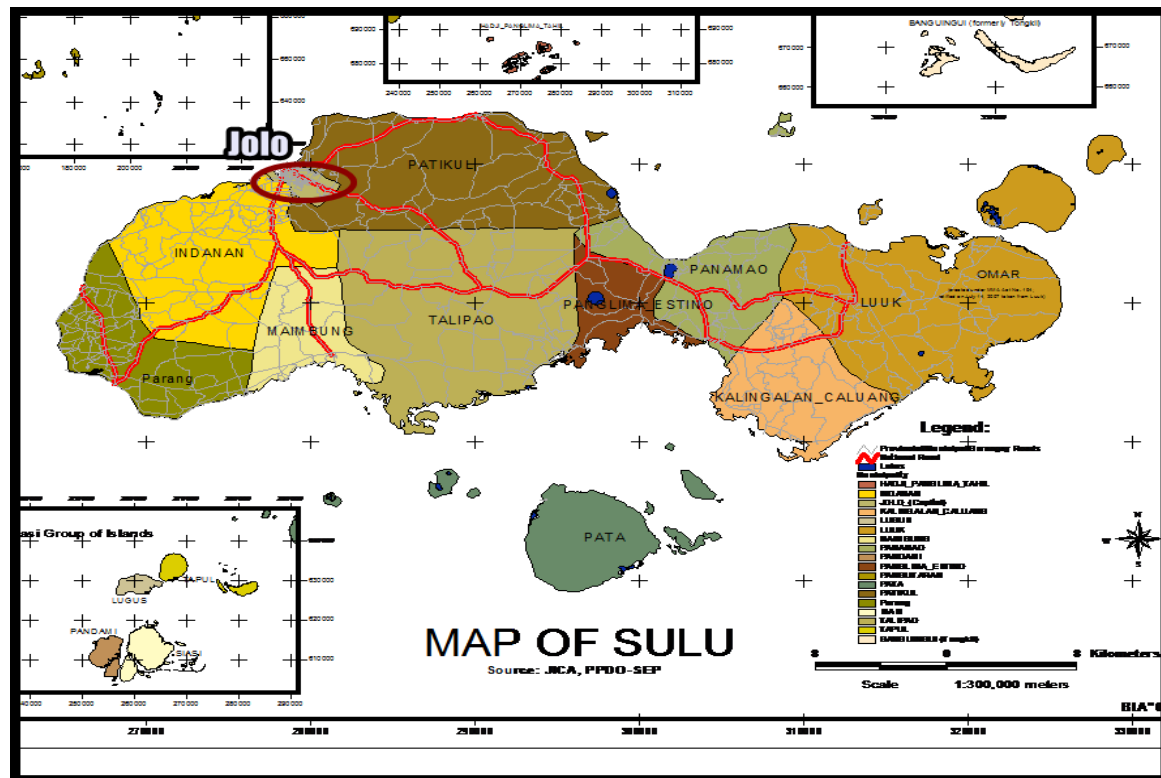
Figure 1. Map of Sulu.

2. *Respondents of the study*

This study included undergraduate students who were part of the student population in identified public HEIs within Sulu. Their curriculum required them to take English-related subjects, making them relevant for investigating English language anxiety. Participants were selected specifically from courses such as English Communication and Literature, where proficiency in the language is integral to academic achievement. This population was deemed suitable for analyzing the occurrence and intensity of English language anxiety, as well as its relationship with students' academic performance.

The gender breakdown of participants within each participating HEI is detailed in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Respondents profile.

HEIs in Sulu Province	Male	Female	Total
1. Hadji Butu College of Arts and Trades	22	28	50
2. Lapak College of Agriculture	24	26	50
3. Mindanao State University	25	25	50

4. Sulu State College	25	25	50
Total	96	104	200

Table 1. *(Continued)*

The study initially intended to have an equal number of male and female respondents (100 of each). However, this was slightly skewed during data collection. Some students did not provide identifying information, and natural gender variations across institutions contributed further to the imbalance. As the table demonstrates, the overall gender distribution was fairly even (96 males and 104 females), but the distribution across specific institutions was not entirely captured due to these factors.

1. *Sampling design*

The identification of participants in this research was achieved through a non-probability sampling strategy, specifically purposive sampling. A total of 200 student-respondents were intentionally selected with their accessibility and relevance to the established study criteria as the basis for selection. This respondents was deemed adequate for the purpose of identifying trends in English language anxiety and assessing its correlation with academic performance. Purposive sampling, a technique that permits researchers to target individuals exhibiting specific characteristics or who are optimally positioned to provide pertinent data [32, 33], was implemented to ensure a balanced representation of participants with regard to gender, age, year level, academic program, and parents' educational attainment.

2. *Data Gathering Procedure*

Participating in this study were college students from public higher education institutions (HEIs) across Sulu, completed a structured survey. Prior to data collection, the researcher identified suitable HEIs and secured the necessary formal approval from both the Dean of Graduate Studies and institutional administrators. Participants were informed about the study's objectives and significance before completing the survey. Ethical standards were maintained by securing informed consent, which highlighted the confidentiality of their data and their right to participate voluntarily. The researcher personally handled the distribution and collection of the completed questionnaires to secure the reliability and coherence of the acquired data.

3. *Research Instrument*

An established instrument for assessing the purpose of assessing language learning anxiety, this study utilized the FLCAS developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [3], was the primary research instrument used in this study. To ensure its relevance to the specific experiences of students learning English in public HEIs in Sulu, the FLCAS underwent adaptation. For cultural and contextual relevance to Filipino college students, the FLCAS was modified in several ways: item phrasing was adapted to acknowledge English as a second language, the items were restructured into four primary domains—Self-Confidence in Speaking English (SSE), Fear of Making Mistakes (FMM), Nervousness During Class Activities (NCA), and Test Anxiety (TA)—and seven supplementary items were added to more fully encompass the unique academic and sociocultural experiences of the target population.

4. *Validity and Reliability*

To ensure content validity, the adapted FLCAS underwent expert review by two seasoned professors from the Graduate Studies Division of Sulu State College, who evaluated the instrument for clarity, cultural relevance, item alignment, and theoretical consistency. Minor linguistic adjustments were made to enhance local comprehensibility while maintaining the original scale's integrity. Although a full pilot test was not conducted due to the minimal modifications, the original FLCAS has demonstrated high reliability (e.g.,

Cronbach's Alpha > 0.90 in prior studies). Thus, the expert validation, supported by the scale's established psychometric properties, was deemed sufficient to ensure its validity and reliability in the Sulu context.

5. *Statistical Treatment Data*

The dataset was evaluated through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Respondent socio-demographics were summarized using frequency and percentage distributions. The extent of anxiety related to the English language was assessed through the calculation of weighted means and standard deviations. To identify significant differences in anxiety levels and academic achievement based on gender, age, year level, academic program, and parents' educational attainment, independent t-tests and one-way ANOVA were applied. Where applicable, Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests were used to pinpoint specific inter-group differences. The Pearson's r correlation was employed to explore the relationship between English language anxiety and academic performance, determining both the strength and direction of the association.

5. Result and discussion

Q1. What are the socio-demographic characteristics of students in public HEIs in Sulu regarding: 1.1 Gender; 1.2 Age; 1.3 Year Level; 1.4 Parents' Educational Background?

Table 2. Gender distribution of student respondents.

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percent
Male (M)	80	40%
Female (F)	120	60%
Total	200	100%

The demographic profile of the student respondents, as can be seen in **Table 2**, provides crucial context for understanding the subsequent findings. The observed predominance of female students (60%) in Sulu's HEIs mirrors broader trends in higher education enrollment in the Philippines, suggesting a significant inclination among women in the Sulu area towards pursuing tertiary education.

1.2 In terms of Age

Table 3. Age breakdown of student participants.

Age	N	%
18 and younger	13	6.5%
19-25	178	89.0%
26-30	9	4.5%
31 and older	0	0
Total	200	100%

The age distribution in **Table 3**, heavily concentrated between 19 and 25 years (89%), is consistent with typical undergraduate populations, indicating that the sample represents the core demographic of college students.

2.3 Regarding the level of study

Table 4. Breakdown of student respondents by year level.

Year Level	N	%
1st Year	55	27.5%

2nd Year	64	32.0%
3rd Year	67	33.5%
4th Year	14	7.0%
Total	200	100%

Table 4. *(Continued)*

The distribution of respondents by year level is presented in **Table 4.** As the data indicates, the majority of participants were either 2nd-year (32%, 64 students) or 3rd-year students (33.5%, 67 students). 1st-year students comprised 27.5% (55 students) of the sample, while 4th-year students represented the smallest group at 7% (14 students). The higher representation of second and third-year students may reflect their increased likelihood to participate in research studies, potentially linked to their established academic standing. While no major ELA differences were found based on year level, academic performance varied significantly by this factor (see **Table 16**). This suggests that continued exposure to English instruction may influence performance, even if anxiety levels remain constant, echoing Popon's[17] assertion that experience can increase competence despite persistent anxiety. The limited number of fourth-year students might be attributed to various factors, including time limitations as they prepare for graduation.

1.4 Regarding Parents' Educational Attainment

Table 5. Parents' educational attainment of student respondents.

Parents' Educational Attainment	N	%
Elementary Graduate	38	19.0%
High School Graduate	75	37.5%
College Graduate	65	32.5%
Master's/Doctoral level/graduate	22	11.0%
Total	200	100%

Table 5 shows parents' educational attainment. Most respondents had parents who completed high school (37.5%, 75 students) or college (32.5%, 65 students). Fewer had parents who completed elementary school (19%, 38 students) or had advanced degrees (Master's/Doctoral) (11%, 22 students). This suggests that about 70% of respondents have at least one parent with a high school diploma or higher, potentially influencing academic expectations and support.

Q2. Regarding students at public HEIs, what are their levels of English language anxiety concerning: 2.1 Self-confidence in Speaking English; 2.2 Fear of Making Mistakes; 2.3 Nervousness During Class Activities; and 2.4 Test Anxiety?

2. 1In relation to self-confidence when speaking English

Table 6. Anxiety levels related to self-efficacy in speaking English.

Statement	Mean	S.D.	Rating
I feel awkward or uneasy when speaking in my English class.	3.11	0.94	Undecided
I get anxious or nervous when I anticipate being called upon in English class.	3.20	1.03	Undecided
I experience a lot of anxiety when I have to speak without preparation in English class	3.15	1.08	Undecided
Nervousness in English class can cause me to have difficulty recalling known concepts.	2.95	1.03	Undecided
I feel self-conscious when providing answers in English class.	2.86	1.09	Undecided

I have confidence while engaging in spoken activities during English class.	3.22	1.07	Undecided
My heart races when I expect to be called on in English class.	3.12	1.00	Undecided
I feel anxious and disoriented while verbal participation in the English language classroom.	3.08	1.04	Undecided
I worry that other students will make fun of me when speaking in English.	2.90	1.22	Undecided
I believe I would feel comfortable communicating with native English speakers.	3.05	1.21	Undecided
Total Weighted Mean	3.09	0.60	Undecided

Table 6. *(Continued)*

SA = Strongly Agree (4.50 - 5.0), A = Agree (3.50 - 4.49), NAD = Neither Agree nor Disagree (2.50 - 3.49), D = Disagree (1.50 - 2.49), SD = Strongly Disagree (1.00 - 1.49)

The total weighted mean of 3.09, categorized as "Undecided" in **Table 6**, reflects a moderate level of anxiety regarding students' self-confidence in using English for speech. This neutral rating suggests that students from public HEIs in Sulu neither feel highly confident nor overly anxious when speaking in class. Notably, they reported discomfort in certain situations, such as trembling in anticipation of being called on (mean = 3.20) and panicking when required to speak without preparation (mean = 3.15). Their uncertainty about feeling confident when speaking English (mean = 3.22) implies that while some anxiety exists, it does not entirely prevent them from engaging in oral communication. This hesitation aligns with Horwitz et al.'s[3] concept of communication apprehension, where individuals experience unease in speaking scenarios. The results also echo Jugo's[12] findings, which revealed nervousness during spontaneous speaking tasks due to fear of being evaluated.

2.2 In terms of Fear of Making Mistakes

Table 7. Anxiety levels related to fear of making mistakes.

Statement	Mean	S.D.	Rating
I frequently perceive that my peers exhibit in English more skillfully than I do.	3.05	1.17	Undecided
I am apprehensive about the potential consequences of failing my English course.	3.60	1.15	Agree
I experience frustration when I am unable to fully comprehend the teacher's feedback.	3.25	1.09	Undecided
Despite my preparation for English class, I still feel an underlying sense of nervousness.	3.08	1.11	Undecided
I possess a sense of confidence when speaking English in front of my classmates.	3.02	1.11	Undecided
I often feel uneasy, fearing that my English instructor will correct every mistake I make.	2.81	1.13	Undecided
I tend to feel more anxious and tense in my English class compared to other subjects.	2.70	1.13	Undecided
I experience heightened anxiety when I fail to comprehend every word spoken by my English teacher.	3.12	1.15	Undecided
The multitude of grammar rules I must learn in order to speak English often feels overwhelming.	3.01	1.20	Undecided
I frequently hesitate to speak English due to a fear of making grammatical errors.	2.95	1.24	Undecided
Total Weighted Mean	3.05	0.77	Undecided

Table 7 shows that HEI students in Sulu experienced a moderate level of anxiety related to the fear of making mistakes when speaking English, as indicated by a total weighted mean of 3.05 ("Undecided"). While the overall anxiety was not extreme, students expressed particular concern about failing their English class (mean = 3.60), highlighting the impact of academic pressure. This supports Abel and Velasco's (2024) assertion that fear of negative evaluation is a key factor in English language anxiety (ELA). Additionally, students reported frustration when they did not understand the teacher's corrections (mean = 3.25), which may further discourage active engagement.

Apprehension about being judged by peers or frequently corrected by instructors appears to contribute to reluctance in participating during class discussions. This moderate anxiety level aligns with Ojanola's[13] findings, which indicate that fear of judgment can inhibit student involvement. Nonetheless, the consistent "Undecided" ratings suggest that while this fear is present, it is not typically debilitating.

2.3 In terms of Nervousness during Class Activities

Table 8. Nervousness in English class activities.

Statement	Mean	S.D.	Rating
I experience anxiety when I make mistakes in English class.	3.32	1.13	Undecided
I often feel the urge to avoid attending my English class.	2.45	1.16	Disagree
I tend to get distracted and think about unrelated matters during English class.	2.70	1.14	Undecided
I worry about not keeping up with the pace in my English class.	2.88	1.10	Undecided
I feel uneasy before attending my English class.	2.65	1.12	Undecided
I become anxious when the teacher asks impromptu questions that I haven't prepared for.	3.24	1.13	Undecided
I am reluctant to participate in group discussions due to a fear of being judged by my peers.	2.91	1.18	Undecided
Reading aloud in English class causes me to feel nervous.	2.78	1.18	Undecided
I feel pressured to speak English even when I am not fully prepared.	3.05	1.17	Undecided
I feel anxious when the teacher unexpectedly asks me to share my opinions in English.	3.12	1.19	Undecided
Total Weighted Mean	2.94	0.82	Undecided

Legend: SA=Strongly Agree (4.50-5.0), A=Agree (3.50-4.49), NAD=Neither Agree or Disagree (2.50-3.49), D=Disagree (1.50-2.49), SD=Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.49)

Table 8 reveals students' nervousness during English class activities, with a total weighted mean of 2.94. These findings echo the observations of Gatcho & Hajan[15], who noted that even students who attend class may withdraw socially or avoid speaking opportunities. Students expressed anxiety about making mistakes (mean = 3.32) and feeling unprepared when the teacher asks questions without prior notice (mean = 3.24). While avoidance of attending English class was not prevalent (mean = 2.45), activities that involve public performance, like reading aloud (mean = 2.78) or group discussions (mean = 2.91), appear to induce nervousness. These results highlight performance pressure as a key contributor to anxiety in the English classroom.

2.4 In terms of Test Anxiety

Table 9. Anxiety during English language tests.

Statement	Mean	S.D.	Rating
I usually feel relaxed during English tests.	3.24	1.12	Undecided
Studying for an English test often leaves me feeling more confused.	2.56	1.09	Undecided
I feel pressured to perform well on English exams.	2.99	1.06	Undecided
I feel uncertain about my answers when taking English tests.	2.88	1.03	Undecided
I experience anxiety when I don't have enough time to complete an English test.	3.24	1.11	Undecided
I feel nervous before an English test.	2.98	1.07	Undecided
I feel stressed when I don't understand the instructions for an English test.	3.31	1.12	Undecided
Seeing my classmates finish quickly makes me feel pressured during English tests.	2.93	1.19	Undecided

Legend: SA=Strongly Agree (4.50-5.0), A=Agree (3.50-4.49), NAD=Neither Agree or Disagree (2.50-3.49), D=Disagree (1.50-2.49), SD=Strongly Disagree (1.00-1.49)

The data in **Table 9** reveals a moderate level of test anxiety among public HEI students in Sulu (overall weighted mean of 2.99, SD of 0.7118). The finding that students generally neither agree nor disagree with statements about test anxiety indicates a degree of ambivalence, yet suggests that test anxiety is present. This moderate anxiety may have implications for students' test performance, focus during exams, and their ability to retain the learned material. Student responses indicate feelings of anxiety and uncertainty related to various facets of testing, such as their overall calmness during tests (mean = 3.24), the counterproductive effect of test preparation (mean = 2.56), the pressure to achieve high scores (mean = 2.99), doubt in their answers (mean = 2.88), anxiety stemming from time constraints (mean = 3.24), and stress caused by unclear test instructions (mean = 3.31). These results suggest that test anxiety is a significant factor that could hinder students' confidence and performance in English language assessments.

Q3. How does the academic achievement of students at public HEIs, indicated by their GPA in English-related subjects (including English Communication and Literature), manifest?

Table 10. Level of academic achievement of HEI students as measured by their GPA in English-related subjects (e.g., English Communication, Literature).

Academic Achievement	Mean	S.D.	Rating
Average GPA in English-related subjects	2.9500	0.91234	Low Passing
Overall Average GPA	2.9500	0.91234	Low Passing

Legend: (1) 1.00-1.25=Outstanding; (2) 1.26-1.50=Very Satisfactory; (3) 1.51-2.00=Satisfactory; (4) 2.01-2.50=High Passing; (5) 2.51-3.00=Low Passing; (6) 3.01 & below=Failure

Table 10 shows that the academic achievement of HEI students in English-related subjects, as measured by their GPA, is at the Low Passing level with a total average of 2.95. This performance level aligns with Nicosia & Esmero's[19] findings that high ELA correlates with lower grades in English. This shows that students in public HEIs in Sulu face challenges in their English courses, suggesting a need for improvement in both language proficiency and academic performance in these subjects. The low passing grades point to significant obstacles in achieving higher academic success in English.

Q4. Does English language anxiety among students at public HEIs significantly vary based on their socio-demographic profile: 4.1 Gender; 4.2 Age; 4.3 Year Level; and 4.4 Parents' Educational Attainment?

4.1 In terms of Gender

Table 11. Differences in English language anxiety among hei students based on gender.

Variables	Grouping	Mean	S.D.	Mean Difference	t	Sig.	Description
Self-confidence in Speaking English	Male	2.9777	0.53504	-0.06762	-0.802	0.423	Not Significant
	Female	3.0453	0.64337				
Fear of Making Mistakes	Male	3.0326	0.73848	0.09007	0.823	0.411	Not Significant
	Female	2.9426	0.80095				
Nervousness During Class Activities	Male	2.9894	0.79575	0.22521	1.952	0.052	Not Significant
	Female	2.7642	0.83017				
Test Anxiety	Male	2.9436	0.62777	-0.04695	-0.468	0.640	Not Significant
	Female	2.9906	0.77232				

*Significant at alpha 0.05

From **Table 11**, it can be observed that there were no significant differences (p > 0.05) in English language anxiety levels between male and female students for any of the examined anxiety components: self-confidence in speaking, fear of making mistakes, nervousness during class activities, and test anxiety. This suggests that gender is not a significant factor influencing the reported anxiety related to English language tasks in this study.

4.2 In relation to Age

Table 12. Differences in English language anxiety among HEI students (Age).

Variables	Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Description
Self-confidence in Speaking English	Between Groups	0.305	2	0.153	0.430	0.651	Not Significant
	Within Groups	70.008	197	0.355			
	Total	70.314	199				
Fear of Making Mistakes	Between Groups	0.394	2	0.197	0.329	0.720	Not Significant
	Within Groups	118.088	197	0.599			
	Total	118.482	199				
Nervousness During Class Activities	Between Groups	0.443	2	0.221	0.327	0.721	Not Significant
	Within Groups	133.337	197	0.677			
	Total	133.780	199				
Test Anxiety	Between Groups	0.213	2	0.107	0.212	0.809	Not Significant
	Within Groups	99.178	197	0.503			
	Total	99.392	199				

Significant at Alpha .05

The analysis presented in **Table 12** reveals that age did not significantly influence students' reported levels of English language anxiety (p > 0.05). No statistically significant differences were found among the three age groups (18 years and below, 19–25 yrs old, and 26–30 yrs old across all anxiety sub-categories. This indicates that age does not significantly influence students' perceptions of their English language anxiety. These findings align with Giray et al.[23], who suggested that ELA is more influenced by experience and exposure than chronological age. Students of different ages tend to report similar levels of anxiety related to English language activities, thus supporting that there is no significant difference in anxiety as it relates to age.

4.3 In relation to Year Level

Table 13. Differences in English language anxiety among HEI students based on year level.

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Description
Self-confidence in Speaking English						
Between Groups	2.948	3	0.983	2.859	0.038	Not Significant
Within Groups	67.365	196	0.344			
Total	70.314	199				
Fear of Making Mistakes						
Between Groups	3.989	3	1.330	2.276	0.081	Not Significant
Within Groups	114.493	196	0.584			
Total	118.482	199				
Nervousness During Class Activities						

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Description
Between Groups	3.315	3	1.105	1.660	0.177	Not Significant
Within Groups	130.465	196	0.666			
Total	133.780	199				
Test Anxiety						
Between Groups	2.004	3	0.668	1.344	0.261	Not Significant
Within Groups	97.388	196	0.497			
Total	99.392	199				

Table 13. (*Continued*)

*Significant at Alpha .05

As reflected in **Table 13**, no meaningful statistical variations were detected (p > 0.05) in English language anxiety levels among students in their 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th years of study. This suggests that students' year level in their academic program does not significantly impact their reported levels of English language anxiety. Being in a more advanced year does not necessarily correlate with lower anxiety levels in English language tasks, supporting the hypothesis that year level does not significantly influence students' assessment of their English language anxiety.

4.4 In terms of Parents' Educational Attainment

Table 14. Differences in English language anxiety among HEI students based on parents' academic background.

Sources of Variation		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Description
Self-confidence in Speaking English	Between Groups	1.277	3	0.426	1.208	0.308	
	Within Groups	69.037	196	0.352			
Fear of Making Mistakes	Between Groups	5.368	3	1.789	3.100	0.028	
	Within Groups	113.115	196	0.577			
Nervousness During Class Activities	Between Groups	6.622	3	2.207	3.402	0.019	
	Within Groups	127.158	196	0.649			
Test Anxiety	Between Groups	1.693	3	0.564	1.132	0.337	

*Significant at Alpha .05

As shown in **Table 14**, parents' educational attainment had a statistically significant influence on students' anxiety specifically in the areas of Fear of Making Mistakes (p = 0.028) and Nervousness During Class Activities (p = 0.019). This suggests that students whose parents have higher levels of education may experience different levels of anxiety in these particular aspects of English language learning. For instance, students with college-educated parents reported higher anxiety in these areas compared to those whose parents had lower levels of education. However, no significant relationship was found between parents' educational attainment and students' Self-confidence in Speaking English or Test Anxiety. Therefore, the hypothesis stating No notable difference in English language anxiety with respect to parents' education is partially supported and partially rejected, depending on the specific anxiety sub-category.

Table 15. Post hoc analysis on the Fear of making mistakes based on parents' academic background.

Variables (I)	Grouping by Parents' Educational Attainment	(J) Grouping by Parents' Educational Attainment	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Fear of Making Mistakes	Elementary level/graduate	High School level/graduate	0.17355	0.15308	0.669
		College level/graduate	0.36156*	0.13623	0.042

Master's/Doctoral level/graduate	0.70198	0.35773	0.206

Table 15. *(Continued)*

* *The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.*

The subsequent post-hoc analysis using the Tukey Test, as shown in **Table 15**, indicates that students whose parents have a college-level education show a statistically significant higher fear of making mistakes (mean difference = 0.36156, p = 0.042) compared to those whose parents have only completed elementary education. This suggests that parental education plays a specific role in shaping anxiety related to fear of making mistakes.

Q5. Does the academic performance of students at public HEIs significantly differ when analyzed by their socio-demographic characteristics: 5.1 Gender; 5.2 Age; 5.3 Year Level; and 5.4 Parents' Educational Attainment?

5.1. In relation to gender

Table 16. Differences in academic achievement based on gender.

Variables Grouping		Mean	S. D.	Mean difference	*t*	Sig.	Description
Academic achievement (GPA)	Male	3.1809	.94996	.21859	1.610	.109	Not significant
	Female	2.9623	.96535				

**Significant with an alpha threshold of 0.05*

As shown in **Table 16**, the analysis reveals that gender did not have a statistically significant impact (p > 0.05) on the academic achievement of students, based on the mean difference and p-value at the 0.05 significance level. This suggests that gender does not have a notable impact on the academic outcomes of students. Consequently, the hypothesis positing that there is a lack of notable difference in academic achievement in regards on gender is supported.

5.2. In terms of age

Table 17. Variations in academic performance according to age

Factors of variation		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.	Interpretation
Academic achievement (GPA)	Between groups	5.066	2	2.533	2.786	.064	Not significant
	Within groups	179.089	197	.909			
	Total	184.155	199				

**Significant at Alpha .05*

The F-ratio and p-value, as shown in **Table 17**, indicate that age does not have a significant impact on academic performance, as no meaningful statistical difference was observed at the 0.05 significance level. This suggests that students aged 26–30 do not outperform their younger counterparts (18 years and below or 19–25) in terms of academic achievement. Consequently, the hypothesis stating that age does not significantly affect academic performance is supported. These results are consistent with the findings of Anliwan et al.[27], who observed that students across age groups tend to perform similarly when factors such as anxiety levels and instructional context are controlled.

5.3. In terms of year level

Table 18. Differences in academic achievement based on year level.

FACTORS OF VARIATION		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Description
Academic Achievement (GPA)	Between Groups	10.572	3	3.524	3.979*	.009	Significant
	Within Groups	173.583	196	.886			
	Total	184.155	199				

Significant at Alpha .05

The results of the statistical analysis in **Table 18** reveal a significant difference in academic achievement across year levels, as indicated by an F-ratio and a p-value of 0.009, which is below the α = 0.05 level of significance. This outcome suggests that students' academic performance tends to improve as they advance in their studies. Specifically, third-year students were found to outperform first-year students. Consequently, the null hypothesis—which posits that there is no significant difference in academic achievement across year levels—is rejected. These findings align with Popon's[17] assertion that more advanced learners generally exhibit better academic performance due to increased exposure to academic tasks and greater adjustment to the demands of English language learning.

Table 19. Post hoc assessment of academic performance differences across year levels.

Variables	(I) Grouping by Year Level	(J) Grouping by Year Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Academic Achievement	First Year	Second Year	-.43153	.17303	.064
		Third Year	-.49986*	.17123	.020
		Fourth Year	-.71948	.28171	.055

* The mean variation is significant based on a 0.05 alpha criterion.

Post hoc examination utilizing the Tukey Test, as shown in **Table 19**, identifies that third-year students show a significant academic achievement difference when compared to first-year students, with a mean difference of -0.49986* (p = 0.020). This finding highlights that third-year students exhibit a more significant level of academic performance compared to first-year students.

5.4 In terms of Parents' Educational Attainment

Table 20. Analysis of academic achievement by parents' education.

Factors of variation		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Description
Academic Achievement (GPA)	Between Groups	6.550	3	2.183	2.409	.068	Not Significant
	Within Groups	177.605	196	.906			
	Total	184.155	199				

Significant at Alpha .05

The analysis of academic achievement based on parents' educational attainment in **Table 20**, reveals no statistically significant differences, as indicated by the computed F-value and p-value were interpreted within the 5% significance criterion. This suggests that variations in parents' education levels, whether elementary, high school, or higher education, do not significantly affect students' academic performance. Consequently, the hypothesis suggesting no significant impact of parents' educational level on academic achievement is proven correct.

Q6. Does a notable statistical relationship exists involving English language anxiety and its effects on academic success among students at public HEIs?

Table 21. The connection between English language anxiety and academic outcomes.

Variables		Pearson *r*	Sig	N	Description
Dependent	**Independent**				
Academic Achievement	Self-confidence in speaking English	.162*	.022	200	Low
	Fear of making mistakes	.306**	.000	200	Moderate
	Nervousness during class activities	.387**	.000	200	Moderate
	Test anxiety	.305**	.000	200	Moderate

The correlation coefficient is significant at α = 0.05. It classifies coefficients as: 0.0-0.1 (nearly zero), 0.1-0.30 (low), 0.3-0.50 (moderate), 0.5-0.70 (high), 0.7-0.9 (very high), and 0.9-1.0 (nearly perfect).

Table 21 shows a low positive correlation between self-confidence in speaking English and academic performance (r = .162, p = .022), and moderate positive correlations with fear of making mistakes (r = .306, p < .001), nervousness during class activities (r = .387, p < .001), and test anxiety (r = .305, p < .001). These findings indicate that higher anxiety levels are associated with lower academic achievement.

The results lead to the rejection of the null hypothesis, confirming a significant relationship between language anxiety and academic performance. These findings support Horwitz et al.[3] and Krashen[4], who highlighted the negative impact of anxiety on second language learning, and align with Chen[21], who found classroom anxiety linked to poor academic outcomes.

6. Conclusion

The findings of this study offer crucial practical implications for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Sulu and similar multilingual contexts. Given the prevalence of moderate English Language Anxiety and its negative correlation with academic performance, HEIs should prioritize the development and implementation of targeted intervention strategies. This could include integrating anxiety-reducing pedagogical approaches, such as fostering a low-stress classroom environment, promoting collaborative learning activities, incorporating varied assessment methods that reduce test anxiety, and providing ample opportunities for low-stakes practice. Furthermore, the establishment of accessible language support centers offering one-on-one tutoring, conversation clubs, and psychological counseling for students struggling with ELA is highly recommended to enhance classroom engagement and boost confidence in English language use. Theoretically, this study significantly contributes to the existing body of knowledge on Foreign Language Anxiety by empirically validating and extending Horwitz et al.'s[3] theory within a unique socio-linguistic setting. By demonstrating how socio-demographic variables, specifically [mention key findings, e.g., parental educational attainment and year level], influence ELA and academic outcomes in Sulu, this research provides nuanced insights into the theory's applicability beyond commonly studied Western contexts. It underscores the critical role of emotional and psychological factors in second language acquisition challenges, suggesting that theoretical models of language learning must adequately account for the specific demographic and contextual influences that shape learners' affective states. This study's findings also lay the groundwork for developing more culturally sensitive theoretical frameworks concerning language anxiety in diverse educational landscapes.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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