



# Language Test Anxiety Between Gender and Proficiency Among Foreign Language Learners

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## ABSTRAK

Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menguji tingkat kecemasan peserta didik dalam menghadapi tes bahasa Inggris di Universitas Internasional Batam, dengan mempertimbangkan jenis kelamin dan kemahiran peserta didik. Penelitian ini ingin mengetahui apakah terdapat perbedaan signifikan dalam tingkat kecemasan ujian antara jenis kelamin peserta didik dan skor kemahiran, serta mencari interaksi antara kedua variabel tersebut terhadap kecemasan ujian.

Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif dengan menggunakan desain penelitian survei. 100 peserta didik (59 perempuan dan 41 laki-laki) menjadi responden dari penelitian ini. Data kemudian dianalisis dengan menggunakan analisis deskriptif. Untuk menguji perbedaan dan interaksi yang signifikan antara jenis kelamin peserta didik dan kemahiran dalam kecemasan ujian, digunakan Two Way Anova sebagai alat pengujian hipotesis. Hasil dari penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pembelajar di Universitas Internasional Batam mengalami dan menghadapi kecemasan ujian sedang. Hasil pengujian hipotesis menunjukkan bahwa terdapat perbedaan yang signifikan dalam tingkat kecemasan ujian antara peserta didik laki-laki dan perempuan, dimana peserta didik perempuan melaporkan tingkat kecemasan ujian yang lebih tinggi (53,19) dibandingkan dengan peserta didik laki-laki (43,61). Namun, tidak ada perbedaan signifikan dalam tingkat kecemasan ujian di antara peserta didik kemahiran. Selain itu, tidak ditemukan interaksi yang signifikan antara jenis kelamin dan kemahiran dalam mempengaruhi tingkat kecemasan ujian di antara peserta didik. Oleh karena itu, diperlukan penelitian lebih lanjut untuk membangun penelitian yang lebih kuat tentang pengaruh jenis kelamin dan kemahiran terhadap kecemasan ujian, serta bagaimana pengaruhnya terhadap kinerja tes bahasa Inggris peserta didik.

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to examine the level of anxiety of students in facing an English test at Batam International University, taking into account the gender and proficiency of the students. This study wanted to find out whether there were significant differences in the level of test anxiety between the gender of students and proficiency scores, and to look for interactions between these two variables on test anxiety.

This research uses a quantitative method using a survey research design. 100 learners (59 females and 41 males) became respondents to this research. The data were then analyzed using descriptive analysis. To examine significant differences and interactions between student gender and proficiency in test anxiety, Two Way Anova was used as a hypothesis testing tool.

The results of this research indicate that learners at Batam International University experience and face moderate levels of test anxiety. The results of testing the hypothesis show that there is a significant difference in the level of exam anxiety between male and female students, where female students report higher levels of test anxiety (53.19) compared to male students (43.61). However, there was no significant difference in test anxiety levels among proficiency learners. In addition, there was no significant interaction between gender and proficiency in influencing the level of test anxiety among learners.

Therefore, further research is needed to build stronger research on the effect of gender and proficiency on exam anxiety, and how it influences students' English test performance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language tests are one of the ways used to measure a person's ability in a foreign language and are tests that are often faced by students in order to evaluate their language abilities. However, many students experience anxiety when facing foreign language tests. This anxiety can affect their performance in the test and have an impact on the scores obtained. Test anxiety in language tests can affect a person's ability to make decisions and solve problems in a language context, as well as influence their motivation to learn the language (Young, 2020). Anxiety when facing language tests is a common issue that occurs in individuals who are studying a second or foreign language. This anxiety can affect students' performance in language tests and impact their learning outcomes. Some factors that can affect foreign language test anxiety

include gender and level of foreign language proficiency. Test anxiety as the anxiety experienced by individuals when faced with testing or evaluation situations, which can affect academic performance and psychological well-being (Wu et al, 2020). Many people experience increased stress and anxiety both before and during tests. This condition can interfere with the learning process and can also affect the test results of someone who is experiencing anxiety (Pratiwi, T. L., et al, 2021, October). From what I have experienced and the results of my observations, many of my friend's experience anxiety before taking TOEIC Preparation, TOEIC Official and etc.

Based on Rector's Decree No. 065/REK/KEP-UIB/IX/2021, that to Register for graduation, UIB students must get a minimum TOEIC official score of 605. Before taking TOEIC official, students at UIB will take TOEIC prediction first, with a minimum score for TOEIC prediction is 605 and a minimum score. However, if students get a TOEIC prediction score that has not achieved the minimum score, the student must repeat the test again until they reach the predetermined score. This phenomenon may make students experience anxiety because they take too many tests, and they are increasingly afraid of failing and not reaching the standard score again. Their anxiety in the test can interfere with their thinking and performance. This can be called foreign language anxiety.

Horwitz (2020) suggests that foreign language anxiety can affect a person's ability to process foreign language information, remember vocabulary, and solve problems in a foreign language context (Horwitz, 2020). This is due to the disruption of concentration and attention caused by the anxiety experienced. Excessive anxiety can interfere with a person's cognitive processes in processing a foreign language and can make it difficult for them to speak, understand, or write in a foreign language. Foreign language anxiety has three types (Horwitz, 2020). First, communicative anxiety is related to a person's ability to communicate effectively and accurately in a foreign language. This anxiety can arise due to fear of making grammatical errors, difficulty in selecting the appropriate words, or fear of not being able to understand the foreign language used by the interlocutor. Second, cognitive anxiety is related to a person's ability to understand the context of the foreign language used, remember vocabulary, and solve problems in a foreign language context. This anxiety can arise due to difficulties in processing foreign language information caused by concentration and attention problems. Third, affective anxiety is related to emotional factors, such as fear of feeling awkward or fear of being ridiculed by others when speaking in a foreign language. This anxiety can hinder a person's confidence in using a foreign language and can affect their motivation to learn the language (Marsevani, M. &Habeebanisya. 2022).

Previous research indicates that language test anxiety differs between gender and language proficiency levels. Several studies have found that females tend to have higher language test anxiety than males (Kim & Jung, 2019; Mohammadhosseini & Taheri, 2019; Ozkan & Bektas, 2021; Yilmaz & Karakaya, 2020). Other studies show significant differences between gender and language anxiety, with female students reporting high language test anxiety (Kim & Jung, 2019; Mohammadhosseini & Taheri, 2019; Ozkan & Bektas, 2021; Yilmaz & Karakaya, 2020). Previous research also indicates that students with lower language proficiency levels have higher language test anxiety than those with higher language proficiency levels (Kim & Jung, 2019; Mohammadhosseini & Taheri, 2019; Ozkan & Bektas, 2021). Other research also show no significant differences between proficiency and language anxiety (Liang et al, 2020). Additionally, previous research shows no significant interaction between gender and proficiency level on test anxiety among students (Tella et al, 2020).

However, research on language test anxiety in Indonesia is still limited, especially in relation to gender and language proficiency level. Therefore, this study aims to determine whether there are differences in language test anxiety between gender and language proficiency level among Batam International University learners. The results of this study can provide information on differences in language test anxiety between males and females, as well as between students with different levels of foreign language proficiency

This research seeks to answer these following questions:

1. What is the level of test anxiety of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners students at Yogyakarta State University who have taken English proficiency tests based on learners students' gender and self-proficiency score?
2. Are there differences in learner students' test anxiety levels based on their gender and self-proficiency score?
3. Are there any interaction between student learner's gender and proficiency in accordance to their test anxiety level?

## 2. METHODS

This research is classified as a quantitative method using questionnaire. According to (Sugiyono, 2017), the philosophy of positivism forms the basis of a quantitative research approach (Sugiyono, 2017). This method is utilized to investigate a specific population or sample and collect data through research instruments. The analysis of data in quantitative research is more quantitative or statistical in nature, with the aim of testing predetermined hypotheses. In this study, researchers used an online questionnaire via Google form to collect data. The questionnaire consists of two parts, namely a background questionnaire and a slightly modified version of Spielberger's Test Anxiety Inventory (1980), as well as survey questions. Adjustments were made to the questionnaire to suit the nature and conditions of the participants, as well as to prevent misunderstandings among the participants. The first part of the questionnaire is the background, which includes information about the participant's gender and proficiency score. The second part is the Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI), which is used to evaluate the anxiety level of participants facing tests. The participants for the present research are female and male learners from Batam International University class of 2019 who have previously taken English proficiency test (TOEIC). There were 100 learners involved in this research. This research chose the class of 2019 as participants for the following reasons: first, the class of 2019 is the last batch at UIB or final semester students at UIB, many of whom have achieved a minimum TOEIC prediction score and several students have already taken the official TOEIC. Second, the class of 2019 has made TOEIC predictions many times until it reaches a predetermined standard score. Third, the class of 2019 has sufficient experience in dealing with the TOEIC test. Fourth, one of the conditions for completing a thesis at UIB is that students must get an official TOEIC score of at least 605 so that the 2019 class must prepare well.

A great deal of research on test anxiety has been conducted using a various instrument of technique (Sarason, 1952; Sarason, Davidison, Lighthall and Waite, 1958; Liebert and Morris, 1967; Sarason, 1978; Spielberg, 1980; Sarason, 1984). This study use a questionnaire as a tool to collect data. (Valunaite Oleskeviciene & Sliogeriene, 2020) defines a questionnaire as a form that contains a collection of questions given to respondents to answer. However, the questionnaire consists of two parts, namely a background questionnaire and a slightly modified version of Spielberger's Test Anxiety Inventory (1980) to examine the level of participants' level of test anxiety, which also labelled as the most prevalent ones among others measurement instrument.

The two objectives underlying the development of the TAI were the development of a brief scale and the use of factor analytic procedures to measure the Anxiety and Emotional subscales (Spielberger, Gonzalez, Taylor, Algaze, and Anton, 1978). TAI is a self-report scale consisting of 20 items and is based on two conceptualizations of test anxiety, namely Worry (thoughts of doing bad things that interfere with concentration during the test) and Emotional (feeling very tense during the test). This scale consists of three subscales, namely the Total Anxiety Test (TAI-T), Anxiety- Worry Test (TAI-W), and Anxiety- Emotionality Test (TAI-E). The TAI-W and TAI-E subscales consist of eight items each, while the remaining four included in Test Anxiety-Total (TAI-T).

The questionnaires were available in two languages: Indonesian and English. The researcher enclosed English translation under Indonesian on the questionnaires to prevent misconceptions as the participants have different backgrounds and levels of language proficiency (Salehi & Marefat, 2014). The learners can then be classified according to their gender and proficiency score The TAI is a 4-point Likert type scale, and each item has four options: (1) Almost Never, (2) Sometimes, (3) Often, and (4) Almost Always (Hariyanto, O. I. B. (2022).

To collect data regarding test taker anxiety, researchers used Spielberger's Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI) (1980) as a data collection tool consisting of 20 items. Data collected through a close-ended questionnaire will then be analyzed using SPSS, and the average score and proportion will be calculated. The questionnaire was entered into the Google Form and shared online via WhatsApp and direct messages on Instagram, and distributed to 100 students. The researcher used three data sets in this research, namely: background information, TAI scores, and students' English test scores. To analyze the data, the researcher performed descriptive statistical. Because this study aims to determine the interaction between variables, researchers used the Two Way Anova test.

The data obtained through the questionnaire is collected by the researcher. The purpose of this study is to determine the contribution of two independent variables, namely gender and proficiency, to the dependent variable, which is test anxiety. Therefore, it is very important to perform accurate analysis in data processing. The questionnaire used in this study uses the Likert scale (Almost Never=1, Sometimes=2, Often=3, and Almost Always=4) to determine the level of test anxiety of the participants. Furthermore, the

participants' anxiety test scores will be classified into three categories, namely low, moderate, and high, in accordance with TAI Spielberger's classification (1980 ).

**Table 1: Questionnaire Likert Scale**

Optional Responses	Scores
Almost Never	1
Sometimes	2
Often	3
Almost Always	4

The data obtained from this study will be processed quantitatively using statistical software (SPSS). Data processing will be done by calculating the average response of the participants. After the calculations are done, the scores from all respondents are obtained. These scores are then adjusted to the available rating range and divided into three categories based on the rating range. The rating range of 20 to 40 is categorized as low test anxiety level, the range of 41 to 61 is categorized as moderate test anxiety level, and the range of 62 to 82 is categorized as high test anxiety level. There are two statistical techniques that will be used to analyze the data, namely descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing. A descriptive statistic is used to examine the level of test anxiety in English language testing among the participants. This analysis serves to describe and present the data in terms of summary frequencies (Cohen et al., 2007). This analysis is used to present the Mean score (M), the frequency of data distribution, and the maximum and minimum scores. In this research, this statistic is used to make inferences and predictions based on collected data, such as hypothesis testing and difference testing (Cohen et al., 2007). In this study, this analysis serves as hypothesis testing to find out the significant differences in test anxiety between female and male test takers that are also based on their proficiency score.

Hypothesis testing was conducted to see the significant differences and interaction in learners' test anxiety level based on their gender and self-proficiency score and its interaction between these two variables on test anxiety. In this case, Two Way Anova test was utilized to test the hypothesis as the purpose of this study was to find out how two independent variables two variable; gender and proficiency, in combination affect dependent variable; test anxiety. Moreover, Two Way Anova is used to address research question focusing on the differences in the means of one dependent variable when there two or more independent variables which is align with this research's nature. The hypotheses that will be tested are as follows:

1. Gender Differences in Test Anxiety

H1: There is a significant difference in test anxiety level between male and female learners.

Ho: There is no significant difference in test anxiety level between male and female learners.

2. Proficiency Differences in Test Anxiety

H1: There is a significant difference in test anxiety level among self-proficiency.

Ho: There is no significant difference in test in test anxiety level among self- proficiency.

3. Interaction between Gender and Self- Proficiency on Test Anxiety

H1: There is a significant interaction between genders and self-proficiency on test anxiety amongst learners.

Ho: There is no significant interaction between genders and self-proficiency on test anxiety amongst learners.

If Sig.  $\leq$  0,05: the null hypothesis (Ho) is rejected

If Sig.  $\geq$  0,05: the null hypothesis (Ho) is failed to reject

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### 1. Descriptive statistics

### a) Test Anxiety (TA) Levels of All Learners

The table below demonstrates the descriptive statistics represents all learners' test anxiety level (Mean score, the maximum and minimum scores). As can be seen below, the highest score was 77 while the lowest was 22 with the mean of 49.26. This condition revealed that the learners faced test anxiety. Then, the data were classified into low, moderate and high anxiety, according to Spielberger's Test Anxiety Inventory (TAI). To classify into low, moderate, and high anxiety, researchers first determine the range. Range is the difference between the maximum and minimum scores in a sample or population (Triola, 2020). So, by calculating the difference between the maximum and minimum scores, it is possible to determine the low, moderate, and high anxiety categories. Therefore, the category ranges in this research are scores of 22 to 40 for low anxiety, 41 to 59 for moderate anxiety, and 60 to 77 for high anxiety. The table below shows that out of 100 participants, there are 33 learners or 33% experienced low-test anxiety level and 28 learners or 28% experienced high-test anxiety level. In sum, there are 39 or 39% out of 100 learners experienced moderate-test anxiety level.

### b) Gender's Test Anxiety (TA) Levels

Based on the comparison of the mean scores between male and female learners, it can be seen that female learners reported higher level of test anxiety compared to the male learners with the mean scores of 53.19 and 43.61 respectively. Female learners' means in all of sub-scales is higher than male learners, which shows that female learners experienced more test anxiety than male learners did.

**Table 2: Gender Differences in Test Anxiety Level**

Test Anxiety				
Gender	TAI Total	TAI-W	TAI-E	TAI-O
Female	53.19	21.34	21.59	10.25
Male	43.61	17.76	17.24	8.61

### c) Proficiency's Test Anxiety Levels

Learners who have advanced proficiency (B2) with the mean scores of 54.72 has the highest mean of test anxiety, followed by B1 level (48.54), A2 (47.31) and C1 with the least mean scores (0). Turning now to the classification of test anxiety, as can be seen from the table below, B2 proficiency has the higher test anxiety level among four of proficiency level. Taken together, these results suggest that learners with higher proficiency have higher test anxiety than those who have lower proficiency.

**Table 3: Proficiency Differences on Test Anxiety Level**

Test Anxiety					
Proficiency		TAI Total	TAI-W	TAI-E	TAI-O
225-545/A2	Basic/Beginner	47.31	19.09	18.91	9.31
550-780/B1	Independent	48.54	19.34	19.68	9.52
785-940/B2	/Intermediate	54.72	22.72	21.78	10.22
945-990/C1	Proficient/Advanced	0	0	0	0

## 2. Hypothesis Testing

### a) Gender Differences in Test Anxiety

The results of the test between-subject effect shows that in gender the F-ratio is 9.260 with p value 0.003. As Table 7 shows, there is a significant difference because sig. (p-value) less than or equal to 0.05 ( $p=0.003$ , Significance level 0.05), therefore  $H_0$  is rejected, which means that there is a significant difference in test anxiety level between female and male learners. This result support the previous finding that has been discussed above, that the differences in test anxiety level between female and male learners are significant in which female learners reported higher test anxiety as compared to the male learners (Kim & Jung, 2019; Mohammadhosseini & Taheri, 2019; Yilmaz & Karakaya, 2020; Ozkan & Bektas, 2021).

b) Test Anxiety Levels Differences Between Proficiency

The result of the test shows  $F_{\text{calculate}}$  of proficiency variable is 0.904 with  $p$  value 0.408. The table above indicates that there is no significant difference in test anxiety level among proficiency because sig. ( $p$ -value greater than or equal to 0.05 ( $p= 0.408$ , Significance level 0.05), therefore  $H_0$  is failed to reject, which means that there is no significant difference in test anxiety level among proficiency.

c) Interaction between Gender and Proficiency on Test Anxiety

The result of the test shows  $F$ -ratio is 0.023 with  $p$  value 0.977. The table above indicates that there is no significant difference in test anxiety level between gender and proficiency because sig. ( $p$ -value) greater than equal to 0.05 ( $p= 0.977$ , Significance level 0.05), therefore  $H_0$  is failed to reject which means that there is no significant interaction between genders and proficiency on test anxiety among learners.

The first research question of the study tried to examine the level of the learners' test anxiety based on their gender and proficiency. The results of the analysis confirm the existence of test anxiety among learners in Batam International University as the overall mean scored 49.26 with 77 as the highest and 22 as the lowest score. This result showed that the learners in Batam International University who have faced English standardized testing experienced and faced test anxiety. Further, if we classify the learners into low, moderate, and high anxiety level, among 33 out of 100 learners experienced low-test anxiety level, 39 learners experienced moderate-test anxiety level and 28 of them experienced high-test anxiety level. In the case of gender, the results build on existing evidence of the differences in test anxiety level based on learners' gender that there is a significant difference between male and female learners' test anxiety. The classification results also showed similar findings that indicates both female and male learners experienced moderate-test anxiety level in general, with female learners having higher means score (53.19) than male learners (43.61). Strengthening the result, compared to female learners who lead in higher percentage of test anxiety, male learners have the highest percentages in low-test anxiety level with 21% percentages, whereas female learners scored lower than male learners with 12% percentages did. In line with previous studies (Kim & Jung, 2019; Mohammadhosseini & Taheri, 2019; Yilmaz & Karakaya, 2020; Ozkan & Bektas, 2021), the findings have demonstrated that female learners tend to experience higher test-anxiety level in all three subscales; Worry, Emotionally, and Other (Total). In line with the hypothesis, the results of the test demonstrated the significant difference in test anxiety level between female and male learners because  $H_0$  is rejected that mean there is a significant differences in test anxiety level between male and female learners". These results are concerning gender and test anxiety, which reported females who have higher test anxiety level than males (Kim & Jung, 2019; Mohammadhosseini & Taheri, 2019; Yilmaz & Karakaya, 2020; Ozkan & Bektas, 2021). If we now turn to proficiency and test anxiety cases, the analysis indicates that learners with beginner or lower proficiency experienced higher test anxiety level than those in higher level. The results, as shown in Table 6 showed that B2 the highest TAI Total (54.72) being the top among the other proficiencies, followed by B1 (48.54), A2 (47.31) and C1 (0). Taken together, these results suggest that learners with higher proficiency have higher test anxiety than those who have lower proficiency. Contrary to expectations that learner with low proficiency will have higher test anxiety; this study found that learners with high or advanced proficiency have higher test anxiety than those in lower proficiency. This finding of the current research differ from that (Kim & Jung, 2019; Mohammadhosseini & Taheri, 2019; and Ozkan & Bektas, 2021) on proficiency and test anxiety which rises question since it has different result with previous research. However, this finding might propose a new idea concerning proficiency and test anxiety research. Furthermore, the results of hypothesis testing confirms the association between proficiency and test anxiety  $H_0$  is failed to reject means there is no significant difference in test anxiety level among proficiency. This finding corroborates the ideas of (Liang et al., 2020). There are no significant differences between proficiency and language anxiety, it suggests that an individual's level of language proficiency does not necessarily predict their level of language anxiety. This means that even highly proficient language users may still experience anxiety in certain language-related situations, while individuals with lower proficiency levels may not necessarily experience more anxiety. The lack of significant differences between proficiency and language anxiety may be due to various factors, such as individual differences in anxiety susceptibility, prior experiences with language learning, and situational factors. Having discussed the differences between genders and proficiency, the final discussion addresses the interaction between genders and self-proficiency on test anxiety amongst learners. The results of the findings confirm that there is no significant relationship between variables. In sum, Two Way Anova that was conducted to examine the effects of gender and proficiency level on test anxiety revealed that there was no significant interaction between gender and proficiency on test anxiety amongst learners. This finding corroborates the ideas of (Tella et al., 2020). The results indicated that the differences between gender and

proficiency were not caused by the main effect or the interaction effect between gender and proficiency on test anxiety level.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The present study was designed to examine test anxiety level among learners at Batam International University. There are three objective of the study: (1) to examine the level of test anxiety of English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners at Batam International University who have taken English proficiency tests before based on learners' gender and proficiency score, (2) to discover the differences in learners' test anxiety levels based on their gender and proficiency score, (3) to determine the interaction levels between learner's gender and proficiency on their test anxiety amongst learners at Batam International University. A number of 100 learners of Batam International University participated in this research in examining learners' test anxiety level based on their gender and proficiency. Concerning the first objective of the research on learners' test anxiety level, it can be concluded that learners as a whole experienced moderate test anxiety. These findings suggest that in general learners experience test anxiety in English test. In terms of gender differences, this study has found that generally female learners as the one who have higher test anxiety than male learners. Turning now to proficiency and test anxiety findings, the results show that in general learners who have intermediate proficiency (B2 and B1) tend to have higher anxiety than those in lower proficiency. In contrast, the research's hypothesis reported no significant interaction among genders and proficiency on test anxiety amongst learners. Consequently, taken the results into account, it is apparent that test anxiety issues is happening among learners across gender and self-proficiency. Thus, an awareness of this issues might be a key role in decreasing the level of test anxiety among learners.

##### 1. Suggestion to Teacher

First, the researcher suggest that the teachers should be aware of the existence of test anxiety among learners. Teacher awareness on this matter is needed since test anxiety can negatively affect learners' learning outcome and process. Second, the teachers are expected to prepare the learners in facing a test by familiarizing the learners with test content, format, technique, and environment. In that way, the learners will be prepared in facing a test and they know how to overcome their test anxiety.

##### 2. Suggestion to Other Researchers

The present study has found interesting findings on test anxiety level concerning learners' gender and self-proficiency. The researcher realizes that the other variables such as learners' studies expectation, learners' major, and education background, in relation with test anxiety can be a potential variable to explore for further research. Thus, a future research to validate the findings achieved from this study is needed, especially in higher institution level. In addition, a research on teachers and instructor side in overcoming test anxiety problems among learners might contribute to solve the problems of test anxiety among learners. It might provide more in-depth understanding of this topic since this study is still limited to certain subjects and variables.

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