Language Anxiety Among Selected Filipino High School Learners: A Sequential Explanatory Analysis

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Abstract— Understanding learners' language anxiety levels and the factors that affect it is essential in helping them learn English more effectively. In the Philippines, despite the status and wide use of English as one of the official languages in the country, Filipino high school learners still find language learning very challenging. Thus, this mixed-methods study aimed to explore the nature of their language anxiety using the sequential explanatory design. The respondents of the study were 59 learners, with ages ranging from 14 to 16, enrolled in the blended distance learning modality of the Iloilo National High School-School for the Arts for the school year 2020-2021. Since the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale is one of the most widely used instruments in studying language anxiety across different learning contexts, the same instrument, paired with individual interviews, was utilized to gather data. Mean and standard deviation were the statistical tools used to analyze learners' anxiety scores and their level of anxiety. Based on the quantitative data, 12 learners with moderate to high levels of anxiety participated in individual interviews to further explore the nature of their anxiety and the factors that affect it, providing more insights into their responses in the survey and their anxiety levels. All learners were also asked to keep a journal as a supplementary source of data, and both interview responses and journal entries were analyzed thematically. The general results of the study show that the selected Filipino high school learners experienced language anxiety that negatively affected their learning. Aside from communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety, learners were also affected by other factors not covered by the FLCAS, especially since they were in a distance learning setup.

Keywords— ESL, distance learning, language anxiety, language learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Studies over the decades [17] [22] [28] [29] [30] show that affective factors like anxiety have an effectual role in language achievement and proficiency. In fact, the relationship between anxiety and language learning has been investigated since the 1970s with only one instrument specifically designed to measure Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) then—a five-item scale designed by Gardner, Clement, Smythe, and Smythe [16], but it was restricted in scope.

The construct of anxiety is defined by the American Psychiatric Association, as mentioned by Edelmann in 1992 [15], as "apprehension, tension, or uneasiness which stems from the anticipation of danger, the source of which is largely unknown or unrecognized." Anxiety, being subjective, can be felt in various instances and situations and can be caused and influenced by different factors, affecting a person in different ways as well. There are similarities in the nature and consequences of anxiety, but the type of anxiety that learners suffer from or may be triggered in a particular discipline is unique to that specific area in certain aspects. In the same way that language learning is a specific and unique field of study, distinguishable from other disciplines, language anxiety is also a specific and unique type of anxiety that affects how language learners feel about themselves and how they interact with the people and materials around them.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [18] were the first to conceptualize foreign language anxiety as a unique type of anxiety specific to foreign language learning. They figured that one of the reasons for the dearth of conclusions concerning anxiety and foreign language achievement in the 1970s was the lack of anxiety measure specific to foreign language learning, thus creating the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which is now a widely-used instrument in measuring language anxiety in both foreign and second language contexts across different target languages. The majority of research on this aspect of language studies available at present is anchored on their Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) theoretical model.

In a review [34], it was claimed that numerous studies using the FLCAS have provided strong evidence about the "detrimental" effects of language anxiety on English language learning. Learners in foreign language classes suffer from considerable levels of anxiety because they

are faced with the challenge of handling the contents in the medium of the target language that they are not very familiar with [19]. Using the same instrument, it was also found that EFL learners experience anxiety in studying a foreign language particularly due to test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation [21]. In another study [33], Croatian EFL learners were identified to be moderately anxious in learning English, but their language teachers did not recognize this level of anxiety in their learners in the same amounts they were proven to have it, stressing the importance of understanding learners' anxiety.

Much has already been said about anxiety in the field of EFL, but with regard to English as a Second Language (ESL) where, even if the language is highly valued because of its functional and practical use such as here in the Philippines and in many countries around the world, language learning is still found to be very challenging since the process goes through complicated tasks that involve psychological as well as social factors [3], there still is a scarcity of available and published written materials which clearly expound on the status of language anxiety and how it can be compared with that of EFL learners for better distinction. Looking at the context of ESL learning in the country, there is a limited number of local literatures related to language anxiety. Nevertheless, in a study [31] among ESL learners in India using the FLCAS, it was found that, if in the classroom, learners are already anxious about learning the language, they are also most likely going to be anxious when using it in practical situations. This is called the English class anxiety and English use anxiety correlation. Moreover, in a study [3] on the levels of language anxiety toward English among Filipino learners using the same instrument, an indication that different factors contribute to anxiety from one context to another was shown. Different social, cultural, and psychological factors that confront learners in interactions with their classmates, teachers, and even the textbook create anxiety among them, posing difficulties in the achievement of their objective of achieving proficiency in the target language [19].

Adding to all these, the situation of language instruction in the country during the coronavirus pandemic brought drastic changes in learners' interactions with the people and materials around them which confronted them with new social, cultural, and psychological factors as they continued learning. Many students were forced into distance learning, since the Learning Continuity Plan (LCP), which was a package of education interventions designed to respond to basic education challenges brought by the pandemic [14], identified three learning delivery modalities (LDMs) that schools could implement, namely distance learning, blended learning, and homeschooling, where school-based face-to-face learning was not possible, with the distance learning being the dominant LDM chosen by school administrators. Learners' lack of agency in the selection of their instructional delivery mode may be a source of anxiety and it is advantageous to use the FLCAS as a tool for language educators to measure their students' perceived language anxiety levels for them to be able to utilize techniques and provide interventions that will help online language learners feel less isolated, less anxious, and more connected to their teacher and to their peers [27].

Although language anxiety is less explored in online language learning environments than in traditional classrooms, the FLCAS had already been used in studies [26] [4] on distance language learning where it was found that this population of students can also experience significant levels of language anxiety. It is also important to note that, while the FLCAS is considered to be an appropriate tool to measure language anxiety in any type of instructional setting [27], it has been designed to be used in a traditional classroom setting, and the wording of some of the questions may have not accounted for distance learning foreign language classes [4].

Thus, this study was conducted to provide insights into the nature of language anxiety in the context of ESL learners in distance learning amid the pandemic using the FLCAS by Horwitz et al. [18]. In doing so, the applicability of the instrument in understanding language anxiety in the case of Filipino high school learners was checked, while exploring the nuances specific to them and their environment, contributing to the growing body of knowledge about language anxiety and providing for the lack of ESL context-specific literature in this particular field of language research in the country.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

To accommodate the nature and nuances specific to ESL learners and their environment, this study aimed to explore language anxiety among selected Filipino high school learners.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of language anxiety among the selected Filipino high school learners?
2. What are the common anxiety-causing factors among the selected Filipino high school learners?
3. What are other factors that contribute to the language anxiety of the selected Filipino high school learners?

III. METHODOLOGY

This study used the sequential explanatory design. This research design typically connects the two phases of the study while selecting the participants for the qualitative follow-up analysis based on the quantitative results from the first phase [13]. The purpose is to understand data at a more detailed level by using qualitative follow-up data to help explain a quantitative database, such as a survey [11]. Using mixed methodology can help understand the topic area in greater depth [5]. It can help increase confidence in findings, providing more evidence while offsetting possible shortcomings from using a single approach [7] [10] [12] [32]. The respondents, who were identified using the purposive sampling method on the basis of convenience since they were enrolled in the same school where the researcher was employed, were the learners of two sections under the blended distance learning modality of the Iloilo National High School-School for the Arts for the school year 2020-2021. The study utilized the FLCAS to measure learners' anxiety levels and key informant interviews to explore the dynamics of anxiety and language learning. Learners were also asked to keep an online journal as a supplementary source of data to document the language learning experiences in the classroom during the conduct of the study.

The learners of the identified sections were asked to answer the FLCAS. It is comprised of 33 statements that are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Nine statements in the scale were negatively worded, namely 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32, so the number responses on these items were reversed and recoded so that higher scores represent higher levels of anxiety. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha of all 33 items in the FLCAS was .93 which is excellent [25]. Thus, the instrument is a valid and reliable scale that has been consistently used in various studies to measure anxiety, including language anxiety in distance learning [4] [26].

Of the 64 learners, with ages ranging from 14 to16, who were asked to answer the scale that was encoded on Google Forms, 59 of them with 19 males and 40 females

accomplished it within the specified time frame. 12 learners with moderate to high anxiety levels based on the scale were invited to participate in a series of interviews conducted individually as classes progressed via Google Meet. Having confirmed their participation, a 10-minute time slot was allotted for every interviewee with the link to join the virtual interview room sent to them only after the previous interviewee was done. Interview sessions were scheduled after the section's last period class in the afternoon. Since the 12 interviewees belonged to two sections with 6 interviewees in each, and each section was scheduled on a different day, there was a total of eight interview sessions conducted in a span of two weeks.

An interview session covered one specific component in the three-factor FLA theory by Horwitz et al. [18] that was used in many studies [21] [36] [23] [19] [29] [33] [28] exploring anxiety in English language learning: 1st session on Communication Apprehension, 2nd session on Test Anxiety, and 3rd session on Fear of Negative Evaluation. The 4th session was an open interview to explore other factors that contribute to the language anxiety of the selected School for the Arts learners of Iloilo National High School. The questions during the interviews were formulated by the researcher to clarify points from the journal entries of the interviewees which served as the springboard of the interviews and to further explore the sources and nuances of their anxiety, thus providing more insights into their responses in the survey and their anxiety levels. The discussions were video-recorded and transcribed.

All learners were also asked to keep a journal as a supplementary source of data as they attended and participated in the different activities of their English class during the 2-week duration of individual interviews. Researcher-made guide questions to help them come up with substantial reflections were provided.

To identify learners' anxiety levels, responses were tallied and analyzed. Individual anxiety scores were computed by summing the scores of the 33 items. FLCAS raw scores range from 33 to 165. To interpret scores more easily, raw scores were divided by 33, which yielded adjusted scores between 1 and 5. Adjusted scores of 3 or higher indicate that at least some level of language anxiety is present [17].

To answer the first research question, the mean of the individual scores was used to determine the overall

level of anxiety, *and* the interpretation was based on a researcher-made scheme. The standard deviation was also computed.

For the second research question, the 33 statements were categorized according to the three factors of the FLCAS which are (1) communication apprehension, (2) test anxiety, and (3) fear of negative evaluation [9]. The overall mean and standard deviation were computed per factor of anxiety from the responses of the 12 learners with moderate to high anxiety levels to determine the consensus of the said respondents regarding that factor.

Using thematic analysis, which is a method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set [6], the researcher transcribed, coded, and analyzed the responses from the interviews to support the quantitative analysis in the second research question and were the basis for answering the third research question where other causes of anxiety were identified. These other factors that contribute to language anxiety were arranged based on the frequency with which they were cited by the interviewees to affect their learning.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Anxiety Levels Among Selected Filipino High School Learners

To identify the anxiety level of the group, the mean of the individual anxiety scores were computed. Since adjusted scores of 3 or higher indicate that at least some level of language anxiety is present [17], the interpretation was based on the scheme shown in Table I.

Table I. Anxiety level interpretation

Mean	Interpretation
1.00-2.99	None
3.00-3.49	Mild
3.50-3.99	Moderate
4.00-4.49	High
4.50-5.00	Very High

The mean of the respondents' anxiety scores as shown in Table II is 3.07, while the standard deviation is 0.53, which implies that these learners experienced a mild level of anxiety.

Table II. Language anxiety level of the respondents

	N	Mean	SD
FLCAS	59	3.07	0.53

This result is consistent with the level of anxiety of Filipino ESL learners in the study of Mamhot et al. in

2013 [23] where, in the process of comparing the language learning anxiety of ESL and EFL learners, they have identified that ESL students show a slight anxiety on the Fear of Negative Evaluation and General Feeling of Anxiety and also in general when interpreted using the scheme above because the ESL group had a mean anxiety score of 3.04, whereas the EFL group in their study had a mean of below 3.0, indicating no anxiety at all. The study of Berowa in 2018 [3] also yielded a mild level of anxiety among Filipino ESL learners with a mean of 3.05 and a standard deviation of 0.18.

The breakdown of the number of respondents under the different levels of anxiety is shown in Table III.

Table III. Number of respondents in the different anxiety levels

Anxiety Level	N
None (1.00-2.99)	26
Mild (3.00-3.49)	21
Moderate (3.50-3.99)	11
High (4.00-4.49)	1
Very High (4.50-5.00)	0

Results show that 26 learners did not show any level of anxiety, while the majority experienced a certain level of anxiety ranging from mild to high levels. To investigate further the nature of anxiety among the group, the 12 learners with moderate to high levels of anxiety were invited to participate in a series of individual interviews.

Common Anxiety-Causing Factors Among Selected Filipino High School Learners

A closer look at the three factors of the FLCAS would illustrate which affects the learners who were identified to have moderate to high levels of anxiety the most and how they truly feel towards English language learning. Table IV shows that learners experienced a high level of anxiety in fear of negative evaluation and a moderate level of anxiety for both communication apprehension and test anxiety, although it can be noted that test anxiety has a higher standard deviation of 0.88, which means that learners' anxiety scores are more distributed here than in the two other factors.

Table IV. Anxiety levels based on the FLCAS factors

FLCAS Factor	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Fear of Negative Evaluation	4.17	0.53	High
Communication Apprehension	3.73	0.51	Moderate
Test Anxiety	3.58	0.88	Moderate

The fear of negative evaluation ranks first with the highest mean of 4.17, and it was indeed the most cited factor that significantly affected learners as confirmed by their responses from the interviews. The majority of them thought that others had better language skills than they.

The fear of negative evaluation is the "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situation, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" [18]. Although similar to test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation is broader in scope because it is not limited to test-taking situations; rather, it may occur in any social evaluative situation and is affected by either real or imagined evaluation of peers.

The following statements under this factor revealed very high levels of anxiety among the learners:

- Statement #7: I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am. (M=4.67, SD=0.49)
- Statement #23: I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do. (M=4.67, SD=0.49)
- Statement #31: I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language. (M=4.58, SD=0.51)

A very high level of anxiety pertaining to both Statement #7 and Statement #23 implies that learners tended to compare themselves with their classmates. Since they came from different socio-economic backgrounds and had different levels of language exposure and access to learning opportunities, those learners who were not as privileged as the others couldn't help but feel a certain sense of inferiority. Thinking that others had better language skills, they became afraid of being laughed at, judged, and humiliated if they committed an error in their language use; thus, a very high level of anxiety was also noted in Statement #31. This was confirmed by the majority of the interviewees.

This fear of negative evaluation from other people and the worry that came from one's expectations also influenced why learners were afraid of being put in a situation where their performance would be evaluated without preparation as shown by the high level of anxiety result from Statement #33: I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance. (M=4.42, SD=0.79) Although summative assessments, whether written or spoken, are announced ahead of time for learners to prepare,

situations where learners are taken by surprise because of questions pertaining to the lesson cannot be avoided in a language class since performance evaluation is an ongoing feature of most foreign language classes [18].

The next factor that caused learners' anxiety at a moderate level as mentioned earlier is communication apprehension. Learners acknowledged that they got anxious in real or anticipated communication in class with varying degrees on the statements pertaining to the said factor and with a moderate level of anxiety in general. The presence of anxiety due to this factor was supported by the individual interviews where all interviewees admitted feeling nervous in varying degrees whenever they were asked to speak in class, leading them to stutter, code switch, have awkward moments of silence, end up not expressing one's thoughts, have a mental block, and even avoid participating in class altogether. They especially felt a very high level of anxiety in relation to Statement #9: I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class. (Mean=4.75, SD=0.45)

The next factor is related to performance evaluation—test anxiety. Test anxiety stems from a fear of getting a failing grade or not achieving unrealistic expectations [18]. The following statements under this factor revealed very high levels of anxiety among the learners:

- Statement #10: I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class. (M=4.75, SD=0.62)
- Statement #12: In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know. (M=4.58, SD=0.67)
- Statement #16: Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it. (M=4.50, SD=0.52)
- Statement #20: I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class. (M=4.75, SD=0.45)

The result for Statement #10 confirms that test anxiety stems from a fear of getting a failing grade or not achieving unrealistic expectations [18]. Giving grades is an essential aspect of the education process through which teachers reflect learners' linguistic performance. With grades also come honors, awards, and section classification. Parents are also presented with their children's grades for feedback and reporting. All these contribute to learners' worries pertaining to getting low grades and perhaps failing. The numbers were also confirmed in both the interviews and journal entries because even the learners who claimed they prepared

well for the test were somehow nervous when asked about how they felt about the test and their performance in class, saying they were afraid of getting low scores which can affect their grades in the subject.

Also, learners' test anxiety as shown in statement numbers 12, 16, and 20 may have been brought about by the types of tests that they take in the language class since oral tests [18] have the potential of provoking test and oral communication anxiety simultaneously in susceptible students. The interviewees confirmed this by sharing that they preferred written tests, despite the difficulties and confusions they encounter in grammar rules, over spoken ones.

Other Factors that Contributed to the Language Anxiety of Selected Filipino High School Learners

Both quantitative and qualitative results of the study confirm that the selected Filipino high school learners indeed experienced a certain level of anxiety toward English language learning. A closer look at the three factors that comprise the FLCAS confirms the experiences of the learners pertaining to each one and which truly affected their language learning. However, upon analyzing the individual interviews that had been transcribed and coded, the identified themes revealed other factors that contributed to the students' language anxiety in the distance learning context of the Philippine education system which the scale was not able to cover.

The Shift to Distance Learning

Filipino learners were offered alternative learning delivery modalities (LDMs) in response to the public health crisis that the country was facing alongside the rest of the world. Distance learning refers to a learning delivery modality where learners are given materials or access to resources, and they undertake self-directed study at home or in another venue [14]. According to the Learning Delivery Modalities Course for teachers [24], there are four types of distance learning: Modular Distance Learning, Online Distance Learning, TV-based instruction/Radio-based instruction, and Blended Distance Learning.

After months of blended distance learning with a combination of modular distance learning and online distance learning, learners expressed the challenges that they encountered because of the changes brought about by their learning delivery modality at the time, such as having less interaction with classmates and the teacher, fewer activities both inside and outside of the language class where they can utilize the language, too much

workload, increased difficulty in understanding the lesson, and conflict with responsibilities at home.

Here are some excerpts from the 4th session interviews that expressed these sentiments:

"Kay iba gid ya ang personal nga pag-school. After class, indi mo dayon bala maisip nga 'Ah may ulubrahon ko, may muni.' Subong ya muna lang tanan naisip mo and may friends ka nga mastorya mo dayon like 'How are you?'" (Learner 6)

(Going to school in person is different. You don't really get to think of the things you have to do after class, unlike right now, it's all you think about. And before, you had friends you could talk to right away and just ask "How are you?")

"Kung tani face-to-face mas damu pa gid activities nga pang vocabulary enhancement bala, Ma'am." (Learner 9)

(If only we were in a face-to-face setup, there would be more vocabulary enhancement activities.)

A learner who was asked about her performance in that day's English class said, "I think not that good because I can't focus well to the discussion while babysitting." (Learner 12)

Another one who missed the class shared, "Absent ko kay nagbantay pa ko kay Lola." (Learner 4) (I was absent because I looked after my grandmother.)

The shift to distance learning was indeed fraught with changes that learners had to adjust to while in the middle of a public health crisis that was already a source of general anxiety for the learners and their families.

Technical Challenges

The technical challenges encountered in distance learning are of two types: (1) beyond the teacher's control and (2) learners' lack of ICT skills

According to the report of Akamai in 2017 [1], the Philippines has the lowest internet connectivity in Asia. Expectedly, another factor that was repeatedly shared by learners to be causing them problems that even their teacher could not help them with was poor internet connection.

"Unfortunately, sometimes ga-occur siya especially if may important nga gakalatabo muna ga-nervous ko kay

my grades might drop because of the internet connection." (Learner 5)

(Unfortunately, it sometimes occurs if there are important things to do. That's why I'm nervous because my grades might drop because of the internet connection.)

Similarly, problems with power interruption, which were also beyond the teacher's control, were cited by the learners.

The rest of the class confirmed the said struggles as noted from their journal entries with others saying that they were kicked out of Google Meet, were losing connection a number of times during the class, and could not hear the teacher clearly on their end. Some learners also blamed the poor internet connection for being absent in class. Another incident that was noted was the disruption of class in the middle of an interesting interaction about the lesson because of a sudden power interruption in the teacher's location, to which the class expressed disappointment.

It was during the pandemic, more than ever, that learners realized the importance of internet connection and the technical aspects of having online classes to be able to join and participate well in their language learning activities. Even if they had prepared well for a test or were motivated to attend the class, if they had problems with their internet connection or if there was a power outage, they still got anxious, knowing that they were missing something and that they couldn't do their work as efficiently as they wanted to. It can also be said that this factor intensified learners' worries related to other factors such as communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Even among learners who said that the learning delivery modality did not greatly affect their grades, they still expressed that they hoped for a better internet connection, so they could perform better and feel more at ease.

Learners also shared instances of encountering other technical difficulties which is supported by Pichette in 2009 [26] and Ushida in 2005 [35], saying that with the new normal in education, learners may have anxiety that is related both to the language and to the use of the instructional technologies that are used to communicate in the target language. Here are some of the participants' sentiments:

"Nabatian ko kagina pagtawag sakun, pero wala gid ko kasabat kay wala nag-work akon microphone. Ambot gani ngaa." (Learner 4)

(I heard it when I was called earlier, but I was not able to answer because my microphone didn't work. I don't know why.)

"Masabat na ko tani gina pero nag-lag akon laptop. Tapos na-out na lang ko." (Learner 3)

(I was already about to answer earlier, but my laptop lagged, and then I was out.)

These technical problems in the virtual communication platform can be addressed by enhancing learners' Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills. Simple troubleshooting techniques can help boost one's confidence in distance learning, as well as facilitate better online learning.

Personal Learning *Baggage*

Past language learning experiences that are carried by learners with them in their language class are another factor that influences and weighs down learners' perceptions and emotions toward language learning. People obtain their sense of self-esteem from past experiences with others and the exterior world [2]. This self-esteem is as important as teaching methods in the classroom [8]. The majority of the participants, however, shared that some of the sources of their hesitations and worries were their unpleasant experiences in their previous classes. Here are some excerpts from the different interview sessions:

"Kis-a magtuon ko gakakulbaan ko basi kis-a ipa-recite ko tapos basi kadlawan ko. Pareho sang Grade 7 ginmangkot ko ni (mentions an English teacher) sala-sala na answer ko nga si Bella nag bite sang dog." (Learner 1)

(I sometimes get nervous when I study if I think that I will be asked to recite because I might be laughed at just like when I was in Grade 7, when I was asked by my English teacher, and I rattled and said that it was Bella who bit the dog.)

"Sang elementary, may experience ko nga na-conscious na ko mag-English. Subong wala nman pero para daw iwas na lang." (Learner 9)

(When I was in elementary, I had an experience that made me conscious to speak in English. Nothing like that happened recently, but I just want to avoid it.")

Nature of the Language

The participants also felt that the complex nature of the English language made them uneasy. Specifically, too many grammar rules on sentence construction, limited vocabulary, and confusing pronunciation of words were the dominant aspects of the language that caused anxiety in class as expressed in the following excerpts from different interview sessions:

"There's a part that I had to construct a sentence using the words, the participle, and something like that. My mind went blank, and I was like 'You just need to construct a sentence, ok?'" (Learner 6)

"Kis-a abi kasalala nga sa amu ni nga word lain ang pagpronounce tapos sa isa may lain man." (Learner 2)

(Because sometimes it's confusing how words are pronounced differently.)

The majority of the participants felt that English is a very difficult language to master because of the many grammar and pronunciation rules, as well as new and difficult words that they come across when introduced to different materials and to people with higher language proficiency. These concerns about the nature of the target language negatively affect learners when expressing themselves, communicating with other people, and taking tests.

Teacher's Character

The last factor which caused learners to feel either relaxed or anxious in class was the teacher. Based on learners' responses, they appreciate a language teacher who has a repertoire of effective teaching strategies since it will surely help in teaching a lesson clearly and making learners understand it. A number of learners stressed that the manner of teaching a lesson greatly affected their learning. Here are some excerpts:

"Subong actually nga lesson daw nahaposan ko kay nami ang pag-teach, maintindihan ko gid." (Learner 3)

(I actually find this lesson easy because it is taught well. I really understood it.)

"Feeling ko taas man score ko sa test kay naintindihan ko gd ang pagtudlo. Namian ko kay daw ginpahapos." (Learner 5)

(I feel like I will get a high score on the test because I understood how the lesson was taught. I like that it was made to seem easier.)

A pleasing and friendly teacher also helps learners to feel more at ease in class as opposed to when a teacher is intimidating. Learner 2 shared, "Kay nga daan sang una nahuya ko and muna ganubo dayun akon grades kay nubo man ang confidence. Pero depende man sa teacher abi if intimidating or indi." (Because before, I was shy and I had low confidence, so I had low grades. But it also depends on the teacher if they are intimidating or not.)

"Kung kululbaan ang teacher, mas nakulbaan pa gid ko maghambal. Gakalipat na ko na dayun." (Learner 10)

(If the teacher is intimidating, I become more nervous to speak. I then forget what I have to say.)

Lastly, learners shared that they want teachers who are patient enough to give them opportunities to think critically and explore. Here are their thoughts:

"Kay nga daan kung like always na lang ang teacher ga-answer, para sakun wala ko may matun-an kay indi ako nangita sang answer sa muna nga problem, indi ko mabal-an kung tsakto or indi." (Learner 6)

(Because if it's always the teacher who answers in class, I don't learn since I did not look for the answer to that problem. I wouldn't know what was right and wrong.).

"Na appreciate ko gid na if patient ang teacher sa mga sala namun sa activities. Ang ga-take time gid mag-correct and help." (Learner 5)

(I really appreciate it if the teacher is patient with our mistakes in the activities, one who takes time to correct and help us.)

The insights and sentiments shared by the learners imply that the language teacher can be a possible cause of anxiety since they can cause learners to feel anxious in class, affecting their performance and attitude towards the target language and language learning in general.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In view of the findings, the following conclusions were formulated:

1. The selected Filipino high school learners experienced a certain level of anxiety that negatively affected their learning of the English language in aspects such as communication, performance, and testing, as well as in terms of motivation and self-esteem. Knowing that Filipino learners still find English language learning very challenging despite the status and wide use of

English as one of the official languages of the country, there is a need to recognize and consider the presence of language anxiety in the planning and implementation of learning experiences given to them.

2. The FLCAS by Horwitz et al. (1986) is a useful instrument in measuring language anxiety as its components were confirmed to be relevant to Filipino high school learners. Even if they had been learning English since their elementary years and the majority of them had already adjusted and managed their concerns in language learning, communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety were still indeed experienced by learners as a whole in different levels. The instrument was able to show that learners were most afraid of being evaluated negatively. The difference in learners' socio-economic backgrounds, thus their varying levels of exposure and access to the English language, was one of the reasons why learners tended to compare themselves with their peers, making them feel a sense of inferiority. This fear of negative evaluation intensified learners' apprehensions in communicating using the English language and their uneasiness toward taking tests in class as confirmed also by the interview responses and journal entries. However, limitations in the scope of the instrument when used in the distance learning context of Filipino high school learners who are ESL learners were identified.

3. Learners were affected by other factors that contributed to their language anxiety but are not covered by the FLCAS by Horwitz et al. (1986), especially since they were in a distance learning setup. The instrument was restricted in scope since the selected School for the Arts learners of Iloilo National High School did not attribute their language anxiety to the instrument's three factors alone but also to other factors such as the shift to distance learning, technical challenges, personal learning baggage, nature of the language, and teacher's character. Thus, learners' anxiety scores and the identified anxiety level as a group did not completely reflect their feelings toward language learning given their situations and experiences. The instrument was not able to capture these aspects of the nature of language anxiety among the selected Filipino high school learners because its items were based on a traditional classroom setup. Filipino high school learners also have their own nuances as ESL learners in language learning, and since English has a very significant status in the country, people tend to be more critical in terms of English language proficiency.

VI. IMPLICATIONS

Learners come from diverse backgrounds, so the learning experiences given to them in class also affect them in different ways. As our environments change, our learners are also confronted with new conditions that may challenge their learning. In the case of Filipino high school learners, we must recognize that they still experience language anxiety which may have debilitating effects on their learning even if they have been exposed to the language for a long time already either by studying it since elementary school or by its simply being a part of the interactions that they have with the people around them even before they have gone to school. This anxiety was magnified given the educational setup that both learners and teachers had to adjust to because of the pandemic. With this, language educators must recognize this concern among learners in similar contexts and help them cope with it until they can hopefully overcome its negative effects on their learning and performance.

The use of instruments to measure learners' levels of anxiety such as the FLCAS by Howirtz et al. (1986) is indeed helpful and has practical benefits. Knowing that learners are generally affected by fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety in varying degrees, teachers can make more informed decisions on the techniques and strategies they are going to employ in class or use for specific learners. However, the components of the said instrument should not be seen as one-size-fits-all anxiety predictors. Thus, in terms of theory, language educators must look deeper into their learners' current situations for a more comprehensive understanding of their feelings and actions in class since the context of when the instrument was first created had already evolved and become more complicated today, also given the diverse groups of language learners concerned. With the necessary knowledge in mind, teachers should undertake measures to help learners who show high levels and alarming signs of language anxiety, as well as to make the language learning experience less stressful for the class as a whole. Learners' affective filter must be lowered for them to access language input available for acquisition [20]. It is only in understanding learners better that they can absorb more of what is taught to them.

Moreover, the use of the sequential explanatory analysis in this study yielded a more comprehensive perspective on the nature of language anxiety among the selected Filipino high school learners. Aside from identifying levels of anxiety, a more in-depth understanding of these

levels and the factors that contributed to it was achieved and can also be achieved in other language learning contexts through this design.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following practical and theoretical recommendations are presented by the researchers:

1. To the academe, interventions to assuage learners' anxiety in language learning, especially those pertaining to the shift to distance learning, are imperative in helping them attain linguistic competence in English. Providing language educators with professional training in online language pedagogy and research-based techniques for designing and facilitating effective online language classes is also ideal.

2. To the language educators, a strengthened effort for awareness of learners' anxiety levels and the factors that cause and contribute to it will pave the way to more informed pedagogical interventions and support for learners. To assist learners in managing their fear of negative evaluation, ensure that all learners feel equally valued despite their differences. Provide enough opportunities for everyone to showcase their skills, openly recognize them for a good performance to boost their self-confidence, and be tactful in correcting errors to avoid embarrassing them. Also, instruments that can measure language anxiety, such as the FLCAS by Horwitz et al. (1986), can be very helpful but need to be supplemented with other methods for a more realistic and comprehensive account of learners' feelings, insights, and experiences.

3. To future researchers, conducting similar studies among learners in other learning delivery modalities and with different age groups will add to the limited context-specific resources and literature on language anxiety among Filipino high school learners. Creating a more accurate instrument to measure language anxiety among the said group of learners is also encouraged.

4. Lastly, it is suggested, not as a result but as an insight, to look into the presence of general academic anxiety indicators common across different learning areas which may be a trigger for learners' fear of negative evaluation since it may not be exclusive to language learning alone, especially that the learners' profile itself affects their perception of themselves and their interaction with their peers. Doing so will help language educators understand learners and their learning processes better. It will pave the way for them to address learning needs and create a more nurturing learning environment, so that learners, regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds and other differences, can unleash their full potential.

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