

Cultural Identity as a Predictor of Language Anxiety Among Second Language Learners

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Abstract. Language anxiety is a key impediment to second language acquisition, but the function of learners' cultural identity in generating anxiety is understudied. This study investigates the influence of cultural identification orientation on language anxiety among Grade 7 students from culturally diverse areas of Maguindanao del Sur and del Norte, Philippines. It also investigates how demographic and linguistic profile characteristics affect both cultural identity and anxiety levels. A quantitative correlational design was used, with 272 Grade 7 pupils selected by stratified random sampling from three public secondary schools. Data was collected using an adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and a culturally grounded identity survey, both of which were scored on a five-point Likert scale. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize levels of language anxiety (communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, classroom-related anxiety, and performance anxiety) as well as cultural identity orientation. The associations between variables were examined using Spearman's rank correlation and linear regression techniques. The findings show that language anxiety is generally high ($M = 3.63$), with the most significant anxiety in language performance ($M = 3.96$) and classroom-related circumstances ($M = 3.86$). Cultural identification orientation was moderately high ($M = 3.48$), owing to positive views toward L2 culture ($M = 3.69$) and strong perceptions of multicultural integration at school ($M = 4.31$). A weak but significant negative connection was found between cultural identification orientation and language anxiety ($r_s = -0.142$, $p = .042$), indicating that learners who have more substantial cultural affirmation experience less anxiety. Ethnolinguistic background and frequency of L2 usage strongly predicted both identification and anxiety levels, whereas age, gender, and first language did not. These findings suggest that fostering a balanced cultural identity through inclusive curricula, culturally responsive pedagogy, and community engagement can aid L2 learners in overcoming language anxiety. To develop psychologically secure and supportive language learning environments, teachers should receive intercultural training and participate in policy initiatives.

Keywords: Cultural identities; Demographic profiles; Language anxiety; Linguistic profile.

1.0 Introduction

Language acquisition is a complex, dynamic process that transcends the mechanics of grammar and vocabulary. (Kostogri, 2024). It is deeply interwoven with the individual's emotional, psychological, and sociocultural realities (Forum, 2020). One significant psychological barrier faced by second language (L2) learners is language anxiety, an affective factor that can hinder or completely obstruct the learning process. Language anxiety refers to the tension and apprehension experienced in foreign or second language contexts, often resulting in lower performance, reluctance to communicate, and decreased motivation (Galante, 2020). This anxiety can manifest across different stages of learning, whether in oral communication, written expression, or listening comprehension, impacting learners regardless of age or academic level. Understanding the variables that contribute to or mitigate language anxiety is essential in optimizing second language acquisition (Hernández, 2022). In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 7836, the Philippine Teachers Professionalization Act of 1994, accentuates the importance of teachers practicing ethical standards inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, Section 8 of the said Act explicitly calls upon all educators in the Philippines to uphold high standards of professionalism, commitment to learners, respect for diversity, and integrity and honesty. It highlights the responsibility of teachers to demonstrate exemplary behavior and foster a positive learning environment. By adhering to these ethical principles, teachers contribute to the overall quality of education and the well-being of their students.

Among the various psychological and sociocultural factors that influence language learning, cultural identity stands as a potent yet often underestimated predictor. Cultural identity encompasses the sense of belonging to a group, shaped by language, traditions, norms, values, and collective experiences (Charles, 2019). When learners perceive a strong alignment or dissonance between their cultural identity and the cultural expectations of the target language, it can significantly affect their confidence and comfort in using that language (Gu, 2022). Cultural conflict, marginalization, or perceived inferiority can exacerbate anxiety, while cultural affirmation can foster confidence and resilience (Erling, 2021). Investigating the role of cultural identity in shaping language anxiety is therefore not only theoretically important but also practically helpful in improving second language education systems (Hernández, 2022).

Globally, language learning is recognized as a critical component of international communication, economic competitiveness, and cultural diplomacy. As globalization accelerates, the demand for multilingual individuals increases, especially in regions where English, French, Mandarin, or Spanish serve as *lingua francas* for business, education, and governance (Harklau, 2019). However, despite the widespread integration of second language programs, many L2 learners experience persistent challenges rooted not only in cognitive factors but in psychological barriers such as language anxiety (Cunningham, 2023). The phenomenon of language anxiety has been widely studied across multiple cultural contexts, and its prevalence has been consistently documented among learners of English as a Second Language (ESL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), and even among those in immersion programs in multilingual societies (Harklau, 2019). Scholarly literature has identified several global trends concerning language anxiety. For instance, Horwitz et al. (1986) seminal work established the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which has since become a standard tool for evaluating language anxiety globally (Nigar, 2024). Numerous international studies reveal a strong correlation between high language anxiety levels and poor language performance, diminished classroom participation, and long-term avoidance of language use (Guo, 2024). These issues are not confined to any single geography; they persist across continents, from East Asia to Latin America and from the Middle East to Europe. Furthermore, learners from minority or indigenous cultural backgrounds often face dual pressures of learning a dominant world language while maintaining their cultural identity, which can intensify anxiety (Méndez et al., 2019).

Cultural identity plays a crucial role in shaping learners' attitudes, behaviors, and emotional responses toward acquiring a second language. Theories like Norton's (1995) investment model suggest that a learner's identity and perceived cultural implications of language learning deeply affect motivation and anxiety levels (Nurshatayeva, 2019). Respecting and integrating learners' cultural backgrounds in instruction can reduce anxiety and enhance performance (Hernández, 2022), while viewing the target language as a threat to one's identity can result in resistance and heightened anxiety.

Migration and diaspora contexts add complexity, as immigrant learners often juggle assimilation with preserving their heritage culture. Studies across countries like the U.S., Canada, and Australia reveal that marginalized

cultural identities can cause cultural dissonance and lower self-esteem (Erling, 2021). Educational institutions are responding with culturally responsive pedagogy and support systems (Harklau, 2019), but understanding the nuanced relationship between identity and anxiety remains incomplete, especially in diverse local contexts (Hernández, 2022). The rise of online learning introduces new challenges, as digital spaces often lack the cultural sensitivity and interpersonal cues that mitigate anxiety (Guo, 2024). This evolving global landscape calls for targeted research that integrates both psychological and sociocultural perspectives.

The Philippines, a richly multilingual nation with over 180 languages, grapples with the complex interplay between cultural identity and second language acquisition. The Bilingual Education Policy (1974) and the Enhanced Basic Education Act (2013) designate English and Filipino as official languages of instruction, English symbolizing upward mobility, and Filipino representing national pride (Jong, 2024). However, most learners speak indigenous languages like Cebuano, Ilocano, or Waray at home, creating a linguistic disconnect in classrooms and fostering anxiety and cultural confusion (Karimpour, 2022). To bridge this gap, the Department of Education implemented the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in 2009, mandating the use of learners' first language from Kindergarten to Grade 3. While this initiative improved early literacy, many learners experience heightened anxiety during the transition to Filipino and English in later grades (Galante, 2020; Perry, 2021).

Recent data from PIDS and DepEd reveal regional disparities in English performance, particularly among ethnolinguistic minorities (Hernández, 2022). Cultural displacement linked to English, often viewed as elitist or colonial, undermines self-esteem and fuels resistance when learners see little representation of their linguistic heritage in the curriculum. Compounding this are societal norms that equate English fluency with intelligence and success, subtly pressuring students to reject their cultural roots (Moonthiya, 2024). This environment not only magnifies language anxiety but also raises urgent questions about the inclusivity of the Philippine education system. The tension between linguistic identity and institutional language norms calls for deeper, region-specific research and culturally responsive teaching practices.

Despite legislative efforts such as Republic Act No. 10066 (National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009) to preserve cultural heritage in the Philippines, its integration into language education remains limited. The emotional impact of language anxiety, particularly among culturally diverse learners, is under addressed in teacher training and curriculum development. There is a pressing need for research and educational practices that recognize the link between cultural identity and second language learning to create more inclusive and psychologically responsive classrooms (Cunningham, 2023; Hu, 2024; Nigar, 2024; Dalmau, 2020).

In linguistically diverse regions like BARMM and Region XII, the mismatch between students' home languages and the school's medium of instruction intensifies language anxiety and undermines engagement and performance. Learners often struggle with cultural dissonance, fear of ridicule, and low confidence when navigating English-based instruction. Despite recognition from educators and stakeholders, culturally responsive practices remain inconsistently applied, highlighting the urgent need for localized interventions that affirm cultural identity and reduce anxiety in second language learning (Cunningham, 2023; Jong, 2024).

While existing literature and educational policy frameworks acknowledge the importance of language and culture, there remains a significant gap in understanding the psychological interaction between cultural identity and language anxiety among second language learners, especially within the Philippine context. Most studies focus on linguistic proficiency and instructional methodologies, with limited attention given to the emotional and identity-based dimensions of learning. Furthermore, national and local education policies, while advocating for multilingualism, have yet to fully operationalize cultural inclusion as a psychological support mechanism in language instruction. This study seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how cultural identity influences language anxiety among second language learners, particularly in Philippine schools where cultural and linguistic diversity is the norm. By identifying cultural identity as a potential predictor of language anxiety, the research aims to contribute to more inclusive, empathetic, and effective language education practices. Understanding this dynamic is essential for curriculum developers, policymakers, and educators seeking to create environments that are both linguistically enriching and psychologically safe for all learners.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a quantitative-correlational design to examine naturally occurring relationships between cultural identity and language anxiety in second-language learners. Using standardized instruments, researchers collected numerical data on learners' cultural identity and anxiety levels alongside demographic variables such as age, gender, grade level, and home language. Without manipulating any variables, they applied statistical analyses, such as correlation coefficients and regression models, to determine whether and to what extent cultural identity and individual background factors are associated with the emotional experience of language anxiety. Through this approach, the study sought to generate evidence-based insights into how learners' sense of cultural belonging and personal characteristics influence their anxiety during second-language acquisition.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique

The study drew its sample from Grade 7 second-language learners at various schools across the Divisions of Maguindanao del Sur and Maguindanao del Norte, Philippines, by employing a stratified random sampling procedure. Each school's full Grade 7 cohort constituted a separate stratum, and the combined total population was used to calculate the overall sample size via the Raosoft online calculator. That total was then apportioned back to each school through a proportional-allocation formula, ensuring that each stratum contributed to recruits in direct proportion to its size. Finally, individual students within each stratum were selected using convenience sampling, a practical step that, when nested within the stratified framework, maintained every learner's equal and independent opportunity for selection.

2.3 Research Instrument

The study utilized a three-part adapted survey questionnaire. Part I gathered demographic information on the learners. Part II incorporated the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986), measuring five dimensions of anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, classroom-related anxiety, and language performance anxiety, with five items per dimension. Part III combined elements from FLCAS, Gardner's (1985) motivation measures, and Berry's (1997) acculturation framework to assess five facets of cultural identity and integration: identification with home culture, attitude toward the second-language culture, perceived cultural compatibility or conflict, language-based identity salience, and cultural integration in the educational environment, also with five items each.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data-gathering process began with formal letters to the Division Superintendent of Maguindanao del Sur and to the principals of the selected public secondary schools, securing institutional approval to conduct the study. Throughout this phase, the research team strictly followed ethical guidelines: they obtained informed consent from all participants, secured parental or guardian permission for minors, and reaffirmed each student's voluntary agreement.

Once permissions and ethical clearances were in place, the survey instrument was finalized. Subject-matter experts vetted any context-specific adjustments to preserve content validity. A stratified random sampling procedure then identified a representative cohort of Grade 7 second-language learners. Researchers administered the questionnaires in scheduled classroom sessions, providing clear instructions, ensuring anonymity, and minimizing instructional disruption. Immediately after completion, all surveys were collected and subjected to double-entry checks to guarantee data accuracy before analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The data gathered from the survey were first examined through descriptive statistics to address the initial three research questions. For Research Question 1, which profiled the Grade 7 learners, we calculated frequencies and percentages for categorical variables age group, gender, grade level, home language, and ethnolinguistic background. We ranked these to highlight the most common characteristics. For Research Questions 2 and 3, focusing on the levels of language anxiety and cultural identity orientation, we computed weighted means and standard deviations for each of the five anxiety subscales (communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, classroom-related anxiety, and language performance anxiety) and each of the five cultural-identity facets (identification with home culture, attitude toward the second-language culture, perceived

compatibility or conflict, language-based identity salience, and integration in the educational environment). Ranking these dimensions further clarified which experiences were most and least pronounced among participants.

To investigate the relationships in Research Questions 4, 5, and 6, we used the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (r). For RQ 4, we examined the strength and direction of the linear association between overall cultural identity orientation and overall language-anxiety scores. In RQ 5, we correlated learner profile variables, including both quantitative measures (e.g., frequency of second-language use) and numerically coded categorical variables (gender, grade level, ethnolinguistic background), with language-anxiety levels. Similarly, RQ 6 assessed the correlation between profile variables and cultural-identity orientation. Throughout the inferential analysis, we set the significance threshold at $\alpha = 0.05$, considering correlations with $p < 0.05$ as statistically significant.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

This quantitative study investigates the extent to which cultural identity predicts language anxiety among second language learners. Ethical safeguards were prioritized. First, informed consent was obtained by clearly explaining the research purpose, participation requirements, and potential implications before securing signed agreements (Creswell, 2013). Second, confidentiality protocols ensured anonymity through pseudonyms and aggregated reporting of sensitive discussions about pedagogical challenges (Subedi, 2025). Finally, voluntary participation was emphasized, allowing advisors to withdraw without consequence, given the study’s focus on deeply personal professional narratives (Ederio et al., 2023).

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 The Level of Second Language Learners’ Language Anxiety

Table 1 presents the learners’ overall language-anxiety level as high ($M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.48$), indicating that students generally agree that anxiety is ever-present in their second-language use. Among the subscales, language-performance anxiety scored the highest ($M = 3.96$), while communication apprehension registered the lowest ($M = 3.30$), pointing to somewhat less pronounced but still notable worry about speaking.

Table 1. The Second Language Learners’ Language Anxiety

	Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Communication Apprehension	3.30	0.60	Moderately high
2	Test Anxiety	3.47	0.50	Moderately high
3	Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.51	0.39	High
4	Classroom-Related Anxiety	3.86	0.31	High
5	Language Performance Anxiety	3.96	0.62	High
	Category Mean	3.63	0.48	High

These results suggest that Grade 7 students frequently experience intense nervousness, fear, or worry in academic or communicative settings, which can undermine participation, engagement, and fluency development. To counteract these effects, supportive teaching methods, anxiety-reduction strategies, and a favorable classroom climate are essential. Consistent patterns emerge in other contexts: Galdonez (2023) found significant Filipino-language anxiety among Grade 12 students at the Philippine Science High School, and Pontillas and Rodrigo (2024) reported that senior-high learners exhibited extreme English-speaking anxiety and low self-confidence, often linked to perceived intellectual inadequacy and peer pressure.

3.2 The Level of Cultural Identity Orientation

Table 2 presents the overall cultural identity orientation of the respondents. The computed category mean is 3.36, with a standard deviation of 0.53, falling under the "Partially Agree" interpretation. This suggests that the students moderately acknowledge and identify with aspects of their cultural identity, both in terms of their home culture and the second language (L2) cultural context. The moderate standard deviation further implies that the students’ responses did not vary widely, indicating a somewhat consistent cultural orientation among the participants.

Table 2. The Level of Cultural Identity Orientation

	Indicators	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
1	Identification with Home Culture	2.78	0.70	Moderately high

2	Attitude toward Second Language Culture	3.69	0.32	High
3	Perceived Cultural Compatibility or Conflict	3.45	0.34	Moderately high
4	Language-Based Identity Salience	3.17	0.20	Moderately high
5	Cultural Integration in the Educational Environment	4.31	0.36	High
Category Mean		3.48	0.38	Moderately high

This result implies that while learners do not exhibit a powerful connection or disconnection from their cultural identity, there exists a balanced internal negotiation between their native cultural values and the demands of the L2 environment. Such a finding aligns with Berry's (1997) Acculturation Framework, which identifies "integration" as a mid-point strategy where individuals attempt to maintain their cultural heritage while also engaging with the host culture, an approach often accompanied by moderate anxiety levels.

Moreover, Gu (2022) emphasized that moderate identification with one's home culture, in the face of dominant L2 culture norms, may generate ambivalent learners, neither rejecting their native culture nor fully embracing the new one, resulting in identity diffusion or internal tension. This internal struggle may be further compounded when the school environment does not consistently promote cultural integration, as noted by Velasco (2024) and Cunningham (2023), who argue that the lack of inclusive practices in multilingual classrooms often prevents students from fully affirming their cultural identity.

3.3 The Significant Relationship between the Cultural Identity Orientation of Second Language Learners and Their Level of Language Anxiety

Table 3 shows that the probability value is 0.042, which is less than 0.05, but it is closer to 0.05. This means, reject H_0 . So, there is a significant relationship between the cultural identity orientation of second language learners and their level of language anxiety. The strength of the relationship is -0.142, which means that there is a weak relationship between the cultural identity orientation of second language learners and their level of language anxiety. Moreover, it is a negative relationship, which means that if the cultural identity orientation of second language learners increases, the level of their language anxiety decreases, and vice versa.

Table 3. *The Significant Relationship between the Cultural Identity Orientation of Second Language Learners and Their Level of Language Anxiety*

Variables	r_s	p-value	Decision
Cultural identity orientation of second language learners	-0.142	0.042	Reject H_0
Level of language anxiety			

Ismail et al. (2022) found that formative assessments help reduce test anxiety by emphasizing progress rather than performance. Similarly, Lei et al. (2021), using Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, showed that academic self-efficacy and peer support can buffer the effects of test-related stress. Roos et al. (2021) confirmed that test anxiety is reflected in both psychological and physiological symptoms, such as increased heart rate. Aloufi et al. (2021) highlighted the effectiveness of mindfulness and coping strategies in lowering anxiety levels. Likewise, Ignacio et al. (2025) demonstrated that positive teacher feedback reduces oral test anxiety, while negative feedback worsens it.

3.4 The Significant Relationship between the Profile of Second Language Learners and their Level of Language Anxiety

The computed probability values for the level of language anxiety for the age, sex, and Home/first language are 0.795, 0.166, and 0.154, respectively, which are all greater than 0.05. Hence, the level of anxiety does not have a significant relationship with that of age, sex, or Home/first language. On the other hand, the level of anxiety has a significant relationship with their Ethnolinguistic background and Frequency of second language use (in school, at home, in the community), as evidenced by computed probability values of 0.007 and less than 0.001, respectively, both of which are less than 0.05.

Table 4. *The Significant Relationship between the Profile of Second Language Learners and their Level of Language Anxiety*

Demographic Profile	t value	p-value
Age	0.260	0.795
Sex	1.388	0.166
Home/first language	-1.430	0.154
Ethnolinguistic background	-2.710	0.007
Frequency of second language use (in school, at home, in the community)	-4.690	less than 0.001

As demonstrated by Lopez and Obenza (2025), fear of negative evaluation (FNE) significantly mediates the relationship between perfectionism and language anxiety among Filipino second language learners. Gao (2021) emphasized that ideological pressures in English classrooms, shaped by cultural norms and expectations, can heighten FNE. Similarly, Peng et al. (2022) found that students with strong ethnic identities and low motivation tend to experience higher FNE, which negatively affects their English performance. Okyar (2023) reported that learners with low self-efficacy and perceived language proficiency are more vulnerable to FNE, especially during oral tasks.

3.5 The Significant Relationship between the Profile of Second Language Learners and their Cultural Identity Orientation

The computed probability values for the cultural identity orientation, categorized by age, sex, and Home/first language, are 0.908, 0.360, and 0.299, respectively, all of which exceed 0.05. Hence, the cultural identity orientation does not have a significant relationship with that of age, sex, Home/first language. On the other hand, the cultural identity orientation has a significant relationship with their Ethnolinguistic background and Frequency of second language use (in school, at home, in the community), as evidenced by computed probability values of 0.024 and less than 0.001, respectively, both of which are less than 0.05.

Table 5. *The Significant Relationship between the Profile of Second Language Learners and their Cultural Identity Orientation*

Demographic Profile	t value	p-value
Age	-0.116	0.908
Sex	-0.917	0.360
Home/first language	-1.041	0.299
Ethnolinguistic background	2.273	0.024
Frequency of second language use (in school, at home, in the community)	8.399	Less than 0.001

The findings are supported by Wonder (2021), which suggests that fear of failure and graded participation contribute to classroom-related anxiety among English majors in Metro Manila. Li and Zhang (2023) noted that emotional dissonance in content-based instruction can either motivate or discourage learners, depending on the level of classroom support. Muhammed (2024) observed that sociopolitical instability, religious influences, and family expectations significantly impact student engagement and anxiety in the Kurdistan context. Similarly, Morales (2024) revealed that bicultural Filipino Americans often internalize language-related shame, which affects both their classroom participation and emotional well-being. Velasco (2024) further argued that rigid pedagogical ideologies and teacher beliefs in the Philippines can reinforce language hierarchies, intensifying classroom anxiety among learners.

4.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings of this study strongly underscore the complex relationship between cultural identity, various sides of language anxiety, and the influence of ethnolinguistic context and L2 exposure within an educational setting. Cultural identity emerged as a significant justifying factor against language anxiety, providing empirical support for socio-affective theories positing that a strong cultural self-concept equips learners with greater emotional resilience in second language environments (Norton, 1995; Gu, 2022). The research further clarified that anxiety is a multidimensional construct, with performance and evaluative anxieties, particularly in public speaking and fear of judgment, being the main, aligning with Horwitz's (1986) established model. This suggests a critical need for skill-specific interventions, especially tailored for oral tasks.

The study also highlighted the challenges of ethnolinguistic marginalization, as evidenced by heightened anxiety among minority learners (e.g., Iranun) due to cultural dissonance in English-centric classrooms, corroborating findings on identity marginalization (Erling, 2021). Furthermore, the data confirmed that infrequent L2 use directly perpetuates anxiety by limiting essential communicative practice, thus validating the crucial role of exposure as a buffer against apprehension (Muftah, 2023). Within the educational environment, the strong desire for cultural integration in curricula was a positive indicator for anxiety reduction, confirming the call for culturally responsive pedagogy (Hernández, 2022). However, the observed weak home culture identification points to an

important gap in fully affirming learners' heritage.

Finally, the persistence of transitional anxiety in later grades, despite current Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policies, revealed a notable policy-practice misalignment, mirroring observations from other contexts regarding unexpected linguistic shifts (Galante, 2020). These conclusions collectively emphasize the necessity of holistic, culturally sensitive, and practice-oriented pedagogical approaches to foster a less anxious and more confident L2 learning environment.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The principal author contributes to the study's writing and implementation. The co-author edits and supervises the data.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

The authors assert no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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