

## The Causes of English Language Learning Anxiety among English Major Seniors at a Vietnamese University


Bellarina-Dung Nguyen<sup>1\*</sup>, Anh Ngoc Trinh<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Temple University Japan, Japan

<sup>2</sup> University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam

\*Corresponding author's email: [bellarinadungnguyen@gmail.com](mailto:bellarinadungnguyen@gmail.com)

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9712-6848>

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### ABSTRACT

**Keywords:** English language learning anxiety, foreign language anxiety, English majors

Foreign language anxiety has long been recognized as a significant factor affecting learners' performance and motivation in second language acquisition. However, limited research has examined this phenomenon among English majors who are expected to be highly proficient English users in non-native contexts. To address this paucity, this paper explores the causes of English language learning anxiety (ELLA) among English majors at a Vietnamese university. Drawing on mixed data from 103 questionnaire respondents and eight follow-up interviews, four major causes were identified: students' difficulties with English vocabulary learning, misconceptions about English language learning, test anxiety, and lack of preparation. The findings indicate anxiety as an existence and a challenge that instructors and learners ought to anticipate, acknowledge, and take notice of. The study also brings new insights into how anxiety might tend to derive internally from students themselves and suggests that language educators should incorporate supportive strategies to mitigate these causes in English learning settings.

### Introduction

English has been the most international language for multilateral communication and diverse perspectives, spoken by around 1.5 billion people worldwide as a first or second language, excluding speakers of English as a foreign language. However, recent data from the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) in 2022 revealed that of the 2.1 million adult test takers from 111 countries and regions, a staggering 72% demonstrated low to moderate proficiency in English (EF EPI, 2022). These statistics clearly indicate the difficulties many learners face in acquiring a strong command of English.

Addressing this issue requires a comprehensive examination of various variables within the cognitive, affective, and miscellaneous domains of language learning (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992). Of particular importance is foreign language anxiety (FLA), which has been identified

as a significant affective factor that hinders the language learning process and outcomes (MacIntyre, 2017; Liu, 2018; Teimouri et al., 2019). Research has shown a negative correlation between FLA and learners' willingness, motivation (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Manipuspika, 2018), as well as their linguistic achievement (Horwitz et al., 1986; Kamarulzaman et al., 2013; Bensalem, 2017).

Contrary to the belief that language anxiety affects only low-level learners, studies have revealed that even students pursuing an English degree in higher education experience distressing levels of FLA (Tóth, 2011; Said & Weda, 2018; Oravuo, 2021). In fact, a meta-analysis of 98 studies conducted by Teimouri et al. (2019) concluded that the impact of FLA on language achievement among college students surpasses its effect on junior and senior high school students. As adult learners, university students may have had negative experiences with English learning in the past, which can impede their language skill improvement, unlike children or individuals without such struggles (Kongi, 2015). Furthermore, higher education learners tend to be more concerned about public embarrassment compared to their peers in basic education, who generally exhibit less self- and other-related prejudice (Kostyuk et al., 2010).

Although efforts have been made to identify the causal factors of English language anxiety in Vietnamese educational context, particularly in secondary and high schools, very few studies, most notably Nguyen et al. (2023), Nhung (2013), and Le (2010), have focused on English-major students who are trained and expected to achieve high proficiency levels. Furthermore, none have targeted senior learners with a mixed-methods approach. Hence, to illuminate this uncharted area, the paper investigates the underlying causes of English language learning anxiety (ELLA) among seniors in the English major program at a Vietnamese university.

Very few studies in Vietnam—most notably Hanh (2018), Nguyet (2017), and Nhung (2013)—have focused on English-major students, and none have targeted senior learners with a mixed-methods approach.

## Literature Review

### *Anxiety from a psychological viewpoint*

Anxiety, which emerged as “an explicit and pervasive problem” in the twentieth century (Spielberger, 2013, p.4), has become increasingly prevalent in contemporary society. It is characterized by an individual's “uneasiness and distress about an unspecified, diffuse, uncertain, and often formless form of threat or danger” (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010, p.5). Psychologists have identified three types of anxiety: trait or global anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. Trait anxiety is a relatively stable personality trait associated with being prone to anxiety (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010). State anxiety, on the other hand, is a momentary psychological and/or physiological response to an external stimulus or threat (Leal et al., 2017). Situational anxiety is both a relatively stable personality trait that arises in specific situations and a momentary reaction to those situations. Notably, anxiety has a self-perpetuating nature, fueling concerns about future consequences and paradoxically intensifying the anxiety further (MacIntyre & Serroul, 2015; Boudreau et al., 2018).

### *Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)*

FLA has been a subject of great interest in the realm of second/foreign language acquisition for over forty years. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), the leading scholars in the field,

FLA can be defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128). To build upon their earlier research, Elaine Horwitz (2017) highlighted that language learners often experience FLA due to "distress at their inability to be themselves and to connect authentically with other people through the limitation of the new language" (p. 41).

Humphries (2011) categorizes language anxiety into facilitative and debilitating types. Facilitative anxiety motivates learners to approach new learning tasks as challenges, while debilitating anxiety leads to avoidance behaviors. FLA typically manifests debilitating anxiety, negatively impacting students' psychological, social, and physical well-being (Oxford, 1999).

FLA is a multifaceted phenomenon that manifests itself differently in individuals and language contexts. Horwitz et al. (1986) extensively examined FLA within the framework of academic and social performance assessment, identifying three primary contributing factors: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to learners' reticence to engage in foreign language communication due to shyness and worry. Test anxiety stems from concerns about academic underachievement. Fear of negative evaluation extends beyond test-taking situations to encompass broader social contexts. Young (1991) compiled an extensive list of potential determinants of language anxiety, categorized into three groups: factors associated with language learners, language instructors, and language institutions.

In further exploration of FLA, Tanveer (2007) investigated the influential factors that lead to language anxiety and highlighted demanding features of the target language, including pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Adopting a socio-cultural perspective, Tanveer suggested that FLA may result from the social environment surrounding the acquisition of the target language (limited exposure and practice within learners' communities can generate apprehension and shyness when tasked with communicating in the foreign language), errors in social setting (frequent feedback and corrections in the classroom may evoke students' frustration and self-consciousness), unequal status dynamics between teachers and students or among students themselves (dissimilar social status and identity can threaten individual identities and self-confidence).

Through the synthesis of these studies, it becomes evident that FLA is subject to various influences that significantly affect students' language-learning experiences. Understanding these complex dynamics is crucial for educators and researchers to address and mitigate the detrimental effects of foreign language anxiety.

#### *Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and English Language Learning Anxiety (ELLA)*

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) refers to anxiety experienced in learning any non-native language and is typically characterized by communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). English language learning anxiety (ELLA) denotes these same processes when they occur specifically in English learning contexts, which may involve English-specific pressures such as global expectations, classroom norms, or assessment practices (Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). Although FLA and ELLA share common mechanisms, including fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation, their scope differs: FLA applies across languages, whereas ELLA focuses solely on English (Horwitz et al., 1986). Accordingly, ELLA research often examines how English-

specific cultural, linguistic, and institutional factors shape learners' anxiety experiences (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001).

### *English Language Learning Anxiety (ELLA) in Vietnamese educational context*

Despite its significance, ELLA has been insufficiently explored in the Vietnamese educational context, particularly among undergraduate English majors. The existing literature primarily focuses on specific skills, such as listening, reading, and speaking. Research shows considerable anxiety about these skills, which affects students' overall language proficiency.

Listening anxiety has been a major area of investigation. Le (2010) explored listening anxiety among 30 freshmen majoring in English at a provincial university, revealing several contributing factors, including listening materials, the listening environment, and characteristics of both speakers and listeners. Nhung (2013) further examined this issue among 30 first-year English major students at a northwestern university, identifying pronunciation difficulties and the fast speech rate of native speakers as particularly challenging aspects of listening lessons. Hang (2017) expanded this focus by studying 100 General English students at a university of engineering and technology in Hanoi, uncovering three primary sources of listening anxiety: the quality of the listening input, listener characteristics, and the physical classroom setting.

Speaking anxiety has also been examined in recent studies. Dung and Hung (2020) studied 128 EFL non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University of Education, revealing moderate levels of speaking anxiety ( $M=67.45$ ) linked to fears such as making mistakes and being laughed at, which correlated with lower academic proficiency. Additionally, Tran (2022) investigated the origins and effects of anxiety on English-speaking skills among 150 students and 4 speaking teachers at the College of Electro-Mechanics, Construction and Agro-Forestry of Central Vietnam. This study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, revealing that anxiety stemmed from multiple sources, including personal perceptions and teacher interactions, and significantly affected students' speaking performance. Furthermore, Thuy and Ha (2020) explored listening anxiety among 171 first-year non-English majors at Thai Nguyen University, finding that, while students recognized the importance of listening skills, they often lacked enjoyment in listening classes and suggested methods to reduce anxiety. In another study, Nguyen et al. (2023) examined reading anxiety among 72 linguistics students at a university in Ho Chi Minh City, uncovering that negative emotions about their prior knowledge influenced their reading experiences.

It is apparent that a comprehensive examination of ELLA among English majors in the Vietnamese educational context is lacking. Building on prior Vietnamese studies that focused mainly on skill-specific anxieties, the present research aims to offer a broader view of ELLA among English majors. It extends existing work by examining multiple potential causes across various aspects of language learning, thereby contributing to a fuller understanding of how ELLA manifests among advanced learners in Vietnam's higher education context.

### *Research Questions*

The research aimed to answer the question:

What are the key causes of English language learning anxiety among English major seniors at a Vietnamese university?

## Methodology

### *Mixed methods approach*

This study adopted a mixed methods approach. Specifically, a questionnaire was used as an essential initial tool to assess the presence of ELLA among the student population and to potentially uncover underlying factors. However, due to the topic's intricate and multifaceted nature, a more extensive exploration was warranted, necessitating interviews to gain deeper insights. According to Yan and Horwitz (2008), insights can be gained by listening to participants' experiences and voices.

### *Participants*

The participants were fourth-year English majors who had completed most of their English-core courses. In this programme, progressing to the final year requires a minimum B2 proficiency (upper-intermediate), as students must meet this benchmark to pass the core course assessments. Thus, the B2 level was institutionally verified through completion of coursework. The objective was to demonstrate that even independent, proficient English users can encounter ELLA. Using convenience sampling, the study included 103 English-major seniors (29 males and 74 females) who were almost complete in the study program and would provide a more comprehensive perspective. For the in-depth interviews, a purposive sampling technique was used to select eight participants (five females and three males) based on specific characteristics: gender, English proficiency level, and native province/city

### *Instruments*

#### *Questionnaire*

Given the convenience and anonymity it offers many participants, an online Google Forms questionnaire was considered appropriate for gathering the necessary information while ensuring honesty. (Patten, 2016). To identify the main problematic areas, the theoretical frameworks of Horwitz et al. (1986), Young (1991), and Tanveer (2007) were utilized. The questionnaire consisted of 29 statements measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Ten items from Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (1986) were selected to improve reliability, and 19 additional statements were designed to align with the research objectives. The items were organized into different sections and subsections. The questionnaire began with key information about the study and was followed by assurances of confidentiality and informed consent.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using the coefficient  $\omega$  (Omega) ( $\omega = .93$ , 95% CI [.91, .95]), indicating excellent internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003). The average inter-item correlation was .32, suggesting that the items measured related but not redundant aspects of English learning anxiety.

#### *Interviews*

Semi-structured interviews were selected to provide flexibility in modifying the line of inquiry and exploring underlying reasons beyond the scope of the questionnaire (Seidman, 2013). Based on individual responses, follow-up questions were generated on the spot. Thirteen basic questions guided the interviews, four of which were adapted from Kongi's (2015) study. Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to enhance participant understanding and comfort in expressing opinions. Prior to the interviews, participants were assured of confidentiality, informed about the study's purpose, and provided explicit rights

to withdraw at any time. To uphold ethical considerations, all recorded interviews were deleted after the analysis phase.

### *Data analysis*

The survey responses were compiled and coded in a CVS file. The data was then analyzed using JASP software and quantified using the mean analysis approach described by Pimentel (2010) (Table 1).

**Table 1.**

Interpretation of Mean Analysis

High	Strongly Agree	4.51 to 5.00
	Agree	3.51 to 4.50
Moderate	Neutral	2.51 to 3.50
Low	Disagree	1.51 to 2.50
	Strongly Disagree	1.00 to 1.50

All eight audio-recorded interviews were transcribed, which itself “is a process of data analysis and interpretation” (Gillham, 2005, p.121). Following this, the comments were selected and organized into relevant sections and subsections. In accordance with ethical guidelines, participant names were coded as FN1 (Female number 1), MN1 (Male number 1), FN2 (Female number 2), MN2 (Male number 2), and so forth, based on gender and interview order.

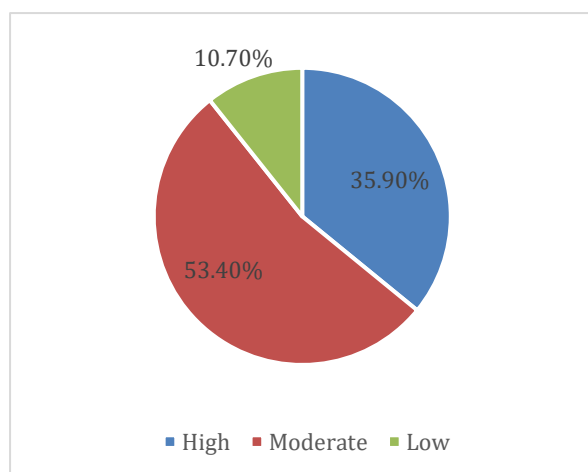
## **Results**

### *Students’ levels of ELLA*

Before determining the primary reasons of ELLA within the target population, it was necessary to ascertain the existence and extent of this phenomenon among the students.

**Figure 1.**

Students’ levels of ELLA





It was evident that the vast majority of the research subjects experienced moderate to high levels of ELLA (figure 1). This finding not only validates the legitimacy and gravity of the issue but also emphasizes the need for a comprehensive identification of the key causes underlying ELLA.

### *Major Causes of ELLA*

#### *Students' fear of tests and exams*

**Table 2.**

Students' Fear of Tests and Exams

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>		
	<b>S9. I am uneasy about the projects/ midterms/ finals that can affect my final scores.</b>	<b>S10. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class.</b>
Valid	103	103
Missing	0	0
Mode	4.000 <sup>a</sup>	4.000
Median	4.000	4.000
Mean	3.505	3.816
Std. Error of Mean	0.100	0.109
Std. Deviation	1.018	1.109
Skewness	-0.639	-1.032
Std. Error of Skewness	0.238	0.238
Kurtosis	-0.152	0.532
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.472	0.472
Minimum	1.000	1.000
Maximum	5.000	5.000
<sup>a</sup> The mode is computed assuming that variables are discreet.		

The participants exhibited a high level of test anxiety and fear of failure (Table 2). This finding is consistent with the themes identified during the interviews, which highlighted students' concerns about grading evaluations. For instance, MN1 said, "To me, grades matter a lot. I'm always so anxious and nervous during midterms and finals." Interestingly, the distribution of responses for S10 is the most skewed among the statements, suggesting that many responses are concentrated at the higher end of the scale, with few at the lower end. The interview data provided insight into this matter, with FN1 sharing, "Before a test, I'm often on edge thinking about what would happen if I got a bad mark. During the test, I think about what would happen if I failed the course". These insights suggest that exam seasons elicit excessive levels of anticipatory anxiety due to concerns about unfavorable outcomes.

*Students' lack of preparation***Table 3.**

Students' lack of preparation

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>			
	<b>S11. I feel very panicky when there is a surprise English test.</b>	<b>S12. I get nervous when the English lecturer asks questions which I have not prepared in advance</b>	<b>S13. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.</b>
Mode	3.000*	4.000*	4.000*
Median	3.000	4.000	4.000
Mean	3.359	3.447	3.379
Std. Error of Mean	0.095	0.099	0.103
Std. Deviation	0.969	1.007	1.049
Skewness	-0.186	-0.350	-0.503
Std. Error of Skewness	0.238	0.238	0.238
Kurtosis	-0.286	-0.422	-0.442
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.472	0.472	0.472
Minimum	1.000	1.000	1.000
Maximum	5.000	5.000	5.000
<sup>a</sup> The mode is computed assuming that variables are discreet.			

The participants ascribed their ELLA to a perceived lack of preparation in the classroom (Table 3). Notably, surprise tests emerged as a significant causal factor (S11). The insights gained from the interviews shed light on the multifaceted impact of surprise tests, which not only elicited anxiety (FN3 stated: "*The surprise element always makes me bewildered; but I am especially anxious when I have to take a surprise test*") but also triggered various behavioral manifestations of language anxiety, including academic dishonesty (FN4 expressed: "If I'm informed of an upcoming test, I can spend time revising the materials and that can somewhat give me a piece of mind. A surprise test, on the other hand, will definitely freak me out and I will have to resort to other dishonest behaviors.") and tendencies to skip class or arrive late (MN2 narrated: "In one particular listening course, I was very anxious and reluctant to go to class because the lecturer was always giving out random tests every week.")).

Furthermore, over half of the participants expressed discomfort when suddenly called upon by lecturers (S12). When describing their emotions in such situations, the interviewees used negative descriptors like "anxious", "confused", "pressured", "uncomfortable", and "terrified". Additionally, many interviewees reported a state of cognitive confusion, wherein they struggled to recall information or articulate themselves clearly. For instance, FN5 stated: "When the lecturer calls my name out of the blue, I often feel so anxious that I have a hard time calling anything to mind. My answers will be some kind of gibberish". Similarly, MN2 shared: "Being called on unexpectedly like that feels like being ambushed. Even if I knew the answer to the question, I might still have difficulties expressing my ideas because I am under too much pressure".



Lastly, S13 indicated that engaging in spontaneous speech without prior preparation contributed to feelings of anxiety. MN3 commented: "In a speaking class or a debate class, if I had time to prepare with a group or by myself, I would feel more certain and confident; but if I did not, I would be very confused and pressured".

### *Students' misconceptions of English language learning*

**Table 4.**

Students' misconceptions of English language learning

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>				
	<b>S14. I believe English language learning is a special gift not possessed by all.</b>	<b>S15. I believe that primary and secondary education play a crucial role in English learning.</b>	<b>S16. I suppose that it is easier for the rich to learn English.</b>	<b>S17. I believe that the regional factor can affect your English ability (accent/ intonation/ liaison).</b>
Mode	3.000*	4.000*	3.000*	4.000*
Median	3.000	4.000	3.000	4.000
Mean	3.252	3.796	3.320	3.806
Std. Error of Mean	0.095	0.088	0.102	0.078
Std. Deviation	0.967	0.890	1.031	0.793
Skewness	-0.198	-0.607	-0.078	-0.720
Std. Error of Skewness	0.238	0.238	0.238	0.238
Kurtosis	-0.249	0.194	-0.641	0.422
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.472	0.472	0.472	0.472
Minimum	1.000	1.000	1.000	2.000
Maximum	5.000	5.000	5.000	5.000
<sup>a</sup> The mode is computed assuming that variables are discreet.				

The analysis of student beliefs in this study reveals several misconceptions regarding English language learning (Table 4). Firstly, there is a prevailing perception among the participants that English proficiency is a gift possessed by only a select few (S12). Curiously, all eight interviewees shared the belief that linguistically gifted students held a clear advantage over others (FN1 stated: "My friend, T., is a very gifted student. She can memorize ten words in five minutes. I, on the other hand, after spending a whole day struggling to memorize the same words, forget them in a few days' time.").

The second misconception regarding the high  $M=3.796$  concerns the significance of mandatory education (S15). This finding aligns with the interviews, in which most participants attributed their confusion, insecurity, and anxiety during their freshman year to inadequate English-language learning in their previous educational experiences (MN3 shared: "If I had had a stronger foundation from high school, the English courses in university would have been easier."); FN1 expressed: "From grade 1 to 12, my old schools

focused mainly on grammar. Therefore, when I was a freshman, I was so insecure and nervous because we had to incorporate a lot of speaking and listening."). Interestingly, one interviewee held a contrasting view, stating that her prior prestigious education had an adverse effect on her confidence, creating a sense of obligation to outperform her university classmates (FN3: "I actually went to a high school for the gifted. During my freshman year at the university, I always compared myself to others; when I got a lower score than a student from a small-town high school, I would feel mortified. I constantly felt like I had to be better than my classmates, and it was so tiring and stressful.").

Thirdly, many participants believed that wealth significantly aided the English learning process. In his interview, MN2 acknowledged the influence of financial resources as "an important contributing factor to everything, including studying English", but emphasized its role as a "leverage", rather than a "determinant". Finally, the majority of students associated regional factors with the ability to pronounce English words correctly (S17 with  $M=3.806$ ). Intriguingly, S17 is the only item that encountered no "strongly disagree" (minimum of 2 and maximum of 5). All interviewees believed that individuals in major cities like Hanoi, known for their "standard accent", could adopt an English accent more easily than small-town learners. Conversely, those with "non-standard" accents often felt "embarrassed", "anxious", and "inferior" when conversing in English among their peers. Five interviewees perceived accentedness as exerting a strong influence on overall pronunciation, which they considered exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to modify.

#### *Students' difficulties in English vocabulary learning*

**Table 5.**

Students' difficulties in English vocabulary learning

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>		
	<b>S27. It is hard for me to remember and retrieve new words.</b>	<b>S28. I am anxious because there are so many new words that I do not know.</b>
Mode	4.000*	4.000*
Median	4.000	4.000
Mean	3.476	3.864
Std. Error of Mean	0.098	0.100
Std. Deviation	0.998	1.010
Skewness	-0.474	-0.769
Std. Error of Skewness	0.238	0.238
Kurtosis	-0.585	-0.182
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.472	0.472
Minimum	1.000	1.000
Maximum	5.000	5.000
<sup>a</sup> The mode is computed assuming that variables are discreet.		

English vocabulary presented itself as a formidable challenge in the English learning process for most participants (Table 5). The most common response for both S27 and S28 is 4, indicating that a significant number of students selected this response as their answer. Notably, item 28 achieved the highest mean score of 3.86, indicating a serious concern regarding the vast number of English vocabulary items. From the interviews, three

participants identified vocabulary as the most challenging aspect of English. FN2 remarked, "There are just too many words and terminologies that I don't know". Similarly, FN4 shared their anxiety about learning new words, stating, "There are so many new words that it's impossible to know half of them." MN3 attributed his struggle with vocabulary to the lack of effective study methods.

## Discussion and Conclusion

This study identified four primary causes of ELLA among senior English majors: difficulties in English vocabulary learning, misconceptions about English language learning, test anxiety and fear of failure, and lack of preparation. These factors emerged consistently across both quantitative and qualitative findings, offering a clear overview of how anxiety manifests among advanced learners. The quantitative analysis showed that 27 of the 28 items had medium or high mean values, indicating the relevance of key components of FLA—communication apprehension, fear of making mistakes, and test anxiety—in shaping English majors' anxiety experiences. These findings align with foundational work such as Horwitz et al. (1986) and Young (1991). The interview findings further supported the quantitative results and clarified which factors senior students perceived as most impactful.

First, difficulties in English vocabulary learning were identified as the most influential factor, consistent with Oxford's (1990) observation that vocabulary is one of the most extensive and demanding components of language learning. When students experience lexical inadequacy, they may struggle to comprehend input or express ideas, leading to embarrassment and withdrawal. This study further highlights that students' subjective perceived difficulty—not only the objective challenge of vocabulary—plays a central role in generating anxiety. When students overestimate the complexity of a task, it can create cognitive and psychological barriers, leading to feelings of anxiety, frustration, and self-doubt. Previous studies, including Liu (2016), have emphasized the importance of strategy use, and the present findings reinforce the need for tailored vocabulary-learning guidance and strategy training.

As technology becomes increasingly integrated into language classrooms, a growing range of vocabulary learning methods has emerged. Meta-analyses and systematic reviews consistently show that technology-assisted vocabulary learning yields moderate to large improvements over traditional methods, with mobile-assisted and game-based approaches being particularly effective (Hao et al., 2021; Yu & Trainin, 2021; Simonnet et al., 2024). Hao et al. (2021) further noted clear advantages for mobile devices and on-the-move learning, suggesting that L2 vocabulary learning may be most efficient when students use mobile phones and are not restricted to classroom environments. Specifically, in the Vietnamese context, recent research has shown similar potential for mobile-assisted and technology-supported vocabulary learning. Ngo and Doan (2023) reported that EFL students significantly improved their academic vocabulary and learning motivation through mobile phone-based activities, while Nguyen (2024) demonstrated that English-major students effectively expanded their vocabulary and collocation awareness through online news resources and mobile applications. These findings underscore that technology-enhanced approaches not only facilitate vocabulary development but also help alleviate learners' anxiety by making vocabulary learning more flexible, autonomous, and engaging.

Second, students' misconceptions about English language learning were shown to contribute strongly to anxiety. These misconceptions, such as overestimating the role of early educational exposure or perceiving regional accents as fixed, could negatively affect motivation and self-

perception. Students who attended schools with inadequate English classes would feel inferior and anxious when studying in the same university program with their peers. Conversely, students who had extensive exposure to English throughout their formal education would feel pressured and obligated to outperform others. Another prevalent misconception was that the regional accent was unchangeable and played a crucial role in acquiring a native-like English accent. This belief can lead to unnecessary stress and insecurity. Individuals residing in major cities with the standard accent may feel compelled to speak English flawlessly, while those from smaller provinces with local accents may feel embarrassed and self-conscious when speaking English. Prior literature, including Ohata (2005) and Kráľová (2016), has similarly documented the anxiety that arises when learners' unrealistic expectations clash with classroom realities. The present findings extend this work by illustrating how these beliefs function among advanced English majors, shaping both their self-efficacy and their interpersonal comparisons in a linguistically competitive environment.

In line with current pedagogical perspectives, comprehensibility should be prioritized over native-like pronunciation. Accordingly, it is important for educators to create appropriate opportunities to discuss and address students' inaccurate beliefs, thereby reducing unnecessary pressure and fostering more realistic and productive orientations toward English learning.

Third, high levels of test anxiety and fear of failure were reported. Interestingly, test anxiety and fear of failure share similarities with generalized anxiety, which is characterized by concerns about potential future disasters (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010). The participants consistently engaged in thoughts about the consequences of failure before, during, and after tests. They perceived the possibility of failure as overwhelming and beyond their control. Although this might appear as an exaggerated response, it is a typical reaction to anxiety, as anxiety can be associated with both present events and future concerns (Jackson & Everts, 2010). In addition, the students exhibited excessive fear of receiving poor grades and of how it could lead to overall failure in the course. This finding supports the theory proposed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which links test anxiety to the fear of failure.

To mitigate these anxieties, students should thoroughly preview and regularly review course content to ensure a comprehensive understanding and adequate preparation. This can help students feel more in control and composed during exams, as they come to realize that their efforts can directly impact their results. In addition to consistent study routines, students may benefit from distributing their learning across smaller, more frequent sessions rather than relying on last-minute preparation, as spaced practice has been shown to strengthen long-term retention (Latimier et al., 2020). Instructors can further support this process by offering guiding questions, sample tasks, or low-stakes quizzes that help students monitor their progress without the pressure of high-stakes evaluation.

Fourth, lack of preparation emerged as another significant cause of ELLA. Situations involving unexpected events such as impromptu speaking, sudden questioning, or surprise tests were found to evoke uneasiness and anxiety among students. The participants revealed that they often went blank and failed to perform properly in such unforeseen circumstances. MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) proposed that this phenomenon, commonly known as "going blank" or "freezing", can be attributed to the debilitating effects of anxiety. It can be inferred that the fear of being under- or unprepared is anxiety-inducing, as it directly affects academic performance and links it to the fear of failure. This study further demonstrates how unpredictability in classroom activities specifically heightens anxiety for advanced learners.

Considering these findings, it is suggested that instructors provide students with a comprehensive weekly or monthly agenda outlining expectations and lesson objectives. This clarity enables students to understand what is expected of them and prepare accordingly. Furthermore, it is advisable to minimize the use of surprise tests to reduce anxiety levels among students.

Essentially, although external factors such as instructors, the university environment, and the English language itself have been identified as contributors to ELLA, this study's findings reveal that much of the anxiety originates internally from students' beliefs, expectations, and self-judgments. The participants held self-limiting assumptions regarding how their background, perceived aptitude, or educational history should determine their English performance. A key insight emerging from this study is that senior English majors' anxiety stems less from fear of external evaluation and more from internalized pressure and self-comparison, highlighting an important psychological dimension of ELLA that warrants further attention.

This study examined ELLA among senior English majors at one Vietnamese university. Because the data were drawn from a single institutional context and a modest interview sample, the generalizability of the findings should be approached with caution. Given the significant role of instructors, future research on ELLA should explore instructors' and students' beliefs, perceptions, and attitudes towards English language learning and teaching. Moreover, employing other research methods, such as observation, can provide a deeper understanding of the complex and multidimensional nature of English learning anxiety. Furthermore, future studies should investigate the effects of implementing various techniques to alleviate English-learning anxiety on students' psychological well-being and academic achievement.

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## Biodata

Bellarina-Dung Nguyen is an ESL/EFL educator with over 8 years of teaching experience across multiple institutions in Vietnam and Japan. Her research interests include the affective aspects of language learning, language acquisition, and strategies for creating engaging, student-centered environments that promote emotional well-being and academic success.

Anh Ngoc Trinh (PhD.) is a lecturer, teacher educator, and researcher at the University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi. Her research

interests include Internationalisation of Higher Education, Curriculum Development, Social Emotional Learning, and English Language Education.