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Comparative Study of Listening Anxiety and Listening Performance of InHouse Test (TEP) for Female and Male Undergraduate Students

Nadiatus Sholichah* & Rahayu Kuswardani
English Education Department, Faculty of Languages and Arts, Universitas Negeri Surabaya,
Jl. Lidah Wetan, Lidah Wetan, Kec. Lakarsantri, Kota Surabaya, Jawa Timur 60213. Indonesia
*Corresponding Author: nadiatus.21027@mhs.unesa.ac.id , rahayukuswardani@unesa.ac.id

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Abstract: This comparative study investigates gender-based differences in listening anxiety and its relationship with listening performance on the Test of English Proficiency (TEP) among first-year English undergraduates. Listening anxiety, which includes components of Tension and Worry and a Lack of Confidence, is a significant psychological barrier that can negatively impact performance in high-stakes testing environments. The study aims to analyze the differences in listening anxiety and TEP listening scores between male and female students. It also seeks to determine if the strength of the relationship between anxiety and performance differs significantly across genders. A quantitative comparative design was used with 60 first-year English students (23 males, 37 females) from a university in Surabaya. Data were collected using the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS) and students' official TEP listening scores. The analysis involved independent samples t-tests, Pearson correlation, and Fisher's r-to-z transformation to compare groups and correlation strengths. The findings revealed that female students reported significantly higher overall anxiety (M = 74.05) compared to male students (M = 61.96). This difference was significant across both anxiety sub-factors: Tension and Worry ($p = 0.001$) and Lack of Confidence ($p < 0.001$). However, there was no significant gender difference in listening performance scores (Male M = 48.43; Female M = 45.95). A significant negative correlation between anxiety and performance was found for both males ($r = –0.666$, $p = 0.001$) and females ($r = –0.509$, $p = 0.001$), but the strength of this correlation did not significantly differ between genders. While female students experience greater listening anxiety, its negative impact on test performance is consistent for both genders. The results highlight the need for pedagogical strategies that address both emotional tension and self-confidence to help all students manage anxiety in high-stakes testing situations.

Keywords: Female, In-House Test, Listening Anxiety, Listening Performance, Male, Test of English Proficiency (TEP).

INTRODUCTION

Among the four core language skills, listening often presents a significant challenge for learners, as stated by Goh (2023). It involves complex cognitive processes, such as decoding words, integrating contextual information and constructing meaning from both linguistic and non-linguistic cues. This challenge is particularly pronounced in the context of standardised English proficiency tests, were listening comprehension is given significant emphasis. These tests evaluate a learner's ability to identify main ideas, recognise details, and interpret tone, often requiring rapid cognitive processing under strict time constraints, making listening a challenging skill to master (Jeh-do et al., 2024). However, the process of listening in a foreign language can provoke significant anxiety for many learners. This psychological barrier, referred to as listening anxiety, has been consistently identified as a factor that negatively impacts performance in listening tasks (Zhang, 2019).

Learners often experience this anxiety due to factors such as unfamiliar vocabulary, rapid speech rates, and the pressure to perform well in high-stakes environments (Zheng & Cheng, 2018). This anxiety can cause Cognitive Overload, which disrupts the processing of auditory information and ultimately impairs test outcomes. University first-year students, who are

in the early stages of their academic journey and still developing advanced listening skills, are particularly susceptible to the impact of listening anxiety.

This study is situated within the specific high-stakes context of the in-house test (TEP) at the University in Surabaya, which is standardised by the institution or the university (Isbell & Kremmel, 2020). Where achieving a particular score is a mandatory academic requirement for students, this policy, while designed to ensure a benchmark proficiency level, inherently increases the pressure associated with the test, thereby exacerbating student anxiety (Zhao, 2022). Students' differences in preparation strategies, such as consistent practice and seeking feedback, can significantly impact test performance, often reducing anxiety and improving results (Liu, 2016). Rather than emphasising test-taking techniques alone, fostering a supportive learning environment can build student confidence (Wang & Cha, 2019). Demographic factors like gender also play a role, as research shows potential differences in anxiety levels, learning styles, and test outcomes between male and female students (Liu & Xu, 2021). Listening anxiety has been shown to negatively correlate with listening test performance, and higher anxiety levels often lead to lower comprehension and scores (Namaziandost et al., 2019; Liu & Xu, 2021).

While the negative correlation between listening anxiety and test performance is widely documented, a gap remains in the literature. Few studies have specifically investigated listening anxiety within the unique context of in-house, high-stakes proficiency tests like the TEP, which have distinct academic and institutional pressures. Furthermore, little attention has been given to first-year students, a group that is more vulnerable to anxiety due to their limited exposure to academic listening tasks. Consequently, there is a limited understanding of how this anxiety-performance relationship might differ across genders within this specific demographic and context. Therefore, this study aims to address these gaps by analysing the correlation between listening anxiety and TEP listening performance among freshmen at a government-owned university in Surabaya, with a crucial focus on investigating whether the strength of this relationship and the causes differ significantly between male and female students.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative comparative design to examine gender-based differences in listening anxiety and its correlation with TEP listening performance. This approach is consistent with quantitative methods that test objective theories through the analysis of statistical relationships between variables—in this case, listening anxiety as the independent variable and listening performance as the dependent variable. The research was conducted at a government-owned university in Surabaya during the second and third weeks of March 2025. The participants were 60 first-year English Education students selected using a purposive sampling method. This group was specifically chosen due to their limited exposure to academic listening tasks, which makes them ideal subjects for anxiety-related studies (Shukla, 2020; Sugiyono, 2018). The final sample was composed of 23 male students (38.3%) and 37 female students (61.7%).

Data were collected using two main instruments. Listening anxiety was measured using the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (FLLAS), adapted from Kim (2000). The FLLAS consisted of 28 items scored on a 4-point Likert scale and focused on two primary factors: "tension and worry" and "lack of confidence". The instrument's validity was confirmed, with all items showing r-values greater than 0.361 ($p < 0.05$) and it demonstrated excellent reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.967. The anxiety measured was considered trait anxiety, which is stable over time and thus valid even with a time gap post-test (Boncquet et al., 2024). Listening performance was measured using the students' official TEP listening scores, which are a mandatory academic requirement at the university. All data were collected with the informed consent of the participants. This study employed a quantitative comparative design to examine gender-based differences in listening anxiety and its correlation with TEP listening performance. As Creswell (2012) and Williams (2011) explain, quantitative methods test objective theories through statistical relationships between variables—in this case, listening anxiety (independent variable) and listening performance (dependent variable).

Data were analyzed using SPSS. After coding responses and calculating total anxiety scores, descriptive statistics (mean, standard

deviation, minimum, and maximum) were used to summarize listening anxiety and TEP performance. Normality was tested using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, which confirmed that the data were normally distributed. The linearity between anxiety and performance was verified through an ANOVA, which showed a significant linear relationship. To compare anxiety and performance between genders, including the differences in factors contributing to listening anxiety, an independent samples t-test was conducted. Pearson correlation was used to examine the relationship between listening anxiety and performance separately for males and females. Finally, Fisher's r-to-z transformation was applied to determine whether the correlation strength differed significantly by gender.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained from the listening anxiety and listening performance scores in the tep test showed that students experienced moderate to high level anxiety, the numbers of which can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Listening Anxiety and TEP Listening Performance by Gender

Variable	Gender	Minimum	Maximum	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Listening_Anxiety	Male	34	91	23	61.96	14.063
	Female	52	97	37	74.05	9.849
Litening_Performance	Male	35	58	23	48.43	6.444
	Female	32	58	37	45.95	6.463

The analysis revealed that students experienced moderate to high levels of listening anxiety, with an average score of 69.42 (SD = 12.97). Meanwhile, the average TEP listening performance was 46.90 (SD = 6.52), indicating a moderate level of proficiency. When broken down by gender, female students reported significantly higher listening anxiety than males. However, in terms of performance, male students had a slightly higher mean score than female students (although the difference was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). The independent samples t-test confirmed a statistically significant difference in listening anxiety between genders ($p < 0.001$), but not in performance ($p = 0.152$). Furthermore.

Tabel 2. Male Pearson Correlation Result

		Listening Anxiety	Listening Performance
Listening _Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.666**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	23	23
Listening_Performance	Pearson Correlation	-.666**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	23	23

Tabel 3. Female Pearson Correlation Result

		Listening Anxiety	Listening Performance
Listening _Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.509**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	37	37
Listening_Performance	Pearson Correlation	-.509**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	
	N	37	37

Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant negative correlation between listening anxiety and listening performance for both groups: $r = –0.666$ ($p = 0.001$) for males and $r = –0.509$ ($p = 0.001$ for females. However, Fisher's r-to-z transformation revealed no significant difference between th correlation strengths across genders ($z = –0.858$, $p = 0.390$). This suggests

that while anxiety level differ, the effect of anxiety on performance is relatively consistent for both male and female students.

In addition to overall listening anxiety, the analysis also examined its two underlying factors: Tension and Worry and Lack of Confidence. The descriptive statistics revealed that female students consistently scored higher than males across both dimensions. For Tension and Worry, females reported a mean score of 34.89 (SD = 5.30), compared to 29.43 (SD = 6.95) for males. Similarly, for Lack of Confidence, females scored 39.16 (SD = 5.47), while males scored 32.52 (SD = 7.45). Assumption tests confirmed normality and equal variances (all $p > 0.05$), validating the use of Independent Samples ttests. The t-test results showed that these differences were statistically significant for both factors ($p < 0.01$), indicating that female students not only experience greater overall anxiety but also report significantly more tension, worry, and lower confidence when performing listening tasks.

DISCUSSIONS

The results of this study highlight the significant role that listening anxiety plays in influencing the performance of English language learners, particularly in high-stakes academic settings such as the TEP (Test of English Proficiency). The finding of a significant negative correlation between listening anxiety and listening performance confirms that students who feel more anxious tend to perform worse in listening tests. This supports previous research by Kim (2000), Namaziandost et al. (2019), and Zhang (2019), who similarly identified listening anxiety as a strong predictor of poor test outcomes among EFL learners. These results can also be interpreted through Sweller's Cognitive Load Theory, which explains that anxiety increases mental load, reducing working memory capacity and making it harder for students to process and retain auditory information. In the same vein, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis posits that high anxiety acts as a filter that blocks linguistic input, thereby reducing language acquisition and performance.

Interestingly, although female students reported significantly higher levels of listening anxiety, their performance was not significantly lower than that of male students. This implies that while female learners may experience greater emotional discomfort during listening tasks, they may also possess more effective coping strategies, such as greater diligence, preparation, or resilience. Previous studies (e.g., Liu & Xu, 2021) have suggested that female learners might demonstrate higher academic motivation and employ more metacognitive strategies to manage anxiety, which could buffer its negative impact on performance. In contrast, male students, while reporting lower anxiety, might not always exhibit the same degree of coping mechanisms, resulting in performance outcomes that are not vastly different despite the anxiety gap.

The lack of significant difference in performance across gender, despite apparent differences in anxiety levels, also reflects the complexity of the anxiety-performance relationship. It challenges simplistic assumptions that higher anxiety directly leads to poorer performance in all cases. Some research (e.g., Yang, 2000) even suggests that a moderate level of anxiety can be facilitative, increasing alertness and focus. However, in this study's context—where the TEP functions as a mandatory highstakes exam—the anxiety experienced by many students likely surpasses the threshold of being motivational and instead becomes debilitative.

The study also explored whether the strength of the anxiety-performance relationship differed by gender. Although the correlation was numerically stronger in male students than in female students, Fisher's r-to-z transformation indicated that this difference was not statistically significant. This suggests that listening anxiety affects test performance similarly across genders, even though its intensity varies. Therefore, gender may act more as a moderator of anxiety levels rather than a determinant of how anxiety influences outcomes.

The significant differences observed in both Tension and Worry, and Lack of Confidence suggest that the gender gap in overall listening anxiety is multifaceted. Female students' higher anxiety is not attributable to a single psychological factor but reflects elevated levels of emotional tension as well as diminished self-efficacy during listening tasks. This aligns with previous research (e.g., Wang & Cha, 2019; Liu & Xu, 2021), which links female learners' anxiety to both emotional reactivity and self-perceived competence. Addressing listening anxiety, therefore, requires interventions targeting both the emotional (e.g., stress reduction, relaxation strategies) and cognitive

(e.g., confidence-building, strategy training) aspects of the listening process, rather than focusing on one dimension alone. These findings echo the view of Piniel & Zólyomi (2022), who found that although female learners often report higher anxiety, the impact of that anxiety on academic performance is not significantly different between genders.

The implications of these findings are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, they reinforce the role of emotional variables—particularly anxiety—in second language acquisition and assessment performance. Practically, they suggest that language instructors and institutions should prioritize emotional support and anxiety-reduction strategies for all students, regardless of gender. Techniques such as test-taking workshops, regular low-stakes listening practice, mindfulness training, and confidence-building activities may help students better manage the stress associated with highstakes testing. Since the TEP plays a critical role in students' academic progress, addressing the psychological barriers to performance is not only beneficial but necessary.

CONCLUSSIONS

This study aimed to investigate the differences in listening anxiety and its correlation with listening performance among male and female freshmen in the English Education Department at a government-owned university in Surabaya. Grounded in the assumption that emotional factors such as anxiety influence cognitive processing, this research focused on a high-stakes academic context—the Test of English Proficiency (TEP). From the outset, the study aimed not only to identify whether gender influences levels of anxiety and performance but also to understand whether gender moderates the relationship between the two. The findings confirmed a significant negative correlation between listening anxiety and listening performance, aligning with theories introduced in the literature review, such as Cognitive Load Theory and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Female students reported higher anxiety levels, yet their test performance did not differ significantly from that of male students. Moreover, while males showed a slightly stronger negative correlation between anxiety and performance, the difference in correlation strength was not statistically significant, suggesting that anxiety impacts learners similarly regardless of gender. This synthesis reinforces the idea, introduced in the background, that anxiety is a crucial factor in language learning, particularly in listening, which requires real-time cognitive engagement. The results bridge the theoretical foundations presented in the introduction with the empirical findings discussed in the previous chapter, validating the need to address anxiety in pedagogical settings. Looking ahead, the implications of this study are twofold. First, it opens opportunities for developing instructional strategies that not only target listening skill development but also incorporate anxiety-reducing techniques such as mindfulness, test-taking training, and emotional support systems strategies that can benefit learners regardless of gender. Second, the study provides a platform for future researchers to investigate the causal factors behind anxiety, extend the analysis to other skill areas (e.g., speaking or reading), and evaluate the effectiveness of specific anxiety interventions across different learner demographics or educational institutions. listening anxiety is not just a psychological state but a measurable, impactful factor in academic language testing. Future studies can build upon this foundation to create more emotionally supportive and cognitively accessible environments for language learners.

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