

# Exploring Teaching Anxiety in Pre-Service ESL Teachers within the Malaysian Context: Conceptual Study

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**Abstract:** *Anxiety is a topic that has been predominantly explored in the field of English learning. Unfortunately, within this extensive scholarly discourse, the prevailing trend has been to direct the bulk of attention and investigation toward unravelling the intricacies of anxiety experienced by foreign or second language learners, leaving a conspicuous absence in the thorough examination and understanding of anxiety in the context of teachers and educators involved in language instruction. As mentioned in language learning psychology, there is a similar tendency to focus primarily on research on language learners' psychology while ignoring language teachers' psychology (Mercer, 2018). However, anxiety related to speaking English while teaching has been identified as a distinct challenge affecting the success of language teaching and learning. Even experienced teachers can face this obstacle. This concept paper aims to explore the factors contributing to English language teaching anxiety among practicum teachers in Malaysian public schools. The study will employ the FLTA questionnaire, consisting of 27 out of 45 questions, to collect relevant data. The anticipated findings will serve as a roadmap for researchers, potentially paving the way for further studies on effective strategies to manage teaching anxiety among language educators.*

**Keywords:** Teaching Anxiety, Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety, Pre-Service Teacher, English as A Second Language

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## 1. Introduction

The teaching practicum stands as a crucial program within the education department, designed to prepare its students for future educator roles. Specifically tailored for final-year students of the program, this practicum serves a significant purpose in shaping the skills and capabilities of aspiring teachers (Novitasari & Murtafi'ah, 2022). Throughout the teaching practicum, the pre-service teachers will experience instructing real students in genuine classroom scenarios, each with unique characteristics and personalities (Djawamara & Listyani, 2021). Due to high English proficiency requirements and minimal teaching skills, it is undeniable that this stage poses a significant challenge for pre-service teachers. This challenge often leads to anxiety, impeding their ability to deliver a successful teaching performance.

Anxiety is a psychological phenomenon in education that significantly impacts teachers and learners. Horwitz (2004) suggests that foreign language teachers often face anxiety in the classroom, primarily because they are learners of the language they are teaching. However, Aydın (2016) pointed out that the anxiety experienced in a learning environment might not

necessarily mirror the anxiety felt in a teaching environment. Horwitz (1996) stated that “even if this anxiety had no impact on the effectiveness of the language instruction, it would seem to be a substantial detriment to the mental well-being and job satisfaction of foreign language teachers”. While this complex psychological factor still happens to experienced teachers, let alone the pre-service teachers with minimal formal classroom experience. Thus, this conceptual paper aims to examine the factors contributing to teaching anxiety among ESL pre-service teachers of primary and secondary schools in Malaysia.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **Anxiety**

Krashen (1989) emphasises that the success of foreign and second language acquisition is closely linked to learners with high motivation, self-assurance, and low anxiety levels. To put it differently, individuals characterised by low motivation, low self-esteem, and increased anxiety quickly experience the affective filter that acts as a cognitive hurdle, obstructing the effective utilisation of comprehensible input for language acquisition. Several researchers have defined the definition of anxiety. Scovel (1978) characterises anxiety as a "state of apprehension, a vague fear" triggered by specific situations. In line with this, Spielberger (1983) defines anxiety as the "subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system." Another definition related to anxiety and language learning is that tension and apprehension are particularly notable in second-language contexts, encompassing various language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Wu, 2010). However, Rapee and Heimberg (1997) propose that anxiety arises from the interplay of three systems. First, the cognitive processing system involves thoughts that emerge when encountering unfamiliar or imperfect situations. Second, the physiological system encompasses bodily changes often linked to anxiety, such as increased heart rate or breathing difficulties. Lastly, the behavioural system drives the tendency to evade or avoid anxiety-provoking scenarios.

### **Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (FLTA)**

Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (FLTA) has garnered significant attention as a multifaceted construct within the realms of teachers and foreign language learning anxiety. FLTA is recognised as a dynamic concept positioned at the intersection of educators' anxieties and the anxieties inherent in foreign language learning (Merc, 2010, 2011). Li et al. (2023) described FLTA as a detrimental emotional encounter involving feelings of restlessness, discomfort, and worry that notably impact EFL instructors during the process of language teaching. Mercer (2018) teaching anxiety in language educators is a multifaceted emotional phenomenon, possibly originating from lower self-confidence in language abilities and foreign language anxiety, particularly in the case of non-native teachers. This definition is in line with Tüfekçi-Can (2018), who thoroughly defines FLTA as encapsulating the sense of incompetency in teaching, practising foreign language skills, and delivering language instruction to actual students in authentic teaching environments. However, opposed to this idea, Aydın (2016) broadens this perspective by asserting that FLTA extends beyond situational anxiety, encapsulating a wide array of personal, perceptual, motivational, and technical considerations.

### **Causes and Effects of Teaching Anxiety**

There are several factors contributing to the anxiety among these pre-service ESL teachers. Kim and Kim (2004) shed light on the origins of Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (FLTA). They emphasise that FLTA is not solely born from limited language proficiency; it is a complex

interplay of factors. These include mentor evaluations and teachers' intricate challenges in managing their classrooms. Adding to this narrative, Ipek (2006, 2016) contributes a unique perspective. He underscores that FLTA is also fuelled by the fear of making mistakes and the struggle with language proficiency-related errors. These elements form significant triggers within the realm of teaching anxiety, while Kang (2013) posits that a teacher's proficiency level acts as a critical determinant in the development of FLTA. This complex psychological factor has contributed to several effects on teachers and students. Sari and Anwar (2021) shed light on how teaching anxiety spawns concerns about meeting the expectations of mentor teachers and students, resulting in heavy burdens and a dearth of skills, ultimately fostering nervousness during classroom instruction. Meanwhile, Khani and Mirzaee's (2015) quantitative study reveals that contextual variables can induce stressors and negative emotions, culminating in teacher burnout. The anxiety experienced by teachers has a significant impact on their presence in the classroom and teaching effectiveness. For example, anxiety can markedly influence a teacher's professional practices, personality, and a student's capacity to acquire a second language (Gannoun & Deris, 2023). The inverse relationship between teachers' anxiety and performance is explored through the lens of Yasmin et al. (2020). Additionally, Muchtar et al. (2020) illuminate how teacher anxiety is perceived to tarnish their image in front of students and potentially impede English exposure.

### 3. Methodology

This conceptual paper seeks to answer the research question, "What factors contribute to teaching anxiety among ESL practicum teachers in Malaysia?". This study involves ESL pre-service teachers who are undergoing teaching practicum at public schools in Malaysia. This study will employ a quantitative method using the FLTA scale (FLTAS) to measure teachers' teaching anxiety. The scale included 27 out of 45 questions and was structured into five factors. Table 1 presents the FLTA scale to be used as the questionnaire.

**Table 1: Foreign Language Teaching Anxiety (FLTA) Scale**

Factors	Item	Statement
Self-perception of language proficiency	1	When I feel anxious in class, I have difficulty using English.
	2	I feel embarrassed when some students speak English better than me.
	3	I feel embarrassed because I am not good at English.
	4	It makes me nervous to use English in class.
	5	Unfamiliar topics in the textbook confuse me.
	6	I feel embarrassed when I think that I am not good at English.
	7	Pronunciation mistakes while I am speaking make me nervous.
	8	Making mistakes while I am speaking makes me feel embarrassed.
	9	I am bothered when I have difficulty teaching the cultural content of English.
	10	Unexpected questions from students put pressure on me.
	11	I forget almost everything while I am teaching.
	12	I feel tense when I have difficulty teaching grammar.
Teaching inexperience	13	I feel tense when I am in the classroom.
	14	I feel worried before entering the classroom.
	15	I feel anxious when I teach in the classroom.
	16	I think my lack of teaching experience makes me nervous.
	17	I fear making mistakes while I am teaching in the classroom.

Lack of student interest	18	I feel stressed when students do not participate in the activities.
	19	I feel upset because my students are bad at learning languages.
	20	I feel discouraged when students lose interest in the activities.
	21	I feel tense when students are not interested in the activities.
Fear of negative evaluation	22	My mentors' observations make me nervous.
	23	I feel panicked when my mentor-teacher observes me.
	24	Students' negative comments about me make me nervous.
Difficulties with time management	25	I feel panicked when I cannot finish the class on time.
	26	I am nervous when I finish the activities before the class ends.
	27	I feel tense when I am not prepared for the class.

This FLTA scale will be utilised because its validity and reliability were confirmed in a previous study by Aydin and Ustuk (2020). The research conducted aimed to assess the reliability and precision of DeVellis' Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (DeVellis, 2016). This study involved 100 senior students training to become English language teachers at a state university in Turkey. The results revealed that the scale exhibited a strong reliability coefficient and internal consistency when subjected to a five-factor solution. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage distributions, and mean, will analyse the data.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study anticipates uncovering insightful findings that shed light on the complex phenomenon of teaching anxiety and its implications for educators. The study expects to identify factors contributing to teaching concerns among ESL pre-service teachers in Malaysia who undergo teaching practicum in Malaysian public schools. These factors include pre-service teachers' self-perceptions of foreign language proficiency, leading inexperience, lack of student interest in their classes, fear of negative evaluation by mentors and students, and difficulties with time management. These findings will offer a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted origins of teaching anxiety. The results of this study can contribute to a sequel study investigating the possible strategies and methods to cope with teaching anxiety.

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