



Counter-Intuitive Correlation: Does Emotional Intelligence Always Mitigate Language Anxiety?

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DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.47134/jpbi.v3i3.2554>

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Received: 07-02-2026

Accepted: 19-03-2026

Published: 30-04-2026



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Abstract: Foreign language anxiety often hinders students' performance, yet the role of emotional intelligence in mitigating this stress remains complex and not fully understood, particularly among middle school learners. The purpose of this study is to look at middle school pupils' levels of emotional intelligence (EI) and foreign language anxiety (FLA), as well as the relationship and influence of these two variables. A quantitative correlational design was employed involving 58 students from two Indonesian middle schools. Data were collected using emotional intelligence and language anxiety questionnaires and analyzed through correlation and simple regression techniques. The findings indicate that most students possess average emotional intelligence (53.4%) and experience mild anxiety (53.5%). A statistical analysis finds a positive association ($r = 0.259$), indicating that higher emotional intelligence is connected with increased anxiety levels. The regression equation ($\hat{Y} = 70.241 + 0.639X$) further confirms that emotional intelligence significantly contributes to the variance in students' anxiety. These results suggest that emotional awareness in young learners does not necessarily reduce anxiety and may instead increase sensitivity to language learning challenges, highlighting the need for educators to design more nuanced and context-sensitive emotional support strategies in the classroom.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Anxiety, Learning English, Middle School

Introduction

Psychological aspects play an important part in learning English as a foreign or second language, and both teachers and learners must carefully examine them. Language acquisition is not just an intellectual endeavor involving grammar, vocabulary, and communication abilities; it also includes emotional aspects that greatly affect the success of learners. For Indonesian middle school students, acquiring English as a foreign language poses significant challenges because of discrepancies in linguistic structures, restricted opportunities for authentic language engagement, and diverse levels of motivation. In such circumstances, psychological variables such as emotional intelligence and anxiety become key determinants in shaping students' learning experiences and outcomes.

As one of the most widely discussed affective factors in language learning, anxiety is the apprehension about the things and events that had yet to come (Bhat et al., 2017). In learning a foreign language, anxiety can become one factor that contribute to students' activeness in performance so that students rarely asked enquiries if they were uncertainty about specific subjects in English due to their fairness of teachers' feedback and comment

(Rodriguez, 2022). According to Hu & Wang (2014), the anxiety happens as soon as a learner encounters fear or uneasiness as they are about to engage in language learning activities. The kind of anxiety is not only limited to speaking but can also occur in listening, reading, and writing tasks. Anxiety in the classroom can profoundly impact learners' confidence, communicative proficiency, and academic achievement. Students who experience high levels of anxiety often report symptoms such as nervousness, mental blocks, and difficulty concentrating, which can negatively impact their ability to process and produce language effectively.

From a broader psychological perspective, learning anxiety is characterized as a complex emotional state involving fear, tension, and uncertainty associated with the learning process (Kusumastuti, 2020). In certain instances, students encountering learning anxiety may be impacted by negative aspects of their behavioral experiences, such as concerns about failure, frustration in specific situations, and a sense of uncertainty in performing tasks. Apriani et al. (2021) further describe learning anxiety as a subjective and unpleasant experience resulting from emotional pressure and worry, which can impede kids' capacity to deal with academic obstacles. As a result, students may avoid participation, delay task completion, or even develop negative attitudes toward learning English.

In contrast to anxiety, emotional intelligence (EI) serves as a positive psychological resource that can help students manage their emotions more effectively. Goleman as cited by Lestari et al. (2022) described emotional intelligence as the individual's method of managing emotions through intelligence, controlling emotions to be balanced and responsive, being able to control themselves and motivate themselves, and having empathy and good social relationships and communication. During adolescence, a developmental stage characterized by significant emotional and psychological changes, emotional intelligence becomes particularly important. Teenagers often experience what is commonly referred to as "storm and stress," making them more vulnerable to emotional instability. In this regard, emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in helping students navigate these challenges and maintain emotional balance (Rachmadini et al., 2019).

Students possessing elevated emotional intelligence are typically more adept at regulating their emotions, such as worry, stress, and irritation, which exhibit a nonlinear correlation among them. (Thomas et al., 2023). They are more capable of maintaining a positive outlook, even in challenging situations, and are more resilient in the face of academic difficulties. Conversely, students with lower emotional intelligence may struggle to regulate their emotions, making them more susceptible to anxiety and other negative emotional states. This difference highlights the position of emotional intelligence as a protective issue that can enhance students' psychological well-being and learning performance.

An increasing number of studies has shown that anxiety and emotional intelligence are significantly correlated. Anxiety levels and emotional intelligence have been found to be inversely associated in a number of studies, suggesting that learners with higher emotional intelligence typically have lower anxiety levels. (Hyun-joo, 2022; Vaishyak & Joshi, 2023). This relationship suggests that emotional intelligence allows students to control their emotional responses well, thereby reducing the intensity and frequency of anxiety. In

addition, emotional intelligence has been shown to contribute to psychological resilience, which allows individuals to cope with stress and adversity more effectively (Zafar & Akhtar, 2023). Higher emotional intelligence students are better able to manage their anxieties and deal with the difficulties they encounter when learning a language. (Shengyao et al., 2024). This is especially crucial in the context of distance learning, where students may experience increased levels of anxiety due to various factors such as technical issues and the unfamiliarity of the online environment (Suhendro & Agustina, 2022). Emotional intelligence helps students to regulate their emotions, maintain a positive outlook, and effectively cope with the difficulties they encounter in their language learning journey (Mayang, 2025; Singh, 2025).

Empirical evidence from different cultural contexts also supports the inverse connection between emotional intelligence and anxiety. Research from a number of nations, including Korea and Pakistan, consistently demonstrates that pupils with higher emotional intelligence exhibit greater emotional maturity in handling stressful situations and have lower anxiety levels (Bhat et al., 2017; Zafar & Akhtar, 2023). These findings show that emotional intelligence plays a moderating role in students' adaptability to academic and social situations.

In addition to its impact on anxiety, emotional intelligence is also closely related to academic stress management. Parker et al. (2005) indicate that students with good emotional intelligence control are more proficient to manage of academic stress through effective coping strategies such as planning, problem-solving, and seeking social support. Similarly, Mayer et al. (2004) argue that emotional intelligence contributes to better social relationships, which can reduce anxiety arising from peer interaction and classroom dynamics. These social and emotional skills are necessary for providing a supportive learning environment that encourages student engagement and participation.

Furthermore, interventions aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence have been shown to produce positive outcomes in educational settings. Social and emotional learning (SEL) programs incorporated into school curricula can greatly enhance kids' emotional intelligence, social skills, and general well-being, according to Durlak et al. (2011). These programs typically include activities designed to develop emotional awareness, empathy, and communication skills. As a result, learners grow more suited to handle their emotions and deal with academic challenges..

Improving emotional intelligence also has implications for learners' achievement at school. MacCann et al. (2011) found that emotional intelligence is positively correlated with academic performance, particularly in subjects that require emotional engagement, such as language learning. Students with higher emotional intelligence tend to stay focused, motivated, and persistent in their learning efforts. This suggests that emotional intelligence not only helps reduce anxiety but also contributes to improved learning outcomes.

Even though emotional intelligence and anxiety have been extensively studied, there are currently few studies that particularly look at the relationship between these factors among Indonesian junior high school students. Most existing studies have been conducted in different cultural contexts, which may not fully reflect the unique characteristics of Indonesian learners. Therefore, there is a need for further research to explore how emotional

intelligence and foreign language anxiety interact among Indonesian middle school students.

It is especially crucial to comprehend this link because it can help teachers create instructional strategies that effectively address both the cognitive and emotional components of learning. Teachers can assist students in improving coping skills, lowering anxiety, and creating a more encouraging and supportive learning environment by cultivating emotional intelligence. Students' engagement, self-assurance, and general academic achievement in studying English can all be improved as a result.

Based on the discussion above, it is assumed that emotional intelligence theatres an important part in reducing foreign language anxiety. Emotional intelligence contributes to making students to be more capable of managing their emotions, building confidence, and coping with the challenges of learning English. Consequently, they are less likely to experience debilitating anxiety that may hinder their learning process.

Then, the purpose of this study is to look at the relationship between junior high school students' concern over learning a foreign language and their emotional intelligence. It is anticipated that the results of this study will add to the body of knowledge already in existence and have useful ramifications for English language instruction in Indonesia.

Based on this rationale, the hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

1. There is a significant correlation between emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety in learning English (H_a).
2. There is no significant correlation between emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety in learning English (H_0).

Methodology

In order to determine the degree, link, and contribution between students' emotional intelligence (as the independent variable, X) and their anxiety during learning English (as the dependent variable, Y), this study used a correlational research design. Correlation analysis, according to John W. Creswell, is a statistical method for determining how closely two or more variables are related and tend to vary together.

The participants of this study were 58 seventh-grade students selected through random sampling from two schools in Hulu Sungai Regency. Two different kinds of questionnaires were used to gather data. The first questionnaire, which was modified from Carepatron, assessed pupils' emotional intelligence. Ten statements were accompanied with four choices: strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The dimension of this questionnaire were self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills were the five dimensions covered by the questionnaire.

The second questionnaire, which was modified from Elaine K. Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, measured students' anxiety related to foreign languages. 33 statements were accompanied with five choices—strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. It assessed four aspects: test anxiety, English classroom anxiety, communication anxiety, and Fear of earning a low grade.

With the help of the English teachers at each school, the questionnaires were given to the pupils during January and February of 2024. The association between the variables was then ascertained by analyzing the gathered data using SPSS version 26.

Result and Discussion

Students’ emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety

The result of the questionnaire both emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety can be seen in the following table:

Table 1: Students’ Emotional Intelligence Level

No	EI Level	Range	Frequency	Percentage %
1	High	30 – 40	26	44.7
2	Average	20 – 29	31	53.4
3	Low	10 – 19	1	1.7
Total			58	100

Based on the Table 1, 26 students are in high level (44.7 %), 31 students are in average level (53.4 %), and 1 student are in low category (1.7 %). It can be said the mostly students’ emotional intelligence is in the average level.

Table 2: Students’ Foreign Language Anxiety Level

No	Anxiety Level	Range	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Very Anxious	124 – 165	0	0
2	Anxious	108 – 123	2	3.4
3	Mildly Anxious	87 – 107	31	53.2
4	Relaxed	66 – 86	24	41.2
5	Very Relaxed	33 – 65	1	1.7
Total			58	100

The result shows there are 0 students in very anxious level (0%), 2 students in anxious level (3.4 %), 31 students in mildly anxious level (53.5 %), 24 students in relaxed level (41.2 %), and 1 student in very relaxed level (1.7%). Thus, based on the table, mostly students’ foreign language anxiety is in midly anxious level.

Correlation between Students’ Emotional Intelligence and Foreign Language Anxiety

1. Testing of Statistical Assumptions

a. Test of Normality

The initial test is to assess the normality of the data collected for this research. The following table displays the normality test results for data on emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety:

Table 3. Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statisti c	df	Sig.	Statisti c	df	Sig.

Anxiety	.064	58	.200*	.988	58	.855
Emotional Intelligence	.108	58	.092	.984	58	.625

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test is used to determine the normality of the data; a significant value more than 0.05 shows that the data is normal. According to the table above, the significant value for emotional intelligence is 0.092 ($0.092 > 0.05$), whereas foreign language anxiety is 0.200 ($0.200 > 0.05$). Because the significance level for attitude toward learning and language learning strategies is greater than 0.05, the data is normally distributed.

b. Test of Linearity

The next step is linearity testing, which determines whether the data is linear. The analysis is performed by regressing the independent variables: Emotional intelligence to the dependent variable: foreign language anxiety. The result is shown below:

Table 4. Anova Table

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Emotional Intelligence * Anxiety	Between Groups	(Combined)	361.307	26	13.896	1.048	.446
		Linearity	51.965	1	51.965	3.920	.057
		Deviation from Linearity	309.343	25	12.374	.933	.566
	Within Groups		410.917	31	13.255		
Total			772.224	57			

The result of the linearity test displayed in Table 4 showed that the significant value was 0.566 ($0.566 > 0.05$), which were greater than .05 level of significance. Therefore, all the regression result of the independents variable to dependent variable in this research is proved to be linear. Thus, since the two assumptions in this research have been fulfilled and therefore the testing of the hypothesis formulated in this research can be carried out by using Pearson Correlation.

c. Correlation Analysis

Person Correlation is employed to examine the association between emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety. The correlation was calculated using SPSS version 26, as shown in the table below.

Table 5. Correlations

	Emotional Intelligence	Anxiety

Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1	.259*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.049
	N	58	58
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	.259*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.049	
	N	58	58

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The analysis above showed a significant positive relationship ($r = 0.259$, $p = 0.049$) between foreign language anxiety and poor levels of emotional intelligence. It shows that an increase in emotional intelligence is followed by an increase in anxiety in respondents, even though the relationship is in the weak category. It means that H_a is accepted and H_o is rejected.

2. Contribution of Emotional Intelligence and Foreign Language Anxiet

To determine the contribution of the independent and dependent variables, simple regression analysis is used. In this study, the independent variable is emotional intelligence (X), while the dependent variable is foreign language anxiety (Y).

Table 6 Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	70.241	9.149		7.678	.000
	Emotional Intelligence	.639	.318	.259	2.010	.049

a. Dependent Variable: Anxiety

Then, the score is inserted to the formula

$$y' = a + bX$$

$$y' = 70.241 + 0.639X$$

- y' : dependent variable
- a : constant
- b : regression coefficient
- X : independent variable

The explanation of the formula is the constant value is 70.241 which mean if the score of emotional intelligent is 0, the score of foreign language anxiety is 70.24. Moreover, regression coefficient of emotional intelligent is 0.639 which means if emotional intelligent increase one scores; the foreign language anxiety will increase 0.639. It indicates that the extent of emotional intelligence influences foreign language anxiety of the students at Junior High School.

Discussion

The current study investigated the relationship between students' emotional intelligence (EI) and foreign language anxiety (FLA) and discovered three key findings: (1) most students had a moderate level of emotional intelligence, (2) the majority had mild levels of foreign language anxiety, and (3) there was a statistically significant but weak positive correlation ($r = 0.259$, $p = 0.049$) between EI and FLA. These findings contribute to the expanding corpus of research on emotional variables in second and foreign language learning, particularly among adolescent learners.

The predominance of moderate emotional intelligence among students suggests that learners possess basic competencies in recognizing and managing emotions, yet these skills may not be sufficiently bloomed to coping with the complex emotional demands of foreign language learning. Emotional intelligence, particularly self-awareness, self-regulation, and social skills, has a significant impact on how students respond to difficult academic settings. Previous research has consistently highlighted that emotional intelligence enhances learners' adaptability and resilience in academic settings. For instance, Han et al. (2022) demonstrated that emotional intelligence contributes positively to students' academic success by enabling better emotional regulation and communication skills in language classrooms. However, the effectiveness of EI depends not only on awareness but also on the ability to regulate emotional responses effectively.

The fact that the majority of students are slightly nervous is consistent with earlier research suggesting that foreign language anxiety is a common phenomenon among language learners. Anxiety in language learning environments is frequently associated with dread of unfavorable evaluation, communicative apprehension, and test anxiety. Even at moderate levels, anxiety can influence learners' willingness to participate and their overall language performance.

Empirical research demonstrates that foreign language anxiety has a negative effect on academic progress and language proficiency. For example, Zhu (2024) found that higher levels of classroom anxiety significantly predict lower English achievement, emphasizing the detrimental role of anxiety in language acquisition. Similarly, broader research indicates that anxiety interferes with cognitive processing, reducing learners' ability to encode and retrieve linguistic information effectively.

One of the most intriguing findings of this study is the positive relationship between emotional intelligence and foreign language anxiety, which contrasts with the dominant view in the literature that EI typically reduces anxiety (Bhat et al., 2017; Suhendro & Agustina, 2022; Thomas et al., 2023). Several plausible explanations can account for this result.

First, students with higher emotional intelligence may exhibit greater emotional awareness that lead them to more accurately perceive and report their anxiety levels. In this sense, higher EI does not necessarily increase anxiety but rather enhances sensitivity to emotional experiences. Second, emotional intelligence is a multidimensional construct; while awareness may be developed, emotion regulation skills may still be insufficient, resulting in heightened perceived anxiety.

Although many studies report a negative association between EI and FLA, they also acknowledge the complexity of this relationship. For example, Han et al. (2022) found that emotional intelligence can reduce foreign language anxiety indirectly, particularly when mediated by factors such as emotional communication and supported by a positive classroom environment. This suggests that the relationship between EI and anxiety is context-dependent rather than purely direct. Furthermore, qualitative evidence suggests that students with higher emotional intelligence may experience both fear and positive emotions, such as delight, during language learning. This coexistence demonstrates the dynamic character of emotional experiences in second language acquisition.

The weak strength of the correlation ($r = 0.259$) indicates that emotional intelligence explains only a small portion of the variance in foreign language anxiety. This implies that other factors play a significant role, including classroom environment, teaching methods, peer interaction, assessment pressure, and learner personality traits.

Research has shown that supportive classroom environments can buffer the negative effects of anxiety and enhance the benefits of emotional intelligence. Han et al. (2022) further emphasized that classroom climate significantly moderates the relationship between EI and anxiety, suggesting that emotionally supportive teaching practices are essential for optimizing learning outcomes.

Additionally, recent studies highlight that modern learning environments, including technology-enhanced classrooms, introduce both positive and negative emotional experiences (Li et al., 2024; Xin & Derakhshan, 2024). Learners may feel motivated and engaged, yet still experience anxiety and stress depending on task difficulty and interaction demands.

The findings have substantial consequences for language teaching practice. First, emotional intelligence should not be viewed as a static trait but as a skill set that can be developed through targeted interventions. Language educators should incorporate emotional regulation training, stress management strategies, and social-emotional learning (SEL) activities. Second, teachers should create low-anxiety classroom environments by fostering supportive interactions, reducing fear of negative evaluation, and encouraging collaborative learning. Third, assessment practices should be designed to minimize excessive pressure and promote confidence in language use.

Conclusion

This study shows that students generally have a moderate level of emotional intelligence and experience a relatively low level of foreign language anxiety. The relationship between these two variables is positive but weak, suggesting that their interaction is not straightforward and may depend on various contextual factors. Interestingly, higher emotional intelligence does not necessarily lead to lower anxiety. In some cases, students who are more emotionally aware may actually feel more anxious if they do not yet have strong skills to regulate their emotions.

Based on these findings, it is important for language teaching practices to go beyond simply raising students' emotional awareness. Teachers should also provide practical

support to help students manage their anxiety effectively. By combining emotional intelligence development with appropriate coping strategies, students can be better supported in creating more positive and productive language learning experiences.

To ensure sustainability, future implementations should integrate emotional intelligence and anxiety management into the regular curriculum through continuous teacher training, structured classroom activities, and periodic evaluation, rather than treating them as one-time interventions. In terms of scalability, this approach can be adapted and applied to other regions with similar educational contexts by adjusting cultural and institutional factors, allowing broader implementation across diverse school settings.

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