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## **LEARNERS' LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING MOTIVATION: AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS**

**Nurshahirah Azman<sup>1\*</sup>, Mirza Madihah Zainal<sup>2</sup>, Noor Fazzrienee JZ Nun  
Ramlan<sup>1</sup> & Amirah Athirah Amir Yazid<sup>1</sup>**

*<sup>1</sup> Academy of Language Studies  
Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Seri Iskandar, Perak, MALAYSIA*

*<sup>2</sup> The International School of Penang (UPLANDS),  
Pulau Pinang, MALAYSIA*

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Corresponding Author:  
nurshahirah@uitm.edu.my

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### ABSTRACT

Language anxiety is an ongoing concern for ESL instructors and educators, impacting students' performance in English language classrooms. Despite years of discussion, learners still grapple with language anxiety. Simultaneously, motivation has emerged as a pivotal factor in English language learning success. This research examines how diverse types of learning anxiety, such as fear of negative evaluation, apprehension of speech and fear of assessments have a bearing on learners' motivation. Employing a quantitative approach, this exploratory study gathered data through questionnaires distributed to 74 undergraduate students, chosen purposively. A 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire was used, incorporating demographic details, the English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, and the English Language Motivation Scale. The results spotlight a significant correlation between learners' anxiety levels and their language learning motivation, with fear of negative evaluation as the main predictor impacting motivation. Motivation and language learning anxiety level were also found to be moderately low among the respondents, with the relationship being weak, positive in nature. These findings illuminate how motivation

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could potentially alleviate anxiety's impact, thus enhancing language learning effectiveness.

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## **1. Introduction**

English has largely become a global language as it has been commonly used by speakers from different parts of the world (Rao, 2019). In schools and higher education, English is a compulsory subject to take and pass in the academic year. Thus, this has led to students competing as to who is able to speak and understand that language fluently. The competitiveness has been derived from English being the fastest most popular language used in business and education as explained by Rao (2019), where English is broadly used throughout this modern world. This has led to students being expected to be able to articulate the English language inside and outside of the classroom. Hence, it correlates to one's motivation in learning the English language as Lau et al. (2019) explains that learning ESL may boost students' confidence to work harder to achieve fluency in the targeted language.

However, despite having their own personal reasons and goals in learning the English language, some students do face anxiety when learning a certain language. In the Malaysian context, language anxiety can happen as early as kindergarten since language is taught from adolescents up to adults. When Malaysians learn English as a second language, it may lead to language anxiety as they are worried about their language ability and skills (Tandang & Arif, 2019).

In Malaysia, English is highly seen as a second language that learners must fluently master to be respected and seen in any organisations. This leads to people being motivated because of their desire to succeed to improve themselves in the future. Nevertheless, learners are still not adequately proficient in English language, mainly affected by their learning motivation and anxiety. Many previous studies have only explored on the role of motivation and anxiety as separate components, while the interplay of these two would lead to greater insights for language teachers and educators to have to improve learners' performance in their English language classes.

Both anxiety and motivation are significant factors influencing language learning results and are closely intertwined in the context of second or foreign language acquisition. However, research examining both language anxiety and motivation concurrently within a language learning context appears to be somewhat limited up to this point. Consequently, there is a need for further investigation in this domain to ascertain the extent to which English language learning anxiety and language learning motivation intersect. Consequently, this current study endeavours to explore the correlation between English language learning anxiety and English language motivation among undergraduate students in a higher education setting.

The ensuing research questions are as follows:

**RQ1:** How do English language learners perceive their level of English language anxiety and English language learning motivation level?

**RQ2:** How does students' language learning anxiety (fear of negative evaluation, apprehension of speech communication and fear of assessments) impact their level of language learning motivation?

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Language Learning Anxiety**

In a second language classroom where learners are required to gain fluidity of, there is always an essence of anxiety as Dansieh et al. (2021) explained in detail, it is a common phenomenon among students when they must speak in the English language setting. The word anxiety itself gives the connotation of a learner feeling pressured, nervous, and worried inside their nervous systems (Toghraee & Shahrokhi, 2014 as cited in Tandang & Arif, 2019). Thus, language learning anxiety is not an uncommon issue as Lau et al. (2019) believes that in English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom, countless students have a fear of speaking in English.

Language learning anxiety often exists in a setting where communication plays an important part in the classroom. As mentioned by Genelza (2021), when students need to communicate inside the class using English, most of them are reluctant to speak because they are anxious of speaking in front of the whole class. Said & Omar (2022) supports this by explaining that when students give a brief presentation in class, it can lead to them having severe anxiety which leads to them feeling stressful.

### **2.2 Motivation in Language Learning**

For a person to master a second language, they have to acquire a strong sense of motivation as it plays an important role in achieving success. As stated by Genelza (2021), motivation can happen in the classroom itself as the goal is to educate students on how to communicate effectively in the English language. Aside from that, intrinsic motivation may happen inside the second language classroom as Lau et al. (2019) disclosed that undergraduate students become confident in language learning because these students anticipate the possibility of being able to speak the English language fluently in the future.

Moreover, when students learn a second language, their anxiety sparks as a motivation for them to try harder to become proficient in the targeted language (Lau et al., 2019). This is also supported by Said & Omar (2022) since having a certain amount of anxiety would act as a positive guide for learners to maintain their motivation in language learning.

### **2.3 Relevant Past Studies on Learning Anxiety and Learning Motivation**

Previous studies have explored language learning anxiety and learning motivation. Majority reported moderate levels of anxiety experienced by students (Cabansag, 2020; Lau et al., 2019; Solangi et al., 2021). Several studies reported a moderately low to high level of anxiety (Sabri et al., 2021; Said & Omar, 2022; Tandang & Arif, 2019) mainly due to fear of failure affected by their apprehension of assessments. This eventually led to students' low performance in assessments. Sabri et al. (2021) revealed that when learning the English language, students are expected to have a native-like language proficiency, and this may cause anxiety as it could hinder one's motivation in learning that language. Solangi et al. (2021) further proposed that in India and Pakistan, English

language is commonly used, and students are demanded to excel in that language. This may give impact on students' motivation and language learning anxiety.

In terms of motivation, Gede et al. (2020) in their study reported a moderate level of motivation among the high school students, with integrative motivation being the main drive. Subramaniam et al. (2021) on the other hand found in their study that their respondents experienced high motivation levels, leading them to be more willing to participate in activities.

The interplay between language learning anxiety and learning motivation together has not been extensively explored by many, but a few (Genelza, 2021; Malik et al., 2023; Shehzadi et al., 2021; Zabidin et al., 2023). Significant correlation was reported between the two variables, which showed the importance of taking into consideration learners' anxiety level to ensure their motivation level is sustained (Shehzadi et al., 2021; Zabidin et al., 2023). Besides that, among most of the type of learning anxiety which are influential towards learners' motivation level, majority of the studies revealed that learners are reluctant to participate and most likely become demotivated due to fear of negative evaluation (Alharbi, 2017; Chioukh & Kaouache, 2021; Dansieh et al., 2021; Nkhi, 2023; Sabri et al., 2021; Sun & Zhang, 2022) and fear of oral communication (Genelza, 2021).

In sum, these past studies have shown significant findings on second language learning anxiety and how it affects students' motivation.

### **3. Methodology**

This study included 74 undergraduate students (52 females and 22 males) from various academic disciplines at both public and private universities, selected through purposive sampling. It adopted a quantitative approach to examine the relationships between language learning motivation and anxiety. A 21-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986), assessed anxiety across dimensions: fear of negative evaluation, apprehension of speech, and fear of assessment. Motivation levels were measured using a 21-item scale adapted from Schmidt & Watanabe's (2001) English Language Motivation Scale, focusing on intrinsic motivation, instrumental orientation, integrative orientation, interest in foreign languages and cultures, task value, strength of motivation, and competitiveness, tailored to the context of university-level English language learning.

Data analysis employed SPSS version 22, including descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for variable summaries. Pearson's correlation analysis explored the relationship between language learning anxiety and motivation, while multiple linear regression assessed the predictive power of motivation on English language proficiency, controlling for relevant covariates. Mean score interpretations were conducted for RQ1 following Norasmah & Salmah (2011) guidelines in Table 1(a), and Pearson's correlation results were interpreted based on Kowang et al. (2015) as illustrated in Table 1(b).

Table 1(a)  
Mean Scores Interpretation

Mean Score	Interpretation of Mean Score
1.00 – 2.00	Low
2.01 – 3.00	Moderately Low
3.01 – 4.00	Moderately High
4.01 – 5.00	High

Source: Norasmah & Salmah (2011)

Table 1(b)  
Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r) Interpretation

R	Strength
0 – 0.19	Very weak
0.20 – 0.39	Weak
0.40 – 0.59	Moderate
0.60 – 0.79	Strong
0.80 – 1.00	Very strong

Source: Kowang et al. (2015)

Instrument content validity was ensured by adapting established instruments. Reliability was established through a pilot study with 20 respondents, demonstrating strong internal consistency. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale was 0.912, and for its sections, it ranged from 0.806 to 0.853. The English Language Motivation Scale exhibited a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.856, with subsections ranging from 0.577 to 0.957, affirming their reliability.

#### 4. Results

The demographic analysis of the respondents reveals a gender distribution, with 29.7% identifying as male and 70.3% as female. Most respondents fall within the age category of 18-20 years (889.2%), with a smaller proportion falling into the 21-23 years age category (10.8%). Notably, none of the respondents are aged 24 years or older. In terms of academic programs, the majority are enrolled in diploma programs (87.8%), while the remaining respondents are pursuing degree programs (9.5%) and foundation programs (2.7%). Regarding the educational institutions, 51.4% of respondents are undergraduate students attending public universities, while the remaining 48.6% are affiliated with private universities.

When considering the semester of study, most respondents are in their first semester (60.8%), followed by those in their second semester (27%), third semester (9.5%), fourth semester (1.4%), and fifth semester (1.4%). Additionally, the data indicates that most respondents are currently enrolled in one English language course (51.4%), while 39.2% are taking their second English language

course. A smaller percentage of respondents (5.4%) are enrolled in three English language courses, and 4.1% have taken four English language courses during their academic pursuits.

### **Learners' Perception on Their Level of English Language Learning Anxiety and Motivation**

To determine the participating respondents' perception on their level of English language learning anxiety, as well as level of learning motivation, the statements for both instruments used were analysed. The scale for the English Language Learning Anxiety is interval, so its central tendency is the mean scores, with standard deviation for its variability (Mohd Ghazali & Jahari, 2021). Hence, mean score interpretation was conducted to analyse the variable.

*Table 2  
Learners' Perception on Their Level of English Language Learning Anxiety*

<b>Mean</b>	<b>Median</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
2.37	2.357	.425

The findings in Table 2 reveal that participants' English Language Learning Anxiety, as indicated by a mean score of 2.37 (S.D.= 0.425) across 21 statements, falls within the category of Moderately Low based on the mean score interpretation by Norasmah & Salmah (2011).

A more detailed tabulation of mean scores for the two subsections of the English Language Learning Anxiety Scale is presented in Table 3.

*Table 3  
Learners' Perception on Their Level of English Language Learning Anxiety*

<b>Subsections on English Language Learning Anxiety Scale</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Level of Perception</b>
Fear of Negative Evaluation	2.357	0.425	Moderately Low
Apprehension of Speech Communication	2.498	0.450	Moderately Low
Fear of English Assessments	2.270	0.435	Moderately Low

Based on Table 3, all three subsections of the English Language Learning Anxiety achieved moderately low levels of perception, as perceived by the learners. Apprehension of Speech Communication ranked the highest mean score (.=2.498), followed by fear of negative evaluation (m=2.357) and fear of English assessments (m=2.270).

Next, for English Language Motivation level, the study findings in Table 4 reveal that learners' motivation level, as indicated by a mean score of 2.27 (S.D.=0.435) across 21 statements, also falls within the category of Moderately Low.



Table 4  
Learners' Perception on Their English Language Motivation Level

Mean	Median	Std. Deviation
2.27	2.25	.435

This suggests that, on average, the participants displayed a moderate level of motivation in the context of their learning experiences. A more detailed illustration of mean scores for the six subsections of English Language Motivation is illustrated in Table 5.

Table 5  
Learners' Perception on Their Level of Learning Motivation

Subsections on English Language Learning Motivation	Mean	Std. Deviation	Level of Perception
Intrinsic Motivation	2.82	.770	Moderately Low
Instrumental Orientation	2.77	.881	Moderately Low
Integrative Orientation	2.97	.849	Moderately Low
Interest in Foreign Lang. & Cultures	2.92	.876	Moderately Low
Task Value	2.85	.757	Moderately Low
Competitiveness	2.74	.837	Moderately Low

Based on Table 5, all six subsections of the Learning Motivation Level achieved moderately low level of perception, as perceived by the learners. Integrative orientation scored the highest mean score (M = 2.97, S.D. = 0.849) and the lowest is Competitiveness (M = 2.74, S.D. = 0.837).

### Correlation between Learners' Language Learning Anxiety and Motivation

The Pearson Correlation analysis in Table 9 revealed a statistically significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.360$ ,  $p = 0.02$ ) between learners' language learning anxiety and their English language motivation.

Table 6  
Correlation between Learners' Language Learning Anxiety Level and English Language Motivation

		Language Learning Anxiety
English Language Motivation	Pearson Correlation	.360
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
	N	74

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

This result indicates that as language learning anxiety levels increase, English language motivation levels also tend to increase, albeit weakly. However, it is crucial to note that the correlation is

characterised as weak ( $r = 0.360$ ). This implies that while there is a statistical association between anxiety and motivation, this association is not particularly strong.

Another correlation analysis was done to examine the strength of relationship for each type of language learning anxiety with the English Language Motivation level. Table 10 illustrates the result of this analysis.

*Table 7*  
*Correlation between Learners' Language Learning Anxiety Level and English Language Motivation*

		<b>Fear of Negative Evaluation</b>	<b>Apprehension of Speech Communication</b>	<b>Fear of English Assessments</b>
<b>English Language Motivation</b>	Pearson Correlation	.384	.345	.213
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.003	.069
	N	74	74	74

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

Based on Table 7, out of the three types of language learning anxiety, Fear of Negative Evaluation obtained a higher significant correlation value with the English Language Motivation ( $r=0.384$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The second one is Apprehension of Speech Communication ( $r=0.345$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The third type, Fear of English Assessments, posed no significant correlation with English language motivation ( $r=0.213$ ,  $p>0.05$ ).

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of this relationship, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. This model included three predictor variables: Fear of Negative Evaluation, Apprehension of Speech Communication, and Fear of Assessments. This explored the extent to which variation in English Language Motivation could be explained by three independent variables. The result is presented in Table 8(a), Table 8 (b) and Table 8(c).

The F-test in Table 8(a) reported a p-value of 0.003, which is less than the conventional significance level of 0.05. This indicates that the overall model (including the predictor variables: Fear of Negative Evaluation, Apprehension of Speech Communication, and Fear of Assessments) is statistically significant. In other words, there is evidence to suggest that these predictor variables collectively have an impact on explaining the variance in English Language Motivation. The statistical significance of the model, as indicated by the F-test ( $p = 0.003$ ), suggests that the combination of these three predictor variables has a significant impact on explaining variations in English Language Motivation.

Table 8(a)  
Multiple Linear Regression: ANOVA<sup>a</sup> (F-test)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	<b>Regression</b>	7.115	3	2.372	5.250	.003 <sup>b</sup>
	<b>Residual</b>	31.620	70	.452		
	<b>Total</b>	38.734	73			

a. Dependent Variable: MotivationALL

b. Predictors: (Constant), AnxietyTest, AnxietyAppr, AnxietyFear

Table 8(b) reported the R-squared value ( $R^2 = 0.149$ ), which indicates that approximately 14.9% of the variance in English Language Motivation can be explained by the predictor variables included in the model. This means that while the model is statistically significant, it explains only a modest proportion of the total variance in English Language Motivation.

Table 8(b)  
Multiple Linear Regression: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.429 <sup>a</sup>	.184	.149	.67209

a. Predictors: (Constant), AnxietyTest, AnxietyAppr, AnxietyFear

In Table 8(c), the p-values for each of the predictor variables (Fear of Negative Evaluation, Apprehension of Speech Communication, and Fear of Assessments) are reported. Fear of Negative Evaluation has a p-value of 0.021 ( $<0.05$ ), indicating that it is statistically significant. This suggests that Fear of Negative Evaluation has a significant impact on English Language Motivation.

Apprehension of Speech Communication has a p-value of 0.119, which is greater than 0.05 (but still relatively close), indicating that it is not statistically significant at the conventional significance level of 0.05. This shows that learners' fear of speech communication did not affect their motivation in language learning.

Fear of Assessment has a p-value of 0.232, which is greater than 0.05 and not statistically significant. This suggests that Fear of Assessment may not have a significant impact on English Language Motivation based on this analysis. In other words, the fear or anxiety related to assessments, such as tests or exams, does not seem to be a significant predictor of learners' motivation to learn English in the context of this research.

Table 8(c)  
Multiple Linear Regression: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.497	.481		3.112	.003
	<b>AnxietyFear</b>	.486	.206	.381	2.356	.021
	<b>AnxietyAppr</b>	.367	.233	.227	1.579	.119
	<b>AnxietyTest</b>	-.323	.268	-.193	-1.206	.232

a. Dependent Variable: MotivationALL

The model is statistically significant, meaning that it collectively explains some of the variance in English Language Motivation. Fear of Negative Evaluation appears to be a significant predictor, while Apprehension of Speech Communication and Fear of Assessment may not have as strong an influence, although further investigation or a larger sample size could yield different results.

## 5. Discussion

Participants reported relatively low levels of anxiety in their English language learning pursuits. While some degree of anxiety may exist, it is not a prominent concern. This moderately low anxiety level indicates that participants generally feel comfortable and confident in their English language learning experiences. This finding is in line with the study done by Lau et al. (2019) who found that their respondents, ESL undergraduates also experience a moderate level of language learning anxiety, albeit more focused on speaking skills. They also revealed that the ESL learners experience the highest anxiety in regard to apprehension of communication as compared to fear of negative evaluation and fear of assessments, which echoes with the findings in this current study. This finding is also in accordance with the study done by Solangi et al. (2021) who also revealed the moderate level of anxiety among their 200 undergraduate ESL students. Cabansag (2020) whose research yielded comparable results, indicated that the moderate level of anxiety suggests that although ESL learners may display signs of anxiety, it remains at a moderate level, and their commitment to attending classes remains strong.

For motivation, the participants also displayed a moderately low level of motivation in the context of their learning experiences. While motivation is present, it may not be as robust as in situations where motivation levels are higher. This finding is in line with a study done by Gede et al. (2020) who also found their respondents to experience moderate levels of motivation in most of their motivation dimensions. However, while this present study revealed the highest moderate level of motivation for integrative orientation, the study by Gede et al. (2020) revealed it to be mainly instrumental motivation. This present study also contradicts the findings of a study by Subramaniam et al. (2021) where respondents demonstrated moderately high motivation levels. These discrepancies warrant further investigation to explore additional variables that may contribute to these differences in findings.

Next, this study identified a weak but positive correlation, suggesting that learners with higher levels of language learning anxiety may also display increased motivation in learning English. It's

important to emphasise that this correlation, although statistically significant ( $r = 0.360$ ), is relatively weak. In our sample, it appears that learners experiencing higher language learning anxiety tend to exhibit higher motivation levels, consistent with prior research, such as Shehzadi et al. (2021), and findings from (Zabidin et al., 2023), which also noted significant correlations between anxiety and learning motivation.

While the correlation is weak, it is noteworthy that the relationship is positive. This indicates that learners with higher language learning anxiety may also demonstrate elevated motivation levels in learning English. It's essential to clarify that correlation does not imply causation, but it suggests that learners with moderate levels of motivation tend to have similar levels of anxiety in language learning. This aligns with the research conducted by Berowa et al. (2018), which emphasizes the importance of maintaining an optimal level of anxiety, as it can benefit learners' motivation and commitment to acquiring the target language. Several factors may contribute to this relatively weak relationship. First, language learning motivation and anxiety are complex constructs influenced by various individual, situational, and cultural factors (King et al., 2019). The interplay of these multifaceted elements can lead to diverse outcomes in learners' motivation and anxiety levels. Additionally, other variables not examined in this study may play significant roles in shaping learners' motivation and anxiety. These could include the quality of language instruction, learners' self-efficacy beliefs, and their prior language learning experiences.

This study also revealed that while the model is statistically significant, it explains only a modest proportion of the total variance in English Language Motivation. While this proportion may appear modest, it is consistent with the previous study done by King and colleagues (2019) which has also found that motivation in language learning is influenced by multiple complex factors. These findings further emphasise the multifaceted nature of language learning motivation.

Among the three types of language learning anxiety, fear of negative evaluation has a significant impact on English Language Motivation. This finding aligns with the existing literature (Sabri et al., 2021) highlighting the substantial influence of learners' concerns about being negatively evaluated by others on their motivation to engage in language learning activities. This finding also coincides with other studies (Alharbi, 2017; Nkhi, 2023; Sun & Zhang, 2022) which revealed that students lack motivation to speak in the classroom because they fear of being negatively evaluated or laughed at by others when committing some grammatical errors.

Surprisingly, this study revealed that learners' fear of speech communication and fear of assessment did not serve as the significant predictor for their motivation in language learning. Fear of speech communication nevertheless scored a borderline significance ( $p=0.12$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) which suggests a potential influence. Speech-related apprehension may play a role in motivation, particularly in larger, more diverse samples. Further research with a larger sample size might elucidate a clearer relationship. This would then be supported by the study done by Genelza (2021) with bigger sample size ( $n=120$ ) who found that learners are mostly demotivated when their level of anxiety is high, showing there is a relationship between speech apprehension and their motivation, thus calling for intervention program in the classroom. Further research with a larger sample size might elucidate a clearer relationship. Besides that, the fear or anxiety related to assessments, such as tests or exams, also does not seem to be a significant predictor at all of learners' motivation to learn English in the context of this research ( $p=0.23$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). This finding contradicts an earlier study (Sabri et al., 2021) that has highlighted the role of assessment-related anxiety in influencing motivation among learners.

## **6. Conclusion**

In summary, there is a weak correlation between anxiety and motivation, which might appear counterintuitive, but it suggests that there are intricate relationships at play. Language instructors should consider the interplay of these factors in their teaching methods, recognizing that learners with anxiety might possess higher motivation. Next, while learners' fear of negative evaluation emerged as a significant predictor, the roles of apprehension of speech communication and fear of assessments warrant further investigation. These findings highlight the complexity of language learning motivation and emphasise the importance of considering multiple factors in educational contexts. These findings have implications for educators and researchers alike. This brings forth the importance of addressing anxiety constructively. It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, including its relatively small sample size and the potential influence of contextual factors. Larger-scale studies encompassing diverse populations could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics between anxiety and motivation.

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## **Authors Contributions**

*Nurshahirah Azman:* The first author was responsible for developing the initial research idea, formulating research questions, and designing the study's framework, and conducted fieldwork, surveys, and experiments, gathering primary data for analysis. Also contributed to the design and selection of research methods, ensuring data validity and reliability.

*Mirza Madiyah Zainal:* The second author conducted an extensive literature review, identifying relevant studies and theories to support the research. Also contributed to the methodology, results, and discussion sections, ensuring coherence and clarity

*Noor Fazzriene JZ Nun Ramlan:* The third author collaborated on data analysis, conducting specific statistical tests and assisting with result interpretation. Played a key role in revising and proofreading the manuscript.

*Amirah Athirah Amir Yazid:* The fourth author assisted in collecting primary data, managing data sources, and ensuring data quality. Also assisted with manuscript revisions and proofreading, as well as managed the citation and referencing format, ensuring adherence to journal guidelines.

## **Conflict of Interest**

There is no conflict of interest associated with this publication.

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