

Academic Anxiety of Foreign Students in Indonesia and Its Handling: An Educational Psychology Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Academic anxiety is a prevalent issue among international students adjusting to unfamiliar educational environments. In Indonesia, foreign students often face emotional stress due to differences in academic systems, communication styles, and cultural norms. This study aims to explore the forms of academic anxiety experienced by foreign students and analyze effective handling strategies from an educational psychology perspective. This research employed a descriptive qualitative approach using fieldwork methods. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations involving seven informants, including four international students and three faculty members from a state Islamic university in Indonesia. Secondary data were obtained from institutional documents. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model through data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Validation was conducted through source triangulation and member checking. The findings reveal three major forms of academic anxiety: communication-related anxiety due to language barriers, social anxiety stemming from cultural adjustment, and innovation-related anxiety influenced by limited academic self-confidence. Handling efforts include structured communicative interventions, inclusive socialization programs, and the development of academic self-efficacy. Educational psychology offers a strategic framework to manage academic anxiety through adaptive learning environments and culturally responsive pedagogical practices. Implementing supportive interventions enhances student engagement, self-confidence, and academic achievement. These findings contribute to policy recommendations for improving academic support for foreign students in Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The academic process faced by students ideally should be approached in a way that supports them to perform at their best, without the pressure that leads to academic anxiety. In its empirical reality, academic anxiety has become a phenomenon in the student world. Academic anxiety is an emotional condition characterized by feelings of stress and excessive worry experienced by students when facing coursework, exams, or other academic situations. This situation can disrupt students' ability to concentrate, lower their academic performance, and reduce their sense of comfort in the campus environment. In addition, academic anxiety is often exacerbated by the demands for high achievement, the fear of failure, and social comparison with peers (Prasetyaningtyas et al., 2022).

Academic anxiety is a common psychological symptom experienced by students along with the academic processes they undergo in the campus world. This is in line with what has been stated that students' academic anxiety is a common academic phenomenon that can arise from various factors (Fransiska et al., 2024). In practical terms, academic anxiety can arise from biological, psychological, social, or environmental factors (Farrasia et al., 2023). Another factor influencing the emergence of academic anxiety is the high expectations placed on oneself, especially for students pursuing education in higher education environments, which do not necessarily correlate with the opportunities they possess. In addition, such expectations may also arise from others who are related to the student, and when fulfilling them in the campus environment encounters obstacles, academic anxiety emerges. The emergence of this academic anxiety becomes a psychological disturbance for a student in carrying out various academic activities, which in turn can have destructive effects on themselves and the people in their social environment. This phenomenon is widely observed among several international students in countries such as the United States, Australia, Malaysia, and others where Indonesian students often continue their studies.

Basically, academic anxiety also has a positive value in that it can motivate a student to do their best to achieve what has been the basis of their anxiety when those goals are not achieved (Prasetyaningtyas et al., 2022). With the motivation to do their best in order to avoid academic anxiety over failures in achieving something, students will plan comprehensively regarding what anticipatory steps need to be taken to avoid various forms of failure that trigger academic anxiety. Consequently, when students fail to manage their academic anxiety into a positive academic drive, they will be trapped in a cycle of anxiety that leads to a decline in their academic achievements and the emergence of pressure that actually hinders the completion of their academic tasks (Sari & Hazim, 2023; Rosida & Syah, 2024).

One group particularly vulnerable to academic anxiety is international students pursuing higher education in Indonesia (Paramartha & Huwae, 2024). If left unaddressed, various forms of academic anxiety can lead to serious psychological consequences, including increased levels of stress (Arifin, 2021). Prior research has explored the impact of academic anxiety from several angles. For instance, Riska, Sutja, and Lubis (2024), in their study "*Pengaruh Kecemasan Akademik terhadap Keaktifan Belajar pada Mahasiswa*," found that academic anxiety negatively influences students' engagement in learning activities. Similarly, Novitria and Khoirunnisa (2022), in "*Perbedaan Kecemasan Akademik pada Mahasiswa Baru Jurusan Psikologi Ditinjau dari Jenis Kelamin*," reported that gender differences contribute to varying levels of academic anxiety among first-year psychology students. Building upon this body of research, the present study offers a distinct perspective by examining the specific forms and classifications of academic anxiety experienced by foreign students, and exploring potential strategies for addressing these issues through the lens of educational psychology.

2. METHODS

2.1 Type of Research

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach through field research. This approach was chosen to provide an in-depth description of the academic anxiety experienced by foreign students in

Indonesia within a real-life context. It aims to understand the informants' subjective experiences and the social meanings associated with academic anxiety in the higher education environment.

2.2 Sources and Types of Data

The data used in this study consist of both primary and secondary data.

- a. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews and observations involving seven informants, consisting of:
 - 1) Three individuals from the institutional side (supervising lecturers and university leaders), and
 - 2) Four foreign students are currently studying at higher education institutions in Indonesia. The number of informants is considered adequate for qualitative research, as the data collected reached a point of saturation, meaning that no new or significant information emerged in the final interviews. This indicates that a sufficient range of perspectives and experiences has been captured.
- b. Secondary data were obtained through document analysis, including academic guidelines, academic activity reports, and other institutional documents relevant to the research theme.

2.3 Research Focus

This study focuses on three main areas:

- a. Forms of academic anxiety experienced by foreign students in Indonesia,
- b. Strategies implemented to manage that anxiety in the campus environment, and
- c. An analysis of these strategies from the perspective of educational psychology.

2.4 Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data were collected using the following methods:

- a. In-depth interviews, guided by a semi-structured interview protocol to explore personal and social experiences of the informants,
- b. Participant observation, conducted during academic and social activities, and
- c. Documentation, involving the review of institutional documents and records related to the academic experiences and support systems for international students.

2.5 Data Analysis and Validation Techniques

Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which involves:

- a. Data reduction: filtering and summarizing relevant information from interviews, observations, and documentation,
- b. Data display: organizing data into thematic narratives to facilitate interpretation, and
- c. Conclusion drawing/verification: identifying patterns and verifying the consistency of findings to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

To ensure data trustworthiness, this study employed the following validation techniques:

- a. Source triangulation: comparing data from students, faculty members, and institutional documents to ensure consistency and reliability,
- b. Member checking: confirming interpreted data with the original informants to verify accuracy and authenticity of the researchers' interpretations,
- c. Audit trail: systematically documenting the data collection and analysis process to maintain transparency and replicability of the research logic.

These validation strategies were applied to ensure the credibility and integrity of the findings, thereby offering a robust understanding of academic anxiety experienced by foreign students in Indonesia.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 *Forms of Academic Anxiety among Foreign Students in Indonesia*

The academic anxiety of foreign students in Indonesia can be understood from their presence in a social environment that is different from their home country. Although this research is still conducted within the context of a single institution, the phenomenon of academic anxiety among these international students can already provide a general picture. The differences in the academic system, social norms, and various dimensions that color their academic life, in turn, lead to various forms of academic anxiety within them. Based on the observations made by the researchers, there are three forms of academic anxiety among foreign students in Indonesia, which consist of academic anxiety in communication, academic anxiety in socialization, and academic anxiety in innovation. These forms of academic anxiety can be described as follows:

3.1.1. Academic anxiety in communication

Describing this, Sarifa Suhra stated that the academic anxiety experienced by foreign students in Indonesia is greatly influenced by their limited access to the language. The limitation in mastering Indonesian as the everyday communication language widely used by the people around them makes many of them experience academic anxiety, which in turn makes them limit themselves in communicating with those around them (Vice Rector for Student Affairs and Cooperation of IAIN Bone, Interview, March 11, 2025)

In the context of academic anxiety in communication, Eslam Amir Mohammed Abdelrahman describes that language differences as a medium of communication present a unique anxiety for them to communicate. The use of expressions of prayer that they often use as a reinforcement in communication, such as *barakallahu fik*, *yarhamukumullah*, *fi riyatillah*, and others, are expressions that are also mentioned by people around them in communication, but with an intensity that is not as high as what they express in communication (Foreign Students in Indonesia, Interview, March 22, 2025).

3.1.2. Academic anxiety in socializing

Humans are social beings who necessitate complex social interactions in their daily lives. Foreign students coming to Indonesia do not only come to study but also to live and immerse themselves in a new environment, which, of course, is significantly different in various dimensions from what they usually encounter in their home countries. As social beings, they cannot live alone; they need conversation partners, places to share stories, and people who can help them adapt. In their daily lives, their social interactions can be very diverse, ranging from chatting with dorm mates, discussing in lecture classes, to interacting with local residents. All of this creates relationships that are not always easy due to differences in culture, customs, and perspectives. However, it is precisely from this social phenomenon that the learning process occurs.

Describing academic anxiety in socializing, Ganim Mohammed Mosa Mohammed expressed that there is anxiety to socialize with people around him. The significant cultural differences between Indonesia and his home country create a culture shock within him (Foreign Students in Indonesia, Interview, March 20, 2025). The same was expressed by Nahi Hashim Fathi Aboalela, stating that the differences in ways of speaking, attitudes, and behaviors in the daily social life of Indonesian students, compared to their existence as foreign students, sometimes leave them feeling anxious when they express words, show attitudes, or perform behaviors that might upset or offend those around them (Foreign Students in Indonesia, Interview, March 22, 2025).

3.1.3. Academic anxiety in innovating

Students are academic individuals who should be driven by scientific innovation in the cycle of the tri dharma, comprising education and teaching, research, and community service. In the context of its application, some international students experience academic anxiety when innovating, especially in the educational and teaching process, in lectures, and in research and community service, when they

are involved in the implementation of the tri dharma of higher education. This is emphasized by Abd. Kallang who states that international students tend to be passive during the learning process in lectures, listening more than expressing their opinions in discussions. Although they have been directed to express their opinions using the language they are proficient in, which in this case is either English or Arabic, they still behave passively as usual. The emergence of their innovative ideas by providing comparative material related to what exists in their country concerning the themes discussed in the lectures was not conveyed (IAIN Bone Lecturer, Interview, March 14, 2025). Based on the report of community service activities conducted by the Institute of Research and Community Service of IAIN Bone, it was found that the participation of international students in these activities varies significantly, with some achieving attendance rates of up to 90 percent and others having attendance rates below 50 percent. Academic anxiety in innovating has become one of the reasons why some of them are less active in participating in these activities (Bone, 2025; PKM Tim LP2M IAIN Bone, 2025)

In response to this, Rawan Mohamed Suliman Mohamed expressed that his position as an international student in Indonesia presents its own academic anxieties in terms of innovation. There is always a concern when he wants to express his opinion during class discussions that what is on his mind may not align with the Indonesian context. The innovative ideas he holds are truths in his own country that may not necessarily be true in the Indonesian context. He believes that simply listening in class is a wiser choice (International Students in Indonesia, Interview, March 19, 2025).

3.2. Handling Academic Anxiety of Foreign Students in Indonesia

Handling academic anxiety needs to be carried out to prevent destructive effects that are very much related to the presence of academic anxiety (Fransiska et al., 2024). In terms of handling academic anxiety for foreign students in Indonesia, there are several steps that have been taken and still need to be improved in their implementation, namely:

3.2.1. Structured communicative interventions to address academic anxiety in communication

To address academic anxiety in communication, structured communicative interventions can be implemented by providing verbal reinforcements in communicating with them. Foreign students in Indonesia, who come from various countries, can use English as an international language with the most speakers as a medium for facilitating their cross-language communication. In response to this, Andi Tahir stated that when there are foreign students who have not mastered English, lecturers can act as translators to facilitate the existing communication (Lecturer of IAIN Bone, Interview, March 14, 2025). In the context of providing verbal affirmations when communicating with them, it is important to engage in communication that does not merely convey messages in the form of words, phrases, or sentences, but also to consider how to deliver messages accompanied by supporting facial expressions, hand movements, finger gestures, and the like

With the structured communication intervention applied in addressing the anxiety of foreign students in Indonesia through verbal and non-verbal reinforcement in communicating with them, they have the opportunity to minimize academic anxiety due to failures in communication. The messages conveyed will be understood by them, albeit gradually. Another point made by Abd. Kallang is that to address academic anxiety through structured communication interventions, foreign students also need to be given the opportunity to speak, somewhat overlooking the grammatical mistakes they make due to their limited knowledge of certain languages that are not their own. For instance, the sentence "*kamu punya rumah*" may be incorrectly pronounced by them as "*punya kamu rumah*". A condescending attitude or even laughter is behavior that must be avoided (Lecturer at IAIN Bone, Interview, March 14, 2025).

3.2.2. An inclusive socialization program to address academic anxiety in socializing

To address academic anxiety in communication, inclusive socialization programs can be implemented by providing understanding to all parties involved in the academic service activities for

foreign students in Indonesia that each individual is a unique person with different cultural and cultural backgrounds. In response to this, Andi Tahir stated that foreign students in Indonesia come to Indonesia bringing cultures and traditions that are certainly different from those in Indonesia. In terms of clothing, for example, they come to campus very neatly where some of them wear complete formal civilian attire with suits and ties. With such outfits, they are neater compared to their classmates during lectures or even their professors. This way of dressing is their culture and should be respected and not regarded as a phenomenon that is considered strange or even laughed at (IAIN Bone Lecturer, Interview, March 14, 2025)

An inclusive socialization program as a form of handling academic anxiety in socializing also necessitates the involvement of foreign students in Indonesia in communication. This is in line with what was stated by Arifin & Fauzan (2021) that the involvement of foreign students in Indonesia in various activities is needed to build inclusive socialization so that they feel their presence is accepted by the people around them. In response to this, Sarifa Suhra stated that the university actively socializes with students who have been interacting with foreign students, emphasizing that their presence in Indonesia, specifically in a dynamic academic atmosphere, is a blessing that should be appreciated. The presence of international students among Indonesian students will lead to a process of cultural exchange between them (Vice Rector for Student Affairs and Cooperation of IAIN Bone, Interview, March 11, 2025).

3.2.3. The development of academic self-efficacy to manage academic anxiety in innovation

To address academic anxiety in communication, academic self-efficacy development should be strengthened by fostering the confidence of foreign students in Indonesia that they have the potential to innovate (Safri et al., 2024). In response to this, Rawan Mohamed Suliman Mohamed stated that the lectures faced during the lessons are very motivating to continue to do their best in the academic process they are undergoing. They involve foreign students in various academic activities, including visiting plantations that grow various crops as part of the campus service program to the community. Here, professors often ask the foreign students participating in the activity to explain how the plantation processing system works in their countries, which have a climate different from Indonesia (Foreign Students in Indonesia, Interview, March 19, 2025)

The above is an effort to address academic anxiety among foreign students in Indonesia by building academic self-efficacy. By providing space for these foreign students to also engage in various academic activities, they will be encouraged to innovate within them. This handling effort will be more effective when they are involved more deeply, such as by asking them to share how the plantation processing system works in their country, as mentioned above. Responding to this, Sarifa Suhra stated that the university is committed to the development of academic self-efficacy in Indonesia. Those selected from the many foreign students wishing to continue their studies in Indonesia are certainly chosen individuals who have passed strict academic selection and have been declared graduates. It is the university's task to facilitate its innovative capacity while continuing to explore the academic potential it possess (Vice Rector for Student Affairs and Cooperation of IAIN Bone, Interview, March 11, 2025)

3.3. Educational Psychology Analysis on Handling Academic Anxiety of Foreign Students in Indonesia

Educational psychology is a discipline that examines how psychological aspects are processed dynamically across various dimensions of education. Educational psychology plays a crucial role in helping lecturers understand how the learning process occurs and the factors that influence the success of the learning process (Linda et al., 2024). The scientific framework of educational psychology can serve as a paradigmatic or practical basis in the development of educational processes to enhance learning achievements (Fatriha & Darta, 2023). This shows how educational psychology analyzes the dynamics of psychological processes in the context of education, specifically how individuals learn and

develop in a learning environment. This discipline plays a strategic role in helping lecturers understand how students absorb, process, and apply knowledge. With this understanding, lecturers can design more effective learning strategies, considering the cognitive, affective, social, and environmental factors that influence the success of lectures (Ekaningtyas, 2022).

In relation to addressing the academic anxiety of foreign students in Indonesia, lecturers must design various components of the courses, including course objectives, curriculum, roles of lecturers, roles of students, course activities, teaching media, and teaching materials. In this context, the creativity of lecturers is essential to building a learning organization that is responsive to learners' social realities (Laihad & Pasande, 2023). The presence of foreign students as individuals who are very vulnerable to various forms of academic anxiety, such as anxiety in communication, anxiety in socializing, and anxiety in innovating, must be considered in designing all the interrelated systemic components of the courses. In the context of lecture objectives, for example, the outlined objectives must lead to various forms of handling academic anxiety that can be maximally elaborated, namely structured communicative interventions, inclusive socialization programs, and the development of academic self-efficacy. What is present in various lecture objectives will subsequently continue to the curriculum, the role of lecturers, the role of students, lecture activities, teaching media, and teaching materials.

Student trust in the campus must be cultivated through academic services that are responsive to their needs (Lokolo et al., 2024). With the handling of academic anxiety among foreign students in Indonesia, they will be able to reduce the academic anxiety they have felt all this time, both in terms of communicating, socializing, and innovating. Their trust in the campus makes them feel that there is strong support for them, which can be recognized from the various academic services that do not neglect their needs, especially what is referred to as socio-psychological academic support (Sulistiyani & Hertinjung, 2024). This indicates that addressing the academic anxiety of foreign students has a significant impact on enhancing learning functions and personal development. When individuals feel their learning environment is responsive to the challenges they face, especially regarding emotional pressure as foreign students living in an academic ecosystem that is certainly different from what exists in their home country, these foreign students tend to demonstrate better adaptation. The availability of services that pay attention to academic socio-psychological well-being also strengthens the sense of safety and increases engagement in the learning process. This affects the growth of a sense of competence, self-acceptance, and the ability to establish healthy social relationships.

The handling of academic anxiety among foreign students in Indonesia needs to be conducted from an educational psychology perspective because this anxiety directly affects their learning processes and academic achievements (Fransiska et al., 2024). Foreign students not only face common academic challenges but also additional barriers such as cultural differences, language, education systems, and complex social adaptation. In educational psychology, academic anxiety is understood as an emotional response that can disrupt cognitive functions such as concentration, memory, and problem-solving. If not addressed, this anxiety can diminish learning motivation, hinder active participation in class, and even increase the risk of dropping out. The educational psychology approach allows for the identification of anxiety-causing factors holistically, as well as the development of interventions based on learning theory, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies, which in turn will greatly assist in the handling process of students' academic anxiety, which can be maximally described as structured communicative interventions, inclusive socialization programs, and the development of academic self-efficacy.

In the framework of its development, the handling of academic anxiety in foreign students can be elaborated through three main approaches in the study of educational psychology, which can be developed gradually and systematically. First, structured communicative interventions enable the creation of a safe and directed dialogue space between students and the academic side, thus minimizing barriers to expressing feelings or needs. Second, inclusive socialization programs help accelerate social adaptation through activities that promote diversity and cross-cultural collaboration, ultimately strengthening the sense of belonging to the campus environment. Third, the development of academic

self-efficacy, which involves confidence in one's ability to complete learning tasks, can be enhanced through academic guidance, learning skills training, and providing constructive feedback. These three strategies complement each other in creating a learning environment that supports mental health, active engagement, and the academic success of foreign students in Indonesia.

4. CONCLUSION

The academic anxiety experienced by foreign students in Indonesia is an emotional response characterized by excessive pressure and worry in facing academic situations that tend to differ from those in their home countries. This condition causes them to experience academic anxiety in communication, socializing, and innovating. In the study of educational psychology, various forms of academic anxiety will significantly disrupt their academic achievements. To address this, systemic and humanistic approaches are needed. Strategic steps include structured communicative interventions, namely providing verbal and non-verbal support that facilitates cross-language communication without causing feelings of inferiority; inclusive socialization programs that support students to blend into the campus community without cultural discrimination; and the development of academic self-efficacy, which is building foreign students' self-confidence through active involvement in academic and social activities. These three approaches, if applied systematically, can not only reduce academic anxiety but also strengthen foreign students' engagement and adaptation in the academic environment. Educational psychology serves as an important foundation in designing these handling strategies effectively. The limitations of the research, which are still restricted within certain institutional contexts, need to be further explored by future research.

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