

Comparative Analysis of English Language Anxiety and Language-Related Stress among Dyslexic and Non-Dyslexic School Children

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Abstract

The present study examined English language anxiety and language-related academic stress among dyslexic and non-dyslexic secondary school children and explored the relationship between these variables. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The sample consisted of 216 students (84 dyslexic and 132 non-dyslexic) studying in Standards VIII, IX, and X in State Board schools in Kanyakumari district, Tamil Nadu. Dyslexic students were identified through records maintained by the District Inclusive Education Coordinator under Samagra Shiksha. Data were collected using the English Language Anxiety Scale (ELAS) and the Language Related Academic Stress Scale (ELRAS). The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, independent samples *t*-test, Pearson's product moment correlation, and Fisher's *z*-transformation test. The findings revealed that dyslexic students experienced significantly higher levels of English language anxiety and language-related academic stress than non-dyslexic students. Gender differences were not significant among dyslexic students; however, non-dyslexic girls reported higher levels of anxiety and stress than boys. A significant positive relationship was found between English language anxiety and academic stress, indicating that higher anxiety tends to increase stress in English language learning contexts. However, dyslexic and non-dyslexic students did not differ significantly in the degree of association between these variables. The study highlights the need for supportive and inclusive instructional strategies to reduce anxiety and stress in foreign language classrooms.

Keywords: English language anxiety, Language-related stress, dyslexia, secondary school students.

Introduction

Language acquisition is a fundamental component of students' academic progress and their ability to participate effectively in socially diverse educational environments such as those found in India. Within the school curriculum, English holds a prominent role since it serves not only as an academic subject but also as an important medium for higher education and international communication. Despite its importance, the process of learning English as a second or foreign language frequently generates strong emotional reactions among learners (Ravichandran & Amran, 2024; Pishghadam et al., 2016). Feelings of anxiety and stress often arise in relation to classroom participation, communication demands, and evaluative situations. English language anxiety has been identified as a significant psychological factor that can obstruct language learning by reducing students' engagement in classroom activities and adversely affecting academic performance (Chan, 2025; Ormzyar, 2023). Research further indicates that elevated levels of foreign language anxiety may disrupt cognitive functioning and diminish learners' confidence in using the language, thereby impeding successful language acquisition (Chan, 2025).

For children with dyslexia, the process of language learning becomes even more demanding. Dyslexia is a specific learning disorder that involves persistent difficulties in reading, spelling, and phonological processing, which in turn hinder the development of literacy skills (Cleveland Clinic, 2026). These academic difficulties often give rise to emotional consequences such as anxiety, lowered self-confidence, and psychological strain, particularly when students are expected to perform tasks that rely heavily on language abilities in classroom settings. Empirical studies reveal that learners with dyslexia generally experience higher levels of anxiety and other internalizing difficulties compared with their typically developing counterparts (Adi et al., 2024; Vieira et

al., 2024). In a similar vein, comparative research has shown that dyslexic students frequently report greater levels of foreign language classroom anxiety than average readers, largely due to the challenges they face in reading and decoding written text (Martinelli, 2021).

Existing literature also highlights a positive relationship between English language anxiety and language-related academic stress among secondary school students, indicating that higher anxiety levels often correspond with increased stress in language learning situations (Liu et al., 2025; Kumar, 2021). However, many previous studies have examined language anxiety and academic stress separately, or they have concentrated on general student populations without making a clear comparison between dyslexic and non-dyslexic learners. In addition, relatively little research has explored gender-based differences or investigated how strongly anxiety and stress are related within these two groups. Consequently, there remains a noticeable gap in understanding the interaction between English language anxiety and language-related stress among dyslexic and non-dyslexic students in secondary school contexts. Exploring this issue is important for informing inclusive pedagogical practices and for designing supportive interventions that address the academic and emotional needs of learners with specific learning difficulties.

Objectives

The study was undertaken with the following objectives:

1. To find out the English language anxiety and language-related stress of dyslexic and non-dyslexic children in secondary schools.
2. To compare the mean scores of English language anxiety and language-related stress of dyslexic and non-dyslexic children.
3. To compare the English language anxiety of boys and girls in dyslexic as well as non-dyslexic groups.
4. To compare the language-related stress of boys and girls in dyslexic as well as non-dyslexic groups.
5. To find out the relationship of English language anxiety and language-related stress of dyslexic and non-dyslexic children in the secondary schools.
6. To compare dyslexic and non-dyslexic children with regard to the degree of relationship between English language anxiety and language-related stress.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested for the study

- H₀1: There is no significant difference between dyslexic and non-dyslexic children in secondary schools with respect to their English language anxiety.
- H₀2: There is no significant difference between dyslexic and non-dyslexic children in secondary schools with respect to their language-related stress.
- H₀3: There is no significant difference between boys and girls in the dyslexic group with regard to their English language anxiety.
- H₀4: There is no significant difference between boys and girls in the non-dyslexic group with regard to their English language anxiety.
- H₀5: There is no significant difference between boys and girls in the dyslexic group with regard to their language-related stress.
- H₀6: There is no significant difference between boys and girls in the non-dyslexic group with regard to their language-related stress.

- H₀₇: There is no significant relationship between English language anxiety and language-related stress among dyslexic children in secondary schools.
- H₀₈: There is no significant relationship between English language anxiety and language-related stress among non-dyslexic children in secondary schools.
- H₀₉: There is no significant difference between dyslexic and non-dyslexic children in the degree of relationship between English language anxiety and language-related stress.

Methodology

The present study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine and compare the levels of English language anxiety and English language-related academic stress among dyslexic and non-dyslexic secondary school children. The population of the study consisted of adolescents aged 14 to 16 years studying in Standards VIII, IX, and X in secondary schools affiliated with the State Board of School Examinations, Tamil Nadu, located within the revenue boundary of Kanyakumari district. A convenience sampling technique was employed to select the participants. The initial sample comprised 236 students, but after excluding incomplete or defective response sheets, the final sample consisted of 216 students, including 84 dyslexic children and 132 non-dyslexic children. Dyslexic students were identified based on records maintained by the Office of the District Inclusive Education Coordinator, Samagra Shiksha, Kanyakumari, while non-dyslexic students were selected from the same schools. The sample represented both boys and girls across three grade levels (VIII, IX, and X). Data were collected using two standardized instruments. English Language Anxiety Scale (ELAS) developed by Arjunan and Archana (2014) was used to measure students' anxiety associated with learning English. The scale consists of 30 items on a five-point Likert format and assesses three dimensions: (i) Communication apprehension, (ii) Performance anxiety, and (iii) Fear of negative evaluation. The tool has reported reliability of 0.81 (test-retest) and validity of 0.72. The Language Related Academic Stress Scale (ELRAS) developed by Arjunan and Bindu (2012) was used to assess stress experienced by students while learning English. It is a 50-item Likert-type scale measuring six dimensions of stress: (i) Cognitive, (ii) Affective, (iii) Behavioural, (iv) Physical, (v) Interpersonal, and (vi) Motivational. The scale has a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.76 and validity coefficient of 0.61. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent samples t-test, Pearson's product moment correlation, and Fisher's z-transformation test to examine differences and relationships among the variables.

Analysis and Interpretation

The analyses carried out to test the hypotheses are presented under appropriate subheadings as follows:

1) *English Language Anxiety of Secondary School Students and Comparison of Sub-groups*

The English language anxiety of the secondary school students was examined by subjecting the ELAS scores to descriptive analysis by considering the sample in total and as sub-groups based on gender and dyslexic status (Table 1).

Table 1: Statistical Indices Relating to Foreign Language Anxiety

Groups	Sample	R	N	M	Mdn	σ	Sk	Ku	SE _M	
Whole	Total	50	216	92.43	92.85	9.63	-0.07	-0.05	0.66	
	Gender	Boys	48	108	90.80	91.5	10.55	0.11	-0.37	1.02
		Girls	49	108	94.06	94.0	8.47	-0.12	0.58	0.82
Dyslexic Status	Dyslexic	37	84	97.07	96.0	7.59	0.19	0.30	0.83	
	Non-dyslexic	49	132	89.48	89.0	9.74	0.14	-0.07	0.85	

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that the foreign language anxiety scores of the students display considerable variability, as reflected in the range of 50. The scores extend from 66 to 116 within the possible limits of 30 to 150. The mean score for the total sample is 92.43 with a standard deviation of 9.63, suggesting that the students experience a moderate level of anxiety in learning English as a foreign language. The skewness value (-0.07) falls within the acceptable limits for a normal distribution, implying that the distribution is approximately symmetrical. Likewise, the kurtosis value (-0.05) suggests that the distribution approximates normality.

The dyslexic and non-dyslexic children were compared with respect to the ELAS scores to find out the differential effect of dyslexic status on English language anxiety of secondary school students. The result is given in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of the English Language Anxiety of Dyslexic and Non-dyslexic Students

Sub-groups	Statistical indices			SE _M	t-value	Sig.
	N	M	SD			
Dyslexic	84	97.07	7.593	.828	6.07	.001
Non-dyslexic	132	89.48	9.736	.847		

The obtained t-value of 6.07 is significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a statistically significant difference between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students with respect to their foreign language anxiety. The higher mean score of dyslexic students shows that they experience greater anxiety in English language learning situations than their non-dyslexic counterparts. The differential influence of gender on the English language anxiety of dyslexic students was found out by comparing ELAS scores dyslexic boys and dyslexic girls (Table 3).

Table 3: Comparison of the English Language Anxiety of Dyslexic Boys and Dyslexic Girls

Sub-groups	Statistical indices			SE _M	t-value	Sig.
	N	M	SD			
Dyslexic Boys	58	97.24	7.888	1.036	0.305	NS
Non-dyslexic Girls	26	96.69	7.024	1.378		

The obtained t-value (0.305) is not statistically significant, indicating that dyslexic boys and dyslexic girls do not differ significantly in their levels of English language anxiety. This suggests that gender does not play a decisive role in determining anxiety among dyslexic learners. The ELAS scores of boys and girls in the non-dyslexic group of students were compared to find out the differential effect of gender on English language anxiety of normal secondary school students (Table 4).

Table 4: Comparison of the English Language Anxiety of Non-dyslexic Boys and Non-dyslexic Girls

Sub-groups	Statistical indices			SE _M	t-value	Sig.
	N	M	SD			
Non-dyslexic Boys	50	83.32	8.037	1.137	6.508	.001
Non-dyslexic Girls	82	93.23	8.749	.966		

The obtained t-value (6.508) is significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a statistically significant difference between non-dyslexic boys and non-dyslexic girls with regard to their foreign language anxiety. The mean scores reveal that non-dyslexic girls experience a higher level of anxiety in comparison with their male counterparts.

2) Language Related Academic Stress of Secondary School Students and Comparison of Sub-groups

Table 5: Statistical Indices Pertaining to Language Related Academic Stress

Groups	Sample	R	N	M	Mdn	σ	Sk	Ku	SE _M
Whole	Total	216	108	162.96	169.0	24.45	-1.06	0.60	1.66
Gender	Boys	108	108	159.76	167.0	26.09	-0.94	0.13	2.51
	Girls	108	107	166.16	172.0	22.35	-1.17	1.22	2.15
Dyslexic Status	Dyslexic	84	98	168.96	174.0	20.39	-1.138	1.57	2.22
	Non-dyslexic	132	108	159.14	167.0	26.07	-0.94	0.046	2.27

The data show a wide dispersion in academic stress scores (range = 108), indicating considerable variability in the level of stress experienced by students. The mean academic stress score for the total sample is 162.96 with a standard deviation of 24.45, suggesting a moderate to relatively high level of stress among the participants. The negative skewness of the distribution indicates a slight concentration of scores toward the higher end of the scale, implying that many students experience comparatively elevated academic stress. Dyslexic and non-dyslexic students were further compared using ELRAS scores to examine possible group differences (Table 6).

Table 6: Comparison of the Language Related Academic Stress of Dyslexic and Non-dyslexic Students

Sub-groups	Statistical indices			SE _M	t-value	Sig.
	N	M	SD			
Dyslexic	84	168.96	20.386	2.224	2.931	.01
Non-dyslexic	132	159.14	26.071	2.269		

The obtained *t*-value of 2.931 is significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a statistically significant difference in English language-related academic stress between dyslexic and non-dyslexic students. The higher mean score of dyslexic students shows that they experience greater academic stress than their non-dyslexic peers. Gender differences in academic stress among dyslexic students were further examined by comparing the ELRAS scores of boys and girls within the dyslexic group (Table 7).

Table 7: Comparison of the Language Related Academic Stress of Dyslexic Boys and Dyslexic Girls

Sub-groups	Statistical indices			SE _M	t-value	Sig.
	N	M	SD			
Dyslexic Boys	58	168.45	19.095	2.507	0.345	NS
Non-dyslexic Girls	26	170.12	23.376	4.584		

The obtained *t*-value of 0.345 is not statistically significant. This indicates that there is no significant difference between dyslexic boys and dyslexic girls in the academic stress experienced while learning English as a foreign language. In other words, gender does not appear to be a determining factor in differentiating dyslexic students with respect to the level of academic stress experienced in English language classes. The comparison of academic stress between non-dyslexic boys and non-dyslexic girls is presented in Table 8.

Table 8: Comparison of the Language Related Academic Stress of Non-dyslexic Boys and Non-dyslexic Girls

Sub-groups	Statistical indices			SE _M	t-value	Sig.
	N	M	SD			
Non-dyslexic Boys	50	149.68	29.486	4.170	3.381	.01
Non-dyslexic Girls	82	164.90	22.010	2.431		

The calculated *t*-value of 3.381 is significant at the 0.01 level, indicating a statistically significant difference between non-dyslexic boys and non-dyslexic girls with respect to academic stress. This result shows that non-dyslexic girls experience significantly higher levels of academic stress in English language learning compared with their male counterparts.

3) Relationship between English Language Anxiety and Language Related Academic Stress

The relationship between English language anxiety and Language Related Academic Stress of the secondary school students was estimated by Pearson’s Product Moment method (Table 9).

Table 9: Relationship between English Language Anxiety and Language Related Academic Stress

Group Criteria	Sample	N	r	SE _r	Sig.	r _{POP}	
						.05 level	.01 level
Whole	Total	216	0.446	0.055	.01	0.34 – 0.55	0.30 – 0.59
	Gender	Boys	108	0.552	0.067	.01	0.42 – 0.68
Girls		108	0.263	0.090	.01	0.09 – 0.44	0.03 – 0.50
Dyslexic Status	Dyslexic	84	0.397	0.092	.01	0.22 – 0.58	0.16 – 0.63
	Non-dyslexic	132	0.414	0.072	.01	0.27 – 0.56	0.23 – 0.60

The data in Table 5.9 indicate a significant positive relationship between academic stress and foreign language anxiety among secondary school students. The correlation coefficient for the total sample is 0.446 ($p < 0.01$), suggesting that higher levels of foreign language anxiety are associated with increased academic stress. The confidence intervals confirm the stability of this relationship in the population. The association is stronger among boys ($r = 0.552$) than girls ($r = 0.263$). Similarly, both dyslexic ($r = 0.397$) and non-dyslexic students ($r = 0.414$) show significant positive correlations. These findings suggest that foreign language anxiety contributes substantially to academic stress irrespective of gender or dyslexic status.

4) Comparison of the Relationship between English Language Anxiety and Language Related Academic Stress of Sub-samples

The dyslexic and non-dyslexic students were compared regarding the coefficient of correlation between English language anxiety and Language Related Academic Stress to examine the differential effect of dyslexic status in the association between the variables (Table 10).

Table 10: Comparison of the Correlation between Foreign Language Anxiety and Academic Stress of Dyslexic and Non-dyslexic Children

Groups	Statistical Indices			Z _{observed}	Sig.
	N	r	z		
Dyslexic	84	0.397	0.42	0.141	NS
Non-dyslexic	132	0.414	0.44		

The Z_{observed} obtained on comparing the correlation coefficients of dyslexic and non-dyslexic students is 0.141, which is not statistically significant. This indicates that the dyslexic and non-dyslexic students do not differ significantly in the degree of relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic stress. The gender variation in the association between English language anxiety and Language Related Academic Stress were examined by using Fisher's z-transformation test (Table 11).

Table 11: Comparison of the Correlation between Foreign Language Anxiety and Language Related Academic Stress of Boys and Girls

Groups	Statistical Indices			Z_{observed}	Sig.
	N	r	z		
Boys	108	0.552	0.62	2.54	.05
Girls	108	0.263	0.27		

The Z_{observed} estimate on comparing the correlation coefficients of boys and girls is 2.54, which is significant at the 0.05 level, indicating a significant difference in the relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic stress across gender. The correlation is stronger among boys ($r = 0.552$) than among girls ($r = 0.263$). This suggests that foreign language anxiety contributes more strongly to academic stress among male students than female students, highlighting the need to address anxiety-related factors in language learning environments.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that dyslexic students experience significantly higher levels of English language anxiety than non-dyslexic students. This result aligns with earlier research indicating that learners with dyslexia often face difficulties in foreign language learning due to limitations in phonological processing, reading fluency, and orthographic awareness, which may lead to frustration, fear of failure, and apprehension during language learning activities (Folia & Malisiova, 2025). Difficulties in decoding and spelling in the first language may also transfer to second-language contexts, thereby increasing anxiety and reducing learners' confidence in language performance (International Dyslexia Association, 2023). Previous studies have similarly reported that students with dyslexia tend to exhibit higher levels of foreign language classroom anxiety than their non-dyslexic peers (Martinelli, 2021). The study also showed that gender did not significantly influence English language anxiety among dyslexic students, whereas non-dyslexic girls experienced higher anxiety than boys. This finding is partly consistent with earlier studies suggesting that female students often report greater foreign language anxiety due to heightened sensitivity to evaluation and stronger academic expectations (Gerencheal, 2016). Recent research likewise indicates that female learners frequently experience stronger communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation in language classrooms (Mukhtiningrum, 2024), although such gender differences may vary across learning contexts.

The study further revealed that dyslexic students experience significantly higher levels of English language-related academic stress than non-dyslexic students. This finding supports earlier research suggesting that learners with language-based learning difficulties often experience greater academic stress due to repeated academic challenges and the additional cognitive effort required to perform language-related tasks (Folia & Malisiova, 2025). Gender differences in academic stress were not significant among dyslexic students, but non-dyslexic girls reported higher levels of stress than boys, a pattern consistent with studies showing that female students often experience greater academic pressure and performance concerns (Kim, 2025). A major finding of the study is the significant positive relationship between English language anxiety and academic stress, indicating that students with higher language anxiety tend to experience greater academic stress. Similar conclusions have been reported in previous research highlighting the detrimental effects of language anxiety on learning outcomes and classroom performance (Kim, 2025; Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). The relationship between anxiety and stress was stronger among boys than girls, although previous studies report mixed gender patterns (Rasool et al., 2023). Furthermore, dyslexic and non-dyslexic students did not differ significantly in the degree of association between the variables, suggesting that anxiety and stress interact similarly across groups. This finding reflects broader

research indicating that emotional responses to language learning challenges are common among learners irrespective of individual differences (Yu, 2024). Consequently, the results highlight the importance of addressing anxiety and stress in language classrooms through supportive instruction and inclusive teaching strategies.

Conclusion

The present study examined English language anxiety and language-related academic stress among dyslexic and non-dyslexic secondary school students and explored the relationship between these variables. The findings revealed that dyslexic students experience significantly higher levels of both English language anxiety and academic stress than their non-dyslexic counterparts. Gender differences were not significant among dyslexic students with respect to anxiety and stress, whereas non-dyslexic girls exhibited higher levels of both variables compared with boys. The results further indicated a significant positive relationship between English language anxiety and academic stress, suggesting that increased anxiety in language learning situations tends to intensify students' academic stress. However, dyslexic and non-dyslexic students did not differ significantly in the degree of association between these variables, although the relationship was stronger among boys than girls. Overall, the study underscores the importance of addressing emotional and psychological factors in foreign language learning environments and highlights the need for supportive and inclusive instructional strategies, particularly for students with dyslexia.

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