CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the study

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has gained significant attention in the field of language learning and teaching due to its potential impact on learners' language acquisition and overall learning experience. Fondo (2019) describes FLA as a "situational, dysphoric and debilitating anxiety" specifically related to the process of learning and using a foreign language. It can manifest in multiple contexts, including academic, professional, and social settings (Fondo, 2019). This anxiety is not simply general performance anxiety because it is directly related to speaking the target language. Whether learning in a formal or informal environment, language anxiety is one of the most important factors affecting language acquisition (L. Hu & Wang, 2014). Students who experience foreign language anxiety may feel limited in their ability to express themselves in a classroom setting. According to Horwitz et al., (1986), FLA is categorized as situation-specific anxiety, which is the viewpoint of anxiety that focuses on the circumstances that cause anxiety.

In the classroom, language anxiety has grown to be a significant factor affecting students studying a foreign or second language. The impact of foreign language anxiety on students' performance can be favourable or negative. While some students try to avoid anxiety in the classroom, certain students can profit from it. It is assumed that FLA can encourage students to develop effective coping strategies and resilience, which can be beneficial in both language learning and other academic contexts (Alnuzaili and Uddin, 2020). This adaptive response can lead to improved resilience and stress management skills (Jin and Dewaele, 2018). On the other hand, FLA has also been shown to negatively impact language learning and performance. High levels of anxiety correlate with lower academic achievement and reduced language proficiency. The results of the study conducted by Lileikienė and Danilevičienė (2016) showed that students with higher levels of FLA often achieve lower scores and exhibit reduced participation in language classes.

Moreover, Dryden et al. (2021) also observed that FLA can lead to feelings of isolation, forgetfulness, and self-avoidance, significantly affecting learners' emotional well-being. In this study, anxiety influences a learner's self-confidence in their ability to employ language abilities. As a result, the learner avoids any learning task that makes them feel frustrated.

The study of FLA has gained substantial attention and has been done with various populations, particularly among university-level learners and adults in various language learning contexts. However, there remains a significant study gap when it comes to understanding FLA among junior high school students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Most researchers exclude junior high school students whose English proficiency is still quite low. Junior high school students often experience anxiety due to the fear of making mistakes, particularly in pronunciation and grammar, and being negatively evaluated by teachers and peers. This fear can lead to significant speaking anxiety and reluctance to participate in class activities (Hidayati et al., 2022). Junior high school students, typically in the age range of 12 to 15 years old, are at a crucial stage of cognitive, emotional, and social development, which can influence their attitudes and experiences in the EFL classroom.

Several studies have explored the concept of FLA and its effects on language learners. FLA is often associated with lower academic performance in language learning. Anxiety can cause cognitive interference, reducing the ability to concentrate and process information effectively during exams and other academic tasks (Andrea, 2021). In addition, Zhou et al. (2023) also highlighted how it affects language learners' willingness to communicate, that higher levels of anxiety can diminish students' willingness to engage in communication, limiting their opportunities to practice and improve their language skills Horwitz et al. (1986) identified three components of FLA: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. These components have been widely used to assess FLA across various age groups.

In the context of junior high school students, the factors contributing to FLA are multifaceted. Communication apprehension is a major contributor to FLA

among junior high students. It involves the fear of speaking in a foreign language due to a lack of confidence, a fear of making errors, and a perceived lack of proficiency compared to peers (Wang & Chinokul, 2023). Additionally, students' prior language learning experiences, self-esteem, and teacher-student interactions can impact their anxiety levels. Studies involving adolescents have shown that FLA can have detrimental effects on language learning outcomes. Wu and Liu (2014) found that language anxiety was negatively correlated with English proficiency among Chinese junior high school students. Similarly, Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) observed that language anxiety was inversely related to students' use of communication strategies, which are essential for effective language learning. The EFL classroom environment also plays a crucial role in shaping FLA levels among junior high school students. The social environment in the classroom, including peer interactions and the pressure to conform, can significantly impact FLA. Students may fear ridicule or judgment from their classmates, leading to increased anxiety (Hidayati et al., 2022). Foreign language anxiety is a significant barrier to effective language learning. Creating a supportive and non-threatening classroom environment can help reduce FLA. Teachers should encourage positive reinforcement, create opportunities for low-stakes practice, and foster a collaborative atmosphere (Dewaele et al., 2018).

In conclusion, understanding the FLA levels among junior high school students in EFL classrooms is essential for effective language instruction and student well-being. Addressing this research gap can lead to the development of targeted interventions and strategies that foster a conducive and supportive environment for language learning, ultimately benefiting students' language proficiency and overall learning experience. This research focuses solely on assessing students' foreign language anxiety levels efficiently, allowing for a focused exploration and targeted results. By narrowing the scope, the researcher can allocate ample time and resources to comprehensively evaluate anxiety levels. This approach establishes a crucial foundation for future studies and strategies, upholding methodological rigour and ensuring the validity of findings. Ultimately, this focused examination provides a solid basis for addressing anxiety in language

education and developing targeted support strategies for students' well-being and language learning success.

This research is conducted based on the phenomenon that the researcher discovered in one of the junior high schools in Tasikmalaya, where the researcher conducted a teaching practice program. The researcher discovered on several occasions that the students experience anxiety and discomfort in the English classroom. Some students tend to avoid participation in class activities, such as raising hands to answer questions or participating in discussions. When the students were asked to speak or perform in front of the class, they refused. They always said that they were afraid to get it wrong, and the other students would laugh at them. They also tended to procrastinate completing the assignments or studying for assessments. Besides that, when they are forced to stand in front of the class, he/she does nothing and get blank. As stated by Padmadewi (2016), an anxious learner may avoid delivering difficult messages, avoid being involved in class discussions, reduce their performance in public communication, et cetera.

This study, therefore, is intended to find out the FLA levels of junior high school students in EFL classrooms. This research involved 7th-grade students from one of the junior high schools in Tasikmalaya. The 7th grader is chosen since the phenomenon found is among 7th-grade students. Besides that, the English language is first taught to the students in the 7th grade. Moreover, according to the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) children between the ages of 10-14 which includes most 7th graders, are in early adolescence, a stage marked by increased self-awareness, social interactions, and cognitive development. This stage offers insights into the unique challenges and experiences junior high school students face in relation to foreign language learning anxiety.

1.2. Formulation of the problem

The formulation of the problem addressed in this present study is formulated in the following question: "What are the levels of foreign language anxiety of the junior high school students in the EFL classroom?".

1.3. Operational definition

1.3.1. Foreign Language Anxiety	:	Foreign language anxiety is a specific type of anxiety that individuals experience when learning or using a foreign language.
1.3.2. Junior High Schools Students	:	Junior high school students refer to the seventh-grade student that typically falls within the age range of 12 to 13 years old.
1.3.3. EFL Classroom	:	An EFL classroom is a learning environment where non-native speakers of English study the language as a subject.

1.4. Aim of the research

This research aims to find out the foreign language anxiety levels of the students in EFL classrooms among junior high school students.

1.5. Significances of the study

1.5.1. Theoretical Use

This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the levels of foreign language anxiety among students in Indonesia, particularly in the context of learning English as a foreign language. Understanding the foreign language anxiety levels of junior high school students in the EFL classroom can contribute significantly to the field of language education. The findings of this study are anticipated to serve as a reference for English teachers in developing effective teaching strategies to reduce students' anxiety in foreign language learning. Moreover, the ideas presented may be used as reference data in conducting new research or in testing the validity of other related findings.

1.5.2. Practical Use

The result of this study is valuable for educators to help the students out in the teaching-learning activity in EFL classrooms and raise the awareness of the educators about the students' foreign language anxiety in EFL classrooms. By

identifying specific anxiety triggers, appropriate interventions and strategies can be developed to create a more supportive and less anxiety-inducing learning environment, ultimately enhancing language learning outcomes. Any improvement in classroom management can help to decrease the level of students' foreign language anxiety in the EFL classroom.