

Beyond Anxiety: A Mixed-Methods Needs Analysis of Postgraduate ELT Students in a Quantitative Research Methodology Course

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Abstract

As evidence-based practice in English Language Teaching (ELT) grows, postgraduate students' quantitative research proficiency is critical. However, students from humanities backgrounds often exhibit significant apprehension. This mixed-methods study conducted a needs analysis to explore the self-efficacy, attitudes, and learning needs of 30 incoming Master's students in an Indonesian ELT program before a mandatory quantitative methodology course. Data were collected via a questionnaire with quantitative scales and qualitative open-ended questions. Findings reveal a paradox: students perceive quantitative skills as highly useful for their careers ($M=4.57$) but report high anxiety ($M=4.10$) and low self-efficacy in statistical tasks ($M=2.13$). Qualitative themes indicate that anxiety is rooted in past experiences and exacerbated by a reluctance to seek help. Motivation is highly instrumental, focused on thesis completion. The study concludes that this cohort is pragmatically motivated but emotionally and technically underprepared, necessitating a pedagogy that explicitly addresses anxiety and builds practical, thesis-relevant skills.

Keywords: Needs Analysis, Quantitative Research, Mixed-Methods, Statistics Anxiety, Self-Efficacy.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) has progressively shifted towards evidence-based practices, demanding a new generation of practitioners and researchers adept at interpreting and conducting empirical research (Ortega, 2012; Phakiti, 2018). Consequently, research methodology courses, particularly in quantitative methods, have become a cornerstone of postgraduate ELT curricula worldwide. These courses are intended to equip future teachers, teacher educators, and researchers with the skills to critically engage with published studies and to conduct their own rigorous investigations, as outlined in foundational texts (e.g., Ary et al., 2018; Dörnyei, 2007; Fraenkel et al., 2019; Mackey & Gass, 2015).

However, delivering this curriculum presents a formidable pedagogical challenge, primarily rooted in the affective domain of learning. A vast body of literature documents the prevalence of "statistics anxiety" among students in the social sciences and humanities (Onwuegbuzie & Wilson, 2003; Williams, 2015). Defined as a state of anxiety experienced when encountering statistics in any form and at any level, this phenomenon is more than mere dislike for a subject; it can trigger debilitating cognitive and emotional responses (Baloglu, 2004). Research has shown that high levels of anxiety can overload a student's working memory, leading to cognitive interference that impairs learning, problem-solving, and overall academic performance (Ashcraft & Kirk, 2001; Eysenck et al., 2007). Many students entering ELT postgraduate programs from humanities backgrounds often carry negative prior experiences with mathematics, creating a significant and immediate barrier to engagement (Field, 2018).

Beyond the visceral response of anxiety, a more nuanced psychological construct at play is self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their own capability to execute the actions required to achieve a specific goal (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000). A student's self-efficacy for quantitative research is a powerful predictor of their persistence, effort, and ultimate success. Low self-efficacy can lead to task avoidance, procrastination, and a premature surrender when faced with challenging statistical problems, irrespective of the student's actual cognitive ability (Cassidy, 2015). Understanding students' specific self-efficacy beliefs—what they feel they can and cannot do—is therefore arguably as important as diagnosing their objective skill deficits.

The motivational dimension further complicates this psychological landscape. Drawing from self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000), student motivation can range from intrinsic (learning for the sake of interest and enjoyment) to extrinsic (learning to achieve an external reward or avoid punishment). For a mandatory and often feared course like quantitative methodology, it is probable that students are driven primarily by instrumental, or extrinsic, motivation—the desire to pass the course, complete their thesis, and enhance their career prospects (Papi & Hiver, 2020; Zusho, 2017). While powerful, this form of motivation requires the curriculum to constantly prove its utility and relevance to the students' personal goals, lest their engagement wane.

Finally, these psychological factors do not operate in a vacuum; they are profoundly shaped by the socio-cultural context of learning. In many non-Western educational settings, such as Indonesia, cultural norms surrounding communication and hierarchy can influence classroom dynamics (Helgesen & Tran, 2021). Behaviors such as asking questions, admitting confusion, or challenging a lecturer might be less common due to a cultural emphasis on maintaining group harmony and showing deference, often encapsulated in the concept of being "malu" (shy, embarrassed, or reluctant). This can lead to a culture of "silent struggle," where students avoid seeking help even when they are struggling, a phenomenon that has been documented in Indonesian higher education (Nugroho & Putri, 2024). This reluctance to seek help can exacerbate the negative effects of both anxiety and low self-efficacy.

While these individual factors—anxiety, self-efficacy, motivation, and help-seeking behavior—are well-researched, a gap exists in the literature for a holistic, mixed-methods study that investigates the interplay of these factors within the specific context of an Indonesian ELT postgraduate program. A simple skills audit is insufficient; what is needed is a deep diagnostic analysis that connects what students know, what they believe they can do, why they are motivated, and how they are likely to behave when they face difficulties. This study aims to address this gap, guided by the following research questions:

- a. What are the self-perceived efficacy levels of incoming postgraduate ELT students across key quantitative research competencies? (QUAN)
- b. What are the prevailing attitudes (e.g., anxiety, perceived utility) of these students towards quantitative research? (QUAN)
- c. How do students' prior experiences and attitudes shape their specific learning needs and perceived barriers to success, including their help-seeking behaviors? (QUAL)

The findings are intended to provide an empirical basis for a more responsive and affectively-aware curriculum design, not only for the local context but for similar postgraduate programs globally that serve students from humanities backgrounds.

METHOD

Research Design

A convergent mixed-methods design was employed for this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This design was chosen to gain a holistic understanding of student needs by collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. The quantitative data provides a broad overview of students' self-efficacy levels and attitudes, while the qualitative data offers deep, contextualized insights into the reasons behind those quantitative patterns. The two datasets were then merged during the interpretation phase to provide a richer, more comprehensive picture.

Participants and Context

The participants were thirty (N=30) newly enrolled Master's students in the English Language Education program at the Postgraduate School of Universitas Negeri Makassar (UNM), Indonesia. The cohort comprised 22 female (73.3%) and 8 male (26.7%) students. All participants were required to take the "Quantitative Research Methodology in ELT" course in their upcoming semester. Their academic backgrounds were varied, with most holding an undergraduate degree in English Education, though their prior research experience differed significantly. Participation was voluntary and solicited before the commencement of the course.

Instrument

The primary data collection tool was a comprehensive, mixed-methods questionnaire developed for this study (see Appendices). The instrument was designed in English, the medium of instruction for the course, and consisted of four sections:

- a. Section A: Academic Background: Collected nominal data on participants' undergraduate thesis type, prior statistics courses, and other research experience.
- b. Section B: Self-Efficacy in Quantitative Research Skills: This section measured research self-efficacy, defined as a student's belief in their capability to successfully perform specific research tasks (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 2000). It consisted of 10 items (e.g., "Formulate a null hypothesis," "Interpret SPSS output") rated on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (Very Unconfident) to 5 (Very Confident).
- c. Section C: Attitudes and Perceptions: This section included three statements assessing attitudes towards quantitative research (e.g., anxiety, perceived utility) on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). This was followed by a key open-ended question prompting students to elaborate on the experiences that shaped their views.

d. Section D: Learning Needs and Goals: This section consisted of three open-ended questions designed to elicit rich qualitative data on students' specific learning objectives, desired skills, and perceived barriers.

The instrument was pilot-tested with five postgraduate students from a different department to ensure clarity and face validity.

Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was administered online via Google Forms one week before the course began. Participants were provided with a Participant Information Sheet and an Informed Consent Form, assuring them of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation.

Quantitative data from Sections A, B, and C were exported to SPSS (Version 26). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means (M), and standard deviations (SD), were calculated to answer RQ1 and RQ2.

Qualitative data from the open-ended questions in Sections C and D were collected in Bahasa Indonesia to allow for richer and more nuanced responses. These responses were then subjected to thematic analysis, following the six-phase process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019). The process involved: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading; (2) generating initial codes from the raw data; (3) searching for patterns and collating codes into potential themes; (4) reviewing and refining these themes; (5) defining and naming the final themes; and (6) writing the analysis. For this article, relevant quotations were translated into English by the author, with the original text provided to ensure transparency.

FINDINGS

This section presents the results of the mixed-methods inquiry, structured to provide a comprehensive and layered understanding of the participants' pre-course dispositions. The findings are organized into two main sub-sections. First, the quantitative data are presented to offer a broad, statistical overview of the cohort's academic background, self-efficacy levels, and attitudes towards quantitative research. This provides the foundational "what" of the study. Second, the qualitative findings are detailed through a thematic analysis of the students' narrative responses. This section provides the crucial "why" by delving into the experiences, perceptions, and motivations that underpin the quantitative results.

Quantitative Findings: A Statistical Portrait of the Cohort

The quantitative data provides an initial, high-level map of the student cohort, revealing significant trends in their prior academic experiences and their current psychological dispositions towards quantitative research.

Table 1. Participant Demographics and Prior Experience (N=30)

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Undergraduate Thesis Type	Quantitative	4	13.3
	Qualitative	18	60.0
	Mixed-Methods	3	10.0
	Non-Empirical/Other	5	16.7
Prior Statistics Course	Yes	17	56.7

	No	13	43.3
Other Research Experience	Yes	6	20.0
	No	24	80.0

Table 1 reveals the academic and research background of the participants, and the data immediately points to a cohort largely uninitiated in quantitative inquiry. The most telling statistic is the distribution of undergraduate thesis types. An overwhelming majority of students (60.0%) wrote a qualitative thesis, establishing an academic identity and a set of research skills grounded in interpretivism, narrative analysis, and textual evidence. In stark contrast, only a small fraction (13.3%) have direct, start-to-finish experience with a quantitative project. This imbalance is critical; it suggests that for most students, the epistemological foundations and procedural logic of quantitative research represent a significant paradigm shift from their established comfort zone. This is further compounded by the finding that a substantial portion of the group (43.3%) has no prior formal training in statistics whatsoever. Even among the 56.7% who have taken a statistics course, the timing and depth of that course are unknown. Coupled with the low percentage of students with any other form of research experience (20.0%), the table collectively paints a picture of a group of learners who are, in essence, novices in the field of quantitative research.

Table 2. Self-Efficacy Ratings for Quantitative Research Tasks (N=30)

Task	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
1. Explaining Quanti-Quali philosophical differences	3.10	1.03
2. Identifying a research gap	3.40	0.93
3. Formulating research questions	3.17	0.95
4. Formulating null & alternative hypotheses	2.40	1.10
5. Choosing an appropriate research design	2.67	0.99
6. Justifying a sampling technique	2.53	1.01
7. Developing a valid & reliable questionnaire	2.80	1.06
8. Using SPSS for data input	2.60	1.25
9. Interpreting SPSS statistical output	2.13	0.85
10. Writing a Methodology (Chapter 3)	2.73	0.94

Scale: 1 = Very Unconfident; 3 = Fairly Confident; 5 = Very Confident

Table 2 moves from experience to psychology, measuring the students' self-efficacy—their belief in their own ability to succeed. The data here is perhaps the most diagnostic, revealing a clear fracture in the students' confidence. There is a distinct divide between their perceived ability in conceptual, 'front-end' research tasks and their ability in procedural, 'back-end' statistical tasks. Students reported their highest confidence in identifying a research gap (M=3.40) and formulating research questions (M=3.17). These are tasks that draw heavily on skills familiar to humanities students: critical reading, synthesis, and argument construction. Their confidence here suggests they feel capable of initiating a research project.

However, the data shows a precipitous drop in self-efficacy as the tasks become more technical and statistical. The mean scores fall below the neutral midpoint of 3.00 for nearly all items related to formal methodology and analysis. Confidence is particularly low in tasks that

require bridging a conceptual idea to a statistical procedure, such as formulating null and alternative hypotheses ($M=2.40$). The absolute nadir of their confidence lies in interpreting statistical output from SPSS ($M=2.13$), the very heart of quantitative data analysis. This specific result is critical; it indicates that students perceive the analysis phase as an insurmountable black box. In essence, the table tells a story of a student who feels they can ask a good question but has very little faith in their ability to use data to find the answer.

Table 3. Attitudes Towards Quantitative Research (N=30)

Statement	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)
1. I feel anxious when I think about statistics.	4.10	0.71
2. I believe quantitative skills are essential for my future career.	4.57	0.68
3. I find quantitative research articles difficult and intimidating to read.	3.93	0.94

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree; 3 = Neutral; 5 = Strongly Agree

Table 3 illuminates the central paradox of the students' mindset by exploring their attitudes. The findings reveal a powerful conflict between pragmatic value and emotional response. On one hand, students demonstrate an almost universal belief in the importance of quantitative skills. The statement "I believe quantitative skills are essential for my future career" garnered the highest mean score across the entire survey ($M=4.57$), indicating a strong, rational understanding of the subject's value in the academic and professional landscape. This shows they are not unmotivated or resistant; they are pragmatists who recognize what is required for success.

On the other hand, this pragmatic appreciation is overshadowed by a profound negative affect. Students reported a very high level of anxiety about statistics ($M=4.10$), confirming that their apprehension is significant. This anxiety is not abstract; it manifests in their engagement with research literature, as shown by their strong agreement that quantitative articles are difficult and intimidating to read ($M=3.93$). When read together, these two findings create a psychological profile of "motivated apprehension." Students are willingly enrolling in a course they are convinced is vital for their future, but they are doing so with a deep sense of fear and intimidation. This internal conflict is the primary emotional challenge that any pedagogical approach must address.

Qualitative Findings: Narratives of Anxiety, Motivation, and Need

The qualitative data, derived from the open-ended questions, breathes life into the statistical patterns observed above. The thematic analysis yielded three primary themes that collectively narrate a story of a student cohort grappling with past academic identities, present anxieties, and future aspirations.

Theme 1: The Spectre of Statistics: Anticipatory Anxiety and Silent Struggle

This theme captures the pervasive sense of anxiety and apprehension students felt, which was almost always linked to past negative experiences with mathematics or a complete lack of exposure. The quantitative finding of high anxiety ($M=4.10$) was vividly brought to life in their narratives, often compounded by a reluctance to seek help.

Original (Bahasa Indonesia): "Jujur, Bu/Pak, otak saya itu kadang-kadang nge-blank kalau lihat angka. Dulu itu matematika musuh terbesar saya, makanya saya masuk Sastra Inggris. Sekarang statistik datang lagi, jadi pusing sekali. Saya mau bertanya ke teman, tapi saya malu... nanti mereka pikir saya tidak pintar."

English Translation: "Honestly, Ma'am/Sir, my brain sometimes goes blank when I see numbers. In the past, math was my biggest enemy, which is why I entered the English Department. Now statistics is coming again, so I'm very dizzy/confused. I want to ask my friends, but I am shy/embarrassed... later they might think I'm not smart."

This struggle is intensified when students encounter the discourse of academic research, which they perceive as exclusionary.

Original (Bahasa Indonesia): "Sulit sekali membaca jurnalnya. Banyak simbol, banyak tabel... saya tidak mengerti itu apa. Saya hanya baca abstrak sama kesimpulannya saja. Rasanya seperti... tidak cukup pintar. Mau bertanya ke dosen, saya takut... Beliau kan sibuk, dan mungkin pertanyaan saya terlalu dasar."

English Translation: "Reading the journal is very difficult. Many symbols, many tables... I don't understand what they are. I just read the abstract and the conclusion. I feel like... not clever enough. To ask the lecturer, I am afraid... He is busy, and maybe my question is too basic."

Theme 2: Instrumental Motivation: A Necessary Hurdle for the Thesis

This theme addresses the motivational paradox identified in the quantitative data: the coexistence of high anxiety and high perceived utility. The narratives revealed that students' motivation was not driven by intrinsic curiosity but by a pragmatic and instrumental understanding of the course's role in their academic and professional progression.

Original (Bahasa Indonesia): "Saya harus jujur, saya mengambil kelas ini karena ini wajib. Pokoknya, saya bisa menulis Bab 3 untuk tesis saya. Tujuan saya adalah menyelesaikan studi dengan cepat untuk mendapat promosi di pekerjaan saya."

English Translation: "I must be honest, I take this class because it is mandatory. The point is, I can write my Chapter 3 for my thesis. My goal is to finish my study fast to get a promotion at my job."

This pragmatic view was often informed by a sophisticated awareness of the demands of an academic career.

Original (Bahasa Indonesia): "Senior saya bilang, kalau mau jadi dosen, harus paham kuantitatif. Banyak jurnal Scopus pakai ini. Jadi ya, mata kuliah ini investasi penting, tapi juga membuat saya stres. Bagi saya, ini tentang masa depan, bukan tentang sekarang."

English Translation: "My senior said, if you want to be a lecturer, you must understand quantitative. Many Scopus journals use this. So yes, this course is an important investment, but it also makes me stressed. For me, it is about the future, not about now."

Theme 3: A Craving for Concrete Application

The final theme speaks directly to the students' pedagogical needs and desires. Overwhelmingly, students expressed a deep yearning for a learning environment that prioritizes practical, hands-on application over abstract theoretical discussion.

Original (Bahasa Indonesia): "Harapan saya untuk kelas ini... tolong jangan hanya teori dan rumus dari buku. Kami butuh praktik, mungkin di lab. Langkah demi langkah cara menggunakan SPSS. Kalau kami hanya mendengar, besok kami lupa. Kami ini orangnya praktis, saya rasa."

English Translation: "My hope for this class... please not only theory and formulas from the book. We need practice, maybe in the lab. Step-by-step how to use SPSS. If we only listen, tomorrow we will forget. We are practical people, I think."

This desire for practicality was consistently and explicitly linked to their most pressing academic goal: the thesis.

Original (Bahasa Indonesia): "Yang paling penting bagi saya adalah bagaimana memilih uji yang benar untuk pertanyaan penelitian saya. T-test atau ANOVA, saya masih bingung. Lalu, bagaimana melakukannya di SPSS dan bagaimana menulis hasilnya untuk Bab 4. Pokoknya, satu paket lengkap untuk tesis."

English Translation: "The most important thing for me is how to choose the correct test for my research question. T-test or ANOVA, I am still confused. Then, how to do it in SPSS and how to write the results for Chapter 4. The bottom line is, a complete package for the thesis."

DISCUSSIONS

This study set out to conduct an in-depth needs analysis of incoming postgraduate ELT students, and the mixed-methods findings reveal a complex and challenging pedagogical landscape. The results paint a portrait of a student cohort characterized by a significant paradox: they are pragmatically motivated to acquire quantitative skills that they deem essential for their academic and professional futures, yet they are simultaneously hampered by low self-efficacy and high levels of anxiety, largely rooted in past experiences and a perception of quantitative research as an alien discourse. This discussion will interpret these findings by integrating the quantitative and qualitative data, connecting them to existing literature, and exploring the profound implications for pedagogical practice in research methodology education.

The Efficacy-Anxiety Paradox and Instrumental Motivation

The most striking finding is the stark contrast between students' high valuation of quantitative skills ($M=4.57$ for utility) and their profound personal apprehension ($M=4.10$ for anxiety). This is not simply a lack of knowledge; it is an emotional and psychological barrier that coexists with rational, goal-oriented motivation. This confirms a large body of literature on "statistics anxiety" (Onwuegbuzie & Wilson, 2003), a phenomenon also documented within the Indonesian postgraduate context (Susanto & Wijaya, 2023). The qualitative data from this study adds a crucial layer of nuance, particularly the theme of Instrumental Motivation. Unlike a student who avoids a subject they dislike, these postgraduate students are actively, if reluctantly, approaching the subject precisely because they value its outcome. Their motivation aligns with the concept of extrinsic motivation, where the drive to act comes from external rewards—in this case, thesis completion and career advancement—rather than intrinsic interest (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The qualitative quotes, such as viewing the course as a "wajib" (mandatory) hurdle and a stressful but necessary "investment," powerfully explain why the utility score is so high despite the fear. This has significant pedagogical implications. An instructor assuming that high perceived utility equates to high engagement or interest might misdiagnose the classroom climate. These students are not necessarily "interested" in statistics; they are "invested" in its instrumental value.

Therefore, pedagogy must constantly reinforce this utility. Every concept, every activity must be explicitly linked to the high-stakes goals that motivate them, primarily the successful completion of their Master's thesis (Murtonen, 2005). The student's plea for a "paket komplit untuk tesis" (a complete package for the thesis), a task known to be a significant challenge for postgraduate students (Paltridge & Starfield, 2019), is perhaps the most potent curriculum design principle to emerge from this study. It suggests that a "bottom-up" approach, starting with abstract theory, is likely to fail. Instead, a "top-down" or problem-based approach, starting with the concrete challenges of the thesis, is more likely to sustain their instrumental motivation and focus their learning on what they perceive as most relevant (Zusho, 2017).

Furthermore, this finding extends the work of scholars like Papi and Hiver (2020) on L2 motivation by applying a similar lens to the "language" of research methodology. Just as L2 learners can be motivated by the need to pass an exam, these students are motivated by the need to pass a significant academic milestone. Recognizing this allows instructors to frame the course not as a theoretical exploration but as a strategic training program designed to equip them with the tools for success, thereby aligning the curriculum with their pre-existing motivational framework.

Deconstructing Self-Efficacy: A Tale of Two Skill Sets

The quantitative data on self-efficacy (Table 2) is particularly revealing. It shows a clear cleavage between conceptual, 'front-end' research skills (identifying gaps, formulating RQs) and technical, 'back-end' statistical skills (using SPSS, interpreting output). Students feel moderately capable of thinking about research but deeply incapable of doing the statistical analysis. This aligns with Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, which posits that efficacy beliefs are domain-specific and highly influential on performance and persistence. A student's confidence in their ability as a critical reader of ELT literature does not automatically transfer to confidence as a user of statistical software.

The qualitative data powerfully illuminates the reasons for this divide. The metaphors students used to describe their feelings—being "pusing" (dizzy/confused) or feeling "not clever enough"—reveal a perception of statistics as a non-intuitive, symbolic system governed by arcane rules, completely disconnected from the narrative and interpretive skills they have honed as humanities students. The low self-efficacy score for interpreting SPSS output ($M=2.13$) is not just a skills deficit; it's an epistemic one. It reflects their struggle to connect the numbers on the screen to a meaningful narrative about their research topic. This finding strongly supports the call for a more applied and less abstract approach to teaching statistics in the social sciences (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020). The demand for "step-by-step" practice is a direct appeal from students to build what Bandura (1997) calls "mastery experiences"—the most powerful source of self-efficacy. When a student successfully performs a task, their belief in their ability to do it again increases.

This finding also suggests a critical pedagogical sequence. Instructors should leverage students' relatively higher self-efficacy in conceptual tasks as a bridge to the more intimidating technical tasks. For instance, the course could begin with an intense focus on perfecting research questions (an area of moderate confidence) and then introduce statistical tests not as abstract formulas, but as specific tools designed to answer those very questions (Phakiti & Li, 2011). By framing statistics as a service to their existing research ideas, the course can re-situate it from a source of anxiety to a powerful extension of their academic inquiry.

The Enduring Shadow of Past Experiences and the Silent Struggle

The qualitative theme of "The Specter of Statistics" provides a crucial diagnostic insight: for many students, the classroom is not a blank slate. It is populated by the ghosts of past academic traumas, particularly from high school mathematics. The student's comment about their brain going "blank" when seeing numbers is a classic description of the cognitive interference caused by anxiety, where working memory is overloaded by intrusive, negative thoughts, leaving fewer resources for learning and problem-solving (Ashcraft & Kirk, 2001; Eysenck et al., 2007). The data suggests that for these students, the quantitative methods course is not just a new subject but a potential re-enactment of past failures.

This anxiety is further compounded by socio-cultural factors prevalent in many collectivist educational contexts, including Indonesia: a reluctance to ask questions for fear of 'losing face' or being perceived as incompetent (Helgesen & Tran, 2021). The qualitative data, with students repeatedly mentioning being "malu" (shy/embarrassed) or "takut" (afraid) to approach lecturers or even peers, suggests that this "silent struggle" is a critical, yet often invisible, barrier to learning. This phenomenon creates a vicious cycle: the initial difficulty of the concepts leads to confusion, but the fear of asking for help prevents that confusion from being resolved. The student who feared their question was "too basic" for the busy lecturer perfectly encapsulates this dilemma. This finding suggests that a lack of questions in the classroom should not be interpreted as understanding, but potentially as a sign of widespread, silent confusion. This resonates with studies on Indonesian postgraduate challenges, which highlight the transition to a more independent and critical learning style as a major hurdle (Herawati, 2022; Woodrow, 2016).

These insights have profound implications, suggesting that teaching quantitative methodology to this demographic is not just a cognitive task but an affective one. The instructor must assume the dual role of a content expert and a facilitator of psychological safety. Simply presenting the material clearly is insufficient if the students are too anxious to process it or too shy to ask for clarification. This empirically validates the need for integrating principles from positive psychology and supportive pedagogies directly into the methodology classroom (Cassidy, 2015). Pedagogical strategies could include:

- a. **Normalizing Anxiety:** The first lecture could explicitly address statistics anxiety, framing it as a common and understandable response rather than a personal failing.
- b. **Focusing on Mastery and Growth:** Shifting the assessment focus away from high-stakes, timed exams towards project-based coursework and formative feedback can promote a "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2006), where mistakes are seen as learning opportunities. This aligns with findings from scholars like Rahayu (2023) on the effectiveness of project-based approaches in the Indonesian context.
- c. **Creating Low-Stakes Channels for Help-Seeking:** Implementing anonymous question forums online or regular, informal "drop-in" sessions can lower the social risk associated with asking "basic" questions, directly counteracting the "malu" culture (Nugroho & Putri, 2024).
- d. **Building a Community of Practice:** Emphasizing collaborative work, as suggested by Lave and Wenger (1991), can create a support system where students can share their struggles and learn from one another in a less intimidating peer environment (Wilson & O'Regan, 2017; Wachter & O'Brien, 2019).

The heterogeneity of the cohort (Table 1), with its mix of students who have and have not had statistics courses or quantitative thesis experience, further complicates this. It necessitates a

differentiated instructional approach. An initial diagnostic assessment, such as the one used in this study, becomes an essential tool for the instructor to identify students who may need additional support, while also leveraging the experience of more confident students as peer mentors.

CONCLUSIONS

The journey into quantitative research for postgraduate ELT students is evidently more than a simple academic exercise; it is a complex negotiation of past identities, future aspirations, technical challenges, and emotional hurdles. This study reveals that behind the door of the quantitative methodology classroom stands a group of capable and motivated students who are not unwilling, but rather, under-confident, anxious, and culturally conditioned to struggle in silence. They see the value of the key but are unsure how to use it and fear the social cost of asking for help. The task of the educator, therefore, is not simply to hand them the key, but to walk with them to the door, demystify its mechanism, create a safe space for questions, guide their hand, and celebrate with them as they discover their own power to unlock new worlds of inquiry. A pedagogically responsive, affectively aware, and practically-grounded curriculum is not just a preference; it is an absolute necessity for empowering the next generation of ELT researchers.

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