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Mathematics Anxiety Profiles and Dominant Predictors of Students' Mathematical Problem-Solving Ability for SDG 4: Quality Mathematics Education

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.63230/jocsis.3.1.305>

Sections Info

Article history:

Submitted: February 9, 2026

Final Revised: April 2, 2026

Accepted: June 4, 2026

First Available Online: July 30, 2026

Publication Date: March 27, 2027

Keywords:

Mathematics Anxiety;

Mathematics Problem-Solving Ability;

Personality Factors;

Psychological Factors;

Quality Education;

Self-Efficacy.

ABSTRACT

Objective: To identify mathematics anxiety profiles among junior high school students and examine the dominant psychological predictors influencing students' mathematical problem-solving ability. The study addresses the limitation of previous research that often treats mathematics anxiety as a single emotional barrier by examining variations in students' anxiety characteristics and their associated predictors. **Method:** A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was employed involving 183 seventh-grade students from two public junior high schools in West Surabaya, Indonesia. Quantitative data were collected using a mathematics anxiety questionnaire and a mathematical problem-solving ability test. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis were conducted to identify anxiety profiles and determine dominant predictors within each profile. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed to provide deeper explanations of quantitative findings. **Results:** The findings revealed that students demonstrated different mathematics anxiety characteristics associated with variations in problem-solving ability. Regression analysis showed that dominant predictors differed across anxiety profiles. Psychological factors emerged as the strongest predictor in Cluster 1 ($B = 1.692, p < 0.001$), while personality factors became the dominant predictor in Cluster 2 ($B = 1.899, p = 0.021$). **Novelty:** The study contributes to mathematics education research by demonstrating that mathematics anxiety should not be viewed as a homogeneous construct. Instead, different anxiety profiles are associated with different dominant predictors, providing implications for developing differentiated learning strategies that support inclusive and quality mathematics education aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

INTRODUCTION

Mathematical problem-solving ability is a fundamental competency in mathematics education because it reflects students' capacity to understand mathematical problems, develop appropriate strategies, apply procedures, and evaluate solutions (Gravameijer et al., 2017). In the context of 21st-century education, mathematical problem solving extends beyond computational skills and involves critical thinking, reasoning, and decision-making abilities. Therefore, improving students' mathematical problem-solving ability has become an important objective in achieving quality education (Kim, Lee, & Cho, 2022). This objective is closely aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), which emphasizes inclusive and equitable quality education and the improvement of learning outcomes for all learners (Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019).

Despite its importance, many students continue to experience difficulties in solving mathematical problems. These difficulties are not only related to limited conceptual understanding or procedural knowledge but are also influenced by affective factors (Dwivedi et al., 2019). One of the most frequently reported affective barriers in mathematics learning is mathematics anxiety. Mathematics anxiety refers to negative emotional responses experienced when individuals encounter mathematical tasks,