FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN THE EFL CLASSROOMS

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Annotation. This literature-based thesis provides information about Foreign Language Anxiety, its causes, and effects, alongside with importance of teachers being aware of this linguistic factor. According to findings, FLA is one of the profound reasons why learners avoid language learning opportunities and fail it, as this factor affect learners speaking confidence, their speaking performance, assessments, as well as their group collaboration. Even though a lot of studies were conducted on this topic, their findings are limited to certain contexts, and this phenomenon in Uzbekistan remains under-explored, hindering learners second language acquisition in this country. Eventually, this presents working tips for FLA mitigation..

Introduction. FLA is a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning, which is a context specific form of anxiety specific only in language learning and characterized by feelings of apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and avoidance behaviors, Horwitz et al. (1986). FLA's impact on learners' language learning is of undeniable importance, as it directly affects learners language proficiency, by making learners reluctant to participate in different class activities, resulting in chances for language practice as well as feedback being missed, Qurbonova (2025). Consequently, when they do not practice they do not improve their skills, makeing them even more reluctant to practice, as they will think that people around will find their mistakes and judge them. FLA impairs cognitive functions such as memory and attention, MacIntyre (1994), affects group collaboration and dynamics, creating unfriendly atmosphere where learners do not have other choice but feeling unsure about their skills, Qaddomi (2013).

Horwitz et al (1986) created Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale in order to investigate what factors make learners have FLA and found out three causes of FLA such as communication apprehension, Test, and fear of negative

evaluation. In 2000s-2010s factors such as teacher behavior and environment, Gregersen (2003), Social factors such as peer pressure, Liu and Jackson (2008), task difficulty as well as lack of preparation, Tallon (2009), and finally Individual learner traits such as motivation, self-efficacy, and personality, Dornyei (2005); Woodrow (2006), were added into list of FLA causes.

Dewaele & Maclntyre (2014) explored the positive impact of a relaxed classroom atmosphere on FLA,concluding that strong classroom community and positive learning atmosphere, can help reduce FLA by enhancing motivation. The study by Arnaiz (2016) further explored the connection between anxiety and motivation, even though in CLIL context. Which was even more fortunate considering that she found that CLIL programs and instructions also has a positive reducing impact on FLA and second language acquisition. Interplay of Content and Language Integrated Learning and FLA is very well-researched area, with a lot of studies namely Lopez-Agudo (2019), Marsh (2011) Dalton-Puffer (2011), and Lopez-Medina (2024) concluding that CLIL is a significant factor that can mitigate FLA by addressing all potential causes of FLA such as personality traits and fostering motivation and positive group dynamics.

With worldwide education system further pushing the request for a conductive to language learning environment, the relevance of FLA to EFL teaching cannot be underestimated, because when FLA is addressed students become more eager to learn, and more motivated, further improving language outcomes and second language acquisition, Maclntyre (2014). These are reasons why this phenomenon must be studied.

Background and Theoretical Perspectives.

The earliest systematic exploration of anxiety in learning contexts was presented by Tobias (1979), who argued that anxiety interferes at three stages: input, processing, and output. Building on this, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which remains a widely used instrument in FLA research. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) later emphasized that FLA should be seen as a situation-specific construct, distinct from trait or general anxiety. This theoretical debate continues, with some scholars suggesting FLA has characteristics of both trait and state anxiety.

Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety.

Many learners hold the misconception that they should only communicate in the target language when they can do it without mistakes, creating immense pressure to perform mistake-freely. Because of this unrealistic standard learners miss a lot of opportunities to practise, participate and learn, (Gkonou et al., 2017). However behind this trend there is a factor which is fear of negative evaluation, when learners mistakenly think that whatever mistake they make will result in negative

feedback and ridicule.Consequently,this fear of making mistakes or being mocked creates a barrier for language practise and participation, as learners can miss very good chances for language development waiting for perfect time which will never arrive, further declining their language proficiency, Young (1990).

The most common factors causing FLA are Cognitive causes which are connected to learners' low self-esteem and biased perception of their knowledge in a foreign language.Learners who critically evaluate their abilities tend to be more susceptible to anxiety, since they constantly anticipate negative outcomes in language practises,Aida(1994).Next comes self-fulfilling prophecy, when a student who consistently underestimates their language skills may enter a classroom and end up expecting failure,which in turns affects their real results, Bartholomew et al.(2021). Additionally, there are cognitive distortions, such as overgeneralizing past failures, when learners because of their failures in the past loss a faith on their learning success, anticipate failure, and start to avoid all opportunities for practise and even classes all together, Hofmann et al.(2012)

Learners with higher levels of anxiety are often more sensitive to criticism compared to their counterparts with lower levels of anxiety or without it at all. However, due to this sensitivity their negative self-perceptions are reinforced and their willingness to engage in language tasks is inhibited, Zhang (2021).

Learners' fear of negative evaluation is a concern which is the most noticeable factor among learners, because even learners who do not have any idea about FLA its causes or effects perfectly notice when they are scared to receive negative feedback, being judged or criticized by peers or instructors and how it negatively affects their language development, making them reluctant to take a part in language improving tasks, Qaddomi (2013). However its consequences usually go beyond these individuals' understanding. For example it not only has an impact on individuals, but it also creates a hostile environment where learners cannot feel free to engage or take risks, affecting group dynamics and collaboration.

This argument emphasizes the complexity of the nature of anxiety and the need for a broad understanding of learners' experiences.

However there is one point in which all studies reached consciousness and this is learners' lack of preparation for the lesson. All studies identically identified that even learners who normally do not have FLA, start experiencing it immediately when they are not prepared to the lesson.It is a result of students anxiety levels that can spike significantly when they fear being unable to contribute meaningfully to discussions or perform adequately in assessments, Li et al.(2022).

Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety. While, some scholars (e.g., Scovel, 1991) argue that moderate levels of anxiety may occasionally facilitate performance by motivating learners to prepare more thoroughly. The negative effects of FLA are widely documented. Learners experiencing high anxiety often demonstrate reduced participation, lower test performance, and weaker long-term language attainment (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Anxiety interferes with working memory, making it difficult to process input and produce accurate output (Eysenck et al., 2007).

In the classroom, FLA is associated with avoidance behaviors, reluctance to volunteer answers, and reduced willingness to communicate (Liu & Jackson, 2008). This creates a cycle where anxious learners engage less, fall behind, and become even more anxious (Sadeghi, 2017). Furthermore, FLA affects self-esteem and motivation, often discouraging learners from pursuing advanced study or real-life use of the language.

Recent research emphasizes that FLA does not affect all skills equally. Speaking is most commonly associated with anxiety, followed by listening and writing (Zhang, 2019). Additionally, high levels of FLA correlate with attrition and dropout from language courses (Dewaele, 2015). These findings underscore the urgent need for effective strategies to mitigate its effects.

Pedagogical Implications.

Teachers play a critical role in addressing and mitigating FLA. Creating a supportive classroom environment, offering scaffolding, and providing constructive feedback can help reduce anxiety.

The use of humor and group-based activities encourages participation in a less threatening manner. In recent years, technology and AI-based platforms have offered opportunities for learners to practice in private, low-stakes contexts, which can help build confidence before classroom performance. Raising teacher awareness of FLA ensures that educators can distinguish between learners' general shyness and anxiety that is specifically tied to language learning.

Conclusion. Foreign Language Anxiety is a linguistic phenomenon, caused by learners fear of negative evaluation, making mistakes, public speaking, as well as their low self esteem. However, by academically supporting and creating positive learning atmosphere can help address FLA's impact on their language development, allowing learners acquire second language.

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