

## Foreign Language Anxiety in ESP Students and the Relationship that Exist between Foreign Language Anxiety and Classroom Presentation Difficulties

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### Abstract

*Foreign Language Anxiety is seen in different studies as one of the most outstanding individual differences that can predict a learner's success in studying a foreign language. The main purpose of this study is to investigate the Foreign Language Anxiety in ESP students as well as the relationship that exist between Foreign Language Anxiety and classroom presentation difficulties. The participants in this study are 176 university students studying English for specific purposes (ESP) at different courses of study at "Aleksander Moisiu" University. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, et al., was used to measure foreign language anxiety. The findings reveal that most students showed moderate to high Foreign language anxiety levels. The study also showed that there exists a positive moderate correlation between Foreign Language anxiety and difficulties at delivering oral presentations in the classroom.*

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, foreign language learning, classroom presentation, English for Specific purposes.

### I. Introduction

Foreign language learning is fundamental for students to effectively function in the modern global marketplace. Different variables related to foreign language learning have continuously been the focus of many studies. Affective variables such as anxiety, are believed to play a crucial role in the process of learning a second language. In fact, language anxiety is considered to be a major obstacle to learning a foreign language (Horwitz, 2001).

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is defined by Horwitz et al. (1986), as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process" (p.128).

### Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the Foreign Language Anxiety in ESP students and the relationship that exists between Foreign Language Anxiety and classroom presentation difficulties.

Two research questions of the given study are as follows:

1. What level of Foreign Language Anxiety do ESP students experience when it comes to learning English?
2. What is the correlation between foreign language anxiety and students' perceptions of classroom presentation difficulties?

### II. Literature review

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Foreign language researchers have long been trying to associate anxiety with language learning in general, and more specifically in the classroom context. Horwitz and Cope were the first to distinguish foreign language anxiety as a distinct phenomenon particular to language learning (Young, 1991). According to Horwitz et al., foreign language anxiety is a result of three factors related to performance: fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. Students who expect others to evaluate them negatively, who fear oral communication and the ones who fear failure, are more prone to have a higher level of foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986).

There are many different forms of manifestations of foreign language anxiety including such reactions as: distortion of sounds, freezing up when called on to perform, refusing to speak and remaining silent, forgetting words and phrases just learned, avoiding eye contact, short answer responses, avoiding activities in class, acting indifferent, being unprepared at school, cutting class, delaying taking the course of foreign language until the last year, or sitting in the last row in class (Young, 1991).

### 2.1 Developments in Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) research

In the past decades, there has been an extensive study of foreign language anxiety in the field of foreign language education. Researchers have analysed the effects of anxiety on foreign language learning since the 1970's (Casado and Dereshiwsky, 2001). As early as 1973, Brown predicted that anxiety was associated with self-esteem and that it played an important affective role in second language acquisition. Earlier studies conceptualized foreign language anxiety as a transfer of other types of anxiety in language learning and produced mixed and even contradictory results (Kleinmann, 1977). The inconsistent results of the early studies on foreign language anxiety may be due to the fact that researchers used various constructs and measures of anxiety (Scovel, 1978). Horwitz et al, 1986, agreed that foreign language anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety distinguished from trait anxiety and state anxiety. In addition, they developed an instrument known as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), to measure foreign language anxiety, which has been widely adopted in foreign language anxiety research. FLCAS made possible the study of different variables related to foreign language anxiety. Some researchers took the FLCAS as a point of departure to develop more language self-report scales (Teimouri, Goetze and Plonsky, 2019).

### 2.2 Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Anxiety associated with foreign language has five main negative effects on foreign language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 2007). First, foreign language anxiety could lead to a poor academic achievement. Studies have reported that there is a negative relationship between foreign language anxiety and academic achievement (Horwitz, 2001). Bailey, Onwuegbuzie and Daley (2003), found that another academic effect of foreign language anxiety is students' drop out. Students with high anxiety are more probable to drop out their courses than those with low anxiety. The second effect is related to social communication. High level anxious students are not interested in communicating with others and language anxiety leads students to be unwilling to communicate in English (MacIntyre, 2007). Another negative effect is related to cognition abilities. Foreign language anxiety functions as an affective filter which impedes information from reaching the cognitive processing system of students (MacIntyre, 1995). The fourth effect is affection: anxiety may negatively influence the other affective factors such as motivation and attitude. According to Horwitz (Horwitz, 2001) foreign language anxiety, which is likely to influence a student's feeling about the study, is negatively associated with students' English learning motivation. The last effect is related to perception about oneself: students who experience anxiety in learning a foreign language could feel miserable about themselves and low in self-confidence (MacIntyre and Gregersen, 2012).

### 2.3 What are the sources of Foreign Language Anxiety?

Exploring the sources of foreign language anxiety can help to explain the effects of anxiety on foreign language learning and also help English teachers find practical and effective teaching programs and strategies (Huang, 2012). Luo (2013), based on a review of the literature on foreign language anxiety, proposed a four dimensional source model of foreign language anxiety, which suggests that some amount of foreign language anxiety is inherent in the classroom environment: the characteristics of the language learner, the target language and the foreign language learning process. According to Young (1991) language anxiety arises from six main factors: personal and interpersonal issues; learner beliefs about language learning; instructor beliefs about language teaching; instructor-learner interactions; classroom procedures; and language testing.

Personal and interpersonal issues (self-esteem, competitiveness, student and teacher beliefs, fear of social performance, social anxiety), are probably the most commonly discussed sources of language anxiety in most studies (Young, 1991). Krashen (1983) states that foreign language anxiety is evoked by the individual's self-esteem. Competitiveness can also lead to language anxiety because it is natural to compare oneself with others when one learns to use a foreign language to communicate (Bailey, 1983). Beliefs of both learners and their teachers can be related to language anxiety (Young, 1991).

In addition to the factors mentioned above, other elements related to teacher support and teacher teaching style can contribute to students foreign language anxiety. According to Alrabai, students foreign language anxiety increases when there is inappropriate teacher teaching style, stressful classroom atmosphere, lack of engagement in classroom activities and inappropriate teaching contents (Alrabai, 2014). Apart from such factors, other studies also correlate anxiety with age (Bailey, Onwuegbuzie and Daley, 2003), motivation (Yan and Horwitz, 2008) and emotional intelligence (Awan, Sabir and Iqbal 2009).

A review of the current literature indicates that studies related to foreign language anxiety conducted in Albania are still limited.

### III. Research methodology

The participants in this study are 176 university students studying English for specific purposes (ESP) in different study programs at Aleksander Moisu University, Durres, Albania.

The instrument for this study was administered to all participants after the first mid term exam. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section intended to collect background information about participants (age, sex, etc..) and information about, perceived classroom presentation difficulty, intensive English language courses prior to university entry, intermediate English test evaluation. The second one included the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz et al. in 1986, for assessing students anxiety in English classes. The FLCAS is a widely recognized instrument to assess general foreign language anxiety. It consists of 33 items which are rated on a Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The quantitative results were analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.0.

### IV. Research Findings

1. What level of Foreign Language Anxiety do ESP students have towards the learning of English?

In order to understand the participants' general level of language classroom anxiety, the total score of each respondent was calculated. Descriptive statistics indicate that the majority of the students in the study were students with moderate to high anxiety levels (56.9%). A total of 43.1 % were identified as students with low anxiety, 21.6% were classified as students with moderate anxiety and 35.3 % as students with high anxiety levels.

Table 1. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

|       |              | Frequency | %     | Valid % | Cumulative % |
|-------|--------------|-----------|-------|---------|--------------|
| Valid | Low FLA      | 76        | 43.1  | 43.1    | 43.1         |
|       | Moderate FLA | 38        | 21.6  | 21.6    | 64.7         |
|       | High FLA     | 62        | 35.3  | 35.3    | 100.0        |
|       | Total        | 176       | 100.0 | 100.0   |              |

2. What is the correlation between foreign language anxiety and students' perceptions of classroom presentation difficulties?

The students were asked about the difficulties they have or have not faced when presenting in front of their peers in the classroom. Surprisingly, most of the participants responded that they face difficulties in presenting in the classroom. As shown in Table.2, the given study demonstrated that there exists a positive moderate correlation ( $r=.493$ ) between Foreign Language anxiety and difficulties of presenting in classroom.

Table.2 Correlation between Foreign language anxiety levels and students' perceptions performance difficulties

|                          |                     | FLA    | Presentation difficulties |
|--------------------------|---------------------|--------|---------------------------|
| FLA                      | Pearson Correlation | 1      | .493**                    |
|                          | Sig. (2-tailed)     |        | .000                      |
|                          | N                   | 176    | 176                       |
| Performance difficulties | Pearson Correlation | .493** | 1                         |
|                          | Sig. (2-tailed)     | .000   |                           |
|                          | N                   | 176    | 176                       |

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

#### IV. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in ESP students and the relationship between foreign language anxiety and classroom presentation difficulties.

The results of the study indicate that the majority of the students have moderate to high anxiety levels (56.9%). The given data also correlates to results from previous studies. In their metanalytic study Necho, Tsehay, Birkie, Miset, and Tadesse in 2021 stated that the average prevalence of anxiety was found to be 38.12%. VonWorde (1998) argued that one third to one half of the participants involved in the study reported a certain level of language anxiety.

Results of the study in question show that the anxiety related to learning a foreign language is a problem among the students. However, the study is not conclusive. Other studies are needed to see more clearly if other factors are related to high levels of anxiety.

It remains to be further investigated whether the level of anxiety that students reported during this study is related to the anxiety associated with learning a foreign language or the generally high levels of anxiety among young people.

Furthermore, the results show that there exists a positive moderate correlation between Foreign Language Anxiety and difficulties of oral presentation in the classroom.

Ritonga, Nasmilah, and Rahman (2020), empathized in their study that there is a correlation between Foreign language anxiety and oral presentations. Based on the results of the study, language anxiety that the students experience during speaking tasks in English language, affects their ability to comprehensibly present ideas. Consequently, this is expected to negatively affect their general performance.

#### V. Conclusions

Foreign Language Anxiety is a challenging issue in foreign language learning. Researchers need to treat this issue systematically and offer a complete understanding of the many dimensions it presents. It is an in-depth understanding of causes and effects of foreign language anxiety that will pave the way towards the solution to the problems it manifests. This study suggests that Foreign Language Anxiety is a problem among ESP students. The positive correlation between Foreign Language Anxiety and the difficulties shown in classroom presentations are significant indicators. Another study for further exploration in this variable needs to be carried out in the future to have more reliable and valid data.

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