

## EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

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**Abstract.** Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a pervasive emotional factor that significantly affects learners' success in second language acquisition. This study explores the impact of FLA on university students' academic performance in Uzbekistan, taking into account the cultural and institutional factors that shape students' experiences. Employing a mixed-methods approach, data were collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and students' academic records, complemented by semi-structured interviews with participants exhibiting high anxiety levels.

**Keywords:** Foreign language anxiety; academic success; academic performance; Uzbek university students; language learning; FLCAS; fear of negative evaluation; classroom anxiety; teacher support; mixed-methods research.

**Annotatsiya.** Chet tili xavotiri (Foreign Language Anxiety FLA) ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish jarayonida o'quvchilarning muvaffaqiyatiga sezilarli ta'sir ko'rsatadigan keng tarqalgan emotsional omillardan biridir. Ushbu tadqiqot O'zbekistondagi universitet talabalari akademik ko'rsatkichlariga FLAning ta'sirini o'rganadi hamda talabalarning tajribalarini shakllantiruvchi madaniy va institutsional omillarni hisobga oladi. Aralash metodlar yondashuvidan foydalangan holda, ma'lumotlar Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) so'rovnomasi va talabalarning akademik natijalari asosida to'plandi. Shuningdek, yuqori xavotir darajasiga ega ishtirokchilar bilan yarim tuzilmali intervyular o'tkazildi.

**Kalit so'zlar:** Chet tili xavotiri; akademik muvaffaqiyat; akademik ko'rsatkichlar; O'zbekiston universitet talabalari; til o'rganish; FLCAS; salbiy baholanishdan qo'rqish; sinfdagi xavotir; o'qituvchi qo'llab-quvvatlashi; aralash metodli tadqiqot.

**Аннотация.** Тревожность при изучении иностранного языка (Foreign Language Anxiety FLA) является распространённым эмоциональным фактором, который существенно влияет на успех обучающихся в процессе овладения вторым языком. В данном исследовании рассматривается влияние FLA на академическую успеваемость студентов университетов Узбекистана с учётом культурных и институциональных факторов, формирующих учебный опыт студентов. Используя смешанный метод исследования, данные были собраны с помощью шкалы тревожности в аудитории иностранного языка (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale — FLCAS) и академических показателей студентов. Кроме того, были проведены полуструктурированные интервью с участниками, имеющими высокий уровень тревожности.

**Ключевые слова:** Тревожность при изучении иностранного языка; академическая успешность; академическая успеваемость; студенты университетов Узбекистана; изучение языка; FLCAS; страх негативной оценки; аудиторная тревожность; поддержка преподавателя; смешанный метод исследования.

### Introduction.

#### 1.1 Background

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) is a distinct type of anxiety associated specifically with language learning. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) define FLA as a complex interaction of self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors triggered in the language classroom. It is a situational form of anxiety that disrupts learners' engagement and performance, particularly during communicative or evaluative tasks (Spielberger, 1983).

Anxiety in academic contexts can either facilitate or impede performance (Alpert & Haber, 1960). However, research indicates that in foreign language learning, high levels of anxiety are primarily debilitating, leading to avoidance, reduced participation, and compromised achievement across listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994).

In Uzbekistan, foreign language proficiency, especially in English, has become a priority due to national educational reforms aimed at global integration (National Database of Legislation of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 2019). Despite the increasing emphasis on multilingualism, many students struggle to achieve fluency because of pervasive FLA, particularly in technical fields where exposure to language learning is limited.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Students in Uzbek universities frequently report nervousness, self-doubt, and fear of negative evaluation in foreign language classes. Contextual factors—such as large classes, teacher-centered instruction, and limited authentic practice opportunities—amplify these anxieties (Horwitz et al., 1986; Spielberger, 1983). FLA negatively affects academic performance, leading to lower test scores, diminished engagement, and higher attrition rates in language courses. Understanding FLA within the Uzbek context is therefore essential for developing effective interventions.

## 1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

1. Examine the relationship between FLA and academic performance among Uzbek university students.
2. Identify strategies that can alleviate FLA within the local context.

The following research questions guide the study:

- How does FLA manifest in university classrooms?
- What is the impact of FLA on academic achievement?
- Which coping strategies are most effective for managing FLA in Uzbekistan?

## 1.4 Significance of the Study

By providing insights into FLA in a culturally specific context, this study contributes to the global discourse on language learning anxiety while offering practical recommendations for educators and policymakers in Uzbekistan. Understanding and mitigating FLA is essential for improving academic outcomes and equipping students to thrive in multilingual environments.

## Literature Review.

### 2.1 Theoretical Foundations

The link between anxiety and academic performance has long been studied (Alpert & Haber, 1960). Facilitating anxiety may enhance performance by motivating learners, while debilitating anxiety overwhelms cognitive and emotional resources. In language learning, anxiety often becomes debilitating due to high cognitive demands.

Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis further explains the impact of anxiety on language acquisition. Emotional states such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence influence learners' capacity to process linguistic input. A heightened affective filter limits comprehension and retention, hindering proficiency development.

Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized FLA as a unique construct comprising communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) extended this framework, emphasizing cognitive interference such as negative self-talk. Spielberger's (1983) state-trait model complements these perspectives, highlighting the situational nature of language anxiety. Recent studies also indicate that motivational orientation and classroom environment moderate FLA (Han et al., 2022; Teimouri et al., 2019).

## 2.2 Contributors to FLA

**Classroom Dynamics:** Teacher-centered instruction, error-focused feedback, and competitive atmospheres can exacerbate anxiety (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). Oral communication tasks are particularly anxiety-inducing due to their immediacy and risk of embarrassment.

**Individual Differences:** Gender, personality, prior experiences, and language proficiency influence FLA. Female learners often report higher anxiety levels, and introverted students may experience greater speaking-related stress (Baker & MacIntyre, 2003).

**Skill-Specific Anxiety:** FLA manifests differently across language domains. Writing anxiety arises from concerns about grammar and coherence (Cheng, 2004); speaking anxiety is linked to real-time communication (Saito et al., 1999); listening anxiety emerges from difficulty understanding spoken language (Elkhafaifi, 2005); and reading anxiety occurs with complex texts. Recognizing these distinctions allows for targeted interventions.

## 2.3 FLA and Academic Achievement

FLA negatively impacts cognitive processes essential for language learning, including attention, memory, and problem-solving (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). High anxiety impairs fluency, reduces accuracy, and limits learners' willingness to engage in language tasks (Teimouri et al., 2019; Han et al., 2022). Over time, repeated exposure to anxiety-inducing situations compounds these effects, resulting in long-term difficulties in language acquisition and overall academic performance.

## 2.4 Coping Mechanisms and Interventions

Effective strategies for managing FLA include cognitive coping mechanisms, emotional support, and classroom modifications. Techniques such as positive self-talk, relaxation, and seeking social support can reduce anxiety (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004; Adelian et al., 2024). Teacher support is critical; a non-judgmental, patient, and encouraging classroom environment fosters risk-taking and participation (Horwitz, 2017;

He, 2018). Structured, flexible activities, peer collaboration, and culturally relevant content further mitigate FLA (Young, 1991; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000).

### **Methodology.**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

A mixed-methods approach was employed to combine quantitative measures with qualitative insights (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This design allows for triangulation and a comprehensive understanding of FLA among Uzbek university students.

#### **3.2 Participants**

The study involved 46 students from the Kokand branch of Tashkent State Technical University. Participants were purposively selected from technical majors to focus on learners who typically encounter FLA due to limited language exposure.

#### **3.3 Data Collection**

Quantitative data were collected using the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986) and academic records (GPA). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants reporting the highest anxiety levels, exploring causes, manifestations, and coping strategies.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis**

Pearson correlation analysis was applied to quantitative data to examine relationships between FLA and academic performance. Thematic analysis was used for qualitative data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase approach. This mixed-methods framework provides both broad statistical trends and in-depth personal perspectives.

### **Results.**

#### **4.1 Quantitative Findings**

Participants reported moderately high FLA, particularly in fear of mistakes, communication apprehension, and test anxiety. Pearson correlation indicated a significant negative relationship between FLA and academic performance ( $r = -0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), confirming that anxiety hinders achievement.

Subscale analysis revealed that fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and test anxiety were the most influential components. Female students exhibited slightly higher anxiety levels than males. Some students with moderate anxiety achieved high GPAs, suggesting mild anxiety may sometimes facilitate performance (Alpert & Haber, 1960).

#### **4.2 Qualitative Insights**

**Fear of Negative Evaluation:** Students reported reluctance to participate in class due to concerns about peer and teacher judgment (Horwitz et al., 1986; Aida, 1994).

**Parental Pressure:** High parental expectations contributed to anxiety, creating additional stress beyond the classroom (Zhai, 2021).

**Competitiveness:** Peer comparison and a desire to outperform classmates amplified stress (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Williams, 1991).

**Oral Tasks:** Speaking activities were particularly anxiety-inducing due to limited practice and fear of errors (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004; Zhai, 2021).

**Cultural and Contextual Factors:** Hierarchical teacher-student relationships and limited English exposure intensified anxiety (Han et al., 2022; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

**Discussion.** The findings reinforce that FLA negatively affects academic performance, consistent with Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre (1999). Cultural factors, including parental expectations and hierarchical classroom dynamics, uniquely shape students' experiences in Uzbekistan. Mild anxiety may occasionally serve as motivation, aligning with Scovel's (1978) facilitating-debilitating framework.

**Practical Implications:** Teachers should foster supportive, low-pressure environments, provide constructive feedback, and incorporate low-stakes speaking activities (Horwitz, 1990; MacIntyre, 1995). Institutions can offer counseling, tutoring, and tailored language courses to reduce anxiety and promote authentic language use (He, 2018; Han et al., 2022).

**Limitations and Future Research:** The study's small, localized sample limits generalizability. Future research could include broader populations, longitudinal analyses, and the role of digital learning environments in shaping FLA (Yoshida, 2010; Piniel, 2024).

**Conclusion.** FLA is a significant barrier to academic success in foreign language learning among Uzbek university students. Factors such as fear of negative evaluation, parental pressure, oral tasks, and cultural norms exacerbate anxiety, particularly for technical students with limited language proficiency.

Targeted interventions at both the classroom and institutional levels are essential for reducing FLA and improving academic outcomes. By fostering supportive environments, integrating culturally responsive teaching, and providing dedicated language support, Uzbek universities can empower students to overcome anxiety, enhance performance, and build confidence in their language abilities.

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