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Foreign Language Anxiety: A Review on Theories, Causes, Consequences and Implications for Educators

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Introduction

Anxiety is a perplexing condition that can prevent people from engaging in various activities and, under some circumstances, can endanger their life stability (Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxiety is believed to affect different aspects of life such as social activities, job positions, and educational status. It has also been recognized to have detrimental effects on second language acquisition (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). As a result, during the last 40 years, many scholars have studied the interference of anxiety and learning a second or foreign language. Given the importance of this psychological condition, there is no universally agreed upon definition of this status and scholars have never agreed on a specific and pervasive definition of this multifaceted, bewildering concept (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

During the last few decades, psychologists and researchers have defined anxiety in various ways. Due to the existence of many potential definitions of anxiety, early research on its effects on second language acquisition (SLA) has produced inconsistent results. Scovel (1978) believed that anxiety is not a simple measurable construct and is triggered by several factors. Studies have shown that this inconsistency in the results was firstly seen in three studies in 1970s: Chastain (1975), Backman (1976) and Kleinmann (1977). Chastain found both positive and negative—and non-significant—correlations between the anxiety and second language (L2) achievement. Backman (Williams, 1991) found out that two of his lower-achieving students in terms of proficiency development had both the lowest and highest anxiety level in his research. Finally, Kleinmann found that slightly anxious students avoided situations that needed specific English structures less than other students and, as a result, concluded that a little anxiety not only does not do harm but can also be beneficial for language learners. Scovel (1978) believed that this inconsistency in the findings of these studies was likely due to the fact that anxiety was not

properly defined and studied. Scovel's study was a turning point in the study of anxiety effects as it highlighted the importance of having a detailed definition of anxiety. He showed that without having an all-inclusive, precise way of constructing a variable, consistency in the findings of the studies seems unattainable.

Anxiety is believed to have a detrimental impact on SLA and is one the most-studied factors in studies examining affecting variables in language learning. Since detailed investigation on the potential factors affecting FLA is still needed to make classes less stress-provoking, the current literature review attempts to shed light on different aspects of this phenomenon. After briefly presenting different definitions of anxiety in general and language anxiety, the authors will discuss some of the most significant theories and models of FLA. Lastly, the causes, effects and consequences of FLA in both face-to-face and online classes, gender differences in FLA and the educational implications mentioned in the recent findings in this field are addressed.

Anxiety: Definition and Categories

Webster's Dictionary defines anxiety as apprehensive uneasiness about an impending situation. According to Hilgrad et al. (Scovel, 1978), anxiety is a state of mind which is described as a vague fear and apprehension which is mostly indirectly associated with a specific situation, place or object. Two broad, all-inclusive theories of anxiety are commonly considered in the field of psychology: the expectancy-value theory of anxiety and the theory of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1991). These two theories attempt to predict the anxiety reaction in different individuals by assessing the situation and the ability of individuals to deal with the threat they are facing. Pekrun (1992) believed that appraisal of threatening occasions by individuals predict the situations in which they are less likely to be successful in overcoming the problems ahead of them and, as a result, feel the tension and anxiety. On the other hand, Bandura (1991) argued that

when individuals face a threat, the anxiety they feel depends mostly on their self-perception of their ability and power to deal with the situation in a positive way. He also believed that self-esteem is a powerful factor in alleviating the impacts of anxiety (Bandura, 1991). The level of anxiety a learner feels depends not only on their perception of self-efficacy, but also on the way they assess threatening situations. These two theories place the concepts of self-efficacy and assessment of threatening situations at the center of attention.

There are other theories that try to outline the types of language anxieties. Psychologists usually differentiates two broad categories of anxiety: the dichotomy of trait and state anxiety. According to Spielberger (1983), trait anxiety is characterized as a type of anxiety which is mostly a stable, permanent, long-lasting personality characteristic. State anxiety, on the other hand is a type of transient anxiety which is mostly provoked by a temporary stimulus such as giving a speech or taking an exam. Alpert and Haber (1960) classified anxiety in two distinct categories: debilitating and facilitating anxiety. Some scholars (e.g., Brown, 2007; Elliot, 1999; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994) believe that debilitating anxiety harms students' learning process and negatively impacts their performance while using their second language. Facilitating anxiety, on the other hand, helps the learner concentrate more on the task and perform better in class, during an exam, or while using their second language.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) added another category which is remarkably similar to Spielberger's (1983) state anxiety in terms of characteristics. This category is called *situation-specific anxiety*, which is a persistent type of anxiety. An example of situation-specific anxiety would be the anxiety caused by deficiency in one's knowledge or public speaking anxiety (Ellis, 1994). This type of anxiety is defined as the apprehension English learners (ELs) feel when they are required to complete an activity in a language in which they are not proficient (Gardner &

MacIntyre, 1993). FLA was once believed to be a type of trait anxiety, but researchers have now agreed on the notion that FLA is an independent, multidimensional and unique type of anxiety that potentially can affect the second or foreign language learning and it has its own characteristics (Horwitz et al, 1986).

FLA: Theoretical Frameworks and Models

In the body of FLA literature, several theoretical models and hypotheses have been used to analyze and explain this phenomenon. FLA anxiety theoretical frameworks and models discussed in this study are: (a) Krashen's (1976, 1981) input or monitor model and affective filter hypothesis, (b) Tobias model (1979), (c) Horwitz et al.'s (1986) theory of foreign language anxiety and (d) Sparks' and Ganschow's (1991) linguistic coding differences hypothesis (LCDH).

Krashen's Input or Monitor Model and Affective Filter Hypothesis

Krashen is one of the scholars who has considerably contributed to the research on factors affecting second language acquisition. In one of his hypotheses, (i.e., input hypothesis; 1976), he argued that despite using second language acquisition and second language learning interchangeably, there are significant differences between the two. 'Acquisition' happens unconsciously and without much effort or stress, while 'learning' happens consciously. Typically, second language, as opposed to a naturally acquired first language, is often learned in the classroom and requires conscious effort and attention. While the language acquisition process happens naturally with minimum anxiety, the (second) language learning process can instigate apprehension. Krashen argued that, although challenging, second language can also be acquired naturally if used in out-of-classroom contexts. It is worth mentioning that language learning is

still a valuable process since it contributes to learners' ability to monitor their progress (Krashen, 1981).

In his input hypothesis, Krashen argued that learning happens only when new information presented to learners is just one level more difficult to the previously learned information or rule. In the formula $I + 1$ in which I stands for input, he illustrates that ideally, learning happens by adding only '1' new input to the already learned input. If too challenging, the input revealed to the students will induce anxiety which will likely hinder the learning process. Later in 1994, MacIntyre and Gardner created a three-part model: Input, Process, and Output. In their model, *input* is defined exactly as in Krashen's input hypotheses. An input is present in the first phase of learning, students then receive a stimuli in the target language (e.g., grammatical rule, new vocabulary) before finally producing an output. In this model, the processing and output phases are affected by anxiety. At the processing stage, the brain analyzes new information while anxiety hinders memorizing it. During the output stage, which is the production phase, learners might freeze and be unable to access the information they had processed earlier. The negative effect of anxiety on language production was also suggested by MacIntyre and Gardner, who reported that anxious students were both less proficient and had more difficulties in using the target language knowledge.

In his affective filter hypothesis, Krashen (1981, built on Dulay and Burt, 1977), presented his most relevant hypothesis regarding FLA. Affective filters are factors, such as lack of motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety, that act as an invisible wall in the mind and hinders the learning process. These filters, which can grow in artificial linguistic environments such as classrooms, can form a mental block and halt the learning of the new input. Krashen's theories were later used as the building blocks of other second language acquisition theories.

Tobias' Anxiety Model

Tobias (1979) proposed a general anxiety model in which the effects of anxiety on the learning process through instruction are discussed. This model is not an FLA anxiety model but is mentioned in different studies as a model that analyzes the learning process in general. He argues that learning process can be affected prominently at three points in time: (a) preprocessing, (b) during processing, and (c) post processing (before output). In the preprocessing stage, highly anxious learners divide their full attention between the task and off-task concerns, such as test results or being judged by others. These worries negatively affect their performance in the task. Tobias' model suggests that providing students with a way to restore the input (e.g., replaying an audio or video prompt or having access to the texts) is beneficial for highly anxious students.

During the processing stage, three factors are likely to have the highest impact on the cognitive processing of the task instruction: "difficulty, reliance on memory, and task organization" (Tobias, 1986, p. 38). Anxiety is believed to be more detrimental in dealing with difficult tasks, thus reducing the difficulty of the task helps highly anxious students' cognitive processing. Relying on short or intermediate memory to keep a stimulus leads to higher anxiety levels, and eventually to debilitated performance. The last factor affecting the processing stage is organization. Tobias' model suggests that well-organized stimuli result in lower levels of anxiety and, as a result, to better performance of the learners. Lastly, the post-processing stage is affected by interference in the retrieval process of previously learned content. In other words, students may have mastered the lesson, but anxious learners will experience difficulties in the retrieval of the previously acquired knowledge due to the fear of being judged or of producing a wrong answer.

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's Theory of FLA

Horwitz et al. (1986) are credited with defining FLA as a situation-specific anxiety. In a study published in 1986, they defined FLA as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz et al., p. 128). They believed that FLA is not just a state-anxiety associated with the process of language learning and supported their hypothesis by studying a group of learners who did not experience any type of anxiety while in other classes, but felt anxious while learning English as a second language. This makes FLA a specific type of anxiety that is different from the type of anxiety experienced in regular academic contexts. Horwitz et al. identified three related situation-specific anxieties that are only related to FLA anxiety: (a) communication apprehension (CA), (b) fear of negative evaluation (FNE), and (c) test anxiety (TA). They have strongly asserted that FLA is not composed of CA, FNE, and TA and is only related to these constructs.

In applied psychology, anxiety is measured in three different ways: (a) by observing the actions of participants (i.e., behavioral test), (b) by participants' self-report of fears; and (c) by conducting physiological tests such as blood pressure or sweating (Scovel, 1978). Due to individual variations and since the other two factors are not easily quantifiable, measuring the anxiety students felt in foreign language classroom did not seem an easy task. Another major contribution of Horwitz and colleagues' (1986) theory of FLA was to present a detailed instrument that measures the level and type of anxiety in second or foreign language classes. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) is a 33 5-point item Likert scale that measures the level of anxiety by summing the score of 33 items. FLCAS ranges from 33 to 132 points and highly anxious learners usually get higher scores in this questionnaire (Horwitz et al.,

1986). Numerous studies have since adopted Horwitz and colleagues' FLA theory and scale, and their findings provided strong empirical evidence supporting the theory. However, some studies did not find any correlation among communication apprehension (CA) fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and test anxiety (TA). For instance, Gardner and MacIntyre's (1993) findings generally supported theory of Horwitz and colleagues but could not find correlation between test anxiety and other components. Aida (1994) replicated Horwitz and colleagues' theory to a non-Western language (i.e., Japanese) and only found a partial support for FLA theory as test anxiety did not seem to be related to FLA (Gkonou et al., 2019). FLA is also an invariable construct which is subject to change. Aida claimed that there is a possibility that FLA manifests itself differently in second language learning. U.S. Japanese learners may have various levels of anxiety compared to U.S. Spanish learners, and individual and cultural subtle differences may lead to different FLA levels in language learners (Gkonou et al., 2019; Price, 1999).

Sparks and Ganschow's Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis (LCDH)

Sparks and Ganschow (1991) suggested LCDH as an alternative to Horwitz et al.'s (1986) FLA hypothesis. They believed that this speculation that anxiety may lead to failure in learning a second language should be approached with caution. They claimed that in Horwitz et al.'s study, the participant's problems in their native language was not assessed and there was no comparison group to provide anecdotal evidence about the contribution of anxiety as an affective factor on SLA. Their controversial hypothesis is based on previous empirical research regarding learning disorders involving neurolinguistic and physiological language disabilities such as dyslexia, and generally underachieving students who experience difficulty in acquiring even their native language. Sparks and Ganschow believed that children with overt or subtle difficulties in language learning process will eventually acquire their first language and are able to produce and

comprehend their first language like other children, but these linguistic disabilities are the precursors of other issues in learning a second language.

LCDH was originally derived from the findings of Vellotino and Scanlon (1986; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991). Vellotino and Scanlon believed that even among native speakers, poor readers and writers face more difficulty in processing the structure of written or spoken words. They claimed that normal readers can decode semantic, syntactic, and phonological components of language while readers with reading disability are only able to decode semantic structures and lack phonological decoding skills. Sparks and Ganschow (1991) have investigated the role of semantic, syntactic, and phonological decoding in a number of empirical studies. In one of their studies, they compared the performance of successful and unsuccessful ELs in terms of IQ, second language aptitude, and most importantly, their native language reading and writing ability. The results showed that unsuccessful language learners performed poorly in phonological and syntactic levels but not in semantic level.

Difficulties in phonological and syntactic levels in native language is overcome through compensatory strategies. However, these strategies become impractical when learners are asked to learn a new and unfamiliar linguistic system (i.e., second language). As a result, they conclude that second language learning issues should be explored with considerations of the learners' native language abilities and disabilities. Sparks and Ganschow's (1991) LCDH sparked a debate among FLA scholars. After publishing their study, MacIntyre (1995) and Sparks and Ganschow (1995), Sparks et al. (2000) and Horwitz (2000) debated on the origin of FLA for years. Sparks and Ganschow believed that poor native language skills could lead to learning anxiety. However, Horwitz et al. (1986) and MacIntyre strongly believed that the number of second language learners who suffer from anxiety is more significant than the number of learners who suffer from

first language disabilities and FLA. They concluded that instead of being the result of native language disability, FLA is the cause of poor performance in learning a second language.

Potential Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety

One of the significant challenges in the field of SLA is alleviating learners' stress level and providing the language learners with a low anxiety environment. To achieve this goal, possible causes of this phenomenon should be identified. In one of the earliest studies on foreign language anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) claimed that FLA is mainly related to three performance-related factors: (a) fear of negative evaluation or apprehension about others' evaluation, (b) communication apprehension, and (c) test anxiety (i.e., performance anxiety caused by fear of failure). However, they have mentioned multiple times in their studies that these factors are simply related to FLA and should not be considered as the causes of FLA. Early studies viewed FLA as a manifestation of other types of anxieties such as test anxiety or stage fright. After presenting different FLA theories, empirical studies were conducted to test the models practically. By reviewing the literature, Young (1991) identified six main anxiety-provoking sources for language learners: (a) personal and interpersonal anxieties, (b) learner beliefs about language learning, (c) instructor beliefs about language teaching, (d) instructor-learner interactions, (e) classroom procedures, and (f) language examination. Similar categories have also been identified by other scholars (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Zhang & Zhong, 2012).

In a deep review of literature, Zhang and Zhong (2012) categorized the causes of FLA in four broad categories with relatively the same theme as previously mentioned studies. These categories are: (a) learner-induced anxiety, (a) classroom-related anxiety, (c) skill-specific anxiety; and (d) society-related anxiety. Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999) have also presented seven factors as the predictors of FLA. These factors include age, academic accomplishments,

experience of traveling to the countries with residents speaking the target language, previous experience of learning a language, high- or low-grade expectations, perceived self-esteem and academic expertise. Rubio (2004; Gkonou et al., 2019) has also identified five dimensions of self-esteem (security, identity, belongings, purpose, and competence), which can be grouped in student-, teacher- and context-inducing elements that lead to FLA. Rubio believed that self-esteem related issues are the most significant causes of FLA. In a close review of the literature on causes of the FLA and based on the findings of other studies and previous classifications, anxiety-provoking sources can be categorized in three overarching groups: student-centered causes, teacher and instruction-centered causes, and interaction-centered causes.

Student-Centered Causes of FLA

Anxiety can be rooted in several student-induced factors, such as unrealistic expectations, low self-esteem, poor language ability—and language disorders—and different learning styles. Students' incorrect or biased beliefs may lead to frustration and disappointment, which are the strongest sources of anxiety. One of these incorrect beliefs is that students are required to produce only the correct forms and avoid mistakes. Horwitz (2000) showed that students were highly anxious about the accuracy of their produced sentences in the target language. Some students even think that they lack the gift and talent to improve in learning the target language (Price, 1991). For example, Kitano (2001) argued that setting high standards in terms of native-like proficiency produces incorrect and unreasonable expectations. On the other hand, some students might underestimate the difficulty and complexity of learning a foreign language and, as a result, facing the reality and finding out about the long journey of learning another language brings about more anxiety.

Low self-esteem is another major source of anxiety. According to Dörnyei (2005), low self-esteem usually occurs while evaluation of our characteristics and achievements does not match our self-concept. Students with low self-esteem are afraid of teachers' and peers' judgement since there is a contradiction between the way they evaluate themselves and their self-perceived proficiency and the way others do. In order to avoid this situation, students prefer to go silent, leading to more anxiety (Dewaele et al., 2008; Horwitz et al., 1986; Krashen, 1981; Onwuegbuzie, 1999; Young, 1991).

For some students, problems in language learning starts during their early childhood. As Sparks and Ganschow (1991) stated in their LCDH, language disabilities in childhood and while acquiring the native language can be overcome through compensatory strategies but they will affect foreign language learning process and may cause anxiety for the student.

Different learning habits can be another important cause of anxiety for the students. An analytic teaching strategy or deductive teaching method may not fit all the students, especially the students who prefer to learn everything globally and practically (Gkonou et al., 2019; Oxford, 1999). Some students also have low tolerance of complexity and ambiguity of situations and in facing highly ambiguous situations experience higher levels of anxiety (Ehrman, 1996; Gkonou et al., 2019). On the other hand, having perfectionist tendencies which roots in a set of unrealistic self-beliefs can lead to FLA (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

Teacher and Instruction-Centered Causes of FLA

Many of the language-based anxiety-provoking situations can be directly or indirectly caused by the teachers and instructions. The manner in which teachers give feedback on students' mistakes and correct them can be a source of anxiety (Aydin, 2008, 2016; Kruk, 2018; Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013). Recent studies have

revealed that teachers' attitudes and personalities can be an indicator of FLA. For example, when a teacher is not patient enough and does not give the students enough time to first understand and then answer the question, the students may experience higher levels of anxiety. Instructors' beliefs about teaching and the way they perceive their role as an educator is another source of anxiety (Young, 1991). Instructors who focus on error-correction rather than using a facilitator approach can also be a significant source of anxiety for language learners (Young 1991; Zhang & Zhong, 2012).

A teacher-centered methodology might also cause anxiety. Teaching strategies which do not promote students' oral interaction with their teachers or peers can be another source of language anxiety (Aida, 1994; Oxford, 1999). Anxiety can also be triggered by certain type of activities that create a climate of competition. Being compared with other students in an activity can be detrimental to students' self-concept and self-esteem dimensions of identity which may lead to higher levels of anxiety (De Andrés & Arnold, 2009; Rubio, 2004).

One of the most important sources of anxiety is evaluation. Giving exams is perceived as an anxiety-provoking activity, regardless of the subject assessed. However, FLA can be caused by an evaluation of a skill which is not properly taught by the teacher. For instance, when the methodology is based on oral skills, but the test is in written format or when the students are not familiar with a specific assessment method (Rubio & Tamayo-Rodríguez, 2012; Young, 1991). A teacher with perfectionist tendencies can develop the same attitude in his/her students which, as mentioned in the previous section, can lead to more anxiety (Young 1991; Zhang & Zhong, 2012).

Society and Interaction-Centered Causes of FLA

Society and social interactions can potentially trigger anxiety. Society and interaction-based factors fall into three main groups: peer-induced causes, identity-related factors, and cultural connotation.

Parallel to other student and teacher-centered causes, anxiety can be induced by peers (Zhang & Zhong, 2012). Fear of others' evaluation or judgement can be a main cause of anxiety among language learners (Horwitz et al., 1986). Students constantly report that they are afraid of making mistakes and they fear "the possibility of looking and sounding dumb" (Young, 1991, p. 429) and being judged by their peers (Gregersen, 2003). Even high-proficient students can be affected by this type of anxiety in a completely different way. Allwright et al. (1991) indicated in their study that even some competent students feel peer pressure because their linguistic superiority may cause consequences such as jealousy and indignation. As a result, these students are more likely to decide to either intentionally make mistakes or withdraw from the class interactions, both scenarios potentially leading to more anxiety-provoking situations. In addition, over competitiveness among the students and unreasonable emphasis on grades with comparing the students' performance on a specific task lead to more anxiety (Young, 1991).

Anxieties related to identity factors are usually caused by the subtractive bilingualism process in which learners experience some aspects of losing ethnic identity and attrition of their native language in order to merge more into the target society (Zhang & Zhong, 2012). When learners perceive the process of second language acquisition as a threat to their ethnic and self-identity, they are more likely to suffer from FLA (Hilleson, 1996).

When addressing FLA causes, cultural factors cannot be taken lightly (Brown, 2007). FLA varies across different cultural groups and students with different cultural backgrounds may

have very different beliefs, habits, sociocultural values, customs, characteristics, and ways of communication (Horwitz, 2010). For example, due to the influence of cultural background, students from East Asia experience different types and levels of FLA compared to what students from European countries feel (Liao & Liang, 2021; Tsui, 1996). For example, Chinese students' FLA is heavily affected by their heritage and cultural background where being quiet in the classroom and not asking many questions from the teacher are perceived as expected gestures of respect to others (Woodrow, 2011).

Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety

There have been opposing views regarding the direction of causality relationship between FLA and language learning potential difficulties (Tran, 2012). Some researchers consider FLA a product and consequence of language learning difficulties (Ganschow et al., 1994; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991, 1995) and some view it as one of the causes of problems learners face while learning a new language (Horwitz et al., 1986). However, recent findings have indicated that even advanced and successful students may suffer from FLA (Horwitz, 2000). As Sparks and Ganschow (1995) suggested, these differing opinions on the causality direction is a cause-and-effect dilemma. In this review, however, only the effects of FLA are briefly discussed.

According to MacIntyre (2017), effects of FLA can be grouped into three main categories: academic effects, cognitive effects, and social effects. Academic effects include lower result grades in second language learning, over-studying which may lead to increased effort and lower grades than expected. Learners might then feel decreased self-perception about their competency level, experience weak performance on following tests, and lastly, have high rates of drop out from schools or second language classes (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999).

Cognitive effects involve impaired performance in cognitive demanding tasks. Having thoughts of failure using second language is one of the most detrimental effects FLA may have on language learners. It can impact all stages of learning from input to output. At the input stage, it acts like a preventing filter that does not let the information get to the cognitive processing system. During the processing stage, FLA may have detrimental impacts on speed and accuracy of information processing. Lastly, at the output stage, communication can be affected by difficulty in retrieving the previously stored information in long and short-term memory (MacIntyre, 2017, p. 17).

At a social level, FLA may have negative effects on the way learners communicate with others. Learners may suffer from reduced linguistic confidence that may lead to higher levels of apprehension in the environments where the target language is predominately spoken. High-level anxiety students are not interested in communicating with their peers, which itself leads to higher levels of anxiety since it affects factors such as motivation and attitude (Price, 1991).

Gender and Foreign Language Anxiety

Current research in gender differences and FLA has produced conflicting findings and scholars do not seem to agree on a common and pervasive explanation of the gender effects on FLA nor how it can impact second or foreign language learning. In an early study, Campbell and Shaw (1994) attempted to study the role of gender in FLA among the students who were learning four different languages (i.e., Spanish, Russian, German, Korean), they found out that males were experiencing higher levels of FLA compared to females. The results of this study were later confirmed by a study conducted by Zhang (2000) regarding Chinese ESL students' reading anxiety. The results of this study revealed that males reported higher levels of reading anxiety.

They reported that their anxiety was mostly due to peer pressure and the perception that females are better English learners.

However, Aida (1994) and Elkhafaifi (2005) did not find any significant differences between genders regarding FLA. In similar studies, no significant gender differences in FLA were found among Japanese students who were learning English as a foreign language at a tertiary level in Japan and also among students at a French immersion program in Canada (MacIntyre et al., 2003).

Contrary to the previous studies, Abu-Rabia (2004) studied the relationship between FLA and teacher's role and gender differences among seventh-grade students of English as a foreign language in Israel, and found that gender is one of the predictors of FLA. Compared to male students, female students had both higher anxiety scores and poorer linguistic competency. Geçkin (2020) examined gender differences in FLA and oral corrective feedback among Turkish students who were learning English as a foreign language, and also determined that female students exhibit higher levels of anxiety compared to males. Even this study is not in full agreement by other studies. For example, Koul et al. (2009) showed that females experienced more FLA compared to their male counterparts; however, they performed better than males in learning English. The results from Koul et al. (2009) later were supported by a study by Park and French (2013) that indicated that females suffered from higher levels of FLA; however, females and highly anxious students performed better and had higher final grades.

Online and Virtual Classes and Foreign Language Anxiety

The last few decades have seen a significant change in teaching modalities. In line with other fields, computer-assisted language learning including distance-learning, fully or partial online classes, or asynchronous and synchronous courses have also become very popular in the

previous years. Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a staggering impact on online education and has prompted more opportunities for distance education. The integration of technology, Internet, and computers in education has been widely investigated since the beginning of the 21st century (Howard & Mozejko, 2015). However, only a few studies have investigated FLA among language learners in online or distance language classes.

In general, it has been suggested that the online approach makes the language learning procedure more flexible and may result in higher levels of engagement and an increase in attendance (Felix, 2008; Gacs et al., 2020; Maican & Cocoradă, 2021). However, many students are now forced into online language learning. Among these students, some might show less interest or comfort in online environment as they become isolated from their teacher or peers. Some might not have access to proper technology or might not be familiar with computer-related learning platforms. These can be a source of anxiety for all learners (Russell, 2020).

Recent studies have indicated that class modality does not affect FLA. Pichette (2009) in his study of 186 French-speaking English and Spanish learners in Canada indicated that general foreign language anxiety profiles among the language learners in online and classroom modes do not defer significantly. Distance learning, which was considered a safe zone for highly anxious language learners is now home to students with very similar anxiety profile such as face-to-face anxious language learners (Maican & Cocoradă, 2021). However, Pichette's findings revealed that anxiety levels tended to drop among advanced online learners compared to their face-to-face counterparts. This result shows an advantage for the online platforms for the students who had completed their first semester in the new online environment and with the new instructional technologies. In her study on the impacts of pedagogical intervention on perceived levels of FLA in an online Spanish class, Russell (2018) also determined that anxiety levels were significantly

lower at the end of the semester compared to the FLA level at the beginning of the semester. While these results are encouraging, the FLA decrease observed at the end of the course can be a result of familiarity with the online platform and technologies or due to other class activities.

Causal factors of students' anxiety in online classes are mostly similar to that of face-to-face classes (discussed previously in Potential Causes of FLA). For instance, Nur and Baa (2022) studied speaking anxiety among students in online classes and found that there are two main groups of factors that cause FLA: internal and external. Internal factors included fear of making mistakes, shyness, lack of confidence, and security. The external factors consisted of instructor teaching styles, poor knowledge of the language, and peer embarrassment. Moreover, according to Maican and Cocoradă (2021), problems can be triggered by technology (e.g., connecting to internet, familiarity with computer)s, loss of interaction with peers and teachers, and lack of immediate feedback from teacher.

Coping Strategies and Pedagogical Implications for Educators

Before the advent of empirical studies on actual coping strategies that students use to alleviate the anxiety, it was believed that cognitive, affective, and behavioral approaches could be taken to remedy this type of anxiety (Hembree, 1988). The cognitive approach assumed that thinking disturbance causes anxiety. As a result, interventions were used that consisted of rational-emotive therapy. In affective approaches, the focus of the strategies was on systematic desensitization and relaxation. Lastly, advocates of behavioral approaches assumed that anxiety arouses due to poor academic skills and as a result they focused on the efficient trainings in study skills (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004).

However, according to the recent empirical studies on coping strategies, one of the widely used coping strategies anxious language learners use to alleviate the level anxiety and its

consequences is the avoidance behavior such as denial, giving up, wishful thinking and avoiding talking to native speakers (Oxford, 2017). Other common coping strategies used by the students mentioned in other studies are: positive thinking, relaxation techniques, and perseverance (Woodrow, 2011; Young, 1991).

Educators play a vital role in reducing the students' anxiety level. In general, there are two options for educators to manage students' anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). They can either help the students find the best ways of coping with the anxiety or they can make their classes, techniques and learning context less stressful for the learners. Educators can provide the students with relaxation exercise and advice on the most appropriate learning techniques for each student based on their specific needs. Educators can encourage the students by emphasizing their positive personality traits, helping them build on their self-esteem and confidence by positive reinforcement (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). They can also refer highly anxious students to specialist or counselors who specialize in anxiety.

Reducing anxiety by changing their techniques and class context is the more challenging option for educators (Horwitz et al., 1986). Hashemi (2011) examined FLA among undergraduate students and made helpful recommendations for the educators. The first technique is acknowledging the existence of the anxiety among the students. Adopting a communicative approach in their teaching techniques can be significantly helpful for the students who are not adequately exposed to the English language. Providing students with more practice in their language skills as well as creating a friendly and informal environment to make the students comfortable, can play a pivotal role in reducing the stress in the classroom. Familiarizing themselves with the ethnic and cultural background of the students can also help teachers understand the potential anxiety provoking areas. Students need to acknowledge that making

mistakes is a part of the learning process and need to be reassured that they will not be judged based on their mistakes by their teachers or peers. To reduce the students' fear of making mistakes, more emphasis needs to be placed on formative assessment and feedback rather than end-of-semester summative assessments. Teachers also need to avoid activities that enhance frustration at the beginning of the class. For example, an activity which is too challenging for students might induce anxiety and hinders the learning process; based on Krashen's (1981) input hypothesis. As a result, exposing the students to new input should happen gradually.

Conclusion

A review of the literature on foreign language anxiety shows that anxiety is caused by several factors and can have debilitating effects on the language learning process. It can even have dire consequences on the students and language learners' academic and social achievements. Although this literature review provided a comprehensive review on the most significant findings of previous scholarly works on FLA, there are many other aspects of foreign language anxiety and its relevance to foreign or second language learning that need to be explored in the future studies. There are still gaps in the literature in several areas such as learning languages other than English, other populations such as elderly language learners, students in intensive English programs, and international undergraduate and graduate students. Due to the fast pace of modern life, there is more empirical evidence needed concerning the modern educational systems, including distance and online education.

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