

Revisiting the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

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Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received on: 18 Dec 2024</p> <p>Revised on: 25 Jan 2025</p> <p>Accepted on: 30 Jan 2025</p> <p>©2025 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p> <p>Keywords – EFL anxiety, silence, motivation.</p>	<p><i>This paper critically examines the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a widely used tool for assessing foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA). Despite its significance in understanding the emotional challenges of language learners, the FLCAS has several limitations. These include unclear definitions of its core constructs, reliance on self-reported data, and a lack of focus on positive emotions. Additionally, the scale's cultural biases and inability to capture the dynamic nature of anxiety over time undermine its applicability in diverse educational settings. The paper argues for improvements in the FLCAS, such as incorporating behavioral observations, physiological measures, and positive emotional states like motivation. It also calls for longitudinal studies to better capture how anxiety fluctuates throughout the language-learning process. By addressing these shortcomings, future research can enhance the effectiveness of FLCA assessments, ultimately supporting more effective language acquisition strategies.</i></p>

I. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety within the context of foreign learning (L2) has been a significant area of focus in research, with much focus on its negative impact on the learning process. Anxiety has been considered a crucial factor influencing L2 acquisition and has been extensively examined in the literature (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei and Ryan, 2015; Horwitz, 1990; MacIntyre, 1999). In particular, foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) has attracted considerable attention (Horwitz, 2010). Foreign language anxiety is a unique blend of emotional responses and behavioral reactions that arise within the specific context of language learning in the classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986).

For the assessment of FLCA, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to evaluate three types of anxiety related to language learning: 1) communication apprehension, 2) test anxiety, and 3) a fear of negative evaluation. The FLCAS consists of a 33-item questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale (see Appendix 1), and since its introduction in 1986, it has become a widely used instrument in research. It has been adapted in various ways and translated into multiple languages, including Japanese (Yashima et al., 2009) and Thai (Tanielian, 2014). The FLCAS has facilitated in the comparison of studies that focus on FLCA (MacIntyre, 2017).

While the FLCAS has been widely used to explore FLCA, it is not without its criticisms. Issues such as

the unclear definition of the scale's core constructs, flaws in factor analysis, cultural biases, and a lack of focus on positive emotions limit its ability to fully capture the complexity of FLCA. Additionally, the scale's reliance on participant-reported data and its limited temporal scope fails to provide a comprehensive understanding of how anxiety fluctuates and affects learners over time. This paper aims to 1) critically evaluate the FLCAS and 2) offer ways to improve its applicability and accuracy in measuring FLCA across educational contexts.

II. FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY

Communication apprehension, test anxiety, and a fear of receiving negative evaluations are the main forms of anxiety that language learners encounter in the classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986). Communication apprehension is the uneasiness when speaking with others. Being shy and a dread of talking to people in a foreign language are frequently associated with this anxiety. This kind of anxiety includes both the oral and aural components of language learning and is particularly relevant during discourse (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Test anxiety is the fear of failing language tests. Students who suffer from test anxiety may experience a great deal of stress and anxiety in foreign language programs because of tests and assessments. Their anxiety is exacerbated by their dread of performing poorly. Test anxiety can prevent pupils from demonstrating their genuine language skills (Horwitz et al., 1986).

The fear of negative evaluation stems from concerns about being criticized or judged negatively (Horwitz et al., 1986). This anxiety relates to how learners perceive others' judgments, both in formal assessments and informal interactions. It is prominent in verbal situations where the worry about receiving criticism or negative judgment may be prominent.

III. METHODOLOGICAL CONCERNS

Although the FLCAS has been widely used in various contexts (see Aida 1994; Arnaiz and Guillen 2012; Dewaele 2013; Kitano 2001; Liu and Jackson

2008; Park and French 2013), it has faced criticism. A key issue is the lack of clarity in how the scale's core constructs are defined. According to Park (2014), the FLCAS did not clearly indicate which of the 33 items were associated with communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This has led to difficulties in analyzing the data and has resulted in the incorrect application of its findings (Park, 2014). According to Park (2014), the use of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to validate the data is another concern. EFA is commonly used to identify anxiety factors, but this technique may be subjective. Park (2014) recommends using other methods, such as oblique rotation to understand the reasons behind FLCA.

IV. CULTURAL BIAS

Cultural and contextual biases may limit the FLCAS's applicability. Originally developed for American students (Horwitz, 2016), the scale may not fully account for the varied anxiety experiences of learners from different cultural or educational backgrounds. Language learning anxiety is influenced by cultural factors (Mendoza and Thian, 2023), such as educational practices and societal attitudes toward foreign languages (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991). Therefore, the FLCAS may struggle to capture the emotional experiences of learners in different contexts.

V. LACK OF FOCUS ON POSITIVE EMOTIONS

The FLCAS has been subject to critique for its exclusive lack of focus on positive emotions. This singular focus on adverse emotions neglects the positive emotional dimensions that can substantially impact language acquisition. Positive emotions like excitement are integral to the language learning process and should be incorporated into any thorough evaluation of FLCA (Dewaele and MacIntyre, 2014; Dörnyei, 2005). By ignoring positive emotions and feelings, the FLCAS may present an inaccurate representation of the emotional experiences of learners.

VI. LACK OF SPECIFICITY

The FLCAS's lack of specificity stems from the fact that it measures anxiety using general constructs. The three factors— communication apprehension, test anxiety, and a fear of negative evaluation—are useful, but they are still not entirely clear and do not take into consideration more context-specific forms of anxiety that students may encounter in the classroom. For instance, the FLCAS does not take into consideration anxiety resulting from certain classroom variables or anxiety associated with particular language skills. Its applicability is further limited by the fact that elements such as personality or learning preferences may influence FLCA (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991).

VII. RELIANT ON PARTICIPANT-REPORTED DATA

The FLCAS's dependence on participant-reported data is another drawback. The FLCAS relies on respondents' capacity for self-assessment, a procedure that is susceptible to biases or inaccurate self-perception. As is typical in Asian nations, learners may either exaggerate their concern to garner sympathy or minimize it to seem more assured (Aida, 1994; Hammond, 2007). Complementary techniques like in-class observations might provide a better depiction of FLCA.

VIII. TEMPORAL SCOPE

The FLCAS also has a limited temporal scope. It is a scale that measures learners' anxiety during the data collection process. However, language learning, including anxiety, is a dynamic and fluctuating process that can change as learners advance in their language learning (Norton & Toohey, 2011). The FLCAS does not take into consideration other numerous variables present in the classroom that can cause anxiety levels to shift during the learning process.

IX. SUGGESTIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Based on the comprehensive review of the FLCAS, this paper offers several suggestions for future research that could address existing gaps and

improve the measurement of FLCA. Future research could focus on developing a more comprehensive instrument that captures a wider range of anxiety-related experiences, including more context-specific forms of anxiety. This could involve incorporating items that account for language skills, such as speaking anxiety versus writing anxiety, or classroom variables such as classroom size and teaching methods, which may influence learners' anxiety levels. Additionally, future research should explore how positive emotions, such as excitement contribute to the language learning process since the current FLCAS primarily focuses on negative emotions. Developing a more balanced tool that evaluates both negative and positive emotions could provide a more accurate and holistic view of learners' emotional experiences in the classroom. Longitudinal studies may also reveal new insights into how FLCA evolves over time as learners progress in their language acquisition, allowing researchers to capture fluctuations in anxiety levels and identify factors that contribute to changes in anxiety throughout the language learning journey, thus offering a more dynamic understanding of FLCA.

Since the FLCAS was originally developed in the context of American education, it may not fully apply to learners from different cultural or educational backgrounds. Future research could explore how FLCA manifests in diverse cultural settings, examining whether cultural factors such as societal attitudes toward foreign languages, educational practices, and the social environment influence anxiety levels differently across cultures. Comparative studies between cultures could reveal new dimensions of FLCA, while research focused on validating and adapting the FLCAS in non-Western contexts, particularly in countries with different social, pedagogical, and cultural practices toward language learning, could expand its applicability. Additionally, given the limitations of participant-reported data, future studies should consider using mixed-methods approaches, combining quantitative scales like the FLCAS with qualitative methods such as interviews and classroom observations. This approach would provide a richer, more nuanced understanding of the complexities of FLCA and allow researchers to triangulate findings, reducing

bias from social desirability or inaccuracies in participant self-reporting.

X. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the FLCAS has made significant contributions to the study of FLCA by providing a standardized instrument for measuring anxiety in foreign language classrooms. Its focus on communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation has helped to identify the emotional challenges faced by learners in the language learning process. However, the scale's lack of clarity in defining its core constructs, overuse of participant-reported data, and its limitation in analyzing anxiety over time undermine its effectiveness in offering a comprehensive understanding of FLCA. Furthermore, cultural biases, its lack of focus on positive emotions, and the broad nature of its anxiety constructs may limit its applicability across diverse educational contexts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

(Horwitz et al., 1986)

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree

6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.
Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree Disagree Strongly Disagree
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

17. I often feel like not going to my language class.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

26. I feel more tense and nervous in language class than in my other classes.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*

33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

*Strongly Agree Agree Neither Agree nor Disagree
Disagree Strongly Disagree*