Foreign Language Anxiety: A Systematic Review

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This paper gives a comprehensive literature review on the concept of foreign language anxiety (FLA). Firstly, drawing on a number of research findings in this area, it defines general anxiety and foreign language anxiety. Secondly, it discusses the theoretical models adopted by language researchers and educators to measure foreign language anxiety levels and constructs. Finally, it reviews the existing studies concerning causes and effects of language anxiety in a systematic way where different settings, languages, learners' stages and disciplines were involved.

Keywords: foreign language anxiety, language anxiety, systematic review

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a complex psychological phenomenon, known for inhibiting people in different activities and even potentially damaging their lives (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). When anxiety is associated with foreign/second language (L2) learning, it is termed Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) or Language Anxiety (LA). Throughout this paper, these terms are used interchangeably though still referring to the conceptualization of the construct defined by Horwitz et al.

(1986).

FLA is characterized by "a distinct complex of self-conceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). As one of the most primary obstacles to overcome when learning a language (MacIntyre, 1999), FLA has long been recognized to have detrimental effects on language acquisition; and to date, it has become one of the most widely examined variables in second language acquisition (SLA) studies (Horwitz, 2001). Research on FLA dates back to the 1970s (Horwitz, 2001). However, the studies during that period yielded mixed results due to inconsistent measures and inadequate conceptualizations of language anxiety (Scovel, 1978). It was not until 1986 that the conceptualization and measurement of FLA were reoriented (MacIntyre, 2017). Horwitz et al. (1986), with their seminal research on FLA, developed the first reliable scale to measure language anxiety known as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Its introduction heralded the start of the "Specialized Approach" where findings and results concerning anxiety and language achievement have been relatively consistent (MacIntyre, 2017). Many studies using this scale have revealed consistent moderate negative correlations between FLA and language learning (e.g., Aida, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Saito et al., 1999). However, there are still inconsistencies as positive correlations and insignificant correlations (Botes et al., 2020) have been also reported in recent times.

More recently SLA scholars have started to re-define FLA from a dynamic perspective which situates it among the multitude of interacting factors that influence language learning and use (MacIntyre, 2017). To be more specific, they have studied the correlations between anxiety and broader factors including learner personality, interpersonal relationships, educational settings and so on. Although minimal research has been conducted in this approach, some promising results have been found (Daubney, Dewaele & Gkonou, 2017). There obviously

need more studies on the dynamics of anxiety to help sharpen our understanding of this multidimensional phenomenon.

This paper attempts to summarize the most relevant findings on theoretical background, measuring models, and causes and effects of FLA from the beginning of its studies in the 1970s until the present day.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Definition of anxiety

Defined as "an unpleasant emotional state or condition which is characterized by subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry" (Spielberger, 1983, p. 18), anxiety is one of the affective variables in human behavior along with self-esteem, extroversion, inhibition and empathy (Coan & Gottman, 2007), which influence how a person responds to a situation (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993).

Types of anxiety

Traditional psychologists categorize anxiety into two types: trait anxiety and state anxiety (Spielberger, 1983). Trait anxiety, as a general personality trait, occurs when a person has a permanent intent to be anxious (Sieber et al., 1977). This form of anxiety remains stable over time because it is a feature of an individual personality. State anxiety refers to the "moment-to-moment experience of anxiety" (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 28), describing emotional responses which occur when a situation is perceived as threatening or dangerous (Scovel, 1978). Whereas trait anxiety is anxiety-proneness, i.e., a tendency to experience anxiety in a wide range of situations, state anxiety may vary in intensity and fluctuate over time (Spielberger, 1983).

More recently the term "situation-specific anxiety" has been used to emphasize the persistent and multifaceted nature of some anxieties (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991a). This is a unique form of anxiety experienced within a given

situation such as taking an exam, participating in a math class, speaking in public and so on (Horwitz, 2001).

FLA, characterized by "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b, p. 284), is undoubtedly one manifestation of situation-specific anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). It is a multifaceted construct of anxiety aroused by typical experiences of learning and using an L2 (Tóth, 2011).

MEASURING FLA

Until now a great deal of effort has been devoted to developing models to define and analyze FLA such as French Class Anxiety Scale (Gardner & Smythe, 1975); Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz et al., 1986); Second Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (Woodrow, 2006), to name just a few. Among them, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986) has been the most popular and adopted by numerous studies in different educational contexts (Botes et al., 2020). Intended to measure L2 learners' levels of anxiety in the language classroom, the FLCAS is a self-report instrument that consists of 33 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale with selections ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." Horwitz et al. (1986) propose the FLCAS in relation to three performance anxieties namely communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Communication apprehension is defined as a kind of shyness caused by fear of communicating with people (McCroskey, 1970). In the SLA context, it is characterized by the anxiety about speaking in groups or public, and difficulty in listening to or understanding oral messages (Horwitz et al., 1986). If learners have difficulty listening to or speaking a foreign language in front of people, their communication apprehension will be high. They may struggle to understand others and make themselves understood in a language class.

Test anxiety refers to the apprehension of "inadequate performance in an evaluative situation" (Sarason, 1978, p. 214). Stemming from a fear of failure, this anxiety makes learners worry about foreign language tests, resulting in performance difficulties. Test-anxious students often set unrealistic expectations and goals, and experience considerable anxiety as tests and exams are frequent parts of learning programs (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Fear of negative evaluation describes the anxiety about others' evaluation and expectations (Watson & Friend, 1969). Rather than being limited to test-taking situations, this construct is related to social evaluation situations including oral presentations, interviews, speaking activities and contests (Horwitz et al., 1986). The learner who has a strong fear of negative evaluation may be easily upset by the judgements from teachers, peers, and fluent L2 speakers on their performance.

It should be noted that FLA is not simply a combination of these constructs, but a nonlinear phenomenon which constantly emerges through the causal interdependence among internal and external variables on different timescales (MacIntyre, 2017).

Despite being questioned about its construct validity, the FLCAS has been recognized as a reliable tool to examine the concept of FLA (Botes et al., 2020; Teimouri et al., 2019). In fact, it not only plays the role of a springboard for further research to analyze students' anxiety in various instructional settings (Aida, 1994; Dewaele, 2013; Rodriguez and Abreu, 2003), but also serves as a foundation for a plethora of studies attempting to test and redefine FLA constructs (Bailey et al., 1999; Cheng et al., 1999; Sheorey, 2006).

In recent years several scales have been developed to examine the relationship between FLA and specific language competencies, such as Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (Saito et al., 1999), the Second Language Writing Anxiety Inventory (Cheng, 2004), and the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale (Elkhafaifi, 2005), which focus on defining skill-based language anxiety

constructs and measures.

CAUSES OF FLA

Understandably, L2 researchers and teachers have long been interested in identifying the causes of FLA so that effective classroom interventions could be made to help minimize student anxiety reactions (Horwitz, 2001). However, as discussed earlier, it is a complex psychological phenomenon influenced by a number of factors, and cannot be explained in a linear way. A number of ideas have been proposed in the SLA landscape. Young (1991, p. 427) lists six sources of FLA: 1) personal and interpersonal anxieties; 2) learner beliefs about language learning; 3) instructor beliefs about language teaching; 4) instructor-learner interactions; 5) classroom procedures; and 6) language testing. Also, Rubio (2007a) suggests that we should study the causes of language anxiety in the contexts of where an L2 is being taught and learnt. In this paper, the sources of FLA are grouped into three intervening elements: students, teacher and context.

Causes centered on students

Learner beliefs. These refer to "general assumptions that students hold about themselves as learners, about factors influencing learning and about the nature of language learning" (Victori & Lockhart, 1995, p. 224). Learner beliefs are the most important to consider when accounting for foreign language anxiety as they may be among the most vulnerable to teacher interventions (Horwitz, 1987) and be accessible to change by the learner (Truitt, 1995). Cheng (2001) found a negative correlation between students' beliefs about English self-efficacy and FLA levels. To be more specific, those who believe that the ability to learn an L2 well is a gift, and whose self-assessment of language abilities was low, tend to experience high levels of anxiety. This is consistent with the studies about learners' self-perceived L2 competence which conclude that anxiety arousal is more likely to emerge in learners with low perception of proficiency (MacIntyre

et al., 1997; Dewaele et al., 2008). Additionally, individuals who have erroneous perceptions about language learning (e.g., "Pronunciation is the most important" or "Some people were born ready to learn language") and unrealistic beliefs and goals (e.g., "Two years is enough to become fluent in an L2" or "Learning an L2 means to speak with an excellent accent like native speakers") are the "likeliest candidates for language anxiety[.]" (Young, 1991, p. 427).

Perception of "self". The sense of self and language are closely tied together because a threat to one is a threat to the other (MacIntyre, 2017). Oral activities in an L2 are often sensed as a threat to a person's self-concept, self-identity, and ego, which they have formed in their first language as reasonable and intelligent individuals (Horwitz et al., 1986). This is because when using a foreign language, learner' self-expression is limited due to insufficient command of that language. Inability to express oneself according to the ideal self-image may lead to negative self-evaluation and fear of negative assessment from others (Guiora, 1983). As learners recognize the disparity between the "idealized self" and the "true self", they will likely become anxious (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Personality. There are several personality traits that have been identified as important predictors of learners' FLA levels (Rubio, 2017). Dewaele (2013) reports that there is a significant link between neuroticism and anxiety, and moderately significant relationships among psychoticism, extraversion and anxiety. MacIntyre and Charos (1996) report that higher levels of extraversion were associated with lower FLA. This finding is supported by studies that show that extroverts are, in general, less likely to experience anxiety, because they tend to feel more comfortable in communication situations (Brown, Robson & Rosenkjar, 2001). Other research has also shown that perfectionists experienced higher levels of FLA (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002).

Previous experiences. Negative prior experiences such as past teachers' judgmental attitudes, failure or low results in exams may influence learners' present degree of FLA and their current self-beliefs (Price, 1991; Gkonou, 2017).

This is because they will expect those experiences to happen again (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991), and likely to result in avoidance behaviors when a similar situation is going to happen (Rubio, 2017). Also, a learner may develop a positive/negative attitude towards the target language based on different factors in their process of learning that language before, such as instructional support, peer relationships, and classroom environment (Chambers, 1998). What is more, a learner's unpleasant memories of learning a language may influence his/her future feelings and perceptions of studying another one (Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

Level of competence. It is intuitive to think that the more proficient in an L2 a learner is, the less anxious he/she may feel when using it (Gardner et al., 1979). However, empirical research findings suggest that the relationship between competence and FLA is not that straightforward (Tóth, 2017). While it was indicated in a number of studies (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Liu, 2006) that individuals at the early stages of learning suffer higher levels of FLA than their more advanced counterparts, contrary evidence was also unearthed in others (e.g., Ewald, 2007; Marcos-Llinas & Garau, 2009). Factors like (1) high expectations to become L2 speakers, (2) fear of being unable to attain the desired L2 level after long years of commitment to learning, (3) feelings of stress to perform well, are believed to be the key sources of anxiety to learners at advanced levels (Tóth, 2009, 2011).

Causes centered on teacher

Teacher beliefs. These, defined as a teacher's "held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught" (Kagan, 1992, p. 65), exert profound effects on 'pedagogical decision making' in the classroom (Li, 2013, p. 175), and in turn, shape learning environment, learners' motivation, emotions and their language achievement (Borg, 2003). Teachers who believe that the teacher should do everything in the classroom, who consider mistakes are intolerant, who feel that their role is more like an authority than a facilitator

may create a further source of language anxiety (Young, 1991). In addition, teachers' emotion beliefs might also arouse learners' positive/negative feelings in the classroom because they will affect the extent to which the teacher engages their students in particular emotion socialization practices (Hyson & Lee, 1996).

Interaction with learners. The way in which the teacher communicates with students, such as to correct mistakes or to give feedback, may make a contribution to their FLA levels (Rubio, 2017). Koch and Terrell (1991) report that the manner of error correction has a potential of producing anxiety; thus, it is how an error is corrected, not what is corrected, that matters. Results from studies by Palacios (1998) and Abu-Rabia (2004) also suggest that levels of anxiety were negatively correlated with levels of teacher support such as helpfulness and concern. Similarly, emphasizing the importance of the language for communication that teachers use, Leon (2007) posits that learners tend to feel more secure and comfortable when receiving praise from the teacher for their good work and motivational words to boost their confidence.

Teaching methodology. A teacher-centered approach is more anxiety-inducing than a student-centered one, because in the former, students have a fear of being observed and evaluated by the teacher and their classmates (Littlewood, 1981). Teacher-led activities not only limit the chances of oral interaction but also create an atmosphere of intimidation. In fact, learners often report that they feel more comfortable talking in pairs/groups, but tend to "freeze" when being called to answer questions or speak in front of the class (Horwitz et al., 1986). If a student knows that his/her name can be called out at any time during lessons, he/she may try to find ways to avoid the situation (e.g., sitting in the last row or avoiding the teacher's eye contact) due to fear of being called upon (Oxford, 2017b).

Evaluation. Examination is usually considered an anxiety-provoking part because examinees place a lot of importance on it due to self and parental pressure, negative comparisons with peers, and so on (Rubio, 2017). It should

be noted that while oral tests and exams are often perceived as one of the most anxiety-producing activities in a foreign language class (Horwitz et al., 1986), apprehension may also come from written exams which are still used as the main tool of assessment in many contexts (Rubio & Tamayo-Rodríguez, 2012). Test anxiety referring to the fear of negative results or failure in an exam or a similar evaluative situation (Ohata, 2005) is caused by a number of variables such as inadequate test-taker qualities (Bachman and Palmer, 1996); unfamiliar test content and format (Young, 1991); high frequency of tests and exams (Horwitz et al., 1986), among others. These factors impinge on students as they create negative attitudes towards the target language (Horwitz & Young, 1991), lack of confidence (Stober, 2004), and negative self-concepts (Knox et al., 1993).

Causes centered on the context

Twenge (2000) states that language anxiety grows with when there is a possibility of classroom environmental threat. According to Hargreaves (2000), emotions are woven into the fabric of daily life in the classroom setting. In fact, everyday learners are continuously engaged in emotion-laden interactions with their peers and teachers (Milkie & Warner, 2011). The quality of those interactions establishes the emotional climate of the classrooms which influences learners' sense of belonging or relatedness (Brackett et al., 2011b).

The sense of belonging, which means the feeling of being accepted, welcomed, or connected to other people or a group, is closely associated with learners' emotional patterns in the classroom (De Andrés & Arnold, 2009). A strong sense of relatedness may lead to positive emotions, such as happiness, contentment, and calm whereas the lack of belongingness may cause negative feelings of anxiety, depression, and loneliness (Osterman, 2000). The latter can be generated by interpersonal conflicts, competitiveness and comparisons, peer pressure, or negative evaluation from the teacher or classmates (Rubio, 2017).

In addition to the abovementioned factors, FLA is thought to be attributable

to a number of other variables, such as prior history of visiting foreign countries (Aida, 1994; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2000), L1-L2 language distance (Kitano, 2001; Alrabai, 2015), cultural backgrounds (Horwitz, 2001), to name a few. It is obvious that FLA is "the psychological outcome of dynamic interactions between different layers of internal and external systems – physiological, cognitive, behavioral and social" (So, 2005, pp. 43–44). In other words, it is both an internal state and a social construct (MacIntyre, 2017).

EFFECTS OF FLA

It is understandable that a person may show different physical symptoms such as trembling, dry throat, and muscle tension when feeling anxious (Oxford, 2017b). However, as a pervasive phenomenon, the effects of FLA on language learning is much more than those physical reactions. A bulk of research in a variety of educational contexts has shown that FLA interferes with many types and aspects of learning including thoughts, communication, and achievement (MacIntyre, 2017). The effects of FLA, in terms of cognitive, academic, social, and personal, will be discussed below.

Cognitive effects

Language learning is a cognitive process which involves encoding, storage and retrieval of information (Harmer, 2007). Anxiety, associated with self-related cognition (thoughts of failure, self-deprecating thoughts, and worry about performance), has been found to interfere with all stages of cognitive processing (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b). The cognitive effects of FLA discussed below are based on a model proposed by Tobias (1979, 1986). This model explains the effects of anxiety on learning from instruction, divided into three stages: Input, Processing and Output. Tobias (1979, 1986) postulates that FLA can affect an individual's ability to process information at each of these stages which may allow teachers to identify why their learners make mistakes or what kind of

difficulties they encounter while using an L2.

In the Input stage where an individual is exposed to new information in the target language, difficulties may arise due to the fast delivery speed of aural input or complex written material, resulting in anxiety (Tobias, 1986). Apprehension acts as a filter that prevents "some information from getting into the cognitive processing system" (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 35), making learners unreceptive to language input. This is similar to Krashen's (1985) popular concept of "affective filter". Thus, anxious students may require more time to intake spoken information due to the interference of anxiety. It is worth noting that anxiety in this stage may have an impact on all subsequent stages, if the missing input is not compensated (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b).

The Processing stage requires students to perform cognitive operations on the information received at the Input stage such as interpretation, organization, storage and retrieval. Anxiety acting as a distraction may affect both the speed and accuracy of learning. Specifically, the attentional control theory, proposed by Eysenck et al. (2007), suggests that anxiety may cause attentional bias when judging real task-related information and irrelevant stimuli by giving greater attention to the latter. Thus, it decreases one's attentional control and cognitive performance (Eysenck & Derakshan, 2011). Cognitive processing may be impaired when tasks are more difficult, more poorly organized, and more heavily reliant on memory (Tobias, 1986).

During the Output stage, learners produce "the language" learnt from the previously received information, either in speaking or writing, which can be measured by test scores, and the qualities of speech (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b). The presence of anxiety as a disruption to retrieval of information may influence the quality of L2 output (Krashen, 1985). Since performance in this stage is usually regarded as the most important indicator of a learner's learning, it is most likely to trigger anxiety, causing ineffective retrieval of vocabulary, inappropriate use of grammar, or even inability to communicate (MacIntyre,

1999). This is consistent with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) explanation of three performance anxieties (communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation) discussed previously.

Tobias (1986) emphasizes that the stages are interdependent; that is, the result of each stage depends on the successful completion of the previous one. Thus, the negative correlation between FLA and performance might be a sign of problems occurring at any of the three stages (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b). These views are supported by the results obtained by MacIntyre & Gardner (1991b, 1994b), and Bailey et al. (2000), who confirm and extend the findings previously reported on cognitive deficits caused by FLA. In short, "anxiety arousal can bias cognitive processing in an anxiety-sustaining way" (MacIntyre, 2017, p. 20).

Academic effects

The relationship between language anxiety and achievement in language learning has been continuously under scrutiny since its inception (Horwitz et al., 1986). The preponderance of research findings has revealed consistent moderate negative correlations between FLA and academic achievement or performance across different target languages and at various instructional levels (Horwitz, 2001; Botes et al., 2020; Teimouri et al., 2019). Anxious learners report to have lower final grades and general achievement in a language learning course compared to their less anxious counterparts (Aida, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Saito et al., 1999). In addition, "overstudying" is another academic effect of FLA (Horwitz et al., 1986). This refers to the increased effort at learning to compensate for the adverse effects of anxiety, which is a common response when a learner realizes that he/she is not performing well due to apprehension (MacIntyre, 1999). However, it often leads to lower outcomes and levels of achievement than expected, creating more frustration and anxiety (Horwitz, 2001).

Research in the field has also examined the effects of FLA on specific language skills (Botes et al., 2020; Zhang, 2019). There is no doubt that a great

deal of attention has been paid to its relationship with oral activities which have been the most frequently cited source of anxiety in SLA studies (Horwitz et al., 1986). This is because speaking, among the four skills, is the main form of communication and involves the most social evaluation (King & Smith, 2017). Speaking anxiety may manifest in different forms, ranging from physical signs (trembling and muscle tension) to unfavorable classroom behaviors (participatory inhibition, skipping class and remaining silent). This negative correlation may be attributable to communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al., 1986), and the fact that anxiety has been found to hinder a learner's grammatical precision and interpretive ability (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991b). Interesting as it may seem, several research findings have uncovered that speaking anxiety is present both within and outside of the classroom (Ohata, 2005), with students reporting to be anxious when communicating with teachers, peers in the class and native and non-native speakers in daily life. This is congruent with the notion of "dual conceptualization" of speaking anxiety by Woodrdow (2006) reflecting oral communication both within classrooms for pedagogical purposes and in everyday life for communicative goals.

Moreover, FLA may interfere with a learner's ability to receive and interpret messages, and discriminate sounds in listening activities (Horwitz et al., 1986; Kim, 2000). This anxiety stems from the nature of L2 listening which is a complex cognitive task (Vandergrift, 2011) requiring learners to extract linguistic, pragmatic, and semantic information from a series of sequentially delivered aural inputs (Rost, 2011). As discussed earlier, FLA can disrupt cognitive processing (Eysenck et al., 2007), and thus can limit the amount of aural information to be processed. Furthermore, overwhelming delivery speed of input, fear of losing the meaning of communication, and belief of having to understand every word may also cause apprehension of listening (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; Kimura, 2008; Kim, 2000). It results in embarrassing misunderstandings, less effective information processing, lower concentration, and compromised information

retrieval (Elkhafaifi, 2005).

When considering the nature of foreign language reading which is less demanding than listening as inputs are usually presented as a holistic unit (Grabe, 2009), one may assume that this skill is not anxiety-arousing. However, studies in the literature have revealed that reading anxiety can be caused by unfamiliar orthography and unfamiliar cultural contexts (Saito et al., 1999). In other words, when L2 texts are written in an unfamiliar writing system, and/or there is a gap in learners' cultural knowledge, apprehension towards reading results. It seems that highly anxious students experience "more off-task, interfering thoughts than their less anxious counterparts" (Sellers, 2000, p. 152), thus limiting their recall of passage content and causing misinterpretations (MacIntyre, 2017). However, it should be noted that reading anxiety is found to have a weak correlation with reading performance (Zhang, 2019). This is understandable because when reading a text, learners can read at their own pace, reread any parts to fully understand, and use other resources to assist comprehension (Grabe, 2009).

Research exploring writing anxiety in L2 is relatively scant thus far (King & Smith, 2017). Available literature suggests that factors contributing to L2 writing apprehension include low self-confidence in writing, negative attitudes towards writing, and fear of negative criticism (Cheng et al., 1999; Cornwell & McKay, 2000). A study on Japanese learners of English by Takahashi (2010) also reported that the weakness of English writing skills in Japanese classrooms, classroom context, and a completely different orthograph system between Japanese and English, may lead to a strong correlation between writing anxiety, motivation, self-rating of ability, and performance.

Social and personal effects

A growing body of research has suggested that FLA exerts adverse social and personal effects on L2 learners. Anxiety may cause participatory inhibition and unwillingness to communicate in the classroom (MacIntyre & Gardner,

1994b). Learners who experience communication apprehension often choose to remain silent and unwilling/less willing than other learners to participate in oral activities (Hilleson, 1996; Liu, 2006) in which they have little control over the situation and their performance is constantly evaluated (Horwitz et al., 1986). In fact, they "tend to sit passively in the classroom, withdraw from activities that could increase their language skills, and may even avoid class entirely" (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, pp. 562–563). They also engage in such avoidance behaviors as procrastinating on homework and skipping class (Horwitz et al., 1986; Oxford, 2017b). Avoiding communication in the target language both in and out of the classroom may create a number of negative consumptions about a reticent speaker such as being less trustworthy, less competent, less socially attractive, among others (McCroskey, 1984).

Numerous empirical studies have also revealed negative correlations between anxiety and other individual variables influencing language acquisition such as motivation, self-rating, attitude, and self-confidence (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996). Inability to express themselves in communicative activities and constant comparison with idealized self-image or their peers cause anxious learners to underestimate their actual language proficiency (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999). As MacIntyre et al. (1997) postulate, low self-perception of competence makes learners believe that they cannot learn, perform, or achieve high levels of the target language, resulting in a "self-fulfilling prophecy" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b, p. 12) with less effort and self-confidence. Anxiety sufferers also tend to adopt negative attitudes towards language learning, thus inhibiting their motivation (Spitalli, 2000).

For anxious students, language learning may be a "traumatic experience" (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 39); thus, personal effects of FLA should not be ignored. Learners with high levels of anxiety may suffer extreme physiological conditions (Young, 1991; Price, 1991), and tend to engage in self-deprecating cognition (Schwarzer, 1986). FLA takes such a heavy toll on learners that in some cases,

it causes them to drop out of their foreign language course (Bailey et al., 2003), or even abandon their career goals (Oxford, 1999).

Recently there has been an increasing interest in identifying facilitating effects of FLA. The rationale for this is that students will not be motivated to learn if there is no pressure; thus, if teachers add some amount of anxiety, it would help enhance their motivation, and eventually improve their L2 performance (Chastain, 1975; Kleinman, 1977). However, this view has received a large number of oppositions from other researchers. In fact, facilitating effects of anxiety have rarely been documented in SLA literature (Phillips, 1992). What is more, Horwitz (2017) - a prominent FLA scholar - calls a search for facilitative anxiety a "step backwards or even a dangerous trend" (p. 40) as it may return language researchers and teachers to the time before Horwitz et al. (1986), when cross-comparisons of research on anxiety and its effect were nearly impossible due to the divergent measures and conceptualizations, and when the anxiety reactions of language learners were largely neglected. Also, she argues that it would be pointless and even unethical to add more pressure to the language learning process which itself is inherently anxiety-provoking and "profoundly unsettling psychological proposition" (Guiora, 1983, p. 8) to many learners. In addition, in many cases, teachers cannot be sure not to cross the boundary into debilitating anxiety; thus, it would actually do more harm than good (Horwitz, 2017). Other researchers (e.g., Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014) believe that it would be better to help learners identify the appealing and pleasurable aspects of the target language and enhance their learning autonomy rather than taking a risk of "walking a very fine line between helpful and harmful anxiety" (Horwitz, 2017, p. 40).

There has also been a "chicken and egg" debate about the causal relationship between FLA and L2 achievement in recent years. Some scholars (e.g., Sparks et al., 1995, 2011) maintain that FLA is a natural result of low L2 proficiency whereas other researchers believe that it is both a cause and effect of language learning (Horwitz, 2001; MacIntyre, 2017). In the latter scholars' view, FLA

both results from a number of problems occurring in the learning process and results in further difficulties, creating a vicious circle (Aida, 1994). For example, anxiety provoked by a threatening classroom environment impedes learners' progress and language achievement, and lowers their self-confidence in learning a language, which, in turn, reinforces their anxiety. They also suggest that there needs to be more research to identify the interplay of various contributing variables to explain the nature of this relationship (Horwitz, 2001).

CONCLUSION

This paper provides a systematic review of different aspects of FLA. It showed that FLA is characterized by an array of intertwined and multidirectional relationships. Despite being a frequent emotional state, it has been found to have debilitating effects on learners and the language learning process which should not be neglected by teachers, educators and researchers. What is important is for teachers to acknowledge the existence of FLA in the classroom before making any assumptions and assessment on learners' performance. Since it is both an internal state and social construct, interventions to reduce FLA should focus on helping learners overcome negative emotions as well as creating a non-threatening learning environment. Creating a relaxing classroom atmosphere, enhancing teacher-student and student-student interaction, and teaching affective strategies are some examples of FLA reduction methods that teachers can adopt.

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