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Foreign Language Anxiety and English Grades: A Study of EFL Learners in Kosovo

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Abstract

This study examines the level of foreign language anxiety and the relationship between communication apprehension, test and assessment anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and English language grades among secondary school students in Kosovo who learn English as a foreign language. A version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) translated into Albanian, with minor modifications, was used to measure foreign language anxiety. The modifications involved replacing 'foreign language' with 'English language' and 'test anxiety' with 'test and assessment anxiety' in order to reflect the English language learning context and anxiety effects beyond standardized testing. A sample of one hundred and seventy students from three secondary schools in Kosovo participated in this study by completing the questionnaire. The gathered data in this study were processed and analyzed using the SPSS software. The results revealed that Kosovo secondary school students experience a moderate level of English language anxiety, with difficulties when preparing for tests and concerns about making mistakes while undertaking tests and when being evaluated. In addition, these results have shown that the three components of foreign language anxiety were positively connected with the students' English language grades. Such results can contribute to a better understanding of the EFL learning process, with a special emphasis on the relationship between foreign language anxiety and secondary school student English achievement.

Keywords: anxiety, assessment, EFL, FLCAS, student, grade.

1. Introduction

Given that the English language has become dominant, particularly in academic and professional settings, its learning as a foreign language has been widely practiced in primary and secondary schools worldwide, including Kosovo (Crystal, 2003). Students in the EFL classroom are assessed through a combination of formal tests, class observations, and ongoing evaluation (Tzagari et al., 2018). Considering that assessment plays an

essential role in students' learning and progress, it may also negatively impact their learning process and foreign language acquisition. Arnold and Brown (1999) highlight that an excess of emotions like fear, anxiety, stress, anger, or sadness can weaken students' effectiveness in learning and acquiring a foreign language. Hence, anxiety, which is defined as a negative emotional reaction, can have a major effect on various aspects of foreign language learning and performance.

Foreign language anxiety is observed as a challenging experience for both teachers and learners in English classrooms. According to Young (1991), anxiety is displayed differently among students depending on their ethnic background, prior language knowledge, personality, and classroom settings. Although some amount of anxiety is common and may motivate EFL learners to some degree, it is clear that an excess amount of anxiety is a serious concern for learners, resulting in interference with achievement and the development of speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills (Bajri & Elmahdi, 2024; Pappamihel, 2002).

Anxiety has also been shown to affect the communication strategies used by students in the language classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986). When present in the EFL classroom, anxiety has a continuous negative effect on students' nervousness, resulting ultimately in lower performance, participation, and confidence (Arnold & Brown, 1999). The effect it has on the learning experience is rather complex and very difficult to measure (Young, 1991).

Thus, understanding its effect on students in an English language learning context is profoundly important, since it may contribute to pedagogical adjustments and thereby improve teaching methods and learning approaches (Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). Given the increasing demand for English language proficiency, and because assessment is integral to teaching and learning processes where assessment anxiety plays a significant part in instructional practices and learners' language learning processes within classroom settings, this study aims to examine the level of foreign language anxiety and the association of its three components with English grades among secondary school students learning English as a foreign language in Kosovo.

In order to achieve the objectives of this research, a translated Albanian version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), with slight changes, was used (Horwitz et al., 1986).

With a focus on students' responses to the FLCAS, this study's objective is to answer the following three research questions:

1. What is the level of English language anxiety that Kosovar EFL secondary school students experience?
2. Which one of the three components is mostly related to secondary school students' English language grades?
3. Is there a connection between FLA and English language grades among Kosovo secondary school students?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Anxiety & Defining FLA

In defining emotional difficulties, Spielberger (1972) characterized anxiety as an uncomfortable emotional condition marked by internal tension, psychological apprehension, nervousness, and persistent worry. Expanding on emotional variables within education, Arnold and Brown (1999) described anxiety as a disruptive psychological element that hinders the learning cycle through a mixture of frustration, self-doubt, uneasiness, and mental strain. Because of its complicated nature, Scovel (1978) emphasized that anxiety cannot be treated as a basic or universally transparent psychological state. Within the scope of language acquisition, Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized foreign language anxiety as an isolated, complex structure of self-perceptions, internal beliefs, emotional states, and communicative behaviors that manifest uniquely due to the specific pressures of the language classroom. Similarly, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) interpreted this form of anxiety as a limited feeling of situational pressure and apprehension directly tied to second language tasks, specifically surrounding oral production, listening comprehension, and classroom learning.

2.2. Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

Developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) reflects three interrelated components of language anxiety. The first, communication apprehension, reflects a form of shyness rooted in fear or nervousness about interacting with others. The second, test anxiety, is understood as a type of performance anxiety driven by a fear of failure. The third, fear of negative evaluation, concerns learners' worry about how others judge them, their tendency to avoid evaluating situations, and their expectation of being assessed unfavorably (Horwitz et al., 1986). Subsequent research has confirmed the FLCAS as a reliable instrument for measuring classroom language anxiety and for tracking its influence on language development (Toyama & Yamazaki, 2018).

2.3. Research in English Language Learning Contexts

Empirical research across different EFL environments further illustrates language anxiety dynamics. For instance, Cheng et al. (1999) evaluated a sample of 432 Taiwanese university students using a translated version of the FLCAS to explore how generalized classroom anxiety interacts with language writing anxiety. Their outcomes pointed to a deficiency in personal self-confidence as the primary driver underlying both categories of academic stress.

Investigating different anxiety aspects in the Middle East, Hashemi (2011) evaluated the variables causing linguistic stress among Iranian learners within both academic and social environments. The author concluded that classroom anxiety typically derives from the learners' sense of self, internal perceptions, differences in cultural background, differences in social status between speakers, and an underlying fear of loss of identity. Looking closely at skill challenges, Sadighi and Dastpak (2017) examined anxiety

sources among 154 Iranian EFL students. Their data isolated three primary triggers for learner distress: a serious fear of making linguistic errors, worry regarding peer evaluation, and a self-perceived lack of target language vocabulary.

Focusing on Turkish EFL learners, Aydin et al. (2020) investigated both the origins of test anxiety and the coping strategies students used to manage it. Their findings indicated that test anxiety arises from a wide range of causes that learners faced with physical, tests, and emotional difficulties, and that they relied on only a narrow set of strategies to reduce it.

Taken together, these studies bring into focus the specific challenges related to anxiety that EFL learners face and deepen our understanding of the factors that give rise to foreign language anxiety.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to assess the prevalence of linguistic anxiety among secondary school students in Kosovo and to determine how the three primary components of foreign language anxiety correlate with final students' English grades. The sample consisted of 170 participants selected from three public secondary schools within Kosovo.

To evaluate anxiety levels, the researchers utilized an adapted Albanian translation of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), originally developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). Minor word adjustments were integrated to fit the specific English as a Foreign Language (EFL) environment: the phrase 'foreign language' was substituted with 'English language' and 'test anxiety' was modified to 'test and assessment anxiety.' This adjustment was useful in identifying anxiety dynamics beyond traditional standardized tests into continuous classroom evaluations. Data analysis was executed using SPSS software. The questionnaire was structured into two sections: the opening section gathered participant demographic data, while the subsequent section comprised 33 separate items designed to measure the participants' English language anxiety levels. Before proceeding with statistical analysis, the internal consistency of each adapted subscale was verified. The research instruments were administered during English language classes on a voluntary and anonymous basis, following formal authorization from the school administration. Participants completed the survey within a thirty-minute window in the physical presence of their respective classroom teachers throughout the period, across the three selected school locations, and could have withdrawn at any time, prior to completing the questionnaire.

The reliability coefficient for the three FLCAS components was verified using Cronbach's alpha. Basic descriptive statistics were used to identify the level of student anxiety. Furthermore, Pearson's correlation coefficients were examined to analyze the specific interactions between the individual FLCAS components and the students' final English grades, while a multiple linear regression model was built to evaluate if the three anxiety subscales could statistically predict final English language grades of the students.

4. Results

The first research question aimed to examine the level of English language anxiety among EFL secondary school students in Kosovo. Descriptive statistics were conducted for each three components and for students' English Grades.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics (170)

Variable	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Communication Apprehension	1.64	5.00	3.42	0.75
Test & Assessment Anxiety	1.71	5.00	3.37	0.73
Fear of Negative Evaluation	1.47	5.00	3.42	0.77
English Grade	2.00	5.00	4.23	0.88

Table 1 shows that secondary school students reported a moderate level of English language anxiety for the three components with a mean score of their English grades are on average on the middle high level.

Table 2

Cronbach's alpha coefficients for three components

Subscale	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Communication Apprehension	10	.82
Test & Assessment Anxiety	9	.73
Fear of Negative Evaluation	8	.81

As presented in Table 2, the Cronbach's alpha for each anxiety subscale ranged from 0.73 to 0.82, indicating that the adapted FLCAS has acceptable internal reliability to apply in the present study.

Table 3

Pearson Correlation between three components and English grade

Variable	1	2	3	4
Communication Apprehension	—			
Test & Assessment Anxiety	.82**	—		

Fear of Negative Evaluation	.75**	.76**	—
English Grade	.47**	.49**	.41** —

In response to Research Question 3, Pearson's correlation coefficient calculation was carried out. The results in Table 3 indicate that the three aspects of English language anxiety are positively correlated among each other as well as with students' English grades, meaning they are positively correlated to each other as also to the English grades.

Table 4

Multiple regression analysis of the three components as correlated to English grades

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Communication Apprehension	0.24	0.15	0.20	1.62	.108
Test & Assessment Anxiety	0.32	0.15	0.28	2.19	.030
Fear of Negative Evaluation	0.06	0.13	0.05	0.48	.631

Results from the multiple regression in Table 4 reveal whether the three components predict students' English grades and indicate that, when entered all simultaneously, significant prediction of students' English grades was found for the Test and Assessment anxiety component ($\beta = .28$, $t = 2.19$, $p = .030$), and no significant prediction for Communication Apprehension and Fear of Negative Evaluation.

5. Discussion

Regarding the initial level of English language anxiety among Kosovar EFL secondary students, descriptive statistics indicated that participants experienced a moderate level of stress across all three components. Because the calculated mean values for each subscale exceeded the average level and the corresponding mean English grade fell within a moderate range, the data indicate that experiencing anxiety is a widespread emotional issue for secondary students in Kosovo, even among those achieving relatively good grades in English (Liu, 2023).

These results demonstrate that the emotional tensions felt by secondary school students during English class tasks, where they must actively process, speak, and undergo evaluation, were present together with higher academic grades. This means that anxiety did not have a negative influence on final grades. This finding aligns closely with the perspectives of Bajri and Elmahdi (2024), who argue that a baseline level of psychological tension is standard and can function as an internal motivator for the language student. When analyzing the collective impact of all subscales through the regression model, Test and Assessment Anxiety emerged as the sole independent predictor of final grades. This implies that focus or concern during exam preparation periods and evaluation

windows may have motivated more rigorous study habits, subsequently manifesting as improved classroom grades.

Additionally, participants indicated a different level of tension during oral communication and interactive tasks in English. This highlights ongoing weaknesses linked to self-confidence, a fear of producing errors, and peer judgment (Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025; Elov et al., 2025; Hägg, 2018). Evaluating the internal consistency of the questionnaire itself, the reliability coefficients for the subscales fell within an acceptable range, verifying that the adapted instrument was fully capable of evaluating how these students process stress associated with language learning.

6. Conclusion

This research aimed to examine the level of foreign language anxiety experienced by secondary school students in Kosovo learning English as a foreign language, as well as how each of the three components of foreign language anxiety was related to their English language grades. An adapted version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), translated into Albanian, was used to measure language anxiety. The results from this research revealed that secondary school students experience a moderate level of foreign language anxiety, which is positively related to English language grades. The results further showed that students' anxiety and its impact depend on the specific type of anxiety they experience. When analyzed together, the Test and Assessment Anxiety component specifically was positively associated with students' grades, indicating that students with higher anxiety levels in this component tended to achieve higher academic results. In addition, the results showed that some students experience a certain level of anxiety linked to the fear of speaking or being negatively judged in front of others. This type of anxiety may be connected to students' unwillingness to speak or engage directly in conversations in EFL classes.

Such results underscore the need for future research including other stakeholders focusing on language anxiety related to self-awareness and self-confidence in verbal interaction with others experienced by EFL learners, within classroom settings. Furthermore, to identify constructive methods to overcome difficulties posed by negative emotions, as well as strategies tailored specifically to address students' challenges to lessen their language pressures for the sole purpose of learners' successful EFL learning and achievement.

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