A STUDY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY WITH ROMANIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract: *The anxiety connected to learning a foreign language is revealed in negative self-perception, beliefs, feelings and behaviours which negatively impinge upon language learning. This form of anxiety is correlated with academic performance and with certain personality traits. This study explores English language anxiety with Romanian participants, its relationship with the respondents' achievement, age, number of years they studied English. These objectives are preceded by the adaptation of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale for the Romanian learners and the study of the psychometric qualities of the version put forward. The findings show good psychometric qualities.*

Key words: *foreign language anxiety, psychometric qualities, Romanian students.*

1. Introduction

Although academic activity is generally thought to be accompanied by positive emotions, most of the qualitative and quantitative research studies have revealed the prevalence of anxiety among students [13], [21], [9], [29]. The importance of this emotion is also underlined by the introduction of the phrase *academic anxiety,* defined as a collection of anxieties experience while in school [2].

The study of anxiety, initiated by Charles Spielberger [24], was centred on investigating state anxiety and trait anxiety. Anxiety was defined by Spielberger as a subjective feeling of apprehension, tension, self-doubt, nervousness and frustration, which are accompanied by a stimulation of the nervous system. The author emphasized that state-anxiety is transitory, fluctuating over time, whereas trait anxiety is relatively stable at all times and in all settings.

Since the 1970s, anxiety has been studied in connection with learning foreign languages, as a type of specific anxiety, expressed in behaviours, self-perception, beliefs and feelings that may reduce language learning [10], [3].

From Horwitz's perspective, anxiety connected to foreign language learning is not a form of general anxiety transferred to foreign language learning. As an argument, the force of correlations is used: anxiety connected to foreign language learning weakly correlates with general trait anxiety, its correlation with language proficiency being stronger than

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the one between general anxiety and foreign language proficiency [25], [9], [16]. Given that communication with the others supposes complex mental operations and permanent social comparison, the level of the performance in foreign language learning represents a challenge, but sometimes also a threat for the self-concept, triggering fear, self-doubt and even panic [9]. In this approach, foreign language anxiety has three components: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety [10].

Communication apprehension comprises feelings of shyness in interpersonal communicative settings, in situations in which the lack of ability to understand the others or make oneself understood may arouse negative feelings in the participants. The fear of negative evaluation occurs in different social situations and is the consequence of the learners' stronger focalization on personal mistakes in foreign language expression, being associated with their negative expectations, as well as on the consequences of adjacent negative emotions over the communication situation. Test anxiety refers to an unpleasant feeling or emotional state experienced in formal examination situations [27], [16], [10].

Anxiety related to the study of a foreign language was first studied with respect to students, where most of the research was conducted, then with respect to teachers. Several research studies have aimed at clarifying the relationship between anxiety in second language and achievement, language course grades, personality traits or educational context [27], [10]. The findings suggest that anxiety is closely associated with emotional intelligence [6], scholar attitudes, motivation or perfectionism [12], [7]. The anxiety threats to self-efficacy and self-esteem and the

learners' anxiety over their foreign language learning may lead to their finding the study less enjoyable [8], [20]. More anxious learners tend to be more perfectionist and judge language learning as relatively difficult [7], [20], [10], while their motivation for learning foreign languages decreases [12], [19]. The findings of the research studies are sometimes appreciated as inconsistent, as there are studies which suggest the benefit brought by anxiety in language learning [28].

Because in learning settings students are required to communicate in front of the teacher and their peers [2], [10], language anxiety is experienced by all students, but especially by beginners [4], but it does not disappear among more advanced learners either [19], [22].

Foreign language anxiety is negatively related to foreign language outcomes, the results suggesting a significant moderate negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and the final grades expected and received by students [20], [9], [1], [10] and a negative relationship between this anxiety and students' self-ratings of their language proficiency [14].

Some scientific papers have focused on the pedagogical perspective, emphasizing that classes can be organized and managed in a manner which minimizes student anxiety reactions [28]. The studies were aimed at the anxiety connected to learning a foreign language, being related to various objectives [15]: the relationship between language anxiety and reading comprehension, anxiety and its relationship to listening comprehension, to the writing performance, anxiety over the speaking performance in the classroom or they approached differences between foreign language anxiety and native oral and written language skills [18], [26], [1], [27], [5].

One of the most widely known tools created for diagnosing this type of anxiety is FLCAS, devised by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope [10] and adapted in many countries. The theory put forward by the authors quoted has been appreciated as having a vital role in language anxiety research, being checked in a large number of studies which revealed it is perfectible [25].

2. Research methodology

The general objective of the research was represented by the adaptation of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale – FLACS [10] for the Romanian population.

The specific objectives of the research focused on: (1) checking the psychometric qualities of the tool for the Romanian population (2) identifying the respondents' level of the anxiety connected to English learning by gender and age, (3) the existence of significant associations between the anxiety level and the number of years respondents studied English, the grades they obtained, the grades they aspire to, their self-rating of the propensity towards learning this subject and avoidance behaviours as regards the involvement during the English class.

Having Elaine Horwitz's consent, we performed, in parallel, double translation and retranslation of FLACS, in order to achieve conceptual equivalence in Romanian. The most suitable formulations were retained. In the Romanian version of the questionnaire, the words "language" and "foreign language" were substituted with "English". Just like in the original version, the items are attached to a 5-step Likert scale, where 1= strongly disagree and 5 =strongly agree. The values of items 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32 were reversed.

The respondents were 355 high school and university students, out of which 67.3% were female. High school students represent 46.5% of the total number of respondents and came from the socio-humanities (23%) and mathematics-computer science specialisms. The university students (53.5% of the total) were enrolled in the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences (53.5%) and in the Faculty of Economic Sciences and Business Administration. The average age is 19.76 years (SD=4.3) and the average period they learned English as a foreign language is 10 years (SD=2.9).

Other tools used were Sherrer's self-efficacy questionnaire [23], a questionnaire regarding English learning, devised by the authors of this article in a larger team [17], a selection being made for the items regarding the aspiration towards performance, the self-rated propensity towards studying English, the avoidance behaviours for the involvement in the English language class. This information was obtained using only one item. Socio-demographic data were collected regarding the respondents' gender, age, marks, year of study, number of years dedicated to studying English.

We denominated the tool resulted from the adaptation of FLCAS "the English (Foreign) Language Classroom Anxiety Scale for Romania" (ELCAS-R).

3. Findings

Reference is also made to the data regarding the existence of anxiety connected to English learning for Romanian respondents. Foreign language anxiety is present with all the respondents, even with advanced ones, who studied English for a long time. The items for which the average anxiety level exceeds step 3 are 2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32, two of them exhibiting statistically

significant or *marginally* significant
differences between female and male
(32) respondents (Table 1).

Items with the highest average scores and gender differences   Table 1

Item	Entire sample		Gender differences		
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Females' mean	Males' mean	Test t
8	3.17	1.29	-	-	-
28	3.23	1.45	3.07	3.57	t=2.42; p<.05
14	3.27	1.33	-	-	-
18	3.28	1.30	-	-	-
32	3.31	1.42			t=1.891; p=.06
22	3.36	1.33	3.24	3.61	t=2.03; p<.05
2	3.44	1.13	-	-	-
5	3.47	1.41	-	-	-
11	3.53	1.26	-	-	-

In order to check the psychometric qualities of the tool, the factorial analysis was first accomplished. The KMO test (.877) shows the sample is very appropriate for the factorial analysis, a thing confirmed by Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, strongly statistically significant (p<.001). To extract the specific factors, the method of the *principal c*omponents was used, where the matrix indicates the presence of a very strong factor, in which all variables are saturated, from the level .762, to .262, the factor anxiety connected to learning English. Under these circumstances, the direct oblimin with Kaiser normalization was used as rotation method. The items selection on scales was made taking the value of 0.30 as the critical value of saturation with the scale. The saturations for the three factors are presented in Table 2.

Results of factorial analysis   Table 2

Communication apprehension		Test anxiety		The fear of negative evaluation	
Items	Correlations	Items	Correlations	Items	Correlations
13	.722	16	.775	11	.723
12	.718	29	.697	22	.638
1	.715	20	.674	14	.609
19	.710	30	.638	18	.564
9	.701	6	.636	32	.533
31	.696	28	.613		
7	.696	24	.575		
4	.652	5	.546		

Communication apprehension		Test anxiety		The fear of negative evaluation	
Items	Correlations	Items	Correlations	Items	Correlations
33	.634	8	.491		
21	.592	2	.472		
15	.543	3	.347		
26	.531	10	.341		
23	.469	27	.306		
25	.448				
17	.351				
13	.722				

Three factors were required. Following the model put forward by the FLCAS authors, the factors thus obtained explain 46.71 of the total variance. The study of the matrix obtained shows that three items (28, 18, 32) have acceptable saturations, greater than .30 for the factor F1 (Communication apprehension), but also for F2 (Test anxiety), respectively F3 (Fear of negative evaluation), which makes it difficult to interpret the results. However, we preserved these items in the component which presents the highest saturation, as it coincides with the logical analysis. In order to denominate the three factors, we used the same phrases as the original version of the tool, so as to allow an easier comparison of the findings. Table 3 presents psychometrics qualities, which recommended this tool.

Psychometrics qualities of ELACS-R   Table 3

Qualities	F1	F2	F3
% of Variance	14.81	25.83	6.07
Eigenvalues	4.88	8.52	2.00
Alfa Cronbach for each scale	.88	.84	.76
Alfa Cronbach for entire scale	.89		

The correlation between the factors (Table 4) is small, but statistically significant at a high level. In this paper, for each table, correlations significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed) is noted by * and correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) is noted by **.

Correlations between the three factors and total score of English anxiety Table 4

Factors	F1 Apprehension of communication	F2 Test anxiety	F3 Fear of negative evaluation
F1 Apprehension communication	1		
F2 Test anxiety	.167[*]	1	
F3 Fear of social evaluation	.087	.183[**]	1
English anxiety (total score)	.637[**]	.686[**]	.645[**]

There are no statistically significant differences by gender, except for *Apprehension_communication*, a scale for which females register the highest scores, like in the case of total anxiety (Table 5).

Mean of the scores for the scales ELCAS-R and gender differences Table 5

Factors	Entire sample		Gender differences		
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Females' mean	Males' mean	Independent samples test
Apprehension communication	22.92	7.68	24.15	20.21	t=4.37; p<.001
Test anxiety	34.77	10.88	34.11	36.22	-
Fear of negative evaluation	16.76	4.80	16.46	17.4	-
English_Anxiety (total score)	74.10	18.19	74.43	73.34	-

In order to study the validity related to the criterion, proofs were selected which refer to the school performance expressed by the general GPA at the end of the year and by the GPA in English. For the entire sample, the correlation coefficients are presented in table 6.

Validity related to the criterion school results and convergent validity Table 6

	F1 Communication apprehension	F2 Test anxiety	F3 Fear of negative valuation	Total English Anxiety
General GDP	-.076	**.410****	.082	**.231****
GPA for English	**-.269****	-.075	.060	**-.143***
General efficacy	-.295*	-	-.171*	-.268*
Social efficacy	-.267*	-	-	-

The anxiety level indirectly correlates with the number of years respondents studied English, with their age and grades they aspire to. Nevertheless, the anxiety level directly correlates both with the lack of positive appreciation of the course/ subject and of the English teacher (Table 7).

Table 7

Correlations between the scores for the anxiety connected to English learning, socio-demographic data and learners' behaviours

	Age	Number of years dedicated to studying English	Self-rated propensity for learning English	Level of aspiration	Uninteresting class	Useless class	The teacher is not liked
Apprehension communication	.129*	-.323**	-.283**	-	.128*	-	-
Test anxiety	-.312**	-.444**	-.237**	-.734**	.153*	.431**	.575**
Fear of negative evaluation	-.226**	-.260**	-	-.455**		.256**	.405**
Total English Anxiety	-.179**	-.468**	-.302**	-.587**	.153*	.359**	.475**

4. Discussion and conclusions

The importance of anxiety in school education, emphasized by several research studies, has called by the concept *academic anxiety,* defined as a collection of anxieties learners experience while in school. A special form of anxiety is considered the learning a foreign language anxiety, as a type of specific anxiety, expressed in behaviours, self-perception, beliefs and feelings that reduce language learning. One of the most widely known and frequently used tools for studying the anxiety caused by learning a foreign language is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), devised by Horwitz et al. [10], used in numerous studies. The authors of the scale inferred the existence of three components underlying this form of anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

The general objective of the present paper was to present the research with a view to adapting the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale for the Romanian population. The results obtained show the presence of this form of anxiety with Romanian respondents, learning a foreign language representing a stressful activity, which impedes on self-efficacy and learning outcomes in the case of certain people. The factorial analysis identified three factors, which explain 46.71 of the total variance, for which the same name was preferred as in the original tool: Apprehension of communication, Test anxiety and Fear of negative evaluation. The correlation between the factors and the total score is good and statistically significant, and therefore the scores for the resulted factors should be aggregated in a unique score, as a synthetic expression of Total English Anxiety. The internal consistency of entire scale is very good, just like the consistency of each scale taken separately. The conclusion that can be drawn is that the tool has good psychometric qualities and can be used for investigating the population from Romania.

The anxiety levels for high school and university students are not very high, but anxiety is present with all respondents, to different extents: for Apprehension communication, 36.5 of the respondents are placed over the average of the sample, for Test anxiety 51.6%, for Fear of negative evaluation - 52.1%. The percentage of the respondents who score higher than the average for the entire scale is 56.1%.

The comparison of the scores obtained by female and male respondents shows statistically significant differences as far as the total score for *Apprehension communication* is concerned, as well as for the items *I feel no pressure when it comes to preparing for the English class* (22) and *When the English class is close, I feel self-assured and relaxed* (28), both reversed.

The study of the correlations between anxiety connected to English learning and school results confirms the results in previous studies: grades in English are indirectly associated with the anxiety level, except for the scale *Fear of negative evaluation,* but the coefficients are weak and moderate, as in other studies. The general GPA is not negatively influenced by anxious feelings, beliefs and behaviours specific to English language classes and correlates indirectly only with communication apprehension, but it is directly and significantly associated with Test anxiety and Total English Anxiety. The scores of the two scales do not correlate significantly with the GPA for English either, which differentiates them from Communication

apprehension, thus bringing forward the importance of the three components for the conceptualisation of foreign language anxiety.

In order to study the convergent validity, we used the correlations between the scores of the three anxiety scales, as well as of the total score with the scores of the self-efficacy. The findings obtained on the Romanian sample confirm previous data, supporting the hypothesis according to which anxiety represents a threat to self-efficacy in learning situations.

Other data from research conducted with FLCAS were also confirmed: the anxiety level indirectly correlates with the number of years respondents studied English and with their age. Although foreign language anxiety is experienced by all students, especially the beginners perceive it more intensely.

The students in secondary and higher education who score high for anxiety have lower grades and lower levels of aspiration as regards school results. They perceive themselves as having a weak propensity towards learning English and report avoidance behaviours: they find the course useless, uninteresting and state they do not like the English teacher. Consequently, the learning motivation decreases, as several researchers have concluded.

Thus, we have the confirmation of the idea that significant anxiety as regards learning a foreign language represents a disadvantage for the high school students' knowledge or for the future graduates' professional development. Creating a supportive and relaxing learning environment which diminishes anxiety becomes one of the objectives of the English language teacher.

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