

## **Exploring Foreign Language Anxiety and its Relationship with Grade Nine Students' English Language Achievement**

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**Abstract:** This study was designed to explore Foreign Language Anxiety and its Relationship with Grade Nine Students' English Language Achievement at Hawassa Tabor, Yirgalem, and Hawassa Lango Preparatory and Secondary Schools. The study was designed on quantitative basis. The participants of the study were 362 grade 9 students and they were selected randomly. Questionnaire and document analysis were employed as data collection instruments. The questionnaire designed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) was slightly modified and used for the study. The data was analysed with multiple analysis methods including descriptive statistics, chi-square test and ordinal logistic regression. The results of study revealed that there existed different levels of foreign language anxiety in grade 9 students at Hawassa Tabor, Yirgalem, and Hawassa Lango Preparatory and Secondary Schools. Of the sample subjects, 6.6 % of the subjects showed high level foreign language anxiety, 77.1 % showed medium-level foreign language anxiety and 16.3 % showed low level of foreign language anxiety. Among the four categories of foreign language classroom anxiety scale, communication apprehension (SD= 0.61) and general English classroom anxiety (SD=0.56) were the most anxiety type the participants experienced most. Second, there was no strong relation between foreign language anxiety and residence of students (P value=0.739>0.05); however, majority of urban students have lower anxiety level than rural students. Third, there was strong relationship between foreign language anxiety and students' sex; that is female students experienced more anxiety than male students (F=0.62SD and M= SD0.60). Meanwhile, ordinal logistic regression analysis showed foreign language anxiety and English language achievements were negatively correlated especially for high and low anxiety levels. On the other hand, medium anxiety level and average achievement had direct relation (P Value=0.000<0.05).

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### **I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY**

As various scholars in the area of language learning claim, language learning is a complex process which may be affected by various variables. According to Brown (1994), language learning is a complex process that the elements of the affective variables are as useful as the elements of cognitive domain. He also added that this affective domain that is related with emotions or feelings of human beings, involves different personality characteristics like self-esteem, empathy and introversion. This shows that the process of language learning may be affected either positively or negatively by one of these variables. In order to strengthen this idea Lightbown & Spada (2006) forwarded that in the process of language learning these variables may have facilitative or debilitating effect.

Language anxiety, especially foreign language anxiety may be observed at all stages of language learning process. So as to support this, Aydin (2001) stated that in language classroom interactions, anxiety becomes particularly obvious because risk taking is an important part of the foreign language classroom, and students may want to avoid making mistakes. The reason could be the students may believe that this could do harm to their self-image, so they may feel anxious and keep silent.

The relation between foreign language anxiety and variables like gender, motivation, achievement, and residence of the students has been investigated by various researches at different times. However, the relationship between foreign language anxiety and achievement has not been studied well. Hence, this study primarily aimed at exploring the relationship between foreign language anxiety and grade 9 students' English achievement in the selected Hawassa University research village schools.

As scholars in the area indicate, anxiety is a feeling that could cause decreased and ineffective levels of learning among students. According to MacIntyre & Gardner (1991), anxiety level is seen as one of the best predictors of achievement in the second language. As the literature reveals, moderate anxiety level may urge learners to use their potentials into learning or more commitment to achieving the linguistic ends. On the other hand, if it is too much, anxiety might lead to failure in achievement on the parts of the students.

Therefore, more studies are needed in order to gather more conclusive evidence to understand the relationship between language achievement and foreign language anxiety in the selected settings.

## **II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Researchers in the area of language teaching have reported somewhat confusing results on the effect of foreign language anxiety on students' language achievement. Some scholars found out that there is a negative relation between foreign language anxiety and achievement. Others also claim that there is no relation between foreign language anxiety and achievement.

Foreign language anxiety can negatively affect the fluency of learners' speech and learning in general (Onwuegbuzie, et. al., 1999). Other scholars indicated no relationship, or a positive relationship (Backman, 1976; Scovel, 1978). In this regard, Horwitz (2001) pointed out that the issue of understanding the association between anxiety and achievement is not solved.

To put the research gap clearly, the investigators have surveyed the existing research output contributed by international and local researchers. In line with this, studies by different scholars, (e.g. Scovel, 1978; Horwitz, et al. 1986; Macintyre and Gardner, 1994), especially in Western countries, have been conducted to investigate the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety and achievement in the learning of foreign language at different environment. On one side, Chastain (1975) found positive relationship between language anxiety and second language achievement. On the other hand, there was a study by Horwitz, et al. (1986) and Macintyre and Gardner (1994) which indicated that foreign language anxiety is responsible for students' negative emotional reaction to language learning. More recently, Batumlu and Erden (2007) and Cubuku (2007) have conducted research on this context to see classroom language anxiety and language achievement correlations and found that anxiety and achievement were correlated negatively.

Furthermore, in the local context Abate Kassahun (1996) conducted an MA thesis to investigate English Language Classroom Anxiety, Performance on Classroom Tasks and Tests of Ethiopian Civil Service College 1st year Students. His findings indicated that most of the students were highly anxious in different kinds of language performance activities such as speaking and writing. And the learners' anxiety scores were negatively and significantly associated with their language performance. Similarly, research conducted by Melesse (2007) was on language writing test anxiety with particular reference to Admas and St. Mary's private university colleges' students taking Sophomore English course. His findings indicated that the students' level of anxiety was high when taking the writing tests. Melkamu (2008) in his part investigated grade 11 students' English language learning anxiety and their English achievement and found out that most of the students were found to be anxious. The study also further showed that there was a significant negative relationship between students' English language classroom anxiety and English achievement test result.

In all secondary schools of Ethiopia, students are taught English as a subject. It has been observed by the researchers and colleagues that most high school students seem to score low marks in English subject. It is also speculated that one explanation for this low achievement in this subject may be foreign language anxiety. Hence, this study aims to explore foreign language anxiety and its relationship with grade nine students' English achievement with reference to Hawassa Tabor, Yirgalem and Hawassa Langano Preparatory and Secondary Schools.

Accordingly, the research attempts to address the following basic questions:

1. What is the level of foreign language anxiety among grade nine high school students?
2. Does the anxiety level vary with respect to students' background urban/ rural?
3. Does the anxiety level vary with respect to gender?
4. What is the relationship between learners' foreign language anxiety and achievements of English subject?

## **III. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework: Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory**

Krashen's (1982) Second Language Acquisition Theory provided a theoretical framework for this study. He proposed five hypotheses along with other variables to be considered in second language acquisition. The five hypotheses include (a) the acquisition-learning distinction, (b) the natural order hypothesis, (c) the monitor hypothesis, (d) the input hypothesis, and (e) the affective filter hypothesis.

Of the Krashen's five hypotheses the fifth is fundamental to the current study. The affective filter hypothesis specifically addresses the role of the affective factors of motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety on second language acquisition.

### **3.2 Foreign Language Anxiety**

This kind of anxiety differs from the other ones in that it is related to foreign language classes. According to Batumlu and Erden (2007), foreign language anxiety is different from all kinds of anxiety because it is a distinct complex of self perceptions, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning process. On the other

hand, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) indicated that foreign language anxiety can be related to three different forms of anxieties which are related to academic and social evaluation situations: Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

As to Batmlu and Erden (2007), communication apprehension is a kind of anxiety that challenges students in speaking in public, listening or learning a spoken message. In order to reduce this type of anxiety EFL teachers play a pivotal role. They can build students' self-confidence by providing positive feedback and promoting self-perception of developing proficiency.

The second type of anxiety is test-anxiety. According to Brown (1994), this type of anxiety drives from a fear of failure in a test or evaluative situations. This may occur if students have poor performance in the earlier tests. As Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), point out test anxious students have false beliefs in language learning. In this case teachers are responsible in reducing test anxious students by using different strategies.

The third type of anxiety scholars agree is negative evaluation. According to Spolsky (1989), though fear of negative evaluation is similar to test anxiety, the earlier one is broader in scope. Fear of negative evaluation may take place in any social, evaluative situations such as interviewing for a job or speaking in foreign language class.

### **3.3 Measurement of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety**

Various researchers in previous studies had incorporated various types of measurement tools that were not sensitive to different types of anxiety. As a result, Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) that contains 33 items to be answered on a 5-point Likert-type scale, from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' in order to consistently measure the anxiety levels of foreign language learners. This instrument has become the standard scale used to measure foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 2010). Since its reliability is tested to use it in its original form or adapting it, the researchers of the current study have decided to use the FLCAS.

### **3.4 Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety and Language Achievement**

Various scholars agree that anxiety does not necessarily have negative impact on language learning that a certain amount of it is helpful. That is, anxiety has a facilitating and debilitating effect on language learning and achievement. According to Spolsky (1989), although anxious learners find it harder to be successful, anxiety plays its debilitating role on their performance and achievement. Batmlu and Erden (2007), added that a lowered anxiety level tends to be more related with achievement.

## **IV. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY**

The three common approaches to conducting research are quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods. Given the nature of the current study, quantitative method has been used.

### **4.1 Research Setting**

Three Hawassa University research village high schools were selected. These were Hawassa Tabor, Yirgalem and Hawassa Langanose secondary and Preparatory schools. The reason for selecting these three high schools was that, there seemed no research work endeavoured on these areas in general, and the present kind of research in particular.

### **4.2. Sampling Technique**

Of the three secondary and Preparatory schools, three sections from Hawassa Tabor, two sections from Yirgalem, and two sections from Hawassa Langanowereselected randomly. Thus, a total of 362 students filled the questionnaire.

### **4.3. Data Gathering Instruments**

Two data gathering instruments have been used for this study. These were questionnaire and document analysis.

The first data gathering tool used in this study was close ended questionnaire. The questionnaire designed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) was slightly modified and used for the study since this instrument has been used in numerous research studies on foreign language anxiety and has been proven to be a reliable and valid measure of foreign language anxiety.

**The other data collecting instrument used in this study was document analysis.** The sample Students' English subject result of semester one has been taken and analysed to determine the association between students' anxiety level and their achievement.

#### 4.4. Data Analysis Method

To analyse the data gathered through questionnaire and students' document, SPSS 20 version was employed. Firstly, descriptive analysis was used. Under Descriptive statistics, Crosstabulation (Anxiety vs Achievement, gender, resident) Frequency, mean, SD, pi-chart and percentage were used. In addition to this, chi-square test was used to test the association between the dependent variable (anxiety level) and the independent variables achievement, gender and residence. We have also employed inferential statistics particularly ordinal logistic regression to check the association between independent variables and their strength with related to the dependent variable particularly the achievement and the anxiety level.

### V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to test the association between variables (foreign language anxiety and students residence, foreign language anxiety and students sex, and foreign language anxiety and students achievement result) Chi-square test was used.

Besides, ordinal logistic regression has been used to see the association between foreign language anxiety and students English language achievement.

**Table 1: General anxiety situation of respondents**

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Anxiety Level of Students	362	1.00	4.52	2.8745	.44594
Valid N (listwise)	362				

According to Oxford (1990), language anxiety can be subdivided in to three categories based on FLCAS scores: high (mean score 3.5-4.4), medium (mean score 2.5-3.4) and low (mean score 1.0-2.4). In line with this, the researchers have labelled the anxiety level of the students in to three categories based on FLCAS: high (mean score 3.5-4.52), medium (mean score 2.5-3.49) and low (mean score 1.0-2.49).

**Table 2: Grade 9 students' English Anxiety level**

		Frequency	Percept	Valid Percept	Cumulative Percept	Mean score
Valid	Low	59	16.3	16.3	16.3	1.0-2.49
	Medium	279	77.1	77.1	93.4	2.5-3.49
	High	24	6.6	6.6	100.0	3.5-4.52
	Total	362	100.0	100.0		

Table 2 reveals, from the total of 362 subjects of the study, 59(16.3%) scored low anxiety level of mean score (1.0-2.49). On the other hand, more than 77% of the subjects of the study labeled moderately anxious. Furthermore, 6.6% of the students belonged to high anxiety level. It can be inferred from the data majority of grade 9 students of the sample schools were moderately anxious in learning English language.

**Table 3: Levels of Anxiety with in Variables**

Rank	Types	Items	FLCAS Scores of each Item	
			M	SD
1	Communication apprehension	8	23.57	4.89
			2.95	0.61
2	Test anxiety	5	14.05	3.56
			2.81	0.71
3	Fear of negative evaluation	9	25.51	5.73
			2.83	0.64
4	General Anxiety of English Classes	11	31.69	6.16
			2.88	0.56

From the above table 3, it can be viewed that the mean score of the items for Communication apprehension was 2.95(SD= 0.61), for test anxiety 2.81(SD=0.71), for fear of negative evaluation 2.83 (SD=0.64) and for general anxiety of English class was 2.88 (SD=0.56). From this it can be noted that communication apprehension was the highest anxiety level. General anxiety of English classes was reported as the second highest anxiety level. On the other hand, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety were ranked as third and fourth respectively. As compared to other variables of language anxiety, communication apprehension considered to be the first.

This finding is similar to a study conducted by Souad, (2010). In Souad's finding communication apprehension was reported the first anxiety variable. Whereas Fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety ranked second in Souad's (2010) and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986; Aida 1994) respectively which is not the case in the current study, it is general anxiety of English classes that takes the second place.

**Table 4: Males and Females English Classroom Anxiety**

Anxiety variables	No. of items	Sex	Mean	Standard deviation
Communication apprehension	8	Male	2.91	0.61
		Female	2.98	0.61
Test anxiety	5	Male	2.78	0.73
		Female	2.84	0.69
Fear of negative evaluation	9	Male	1.54	0.40
		Female	1.57	0.39
General Anxiety of English Classes	11	Male	2.84	0.54
		Female	2.92	0.57
Over all anxiety level	33	Male	2.82	0.60
		Female	2.92	0.62

Table 4 shows that in terms of either over all anxiety level, or each specific kind of anxiety, females' mean (2.92) scores are somewhat higher than that of males' (2.82).

**Table 5: Association between foreign language anxiety and students residence**

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.528 <sup>a</sup>	2	.768
Likelihood Ratio	.543	2	.762
Linear-by-Linear Association	.111	1	.739
N of Valid Cases	362		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 8.62.

The results in table above indicated that there is no significant association between foreign language anxiety level and resident/background of the students (P value=0.739>0.05).

		Count		Total
		Residence of students		
		urban	rural	
Anxiety level	Low	38	21	59
	Medium	177	102	279
	High	17	7	24
Total		232	130	362

As table 6 above shows 177(48.9%) of urban students reported to have medium anxiety level whereas, 102(28.2%) of students from rural have medium anxiety level. This clearly shows that majority of students with medium anxiety are residents of urban.

**Table 7: Association between foreign language anxiety and Sex of students**

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.451 <sup>a</sup>	2	.108
Likelihood Ratio	4.542	2	.103
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.226	1	.040
N of Valid Cases	362		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.87.

The chi-square tests shows that there is strong association between foreign language anxiety and sex of the students (P<0.04 which is less than P<0.05).

**Table 8:Anxiety level1 \* Sex of the students Cross tabulation**

		Count		
		Sex of the students		Total
		Male	female	
Anxiety level1	Low	32	27	59
	Medium	125	154	279
	High	7	17	24
Total		164	198	362

According to table 8 above, 32 (8.8%) male and 27(7.6%) female students had low anxiety level. On the other hand, highest number 154 (42.5%) of female students had medium anxiety level as compared to the male ones. The study also confirms that 17 female students labeled highly anxious in foreign language classes, but few number of male students are highly anxious.

This shows that female students tend to display high anxiety than male students. Theresultofthis study is similar to other studies. For example, research conducted by Elkhafaifi (2005), found out that female students often have higher levels of anxiety than males in academic settings. Another study which supports the current study is a research conducted by Von Worde (2003). The result of Von’s study indicated that female students were more likely to be much apprehensive than male learners.

**Table 9: Association between Foreign language Anxiety and achievement**

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymp. Std. Error <sup>a</sup>	Approx. T <sup>b</sup>	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal by Ordinal	Gamma	-.370	.120	-2.736	.006
N of Valid Cases		362			
a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.					
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.					

The table above shows, there is significant association between anxiety level and achievement(P value=0.006

**Table 10: Strength of the association among the dependent and independent variables**

Parameter Estimates								
		Estimate	Std. Error	Wald	df	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Threshold	[anxiety1 = 0]	-1.783	.530	11.324	1	.001	-2.821	-.745
	[anxiety1 = 1]	2.693	.555	23.569	1	.000	1.606	3.781
Location	[achievement2=0]	1.147	.613	3.504	1	.061	-.054	2.349
	[achievement2=1]	-.038	.523	.005	1	.942	-1.063	.986
	[achievement2=2]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.
	[sex=0]	-.467	.254	3.385	1	.066	-.964	.031
	[sex=1]	0 <sup>a</sup>	.	.	0	.	.	.
Link function: Logit.								
a. This parameter is set to zero because it is redundant.								

<0.05).

The results of the ordinal logistic regression analysis of table 10 showed that English language anxiety and English achievement were negatively correlated particularly for high and low anxiety level (odd ratio=-1.783, P value=0.001<0.05). This value shows that anxiety has a negative impact on achievement. This is because, statistically, if the odd ration value is negative and the significant value is less than the given point value, anxiety has debilitating effect on students’ achievement. In relation to this Gardner (1985) and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) pointed out that negative correlation indicate the fact that anxiety impairs performance.

On the other hand, for medium anxiety level, they have direct relation (odd ratio=2.693, P Value=0.000<0.05). This shows that most of the subjects with medium anxiety level have scored average result in their English subject. Hence, the present study shows that high anxious learners tend to perform relatively and significantly less successful in their English subject than students experiencing lower anxiety levels. However, students with

medium anxiety level have average results. This indicates that medium (moderate) anxiety level has a facilitating effect on achievement.

**Table 11: Anxiety level \* achievement Cross tabulation**

Count		Achievement			Total
		low	Average	High	
Anxiety level1	Low	5	51	3	59
	Medium	41	219	19	279
	High	10	14	0	24
Total		56	284	22	362

As table 11 shows, students with medium anxiety level had scored high achievement in their English subjects. Of 279 students with medium anxiety level, 19 (5.4%) of them had scored high marks in their English subject. Whereas, most (60.5%) of the students under study achieved average mark (50-79.9) in their English subject. However, 41(11.3%) students scored low mark in the subject. This clearly shows that students with medium/ moderate anxiety level had scored average (50-79.9) mark in the English subject.

With regard to students with high anxiety level, none of the students scored high mark, but only 14 and 10 of them had scored average (50-79) and low (less than 50) marks respectively.

The table also indicates that from 59 low anxious students, three of them achieved high mark in the English subject. Significant number of students had an average achievement in the subject. Only, 5 of the students with low anxiety level had scored low marks in English subject.

Therefore, from the above data we can conclude that students with medium anxiety level had achieved average and high mark scores respectively. This shows that moderate anxiety level has a significant contributing effect on students' English achievement. Next to this, having low anxiety level contributes to students English achievement. On the other hand, students with high anxiety level scored low marks in their English subject.

## VI. CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings of the study obtained, the following conclusions have been made.

- With regard to the general foreign language anxiety situation of respondents, the minimum mean score of the FLCAS is 1.00 and the maximum mean score of FLCAS is 4.52.
- Of 362 students, 6.6 % of the subjects showed high level foreign language anxiety, 77.1 % showed medium-level foreign language anxiety and 16.3 % showed low level foreign language anxiety.
- Large number of students from urban residence have medium anxiety level; urban students leveled lower anxious than rural students.
- As compared to male and female students' foreign language anxiety level, female students are more anxious than males.
- As the ordinal logistic regression analysis shows, foreign language anxiety and English language achievement were negatively correlated especially for high and low anxiety levels; on the other hand, for medium anxiety level and average achievement had direct relation (odd ratio=2.693, P Value=0.000<0.05).

## VII. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions drawn, the following recommendations have been suggested.

- English language teachers should work on increasing self-confidence of the students in their language abilities.
- Students should participate actively in English classes more because active participation may gradually reduce their anxiety.
- Teachers should consider students residence and gender while designing classroom activities.
- Teachers should encourage students to use English both inside and outside the classroom freely.

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