STRATEGIES FOR MITIGATING FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN EFL CLASSROOMS

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Received: 13.09.2025
Revised: 14.09.2025
Accepted: 15.09.2025

Annotation: Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) continues to be a barrier to effective language acquisition, often limiting learners' participation, confidence, and achievement. While there is a major gap in terms of FLA mitigation strategies, as prior studies lack focus on this aspect, this tezis aims to provide a literature-based review of working strategies identified in FLA studies. Key approaches include creating supportive classroom environments (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014), applying positive reinforcement and constructive error correction (Gregersen, 2003), and using humor to reduce tension (Pavelescu & Petric, 2018). Collaborative activities and group work have been shown to foster peer support and lower anxiety (Liu & Jackson, 2008), while task design and scaffolding contribute to building learners' self-confidence (Woodrow, 2006). More recent research also highlights the role of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programs in reducing FLA by enhancing motivation and group dynamics (Lopez-Agudo, 2019; Dalton-Puffer, 2011). All these information related to strategies promote the necessity to be more aware of FLA and reduce it, creating motivating learning environments in TESOL and EFL contexts.

Introduction. The term *Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)* was first introduced by Elaine K. Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz, and John Cope in 1986. They described FLA as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning. FLA is a context-specific form of anxiety characterized by feelings of apprehension, fear of negative

2025
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evaluation, and avoidance behaviors (Horwitz et al., 1986). While, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) suggested that FLA is not distinct but rather a component of general anxiety, Horwitz (2001) proved them wrong.

The causes of FLA have been analyzed for more than 50 years. Scovel (1978) highlighted that speaking in a foreign language makes students anxious, though he did not define FLA. Horwitz et al. (1986) later developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and identified three main causes: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Later research added teacher behavior and environment (Gregersen, 2003), peer pressure (Liu & Jackson, 2008), task difficulty and lack of preparation (Tallon, 2009), and learner traits such as motivation, self-efficacy, and personality (Dörnyei, 2005; Woodrow, 2006).

More importantly FLA hinders learners second language acquisition and profoundly impacts their learning process, causing avoidance behavior, hesitation, low confidence.

Existing research cannot cover Uzbekistan context, resulting in under exploration of the relevance of FLA to EFL. This is a huge gap which should be filled, because when FLA is addressed, students become more eager to learn, more motivated, and ultimately improve language outcomes and second language acquisition (MacIntyre, 2014).

Research has consistently shown that while FLA cannot be fully eliminated, teachers can adopt pedagogical strategies to reduce its impact and create more supportive classroom environments. This literature-based thesis reviews strategies identified in the literature and highlights their effectiveness in addressing FLA in EFL contexts.

Classroom Environment and Teacher Attitude.

In FLA mitigation, creating positive classroom atmosphere is a first step Akkakoson,(2016), as it helps learners feel save and lower their affective filters. However, fostering such classsroom atmosphere is not an easy thing and certain measurements should be taken for this. First of all,increasing the students self-efficacy by introducing different goal-setting activities. Furthermore, building rapport among classmates and improving the relationships in the class are essential aspects of anxiety management. It is assumed that students participate more and speak more freely in English if they feel safe and appreciated by their peers and teachers. It might also be beneficial for the students and their relationships with each other if they realise that they are not alone with their anxiety, but that it is a common phenomenon in language learning. This could be achieved by discussing feelings of anxiety with all students at the beginning of the school year. Additionally, it might be helpful to develop a system to help anxious students manage and deal with FLA. Another measure that teachers can

take to improve and strengthen the class community is to teach the students how to be supportive and respectful partners during pair or group work. The students should learn to take responsibility for their behaviour in the classroom and realise that they also play a part in creating a pleasant and supportive classroom atmosphere (Inada, 2021; as cited by Rathmayr,2024)

Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014) found that learners report lower anxiety when teachers establish trust and a strong sense of classroom community. Teacher immediacy, empathy, and encouragement play a crucial role in reducing learners' fear of making mistakes.

Feedback and Error Correction.

Additionally, learners must realize that making mistakes is not a big deal, as it is natural part of learning, and learners usually experience FLA due to their fear of making mistakes. Therefore, if teacher succeds on persuading learners being open to mistakes, and approach it fearlessly, it can result in addressing FLA. First step to achieve this is establishing a positive error culture where learners do not need to be ashamed of making mistakes and even when they do so, accept it normally. There are many proposals that offers some guidelines to properly correct learners' mistakes, as in otherwise it can further exaggerate feelings of anxiety. However, Error correction is often a source of anxiety. Research suggests that constructive, non-threatening feedback reduces stress while still supporting learning. Gregersen (2003) highlights that learners respond more positively to gentle correction and reinforcement than to harsh criticism, meaning that teachers must acquire skill of feedback-giving.

Humor and Motivation.

Humor has been recognized as an effective pedagogical tool. Pavelescu and Petric (2018) showed that humor not only reduces tension but also enhances classroom rapport and motivation. Similarly, Arnaiz (2016) found that motivation and reduced anxiety are interdependent, suggesting that strategies which enhance motivation also indirectly mitigate FLA.

Collaborative Learning and Group Work.

Fostering group collaboration and peer interaction is another mission which teachers must complete to help learners cope with FLA. Liu and Jackson (2008) emphasize that collaborative learning reduces the pressure of individual performance and fosters a sense of belonging, which can help learners overcome communication apprehension. Eventually this strategy can reduce social impact of FLA.

Task Design and Scaffolding.
Studies focused on causes of FLA established the fact that learners feel more insecure and anxious in the face of more complicated tasks, which are far abow their linguistic competence.
Woodrow (2006) and Tallon (2009) argue that well-scaffolded tasks matched to learners' proficiency levels can gradually build confidence, reducing the fear of failure.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).
Although not the central focus of all studies, CLIL has been shown to indirectly reduce FLA by engaging learners in meaningful communication and promoting collaborative environments. Lopez-Agudo (2019), Dalton-Puffer (2011), and Lopez-Medina (2024) argue that CLIL fosters motivation and group dynamics, both of which help mitigate anxiety.

Conclusion. To establish working FLA addressing strategies, FLA causing factors have been taken into account, resulting in diverse strategies which can mitigate all 3 main sources of FLA , namely academic, cognitive and social. What connect these strategies is their aim of helping learners overcome FLA and successfully acquire second language. Prior studies demonstrated that Teachers who apply humor, constructive feedback, scaffolding, and collaborative activities can significantly reduce learners' anxiety. Meanwhile, CLIL and technology-assisted approaches represent promising innovations for future practice.

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