



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20121183>

---

## Foreign language anxiety and learner outcomes: facilitating and debilitating dimensions

---

**Islomov Utkirjon Akhrorjon ugli –**  
Kokand State University,  
ESP Teacher

E-mail: [u.islomov877@kokandsu.uz](mailto:u.islomov877@kokandsu.uz)

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-8497-6558>

Tel.: +998 91 676-47-88

**Annotation.** *This article examines the dual role of anxiety in foreign language learning by comparing its facilitating and debilitating effects on students' performance and participation. The findings show that moderate anxiety may encourage preparation and engagement, whereas high anxiety is linked with avoidance, cognitive blocking and lower achievement.*

**Keywords:** *foreign language anxiety, facilitating anxiety, debilitating anxiety, ESP, performance, participation, speaking skills, assessment.*

## Тревожность при изучении иностранного языка и результаты обучения: стимулирующие и сдерживающие аспекты

**Аннотация.** *В статье анализируется двойственная роль тревожности при изучении иностранного языка: она может стимулировать подготовку или, наоборот, снижать речевую активность. Результаты показывают, что умеренная тревожность связана с вовлеченностью, а высокий уровень тревожности - с избеганием, когнитивными блоками и более низкой успеваемостью.*

**Ключевые слова:** *иноязычная тревожность, фасилитирующая тревожность, дебилитирующая тревожность, ESP, успеваемость, участие, говорение, оценивание.*

## **Chet tilini o'rganishdagi xavotir va ta'lim natijalari: rag'batlantiruvchi hamda to'sqinlik qiluvchi jihatlar**

*Annotatsiya.* Maqolada xorijiy til o'rganishda tashvishning ikki xil ko'rinishi - o'quvchini faollashtiruvchi va natijani pasaytiruvchi ta'siri tahlil qilinadi. Natijalar o'rtacha tashvish tayyorgarlik va ishtirokni kuchaytirishi, yuqori tashvish esa qochish, ichki to'siq va pastroq akademik natijalar bilan bog'liqligini ko'rsatadi.

*Kalit so'zlar:* xorijiy til tashvishi, fasilitatsion tashvish, debilitatsion tashvish, ESP, akademik natija, ishtirok, nutqiy ko'nikma, baholash.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Foreign language anxiety is one of the emotional factors that most clearly affects what students do in the classroom. It can appear when learners answer a question, take a test, speak in front of peers or compare their English with that of more confident classmates. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope define it as a special set of feelings and behaviours connected with classroom language learning [6]. In this sense, anxiety is not only a private emotion; it changes participation, confidence and the visible use of knowledge.

The present article shortens and reshapes the original study around a practical problem: anxiety may either support or damage learning depending on its level and classroom conditions. Classical research distinguishes facilitating anxiety, which pushes students to prepare and concentrate, from debilitating anxiety, which blocks performance and encourages avoidance [2]. Therefore, the aim is to compare these two forms of anxiety in relation to university students' academic performance and classroom participation.

### **RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC AND CURRENT STATE**

The topic is relevant because university English classes increasingly expect students not only to know grammar and vocabulary but also to use English in public and professional situations. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis explains that high anxiety may prevent learners from processing input effectively [9], while empirical studies show that foreign language anxiety often has a negative relationship with achievement [1; 11]. Speaking tasks are especially sensitive because mistakes are immediate and visible. When students fear negative evaluation, they may choose silence even when they know the answer [10; 15; 16].

At the same time, current research does not support the idea that all anxiety is harmful. Moderate emotional tension can increase alertness and effort if it does not overload attention [4]. Learners may even experience anxiety and enjoyment together, and this emotional balance can influence willingness to communicate [3]. This view is important for English for Specific Purposes classes in Uzbekistan. Recent studies report that technical university students often feel anxious about oral presentations, technical vocabulary and peer judgement [8; 13]. Thus, anxiety-sensitive teaching is necessary for both general EFL and ESP contexts.

### **EXPERIMENTAL PART: RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION**

The study used a mixed-methods design. The quantitative part was based on an adapted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and students' academic records, while the qualitative part used semi-structured interviews. Fifty-two valid responses from university students were analysed. The participants represented English-related and non-English academic streams, which allowed the study to consider both general language learning and ESP-oriented experiences.

Anxiety scores were grouped into low, moderate and high levels. Academic performance was examined through end-of-semester test scores and participation logs. Six students, two from each anxiety group, were interviewed about speaking tasks, tests, teacher behaviour, peer comparison and their own strategies. Quantitative data were interpreted through descriptive and correlational analysis; interview answers were grouped thematically according to whether anxiety was experienced as a challenge or as a threat.

### **ANALYSIS OF RESULTS**

The results showed that 14 students (27%) had low anxiety, 21 students (40%) had moderate anxiety and 17 students (33%) had high anxiety. Overall anxiety had a moderate negative correlation with academic performance ( $r = -0.48$ ). This confirms that higher anxiety usually relates to weaker achievement. However, the group comparison gave a more balanced picture: students with moderate anxiety had the highest mean test score ( $M = 78.3$ ), while low-anxiety students scored  $M = 74.5$  and high-anxiety students scored  $M = 68.1$ .

Participation records supported the same conclusion. Moderately anxious students joined classroom discussions and oral activities more regularly. They did not describe anxiety as pleasant, but they saw it as a reminder to prepare. This interpretation is close to the idea that manageable pressure can improve effort and attention [4; 5]. In other words, facilitating anxiety did not remove nervousness; it changed nervousness into preparation, rehearsal and more careful task performance.

High anxiety produced the opposite effect. Interviewed students in this group described anxiety as a block, a wall or a fear of failing before speaking. They reported shaking hands, forgetting familiar words and avoiding voluntary answers. Such experiences are consistent with the view that debilitating anxiety interrupts real-time language use [6; 11]. In the Uzbek context, Nishonov also notes that anxious learners may know the material but fail to express it fluently because fear interferes with speaking performance [14].

The interviews showed that classroom context strongly influenced anxiety. Supportive teacher behaviour, enough thinking time and correction after the student had finished speaking reduced pressure. Immediate interruption, public comparison and overemphasis on accuracy increased it. Peer dynamics were also important: strong classmates motivated some learners but intimidated others. This finding corresponds with recent ESP research showing that presentations and spontaneous speaking tasks are the most anxiety-provoking activities for technical university students [13].

Self-evaluation was another key factor. Students with low or moderate anxiety usually accepted mistakes as part of learning, while highly anxious students interpreted small errors as evidence of poor ability. As a result, debilitating anxiety reduced not only scores but also opportunities for practice. Facilitating anxiety, by contrast, created attention and responsibility without closing the door to participation.

### **CONCLUSION**

The study confirms that foreign language anxiety is not a single negative construct. Its influence depends on intensity, learner interpretation and classroom conditions. Excessive anxiety weakens participation and lowers achievement, while moderate anxiety may support preparation, concentration and engagement. The data from 52 students show that the moderate-anxiety group performed and participated better than both low- and high-anxiety groups, which supports the distinction between facilitating and debilitating anxiety [2].

For teachers, the main implication is to manage anxiety rather than simply try to remove it. Gradual speaking practice, clear task instructions, constructive feedback and a friendly classroom atmosphere can prevent anxiety from becoming harmful. In ESP settings, scaffolded presentations, vocabulary support and formative assessment are especially useful

because students must combine English with professional content [8; 13]. The study is limited by its sample size and institutional scope, but it shows that properly guided anxiety can become not only an obstacle, but also a source of purposeful learner engagement.

## REFERENCES

1. Aida Y. Examination of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's construct of foreign language anxiety: The case of students of Japanese // *The Modern Language Journal*. – 1994. – Vol. 78. – No. 2. – P. 155–168.
2. Alpert R., Haber R.N. Anxiety in academic achievement situations // *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*. – 1960. – Vol. 61. – No. 2. – P. 207–215.
3. Dewaele J.M., MacIntyre P.D. The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom // *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*. – 2014. – Vol. 4. – No. 2. – P. 237–274.
4. Eysenck M.W., Calvo M.G. Anxiety and performance: The processing efficiency theory // *Cognition & Emotion*. – 1992. – Vol. 6. – No. 6. – P. 409–434.
5. Gregersen T., Horwitz E.K. Language learning and perfectionism: Anxious and non-anxious language learners' reactions to their own oral performance // *The Modern Language Journal*. – 2002. – Vol. 86. – No. 4. – P. 562–570.
6. Horwitz E.K., Horwitz M.B., Cope J. Foreign language classroom anxiety // *The Modern Language Journal*. – 1986. – Vol. 70. – No. 2. – P. 125–132.
7. Islomov O.A. Cultural tourism // *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences*. – 2021. – Vol. 10. – No. 12. – P. 286–290.
8. Islomov U. Exploring foreign language anxiety in technical higher education: Evidence from engineering students // *Advances in Science and Education*. – 2026. – Vol. 2. – No. 03. – P. 45–52.
9. Krashen S.D. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. – Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1982.
10. Liu M., Jackson J. An exploration of Chinese EFL learners' unwillingness to communicate and foreign language anxiety // *The Modern Language Journal*. – 2008. – Vol. 92. – No. 1. – P. 71–86.
11. MacIntyre P.D., Gardner R.C. Methods and results in the study of anxiety and language learning: A review of the literature // *Language Learning*. – 1991. – Vol. 41. – No. 1. – P. 85–117.
12. MacIntyre P.D., Gregersen T. Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive-broadening power of the imagination // *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*. – 2012. – Vol. 2. – No. 2. – P. 193–213.
13. Islomov U. Speaking anxiety in ESP classrooms: Evidence from technical university students // *Advances in Science and Education*. – 2026. – Vol. 2. – No. 04. – P. 58–66. DOI: 10.70728/edu.v02.i04.013.
14. Nishonov I.D. The effect of anxiety on speaking performance of L2 learners // *O'zbekistonda xorijiy tillar*. – 2022. – No. 1(42). – P. 104–113. DOI: 10.36078/1649676544.
15. Young D.J. Creating a low-anxiety classroom environment: What does language anxiety research suggest? // *The Modern Language Journal*. – 1991. – Vol. 75. – No. 4. – P. 426–437.
16. Woodrow L. Anxiety and speaking English as a second language // *RELC Journal*. – 2006. – Vol. 37. – No. 3. – P. 308–328.