THE ROLE OF TEACHER EXPERIENCE IN SHAPING AND MITIGATING FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Kurbonova Parizoda Alisherovna

Student of Westminster International university in Tashkent MALT TESOL, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

E-mail: Parizodaalixanova@icloud.com

Abstract: Current trend on learning foreign language has become widely popular in different corners of the world, with billions of students trying to acquire it in order to pass exams, become a student, find a work, promote, travel, move and so on. Unquestionably, there are countless occasions which require people in different ages know and be able to use language fluently. However, similarly there are countless factors which hinder people from learning the necessary language, and on of them is Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), which is significant affective factor influencing second language acquisition, by affecting learners classroom engagement, language performance, and overall achievement. However, this language phenomenon remains under explored, since studies conducted so far focused only on certain aspects of FLA such as its nature, causes, effects, remaining other important aspects as teachers' role, mitigating and so on unstudied. Moreover, prior studies applicable for only specific contexts such as institutions or countries. This study, therefore, aims to explore role of teachers' experience on mitigating FLA that their students have. To achieve this mixed-method study has been conducted in Westminster International University in Tashkent , that examined 48 Postgraduate teacher-students with the help of online questionnaire, 10 of them were interviewed, and 5 observed when they were teaching. First, participants awareness of FLA's causes and effects was examined in the questionnaire, then strategies that these students use to address FLA have been outlined in the interview, before being ensured in Observations. Findings revealed that student-teachers' who had worked as a teacher for a long time understands the nature of FLA, its causes and effects more than student-teachers who does not have as much experience in this field. Furthermore, former category of student-teachers have already created and used strategies to mitigate FLA, while later ones could not do so, because they do not know any strategies, resulting in their students failing their language learning.

To achieve this, all interview participants were selected according to their teaching experience and had various teaching experience, starting with 0-1 years of teaching to 10+ years.

Key words: Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), Teacher Awareness, TESOL, FLA strategies, Teacher Experience, Causes of FLA, Effects of FLA.

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 specific only in language learning and characterized by feelings of apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and avoidance behaviors, Horwitz et al. (1986). However, this argument resulted in heated discussions among researchers, with MacIntyre and gardener (1991) suggesting that FLA is not distinct but rather a component of general anxiety, pointing out that learners who experience FLA tend to be generally anxious.

Following discussions and studies evolved around this topic until in empirical data provided strong argument   that language learners do not necessarily be generally anxious to experience anxiety in language tasks, Horwitz (2001).

FLA's impact on learners' language learning is of undeniable importance, as it directly affects learners language proficiency, by making learners reluctant to participate in different class activities, resulting in chances for language practice as well as feedback being missed. Notably it is a two edged sword, as when learners feel anxious they do not practice, and when they do not practice they do not improve their skills. Which in terms make them even more reluctant to practice, as they will think that people around will find their mistakes and judge them. As a consequence they wil never be able to fluently and coherently use language. Therefore, there are a lot of students who consider language learning process as more complicated than it is, and give up on learning. But how FLA affects learners in that extend is still under a big question among scholars, with some arguing that FLA impairs cognitive functions such as memory and attention, MacIntyre (1994) and others saying that FLA affects learners by compromising group collaboration and dynamics, creating unfriendly atmosphere where learners do not have other choice but feeling unsure about their skills, Qaddomi (2013).

"We know that when learners have FLA they feel nervous to use language but what makes them feel this nervousness" was the question which pushed researchers towards exploring and analyzing causes of FLA for more than 50 years (1970-present). Scovel (1978) , for instance highlighted that speaking in a foreign language make students anxious, even though it did not define FLA. Then Horwitz et al (1986) created Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale in order to investigate what factors make learners have FLA and found out three causes of FLA such as communication apprehension, Test, and fear of negative evaluation. In 2000s-2010s factors such as teacher behavior and environment, Gregersen (2003), Social factors such as peer pressure, Liu and Jackson (2008), task difficulty as well as lack of preparation, Tallon (2009), and finally Individual learner traits such as motivation, self-efficacy, and personality, Dornyei (2005); Woodrow (2006), were added into list of FLA causes.

Various studies explored and discovered a lot of strategies to reduce Foreign Language Anxiety. For example Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) explored the positive impact of a relaxed classroom atmosphere on FLA,concluding that strong classroom community and positive learning atmosphere, can help reduce FLA by enhancing motivation. The study by Arnaiz (2016) further explored the connection between anxiety and motivation, even though in CLIL context. Which was even more fortunate considering that she found that CLIL programs and instructions also has a positive reducing impact on FLA and second language acquisition. Interplay of Content and Language Integrated Learning and FLA is very well-researched area, with a lot of studies namely Lopez-Agudo (2019), Marsh (2011) Dalton-Puffer (2011), and Lopez-Medina (2024) concluding that CLIL is a significant factor that can mitigate FLA by addressing all potential causes of FLA such as personality traits and fostering motivation and positive group dynamics.However in this study I did not focus on CLIL, because my participant are English teachers in EFL classrooms not CLIL. In contrast this research focuses on other strategies providing positive reinforcement, error correction, and humor, which are proven to be useful in terms of FLA mitigation, Qurbonova (2025, unpublished masters dissertation)

Prior studies mainly focused on nature, causes and effects of FLA, and I could not find even one article which explored the connection between teachers' years of teaching and their ability to address FLA. On top of that, most studies focused on only learners FLA, and only few ones examined teachers and their role in FLA mitigation. Finally, most of the studies conducted so far cannot be applicable in Uzbekistan context, and there are very limited studies which explored pedagogy in Uzbekistan. In this study I want to fill these gaps in the literature.

I believe all teacher at least once in their entire career faced a moment when their student fails an exam regardless of effort he/she put on study. Which was a case in my situation as well, and provoke my interest on learning this phenomenon. In one article I found that FLA makes learners over-study and it might result in their academic failure, which I believe happened to my student and I could not help to her, because I simply did not know what was the reason and what FLA is. Therefore, I aim to enhance student-teachers and teachers awareness with the help of this study.

With worldwide education system further pushing the request for a conductive to language learning environment, the relevance of FLA to EFL teaching cannot be underestimated, because when FLA is addressed students become more eager to learn, and more motivated, further improving language outcomes and second language acquisition, MacIntyre (2014). These are reasons why this phenomenon must be studied

While my masters dissertation focused on Teachers' awareness of FLA, this article extends my work in this field by investigating the correlation between teachers; years of experience aand their ability of mitigating FLA.

Research question

1 What is the relationship between student teachers' years of experience and their awareness of FLA

Research objectives

1 To explore WIUT MALT TESOL students' understanding of their learners FLA, its identification, causes, and effects.

2 To investigate strategies these student-teachers use in their teaching practices in order to address FLA

3 To analyze how participants approach FLA in connection with their years of experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign Language Anxiety is a significant factor in language learning and teaching that affect students, their performance, collaboration with others, even their future, because students experiencing FLA prone to avoid all language learning opportunities, which consequently hinders their second language acquisition. Therefore it is profoundly important to address this issue, as tackling improves learners confidence and overall engagement with the language,

allowing more rooms for students' personal growth, motivation, and improvement of the language skills. But to achieve this, nature of the FLA and its aspects should be taken into account. Therefore this literature review focuses on evolvement of FLA over extended period, starting with early 1970s when the term was not defined but concept existed till 2020s when new dimensions of FLA have been investigated, sometimes with narrow focus on skills, or in connection with technology.

Conceptual framework

Until 1986, the term FLA had not been established yet, but concept of learners feeling anxieties wile learning existed. They mainly considered this anxiety as a part of general anxiety which disturbs learning at three stages, input, processing, output, Tobias (1979). Tobias' findings helped to shape general picture of how anxiety disturbs learning, (not specifically language learning it can be applicable to all subjects). In input stage worrying thoughts prevent learners from fully focusing on the lesson and acquiring the content of the lesson, Maclntyre & Gardner (1989, 1991a), Eysenck et al.(2007). Anxiety reduces working memory capacity, cognitive efficiency, making it even more harder for learners to remember and store necessary information such as vocabulary or grammar, Maclntyre & Gardner (1991b), Maclntyre (1995), Onwuegbuzie et al . (1999)

This issues are connected to each other and result in learners inability to speak and use language, because when students could not get or process material they cannot produce any information based on their knowledge.It is how output stage is compromised. Exploring this stage laid a groundwork for establishing FLA, since Horwitz et al.(1986) introduced the term and three types of FLA based on learners performance, concluding that there are 3 dimensions of FLA such as communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. All these three types of FLA affects learner severely. For example, when learners have communication apprehension they are afraid of communicating because they think they are not good enough to speak and they will be able to speak only when they reach native-like level. Whereas, test anxiety affects learners final performance, no matter how well they are prepared they will have fear of tests and nervousness leads to poor performance. Fear of negative evaluation is a state of nervousness when learners cannot speak in front of other people, because they think if they make mistake others will notice it and judge them. All these factors result in learners' avoidance behavior when they do not participate in lessons, language practices, collaboration and different learning activites, which definetely affect their language lerning prcess. Then, 5 years later Maclntyre & Gardner (1991a, 1991b) distinguished between trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety, revealing FLA as mostly situation-specific, as according to that study FLA of learners not always present, but instead arises as a response to stress triggering situations. This finding contradicted all prior studies such as Spielberger (1983), Chastain (1975), Scovel (1978), who considered anxiety in language learning as a part of general anxiety, and regarded it as trait anxiety, arguing that people who experience it are generally anxious people all the time. However, this claim related to FLA being situation-specific is dominant in this field of research even these days.

As soon as the term FLA established, another wave of discussions evolved around its nature and effects, which resulted in researchers discovering that FLA is not always harmful, but instead it sometimes can force learners prepare and work harder, Scovel (1978, 1991). This form of FLA is called facilitating anxiety and considered to benefit learners. However, most of studies conducted so far mainly focus on debilitating anxiety (the form of anxiety which harms learners, their motivation and result in avoidance behavior), Horwitz et al. (1986), Maclntyre & Gardner (1994).

Causes and effects of FLA

The reason why FLA should be addressed is its debilitating effect which affects learners' academic performance, their sociability, cognitive functions and future.

FLA immediately affects learners cognitive functions by abstracting intake of new information such as vocabulary and grammar, (Gardner, 1994; Cheng 2018), as well as it prevents creation of meaningful connections between prior and new acquired knowledge (Ambrose, 2010; Eysenck, 2007). As a consequence, learners will not be able to analyze their own mistakes and weak points, which strengthens their anxiety to new extents, Woodrow (2006). Finally, when learners have FLA they not only struggle to acquire and interconnect information, but also retrieve knowledge becomes difficult, making learners hesitate while speaking, Scovel (2001), and use simple language, or avoid speaking all together, Tanveer (2007). These cognitive effects are caused by leaners low self-esteem as well as their biased self-perception of knowledge, Aida (1994), negative expectations, Bartholomew et al. (2021), and sensitivity to criyicism, Zhang (2021). As a result of cognitive breakdowns caused by FLA, and fear of negative evaluation, as well as fear of making mistakes learners cannot perform well academically, their grades and self-perception diminishe, and they fail exams, Zhang (2019). Moreover, even proficient learners may underperform in assessment, because when learners have anxiety their actual capabilities are overshadowed by their emotional barrier, Cooper et al (2018). In addition, FLA diminishes learners' confidence and willingness to interact. Students experiencing high levels of anxiety often withdraw from speaking opportunities (Kasap & Power, 2019), which not only restricts their own practice but also negatively influences classroom atmosphere and group dynamics (Young, 1999). The reduction in peer collaboration and group learning lowers the overall effectiveness of instruction (Aida, 1994), and this is how FLA hinders social engagement.These social effects are result of negative classroom atmosphere, Young (1990), Qaddomi (2013).

Teacher's role in mitigation of FLA

As I discussed in my MA dissertation (Qurbonova, 2025), there are very limited information that can be implemented, which provides information about teacher strategies of FLA. As complicated as it is, there is even more prevalent problem in terms of understanding how teachers handle their learners anxiety, with very few studies examining teachers strategies. The present study filled this gap by exploring WIUT postgraduate student teachers.

Tran & Moni (2015) provided information about 3 groups of strategies that teachers might use in cases when their learners are struggling with FLA and the first one is Problem solving strategies. Second one teaching strategies, and the last one is called Relationships with students. This classification shows that addressing anxiety is not a single-action process, but rather a multifaceted effort that requires teachers to balance problem solving with pedagogy and interpersonal sensitivity. Other researchers also confirmed that teachers' role is not only to teach language but also to support students emotionally in ways that reduce their affective barriers (Horwitz, 2001; Young, 1991).

When it comes to addressing FLA, learners feelings play a crucial role, therefore making them feel safe is necessary. To manage this positive classroom atmosphere can be seen as the perfect strategy and solution, Akkakoson (2016). Teachers' responsibility here is to establish

conditions where mistakes are normalized and communication is valued over accuracy alone. Research has consistently shown that a relaxed classroom climate is one of the strongest predictors of reduced FLA (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014; Arnaiz, 2016). But fostering such classroom atmosphere is not an easy thing and certain measurements should be taken to achieve 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).

The another aspect which should be considered by teachers in dealing with FLA, is encouraging learners to realize that making mistakes is not a big deal, as it is natural part of learning. In order to achieve this teacher must establish 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. For example Akkakoson (2016) suggested pair or group evaluation as less provoking, not all mistakes should be corrected, heavy criticism and direct correction should be avoided. Regarding error correction, one suggestion that Keramida and Tsiplakides (2009) made is to provide feedback after task or activity is completed. Such findings confirm that error correction is a double-edged sword—it can either support students' development or increase their stress depending on how it is applied.

Besides teachers can also implement a variety of teaching strategies that help them deal with their learners language anxiety in the English language classroom. For instance, social strategies such as practicing English with peers, Tran & Moni (2015), affective strategies that help learners regulate their emotions, Rathmayr (2024), or focusing on thorough preparation before the English lessons (Akkakoson, 2016), which can be done by modifying teaching pace, or adjusting lesson plan. In practice, this means teachers should diversify classroom tasks, provide structured preparation time, and carefully sequence lesson activities so that learners are not suddenly forced into high-stakes performance.

However, the researcher that put a lot of effort on examining and creating different strategies for dealing with FLA is Rathmayr (2024). In her study "Strategies for Dealing with Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) in the English Classroom", she employed a qualitative survey with English teachers and lower secondary EFL learners in Austria, further expanding strategies for

addressing FLA. Notably in her previous research she also explored the strategies that both teachers and students can implement. For example, the role of classroom atmosphere, Error culture, and teaching/assessment strategies in her former research, Offering support, encouragement and praise, teaching strategies, and evaluation in later one. These strategies can help educators to deal with FLA in EFL classroom effectively.

What makes Rathmayr's contribution particularly valuable is that she links both affective and instructional aspects. While many earlier studies focused on either teacher behavior or student strategies in isolation, her findings highlight that mitigation requires an integrated approach. Teachers cannot simply rely on supportive words without adjusting lesson design, nor can they only adjust teaching pace without paying attention to emotional support.

As mentioned above, there is no literature related to Foreign Language Anxiety in Uzbekistan, which leads to lack of understanding regarding Uzbek' EFL teachers awareness of FLA. Which should be accounted immediately, as FLA can have profound negative impacts on the learning process and the EFL performance. As a result, FLA is of concern not only for students but also for teachers. Therefore, it is especially important to equip educators with strategies and techniques that help them alleviate their students' anxiety regarding language learning and learning in general, Rathmayr (2024). However, to achieve this educators should be aware of its existence and various possible consequences of FLA. Horwitz et al. (1986). Therefore, I decided to fill this gap and provide WIUT and even Uzbekistan with such an important research.

In sum, the role of teachers in mitigating FLA is multidimensional. They are not only language instructors but also facilitators of a classroom climate that supports emotional well-being. Teachers who can foster trust, establish positive error culture, apply constructive feedback strategies, and design lessons that balance challenge with support are more likely to help learners overcome the barriers posed by anxiety. While international research has provided useful insights into these strategies, their application in specific contexts like Uzbekistan still remains underexplored. This highlights the importance of further investigation into how WIUT TESOL student-teachers understand, adapt, and apply these strategies in their classrooms.

While teachers' role in FLA mitigation has been clearly stated, little research investigated whether teachers' years of experience correlates with their ability of addressing FLA.

METHODOLOGY

This study's design is categorized as qualitative survey, as it investigates a sensitive topic which examines participants' perceptions and awareness in a limited time and scope, utilizing qualitative methodology. Therefore, 3 qualitative data collection tools, such as questionnaire, interviews, and observations are used in the present survey in order to examine sensitive, complex, and subjective phenomenon like anxiety.This study draws on the dataset collected for my master's dissertation, which examined teachers' awareness of FLA. For the present article, the data were reanalyzed to explore whether teachers' years of teaching experience are associated with their awareness and mitigation of FLA."

Sampling Method

The present survey employed purposive sampling of WIUT MALT TESOL students who teaches as English language or IELTS teachers. Overall 48 student teachers participated in questionnaire, while 10 of them were first interviewed and then 5 were observed while teaching. To secure the privacy of participants of Interviews and observations, all candidates were coded by using P for participant and participation order, P1=Participant1, for example.

Ethical Considerations

In conducting this research, i adhered to all ethical considerations including:

1. Informed Consent: Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, their role, and the use of the data collected.

2. Confidentiality: I ensured that all participant data is kept confidential. Personal identifiers were removed, and data was stored securely.

3. Right to Withdraw: Participants were informed that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

4. Minimizing Harm: I took steps to ensure that participation does not cause psychological distress or discomfort, particularly given the sensitive nature of discussing anxiety.

5.Ethical Approval: I asked ethical approval from the relevant committee at WIUT prior to commencing data collection to ensure compliance with institutional guidelines.

Data Analysis and Coding of Qualitative Data

For present study I employed an online questionnaire and triangulated it with blended interviews and observations. The process of analyzing data in this study was thematic and involved several systematic steps in order to ensure a thorough analyse of WIUT Post graduate participants understanding of their learners FLA and its influence on their teaching.

The data itself is divided into 3 groups such as findings of questionnaire, findings of interviews, and findings of observations. All these 3 groups were then coded into themes.

For example the Data from questionnaire involved 7 themes, which begins with "Demographic information of participants", followed by "Awareness of FLA", "Symptoms in

students","Perceptions of FLA", "Impact on students", "Impact on teaching", and finished with "Strategies". "Demographic information" and "awareness of FLA" were analyzed according to proportion and numbers of participant' responses, while "Perceptions" and "Strategies" were analyzed according to the way participants' rated different opinions and strategies. In contrast,Impact on learning and teaching were analyzed regarding participants' reports in terms of how affected were different patterns and how student teachers modified their teaching, respectively.

The data from interviews also went through a complicated process of analyzing and coding, starting from recording. Then all records were transcribed in order to gain text-based format, ensuring convenience for analyzing.

Then I created themes for interviews which are "Background information", "Understanding of FLA", "Identification", "Impact on teaching", and "Strategies". Then I read the transcript of interviews and highlighted relevant information, before categorizing them into themes.

Observations were categorized into themes such as "Numbers of anxious students in the class and anxiety signs they showed", "Teachers' actions", "Anxiety triggers".

Then in discussion, these findings are connected with each other, and further divided into themes such as " Awareness of FLA", and " FLA's impact on teaching" in order to clearly answer a research question.

To analyze relationship between teacher's years of teaching and FLA mitigation knowledge, I read and reanalyzed information provided by 10 research participants who had different years of experience, focusing on relatable data such as their teaching years, and their behavior when they realize that their students have anxiety. Then I categorized them according to their teaching experience. For example,

P1 has 11 years of teaching experience and teaches intermediate levels.

P2 has 2 years of teaching experience and teaches beginner levels.

P3 has more than 3 years of teaching experience and teaches multi levels

P4 has 2 years of teaching experience and teaches intermediate levels.

P5 has 6 years of experience and teaches multi levels

P6 has less than 1 year experience and teaches elementary levels

P7 has more than 10 years of experience and teaches multi level students.

P8 has nearly 2 years of experience and teaches multi levels.

P9 has lass than 1 year of teaching experience and teaches elementary

P10 has more than 1 year of teaching experience and teaches advanced learners.

Eventually, I divided information of participants into themes such as "correlation between years of teaching and FLA awareness", "correlation between teaching years and Actions participants take when face FLA of learners".

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Before starting data collection, In order to meet criteria for validity and reliability,I gathered a lot of information related to them by reading and discussing with my Module leader and supervisor. That is how I decided to triangulate my research by complementing a semi-structured interview and lesson observation in addition to the online questionnaire. The main problem in terms of validity assurance was subjectivity of the study, resulted from context of the study and participants. It is quite obvious, if we take into account the fact that all participants of the present study are my fellow students in university, and the possibility of some of them being dishonest in their responses was quite high, leading to the risk of results being biased. However,I attempted not to use questions which could lead to biased responses in both my questionnaire and interviews. Moreover, I intentionally tried to create a user-friendly environment, where learners can feel free to be as truthfully as possible. The other action which I took to ensure validity was first discussing my questionnaire with my supervisor, and after her approval piloting it with 4 my questions. Only after receiving responses which I was looking forward to find in the piloting I launched the questionnaire. The same procedure took place in the interview.

To ensure reliability of this study I focused on consistency and stability when I conducted the research, and when I stored it. Furthermore, I transcribed every interview and checked them two times for mistakes.

Research Limitations

1. Sample Size and Generalizability: While the study includes 50 participants, this sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of language learners and teachers. The experiences of MALT TESOL students at WIUT may not represent those in other contexts or institutions either.

2. Subjectivity of qualitative data:Considering that we are studying at the same university with participants, some of them might have been not honest in their responses. Leading to consistency and reliability of the data being affected.

3. Time Constraints: The research must be submitted by 25th of april, which means research took place only throughout 2-3 months.

RESULTS

Teaching years and FLA awareness

Interview findings clearly established correlation between teachers' FLA awareness and their teaching experience, with those teachers who teach longer showing strong awareness, and those who just started working lacking awareness. For example,

P6 (is teaching less than 1 year) " THIS TERM IS NEW FOR ME, I HAVE NOT LEARN OR EXPERIENCE IT, BUT I KNOW THAT EVERYBODY IN THE BEGINNING OF THEIR STUDIES ANXIOUS.

P9 (less than 1 year) "I do not know what it is, but I only know that learners may feel nervousness while learning a new language"

Whereas, teachers who work longer showed precise awareness of FLA and connected it to their teaching. For example:

P1 (11 years) defined FLA as "when students feel anxious about using Foreign Language in classes"

P3 (3 years)" I usually notice my learners nervousness, sometimes because of nervousness they tear their things apart, for example one my student tore his bag while speaking in the class"

P4 (2 years) "Learners can usually be nervous while speaking, because they afraid of making mistakes, and consider mistake making as a very bad thing. They are also not confident to speak", "FLA is a natural thing everyone experience it, but some students experience excessive levels of anxiety which is problematic".

P5 (6 years) "FLA is common thing even my high level students experience it in their speaking and writing, especially when they know words but cannot use it, in such cases they cannot perform even if they know content quite well", "FLA results in giving up on language learning".

P7 (10 years) "WHEN STUDENTS DO NOT FEEL SECURE THEY EXPERIENCE FLA BECAUSE OF THEIR TEACHERS PEERS OR FOR ANY OTHER REASONS THERE ARE A LOT OF CASES.

I READ A BOOK BY OXFORD UNIVERSITY ABOUT FLA WHEN THE STUDENTS ARE RELUCTANT TO TALK EITHER BECAUSE THEIR SHYNESS OR WHATEVER FEAR THEY HAVE, IT IS CONNECTED TO AFFECTIVE FILTER"

On the other hand those who have been teaching for not to short or long period understand FLA but cannot connect it to their students, focusing on their own personal experience. These people have moderate understanding of FLA, and similar 2 years of teaching experience.

P2 "I know that learners can experience FLA, I remember being ashamed to talk in the class because of my pronunciation and speaking skills"

P8 "I AM FAMILIAR WITH FLA AS I EXPERIENCED IT AS PUPIL IN THE PAST AND I BELIEVE MORE SPEAKING AND PRACTICAL TASKS CAN HELP TO AVOID IT".

Causes of FLA and its impact on students.

Teachers who teach less than 2 years highlighted that:

FLA is caused by learners fear of making mistakes and results in hesitation (P9-<1 year)

FLA results in learners avoidance behavior but could not establish the factor causing it (P6->1 year). Whereas, P10 (<1 year) highlighted the same impact and reported that learners lack of exposure to the language as a cause.

Teachers who teach around 2 years:

P2 (2 years), and P4 (2 years) reported that FLA results in learners avoidance behavior and caused by personal traits of learners and their fear of making mistake respectively. While P8 (~2 years) highlighted that FLA caused by learners' personal trait and lack of exposure make them less confident in their performance.

3-6 years

P3 (3+ years) identified fear of negative evaluation as a factor causing FLA, and resulting in avoidance behavior.

P5 (6 years) identified that FLA is caused by learners' negative self-attitude and manifests in confidence issues.

10+ years

P1 (11 years): identified several reasons why learners experience FLA, such as personal traits, lack o knowledge, and public speaking, and informed that it has an impact on learners confidence.

P7 (10+ years): on top of reduced confidence this participant blamed lack of preparation for learners experiencing FLA and avoiding practice opportunities.

Teaching experience and FLA addressing strategies

Actions taken by teachers.

Reaction and strategies of 5 participants used as the response to learners' FLA was analyzed in observations .

Less than 1 year

P6 (<1 year): Did not take any measures to address learners' anxiety.

P9 (<1 year): Requested anxious learners to join a speaking task, which backfired and increased avoidance.

6 years

P5 (6 years):

1 Used humor (including AI-generated jokes) to build a positive atmosphere.

2 When students hesitated, applied **scaffolding** and encouraged them to speak without pressure.

3 Praised effort over accuracy in feedback.

10–11 years

P1 (11 years):

1 Started lesson with humor.

2 Provided scaffolding (vocabulary examples).

3 Maintained strictness even though students did not show anxiety.

P7 (10 years):

1 Identified anxiety, found out that it was caused by lack of preparation.

2 Discussed with student privately after class.

3 Encouraged participation in another group to reinforce learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings revealed a clear correlation between teachers' length of experience and their awareness of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA), its causes, and strategies for mitigation. Novice teachers with less than two years of experience tended to conflate FLA with general anxiety and focused only on observable, academic challenges. This limited awareness is not surprising, as early-career teachers often lack the classroom exposure necessary to recognize the more subtle social and affective dimensions of anxiety (Horwitz, 2016). In contrast, teachers with moderate experience (3–6 years) showed greater awareness, often connecting FLA to cognitive and social factors, though their interpretations remained rooted in their own personal experiences rather than their students'. This pattern suggests that awareness develops gradually, as teachers shift from a self-oriented to a learner-oriented perspective (MacIntyre, 2017).

The most experienced teachers in the study (6–11+ years) demonstrated multidimensional understandings of FLA, identifying performance-related, social, and affective causes, and linking them directly to learners' behavior. Their ability to make such nuanced connections aligns with recent research showing that experience deepens teachers' capacity to diagnose both overt and hidden sources of anxiety (Özdemir & Seçkin, 2025). This group also reported using complex, individualized strategies such as humor, scaffolding, and personalized feedback—approaches shown in previous studies to foster supportive classroom climates and reduce learners' anxiety (Attia & Algazo, 2025). By contrast, novice teachers sometimes applied counterproductive strategies that risked exacerbating learners' discomfort, a finding that highlights the pedagogical risks of limited awareness.

Taken together, these results suggest that teaching experience plays a pivotal role in shaping teachers' conceptual and practical responses to FLA. The progression observed—from limited recognition among novices to highly developed awareness and strategy use among experienced teachers—illustrates how experiential learning and sustained classroom practice cultivate professional sensitivity to learners' emotional needs. However, this also underscores a gap in teacher education: if new teachers rely solely on years of experience to develop awareness, learners in their classrooms may remain unsupported in the critical early stages of language learning. As recent studies advocate (Dorić & Kuruzović, 2025), explicit training in anxiety recognition and management could help novice teachers acquire such skills earlier, reducing reliance on experiential trial-and-error.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between teachers' years of experience and their awareness, understanding, and mitigation strategies of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA). The findings demonstrated a clear progression: novice teachers often struggled to distinguish FLA from general anxiety and relied on limited or counterproductive strategies, mid-level teachers recognized cognitive and social dimensions but tended to interpret anxiety through personal experience, while the most experienced teachers exhibited nuanced awareness and employed individualized, effective interventions. These results underscore the significant role of teaching experience in shaping both the conceptual and practical dimensions of addressing FLA in the classroom.

The study contributes to the growing body of FLA literature by providing evidence from the Uzbekistan context, which remains underrepresented in international research. It highlights that while experience fosters teachers' sensitivity to learners' emotional needs, relying solely on time in the profession risks leaving novice teachers—and their students—without adequate support. Accordingly, teacher education programs should embed explicit training on FLA, equipping teachers with diagnostic skills and coping strategies earlier in their careers.

Despite its contributions, the study has limitations, including a relatively small sample size and its focus on a single institutional context. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs to track the development of FLA awareness across teachers' careers, or intervention-based approaches to examine how targeted professional development accelerates teachers' readiness to address anxiety. Expanding this line of inquiry across diverse cultural and institutional contexts would further strengthen the generalizability of these findings.

In conclusion, the study shows that experience is a powerful teacher of awareness, but structured professional development can—and should—shorten the learning curve, ensuring that all teachers, regardless of their career stage, are equipped to recognize and respond effectively to Foreign Language Anxiety.

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