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MASTER'S THESIS

Exploring Language Anxiety Among Postgraduate Students of English  
Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo

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## Contents

<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Sažetak .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>1. Introduction.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>1.1. Statement and Goal of the Study.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.2. Research Questions.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.3. Hypotheses.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>1.4. Significance of the Research.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.5. Structure of the Research.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>1.6. Key Terms.....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>2. Literature review.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1. Decoding Anxiety.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1.1. Understanding Anxiety.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>a) Trait anxiety.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>b) State anxiety.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>c) Situation-specific anxiety.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>2.1.2. Impact of Anxiety.....</b>	<b>15</b>

2.1.3. Factors Inducing Anxiety .....	16
a) <i>Cognitive factors</i> .....	16
b) <i>Affective factors</i> .....	16
c) <i>Performance factors</i> .....	17
2.2. Foreign Language Anxiety .....	17
2.2.1 Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety .....	19
2.2.2. Factors Inducing Foreign Language Anxiety .....	20
2.2.3. The Transaction between Proficiency and Language Anxiety in Communication.....	22
2.2.4. Communication apprehension .....	23
2.2.5. Test Anxiety .....	24
2.2.6. Fear of Negative Evaluation .....	25
2.3. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety .....	25
2.3.1. Identifying the Triggers of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety .....	26
a) <i>Fear of Negative Evaluation</i> .....	26
b) <i>Communication apprehension</i> .....	27
c) <i>Low self-esteem and self-confidence</i> .....	27
d) <i>Cultural Differences</i> .....	27
e) <i>Previous Negative Experiences</i> .....	27
2.4. How Foreign Language Anxiety Manifests in Learners.....	28
2.5. Overcoming Foreign Language Anxiety .....	30
3. Methodology .....	31
3.1. Research Design .....	31
3.2. Data Collection Methods .....	32
3.3. Instruments .....	32
3.3.1. Questionnaire.....	32
3.3.2. Interviews .....	33
3.4. Research Site and Procedures.....	35
4. Results and Discussion .....	35
4.1. Participants.....	35
4.2. Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire.....	38
4.2.1. Anxiety types .....	40
4.3. Semi-Structured Interview.....	40
4.3.1. Causes of FLA.....	42
4.3.2. Manifestations of FLA .....	43
4.4. Limitations of the Study .....	45
5. Conclusion .....	46

<b>References .....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>Appendix .....</b>	<b>55</b>

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to examine the topic of foreign language speaking anxiety from the perspective of postgraduate students of English language and literature at the Department of English at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo. The main objective of this study is to investigate whether Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) affects students, who are future English teachers, and how it influences the quality of communication in English classrooms. The study is particularly focused on identifying and exploring the factors that cause and contribute to FLSA for the purpose of understanding the phenomenon of language anxiety among postgraduate students of English Language and Literature.

For the purpose of this research a mixed-method approach i.e. the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods was used (MacKey and Gass, 2005). The quantitative data comes from a questionnaire designed by Horwitz et al. (1986), and the qualitative data comes from a semi-structured interview.

The results have revealed that language anxiety is present among postgraduate students in the Department of English Language and Literature. In addition, the findings also indicate that FLSA is usually caused by factors such as *self-perceived language proficiency*, *fear of negative*

*evaluation, and past negative experiences in English language use.* Even though the findings show that FLSA is present, the research findings reveal that FLSA does not impact the quality of students' communication in the classroom.

Key words: anxiety, foreign language speaking anxiety, language proficiency, EFL classroom

## **Sažetak**

Ovaj rad ima za cilj ispitati temu govorne anksioznosti stranog jezika iz perspektive studenata postdiplomskog studija engleskog jezika i književnosti na Odsjeku za anglistiku Filozofskog fakulteta. Glavni cilj ovog istraživanja je istražiti uticaj jezičke anksioznosti stranog jezika (FLSA) kod studenata koji su budući učitelji engleskog jezika te kako utječe na kvalitetu komunikacije u učionici engleskog jezika. Studija je posebno usmjerena na identifikaciju i istraživanje faktora koji uzrokuju i doprinose FLSA u svrhu razumijevanja fenomena jezične anksioznosti među studentima postdiplomskog studija engleskog jezika i književnosti.

Za potrebe ovog istraživanja korišten je mješoviti metodski pristup, odnosno kombinacija kvantitativnih i kvalitativnih metoda (MacKey and Gass, 2005). Kvantitativni podaci potječu iz upitnika koji su izradili Horwitz et al. (1986), a kvalitativni podaci potječu iz polustrukturiranog intervjua.

Rezultati pokazuju da je jezička anksioznost prisutna među studentima postdiplomskog studija Odsjeka za engleski jezik i književnost. Osim toga, rezultati također pokazuju da je FLSA obično uzrokovan faktorima kao što su vlastita percepcija jezične sposobnosti, strah od

negativne ocjene i prošla negativna iskustva u korištenju engleskog jezika. Iako rezultati pokazuju da je FLSA prisutan, rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da FLSA ne utječe na kvalitetu komunikacije učenika u razredu.

Ključne riječi: anksioznost, strah od izražavanja na stranom jeziku, jezična stručnost, učionice gdje je engleski strain jezik

## **1. Introduction**

It is a well-known fact that when acquiring and learning a foreign language, the fear of oral expression also appears. Language anxiety is a psychological phenomenon that affects an individual's ability to communicate effectively in a foreign language. It has become an important area of study within applied linguistics and educational psychology. Research on language anxiety began to gain attention in the late 1970s and 1980s. The initial research on the concept of language anxiety was first explored in the border context of foreign language learning anxiety, and some of the most influential and earliest work was attributed to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope in their 1986 study „Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety“. This study introduced the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which provided the foundation for later research on how anxiety affects language learning. Since the 1980s, language anxiety has become a significant area of study, and researchers are starting to investigate more and more, its causes, effects and potential strategies for easing the levels of anxiety.



The transition from exploring language pedagogy to researching the motivation and the role of personality in language acquisition happened in the 1970s (Tanveer, 2007). This transition implied that the development of linguistic competencies moved to the development of communicative competencies. This shift in focus created challenges for learners since they were more exposed to communication. It was important to explore learners' personality, learning styles and motivation to deal with these challenges.

Anxiety, as a psychosomatic concept, is often considered by psychologists to be a state of uneasiness and fear (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). It is also defined as a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension and nervousness (Spielberger, 1983). One type of anxiety is Foreign Language (Speaking) Anxiety. It has been defined by many but some of the best definitions come from Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) and Young (1992). They claim that FLA is one of the most psychologically debilitating concepts that may negatively affect the language learning process, especially when we talk about foreign language learners. Students frequently engage in various classroom activities, such as discussions, presentations, and workshops in an effort to enhance their speaking skills. While these activities can be good and effective for skill development, they also present challenges to the learning process. Foreign language anxiety was initially described as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" by Horwitz et al. (1986), the first academic to establish the term.

Speaking is the foreign language learner activity that causes the most anxiety, according to a number of studies (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991b; Young, 1992). Thus, it can be observed that FLA is mostly seen in speaking classes, as the students have a few tasks simultaneously: processing input and their thoughts and producing output (Horwitz et al., 1986). Based on the author's observations the topic of FLA is rarely mentioned and researched in Bosnia and Herzegovina. When searching for works on FLA in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the researcher found one published work on the COBISS platform and none other on any different platforms, while the general concept of anxiety is much more explored and talked about on various other platforms. What has been observed is that the phenomenon of FLA has been explored much more in the neighbouring countries of Croatia ([hrčak.srce.hr](http://hrčak.srce.hr)) and Serbia (ResearchGate).

## **1.1. Statement and Goal of the Study**

Research on Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) has been conducted across various languages such as Spanish, German, Chinese, Japanese etc. The research mostly refers to high schoolers and adult learners of these languages (Dewaele, 2007; Huck & Hurd, 2005; Aida, 1994), but rarely can we find discussion and problematization about the point of view of students of English as a foreign language, which is the case for this thesis.

This study focuses on identifying the phenomenon of language anxiety among postgraduate students studying English language and literature at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo.

The study aims to explore the types of factors causing FLSA and propose strategies for educators to reduce language anxiety and enhance students' confidence and performance in EFL classrooms and in the overall use of a foreign language (in this case English).

## **1.2. Research Questions**

The study was led by the following research questions:

1. Is language anxiety present among postgraduate students of English language and literature?
2. What are the most common reasons causing language anxiety?
3. How does language anxiety manifest itself and in which teaching situations is it most often encountered?
4. How can the awareness of this phenomenon be raised among teaching staff and students?

## **1.3. Hypotheses.**

With the research questions, the researcher proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: Language anxiety exists among postgraduate students studying English as a foreign language.

H2: Language anxiety tends to be more evident in classes where non-native English speakers are the instructors.

#### **1.4. Significance of the Research**

The study is expected to contribute to understanding the causes of language anxiety and its impact on the quality of spoken performance among postgraduate university students studying English as a foreign language. This will raise awareness among educators and instructors about language anxiety, motivating them to develop effective strategies to reduce overall anxiety in learning and language anxiety specifically, improve language proficiency, and create a more supportive learning environment. Ultimately, these efforts aim to enhance learning outcomes.

#### **1.5. Structure of the Research**

The paper is structured as follows: after the Introduction, the Literature Review chapter discusses the most important theoretical frameworks concerning language anxiety in the context of learning English as a foreign language. Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the research design and methodological instruments, followed by the Results and Discussion chapter. The paper concludes with recommendations for further research and a discussion of the study's limitations.

#### **1.6. Key Terms**

*Anxiety* is a feeling of worry, nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome (Zeinder, 2010).

*Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety* is a specific type of anxiety experienced when speaking a non-native language, often manifesting as fear, nervousness, and apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986).

*Language proficiency* refers to the ability of an individual to speak, understand, read, and write in a language with accuracy and fluency (Council of Europe, 2001).

An *EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom* is a learning environment where English is taught to students whose native language is not English (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

## **2. Literature review**

This chapter provides an overview of relevant literature findings on language anxiety in the process of learning a foreign language. Given the focus of this study on English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it explores studies that discuss language anxiety among EFL learners across all levels of education available to the author of this paper.

### **2.1. Decoding Anxiety**

In this part of the literature review, the deconstruction of the concept of anxiety, how it works, and its impact on life will be provided.

For this research, it is of great importance to understand the generality of the concept of anxiety, especially how it is described as a Psychological Construct (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020).

### **2.1.1. Understanding Anxiety**

Anxiety comes from the Latin word “anxietas”, which means feelings of fear and worry. It is a state of mind that comes as a normal reaction to some potential threat, and when it becomes excessive it falls into the category of an illness (Gross & Hen, 2004). One can conclude that anxiety disorders have always been a part of us humans, from world literature to poems and songs. Some ancient civilisations, such as Egyptians and Greeks, acknowledged symptoms that today resemble anxiety. They did so in some medical and philosophical texts. Hippocrates and Seneca started to describe people with symptoms of anxiety, such as continual worry and irrational fears. Hippocrates also described the condition as hysteria. Later on, in the Middle Ages, anxiety was often assigned to some spiritual or supernatural causes that led to major treatments such as exorcism and other religious rituals. For years, people did not understand the concept, only in the 1800s and early 1900s, people started to recognise and approach the topic (Horwitz 2001; as cited in Hanna 2013).

Some significant advancements in this field can be attributed to Sigmund Freud who established the connection between anxiety and unconscious conflicts. Later, the field of cognitive-behavioural theories emerged, offering new avenues for treatment. In “The Problem of Anxiety” Freud (1936) explores the nature of anxiety, saying that it is “an internal conflict”. Freud names differences between realistic anxiety which reacts to dangers from the outside, neurotic anxiety which results from an unconscious fear of being overtaken by innate desires, and moral anxiety which is associated with the superego and the dread of going against moral standards. He later introduces the concept of “signal anxiety”, where anxiety acts as an alarm to the ego about some potential danger.

Anxiety awakens “destructive” human feelings, often having side effects such as being “tense, worried, frustrated, nervous and apprehensive” (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020, pp. 55-56). Anxiety, alongside anger, sadness, disgust and some others, is considered to be a negative emotion, which can be very similar to fear (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Anxiety is considered to be made up of two components: worry and emotionality (Morris, Davis & Hutchings, 1981). Anxiety can also be defined as a phenomenon that is made

up of some common characteristics such as fear, uneasiness and apprehension (Horwitz & Young, 1991). The mentioned characteristics can often lead to negative emotions in a person. They may have a low level of confidence and self-esteem.

When it comes to students, in situations in which their knowledge or a set of skills are judged and observed, feel a sense of threat, that can come from non-verbal actions of people from the surrounding. These mentioned actions are often ambiguous which connect the students with a sense of uneasiness and uncertainty. This makes anxiety a future-oriented phenomenon, accompanied by concerns about possible outcomes, “nervousness and tension, as well as worries and intrusive thoughts” (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010, p.2).

Finally, anxiety is a psychological state as it primarily involves our mind’s response to recognised (often non-realistic and non-objective) threats of a situation or a person. It only becomes a problem when it is excessive and persistent (as mentioned above by Gross and Hen, 2004), or when it occurs in situations where there is no real danger or threat. To vividly explain, anxiety is like a red emergency button that is out of order, we keep on pressing it and we cannot realise what is realistic and what is not, as we constantly expect things to happen. This vivid explanation comes from my deep talks on anxiety with the psychologist Maja Hodžić, who with an open mind helped me in the writing and understanding of this topic.

The concept of anxiety is complex, and scholars have distinguished between several forms and types of anxiety (Horwitz, 2010). An overall list is trait anxiety, state anxiety and situation-specific anxiety, which will shortly be explained in the following division of this chapter.

#### ***a) Trait anxiety***

Trait anxiety refers to a consistent tendency to feel anxious across many different situations over time (Spielberger, 1983). It can be applied to a personality characteristic, as some people tend to be generally anxious about many different things. People with high trait anxiety perceive more situations as threats and respond with higher anxiety. This high level of sensitivity can impair cognitive functions such as attention and memory (Eysenck et al., 2007) and is associated with increased activity in brain regions linked to fear responses (Calhoun & Tye, 2015).

### ***b) State anxiety***

State anxiety refers to a temporary emotional reaction that is seen through feelings of tension, apprehension and nervousness in response to specific situations (Speilberger, 1983). It is a reaction to a recognized threat and the response can vary in intensity and duration. State anxiety is often triggered by high-stakes situations such as exams, public speaking, projects, competitions and so on (Speilberger, 1983). In the process of language learning it is normal for learners to feel state anxiety to some extent.

### ***c) Situation-specific anxiety***

Situation-specific anxiety refers to anxiety that is triggered by specific and defined situations, such as public speaking, performances, tests and so on. Situation-specific anxiety evolved because trait and state anxiety were unable to fully explain the questions around worry related to learning a foreign language. Numerous researchers went on to develop this type of anxiety. Unlike general anxiety disorders, situation-specific anxiety occurs only in the mentioned defined contexts, where they feel there will be a negative evaluation or failure (McNeil, 2001).

## **2.1.2. Impact of Anxiety**

As mentioned above, anxiety is generally painted as a negative feeling. It is the most common psychiatric disorder (Kessler et al.1994). Anxiety disorders significantly impair the quality of life and cause substantial impairment when they occur alongside other disorders (Lesser et al., 1989; Massion, Warshaw, & Keller, 1993; Mogotsi, Kaminer, & Stein, 2000; Schneier, Johnson, Horning, Liebowitz, & Weissman, 1992; as cited in Van Ameringen, Mancini & Farvolden, 2003).

Anxiety disorders typically begin in the childhood stages of life and adolescence stages and later persist into adulthood (Chorpita, & Barlow, 1998). Studies have shown that anxiety disorder rates are from 17 to 21% in the USA, while in Canada the rate is 20% for females and 11% for males (Anderson, Williams, McGee, & Silva, 1987; Kashani & Orvaschel, 1988,

Kashani & Orvaschel, 1990; Offord et al., 1994; as cited in Van Ameringen, Mancini & Farvolden, 2003). When it comes to social phobia, most adult patients indicate that their phobia started in their childhood or adolescence, making mid-adolescence the usual start (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

### **2.1.3. Factors Inducing Anxiety**

#### ***a) Cognitive factors***

Cognitive factors are characteristics of a person that in some way affect the process of learning and performance. They involve cognitive functions such as attention, retention and reasoning (Danili and Reid, 2006). Cognitive factors play a crucial role in inducing anxiety, firstly through distortions, negative self-evaluations and catastrophizing. Beck (1976) identified cognitive distortions such as overgeneralizations as noteworthy factors that contribute to emotional distress. Catastrophizing intensifies anxiety when an individual is constantly worrying about the worst possible outcomes that can come from a situation (Cropley & Purvis, 2003). Additionally, negative self-evaluation and fear of negative judgment are considered to be central to social phobias and overall anxiety (Clark & Wells, 1995). Eysenck and Byrne (1992) further show how the perception of threats impacts cognitive performance and heightens levels of anxiety. These cognitive factors collectively influence the development and severity of anxiety.

#### ***b) Affective factors***

There has been a shift from cognitive factors to affective factors in the 1970s and 80s when it comes to the process of language learning (Brown, 1973; Tobias, 1986). In contrast to cognitive factors that refer to the thinking process, affective factors are factors of our emotions, attitudes and overall motivation, which later influence the learning process. Hurd (2008) notes that research in neuroscience suggests affect and cognition are essential and interconnected components of how the human brain functions. Affective factors influence attention and working memory, motivation, the kind of cognitive techniques that will be employed, and how information is stored in the brain and later recalled (Valdivia, McLoughlin & Mynard, 2011). A concept that has not been touched upon in our society that affects all of us is emotional



regulation. People who struggle with regulating their emotions often experience stressful situations (they experience high anxiety levels).

### *c) Performance factors*

Performance factors contributing to anxiety often involve concerns about one's ability to perform tasks effectively and the fear of negative outcomes. Key performance-related factors include fear of failure (Elliot & McGregor, 2001), self-doubt (Neff, 2003), and performance pressure (Putwain & Symes, 2011). Research has demonstrated that these factors can significantly exacerbate anxiety and impact overall performance.

## **2.2. Foreign Language Anxiety**

Since the early 1970s anxiety has been the major topic of research in foreign language education (Liu and Huang, 2011). Research done by Campbell & Oritz (1991) reports that approximately one-half of all language students in some way experience a surprising level of anxiety (as cited in von Worde, 2003). Learners of both a foreign and second language experience language anxiety and it presents some possible problems as it can get in the way of "acquisition, retention and production" (McIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a specific type of anxiety that occurs in the context of learning and using a new language, and it tends to be different from other types of anxieties. It is present when learners try to express their skills in a target language. As previously mentioned, anxiety in general is accompanied by feelings of nervousness, fear and apprehension. These

feelings severely delay learners' ability to effectively communicate their ideas and thoughts. Studies have shown that learners with high levels of FLA are more likely to score lower and have less success in academic achievements. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), FLA can slow down cognitive functions like processing, encoding, and information retrieval which are essential for language learning. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) frequently results in students avoiding participation in classroom activities or projects, limiting their use of the target language, and even leading to withdrawal from foreign language courses (Horwitz, 2001, Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). A crucial study in this field of anxiety has been done by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope in 1986, when the authors defined FLA as a specific system of "self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours" that are related to the "classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128).

FLA shows up as learners realise that, after being "deprived" of their primary language (the L1), they must communicate in a language in which they are not fully proficient. This is meant to imply perceptions of incompetence regarding academic performance, due to the close connection between "language and self-expression, self-presentation" (Schlenker & Leary, 1982; as cited in Toth, 2011; p. 40). Language learners who are conscious of their language limitations could feel that there is a difference between the "true" them and the more constrained versions of themselves that they can communicate in the L2 (Horwitz et al., 1986). This is due to the fact that "language and self/identity are so closely bound, if they are not one and the same thing" (Cohen & Norst, 1989, p.76). ). An attack on one is therefore interpreted as an attack on the other (as cited in Toth, 2011).

Tobias (1986) proposed a model of the cognitive effects of anxiety related to foreign language learning. In that research, Tobias (1986) claims that anxiety can obstruct language acquisition in three distinct phases: "input, processing and output" (as cited in von Worde, 1998; p. 31). The input stage is made up of the learner's first exposure to a stimulus. Here, anxiety may distract attention, and reduce the number of stimulus encoded. If this is the scenario, the number of repetitions is crucial to get an end result, i.e. the instructor may need to repeat the task (expose the stimulus to the learner) to overcome the initial induced anxiety. In the processing stage, new words have meaning, but anxiety may affect second language comprehension if the meaning is not recognised. In the output stage, anxiety may lead to ineffective or defective vocabulary recovery/retrieval, inappropriate grammar rule use and/or inability to respond in the target language (Ahmad & Zafar, 2010). Students often mention that they are familiar with the vocabulary and forms in grammar but they fail to apply it in communication and examination.

This is also called “freezing”. It often occurs in the middle of a test or an exam. This feeling can be explained through anxiety at the stage of output, where a learner is asked to recall the studied material (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

According to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), a model of language anxiety can be created. Based on this model, FLA can be linked to three main components: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Each of these components plays a crucial role in the overall anxiety experienced by the students.

Students, in situations in which their knowledge or a set of skills are judged and observed, feel a sense of threat, that can come from non-verbal actions of people from the surrounding. These mentioned actions are often ambiguous which connect the students with a sense of uneasiness and uncertainty. This makes anxiety a future-oriented phenomenon, accompanied by concerns about possible outcomes, “nervousness and tension, as well as worries and intrusive thoughts” (Zeidner & Matthews, 2010, p.2).

### **2.2.1 Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety**

Anxiety during childhood and adolescence has been repeatedly shown to have a detrimental effect on a variety of psychosocial factors, such as social functioning and academic achievement (Kessler et al., 1994). With young children, anxiety disorders are likely to result in chronic refusal of educational prosperity, which can lead to major social and academic challenges (Berg, 1992). Older children and adolescents with anxiety disorders carry a major risk of underachievement in academic settings and risk of leaving school early, in contrast with the general public (Kessler, Foster, Saunders, & Stang, 1995).

Kessler et al. (1994) state that students who drop out of school prematurely have major social and economic implications. The same research states that there are many factors to students not getting their high school diplomas. Still, anxiety disorders may be an important factor in school

dropouts and a determiner of educational underachievement. Kessler et al. (1994) further analyse how 14.2% of high school dropouts and 4.7% of college dropouts in the US drop out as a result of anxiety disorders (as cited in Van Ameringen, Mancini & Farvolden, 2003).

Furthermore, language anxiety can significantly contribute to dropout rates among students especially when the presence of social isolation and fear come into the mix. Some students who experience language anxiety often avoid participating in discussions in class and are afraid of group or pair activities, as well as some projects that are presented as social events. They fear making mistakes and being judged negatively by peers and higher-ups. This avoidance stance severely limits social interactions which are highly important for academic achievements and the overall well-being of our mind. Without this social interaction, students may feel isolated and not supported enough, which can quickly lead to a higher chance of dropping out (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

In addition, research indicates that students with severe levels of language anxiety tend to struggle with concentration, comprehension of the materials and retention of new information, which significantly affects their overall academic achievement (Horwitz, 2001). These struggles often increase anxiety, reduce motivation and increase the chances of dropping out of school, as students try to look for an escape from an anxiety-inducing environment (Horwitz, 2001).

### **2.2.2. Factors Inducing Foreign Language Anxiety**

As discussed in the chapter on factors inducing general anxiety, these factors can be categorized into three main groups: cognitive, affective, and performance factors.

Cognitive factors relate to the mental processes that are involved in language learning and language use. These factors include perceptions of language difficulty, overall doubt about an individual's skills and abilities in language and concerns about making mistakes in the target language (McIntyre & Gardner, 1991). The authors further state that learners who perceive the language as a complex phenomenon or feel unsure about their cognitive abilities in grasping the language are more likely to experience anxiety. Most of all, cognitive factors focus on the background knowledge that the students have as it influences the speaking achievement of students. When the topics are unfamiliar, EFL students are more likely to face problems when they are requested to talk about them. Lack of subject knowledge was shown to be the root

cause of high speaking anxiety (Tuan & Mai, 2015; Kasbi & Shirvan, 2017 as cited in Hanifa, 2018). This research resulted in students' unwillingness to participate in speaking activities, as they were questioned about things they did not know anything about. They were not able to come up with things to say and this made them hesitant to engage in participation in the classroom. This issue can be a big challenge for university professors as the topics in the EFL classrooms may be totally unfamiliar to the students. Among other sources of anxiety related to cognitive factors, the demands and stress of learning a foreign language take their place high on the charts. Hanifa (2018) names some of these demands: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency and pronunciation (taken from Brown 2004). There tend to be things that are musts: how to say something, the correct word, order and so on. Once the students experience some of these linguistic challenges, they get anxious about their language use. Many linguists emphasise that language-related factors such as lack of a rich vocabulary and knowledge of grammar can destroy confidence and lead to higher levels of anxiety (Kasbi & Shirvan, 2017; Mukminin et al., 2015; Rahman, 2017; Sadeghi et al., 2013; as cited in Hanifa, 2018). This occurs as a result of the students' excessive attention to appearance and anxiety over the repercussions of failing the course (Alsowat, 2016).

On the other hand, affective factors border emotional responses and feelings towards language learning. They include fear of negative evaluation, self-doubt and negative experiences from the past (Young, 1991). Emotional responses often heighten anxiety, which results in learners' unwillingness to engage in language tasks. These responses usually result in embarrassment and a lack of confidence (Young, 1991). In many research articles, the main determiner of foreign language learning is motivation (as cited in Henter, 2014). Krashen (1985) introduces the Affective Filter Hypothesis which is said to serve as a filter-blocking input in the language learning process (as cited in Fiadzawoo, 2015). The hypothesis states that if the filter is low (down) learning happens, and if it is high (up) and the levels of anxiety in the classroom are high it will be harder for the students to learn. There is a body of research highly significant on the relationship between foreign language learning and affective variables (Chastain, 1975; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991b, 1994). One of those variables is anxiety. An affective factor that is significant is the negative emotional inflammation which includes the feelings of fear, shame and often guilt. These emotions amplify anxiety when students face situations that trigger these feelings. This increase in anxiety makes it hard for students to focus, learn and perform tasks effectively (Tasnimi, 2009). Low self-esteem can also contribute to high levels of anxiety as students tend to doubt their capabilities and they fear judgment and failure from others, peers

or professors. These fears and doubts lead to avoidance which reinforces anxiety. When students repeatedly avoid anxiety-provoking situations, they miss opportunities to build confidence creating a cycle of increasing anxiety and avoidance (Horwitz, 2001). In these situations learning a foreign language becomes extremely difficult.

Performance factors involve aspects related to the actual use of the language and performance. These factors include communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of not meeting expectations (Horwitz, 2001). Communication anxiety is one element that fosters FLA in the classroom, according to Horwitz et al. (1986). Individuals who struggle with communication anxiety usually find it difficult to interact with people, and it's realistic to assume that extremely nervous students could feel quite afraid during every EFL conversation. However, depending on the speaking method, the level of worry will change. Numerous studies have confirmed that speaking in public for extended periods of time, such as giving a presentation, can be more challenging and cause more anxiety than simply having a discussion (as cited in Hanifa, 2018). Communication fright is the most common problem among students who are tasked with speaking in front of a group (Singh 2012; as cited in Hanifa, 2018). Other research also suggests that speaking anxiety appears when students have to speak in public.

In a learning setting, performance factors often manifest during presentations and exams. This can severely affect cognitive functions: memory and attention. According to Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986), anxiety in foreign language learning classrooms can impact the learning process. For example, the fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension and test anxiety. Students with high anxiety levels may avoid using the target language and it can prevent them from practising improving their skills (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Performance factors extend beyond speaking. They can have an impact on other skills such as listening, reading and writing. Kim (2002) claims that foreign language listening anxiety involves emotional reactions like nervousness and tension, which disturb the ability to understand and comprehend spoken language. Later on, Cheng (2004) emphasized that writing anxiety can lead to sweating, trembling and cognitive disruptions such as jumbled thoughts, which impact the end result of writing in a target language. Likewise, these anxieties create a negative emotion and lead to avoidance and further impact language acquisition. This has been claimed by both Kim (2002) and Cheng (2004).

### **2.2.3. The Transaction between Proficiency and Language Anxiety in Communication**

When one thinks of communication and its effectiveness, proficiency and anxiety are two critical factors. “Language proficiency” refers to one's ability to comprehend, produce and manipulate language in numerous different contexts, private or public. On the other hand, language anxiety circles feelings of apprehension or states of nervousness when using a foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Contrary to what has been mentioned in the paragraph above, language anxiety can delay communication and disturb the process of language learning (Young, 1991). Speakers who in some way experience anxiety may have symptoms such as trembling, body sweats, avoidance and so on. This language anxiety comes from fear (various levels of fear) of making mistakes, being judged by peers or higher-ups, or even freezing or breakdowns in communication. This apprehension can formulate an unbreakable cycle in which speakers become more and more anxious which leads to a reduction of effectiveness in communication and finally a decline in proficiency.

Reduced language proficiency can increase anxiety, as students might feel inadequate or insecure about their language abilities. Heightened anxiety can impair language performance, making it challenging for students to demonstrate their true proficiency (Oxford, 1999).

There are numerous research that show the influence between language proficiency and anxiety. What can be observed by a mere analysis of the researcher is that differences in individuals are present. They can reflect in personality traits, previous learning experiences and settings such as family and culture (Young, 1991). The mentioned differences contribute to the fact that without them the relationship between anxiety and language learning would go unnoticed.

#### **2.2.4. Communication apprehension**

Communication apprehension is defined as the fear that an individual feels in oral communication (Horwitz et al., 1986; Daly, 1991 as cited in Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). One of the most important abilities when learning a foreign language is speaking; if a learner is afraid to communicate, they may avoid it, which can impair their total language ability. Since involvement in classroom activities directly affects students' performance in learning a language, it is crucial to lessen communication anxiety (Khader, 2011). communication apprehension is connected to speaking outcomes, activities and tasks, as well as the embarrassment that learners face when they are in a foreign language classroom. Moreover, it

is caused by some personality traits such as „shyness, quietness, and fear of making mistakes“ (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020).

As reported by Daly et al. (1997), students experiencing FLA act as silent and passive students during a class. Furthermore, when students are not given enough time to prepare an answer, they can get anxious feelings and avoid the scenario at all costs (Cheng, 2009). Students may not know the proper word or phrase to adequately respond. In language acquisition theory, this phenomenon is called „unprepared speech“. Unprepared speech refers to spontaneous verbal communication that occurs without any planning, often reflecting the speaker's natural language proficiency and cognitive processing. In the context of language acquisition, unprepared speech provides valuable insights into a learner's ability to apply learned linguistic structures in real-time conversation (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Avoidance is a typical behavioural reaction to communication apprehension that can make learning a foreign language really difficult. Sometimes students are called on and there is no way for them to avoid communication, so they choose to withdraw from communication. There are differences between complete and partial withdrawal. In a classroom, this is seen through responses when students are called out with short answers and no elaboration (McCroskey and Richmond, 1990). While students may be quite adept at answering practice questions and delivering prepared speeches, they become more nervous when required to speak spontaneously. The problem of communication apprehension is unique to foreign language courses, as students must acquire the target language (Cheng, 2009).

### **2.2.5. Test Anxiety**

Test anxiety is defined as apprehension from academic evaluation (McIntyre & Gardner, 1991). It is defined as the fear of failure in evaluation situations such as written and oral tests and presentations (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). This type of anxiety can occur at the very beginning, in the middle or at the end of an assessment process. It is also important to mention that oral tests and exams provoke the highest levels of anxiety in classrooms (Horwitz et al., 1986). It awakes not only test anxiety, but also communication apprehension at the same time, which further leads to higher anxiety levels.



Symptoms of test anxiety include some physical signs such as sweating and increased heart rate. Some symptoms are also emotional responses such as fear and feelings of helplessness. There are also cognitive issues such as difficulty concentrating (Zeinder. 1998). Test anxiety can come from fear of failure, lack of preparation, or negative past experiences. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) also stress that a teacher's incorrect assessment that a student lacks the aptitude to learn a language or the motivation to put in the necessary work for a good performance can be influenced by the subsequent poor test performance and inability to function in class.

### **2.2.6. Fear of Negative Evaluation**

Fear of negative evaluation is defined as apprehension about other's evaluations, avoidance of those situations, and the fear that others will evaluate one negatively (Horwitz & Young, 1991; Horwitz et al., 1986). Fear of negative evaluation is quite similar to test anxiety. But the difference lies in the fact that test anxiety occurs in test-taking situations, contrary to it, fear of negative evaluation may happen in any social or academic assessment process (Horwitz et al., 1986; as cited in Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). Tanveer (2007) claims that it is broader in the sense that students are evaluated by both the instructors/professor and their peers/colleagues.

### **2.3. Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety**

As cited in Alnahidh & Altalhab (2020), many scholars found that FLA is mostly present in speaking classes (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1999; Young, 1992). The issue of foreign language speaking anxiety affects many language learners. FLSA can appear in different forms such as “nonverbal behaviours” like blushing, unwillingness to communicate, refusal to make eye contact and so on (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013; as cited in Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). The problem of FLSA usually occurs when learners/speakers assume their use and oral performance to be wrong, stupid or incomprehensible (Brown, 2001; as cited in Cagatay, 2015).

As previously mentioned in the chapter above, FLA has been comprised of three major components: *communication apprehension*, *test anxiety* and *the fear of negative evaluation*. There are two crucial distinctions in observing anxiety: “beneficial” vs. “debilitating anxiety”

(Cagatay, 2015). Beneficial anxiety can trigger action and excitement and make way for success while debilitating anxiety creates a barrier between the learner and success (Cagatay, 2015). According to Scovel (1978), the average person experiences both beneficial and debilitating anxiety simultaneously. Anxiety of this kind paired with other motivations drives a person to learn a new language.

According to Pertaub, Slater, and Carter (2001), individuals often feel anxious when speaking in front of an audience or interacting with native speakers of a foreign language due to the fear of being judged or evaluated negatively. This anxiety persists even when the person recognizes it as irrational, potentially leading to feelings of distress and frustration (Pertaub, Slater, & Carter, 2001; as cited in Cagatay, 2015). Foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) is common in such situations and can intensify when conversing with native speakers (Horwitz et al., 1986).

There have been numerous studies done on the topic of FLSA in many countries around the world, such as Turkey, China, and Greece, just to name a few (Cagatay, 2015; Luo, 2014; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009). Another example comes from Malaysia. This study was done by Heng et al. (2012), where it was concluded that Malaysian university students have a moderate level of speaking anxiety. The sources of their anxiety were fear of negative evaluation and fear of test failure in addition to fear of speaking with natives (as cited in Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). Moreover, speaking in front of peers/colleagues was pronounced to be a highly anxiety-provoking cause for EFL learners (Price, 1991; as cited in Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020).

### **2.3.1. Identifying the Triggers of Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety**

Young (1990) highlighted a number of sources of FLSA, such as interactions between instructors and students, as well as students' perceptions of language acquisition, assessment/evaluation, and instructional methods in the classroom. These sources of language anxiety can be categorised as „learner-induced“, „classroom-related“, „skill-specific“ and „society-imposed“ (Zhang & Zhong, 2012). Alnahidh & Altalhab (2020) name these as „sources associated with the learner, the teacher and the methodology.“

#### ***a) Fear of Negative Evaluation***

Fear of Negative Evaluation is one of the primary sources of FLSA. It is described as the fear of being judged by others (Watson & Friend, 1969). Learners often worry that their peers, professors or natives will criticize their language skills, pronunciation, or grammatical errors

(Horwitz et al., 1986). The fear of negative evaluation has been previously discussed in this work, but it is important to recall it as it is intense in classroom settings where students are regularly assessed (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020).

***b) Communication apprehension***

This source of FLSA refers to general anxiety when it comes to communication with others, creating fears such as speaking in front of groups, interacting with unfamiliar people, and participating in conversations where students worry about not being understood (McCroskey, 1977). The author further states that communication apprehension can arise when students use a foreign language, particularly if they perceive themselves as having limited proficiency in the language, which can lead to reduced self-confidence in these situations.

***c) Low self-esteem and self-confidence***

Anxiety is more common among learners who have low self-esteem or lack confidence in their language skills. They may fear failure or shame and believe that their language abilities are insufficient (Price, 1991). In addition to fear of negative evaluation, research has shown that low self-esteem is one of the main sources of FLSA (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). This source leads to poorer performance in the target language, which further lowers confidence in general.

***d) Cultural Differences***

This source also leads to FLSA, as students/learners have a fear of making cultural mistakes or they often do not understand some cultural differences. Cultural and language acquisition are often mixed, and there can be a great level of anxiety associated with breaking social standards or upsetting other people (Woodrow, 2006). Cultural mistakes in language refer to errors made while using a language in a way that unintentionally violates the cultural norms of the target language's speaker (Gass & Selinker, 2008). For instance, differing norms regarding politeness, formality, or nonverbal cues can result in cultural mistakes during interactions (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

***e) Previous Negative Experiences***

Public speaking can heighten students' nervousness, especially if they have previously encountered negative language-learning experiences, such as failure, ridicule, or harsh criticism. These past experiences can create a psychological barrier, making students overly cautious and fearful of repeating the same mistakes (Young, 1991).

## **2.4. How Foreign Language Anxiety Manifests in Learners**

Each person has different manifestations of anxiety. Researchers studying anxiety in foreign languages have identified a variety of signs and behaviours that nervous learners exhibit (Tanveer, 2007). According to Leary (1982), there are three types of behaviour that come from anxiety in social settings. Those three types are arousal-mediated responses, disaffiliative behaviour and image-protection behaviour (Schlenker & Leary, 1982).

When students "squirm in their seats, fidget, play with their hair or hands, clothes, or other manipulative objects, stutter and stammer as they talk, and generally appear jittery and nervous," they are exhibiting the symptoms in the first scenario (Leary, 1982, p. 110). As Spitzberg and Cupach (2002) outline, „disaffiliative behaviour“ is defined as any activity that decreases social contact. Examples of this type of behaviour include speaking less in front of an audience, participating less in conversations, and allowing more time for silence during talks.

The final type of behaviour is image protection, which is symbolised by frequent nods and smiles as well as a rare tendency to interrupt others (Young, 1991).

Some additional anxiety symptoms that are specific to foreign language teaching settings were identified by Horwitz et al. (1986). Learners frequently stay away from personal or complicated conversations and claim to understand a certain grammar point but forget it during an oral exercise or test. Additionally, they note that students may become frozen during role-play exercises or express frustration about their inability to distinguish between the sounds and structures of messages in other languages. (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Oxford (1999) further names other symptoms in which foreign language anxiety may manifest itself. The author groups them into four categories which are: physical, psychological, behavioral, and other symptoms, each of which in their own way hinder language learning and use.

Physically, FLA may lead to a rapid heartbeat, muscle tension, dry mouth, and excessive perspiration. These symptoms are often the body's response to perceived stress or fear, making it difficult for learners to feel at ease when speaking a new language.

Psychologically, learners may experience embarrassment, feelings of helplessness, fear, and the sensation of going blank. These emotions can impair concentration, leading to poor memory recall and retention, further worsening anxiety.

Behaviorally, anxiety might cause fidgeting, playing with hair or clothing, and stuttering. More severe behavioural reactions include avoidance behaviours, such as inappropriate silence, providing short responses, avoiding eye contact, or an unwillingness to participate. In extreme cases, this can lead to arriving unprepared, cutting classes, or even withdrawing from the course entirely.

Moreover, anxiety can drive individuals to overanalyse their performance, foster perfectionism, encourage excessive competitiveness, and provoke self-criticism. These tendencies can create a vicious cycle where the fear of failure leads to even greater anxiety, ultimately delaying progress in language learning and language use.

Additionally, symptoms of FLA can be categorised into four groups: physiological, linguistic, behavioural and cognitive (Horwitz et al., 1986). Physiological manifestations of anxiety include increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, dry mouth, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, muscle tension, and headaches. These symptoms result from the body's fight-or-flight

response, preparing to deal with perceived threats, but can impede focus and performance in stressful situations.

Linguistic manifestations of anxiety include stuttering, hesitations, frequent pauses, reduced speech fluency, lower speech volume, limited vocabulary use, avoidance of complex sentences, and frequent self-corrections. These symptoms reflect the speaker's nervousness and can delay effective communication, making it challenging to express thoughts clearly and confidently.

Behavioural manifestations of anxiety include avoiding participation, reluctance to speak or engage, procrastination, fidgeting, restlessness, nail-biting, foot-tapping, and frequent checking of time or surroundings. These behaviours indicate discomfort and can negatively impact learning and social interactions, reinforcing the cycle of anxiety and avoidance.

Cognitive manifestations of anxiety include difficulty concentrating, negative self-talk, overthinking, indecisiveness, memory problems, a constant sense of worry, and catastrophising. These cognitive disruptions can impair decision-making, and create a mental barrier to learning and performing tasks efficiently. They can further cause the inability to process information.

These manifestations will further be demonstrated in the Discussion portion of the study.

## **2.5. Overcoming Foreign Language Anxiety**

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a common barrier to language acquisition, characterized by nervousness and fear of negative evaluation when communicating in a non-native language. To overcome this anxiety, a shift in focus is crucial. Teachers play a huge role by fostering a classroom atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and values progress and communication over perfection. As Horwitz (2016) states, language learners are often pressured to speak without errors which intensifies levels of anxiety. The main point to build confidence in a target language is constructive feedback and guidance. According to studies, students who feel that their classroom is supportive are more likely to participate in speaking activities and are less likely to suffer significant levels of anxiety (Young, 1991). When making errors becomes a natural part of the learning process, it helps learners reduce fear of mistakes and errors become learning opportunities (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014).

Another vital factor in overcoming FLA is regular practice. Over time practice helps in the reduction of fear of speaking (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014).

Mindfulness and relaxation techniques also prove beneficial in managing FLA. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) found that anxious language learners who engaged in relaxation techniques reported lower anxiety levels and improved performance and proficiency. These methods help students develop a more positive mindset towards language learning, making them more resilient to anxiety triggers.

### **3. Methodology**

This chapter gives an overview of the research design, data collecting techniques, tools utilized, study participants, and data analysis process.

#### **3.1. Research Design**

This study has been designed as a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods (MacKey & Gass, 2005). The study has qualitative characteristics because it is about the explanation of the phenomenon (description), while the quantitative characteristics relate to the use of descriptive statistics concerning the analysis of responses by respondents (research participants).

### **3.2. Data Collection Methods**

For the purpose of this research, the following instruments were used:

a) questionnaire and b) semi-structured interviews.

Questionnaires were used in this research as a method for data collection recognized to be a suitable research instrument when it comes to the opinions and attitudes of a large group of participants (Mackey and Gass, 2005).

Interviews were used to give participants access to things that could not be directly observed, such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, and beliefs, because anxiety is a subjective feeling that differs from person to person (Linh, 2011). This allowed participants to choose, reconstruct, and reflect on their experiences. The semi-structured interviews are proven to be effective for exploring FLA as they allow for flexibility in questioning, allowing for further exploration of personal experiences. This method of data collection captures the psychological side of anxiety which might be missed in structured interviews (Merriam, 2009). The semi-structured interviews allow for a more comfortable atmosphere which potentially might lead to richer data. These interviews also allow for further and newer questions and problems to be recognized and researched.

### **3.3. Instruments**

#### **3.3.1. Questionnaire**

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was the instrument used to measure the degree of speaking anxiety. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope created the questionnaire in its original form in 1986. The questionnaire contains 33 items which use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. For the purpose of the study, the researcher translated the FLACS questionnaire from English to B/C/S, as it would provide more valid results and would reduce expressiveness, i.e. it was translated to avoid any misunderstandings. The questions from this questionnaire can be seen in the appendix. The questions were given out through the *Google Forms* platform.

The questionnaire consisted of 33 questions by following three components of anxiety:



1. Communication Apprehension consists of 11 questions (1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, 32),
2. Test Anxiety consists of 15 questions (3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28) and
3. Fear of Negative Evaluation consists of 7 questions (2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, 33).

These questions can be answered in a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. This scale has been used since 1986 to measure anxiety levels in a classroom context and was found to be a highly reliable instrument that provided valid results (Horwitz et al., 1986). The answers of students consisted of strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree turned into scores 1 to 5 for negative statements and 5 to 1 for positive statements.

**Table 1**

*FLACS scoring/Liker scale*

	Statement				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Negative	1	2	3	4	5
Positive	5	4	3	2	1

The research also utilizes the Oetting’s Scale (1983). The scale is considered to be suitable for this research, since it is a psychological assessment tool used to measure anxiety levels, particularly in the context of foreign language learning (Juwitawati & Pratiwi, 2018). The scale includes a series of statements (questionnaire) related to common anxiety triggers, such as speaking in front of others, being corrected, or understanding spoken language. Respondents indicate the extent to which they experience these symptoms, allowing researchers or educators to identify patterns of anxiety and tailor interventions accordingly.

### **3.3.2. Interviews**

Rich qualitative data is obtained through interviews, which provide in-depth stories and firsthand experiences that can enhance comprehension of some complex topics, such as language anxiety. Qualitative data can offer significant context and insights that may not be captured by quantitative data alone. This research provided semi-structured interviews. The questions (11) were open-ended, as they encourage participants to provide detailed responses,

allowing the researcher to look into their experiences in more detail. These interviews also allowed the researcher to compare and contrast the differences between participants, which is useful for the analysis of the study. A simple warm-up question is asked at the beginning of the interview to help the participants get comfortable. The interview itself is shown below. The interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and were later transcribed and translated by the researcher. The interviews were done in person and over the Zoom platform. Additionally, the interviews were done in Bosnian, in order to create a comfortable atmosphere, where anxiety would not take over.

### **Interview structure**

“Hello, my name is Amina Dervišević, I am currently a 5th-year student at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, in the Department of English, majoring in teaching. I am conducting this interview as part of my master's thesis, which has as its task the analysis of communication in a classroom where a foreign language (in this case English) is used. First of all, thank you for your participation and your time. All information and your answers will be anonymous, and thus no one will be able to reveal your identity.

1. How are you today?
2. In your opinion, what is the thing about learning English? Is it grammar, reading, speaking, writing, or listening?
3. How do you feel when you speak in English?
4. Is it easier for you to speak if you prepare in advance?
5. Is it a problem for you to ask for clarification if you don't know something (a word, phrase, etc.)?
6. What disturbs you most in your foreign language class?
7. In your opinion, what causes foreign language speaking anxiety?
8. Are you worried about making errors?
9. Do you worry about what your classroom colleagues and your teachers think of your language skills?
10. How do you feel when the instructor suddenly calls out your name?
11. How do you feel when you are corrected by your instructor or peers?
12. Is there anything that can be done to relax the learners and make foreign language classes less stressful?

Thank you for your participation.”

\*The questions were taken from an unpublished master thesis (Hodžić, 2016).

### **3.4. Research Site and Procedures**

This research has been done at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo. The research questionnaire was first distributed to students in the first year of postgraduate studies, over their group chat. They had three days to fill out the questionnaire which approximately took 10 minutes to do. Then they were asked to join a group chat that would be used to schedule a semi-structured focus group interview. I will talk more about this in the chapters that follow. The questionnaire was subsequently distributed to the second-year postgraduate students over their group chat. They also had three days to complete it. Then they were asked to participate in the interview.

The students gave out their consent to the researcher for their participation in the interview. Out of the 22 participants from the questionnaire, and overall around 50 postgraduate students, only 1 student from the first year and 4 students from the second year studies decided to participate in the interviews. The interviews lasted for about 15 minutes and were recorded with the permission of the students. The interviews were conducted in the building of our faculty and over the *Zoom* platform. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher and those transcriptions provided the source for qualitative analysis. The participants were number-coded to ensure confidentiality.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

This chapter provides an overview of quantitative and qualitative data results including a discussion.

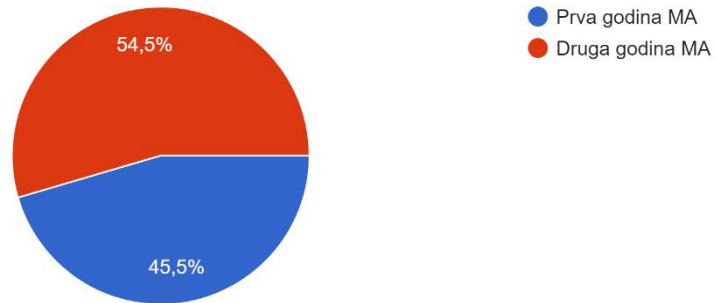
### **4.1. Participants**

A total of 22 postgraduate students, enrolled in the Master's programme at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Sarajevo, participated in this study. There was a total of 10 students from the first and 12 students from the second year of postgraduate studies. The ratio can be seen in the graph shown down below.

#### **Graph 1**

*Year of Study*

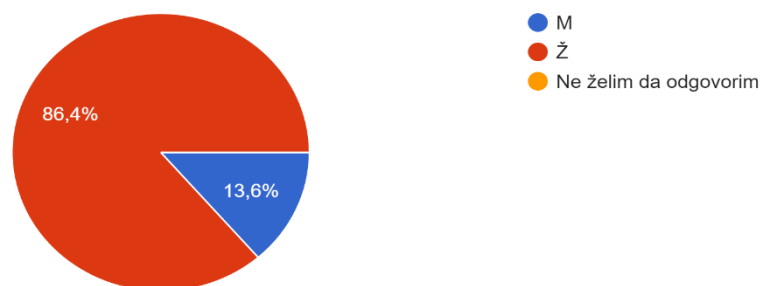
Godina studija  
22 odgovora



## Graph 2

### Gender

Spol  
22 odgovora



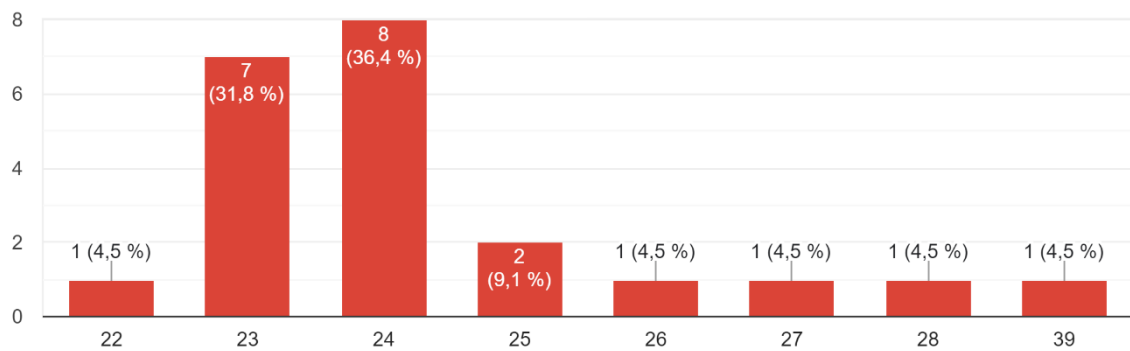
As can be seen from the graph there was a total of 19 female and 3 male students who took part in the questionnaire.

The age of the participants ranged from 22 to 39, with an average of 24.7 as can be seen in graph 3.

### Graph 3

*Age*

Godine  
22 odgovora

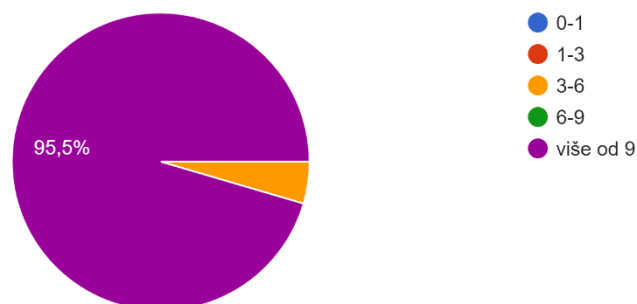


21 of the 22 students, which equals 95,5%, have been learning English for more than 9 years and only 1 (4,5%) student has been learning English for 3 to 6 years.

### Graph 4

*How many years have you been learning English?*

Koliko godina već učite engleski jezik?  
22 odgovora

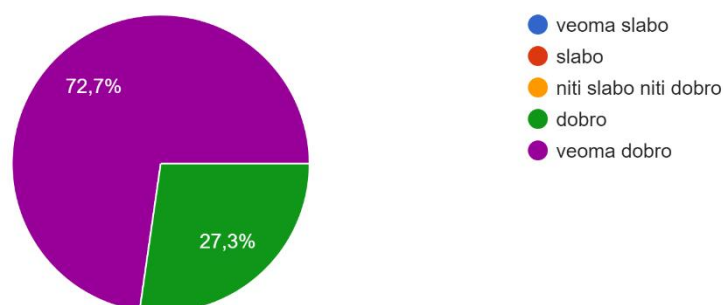


16 (72,7%) out of the 22 participants rated their knowledge of English as very good and 6 (27,3) of them as good.

### Graph 5

*How would you rate your knowledge of the English language?*

Kako biste ocjenili Vaše znanje Engleskog jezika?  
22 odgovora



## 4.2. Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire

Several noteworthy findings have come from the quantitative data gathered utilizing the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) questionnaire.

After the time frame was over (three days for each year) the next step was to calculate students' scores to discover the anxiety level of postgraduates of the English department at the Faculty of Philosophy in Sarajevo. The scale was adapted from Oetting's scale, ranging from very relaxed to very anxious.

**Table 2**

*FLCAS anxiety scale adapted from Oetting's scale*

Range	Level
126 - 165	Very anxious
108 - 123	Anxious
87 - 107	Mildly Anxious

66 - 86

Relaxed

33 - 65

Very relaxed

---

The research revealed that the average general anxiety score, as measured by the FLCAS, for all 22 participants (100%) was 90.36. Additionally, the anxiety scores ranged from a minimum of 61 to a maximum of 112. The study indicated that anxiety levels among postgraduate students in the English department (in programs such as teaching, translation, and literature) were moderately high, categorizing the students as mildly anxious.

The following table shows the percentage of students' speaking anxiety levels according to Oetting's scale in this study.

**Table 3**

*The Levels of Student's Speaking Anxiety*

<b>Level of Anxiety</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very anxious	0	0%
Anxious	4	18%
Mildly Anxious	9	41%
Relaxed	7	32%
Very Relaxed	2	9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100%</b>

The table shows that the students get different levels of anxiety. Out of 22 students, none (0%) are in a very anxious state. 4 out of the 22 students (18%) are in the anxious level. 9 students (41%) are in the mildly anxious stage, which is the majority of the 22 participants. 7 students

(32%) are in the relaxed level and two students (9%) are at the level of very relaxed. Taking into consideration the fact that the average level of anxiety for the 22 student participants is 90.36, this data shows that most of the students experience some degree of anxiety.

#### 4.2.1. Anxiety types

When it comes to different types of anxiety presented through the questions (Communication apprehension), TA (Test anxiety) and FNE (Fear of negative evaluation), the research has shown that there are moderate differences in responses of students' respective types of anxiety. The average number of CA = 2.88, TA = 2.76 and FNE = 2.45.

**Table 4**

*The average score of types of anxiety*

<b>Type of Anxiety</b>	<b>Average score</b>
Communication Apprehension	2.88
Test Anxiety	2.76
Fear of Negative Evaluation	2.45

As can be seen from Table 4 above, 4 (18,18%) students have confirmed that they feel communication apprehension in the EFL classroom. While 5 (22,37%) students experience high levels of test anxiety. 2 (9,09%) students agreed to high levels of fear of negative evaluation. The other responses were in the middle and as concluded, the final result of anxiety in EFL classrooms is moderate anxiety.

#### 4.3. Semi-Structured Interview

This part will focus on the analysis of the semi-structured interview. The interview was a semi-structured type. It was conducted in two groups, one with the postgraduate students enrolled in the first year of the MA programme, and one with the students enrolled in the second year of the MA programme.

The interview was conducted with 5 students (22.37%) out of the total 22 participants (100%). Their identities were coded as P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 ("P" stands for participant) to protect their



anonymity and safeguard against any malicious intent. The interviews were conducted one-on-one (Researcher and Participant) in an online environment using Zoom.

Before the interview started, the researcher introduced herself as well as the study purpose to the participants and explained to them the overall goal of the interview. All of the participants were open to conversation and the process of recording did not inhibit the responses at all. For the purpose of the research abbreviations such as P1, P2, P3 and so on, were used. A lot of the time the participants expressed themselves with vivid explanations and backstories/flashbacks, which was good to observe. From this, it can be concluded that talking about such topics as anxiety, especially in speaking, is not a problem for them. A few examples of such instances:

Q3: How do you feel when you have to speak in English?

#P2: “It depends on who I am speaking to. If it’s my friends then I am fine. I know even if I am wrong, they are there to correct me, and they are less judgy, in comparison to someone else. With professors, it is a bit different. They teach the language I am studying, and when I talk to them I feel a bit nervous because I do not want to say something wrong, and for them to be like why is she enrolled here? (...) If I am speaking with a native, it is also a bit different. Then I am more nervous and I constantly think what to say next, if I will manage to pull it off. When we had interviews with a native speaker (professor) from the USA, it was a bit stressful, because I did not know what we would talk about, so I did not have time to prepare. At one point I blanked and could not continue, and it was extra stressful as she does not speak Bosnian. (...) Basically, it depends on who I am talking to and how important the conversation topic is to me.”

#P1: “I feel pretty confident when speaking in English like it is in my nature, considering the fact that I have been studying and using it since my childhood. But of course, sometimes my level of confidence depends on the professor I am talking to.”

#P4: “I feel good. For me personally, it is easier to talk in English than Bosnian”

From these three answers we can gather information that generally speaking in English does not spark high levels of anxiety, but that it significantly depends on the person that the students are speaking to, as well as the topic of conversation and its relevance.

### 4.3.1. Causes of FLA

The participants mentioned numerous factors which in their opinion contribute to FLA. Some of those are the inability to catch up to the instructor, inability to comprehend, speaking activities such as interviews, lack of time for comprehension (eg. not enough time to read a text), errors in speaking, low self-confidence, lack of use of the language, expectations from yourself and others, putting importance to other's opinions, lack of knowledge and self-esteem.

The following answers talk about this particular issue:

Q7: 7. In your opinion, what causes foreign language speaking anxiety?

#P3 "I get very nervous in class when I don't have enough time to understand the text we are reading, or when I can't understand everything the professor is saying, and at the same time I expect to be called on or that I should say something. Personally, I need a little more time to read a certain text and to think carefully about it and what I want to say, because if I feel pressured to answer questions, I won't be able to give such a satisfactory answer. (...)"

#P3: "Uncertainty, excessive expectations on the part of oneself and others, unfamiliarity with the matter discussed in the old language, excessive thinking about who will say what and how it will sound to others."

#P2: "Probably fear of making a speech mistake. One thinks that he will be ridiculed for these mistakes. Also, if one does not have enough self-confidence, it can cause anxiety, especially when one thinks that one is not capable enough to communicate in a foreign language."

One participant added:

#P5:" In my opinion, speech anxiety causes insecurity in speaking that appeared at a very young age and was not adequately addressed at the time. This insecurity eventually turned into anxiety because it was not acted on time."

What can also be concluded from previous answers is that fear of making mistakes or errors in speech is linked with the learners' concerns of being ridiculed by others, instructors and peers. Furthermore, the time for preparation seems to be important as students feel that they will lose

their train of thought, and will not be able to give a proper answer, which might have bad consequences for them such as ridicule, negative evaluation and so on. One participant added:

#P3: “When I interpret, the thought of what someone else will think is activated, but I try to turn it off quickly.”

One of the participants mentioned the moment of being called out suddenly and not knowing the answer. In such instances, a learner does not have time to prepare and feel as if everyone is waiting on them. It has been mentioned in multiple cases of the interview.

Q10: How do you feel when the instructor suddenly calls out your name?

#P2: “Stressful. Especially if they call me out first and then ask a question. I panic if I'm not given enough space and time to think about everything I'm going to say.”

#P4: “It depends if I followed the class at that moment and if I know the answer. However, in most cases, I have learned not to feel any negative emotions no matter how such a situation ends.”

#P1: “(...) I don't like being called out if I haven't raised my hand to answer.”

#P5: “(...) I have no problem with the professors calling me out at any moment of the lecture, even if I don't know the answer, I will try to answer to some extent and manage the given situation.”

From these answers, we can see a difference in opinions and feelings. Some students do not want to answer when called out, and it gives them high levels of anxiety, while for others it depends on various factors. It is often that students in those cases tend to freeze and block out of panic and anxiety, which can result in negative emotions and experiences.

#### **4.3.2. Manifestations of FLA**

The manifestations of FLA differ from person to person. This makes them really interesting to analyse. Thus, anxiety can manifest in many different ways. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) name four different categories: a) physiological manifestations, b) linguistic manifestations, c) behavioural manifestations, and d) cognitive manifestations.

**a) *Physiological manifestations***

Speaking of psychological manifestations (increased heart rate, sweating, trembling, dry mouth, shortness of breath, nausea, dizziness, muscle tension, and headaches) see p. 26. The participants mentioned:

#P2: “(...) I feel my heart pounding and my body shaking. (...)”

#P1: “(...) It happens when I am talking, I get a shaky voice. (...)”

**b) *Linguistic manifestations***

Linguistic manifestations of anxiety manifest in examples of difficulty while speaking. A few examples from the participants include:

#P2: “(...) a certain level of knowledge of the language is expected of me, and then it creates pressure for me because whether I meet those expectations or not is questioned.”

#P4: “(...) taking everyone into consideration, I can accept any criticism of my linguistic skills as a potential way to improve on my weaknesses, depending on who the criticism comes from and in what way.”

**c) *Behavioral manifestations***

Speaking of behavioural manifestations of anxiety (avoiding participation, reluctance to speak or engage, procrastination, fidgeting, restlessness, nail-biting, foot-tapping, and frequent checking of time or surroundings) see p. 26. Example from a participant:

#P1: “(...) I don't like being called out if I haven't raised my hand to answer.”

From this answer, we can conclude that the behaviour of the student can easily change if called out suddenly. i.e. they can completely avoid answering/participating.

**d) *Cognitive manifestations***

Cognitive manifestations of anxiety can cause the inability to process information.

#P1: “It happens that while I'm speaking, I overthink too much about how I'm going to put the sentence together so it doesn't sound stupid, but that's exactly what makes the process difficult for me. (...)”

#P2: ”I create a problem in my head and increase my anxiety level, because I think that someone will make fun of me. I guess I set some high level of expectations for myself and that leads to some negative thoughts when those mistakes happen.”

#P3: “Sometimes I'm a perfectionist and if I don't do as I imagined, I criticize myself, which is not good at all.”

The researcher also observed that when talking about this topic, students often switched to English, even though the interview was done in B/C/S. The participants also often used English verbs in the middle of a sentence in B/C/S (an example is *judgy*).

Since the results indicated that experienced anxiety had no effect on communication quality, it may be concluded that anxiety occurs but that learners manage to deal with it. The fact that students get instructions in smaller groups at postgraduate studies, and have better connections with the professors, who create supportive environments with no judgement, might be a contributing factor to this study.

#### **4.4. Limitations of the Study**

This study on Foreign Language Anxiety has potential limitations. The researcher has grouped them into two major ones: sample number and lack of interest from the students.

The first significant limitation of the study is the small sample size. The sample size of the students was 22 for the questionnaire and 5 for the semi-structured interviews. The small sample size of participants limits the general applicability of the findings, as the results may not accurately represent all or the vast majority of the students from the Department of English Language and Literature at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo. The small sample size also increases the error levels when it comes to conclusions drawn from the little information received. The importance of a larger sample size of participants lies in the fact that

larger groups can fully capture the diversity of experiences and ideas of students, as well as anxiety levels among them, thus impacting the overall validity of the research.

Another limitation is the apparent lack of interest of students, which influenced the quality of the data collected. This limitation can be connected with the previous one (small sample size). The students often lack interest in topics such as these, as they do not understand them, do not talk about them. Thus, they do not feel as the research is relevant for them, and does not apply to them, and further has no academic relevance. Moreover, students might feel that interviews might be anxiety provoking and especially talking about similar topics, so they tend to back out and play safe.

In addition, the study was conducted exclusively at one university within a single department in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which further limits the general applicability of the research. Even though the study was specific to the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Sarajevo, the findings might not apply to other universities in Bosnia.

In further studies, it is important to address these limitations by increasing the sample size (at the university and draw students from other universities, broadening the study to a national level) and by employing strategies that will engage the students more.

## **5. Conclusion**

According to research, one of the most significant emotional factors that prevents the participants of this study (postgraduate students of English) from confident and effective acquiring a foreign language is anxiety. This research has shown that speaking in a foreign language (English) causes the highest levels of anxiety. Almost all of the participants admitted to experiencing anxiety and nervousness when speaking English in an EFL classroom.

Although it was anticipated that anxiety appears as a burden/barrier to effective English communication, the findings showed that there is no meaningful correlation between anxiety and effective communication. Though the impact size of the association between willingness to speak and anxiety was only mild, one may infer that there would be a strong correlation between those two variables if the study's sample had been larger.

The results of this study show that there is a moderate level of anxiety among postgraduate students (again mentioning that the sample is rather small with 22 participants and 5 interviews). However, the results also show that there is no significant impact of anxiety when

it comes to communication quality. By what has been said, we can conclude that the hypotheses have been partially confirmed. In other words, the analysis results have highlighted that language anxiety does exist in students who study a foreign language, but that it is more prominent in classes taught by non-native speakers. In other words, language anxiety does affect students, but does not necessarily affect their participation in communication.

Finally, the results indicate that language anxiety stems from the influence of professors. The study indicates that language anxiety in EFL classrooms is rather invisible and experienced by the students internally. Regardless, the study does mention some visible and external manifestations of language anxiety.

Addressing language anxiety is crucial because it can impact individuals' ability to communicate in both a first and second or foreign language. Language anxiety can affect us socially, as individuals who experience language anxiety tend to have fewer social interactions.

By addressing language anxiety and exploring it, both the students and educators can implement strategies to manage and overcome it, and create a safe and supportive classroom environment. Furthermore, by talking about it, the stigma is lifted, and it normalises this experience as something that really can happen to anyone, even if they are the best in B/C/S, learners may be below average in a foreign language. This study has provided valuable information for further research on this topic, from both statistical and descriptive aspects. What has to be acknowledged is the fact that this issue is highly complicated and it requires even more exploration from different aspects.

Another possible research topic could be language anxiety when talking about controversial issues and topics. As I had the chance to see in the Methodological Practice 2 course, high school students had mild anxiety talking about controversial issues. It would be a good thing to observe workshops that deal with the issue and explore the differences in student responses and causes of language anxiety.

Evidence from the research further shows that it is easier to talk about difficult topics in a foreign language. Why is it easier to talk in another language, why do people tend to talk about difficult topics in their second language, could it be a case of detachment or escapism? All of these are left for the reader's mind to explore and think of.

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## Appendix

### Questionnaire

### Upitnik

Poštovane kolegice i kolege. Pred vama se nalazi upitnik za mjerenje jezičke anksioznosti među studentima i studenticama Odsjeka za engleski jezik Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Sarajevu. Molim vas da kod svake tvrnje odaberete samo jedan odgovor. Ovaj upitnik će biti analiziran u istraživačke svrhe za završni magistarski rad.

Kontakt za pitanja vezana za ovaj upitnik: [amina.dervisevic1946@gmail.com](mailto:amina.dervisevic1946@gmail.com)

Godina studija:

Spol:

Godine:

Koliko godina učite engleski jezik:

Kako biste ocjenili Vaše znanje Engleskog jezika?

Skala za mjerenje anksioznosti pri govoru na stranom jeziku (FLACS- Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M.B. & Cope, J. (1986). The Modern Language Journal, 70(2), 125-132.

- 1 – Apsolutno se ne slažem
- 2 – Ne slažem se
- 3 – Niti se slažem niti se ne slažem
- 4 – Slažem se
- 5 – Potpuno se slažem

1. Nisam potpuno siguran/a u sebe kada govorim na engleskom jeziku.  
u potpunosti se slažem – slažem se – niti se slažem, niti se ne slažem – ne slažem se – nikako se ne slažem
2. Ne brinem da li ću praviti greške na engleskom jeziku.
3. Uplašim se kada me prozovu na časovima.
4. Ne osjećam se prijatno kada ne mogu da razumijem o čemu profesor/asistent/strani lektor govori tokom nastave na engleskom jeziku.
5. Ne bi mi smetalo da imamo više predavanja/vježbi/seminara na engleskom jeziku.
6. Za vrijeme nastave, uhvatim sebe kako razmišljam o stvarima koje nemaju nikakve veze sa temom koja se obrađuje.
7. Smatram da su ostale kolegice i kolege s kojima studiram, kao i svi s kojima komuniciram na engleskom jeziku a nisu moji profesori, uspješniji iz engleskog jezika od mene.
8. Za vrijeme provjere znanja na engleskom jeziku obično ne osjećam strah.
9. Obuzme me panika kada moram da govorim bez prethodne pripreme.
10. Zabrinut/a sam zbog mogućih posljedica neuspjeha iz engleskog jezika jer se osjećam nesigurno.
11. Ne razumijem zašto bi se studenti/studentice uznemiravali zbog časova engleskog jezika.
12. Na časovima engleskog jezika sam toliko nervozan/na da zaboravim i ono što znam.
13. Neprijatno mi je da se sam/a javim i odgovaram na pitanja u toku nastave.
14. Smatram da ne bih bio/la nervozan/na kada bih razgovarao/la na engleskom jeziku sa osobama kojima je engleski jezik maternji.
15. Osjećam se uznemireno kada ne razumijem šta profesor/asistent/strani lektor ispravlja.



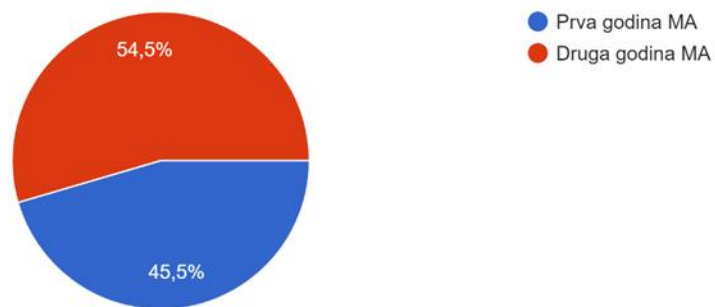
16. Čak i kada se dobro priprelim za nastavu na engleskom jeziku, osjećam strah i nelagodu.
17. Često mi se ne ide na nastavu zbog straha od usmenog izražavanja na engleskom jeziku.
18. Osjećam se samouvjereno prilikom usmenog izražavanja na engleskom jeziku.
19. Strepim od toga da će profesor/asistent ispravljati svaku moju grešku.
20. Osjećam kako mi srce lupa kada treba da usmeno govorim/usmeno odgovaram na engleskom jeziku.
21. Što više učim sve sam zbunjeniji/a.
22. Ne osjećam pritisak da moram da se dobro priprelim za nastavu na engleskom jeziku.
23. Uvijek imam osjećaj da moje kolegice i kolege, kao i svi s kojima se susretnem i koji govore engleski jezik, a nisu nastavnici, bolje govore engleski od mene.
24. Osjećam samopouzdanje kada govorim na engleskom jeziku pred svojim kolegicama i kolegama, kao i pred drugim govornicima engleskog jezika, neovisno od toga da li su izvorni govornici ili ne, neovisno od toga da li su moji profesori ili ne.
25. Na časovima se gradivo prelazi velikom brzinom i često brinem da ne zaostanem.
26. Osjećam veću napetost i nervozu na svim časovima na kojima se forsira usmena komunikacija na engleskom jeziku.
27. Postanem nervozan/na i lako se zbunim kada se usmeno izražavam na engleskom jeziku tokom nastave.
28. Prije nastave, uvijek se osjećam sigurno i opušteno.
29. Unervozim se kada ne mogu da razumijem svaku riječ na nastavi.
30. Smatram da postoji previše gramatičkih i drugih jezičkih pravila koja treba naučiti da bi se govorio engleski jezik.
31. Plašim se da će mi se kolegice i kolege, kao i svi s kojima dolazim u kontakt na engleskom jeziku, podsmijevati radi izgovora ili radi grešaka koje mogu napraviti tokom usmenog izražavanja.
32. Vjerujem da bih se mnogo opuštenije osjećao/la prijatno u okruženju u kome bi engleski jezik maternji.
33. Nervozan/na sam kada me profesor/asistent/strani lektor pita nešto što unaprijed nisam pripremio/la.

Graphs:

### **Graph 1**

*Year of Study*

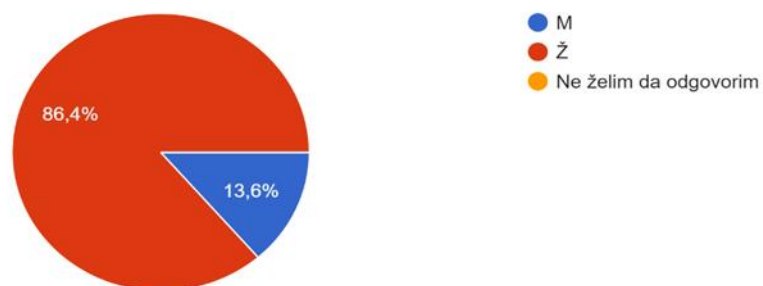
Godina studija  
22 odgovora



## Graph 2

Gender

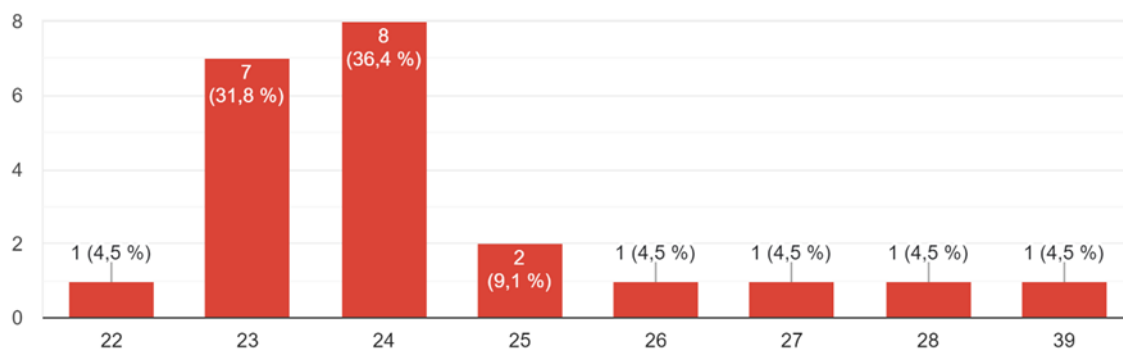
Spol  
22 odgovora



## Graph 3

Age

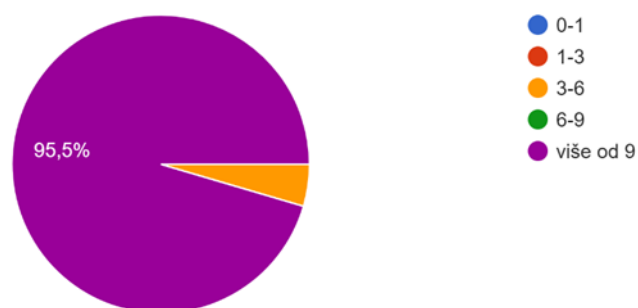
Godine  
22 odgovora



#### Graph 4

*How many years have you been learning English?*

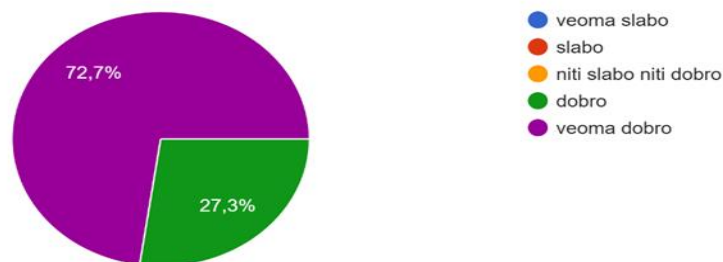
Koliko godina već učite engleski jezik?  
22 odgovora



#### Graph 5

*How would you rate your knowledge of the English language?*

Kako biste ocjenili Vaše znanje Engleskog jezika?  
22 odgovora



**Table 1**

*FLACS scoring/Liker scale*

	Statement				
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Negative	1	2	3	4	5
Positive	5	4	3	2	1

**Table 2**

*FLCAS anxiety scale adapted from Oetting's scale*

Range	Level
126 - 165	Very anxious
108 - 123	Anxious
87 - 107	Mildly Anxious
66 - 86	Relaxed
33 - 65	Very relaxed

**Table 3**

*The Levels of Student's Speaking Anxiety*

<b>Level of Anxiety</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Very anxious	0	0%
Anxious	4	18%
Mildly Anxious	9	41%
Relaxed	7	32%
Very Relaxed	2	9%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 4**

*The average score of types of anxiety*

<b>Type of Anxiety</b>	<b>Average score</b>
Communication Apprehension	2.88
Test Anxiety	2.76
Fear of Negative Evaluation	2.45