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Published in the USA

European Journal of Contemporary Education

E-ISSN 2305-6746

2026. 15(1): 24-38

DOI: 10.13187/ejced.2026.1.24

<https://ejce.cherkasgu.press>

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**European Journal of
Contemporary Education**



ELECTRONIC JOURNAL

Combating Foreign Language Anxiety in Translation Students by Developing Learner Autonomy

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Abstract

The present research paper investigates the issue of foreign language anxiety among translation students in Russia and suggests the way to diminish it by developing learner autonomy. The authors conducted an experiment during the second semester of 2023–2024 academic year, (117 participants) and found out that female students are more anxious than their male counterparts, undergraduate students are more prone to foreign language anxiety compared to younger students since they have to take state exams and defend their diploma papers. Junior students are more concerned about interpersonal communication, whereas undergraduates have more problems with negative assessment and test anxiety. By developing learner autonomy, it has become possible to diminish foreign language anxiety and at the same time make students more responsible and motivated. Personal and competence-based components of learner autonomy primarily contribute to lower foreign language anxiety.

Keywords: foreign languages, learner anxiety, learner autonomy, translator in VOLL, self-esteem.

1. Introduction

The present study is quite topical since mastering foreign languages greatly depends on learners' psychological readiness to acquire knowledge, overcome barriers, be fully aware of one's abilities and potential, cope with tests and unfamiliar environment, communicate with teachers, classmates and native speakers. Psychological problems, such as anxiety, apprehension, nervousness, fear of making mistakes, confidence gap, are known to impair cognitive functioning, disrupt memory, lead to avoidance behavior (Macintyre, Gardner, 1991; Tsiplakides, Keramida,

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2009), thus worsening the process of knowledge acquisition and, consequently, the final result (Abdurahman, Rizqi, 2020; Arabai, 2014; Song, 2024).

Questions concerning language anxiety came into focus of the following researchers' attention: Ma et al. (2018), Kochkonbaeva et al. (2023), Horwitz et al. (1986), Lopukhina et al. (2024). Western researchers (Horwitz et al., 1986) developed a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), consisting of 33 questions based on the Likert scale. The topic of foreign language anxiety (FLA) has become popular in the East as well (Al-Saraj, 2014; Dong, 2021; Liu, Chen, 2013; Lu, Liu, 2011; Yan, Liang, 2022). Russian scientists made their contribution to the study of the issue of foreign language anxiety. Among them Brovko et al. (2024), Galishnikova (2014), Andryushkina (2020), Kayavo (2021), Rafikova (2022), Sholokhova (2022), Usmanova et al. (2022), Doronina (2022) and others.

As some studies show (Ter-Minasova, 2005), the problem of FLA can also depend on the nature of the system of education as a whole, its focus on the final result and high performance; hence, it may be country-specific. Magdy et al. (2014) claims that more research is needed to determine whether Western tools and methods are applicable to other educational and cultural contexts.

Today's imperative for students of non-linguistic universities under the program of translator in VOLL (vocationally-oriented language learning) in Russia is to master one or several foreign languages at C1 (CEFR levels) for their future professional oral and written communication. Since, according to curriculum, such students have less time to acquire the necessary skills compared to their counterparts in linguistics, the problem of finding ways and means to cope with foreign language anxiety becomes quite relevant.

At the same time, equally important is the issue of developing learner autonomy. According to the authors' previous studies (Chernova, 2018; Chernova et al., 2018; Chernova et al., 2019), the primary objective of universities should be fostering a motivated and creative learner, ready to take full responsibility for his/her learning outcome, to be an independent and autonomous personality and in some situations to be one's own supervisor and tutor (Chernova et al., 2020; Chernova, Litvinov, 2022).

In the current conditions, however, as far as the level of learner autonomy in Russia is concerned, there is a lot of room for improvement. Consequently, the key objective for Russian universities is to create the environment to foster an autonomous personality able to take responsibility for one's studies and at the same time decrease anxiety.

In this paper the authors have attempted to diminish FLA by means of developing learner autonomy.

2. Materials and methods

A more general understanding of anxiety can help better comprehend FLA. In Philosophy and Psychology there formed a certain philosophical view of the problem of anxiety as a particular trait of personality and his/her individual reaction to stress factors going along with increased apprehensiveness and uncertainty (Luria, 2022; Sidorov, 2013).

Macintyre and Gardner (1991) singled out three characterizations of anxiety: trait, state, and situation-specific anxiety. A Dictionary of Psychology defines trait anxiety as a person's general or characteristic level of anxiety (Colman, 2015). State anxiety is "a relatively temporary feeling of worry experienced in relation to some particular event or act" (Brown, 2007: 390). Situation-specific anxiety is provoked by a specific set of conditions. As far as education is concerned, common anxiety-provoking situations involve public speaking, tests and examinations, and speaking in class (Gadzaova et al., 2024). In each situation, some individuals tend to experience more anxiety than others.

An original viewpoint was expressed in the Russian Psychology by Bozhovich (1995), who singled out two types of anxiety: adequate, which reflects objective lack of conditions to satisfy needs, and inadequate, which arises even if such conditions are available. In the latter case one can speak about anxiety as a stable functional structure of emotional sphere, permanent personal complex. In the present paper we do not consider this type of anxiety. Our attention has been focused on situation-specific (adequate) anxiety.

Prikhozhan (1998) distinguishes partial (specific) and generalized anxiety, with the former being a normal reaction to a potential threat to an individual's idea of one's competence, as a search for means to overcome this threat. The researcher does not consider this type of anxiety to

be a personal complex. It is a kind of a function of unfavourable communication environment, e.g., specific demands to the interlocutor or low value of his/her efforts. When it becomes possible to change the system of relations in communication or the position of a partner who has anxiety, then anxiety disappears. The authors consider the change of position of communicating partners to be an effective tool in diminishing anxiety when a learner becomes a coach.

When learning a foreign language, foreign language anxiety arises. Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) define FLA as, “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning arising from the uniqueness of the (foreign) language learning process”. The process of learning a new language triggers anxiety in various types of students, not only in those who are naturally inclined to anxiety (trait anxiety). Hence, FLA can be characterized as situation-specific rather than trait anxiety (Teimouri et al., 2019).

The manifestation of the following behavioral patterns can be regarded as FLA: disruptive behavior as a defense mechanism to be less vulnerable and emotionally-exposed (Ehrman, 1996); slow learning of a foreign language (FL) (Zhuzeyev et al., 2024); avoidance behavior (missing classes, being late), physical actions, physical ailments and a wide range of culture-specific signs (Oxford, 2005); evasion of “risky” behavior (e.g., public speaking) (Macintyre, Gardner, 1994; Steinberg, Horwitz, 1986). Some students may become anxious over their performance and develop a fear of failing (Ehrman, 1996). If a student demonstrates a bunch of such behaviors, he/she is likely to be unwilling to take part in class activities and study well. Though, the symptoms of anxiety should be distinguished from the lack of motivation and/or interest to the learning process.

Researchers in different countries conducted a number of studies devoted to the connection between FLA and other variables (Oteir, Al-Otaibi, 2019), such as willingness to communicate (Kalsoom et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2018), learning style and strategies (Alamer, Almulhim, 2021; Demir, Zaimoğlu, 2021; Ghafourina, 2023), self-esteem and self-confidence (Bensalem, Thompson, 2021; Wang et al., 2022), motivation (Alamer, Almulhim, 2021), individual differences of learners (Pan, Lou, 2023; Subatira et al., 2020), teacher’s behaviour (Djafri, Wimbari, 2018).

The most common tool to assess FLA has been FLCAS, designed by Horwitz et al. (1986). The FLCAS is a 33-item questionnaire which uses a five-point rating scale (the Likert scale). It assesses issues related to communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. The FLCAS was based primarily on the authors’ experience with college students attending ‘support groups’ for foreign language learners. The items of the questionnaire describe specific situations that might trigger anxiety in students making the FLCAS an assessment tool of situation-specific anxiety.

Some researchers (Liu, Li, 2019) have criticized the FLCAS since “many of the items appear to be tapping students’ perceptions and attitudes about language as well as their feelings about anxiety” (Sparks, Ganschow, 2022: 202), while Onwuegbuzie et al. (1999) found a strong correlation between FLA and foreign language achievement. In the present research, the authors adopted the situation-specific approach used by Horwitz et al. (1986) since, in our opinion, the situation-specific characteristic of FLA is most consistent with its definition and provides numerous advantages for conceptualizing and assessing anxiety.

Mihaljević Djigunović (2002, p. 164) divides FLA into three levels: low (<76), medium (76–119), and high (>119).

According to Oxford (2005), anxiety is always expressed within a context with cultural norms being part of that context. Western researchers (Horwitz et al., 1986; Zaripova et al., 2023) have found that FLA manifests itself primarily in listening and speaking activities in a foreign language.

In Russia, the system of education itself affects learners and their anxiety. According to Ter-Minasova (2005), it is focused more on perfectionism and is theoretically-oriented regardless of learners’ practical needs and development of communicative skills. Russian researchers consider it to be very demanding (Khudobina et al., 2019; Rasskazova et al., 2017; Stakanova, 2018). Stakanova (2018, pp. 29-30) claims that teachers are like ‘error hunters’, so they involuntarily discourage students, since the latter are afraid of speaking, experimenting, and making mistakes. Thus, students have higher anxiety when speaking and listening (Iksanova et al., 2021; Khudobina et al., 2019; Shepelenko, 2017). The primary anxiety-triggers are spontaneous discourse, fear of negative assessment from the teacher and peers, dull educational process including memorizing vocabulary and grammar (Kaskevich, 2012). Besides, any previous negative experience of language

learning in childhood can affect further mastering of FL in adolescence and adult life (Kazennaya, 2020; Khodyakov, 2013; Shchaveleva, Naumenko, 2022).

The above-mentioned factors signify that FLA in universities around the globe is a topical issue; therefore, the authors suggest developing learner autonomy as one of the possible ways to diminish anxiety.

There are different opinions on learner autonomy among researchers (Bekbayeva et al., 2022; Korotaeva, Kapustina, 2022; Koryakovceva, 2001). We define learner autonomy as “an ability of an individual to consciously carry out his educational activities aimed at creating a personally significant educational product, self-reflex and adequately evaluate this product, accumulate positive experience, interact constructively and creatively with the educational environment and members of educational activities, taking responsibility for the process and product of this activity” (Chernova, 2018: 28).

The authors identified the following components in the structure of learner autonomy: motivational, personal and competence-based, and classified skills necessary for would-be translators in VOLL to develop their autonomy into the following groups: 1) general skills (goal-setting, planning, self-correction, self-control, an ability of self-forming transfer skills, use technical learning aids, reference and information search); 2) special skills (communicative skills by types of speech activity, characterizing the level of proficiency in a foreign language as a means of communication); 3) intellectual skills (an ability to compare, generalize, analyze and systematize information, argue, draw conclusions, establish cause-and-effect relationships, classify, draw analogies, logically comprehend the material, highlighting the main idea); 4) psychological-characterological skills (persistence, attention, good memory, high performance, perception, will, reflection, an ability to conduct self-monitoring and introspection, to give an adequate self-assessment of one's activities, to be aware of one's motives) (Chernova, Litvinov, 2022: 370). General skills play a major role in the development of learner autonomy of would-be translators in VOLL.

3. Purpose of the study

This study focuses on investigating the factors which triggered FLA among students of various age and gender groups and identifying the ways to diminish it, taking into account the specific traits of the Russian system of education. Besides, it is necessary to analyze which components of learner autonomy were developed better than the others and to make use of them for the purpose of diminishing FLA.

Taking into account the fact that in the present research the authors conduct interdisciplinary studies, the research questions are as follows:

1. What factors triggered FLA among students of different gender and age?
2. Which more developed components of learner autonomy in students may contribute to diminishing their FLA?
3. What are the ways to reduce FLA in the Russian system of education?

4. Method

In the present research, the authors used both theoretical (analysis, synthesis, generalization, putting forward hypotheses), and empirical (questionnaires, tests) methods. Also the authors used an experimental method of assigning students as tutors to a weaker group and then exchanging their roles.

To determine the students' progress in mastering the selected grammar points, the authors used a 100-point test designed according to the Program of translator in VOLL.

4.1. Participants

The research was conducted during the spring semester 2023-2024 academic year with 117 students (86 (73.5 %) were female, and 31 (26.5 %) were male) from Peoples' Friendship University of Russia named after Patrice Lumumba (RUDN University), Academy of Engineering (Departments of Mechanics and Mechatronics, Innovative Management in Industries, Civil Engineering, Architecture, Machine Building, Transport, Oil and Gas Engineering) and Economics faculty.

Nowadays STEM education in Russia is rather popular with women, there are some specialties, like architecture, where female students predominate.

4.2. Research tools

The researchers used the following methods: the FLCAS, a questionnaire consisting of open-ended and closed-ended questions, and Entry and Final tests composed according to the Program of translator in VOLL, methodologies by Rokeach (2009) and Kozlov et al. (2002) as data collection tools. The questionnaire, created on the basis of specialized literature and the authors' own experience, was primarily examined by experts (two linguists and two psychologists). The authors made adjustments according to their recommendations. As far as the FLCAS is concerned, FLA was subdivided into barriers in interpersonal communication (questions 1, 9, 14, 18, 24, 27, 28, 32); negative assessment (questions 3, 7, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 31, 33); fear of tests (questions 2, 8, 10, 19, 21); psychological problems during the lesson (questions 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 16, 17, 22, 26, 29, 30).

4.3. Procedure

Firstly, researchers selected grammar points to be studied during the spring semester, according to the Program of translator in VOLL.

All participating students answered questions in the Entry test to check their background knowledge and in the FLCAS questionnaire (1 week).

During the semester (16 weeks) each student who mastered some grammar point according to the Program, was assigned to be a tutor to a group of students who were weak in this material. The student-tutor prepared theoretical material and some examples and reported at the lesson. The class translated his/her examples from Russian into English. If there were any mistakes, the student-tutor corrected them and explained why it was a mistake. After that he/she composed ten sentences on this grammar material and set an assignment to his/her students to translate them from Russian into English at home. The students translated the sentences and sent them back to the student-tutor to be checked. If a student made any mistakes, then the tutor gave him/her another ten sentences to be translated. The cycle repeated until he/she made no errors. Thus, at the end of the term all students tried themselves in the role of the tutor, exchanging it with student's role.

Finally, all participants took the Final test and again answered the FLCAS questionnaire and the questionnaire designed by the researchers (1 week).

The questionnaire designed by the researchers:

Sex (male, female)

Year of study (1, 2, 3, 4)

- 1) What is your purpose of studying a foreign language? (work, travel, education abroad, other)?
- 2) What was your level of English when you entered the university? (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2)
- 3) What is your level of English now? (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2)
- 4) What level would you like to acquire when you graduate?
- 5) Are you satisfied with your progress in learning a foreign language? (Yes/No)
- 6) What prevents you from achieving your goal?
- 7) What do you like most of all when learning a foreign language?
- 8) What activities at the lesson stimulate your interest to learning a foreign language?
- 9) What should be improved/changed at the lessons of foreign language?
- 10) Describe your feelings when you played a role of a foreign language teacher.

4.4. Data collection and analysis

The data collection was conducted by foreign language professors in their classrooms with the students' consent to be research participants.

For data analysis, the authors used software Statistica Professional 10.0 developed by StatSoft, a useful tool for statistical analysis that helps to mine, control, analyze and visualize data with the help of statistical methods. To calculate the level of FLA the researchers made use of the methodology, proposed by Mihaljević Djigunović (Mihaljević Djigunović, 2002).

The present paper is the first stage of a wider research into efficiency of the proposed model involving students-tutors. At the next stage the authors plan to further study factors of diminishing anxiety and checking correlation between different parameters, e.g., motivation of learning a foreign language, intensity of the need to communicate, teacher's behaviour, etc. The engagement of students-tutors as an effective method will be used in experimental groups to be compared with control groups who are not involved in the model.

The results obtained are the initial step of more extensive work to be continued since it is rather topical for the Russian system of education and need to be studied and analyzed in detail.

5. Results

5.1. Factors triggering FLA among students of different gender and age

At the beginning and at the end of the term, after analyzing students' answers to the FLCAS and the questionnaire, as well as the results of the Entry and Final tests, with regard to the first research question, the authors found out the following:

- a) Female students experience more anxiety than their male counterparts (Table 1).

Table 1. The level of FLA depending on the gender

The number of respondents	Gender	Sampling mean (beginning of the term)	Cronbach's alpha (beginning of the term)	Sampling mean (end of the term)	Cronbach's alpha (end of the term)
86	F	97.131	0.824	90.570	0.836
31	M	87.386	0.876	82.000	0.725

b) As for the year of study, fourth-year students experience the highest level of anxiety, which can be explained by a higher responsibility since they took their state exams and defended their diploma papers to get a Bachelor's degree in late spring and early summer. First-year students rank the second at the beginning of the semester because they get into new environment and have to get used and adapt to new people, new circumstances, new requirements and demands (Table 2).

Table 2. The level of FLA depending on the year of study

The number of respondents	Year of study	FLA Total (M ± SD) (beginning of the term)	Sampling mean (beginning of the term)	Cronbach's alpha (beginning of the term)	FLA Total (M ± SD) (end of the term)	Sampling mean (end of the term)	Cronbach's alpha (end of the term)
18	1	86.94 ± 16.43	93.957	0.828	86.94 ± 16.43	86.440	0.841
58	2	88.29 ± 14.91	91.154	0.837	89.32 ± 15.16	88.293	0.814
26	3	86.80 ± 15.59	88.476	0.867	89.14 ± 12.97	86.385	0.851
15	4	93.27 ± 15.58	95.445	0.909	99.25 ± 18.89	93.267	0.814

c) As far as the aspects of FLA are concerned, first, second and third-year students are more concerned about interpersonal communication, whereas fourth-year students have more problems with fear of tests and negative assessment (Tables 3-4).

Table 3. Aspects of FLA depending on the year of study

Year of study	Aspects of FLA	Sampling mean (beginning of the term)	Sampling mean (end of the term)
1	Fear of interpersonal communication	30.783	29.384
	Fear of negative assessment	24.348	22.111
	Fear of tests	23.261	21.389
	Psychological problems during the lesson	14.304	14.056
2	Fear of interpersonal communication	31.000	30.276
	Fear of negative assessment	23.154	22.586
	Fear of tests	22.346	21.086
	Psychological problems during the lesson	14.654	14.345

Year of study	Aspects of FLA	Sampling mean (beginning of the term)	Sampling mean (end of the term)
3	Fear of interpersonal communication	29.000	28.731
	Fear of negative assessment	22.952	22.615
	Fear of tests	22.333	21.346
	Psychological problems during the lesson	14.191	13.692
4	Fear of interpersonal communication	23.556	22.600
	Fear of negative assessment	24.667	24.466
	Fear of tests	32.778	31.933
	Psychological problems during the lesson	14.444	14.267

Table 4. Aspects of Foreign Language Anxiety Depending on the Year of Study (Mean \pm SD)

Year of study	Period	Interpersonal Communication (M \pm SD)	Negative Assessment (M \pm SD)	Test Anxiety (M \pm SD)	Psychological Problems During the Lesson (M \pm SD)
1	beginning of the term	23.11 \pm 3.14	22.11 \pm 7.75	14.06 \pm 2.24	27.67 \pm 5.77
	end of the term	23.11 \pm 3.14	22.11 \pm 7.75	14.06 \pm 2.24	27.67 \pm 5.77
2	beginning of the term	22.76 \pm 2.53	22.59 \pm 8.13	14.34 \pm 2.24	28.60 \pm 5.29
	end of the term	22.88 \pm 2.54	23.04 \pm 8.41	14.36 \pm 2.25	29.04 \pm 5.39
3	beginning of the term	22.56 \pm 3.39	22.72 \pm 8.29	13.88 \pm 2.03	27.64 \pm 5.92
	end of the term	23.14 \pm 4.85	23.43 \pm 8.04	13.86 \pm 1.86	28.71 \pm 5.50
4	beginning of the term	23.33 \pm 2.23	24.47 \pm 8.70	14.27 \pm 2.19	31.20 \pm 5.88
	end of the term	24.00 \pm 2.33	27.13 \pm 10.74	15.13 \pm 1.96	33.00 \pm 7.09

The table presents mean scores and standard deviations for each FLA aspect across different years of study at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The inclusion of standard deviations allows for the assessment of within-group variability and provides a more comprehensive description of the distribution of anxiety levels among students.

d) Most participating students have medium level of FLA (Tables 5-7).

The table presents mean scores and standard deviations for each FLA aspect across different years of study at the beginning and at the end of the semester. The inclusion of standard deviations allows for the assessment of within-group variability and provides a more comprehensive description of the distribution of anxiety levels among students.

Table 5. Overall level of FLA (the number of participants)

low		medium		high	
Beginning of the term	End of the term	Beginning of the term	End of the term	Beginning of the term	End of the term
14.53 %	19.67 %	76.92 %	74.35 %	8.55 %	5.98 %

Table 6. Level of FLA depending on the gender (the number of participants)

Gender	low		medium		high	
	Beginning of the term	End of the term	Beginning of the term	End of the term	Beginning of the term	End of the term
M	22.58 %	32.25 %	70.97 %	64.52 %	6.45 %	3.23 %
F	11.63 %	15.12 %	79.07 %	77.90 %	9.30 %	6.98 %

Table 7. Level of FLA depending of the year of study (the number of participants)

Year of study	low		medium		high	
	Beginning of the term	End of the term	Beginning of the term	End of the term	Beginning of the term	End of the term
1	11.11 %	22.22 %	77.78 %	72.22 %	11.11 %	5.56 %
2	13.79 %	18.97 %	77.59 %	74.13 %	8.62 %	6.90 %
3	19.23 %	23.08 %	73.08 %	73.07 %	7.69 %	3.85 %
4	13.33 %	13.33 %	73.34 %	80.00 %	13.33 %	6.67 %

The reliability of the FLCAS was checked by calculating Cronbach's alpha; the reliability coefficient for this instrument is 0.855 for the beginning of the semester and 0.821 for the end.

5.2. Components of learner autonomy contributing to diminishing students' FLA

As far as the second research question is concerned, analysis of the results of the Final test, as well as the answers to the FLCAS and the questionnaire designed by the researchers at the end of the term have demonstrated that personal and competence-based components of learner autonomy primarily contribute to lower FLA. Students, being 'tutors' for their groupmates and exchanging their roles, become more responsible, motivated and proficient in the foreign language, develop communicative and information search skills, creativity; an ability to systemize and analyze information. All this leads to diminishing FLA.

a) The results of the Final test demonstrate that all participating students have mastered the studied material and got positive results (Table 7).

Table 7. Results of the Final test at the end of the term (the number of participants and their grades)

Year of study	A	B	C	D	E	FX	F
1	16.67 %	38.89 %	22.22 %	16.67 %	5.55 %	0 %	0 %
2	13.79 %	18.97 %	37.93 %	20.69 %	8.62 %	0 %	0 %
3	15.39 %	19.23 %	26.92 %	23.08 %	15.38 %	0 %	0 %
4	13.33 %	53.33 %	33.34 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

b) As far the questionnaire is concerned, most respondents learn English to find a better job (85.47 %), to continue their education in Russia or abroad (76.92 %); to travel (66.67 %); to communicate with native speakers and people who do not know Russian (41.03 %); to watch films, read books, newspapers and manuals in the original (29.91 %). Some students like learning a language for self-development and self-improvement, they tend to life-long learning (15.38 %). While others would like to move abroad (2.56 %). About 20 % of the respondents gave extended answers, which shows their interest to the subject under discussion.

Most students enrolled at the university with B1 level (35.19%), followed by A2 (24.07%), B2 (22.22 %), C1(9.29 %), A1(9.23 %). Currently, most of the respondents assess their level as B2 (43.21 %), followed by B1 (25.93%), A2 (19.75%), C1 (11.11 %). As for graduation, most students expect to master the language at C1 (54.32 %), B2 (23.46 %), and C2 (22.22 %). The Program of translator in VOLL envisages C1 level at graduation.

The majority of students (53.09 %) are satisfied with their progress in learning a foreign language. Those students who are not quite satisfied with their progress consider lack of time, practice, motivation or discipline; home assignment (too complicated, too easy, too much);

misunderstanding with the teacher; fast pace; absence of the final goal and no opportunity of taking international exams in Russia as main barriers to mastering a language.

When answering the question about students' likes in learning a foreign language at the university, the answers differed markedly, including discussions of interesting topics, regular classes, teacher's approach and methods, groupmates, vocational themes, atmosphere at the lessons, creative activities, native speakers, writing essays, etc. Among stimulating activities, the respondents singled out talks, dialogues, debates, discussions; project work; games; watching video and short films; competitions, quizzes; preparing reports and teachers' attitude.

Students put forward the following proposals to improve the lessons and stimulate their motivation: include more interactive activities, more lessons with native speakers, a wider use of visual aids, more case studies to discuss. Also, they expect a more individual approach from their teachers, to take part in speaking clubs, to learn informal English and slang. And they would welcome an opportunity to have more lessons of a foreign language in the curriculum.

The respondents shared their feelings and emotions while being tutors to the groupmates:

"Every time I am anxious being a teacher, since I am aware that I can make a mistake. But then I tell myself that I am not a robot, but a human being. All human beings make mistakes".

"It was pretty complicated, but interesting".

"It was very interesting to be a person who knows more than others".

"I am a bit worried, but at the same time happy if I managed to explain the material so that my students understand it".

"I feel anxiety and awe at the same time".

"I adore English. And the most rewarding part in being a teacher is when you see the result of your work – when your students become motivated and interested in learning a language and their eyes light up".

"The most difficult for me was to be patient when my students did not understand or made mistakes. I do not know how our teachers can be that patient with students."

"On the one hand, I was self-confident because I knew more than others, on the other – I felt anxious to make everything understandable and interesting".

"I felt high responsibility for my students. My task was to explain the material in such a manner so that they could understand it and use in practice without any mistakes".

"I wondered if my students would be able to understand my explanation, and when I saw they did, I felt delighted that I can give somebody new knowledge".

As can be seen from the information above, the students-tutors were anxious to do their best, to share their knowledge, and felt responsible for others.

5.3. Ways to reduce FLA in the Russian system of education

The analysis of the third research question has indicated that FLA is an inevitable barrier when learning foreign languages (Antineskul, Sheveleva, 2017; Aydin, 2018; Kozubovskaya, Sentebova, 2015). Some strategies to bring the barrier down have been described in literature (Iksanova et al., 2021; Mouhoubi-Messadh, Khaldi, 2022; Skelly, Estrada-Chichon, 2021).

When developing an approach to reduce FLA in Russia, it is necessary to bear in mind that it can be done by overcoming barriers and stereotypes, sometimes negative attitude towards learning a foreign language, often caused by previous experience (Anosova, Sorokoumova, 2022; Chen, 2023; Sanakoeva, 2022); making educational process more diverse and creative, being the 21st century professor and playing the roles relevant to today's teaching (Lueke, Lueke, 2019; Neerukonda, 2020; Serdyuk et al., 2020), using modern ICT, LMSs and VR technologies, mobile learning, an environment students are familiar with and in which they feel more self-confident; motivating students by creating a more friendly and less tense atmosphere at the lesson. In the present paper, the authors made a successful attempt to diminish FLA by helping students develop learner autonomy, scaffolding them at an initial stage, and later expressing trust in their abilities of self-monitoring, self-control, and self-correction.

6. Discussion

In the present study, several research questions have been considered. Firstly, the authors made an attempt to identify factors triggering FLA among students of different gender and age. The research findings revealed that female students were more anxious than male students; graduate students had the highest level of anxiety, followed by first-year students. As for the fourth-year students, they had to focus on their English diploma as well as engineering diploma

and state exams in both English and major subjects. All these factors resulted in a high level of stress and anxiety, lack of time, and sometimes sleep deprivation. Taking into account the fact that it was their first degree, it was a novel experience for the students and rather frustrating. As far as first-year students are concerned, university environment including new subjects, groupmates, professors, exams, demands and discipline, was a barrier to overcome, circumstances to get accustomed to, which, in turn, led to more anxiety. As regard to the aspects of FLA, younger students demonstrated fear of interpersonal communication whereas senior students were more concerned about tests and negative assessment.

These findings have been partly evidenced by those reported by Kalganova and Mardanshina (2015) and Fedorovsky and Atamanova (2023) with female students being more anxious than their male groupmates. Though the outcomes of this study do not go along with that of Kalganova and Mardanshina in the level of anxiety of different age groups and aspects of FLA. In their research first-year students were the most anxious, with fifth-year students being the least; first and second-year students were more concerned about tests while fifth-year students had more problems with interpersonal communication.

The analysis of the second research question has indicated that personal and competence-based components of learner autonomy primarily contribute to lower FLA.

Personal component of learner autonomy means adequate self-esteem, qualities and habits that contribute to raising efficiency of independent activities (hard work, time-management), psychic qualities of personality (memory, attention span) necessary for autonomous work. Initial requirements for would-be translators in VOLL include personal qualities (high responsibility, resilience, ability for self-criticism, emotional stability), psychocognitive (good memory, creativity, ability to concentrate, logic, intuition). Competence-based component includes knowledge, abilities and skills of goal-setting, planning, work with different sources of information, self-control, self-analysis and self-correctness, etc. (Chernova, 2018).

While playing a tutor's role, students developed their general skills (as well as special ones) of planning, self-correction, self-control; an ability to use reference and information search, visual aids; design schemes, graphs, and mind maps to explain their material; check their students' understanding, and speculate. According to Koryakovceva (2001), an autonomous learner is able to select the necessary means to solve the task, choose required strategies and approaches; control the outcome; evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the strategies and approaches used; self-regulate the results of the task.

The findings related to the third research question suggest that developing learner autonomy may contribute to reducing the level of foreign language anxiety. Providing initial guidance and consultation, fostering students' confidence, and gradually supporting them in overcoming linguistic barriers appear to be associated with improved emotional comfort and lower anxiety levels. It is illustrated by the results of the Final test, answers to the FLCAS and the questionnaire designed by the researchers.

The study has several limitations. The sample was gender-imbalanced and consisted of students from specific faculties of a single university, which limits the generalizability of the findings, and the quasi-experimental design without a control group makes it difficult to attribute the observed reduction in foreign language anxiety exclusively to the intervention. Future research should address these limitations by including control groups and applying inferential statistical methods, such as paired-samples t-tests or ANOVA, to determine whether the observed changes are statistically significant.

The present study provides the potential for future research in diminishing FLA by developing learner autonomy. Further studies using delayed post-tests seem necessary to ensure that the efficiency of the proposed technology promotes both short-term and long-term mastering of English by taking away obstacles to a better command of the language in the form of FLA.

7. Conclusion

The present research has studied factors that can trigger FLA among students of different age and gender groups under the Program of translator in VOLL in Russia. The key ones are as follows: interpersonal communication among younger students and negative assessment and fear of tests in case of undergraduates.

Besides, the authors identified components of learner autonomy that can help diminish FLA, with the most essential being personal and competence-based ones. During the study, participants

played the roles of tutors and students taking them in turn, being 'experts' in some particular area of grammar. This technology helped them take more responsibility, increase their motivation and knowledge of English, feel more confident communicating with peers and the teacher, presenting in the class in front of the audience, feel less nervous during the tests, and, ultimately, decreased their FLA.

It should be noted that the issue of FLA is a complex one and requires further research overall and in respect to the Russian system of education.

7. Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

8. Author contributions

OCh developed the concept, designed the methodology, collected and analyzed the data. AL prepared the original draft of the manuscript. TE provided supervision, reviewed and edited the manuscript. VS validated the findings and managed the project.

8. Funding

This paper has been supported by the RUDN University Strategic Academic Leadership Program.

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