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## **EXPLORING ANXIETY, WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AMONG KAZAKHSTANI EFL LEARNERS**

*This study aims to examine Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) and Willingness to Communicate (WTC) among Kazakhstani undergraduate EFL learners majoring in English, taking into account their self-rated English proficiency. Both FLCA and WTC are crucial affective factors that influence the effectiveness of foreign language acquisition. Although English is widely regarded as a global language and many students choose it as a pathway toward their future careers, relatively few studies have focused on these phenomena among English majors in Kazakhstan.*

*To address this gap, the study employed a mixed-methods approach, including questionnaires administered to 72 participants and semi-structured interviews with 11 individuals. Quantitative analyses revealed significant negative correlations between FLCA and WTC ( $r = -.533$ ,  $p < .01$ ) as well as between FLCA and proficiency ( $r = -.477$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Qualitative thematic analysis identified five key sources of anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, fear of public speaking, and the negative emotional influence of teachers.*

*These findings have important theoretical and pedagogical implications. Theoretically, the study contributes to the broader understanding of affective variables in second language acquisition (SLA) by providing empirical evidence on how FLCA and WTC interact within the Kazakhstani EFL context. Practically, the findings suggest that supportive teaching environments can help alleviate anxiety and enhance*

*learners' willingness to communicate and underscores the importance of addressing FLCA through positive classroom dynamics and targeted interventions. Future research should consider additional factors, such as motivation, cultural factors, and out-of-classroom experiences in relation to foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) and willingness to communicate (WTC). Investigating these factors in other contexts, such as among learners of Kazakh and Russian, and speakers of minority languages in Kazakhstan, could provide valuable insights.*

*Keywords: language anxiety, willingness to communicate, language proficiency, EFL learners, affective factors, fear of public speaking, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety.*

## **Introduction**

Achieving a high level of English competence is a challenging goal for many Kazakhstani students, partly because English belongs to a different language family than their native languages. Although students in Kazakhstan study English from primary school through undergraduate education – and English proficiency is required for admission to graduate programs – they often encounter difficulties in language learning. Anxiety is one of the major impediments hindering success in the foreign language classroom [1]. This study explores the reasons for classroom anxiety and examines its relationship with students' willingness to communicate (WTC) and their self-rated English language proficiency.

Foreign language acquisition is a complex process that can be significantly undermined by Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), which refers to the apprehension and negative emotional reactions experienced when using or learning a second or foreign language [2]. WTC is defined as a learner's intention to engage in communication with a specific person using a second or foreign language and is considered "the most immediate determinant of L2 use" [3, p. 191]. It was found that learners with high scores on the WTC scale actively participate in classroom interactions, whereas those with low scores participate less, therefore, [4] regard WTC as one of the crucial goals of language teaching, as the willingness to communicate reflects a learner's competence and signals active classroom participation.

While numerous studies have examined FLCA and WTC internationally [3; 5], few have focused on the Kazakhstani context [6; 7]. Suleimenova [7] found that a majority of Kazakhstani students experience severe anxiety during speaking activities, and the educational setting does not sufficiently promote communicative skills. Piniel, Khudiyeva, and Gafiatulina [6] compared language learning profiles of Kazakhstani and Hungarian students, including FLA, self-efficacy, and

motivation. However, the concept of WTC and its relationship with FLCA and language proficiency have not been studied in Kazakhstan. This study aims to fill this gap by examining FLCA, WTC, and self-rated language proficiency among English majors, whose proficiency levels are expected to increase over time due to their specialized curriculum.

Language learners face various cognitive challenges during the learning process. Because questionnaires like the FLCAS and WTCS may not capture all intrinsic and extrinsic affective variables, combining quantitative approaches with qualitative interviews is important. In this study we will use a mixed methods design to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the causes of FLCA among EFL learners? (2) Is there a significant relationship between EFL learners' FLCA and WTC? (3) Is there a significant relationship between EFL learners' FLCA and language proficiency?

Therefore, this study examines the relationship between FLCA, WTC, and language proficiency among English majors in Kazakhstan, aiming to contribute to the existing literature by addressing gaps in previous research.

This study is based on the theoretical framework of individual differences in second language acquisition. Individual differences significantly impact second language (L2) acquisition, influencing learning outcomes and proficiency levels. These differences encompass cognitive factors—such as language aptitude, intelligence, and learning strategies—and affective factors, including emotions like anxiety, motivation, and attitudes [8].

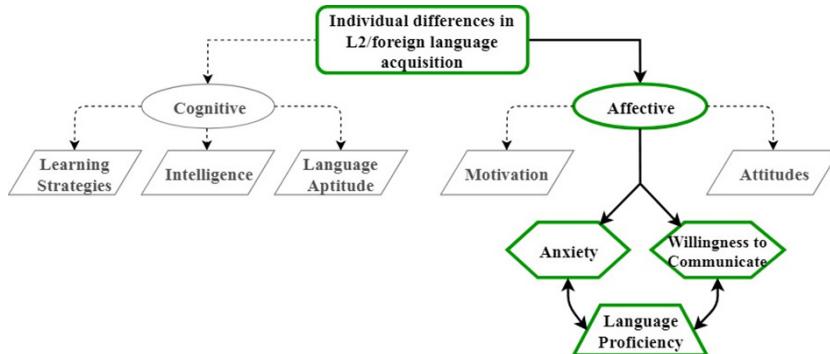


Figure 1 – Individual differences in L2/foreign language acquisition framework.

Compiled by the author from Gardner and Clement [8] and MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels [4]

Language anxiety is recognized as the strongest emotional factor influencing language learning, and it is a central affective factor in L2 acquisition, closely related to constructs like WTC and language proficiency [1]. In language learning, anxiety can become pervasive if negative experiences are repeated, as it is a learned emotional response [2]. Anxiety in language learning is a situation-specific phenomenon measurable among foreign language learners in classroom settings. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [1] identify three primary components of FLCA that have been further documented across various educational contexts [9; 5]: (1) Communication Apprehension: Shyness or fear hindering communication, often accompanied by anxiety. (2) Fear of Negative Evaluation: Concern about being judged unfavorably by others. (3) Test Anxiety: Worry about academic evaluations and assessments.

While these three factors provide a solid foundation for understanding anxiety-related behaviors, we propose to expand this framework by incorporating two additional variables: fear of public speaking and teachers' influence on anxiety. These additional factors allow us to address specific academic contexts where public presentations and teachers' roles significantly impact students' anxiety levels.

Fear of public speaking is another significant source of anxiety in language classrooms since students often experience heightened anxiety during presentations or when required to speak individually in front of peers [10]. While Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [1] consider fear of public speaking a facet of communication apprehension, some studies suggest it may be a distinct source of anxiety. Learners may feel comfortable in group work but become anxious when speaking publicly, indicating that fear of public speaking can be independent of general communication apprehension [10]. Similarly, the teacher's attitude and behavior significantly impact students' anxiety levels. A supportive and positive classroom environment can reduce anxiety, whereas judgmental teaching attitudes and unsympathetic personalities can increase it [9]. Positive teacher-student relationships characterized by openness, trust, and interest in students' ideas promote a relaxed learning atmosphere conducive to language acquisition [9].

Another vital factor influencing individual differences in L2 acquisition is WTC. Defined as «the intention to initiate communication, given a choice» [4, p. 538], WTC is both an influential factor in language learning and an ultimate goal of L2 education. It explains why some individuals are more inclined to communicate than others in identical situations. Anxiety is closely related to WTC. High anxiety levels can diminish self-confidence, leading to lower WTC [4]. Studies have found significant negative correlations between language anxiety and WTC. For example, Yashima [11] reported a strong negative correlation ( $r$

=  $-.68$ ) between communication confidence and WTC among Japanese EFL learners. Similarly, Rastegar and Karami [16] found a negative correlation ( $r = -.36$ ) between FLCA and WTC among Iranian EFL learners. These findings suggest that as anxiety increases, students are less willing to initiate communication in the language classroom. Addressing anxiety can therefore enhance WTC and promote more active participation in language learning activities.

Next, research indicates a reciprocal relationship between language anxiety and language proficiency. Gardner and MacIntyre [2] observed that as language proficiency increases over time, the negative effects of anxiety diminish. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [1] found strong negative correlations between FLCA and final grades in foreign language courses ( $r = -.49$  for Spanish and  $r = -.54$  for French learners), indicating that lower anxiety is associated with higher proficiency. However, the direction of this relationship is complex. Some scholars argue that increased proficiency reduces anxiety [4], while others suggest that reducing anxiety is necessary for proficiency to improve [12]. More specifically, MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels [4] propose a bilateral relationship: high proficiency can boost confidence and reduce anxiety, but high anxiety can impede active practice and hinder proficiency development.

This research investigates the sources of language anxiety among EFL learners – specifically focusing on communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, fear of public speaking, and teachers' influence on anxiety – and examines how these factors relate to learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) and learners self-rated language proficiency. Grounded in the theoretical framework of individual differences in second language acquisition, which highlights the impact of cognitive and affective factors on learning outcomes, the study aims to understand the complex interplay between anxiety, WTC, and proficiency levels. By expanding upon existing models of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), the research seeks to provide deeper insights into how anxiety affects language acquisition and to identify strategies that can mitigate its negative effects on learners' communication willingness and proficiency development.

### **Materials and Methods**

The present study employed a convergent parallel (or concurrent) mixed methods design to collect and combine both quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously, thus compensating for the weaknesses inherent in each approach [17]. Employing both quantitative questionnaires and qualitative interviews allowed for a more in-depth understanding of the multifaceted nature of language anxiety and yielded more reliable results.

This study used nonprobability convenience sampling to recruit 81 English major students from a university in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan, which has a relatively long history of preparing English specialists to meet labor market needs. Since different academic years might bring diverse experiences, such as exposure to various courses and teaching methods, this study included students from all four years to ensure a varied sample that enriches the understanding of the factors contributing to language anxiety. English major students were chosen because they tend to demonstrate more deliberate efforts in language learning, in contrast to students whose qualifications and future careers do not necessarily demand a high command of English. Additionally, many English major students in Kazakhstan pursue careers in English language teaching, which may make them more adept at assessing their own English proficiency. The process of becoming an English teacher involves not only academic study but also practical application through teaching experiences and interactions with diverse language learners. This hands-on engagement allows English majors to develop a heightened awareness of their own language proficiency, as they continually assess their ability to convey complex linguistic concepts and facilitate language learning.

Furthermore, to validate the collected quantitative data, purposeful maximal variation sampling was employed to recruit 11 students from among those who had completed the questionnaire for face-to-face semi-structured open-ended interviews. To fulfill the requirements of maximal variation sampling, we intentionally selected three first-year students, two second-year students, three third-year students, and three fourth-year students to offer diverse perspectives on the issues considered in the study.

Two closed-ended questionnaires, adapted from established scales, were employed to collect quantitative data. The first questionnaire, adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [1], is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), comprising 33 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale. This instrument aims to assess the extent of language anxiety experienced by learners in various foreign language classroom situations, encompassing activities related to speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The second questionnaire is the Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTCS), adapted from MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, and Conrod [18]. It gauges language learners' willingness to communicate across the four language skills during lessons.

Open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data on students' FLCAS and WTCS. The interview questions were predominantly derived from both the FLCAS and WTCS questionnaires, providing additional insights to complement or validate the quantitative data. The interviews were conducted in Kazakh and Russian, depending on participant preferences. They

were conducted immediately after the lesson in which the students were surveyed and lasted approximately 15 minutes each. The paper-based questionnaires were administered to 81 English major undergraduates in the middle of the 2017–2018 academic year. Only 72 responses out of 81 could be used; 9 responses were discarded due to incompleteness.

To analyze the data, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed. The quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed separately, and the results were interpreted to determine whether the findings from these two approaches confirmed or contradicted each other [17]. For the quantitative data analysis, the IBM SPSS Statistics 17.0 software package was employed. The responses from 72 participants out of the initial 81 were entered into the software, excluding 9 students due to incomplete answers. The analysis began with the calculation of data reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. Both FLCA and WTC scales demonstrated a very high level of internal reliability, yielding Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of  $\alpha = .938$  and  $\alpha = .905$ , respectively. The internal consistency reliability for the combined questionnaires was  $\alpha = .795$ , indicating acceptable credibility. As the collected data satisfied the criteria for Pearson's correlation, this analysis method was chosen to identify the direction, strength, and significance of the relationships between variables. Consequently, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to examine how FLCA, WTC, and language proficiency are interconnected.

The qualitative interview data were interpreted through thematic analysis. Key themes were identified during the coding process. Specifically, we focused on participants' responses that detailed their reasons for classroom anxiety. Subsequently, the identified sources of anxiety were categorized, presented, and discussed in the following chapters. We identified five major factors that triggered anxiety among the participants.

### **Results and Discussion**

Students in the questionnaire surveys demonstrated a moderate level of FLCA. Descriptive statistics for the FLCAS indicated a mean score of  $M = 88.92$  (out of 165) with a standard deviation of  $\sigma = 21.73$ . Therefore, 95 % of participants scored within two standard deviations of the mean, ranging from approximately 45.46 to 110.65.

Our findings align with Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's [1] conceptualization of foreign language anxiety, as participants in our study reported experiencing communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Additionally, the interviews revealed that a negative learning atmosphere created by the teacher and fear of public speaking contributed to FLCA manifestation.

The FLCAS questionnaire identified that EFL learners experience communication apprehension stemming from the fear of not understanding every word the teacher says. Specifically, 38.9 % (n = 28 out of 72) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement «It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English», and 37.5 % (n = 27) with «I get nervous when I don't understand every word an English teacher says». This indicates that more than a quarter of the students feel anxious in their English classes due to communication apprehension. Qualitative data supported these findings as some students reported feeling anxious when the teacher's speech includes unfamiliar or difficult words. For instance, Student 9 explained:

Sometimes it happens [anxiety takes place]. For example, when a teacher speaks English, and I understand some of his words, but I still don't understand many other words. Then I try to ask the teacher again, or I can ask my peers what task was given and what to do. (Student 9).

Students also experience language anxiety due to the fear of being perceived as less knowledgeable than their classmates. This cause of anxiety was identified through the following questionnaire items, with students agreeing or strongly agreeing: «I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am» (45.8 %, n = 33); «I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do» (37.5 %, n = 27); «English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind» (26.4 %, n = 19); «It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class» (32 %, n = 23); «I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English» (18.1 %, n = 13).

Approximately 30–45 % of participants worry about being negatively perceived by their peers, comparing their own proficiency, participation, and achievements with those of their classmates.

Several students expressed anxiety about what others might think of them, fearing they may appear less competent. Student 4 explained:

Yes, in general, I have that [worry about others' opinions] since childhood. I have always been listening to the opinions of people and wondering what people may think of me if I make a mistake or tell them something wrong. I always thought about it. It seems to me a big minus ... Maybe the fact that I think about the opinions of people... it's probably a kind of barrier to learning the language. Perhaps if I had not thought about it, I would have known [the English language] much better now. (Student 4)

She believes that this fear has hindered her from achieving higher language proficiency.

This fear also relates to peers' reactions. One interviewee discussed her feelings about classmates' comments during lessons:

There are moments when I speak, for example, I perform my speech in English and my classmates... I know they are smart and that's how it starts, everyone puts out their comments. So they might point 'you did not say that correctly here or there...'. I would be more comfortable if I am corrected by a teacher, rather than a classmate. Well, because it annoys me for some reason. (Student 5)

She feels more comfortable receiving corrections from the teacher rather than classmates, as peer feedback can increase her anxiety.

The questionnaire items «I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make» and «I don't worry about making mistakes in language class» received 13.9 % (n = 10) agreement and 29.1 % (n = 21) disagreement, respectively. Students who agreed with the former and disagreed with the latter items appear anxious about making mistakes in English lessons.

One student reported her particular concern over mistakes made during oral performance:

Let's say when I answer the teacher and meanwhile all the classmates are listening, and when the teacher makes any kind of... remarks, that seem to be elementary, and I knew about them. So, I understand that I could avoid making these mistakes. And someone may look at me like, 'Hey, why [made such a mistake]? You could have responded in a different [correct] way'. (Student 2)

She emphasizes her concern about the correctness of her speech rather than others' opinions.

Another student expressed feeling constantly tested by the teacher and worrying about performing successfully to receive a high grade:

I'm worried because I try to remember everything that I know. And this, in turn, affects me since I might feel tense. And at that moment I'm thinking about not what I'm going to say, but about what mark I'm going to gain now. And these thoughts are really confusing. (Student 10)

She struggles to think constructively during lessons due to worries about potential grades.

Three out of eleven interviewed students reported feeling anxious about speaking in front of others. They explained that presenting information or answering questions in the presence of classmates can trigger nervousness:

But particularly in terms of the classes, only during an oral speech. It [anxiety] appears when for example I have to perform a presentation. That's the only case when I feel nervousness. (Student 1)

When you [I] have to speak in front of the public. A group work is much more comfortable. I can also work individually, but in front of the public, yes, I am anxious. (Student 4)

Well, yes, when you [I] have to, for example, to say something without having prepared for this beforehand. Speaking in front of the audience. (Student 6)

The act of public speaking itself is a source of anxiety for these students.

Apart from individual differences, a teacher's attitude can significantly affect the degree of language anxiety. Students emphasized that the teacher's demeanor influences their emotional state:

I like any [teaching] method. The main thing is whether the teacher himself is interesting to me. Whether he is interested in us [students], in the lesson itself. (Student 2)

It [anxiety] depends on the mood of the teacher rather than a teaching method used. But in general, I feel quite confident. (Student 11)

Not at the moment. But in general yes, I experienced it [language anxiety]. It was depending on the teacher. Our current teacher knows how to ingratiate herself to us. Well, she wins us over, and we may behave in the more liberated way. (Student 4)

I don't know, she does not react in that way when I make a mistake... Well, if you make mistakes in your speech... other teachers... let's say might look at you differently. But she... She will not look at you with a scorn. And on the contrary, she may even laugh with you. She's a person who praises people. Let me put it in this way... When you do something, she can find the pluses in it... and in a person. (Student 4)

I think that ideally, a teacher should be like ours – [name hidden]. I do not know if you know her or not ... She jokes with us. She uses her life examples. She makes us feel on equal terms with her. Well, she rather feels herself on equal terms with us. And there is no such a barrier that she is an adult and everything should be serious. I don't know, we are joking with her and having fun, and apparently, I've got a confidence in the lessons particularly due to this. Well... And it's easier for me. We have another teacher... For example, there is a teacher of German. That teacher really makes me feel anxious. (Student 5)

These excerpts illustrate that a supportive and positive teacher-student relationship can reduce FLCA, while negative reactions and criticism can increase it.

The relationship between FLCA and WTC was calculated using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. The analysis revealed a significant negative correlation between FLCA and WTC ( $r = -.533$ ,  $p < .01$ ), indicating that higher levels of language anxiety are associated with lower willingness to communicate (and vice versa), which represents a large effect size as given in the following table.

Table 1 – Correlation Matrix of the FLCAS and WTCS

		FLCA	WTC
FLCA	Pearson Correlation	1	-.533**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	72	72
WTC	Pearson Correlation	-.533**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	72	72

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Qualitative data aligned with these findings. Many students reported increased willingness to participate in English lessons as their language anxiety decreased. For example, Student 4 reflected:

For example, during the first two courses, English for me was... how to say... it was really disturbing me. Because I was afraid... Well, you know, I thought there is always someone who knows English better than me. [Was afraid] That I will have gaffes somewhere. But now, conversely, I'm going to the English lessons with pleasure... yes. I even like it. I feel more comfortable [during the lessons]. (Student 4)

She associated past language anxiety with fear of negative evaluation and mistakes. Over time, as her anxiety decreased, her willingness to participate increased. Similarly, Student 1 described how language anxiety affected his willingness to communicate:

... At the beginning. At the very beginning, we all had a language barrier. And even if you know something, let's say basics, you do not want to talk. Because you know... who cares about my basics? What can I tell them?! (Student 1)

He linked communication apprehension with a lack of willingness to communicate due to limited language proficiency.

In terms of the relationship between students' FLCA and their English proficiency, FLCA scores decreased as proficiency levels increased: elementary M = 126.00, pre-intermediate M = 107.50, intermediate M = 84.55, upper-intermediate: M = 80.90, advanced M = 67.00.

Pearson's correlation indicated a significant negative relationship between FLCA and self-rated language proficiency ( $r = -.477$ ,  $p < .01$ ) as depicted below, suggesting that students with higher language proficiency experience lower FLCA.

Table 2 – Correlation Matrix of the FLCAS and Self-Rated Language Proficiency

		FLCA	Self-rated language proficiency
FLCA	Pearson Correlation	1	-.477**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	72	72
Self-rated language proficiency	Pearson Correlation	-.477**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	72	72

\*\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Interview participants echoed these findings. Students narrated how improving language proficiency reduced their anxiety. Student 1 stated:

But honestly, I can say that I'm... Well... I cannot feel this feeling when the language [English] has improved. I can only feel it only when I use the language itself. For example, when I speak with a foreigner. I can understand that I can speak well. But in exams, it's just a requirement. I need to learn this and I told you this. Of course, a confidence is... Well, if you know the language well, then it [confidence] comes to you. A confidence. Personally, I feel like this. (Student 1)

He feels more confident and less anxious when his language proficiency improves through actual use.

Student 2 added:

Undoubtedly. This happens. Because each time there is a new material – it is interesting, somewhat complicated and at the same time, it is a great pleasure when you study... something new and at the same time not familiar to you. It even gives [me] sort of confidence, really. You are satisfied, so to speak. Because you feel the work is done, it helps you grow in your level of language skills. (Student 2)

She gains confidence from studying new material, which reduces her anxiety. Several students highlighted the importance of expanding their vocabulary:

Oh sure. Always. Well, not when I start speaking more with someone or studying something, but after reading a few books. Then you start to realize that your speech becomes better and you start to use other words that you didn't know before, and then you already know them. It is good for you to know and use them. (Student 7)

In fact, I have never tried to evaluate my knowledge in the [English] language, but in general, as time goes on, you learn the language better. And in fact, yes, the

confidence appears. Especially when your vocabulary is being replenished. You learn more words and you feel more comfortable when you speak. Something like this. (Student 8)

For example, when I studied at school, we had teachers who spoke Kazakh or Russian only at the lessons. They usually did not speak English or spoke at least sometimes. But now, here all the [English] lessons are taught in English. In the beginning, yes, I did not understand the words. But from time to time, I started to understand these words, and that was the change. By now, I can say that I know and understand better than before. For example now, if I will have to speak with a foreigner in English, I can do that freely. (Student 9)

Conversely, Student 10 reported that poor vocabulary contributes to her anxiety: [Feel anxious] When for example you need to express your opinion. Something about this. Due to the fact that... Once again, the lack of vocabulary and for example, I cannot connect the words. I have some sort of set of certain words that I just usually use, but I cannot properly connect them. Particularly because of this [anxiety takes place]. More precisely because of the fact that my foundation is weak, the knowledge (Student 10). She emphasizes that low language proficiency and limited vocabulary increase her anxiety during English lessons.

The following paragraphs will discuss the interpretation of the results presented above. This study identified five primary factors contributing to foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) among EFL learners: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, fear of public speaking, and teachers' negative emotional influence. These findings are consistent with previous research on language anxiety in second language learners [1; 5]. Communication apprehension arises when students do not fully understand their teacher's speech, leading to fear of ineffective communication. As Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [1] explain, students often believe they must comprehend every word to communicate effectively, and this perceived necessity can provoke anxiety when comprehension is incomplete. The fear of negative evaluation involves concern about being judged unfavorably by peers or instructors. Students may feel that others are more proficient and worry about appearing less knowledgeable, which hinders classroom participation [5]. This anxiety is intensified in competitive environments where students strive not to be perceived as inferior. Test anxiety stems from stress related to constant evaluation and the possibility of making mistakes. Students preoccupied with correctness may experience heightened anxiety, impairing their performance [1]. Negative attitudes from teachers toward errors (negative feedback, highlighting and criticizing learners' errors in their language use) can exacerbate this anxiety, causing students to focus excessively on form over meaning, which may impede language improvement [12]. Conversely,

well-implemented corrective feedback, combined with supportive practices, such as speaking practice, group-work strategies, and consideration of individual learner differences, has been shown to significantly alleviate learners' language anxiety, leading to improved academic performance and attitudes toward learning [13; 14; 15]. The fear of public speaking specifically refers to nervousness when speaking in front of classmates, which can differ from general communication apprehension [10]. While group discussions may be less intimidating, presenting to the entire class can trigger significant anxiety. This fear may be linked to concerns about meeting perceived standards of effective public speaking in a foreign language. Finally, teachers' negative emotional influence significantly affects student anxiety levels. Negative attitudes, behaviors, and a stressful classroom atmosphere created by the teacher can increase anxiety [10]. Participants noted that a teacher's negative emotional state impacts their feelings, especially if such negativity is consistent. Conversely, teachers who foster a supportive and positive learning environment can reduce anxiety, highlighting the crucial role of the teacher in shaping the classroom atmosphere.

A significant negative correlation was found between FLCA and WTC, indicating that higher anxiety levels are associated with lower willingness to communicate. This finding is consistent with previous research [11]. According to MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels' [4] heuristic model, state anxiety can reduce WTC in specific situations. Qualitative data supported this, with students reporting increased WTC as their anxiety decreased over time. Furthermore, the study found a significant negative correlation between FLCA and self-rated language proficiency. Students with higher proficiency experienced lower anxiety, corroborating findings by Gardner and MacIntyre [2]. Participants noted that expanding their vocabulary and improving language skills reduced their anxiety, echoing Lucas, Miraflores, and Go's [9] observation that vocabulary acquisition aids in coping with anxiety. Some students believed that reducing anxiety led to improved proficiency, aligning with Krashen's [12] Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that high anxiety acts as a mental block to language acquisition. Others felt that enhancing proficiency decreased their anxiety, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between the two variables.

### **Conclusion**

This study explored the causes of foreign language classroom anxiety and its relationships with willingness to communicate and language proficiency among Kazakhstani EFL students majoring in English. The key findings are:

Five main factors contribute to FLCA: communication apprehension (anxiety due to incomplete comprehension during communication), fear of negative evaluation (concern about being judged unfavorably by peers or teachers), test

anxiety (stress from constant evaluation and fear of making mistakes), fear of public speaking (nervousness when speaking in front of classmates), and teacher's negative emotional influence (the teacher's negative attitude or behavior increasing student anxiety).

FLCA and WTC: A significant negative relationship exists between FLCA and WTC. Lower anxiety levels are associated with higher willingness to communicate.

FLCA and Language Proficiency: There is a significant negative correlation between FLCA and language proficiency. Students with higher proficiency levels experience less anxiety.

The findings underscore the critical importance of fostering a supportive classroom environment where teachers cultivate a positive atmosphere to reduce anxiety, encourage participation, and support language acquisition. By recognizing and addressing specific anxiety factors – such as communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety – educators can help students overcome barriers to learning. Moreover, strategies aimed at encouraging students' willingness to communicate should not only focus on enhancing language proficiency but also consider the social and affective factors that influence their readiness to engage.

Despite the valuable insights gained, the study's sample size, 72 participants for quantitative analysis and 11 for interviews, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples to enhance applicability. The reliance on self-rated language proficiency may also introduce bias; therefore, subsequent studies should employ objective proficiency measures like standardized test scores. Further research could explore additional variables such as motivation, cultural factors, and out-of-classroom experiences in relation to foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) and willingness to communicate (WTC). Investigating these factors in other contexts, such as learners' first language or among speakers of minority languages in Kazakhstan, could provide valuable insights.

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## ҚАЗАҚСТАНДЫҚ БАКАЛАВРИАТ СТУДЕНТТЕРИНІҢ ҚОБАЛЖУШЫЛЫҒЫН, ТІЛДЕСУГЕ ДАЙЫНДЫҒЫН ЖӘНЕ АҒЫЛШЫН ТІЛІ ДЕНГЕЙІН ЗЕРТТЕУ

Атапмыши зерттеу мәқсаты Қазақстанда ағылышын тілін мамандық ретінде таңдаған және оны шет тілі ретінде меңгеріп жатқан студенттер арасында олардың шет тілін үйрену сабагындағы қобалжушылығы (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, FLCA) мен тілдесуге дайындығын (Willingness to Communicate, WTC) ағылышын тілін менгеру деңгейін өзіндік бағалауымен байланыстыра отырып қарастыру. FLCA мен WTC – шет тілін тиімді игеруге ықпал ететін маңызды аффективті факторлар болып табылады. Ағылышын тілі жаһандық тіл ретінде кеңінен қолдануына және көптеген студенттердің оны келешектегі қасиби жолдарына қажетті құрал ретінде таңдауына қарамастан,

Қазақстанда атапланған факторлардың ағылышын тілін үйрениудегі әсеріне жүргізілген зерттеулер жеткіліксіз.

Осы олқылықтың орнын толтыру мақсатында, атапланған зерттеуде аралас әдіснама қолдану арқылы 72 қатысушыға саяулнама жүргізіліп, 11 студенттен жартылай құрылымданған сұхбат алынды. Сандақ талдау нәтижелері FLCA мен WTC арасында ( $r = -.533$ ,  $p < .01$ ), сондай-ақ FLCA мен тілдік біліктілік деңгейі арасында ( $r = -.477$ ,  $p < .01$ ) елеулі теріс корреляция бар екендігін көрсетті. Сапалық тақырыптық талдау нәтижесін FLAC-дің бес негізгі көзін анықтады: коммуникация құррудагы қорқыныш, теріс баға алудан қорқу, емтихан үрейі, көпшілік алдында сөйлеуден қорқу және оқытушылардың теріс эмоциялық ықпалы.

Бұл зерттеудің теориялық және педагогикалық тұрғыдан маңызды тұжырымдары бар. Теориялық тұрғыдан, зерттеу Қазақстандық ағылышын тілі шет тілі ретінде оқытыларатын (EFL) мәннітінде FLCA мен WTC арасындағы өзара байланысты әмпирикалық деректер арқылы көрсетіл, екінші тілді меңгеру саласындағы аффективті факторларды тереңірек түсінуге ықпал етеді. Педагогикалық тұрғыдан, зерттеу нәтижелері тіл үйрениудегі қобалжусылықты азайтуда және студенттердің тілдесуге деген ниетін арттыруда жағымды сыныптық атмосфера құру мен мақсатты педагогикалық араласулар үйімдастырудың маңыздылығын көрсетеді. Болашақ зерттеулерде тіл үйрениудегі қобалжусылық пен тілдесуге дайындықты мотивация, мәдени факторлар және аудиториядан тыс тәжірибелер сияқты қосымша аспектілермен байланыстыра қарастыру ұсынылады. Сонымен қатар, бұл факторларды қазақ және орыс тілдерін үйрениушілер мен Қазақстандағы этникалық аз санды топтар өкілдерінің арасында зерттеу құнды теориялық және практикалық түсініктер беруі мүмкін.

Кілттің сөздер: тіл үйрениудегі қобалжусылық, тілдесуге дайындық, тілді меңгеру деңгейі, ағылышын тілін шет тілі ретінде үйрениушілер, аффективті факторлар, көпшілік алдында сөйлеуден қорқу, теріс баға алудан қорқу, емтихан үрейі.

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## ТРЕВОЖНОСТЬ, ГОТОВНОСТЬ К ОБЩЕНИЮ И УРОВЕНЬ ВЛАДЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКИМ ЯЗЫКОМ СРЕДИ КАЗАХСТАНСКИХ СТУДЕНТОВ-БАКАЛАВРОВ

*Настоящее исследование посвящено изучению тревожности, связанной с изучением иностранного языка (аудиторная тревожность при изучении иностранного языка – FLCA), и готовности к коммуникации (WTC) среди казахстанских студентов бакалавриата, обучающихся по специальности «Английский язык». В работе учитывается их субъективная оценка уровня владения английским языком. Оба указанных феномена – FLCA и WTC – представляют собой ключевые эмоционально-психологические факторы, влияющие на успешность освоения иностранного языка. Несмотря на признанный статус английского языка как мирового средства общения и его востребованность среди студентов, стремящихся к построению международной карьеры, в отечественной научной литературе этим вопросам уделено недостаточно внимания, особенно в отношении студентов-лингвистов Казахстана.*

Для восполнения данного пробела в исследовании применён смешанный методологический подход, включающий анкетирование 72 участников исследования и проведение 11 полуструктурированных интервью. Количественный анализ выявил значимые отрицательные корреляции между FLCA и WTC ( $r = -.533, p < .01$ ), а также между FLCA и уровнем владения языком ( $r = -.477, p < .01$ ). Качественный тематический анализ позволил выделить пять основных источников тревожности: коммуникативная скованность, страх негативной оценки, тревожность перед экзаменами, боязнь публичных выступлений и негативное эмоциональное влияние преподавателей.

Полученные результаты имеют важное теоретическое и педагогическое значение. С теоретической точки зрения исследование способствует более глубокому пониманию

эмоциональных факторов, влияющих на овладение вторым языком, и предоставляет эмпирические данные о взаимосвязи FLCA и WTC в условиях изучения английского языка в Казахстане. Практическая значимость работы заключается в том, что её выводы подчёркивают важность создания благоприятной образовательной среды, снижающей уровень тревожности студентов и способствующей их готовности к коммуникации. Кроме того, исследование акцентирует внимание на необходимости формирования позитивной динамики в учебной аудитории и внедрения целенаправленных педагогических стратегий, направленных на снижение FLCA. Перспективы дальнейших исследований включают рассмотрение дополнительных факторов, таких как мотивация, культурные особенности и внеаудиторный опыт, в контексте изучения FLCA и WTC. Расширение данного направления на другие языковые среды, включая изучающих казахский и русский языки, а также представителей языковых меньшинств Казахстана, может дать ценные научные результаты.

**Ключевые слова:** языковая тревожность, готовность к коммуникации, уровень владения языком, изучающие английский язык как иностранный, аффективные факторы, страх публичных выступлений, страх негативной оценки, экзаменационная тревожность.

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