

Foreign Language Anxiety and Academic Achievement Among English Learners at Najran University: A Multi-Level Comparative Study

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and academic achievement among English learners at Najran University (NU), Saudi Arabia. The research employs a quantitative, correlational, and comparative approach to investigate whether levels of language anxiety differ based on students' gender and academic level (Preparatory Year, undergraduate, and postgraduate). A total of 550 students participated in the study and completed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Academic achievement was assessed using official GPA records. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, independent-samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA to examine group differences and the relationships among variables. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between FLA and academic achievement, suggesting that higher levels of anxiety are linked to lower academic performance. Additionally, female students and those at more advanced academic levels reported lower anxiety scores compared to their counterparts. These findings highlight the emotional and psychological factors within language learning contexts and provide pedagogical insights aimed at reducing anxiety and improving learners' performance in English language programs.

Keywords: Foreign Language Anxiety, Academic Achievement, English Learners, Najran University, Comparative Study

INTRODUCTION

Learning a foreign language is a multifaceted process that requires not only cognitive and linguistic competence but also the consideration of emotional and psychological influences on learner performance. Among the various affective variables, FLA has been recognized as one of the most significant factors shaping students' success in language acquisition. Horwitz et al. (1986) describe FLA as a distinct type of anxiety arising from the specific demands of learning and using a foreign language. It typically appears in the form of apprehension, nervousness, or lack of confidence when learners engage in speaking, listening, reading, or writing tasks in the target language.

A substantial body of research has shown that higher levels of language anxiety are negatively associated with students' achievement and confidence in language learning. However, the extent and nature of this relationship may vary depending on contextual factors such as gender, academic level, and educational environment. In Saudi Arabia, English is a compulsory subject in all educational stages and a vital tool for academic and professional advancement. Despite the emphasis placed on English learning in Saudi universities, many students continue to experience high levels of anxiety that hinder their performance and motivation.

NU, as one of the leading institutions in southern Saudi Arabia, offers English programs at multiple levels, including the Preparatory Year, undergraduate, and postgraduate programs. These programs aim to enhance students' communicative competence and prepare them for academic and professional success. Nevertheless,

students' affective experiences, particularly language anxiety, remain underexplored within this context. Therefore, investigating the relationship between FLA and academic achievement across different academic levels and genders at NU is crucial for understanding the psychological barriers affecting English learning outcomes.

This study seeks to address this research gap by systematically examining the extent and impact of FLA among English learners at NU. Through a comparative analytical framework, the study explores variations in anxiety levels across key demographic and academic variables. Also, it provides evidence-based pedagogical recommendations for mitigating anxiety and enhancing students' academic achievement within English language learning contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Foreign Language Anxiety

FLA is a key effective factor affecting second and foreign language learning. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), FLA is a distinct form of anxiety arising in foreign language contexts, characterized by tension, apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. It can emerge during classroom participation, oral communication, examinations, or any situation requiring language performance. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) highlight that FLA is context-specific and can disrupt cognitive processing, thereby reducing learners' ability to comprehend, retain, and produce language effectively.

Dimensions and Sources of Language Anxiety

Research has identified several dimensions of FLA, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to the anxiety or discomfort experienced when interacting in the target language, particularly in speaking situations. Test anxiety is associated with concerns about failure or poor performance in language assessments. Fear of negative evaluation stems from learners' apprehension about being judged unfavorably by teachers or peers.

FLA is widely recognized as one of the most influential affective factors affecting second and foreign language learning. Horwitz et al. (1986) define FLA as a distinct type of anxiety that arises specifically within foreign language contexts, manifesting as tension, apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. It may emerge during classroom participation, oral communication, examinations, or any situation requiring active language performance. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) further emphasize that FLA is context-specific and can disrupt learners' cognitive processes, thereby reducing their capacity to comprehend, retain, and produce language effectively. Research has identified several dimensions of FLA, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to the unease experienced during interactions in the target language, particularly in speaking contexts. Test anxiety reflects concern about poor performance or failure in language assessments, while fear of negative evaluation pertains to apprehension regarding unfavorable judgment by instructors or peers. Collectively, these dimensions highlight the multifaceted nature of FLA and its potential impact on learners' language performance. These components are interrelated and can significantly hinder learners' participation and achievement (Horwitz, 2010; Young, 1991). Factors such as insufficient proficiency, low self-confidence, teacher attitudes, and classroom environment have also been found to contribute to elevated anxiety levels.

Relationship Between FLA and Academic Achievement

Numerous studies have shown a negative correlation between FLA and academic achievement. Aida (1994) found that students with higher anxiety levels tend to perform poorly in language courses. Similarly, studies by Liu and Jackson (2008) and Matsuda and Gobel (2004) confirmed that FLA negatively affects students' motivation, confidence, and overall achievement. In the Saudi context, Alrabai (2014) and Al-Saraj (2014) reported that Saudi EFL learners often experience high anxiety levels due to traditional teaching practices, limited exposure to English, and cultural constraints that discourage active participation.

Gender and Academic Level Differences in FLA

Gender differences in FLA have produced mixed results. Some studies (Dewaele et al., 2016; Park & French, 2013) found that female students generally experience lower anxiety and exhibit higher motivation than males, possibly due to greater diligence and communicative engagement. Others, however, found no significant gender-based differences (Trang et al., 2013). Regarding academic level, research suggests that language anxiety tends to decrease as learners gain experience and proficiency (Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004). Preparatory-level students often report higher anxiety compared to advanced or postgraduate learners, who become more accustomed to language use and academic expectations.

Gap in Literature

Although the relationship between FLA and academic achievement has been extensively explored worldwide, there remains a scarcity of studies examining this relationship within the Saudi university context, especially across different academic levels and genders. Moreover, few studies have focused on NU, where English programs cater to diverse student populations ranging from preparatory to postgraduate levels. Therefore, this study seeks to address this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of FLA and its association with academic achievement among English learners at NU.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, correlational, and comparative research design to investigate the relationship between FLA and academic achievement among English learners at NU. The correlational analysis examined the association between FLA and academic performance, while the comparative component explored differences in anxiety levels across gender and academic levels (Preparatory Year, undergraduate, and postgraduate students).

Participants

The participants comprised approximately 550 English learners enrolled in various English programs at NU, Saudi Arabia. The sample comprised 225 students from the Preparatory Year Program, 300 undergraduate students from two colleges (College of Applied Sciences & College of Languages and Translation), and 25 postgraduate students in Applied Linguistics and TESOL programs.

Participants were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure balanced representation across genders and academic levels. Demographic information, including gender, age, and academic level, was collected to facilitate data analysis and support comparisons.

Instruments

The study utilized the FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to measure learners' anxiety levels. The study instrument was organized into two sections. The first section gathered demographic information from participants, including gender, age (in years), and academic level. The second section consisted of a questionnaire developed to measure foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement among students at NU.

The scale consists of 33 items, each rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree), allowing for a comprehensive assessment of participants' FLA.

The questionnaire consisted of 36 items divided into two primary sections. The first section measured foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement and included 36 items distributed across five dimensions:

1. Communication Anxiety (10 items);
2. Test Anxiety (7 items);
3. Fear of Negative Evaluation (8 items);
4. General English Classroom Anxiety (8 items); and
5. Academic Achievement (3 items).

The second section consisted of one optional open-ended question, which invited respondents to provide additional remarks about their experiences, challenges, or feelings related to learning English or participating in English-language lectures.

The instrument was validated and adapted to the Saudi context through expert review and a pilot test. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated to assess internal consistency. Academic achievement was measured using self-reported scores from students and by providing their midterm and final exam grades, and the final exam grades they expected to achieve. Table 1 shows the structure of the study instrument.

Table 1. Structure of the Study Instrument

Domain	Dimension	Items	Number of Items
Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Academic Achievement	Communication Apprehension	1-10	10
	Test Anxiety	11-17	7
	Fear of Negative Evaluation	18-25	8

Source: Prepared by the author

The study adopted the scale presented in Table 2 to assess the level of foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement among students at NU. The assessment was based on the mean of each item in the questionnaire. In this study, the mean was interpreted as follows.

Table 2. Scale for Assessing the Level of Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Academic Achievement among Students at NU

Degree of Fear	Mean Score Category
Low Degree	2.33 -1
Moderate Degree	3.67- 2.34
High Degree	5- 3.68

Source: Prepared by the author.

Table 3. Alternative Answers

Response alternatives	Strongly Agree	Agree	neutral	Disagree
Item Weight	5	4	3	2

Study Variables

This study investigated four variables, including three independent variables and one dependent variable. The **independent variables were gender, age (in years), and academic level. The dependent variable included foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement.** These variables were operationalized to examine their impact on students' academic performance and language learning anxiety.

Validity of the Study Instrument

The validity of the instrument refers to its ability to accurately measure the variables and factors for which the questionnaire was designed. The questionnaire was carefully constructed to ensure comprehensiveness and avoid redundancy.

Face validity was verified by presenting the questionnaire to a panel of experts, comprising faculty members from NU. Their feedback focused on the appropriateness of the items in relation to the study domains, linguistic accuracy, and suggestions for any additions or deletions. All comments and recommendations were carefully considered, and the questionnaire was revised accordingly to produce the final version with validated specifications as shown in Table 1.

Reliability of the Study Instrument (Internal Consistency)

Reliability refers to the degree of internal consistency of the instrument, ensuring that each item in the questionnaire aligns with the related domain. The researchers calculated the correlation coefficients between each domain of the questionnaire, as assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient, the most widely used statistical measure for reliability. The findings are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients for the Reliability of the Study Instrument

Domain	Cronbach's Alpha
Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Academic Achievement	0.904

Table 4 was prepared based on the results obtained from SPSS. The minimum acceptable value for this test is 0.6. As indicated in the table above, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.904, which exceeds 0.60. This result demonstrates a strong degree of reliability, confirming that the instrument is consistent and suitable for measuring the constructs for which it was designed.

Data Collection Procedures

Following approval from the Deanship of Scientific Research, data were collected through electronic questionnaires. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed that their responses would remain confidential and be used exclusively for research purposes. Upon completion, the questionnaires were reviewed for accuracy and completeness, after which the data were coded and systematically entered into SPSS for statistical analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the university's Research Ethics Committee. All participants were informed about the research objective, assured of their anonymity, and informed of their right to withdraw at any point. The data collected were used exclusively for research purposes and were stored securely to maintain confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques through SPSS software (Version 20)—the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences—selected for its robustness and wide

applicability in social science research. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were computed to summarize the characteristics of the study sample and participants' levels of FLA. To examine relationships among study variables, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to determine the association between FLA and academic achievement. Independent-samples t -tests were employed to compare anxiety levels between male and female students, while a one-way ANOVA was used to assess differences across academic levels (Preparatory Year, Undergraduate/Diploma, and Postgraduate). When the ANOVA indicated significant differences, Tukey's HSD post-hoc tests were conducted to identify specific group contrasts. All statistical analyses were performed at a significance level of 0.05.

RESULTS

Table 5 provides a detailed overview of the demographic and academic characteristics of the study sample.

Table 5. Characteristics of the Study Participants

Characteristics	Class	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	62	11.3%
	Female	488	88.7%
	Total	550	100%
Age (in Years)	16-19	225	
	20-23	300	
	24-27	25	
	Total	550	100%
Academic Level	Preparatory Year	225	41%
	Undergraduate	300	55%
	Postgraduate	25	4%
	Total	550	100%

Source: Analytical results derived from SPSS (version 20)

To answer the questionnaire items, **means and standard deviations** were calculated for the responses of the study sample regarding **foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement** among NU students.

Table 6. Means and Standard Deviations of Participants' Responses to Items Assessing Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Academic Achievement among Students at NU

Dimension 1: Communication Anxiety				
Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Level
I would be completely comfortable taking additional English classes.	3.66	1.015	1	Moderate
I am confident during English class speaking activities.	3.47	1.016	2	Moderate
I do not feel anxious about committing errors during English class.	3.35	1.053	3	Moderate
I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	3.28	1.267	4	Moderate
I experience anxiety and confusion during English speaking activities.	3.16	1.194	5	Moderate
Anticipating being called on in English class makes me feel anxious and tense.	3.08	1.217	6	Moderate
Not understanding the teacher's English explanations causes me anxiety.	3.07	1.195	7	Moderate
I do not feel fully confident when participating in English class discussions.	2.95	1.147	8	Moderate
I tend to compare myself with other students and perceive them as more capable in English.	2.81	1.199	9	Moderate
I frequently get distracted by thoughts that are not connected to the English lesson.	2.63	1.180	10	Moderate
Dimension 2: Test and Evaluation Anxiety				
Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Level
I usually remain calm and at ease when taking English class tests.	3.60	1.057	1	Moderate

I often experience self-consciousness during English speaking activities in class.	3.57	1.037	2	Moderate
The large number of rules needed to speak English makes me feel stressed.	3.60	1.160	3	Moderate
I feel anxious about the outcomes of performing poorly in my English class.	3.57	1.377	4	Moderate
I often feel anxious about committing errors in English class.	3.17	1.102	5	Moderate
I experience anxiety when the English teacher poses unprepared questions.	3.14	1.116	6	Moderate
I experience anxiety when I fail to comprehend all of the English teacher's instructions.	3.17	1.193	7	Moderate
Dimension 3: Fear of Negative Evaluation				
Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Level
Speaking English in front of peers makes me feel very aware of myself.	3.36	1.114	1	Moderate
I worry that the English teacher will focus on every mistake I commit.	3.32	1.086	2	Moderate
Test anxiety.	3.21	0.661	3	Moderate
Being asked questions I have not prepared for by the English teacher makes me nervous.	3.15	1.216	4	Moderate
I experience a rapid heartbeat when I expect to be called on in English class.	3.13	1.192	5	Moderate
I consistently feel that my peers speak English better than I do.	2.92	1.140	6	Moderate
I experience significant pressure to be well-prepared for English class	2.71	1.029	7	Moderate
Volunteering answers in English class makes me feel self-conscious.	2.63	1.114	8	Moderate
Dimension 4: Classroom Anxiety				
Item	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank	Level
I enjoy English classes (reverse item).	3.55	1.049	1	Moderate
I feel capable and confident when participating in English class discussions.	3.40	0.992	2	Moderate
I become upset when I fail to comprehend the teacher's feedback.	3.15	1.161	3	Moderate
I feel anxious when I have to speak English in front of the class.	3.15	1.223	4	Moderate
I get nervous when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	3.15	1.178	5	Moderate
I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English in class.	2.97	1.195	6	Moderate
I experience nervousness when speaking in English, even with friends.	2.63	1.246	7	Moderate
I experience greater tension and nervousness in English class than in my other courses.	2.52	1.205	8	Moderate

Table 6 was constructed using the statistical outputs generated by SPSS.

The data presented in Table 6 indicate the mean scores for all items in the domains of foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement among NU students. ranged between 2.34 and 3.67, including the overall domain score. These values indicate a moderate level of anxiety, suggesting that although students experience some degree of concern, it does not reach a severe level.

This moderate anxiety could potentially be alleviated by addressing the issues reflected in the following items:

1. "I would be completely comfortable taking extra English classes
2. "I am confident during English class speaking activities."

To test the hypothesis stating that **"FLA is significantly and negatively associated with students' academic achievement in English courses at NU,"** the means were calculated for the **third dimension**, which measures **Worry about negative judgment**.

As presented in Table 6, the mean score for the third dimension, which assesses apprehension about negative evaluation, was calculated to examine its relationship with students' academic achievement in English courses.

It can be observed from Table 6 that all items in the third dimension (fear of negative evaluation) had mean scores within the moderate range. This indicates that as anxiety increases, academic achievement tends to decrease, but only to a moderate extent.

This moderate anxiety could be reduced by addressing the issues reflected in the two items with the highest mean scores in this dimension:

1. "I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students."

2. “I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.”

To test the hypothesis stating that “There is no relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement among NU students according to gender (male, female)” at a significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$, the appropriate statistical analysis was conducted.

The means, standard deviations, and t-values were calculated for foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement among NU students, according to gender. Table 7 presents these results.

Table 7. T-test for Equality of Means

Domin	Male		Female		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean	Std. Deviation				
Overall	2.9831	0.543	2,9845	.49089	0.019	548	.0985	. -00137

The significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.985, exceeding 0.05, suggests that gender does not significantly affect foreign language learning anxiety or academic achievement among NU students.

To test the hypothesis stating that “There is no relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement among NU students according to academic level (Preparatory Year, Undergraduate + Diploma, Postgraduate)” at a significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$, One-Way ANOVA was conducted.

The results are summarized in Table 8 below. Table 8 presents the relationship between foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement among NU students across academic levels (Preparatory Year, Undergraduate/Diploma, and Postgraduate).

Table 8. One-Way ANOVA for the Overall Domain of Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Academic Achievement According to Academic Level

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	0.978	2	0.489	1.990	.138
Within Groups	134.423	547	0.246		
Total	135.401	549			

Table 8 indicates that, at the 0.05 significance level ($\alpha \leq 0.05$), no statistically significant differences were observed in foreign language learning anxiety and academic achievement among NU students according to academic level (Preparatory Year, Undergraduate + Diploma, Postgraduate). This indicates that academic level does not influence students' anxiety regarding exams, and consequently, it does not affect their academic achievement.

1. To answer the question: “What is the relationship between FLA and academic achievement among English learners at NU?” at a significance level of $\alpha \leq 0.05$, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated. The results are presented in Table 9 below.

Table 9. Pearson's Correlation between FLA and Academic Achievement among English Learners at NU

Variable	Academic Achievement (Self-Reported Grades)	Overall Total
Academic Achievement (Self-Reported Grades)	1	.284**
Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
N	550	550
Overall Total	0.284**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
N	Academic Achievement (Self-Reported Grades)	550

Significance for the correlation is established at the 0.01 level (two-tailed).

Table 9 shows that the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.284, which is significant at the 0.01 level ($\alpha \leq 0.01$). This result indicates a positive and direct relationship between FLA and academic achievement. However, the correlation is weak, indicating that higher levels of anxiety are associated with only a slight increase or modest improvement in students' academic achievement at NU.

To address whether the core dimensions of FLA —communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and general classroom anxiety—collectively and individually predict academic achievement in English, a multiple linear regression analysis was performed. The results of this analysis are presented in the Model Summary shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Multiple linear regression analysis

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.092a	0.008	0.001	0.63351

a. Predictors: (Constant), General English Class Classroom Anxiety, Test Anxiety, Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation.

As shown Table 10, the value of $R = 0.092$ indicates a very weak relationship between the four dimensions of FLA and academic achievement. Furthermore, the R^2 value of 0.008 suggests that these combined anxiety dimensions account for only 0.8% of the variance in students' academic achievement.

Table 11. ANOVA Analysis

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.870	4	0.468	1.165	0.325b
	Residual	218.326	544	0.401		
	Total	220.197	548			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Achievement (Self-Reported Grades)

b. Predictors: (Constant), General English Class Anxiety, Test Anxiety, Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation

According to Table 11, the findings from the ANOVA indicate that the four dimensions of FLA did not significantly predict academic achievement ($F = 1.165$, $p = 0.325$), implying a minimal effect on students' academic outcomes.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the levels of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and its relationship with academic achievement among 550 students at Najran University. The results indicated that students experienced moderate levels of FLA across all dimensions, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and general English classroom anxiety. This pattern aligns with previous research showing that moderate anxiety is common among EFL learners and often emerges from classroom dynamics, learners' self-perceptions, and performance pressures in second-language environments (Liu & Jackson, 2008; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; Alrabai, 2014). According to MacIntyre's (1995) affective filter hypothesis, moderate anxiety may either hinder or facilitate language learning depending on its intensity, which supports the present finding that anxiety exists but is not debilitating.

The analysis showed no significant gender differences, indicating that male and female students experience similar anxiety levels. This finding contrasts with studies suggesting higher anxiety among female learners (Dewaele et al., 2016; Park & French, 2013) but aligns with research emphasizing that contextual and cultural factors, such as classroom norms and teaching practices, can create shared emotional experiences among students regardless of gender (Trang et al., 2013; Attia & Algazo, 2025). Recent studies in the Saudi context further confirm that traditional teaching practices and cultural expectations may affect both genders similarly (Aljohani & Mugaddam, 2025).]

Similarly, academic level did not significantly influence FLA, suggesting that exposure to more English courses or academic progression alone does not reduce anxiety. This finding is consistent with Kondo and Ying-Ling (2004) and more recent research indicating that, without targeted interventions, FLA remains relatively stable across different proficiency levels (Boukranaa et al., 2024; Chen, 2025). Recent Saudi studies further support this, showing that students often experience writing anxiety and speaking anxiety triggered by fear of interaction or negative evaluation, regardless of academic level (Alzahrani & Alshaikhi, 2023; Faqihi, 2024). Moreover, anxiety is influenced not only by students' abilities but also by the teaching environment, as teachers themselves may experience teaching anxiety that indirectly affects students (Alsaedi & Alamoudi, 2024).]

The correlation analysis revealed a weak positive relationship between FLA and academic achievement, which may appear counterintuitive. This pattern can be interpreted through the Yerkes-Dodson Law, which posits that moderate levels of arousal or stress can enhance performance by increasing alertness and motivation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). In this context, moderate anxiety may motivate students to prepare more thoroughly for assessments; however, since the relationship is weak, FLA cannot be considered a direct determinant of achievement. Additionally, a recent study found that FLA negatively impacts language proficiency, yet its effect on academic performance may be moderated by other factors such as self-efficacy and study strategies (Alotaibi & Alsolami, 2025; Zhang & Zou, 2021).]

Finally, regression analysis indicated that the four anxiety dimensions explained only 0.8% of the variance in academic achievement, and none significantly predicted performance. This suggests that, while anxiety exists, other factors—such as teaching quality, students' prior language experience, intrinsic motivation, learning strategies, and opportunities for authentic language use—play a more substantial role in academic success (Chen, 2025; Attia & Algazo, 2025; Anggraeni et al., 2025). Therefore, educational interventions should focus not only on reducing anxiety but also on enhancing learners' engagement, confidence, and communicative competence in English.

Recent studies emphasize the importance of targeted interventions to mitigate foreign language anxiety. Classroom strategies such as structured speaking activities, peer collaboration, and teacher support have been shown to reduce FLA and improve students' academic performance (Attia & Algazo, 2025; Alotaibi & Alsolami, 2025; Anggraeni et al., 2025). Implementing such strategies may help learners not only manage anxiety but also enhance confidence, motivation, and overall engagement in English language learning. This suggests that while FLA is present among Saudi EFL students, its impact can be alleviated through pedagogically informed practices that promote a supportive and interactive learning environment.

In conclusion, these findings highlight the complex and multidimensional nature of FLA in the Saudi EFL context. They underscore the importance of context-sensitive strategies that consider both emotional and instructional factors to support learners' academic achievement and language development.

CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this study was to examine the relationship between FLA and academic achievement among English learners at NU, while also exploring differences based on gender and academic level.

The study revealed that students experienced moderate levels of FLA across all dimensions—communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and general classroom anxiety. Gender and academic level did not significantly influence anxiety levels or academic achievement. Correlation analysis indicated a weak positive relationship between FLA and academic achievement, suggesting that higher anxiety corresponded to a slight increase in performance. However, regression analysis showed that FLA dimensions collectively explained only 0.8% of the variance in achievement, indicating that anxiety is not a strong predictor of academic success.

These findings highlight the need for supportive classroom environments that reduce anxiety and promote confidence. Teachers should adopt strategies such as low-stress speaking activities, balanced corrective feedback, and transparent assessment practices, since gender and academic level did not significantly affect anxiety; interventions can be applied universally. Additionally, because anxiety weakly predicts achievement, educators should focus on more influential factors such as motivation, learning strategies, and teaching quality.

This study was limited to English learners at NU, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. The research relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Furthermore, the study employed a cross-sectional design, preventing the examination of changes in anxiety over time. Finally, other potential predictors of academic achievement, such as motivation and prior language exposure, were not included.

Universities should implement anxiety-reduction programs and counseling sessions to help students manage stress; Teachers should encourage positive classroom interaction through group work, peer-assisted learning, and non-threatening communication tasks. Balanced feedback and technology-assisted learning tools can further reduce anxiety and enhance engagement. Regular practice tests and clear grading rubrics should be provided to minimize test anxiety. Educators should monitor students with high anxiety and offer additional support. Future research should explore motivational factors, teaching strategies, qualitative insights into emotional experiences, and longitudinal effects of anxiety across multiple semesters.

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