Language Teaching and Educational Research

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Review Article

Research perspectives on foreign language speaking anxiety in Turkish EFL context: A systematic review

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Abstract

Foreign language anxiety is an inevitable factor in the learning process, and it is believed that it is experienced mostly in productive skills especially in speaking since it is perceived as the most challenging skill in a foreign language. This study aims to reveal the current situation of research conducted in the 21st century upon investigating foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA) in Turkey in order to identify what has been done so far and to find the research gap to be filled by future researchers. This study adopts the meta-synthesis method which is an intentional approach aiming to bring studies together to synthesize and interpret data through qualitative studies. 24 Turkish-context qualitative studies, chosen according to their publication year, and the ones conducted in the 21st century were analysed thematically in order to reach new interpretations. The findings revealed six main themes as sources of anxiety, i.e., exploring some techniques and methods to decrease foreign language anxiety, teachers' perceptions towards FLSA, overcoming strategies against speaking anxiety, the effect and results of speaking anxiety upon learners and their communication & performance and identifying an ideal anxiety-free classroom setting.

Note(s) from the author(s)
» None

Introduction

Undoubtedly, anxiety is a common phenomenon experienced by all human beings, particularly by language learners. Teachers usually deal with anxious learners, and numerous studies have been conducted on this issue in the field of educational sciences. Psychology has the utmost importance in learning a new subject or acquiring a new language. Any learning environment is affected by factors of human psychology that plays a significant role in foreign language learning process (Ortega, 2014). In a foreign language learning process, there are many individual factors affecting learners' acquisition or learning in many ways. These factors include aptitude, motivation, and affective variables like anxiety, learning strategies, cognitive styles, extraversion vs, introversion and many others (Ortega, 2014). Anxiety, as one of those affective factors, has undeniably the utmost importance in foreign language learning. Simply referring to the body's natural response to stress, anxiety is defined as "a psychological construct, commonly described by psychologists as a state of apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object" (Hilgard, Atkinson, & Atkinson, 1971, as cited in Scovel, 1991, p. 18). When it comes to foreign language anxiety, it is basically individuals' experiencing intense feeling of apprehension, tension, and even fear about what's to come when they think of a foreign language (Ortega, 2014). According to Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, a student's anxiety besides low self-esteem and lack of motivation cause a mental block. Following Krashen's claim, anxiety, being a set of psychological barriers in learning a foreign language, prevent successful acquisition of a foreign language. Some other scholars such as Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) are referred to as first researchers in this field treating foreign language anxiety who discussed it as a totally separate phenomenon regarding of its distinctive feature. These two authors defines it as a "distinct complex of beliefs, self-perceptions, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning process" (p.128).

Since foreign language anxiety mostly occurs in learning environment, it has different effects on various features of learning. Although learners experience foreign language anxiety at different levels depending on the case, the most anxiety provoking skill and challenging part of learning a second/foreign language was found to be speaking (Maclnytre and Gardner, 1994). Numerous studies have been conducted so far to reveal the levels of anxiety experienced by learners, the consequences of anxiety and major causes of foreign language anxiety, and all of these studies aimed to guide teachers as well. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) emphasized that teachers should first accept the existence of foreign language anxiety, and then they have two options to help anxious learners. First, they can help them learn to cope with the existing anxiety provoking situations. Second, they can make the learning context less stressful. In addition to this in-class perspective, foreign language speaking anxiety has also been a research matter on which many instruments were developed to help researchers study this issue. For instance, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) comprising 33 five-point Likert-scale items developed by Horwitz and his colleagues (Horwitz et al., 1986). Another instrument is the Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety Questionnaire consisting of 28 five-point Likert scale items developed by Huang (2004).

Literature Review

SLA research has revealed that almost one-third of the students experience at least a moderate level of foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001). Experiencing foreign language speaking anxiety is inevitable since speaking is perceived as the most challenging and most anxiety provoking skill in the foreign language learning process (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013; Young, 1991). Many studies were conducted to find out the effect of foreign language speaking anxiety in learning process. These studies were categorized according to the variables they investigated such as gender, motivation, proficiency, academic success (Balemir, 2009; Bozer & Çalışkan, 2016; Dalkılıç, 2001; Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Han & Şahan, 2016; Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013; Koçak, 2010; Mestan, 2017; Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013, November; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Subaşı, 2010; Tüm & Kunt, 2013; Yaman, 2016; Zerey, 2010). Luo (2014) carried a study on Chinese language speaking anxiety with college students who learn Chinese in the USA and the findings showed that most of the participants had a high level of anxiety when they spoke Chinese and that gender had a significant effect on determining speaking anxiety level. A number of other studies also demonstrated that gender has an important effect on students' foreign language speaking anxiety (Csizer & Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei & Clement, 2001; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Huang, 2004).

Other similar aspects were investigated in terms of their relationship with anxiety. The relationship between foreign language speaking anxiety and oral performance attracted other researchers (Phillips, 1992; Woodrow, 2006; Young, 1990) and the results indicated that there were a significant negative relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking performance. As a result, it was alleged that anxiety is the predictor of oral performance. Speaking in front of a community or a class is also another anxiety-provoking factor since they experience a fear of making mistake and negative evaluation by the others (Koch & Terrell, 1991; Price, 1991; Young, 1990). Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) also found similar results approving the negative peer evaluation's negative effect on foreign language speaking anxiety.

In the Turkish EFL context, foreign language speaking anxiety has also been a trendy focus for SLA researchers, and it was examined in many ways. Öztürk and Gürbüz (2013) investigated the gender effect on anxiety and the results of quantitative data presented that there was a significant difference between genders in terms of speaking anxiety that they experience since male learners' speaking anxiety level found out to be lower than female learners, and the qualitative data obtained from interview questions supported the quantitative data. Results of this study indicated similar results to Balemir (2009) revealing that female students were more anxious while speaking English, so they experienced higher level of speaking anxiety than male students. Examining the impact of FLSA on learners' academic success in their language learning process, Dalkılıç (2001) performed a study, and both qualitative and quantitative data revealed that there was a significant correlation between the students' level of anxiety and their performance in speaking classes. In Saltan's (2003) study EFL speaking anxiety was examined from both teachers' and learners' perspectives and results showed that learners experienced FLSA, but the level of their anxiety was not so high.

While carrying out a research study, enlarging data sources for crosschecking is important so the ideal way is to support quantitative data with the qualitative one. However,

there may be some contrast in findings. For instance, Öztürk & Gürbüz (2014) conducted a study to find out the learners' speaking anxiety level and major causes behind FLSA and while quantitative data revealed that learners experienced low level of speaking anxiety, according to qualitative data gathered from interview questions most of the students thought that speaking skill was an anxiety-provoking factor to them. In this same study, the major causes of FLSA were spontaneous speaking, fear of making mistakes, having a perfectionist attitude and reactions of other students. In his study, Ay (2010) also reported similar results to Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014) in terms of the perception that learners feel more anxious when they are asked to speak without being prepared beforehand. Subaşı (2010) investigated the causes of speaking anxiety and two major causes have been illustrated at the end of the study: fear of negative evaluation and their self-perceived speaking ability.

As aforementioned, a great number of studies have been conducted so far with the intent of identifying the concept of the foreign language speaking anxiety, revealing its effects on both individual and learning process, detecting its major causes and suggesting implications for teachers and researchers. In the present study, it is aimed to review studies conducted on foreign language speaking anxiety in order to analyse them according to the main themes they focus on, reach new interpretations through qualitative data obtained from these studies and detect the research gap if there is any.

Significance of the study

Since the 1980s, there has been a load of studies on foreign language speaking anxiety in SLA —both in international context and in Turkish context. However, the fact is that there are relatively a few meta-synthesis studies in number to benefit from future implications that is why this study is going to be a valuable contribution to Turkish literature in SLA domain. Moreover, the review of studies in Turkish context will enable us to make a comparison of the results between foreign and Turkish context. The last but also important, this study sheds light on not only the future researchers to carry on new studies to fill the research gap but also teachers in order to take actions and precautions against foreign language anxiety to help their learners in many ways by following the guidance of this study.

There are mainly three objectives of this study. Firstly, this study aims to present a meta-synthesis of all the studies that have been carried out in the 21st century in Turkey. Secondly, the purpose of this study is to make a comparison between the studies conducted in foreign context and Turkish context by reviewing a number of studies and the qualitative data obtained from them. Finally, by examining the implications of scientifically valuable studies carried out in international context, the main aim is to find out whether we, as Turkish researchers, are in the right way in terms of conducting scientifically reliable, valid, qualified and well-designed studies to improve the current conditions and take necessary actions for a better progression in this field.

Method

A meta-synthesis method was employed in this study in order to analyse qualitative data gathered from 24 studies on speaking anxiety. According to Finfgeld (2003), meta-synthesis is a quite broad term addressing synthesis of findings of qualitative studies in order to

create a new interpretation over those studies. All the studies adopted for the present meta-synthesis study conducted in Turkish context by collecting data through whether qualitative or mixed method; however, only qualitative data obtained by these studies were analysed in order to realize the aim of the meta-synthesis method. Besides, 21 studies examined in this article were taken from some journals related to language learning such as *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, Çukurova University Journal of Social Sciences, International Journal of English Language Education, International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies, International Education Studies, The Journal of Language Learning and Teaching, Journal of History Culture and Art Research, Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, Advances in Language and Literary Studies, Journal of Foreign Language Education and Technology, Journal on Educational Psychology, Journal of language and Linguistic Studies, ELT Research Journal, Hacettepe University Journal of Education, English Language Teaching, Romanian Journal of English Studies and Education and Learning Research Journal.* One out of 24 studies was a master thesis, one was a doctoral dissertation, one of them was a book chapter and the rest were articles published in journals that aforementioned. While selecting the sample studies, the reliability and validity of both the studies and the data collection tools used in studies were taken into consideration to ensure the trustworthiness of the present study. While searching for the studies, the key terms that were used in the search query were "EFL anxiety, foreign language learning anxiety, foreign language speaking anxiety".

The selection of studies followed the following criteria:

1. Focus on foreign language speaking anxiety in Turkey,

2. Studies conducted using qualitative method and data collection instruments such as interviews, reflective journals, voice diaries, open-ended questionnaires etc.

3. Publication in national and international journals, conference papers and book chapters,

4. Published or unpublished theses and dissertations,

5. Publication date between 2000 and 2020.

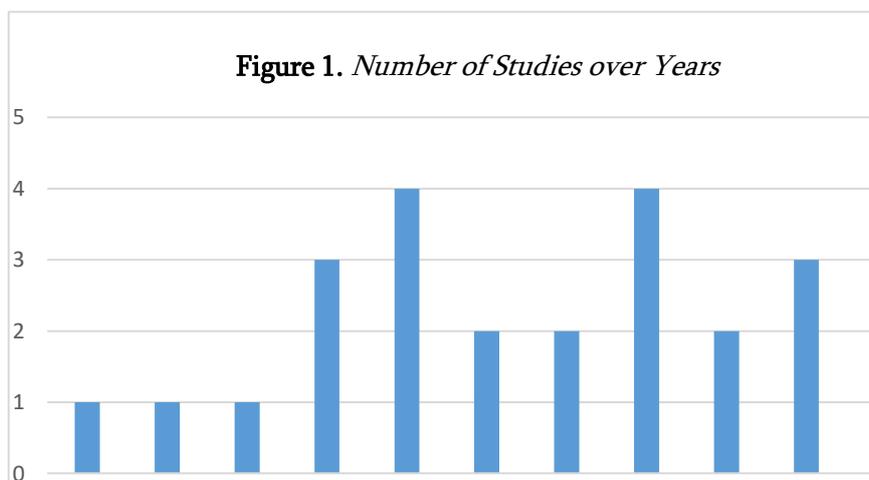**Figure 1.** *Number of Studies over Years*

Figure 1 shows the number of studies conducted in the 21st century from 2000 to 2020 and distribution of publication years were demonstrated below in the graph. Not a single study was found between 2002-2007 and in 2011, 2012 and 2018. Most of the studies related to foreign language speaking anxiety were carried out after 2007, and later on the number of the studies gradually increased. It can be implied that FLSA have become a phenomenon after 2007 and it is still a matter of question in SLA domain in Turkish EFL context. 24 studies synthesized for this article took place in all education contexts from primary to tertiary level; however, the majority of them were carried out with university students.

Table 2. Systematic review table

Publication Source	Participants	Context of the Study	Research Instruments
Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies	19 preparory program students	State university	Semi-structured interview questions
International Journal of Psychology and Educational Studies	16 third year prospective English teachers (12 females and 4 males)	ELT department at a state university	Written reflections of participants on activities
Romanian Journal of English Studies	39 second-year students	ELT department at a university	Semi-structured interviews
Journal of Foreign Language Education and Technology	80 students from 6th, 8th, 10th,12th grades	Secondary school and high school	Open-ended questions
Çukurova University Journal of Social Sciences	115 (41 males and 74 females) freshman students	ELT department at a state university	Interview protocol
Journal on Educational Psychology	167 in total 17 for interviews	Preparory program at a state university	semi-structured interviews

No	Author & Year	Title of the Study
1	Öztürk, G., & Gürbüz, N. (2014)	Speaking anxiety among Turkish EFL learners: The case at a state university
2	Güvendir, E., Kocabiyik, O. O., & Dündar, S. (2020)	The Influence of Counsellor Trainee Support on Public Speaking and Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in the Class Setting
3	Zerey, Ozge. (2010)	Voices from Students: A Study on Some Possible Sources of Foreign Language Speaking
4	Mestan, T. (2017)	Speaking Anxiety among Different Grades of K12: 6th, 8th, 10th and 12th Grades
5	Dalkiliç, N. (2001)	The role of foreign language classroom anxiety in English speaking courses
6	Okay, A., & Balçikanli, C. (2017)	.Belief Patterns and Anxiety Levels of Turkish EFL Students in Relation to Level of Instruction

In the analysis of the studies, Table 2 was used as a template for the systematic review of all studies included in the present study consisting of author and year of publication, title of the study, publication source, participants, education context of the study and research instruments used in data collection.

As the next step, after reviewing the 24 qualitative studies, in order to analyse the data obtained from these studies thematic analysis was run. Thematic analysis is a widely-used qualitative analytic method which helps the analysis of qualitative data. Maguire and Delahun (2017) state the aim of thematic analysis as "to identify themes, i.e. patterns in the data that are important or interesting, and use these themes to address the research" (p.3353)

Findings

As a result of the thematic analysis of 24 studies that investigate foreign language anxiety in Turkish context with all kinds of education levels, six main themes emerged. These themes were categorized as: sources of anxiety, exploring some techniques and methods in order to decrease foreign language anxiety, teachers' perceptions towards FLSA, overcoming strategies against speaking anxiety, the effect and results of speaking anxiety upon learners' and their communication & performance and identifying an ideal anxiety-free classroom setting. The first and the most focused theme was exploring the sources of FLSA, and 16 out of 24 studies investigated the major causes of speaking anxiety and mostly similar but some conflicting findings were revealed at the end of their research (Balemir, 2009; Bozer & Çalışkan, 2016; Dalkılıç, 2001; Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Han & Şahan, 2016; Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013; Koçak, 2010; Mestan, 2017; Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013, November; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Subaşı, 2010; Tüm & Kunt, 2013; Yaman, 2016; Zerey, 2010).

The studies that were conducted in order to find out the sources of FLSA indicated numerous reasons causing the increase of speaking anxiety. Most of the EFL learners perceived

speaking English itself as the most anxiety provoking factor. Studies that aim to explore the sources of FLSA revealed causes of anxiety as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Sub-themes and regarded studies

THEME	STUDIES
Major Causes of FLSA	
Teacher's attitude either positive or negative plays an important role as one of the determining factors of speaking anxiety	Bozer & Çalışkan, 2016; Han & Şahan, 2016; Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013, November; Subaşı, 2010; Zerey, 2010
Fear of making mistake	Bozer & Çalışkan, 2016; Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Han & Şahan, 2016; Mestan, 2017; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Tüm & Kunt, 2013; Yaman, 2016
Fear of failure and getting low marks	Bozer & Çalışkan, 2016; Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013; Koçak, 2010; Zerey, 2010
Speaking in front of others in classroom	Koçak, 2010; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Zerey, 2010
Gender factor was found to be a predicting factor of speaking anxiety in some studies while some could not find a significant relationship between gender and anxiety	Balemir, 2009; Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013
Competitiveness among students by comparing their performance to good students in class	Balemir, 2009; Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013; Subaşı, 2010
Fear of negative evaluation by peers	Balemir, 2009; Bozer & Çalışkan, 2016; Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Subaşı, 2010
Students' beliefs and feelings towards speaking English	Mestan, 2017; Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013, November; Yaman, 2016
Level of instruction and proficiency level of learners	Balemir, 2009; Debreli & Demirkan, 2015Okay & Balçıkanlı, 2017
Lack of speaking practice in foreign language	Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Okay & Balıçıkanlı, 2017
Immediate questions and spontaneous speaking due to unpreparedness	Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014
Lack of self-confidence and self-esteem	Bozer & Çalışkan, 2016; Dalkılıç, 2001; Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013, November; Zerey, 2010

Perfectionist attitude of learners	Debreli & Demirkan, 2015; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014; Tüm & Kunt, 2013
Having high expectations from their performance	Dalkılıç, 2001; Subaşı, 2010; Zerey, 2010
Being graded/assessed	Zerey, 2010
Effect of subject and uninteresting teaching procedures	Subaşı, 2010; Zerey, 2010
Negative past experiences	Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013
Lack of information in their native language	Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013
Lack of knowledge in foreign language and having linguistic difficulties such as limited vocabulary, lack of fluency etc.	Dalkılıç, 2001; Kayaoğlu & Sağlamel, 2013; Subaşı, 2010; Yaman, 2016; Zerey, 2010
Negative self-assessment of ability	Subaşı, 2010
Speaking to natives	Tüm & Kunt, 2013

Some studies sought new ways in order to deal with foreign language anxiety, and suggested new models and methods. These suggested methods and techniques were tested, and it was alleged that all of these found to be efficient in debilitating the effect of FLSA of EFL learners. Studies that aim to explore methods to deal with FLSA are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Sub-themes and regarded studies

THEME	STUDIES
Exloring New Ways to Decrease FLSA	
Quantum Learning Model (designed based on learners' needs)	Altın & Saracaoğlu, 2019
Interventionist Model of Dynamic Assessment	Köroğlu, 2019
Taking advantage of collaborative activities through group works	Yalçın & İnceçay, 2013
Counsellor trainee support	Güvendir & Dündar, 2020
Theatre production in foreign language	Zerey, 2008
Using drama techniques in classroom	Ataş, 2014

Using mobile application for speaking activities	Han & Keskin, 2016

Furthermore, strategies used by learners and teachers to cope with FLSA were investigated (Dalkılıç, 2001; Han & Şahan, 2016) as well as clarifying and identifying the concept of an ideal classroom (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2013, November). Last but not least, the effect of FLSA's upon EFL learners and their communication besides with the consequences of speaking anxiety were examined (Dalkılıç, 2001; Kasap, 2019; Tüm & Kunt, 2013).

Discussion

Since the 1980s, the concept of foreign language speaking anxiety has been in the limelight of SLA domain and in both the international and national base many researchers have put invaluable efforts with the intent of understanding the FLSA concept and coming up with solutions to eliminate its negative effects on the learning process by which both learners and teachers are affected. In terms of the sources of foreign language speaking anxiety, studies in both foreign and Turkish contexts show similarity. However, not only the teachers' attitude but also classroom procedures and teaching methods were found to be a predictor factor of speaking anxiety according to some studies conducted in foreign context (e.g. Kasbi & Shirvan, 2017) but they were not mentioned in Turkish-context studies. Along, with in-class anxiety provoking factors, out of class anxiety provoking factors should be investigated and the distinction between two contexts should be made in Turkey as Woodrow (2006) suggests. Besides, Kasbi & Shirvan revealed that effect of culture, preventing to speak L1 and family pressure on students were among sources of FLSA, but these factors were not mentioned or focused on in Turkish-context studies.

Moreover, friends were found to play an important role in students' speaking anxiety in L2 as they share their feeling with each other and exchange advice for their problems about this anxiety issue (Tran & Moni, 2015) so the effect of friends on Turkish EFL learners may be investigated as well. When these 24 studies are examined, it can be concluded that the majority of the studies still aim to find out the causes of speaking anxiety but studies exploring new ways to overcome FLSA's negative effects on language learning process are few in number. In foreign context, there are examples of this kind of research focused on revealing overcoming strategies of language learners such as Rafieyan (2016), Tsiplakides & Keramida (2009) and Woodrow (2006). Consequently, the findings indicate a need for research to find out the strategies to overcome and minimize FLSA's negative effects.

While much research focused on debilitating speaking anxiety or demolishing it, future researchers may conduct new studies in Turkish context by changing their direction to find ways in order to work with FLSA by minimizing its negative effects and taking advantage of its positive effects as it was stated by Tran & Moni (2015). Another point to be touched upon is that foreign language anxiety is a separate phenomenon from foreign language anxiety (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2004); however, research on revealing the relationship between FLSA and other components of language should be unearthed according to Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert (1999)

so similar studies may be conducted in Turkey as well in order to shed a light to teachers and future researchers.

Conclusion and Implications

This study adopted the meta-synthesis method and 24 qualitative studies, which were conducted on investigating foreign language speaking anxiety in Turkey through various data collection tools such as structured or semi-structured interviews, open-ended questionnaires, reflective journals, diaries or voice diaries etc., were analysed in order to follow this method. Qualitative data obtained from 24 studies were analysed by employing the thematic analysis and six main were revealed at the end of it.

These six main themes were sources of anxiety, exploring some techniques and methods in order to decrease foreign language anxiety, teachers' perceptions towards FLSA, overcoming strategies against speaking anxiety, the effect and results of speaking anxiety upon learners' and their communication & performance and identifying an ideal anxiety-free classroom setting. The most focused theme was revealing the sources of FLSA, and it was followed by techniques and methods used to alleviate the effect of speaking anxiety experienced by Turkish EFL learners and exploration of effects' & results of FLSA upon learners is the third most focused theme in Turkish context.

A considerable number of studies conducted on the concept of FLSA helped the literature gain ground to a great extent. However, there are still some weak and ambiguous points that needs to be explored, strengthen and shed light on for future researchers, teachers and learners. To start with, there is a dearth of research exploring the teachers' perceptions towards speaking anxiety experienced by their learners and the existence of this kind of studies would help us so that we can make sure of the EFL teachers' awareness of this issue and increase their awareness by helping them take appropriate actions.

Moreover, whether language teachers are conscious of the related issue, they should be trained about what overcoming strategies of FLSA are and how they can make their students learn and apply these strategies to minimize the undesired consequences of FLSA. Since FLSA is related to personality to some extent, thus to the culture that one was raised in, culture specific studies may bring a brand-new perspective to the field which provides us with more tangible results regarding FLSA's relationship with culture. Besides, out of classroom anxiety provoking factors need to be focused as well as in-class factors and the distinction between them should be done. Moreover, facilitating effect of anxiety should not be neglected and learners should be taught how to work with anxiety by minimizing its negative effects and teachers play an undeniably important role at this point so related studies may focus on teacher training on this issue. Finally, since this study is limited to qualitative data obtained from studies that adopted mixed or qualitative method, quantitative studies would be analysed by employing a meta-analysis study to reach many more studies that focuses on FLSA in the field so that the results of all studies would be generalized to the population.

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