

An Examination of Foreign Language Learning Anxiety and Stress Factors on the Path to Success from the Perspective of Undergraduate Students¹

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the dimensions of anxiety and stress experienced by undergraduate students in the Department of Aviation Management during the process of learning a foreign language, the strategies they use to cope with these emotions, and the impact of these factors on their academic success. Conducted using a qualitative research method, the study adopts a phenomenological design and criterion sampling technique; data were collected from 66 students through a semi-structured interview form. As a result of the analysis, five main themes were identified: "sources of foreign language anxiety, stress triggers, coping strategies, methods of increasing success, and the effect of anxiety and stress on success." It was found that students most frequently experienced anxiety due to fear of making mistakes while speaking, feelings of inadequacy, and the stress of speaking in front of a group. While some students coped with this anxiety by using strategies such as listening to music, breathing

exercises, and social interaction, others resorted to avoidance behavior, distancing themselves from learning environments. Social support showed positive effects in managing anxiety. The study highlights the importance of emotional and psychological factors in foreign language learning and emphasizes the necessity of student-centered, supportive learning environments. Establishing learning settings that understand students' emotional processes and foster awareness and support plays a critical role in learning efficiency. Practices that enhance emotional resilience (e.g., breathing exercises, role-playing, small group discussions) should be integrated into teaching processes, and cooperation with counseling units should be strengthened.

Keywords: Foreign Language Anxiety, Stress Factors, Coping Strategies, Success.

JEL Codes: I21, I23, I29, M19

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1. Introduction

In today's globalized world, knowing a foreign language not only provides academic or professional advantages but also serves as a critical tool for communication, intercultural interaction, and personal development. In this context, foreign language learning—particularly for widely used languages such as English—often becomes an integral part of the educational process for university students. However, the successful completion of language learning depends not only on cognitive competencies but also on students' emotional and psychological processes. At this point, factors such as anxiety (foreign language anxiety, FLA) and stress that emerge during the foreign language learning process hold critical importance.

In the process of learning a foreign language, anxiety and stress are frequently regarded as emotional barriers that can directly affect students' performance. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined foreign language classroom anxiety as a unique variable related to learning and highlighted its inhibitory effect on language learning. More recent studies have also shown that foreign language anxiety is associated with sub-dimensions such as fear of making mistakes, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation, which limit students' participation in speaking activities (Fattahı Marnani, 2022). For instance, a study conducted by Borisova et al. (2024) suggested that foreign language anxiety could disrupt cognitive processes and negatively influence students' language performance. In addition, a study by Özdemir and Seçkin (2025) emphasized that students experience intense anxiety particularly during the evaluation of their speaking skills. These findings indicate that anxiety affects not only the learning process but also indirectly influences students' self-confidence, learning engagement, and academic achievement.

Although stress is closely related to anxiety, it represents a broader framework of psychological pressure and strain. Students may experience stress due to factors such as academic expectations, exam pressure, time management, and the uncertainty of communication environments. Particularly in foreign language settings, these stress factors can negatively affect students' attitudes toward learning. A review conducted by Liu and Wang (2023) reported that stress management strategies in language learning, including relaxation techniques, meditation, visualization, and mindfulness practices, are effective. In this regard, addressing anxiety and stress together in the foreign language learning process provides a more comprehensive perspective than studies focusing solely on anxiety. The role of such psychological factors in both learning processes and students' academic motivation is of direct relevance to educational institutions, language teaching programs, and guidance and counseling units. Unders-

tanding students' emotional burden and implementing strategies to support them make educational processes more human-centered.

According to Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986: 125), anxiety is defined as a negative emotional state associated with the activation of the autonomic nervous system. These emotional states include feelings such as tension, sadness, and worry. Kleinmann (1977) stated that individuals with high levels of anxiety tend to use more complex grammatical structures in their speaking and writing language skills. Dilmac, Hamarta, and Arslan (2009: 144) described anxiety as a state of arousal that arises from physical, emotional, and mental changes experienced by a person in the presence of a non-objective threat. The theoretical framework of foreign language anxiety was established by Horwitz et al. (1986). Foreign language learning anxiety is a negative emotional reaction to worry that emerges while learning or using a foreign language (MacIntyre, 1999: 27). Foreign language anxiety is defined as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning processes" (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994: 284). Based on studies that identified the causes of foreign language anxiety, Young (1991: 427) categorized the contributing factors as personal and interpersonal anxieties, students' beliefs about language learning, teachers' beliefs about language teaching, teacher-student interaction, classroom practices, and language testing.

Foreign language learning anxiety causes individuals to experience stress. Canadian physician Hans Selye (1936) was the first to introduce the concept of stress. According to Humphrey and King (2000), stress is any internal or external factor that disrupts the balance between an individual and their environment. In this context, individuals need to make greater efforts to maintain or restore this disrupted balance. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), stress is the interaction between the individual and the environment that is perceived as threatening the well-being of the organism, reducing its capacity, and being challenging. Aydin (2008) divided stress symptoms into three categories: physical, psychological, and behavioral. Physiological symptoms include loss of appetite or overeating, weight loss and weakness, chronic fatigue and exhaustion, insomnia, excessive or irregular sleep, and excessive use of cigarettes or alcohol. Psychological symptoms include fear and anxiety, excessive nervousness, sensitivity, tension, irritability, incompatibility, feelings of inadequacy, and anxiety. Behavioral symptoms include excessive mobility, nail biting, procrastination of responsibilities, or avoidance of responsibilities.

When foreign language learning anxiety is combined with stress factors, significant obstacles may arise for individuals on the path to success. Individuals

may not be able to achieve their goals and objectives within the desired time and scope. By nature, people desire to succeed in a task (Pekrun, Elliot & Maier, 2009). The desire to experience a sense of success is, of course, influenced by the need to establish a place in society and create a positive image. The feeling of failure leads to anxiety. According to Rhodewalt and Hill (1995), this success should not be considered solely in the academic sense. In order for an individual to live a healthy life in society and be a useful person to themselves and to society, they are expected to use their competencies at the highest level and to be successful.

This study draws attention to the significance of not only cognitive but also emotional and psychological factors in the process of foreign language learning. It also emphasizes the necessity of supportive learning environments that enhance students' self-awareness. Creating supportive and awareness-enhancing educational environments that comprehend students' emotional processes plays a critical role in learning efficiency. In order for students to cope with anxiety and stress in a healthy manner, practices that foster emotional resilience (such as breathing exercises, role-playing, and small group conversations) should be integrated into teaching processes. In addition, collaboration with guidance services should be strengthened.

Many studies have focused on the quantitative relationships between foreign language anxiety and achievement, examining correlations between students' performance and their FLA levels measured through surveys. For instance, a study conducted by Shuaibi et al. among university students in Jordan found that 63.4% experienced foreign language classroom anxiety. However, quantitative studies do not address in-depth psychological dynamics, students' personal experiences, coping strategies, and the interaction between anxiety and stress. On the other hand, Lachica (2019), in the study titled "A Phenomenology of the Speaking Anxiety Experienced by University Students," focused on the physiological, cognitive, and linguistic manifestations of speaking anxiety. Similarly, in the study "Student Anxiety in the Foreign Language Classroom," students' experiences of foreign language anxiety were qualitatively examined, and the triggers of anxiety and student perceptions were identified (Lambert, 2023). Nevertheless, there are not many studies aimed at understanding how anxiety and stress factors intertwine in the language learning processes of students from specific departments—such as occupationally oriented programs like aviation management. Moreover, qualitative studies that systematically investigate coping strategies for anxiety are relatively limited in the literature. Mechanisms such as students' avoidance behaviors, use of social support, emotional regulation methods, and loss of

motivation are frequently proposed theoretically but have not been analyzed in depth from the students' perspective. In this context, the study aims to examine, through a phenomenological approach, the anxiety–stress processes, coping strategies, and the impact of these processes on achievement among undergraduate students in the Department of Aviation Management as a specific focal group. Thus, it will provide an original contribution to the theoretical literature and develop practical recommendations for educational administrators and instructional design. Furthermore, as a qualitative study, it can be stated that it holds significant importance for the literature as the first research in which these three concepts are examined together.

2. Methodology

2.1. Method

This research focused on a qualitative design. The study population consists of undergraduate students studying in the Department of Aviation Management at a foundation university. The participants' responses to the questions were analyzed using content analysis (Creswell, 2013: 203). According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 142), content analysis is the detailed and systematic examination of a text on a particular subject. In order to ensure the validity of the content analysis during the research process, expert opinions were obtained by applying researcher triangulation in line with Creswell's (1994: 158, 167) recommendations during the analysis process. The research design employed was phenomenology. As the sampling method, criterion sampling -one of the purposeful sampling methods, which is among the non-probability sampling approaches- was used. Criterion sampling is formed by selecting individuals who represent a group with characteristics related to the problem, based on their compliance with certain criteria. Therefore, the individuals to be included in the sample are determined according to specific criteria (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2012: 11). Determining individuals according to specific criteria ensures more reliable and valid results from the study. Validity refers to the development of the measurement tool according to the characteristics intended to be measured and ensuring that the data obtained with this tool fully reflect the nature of the characteristic being measured (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2018: 160).

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee of Kapadokya University with the decision dated 23/01/2025 and numbered E-64577500-050.99-99606. In addition, parental consent was obtained since the study included participants aged 17.

2.2. Data Collection

The data were collected face-to-face between January and February 2025. Feedback was obtained from 66 students, consisting of 33 males and 33 females. A written interview form, in which the purpose of the research and how it would be conducted were clearly stated, was used to collect data during the interviews, and the process took approximately 20–30 minutes. As the data collection method, a semi-structured interview form -one of the interview techniques- was used. This form consists of a total of 13 questions, including 7 open-ended questions and 6 demographic questions. In the research design, the questions were expressed as open-ended in a way that was easy, clear, and not leading. In the study, detailed and in-depth information was collected by asking students open-ended questions and

conducting interviews; the data were presented to the reader in bullet-point format without interpretation and included direct participant expressions. In this way, the reliability of the research was aimed to be ensured (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). In a semi-structured interview, half of the interview form is structured while the other half is unstructured. Based on the interviewer's reactions during the interview, the open-ended interview form is prepared in a flexible manner (Aypay et al., 2014: 151). The data obtained from the participants were recorded in written form using semi-structured forms. Each data form was assigned a number. The responses of each student were coded as K1, K2, K3, ... K66. The students' statements were coded based on their content. The interview form conducted with the participants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Interview Form

Demographic Questions	
1. Your gender	
2. Your age	
3. Your grade	
4. Your school grade point average	
5. Your family's income	
6. The number of people living off their income	
Questions About Success, Foreign Language Anxiety, and Stress	
7. How do you define the anxiety you experience while learning a foreign language?	
8. In which situations do you feel the most anxiety while learning a foreign language?	
9. What do you do to reduce your foreign language learning anxiety?	
10. What situations do you perceive as stress?	
11. How do you cope with stress?	
12. How do you evaluate the effect of the stress you perceive as a result of the anxiety you feel in line with your foreign language learning goals on your success?	
13. What do you do to increase your success in learning a foreign language?	

In this study, which investigates foreign language learning anxiety and stress factors on the path to academic success among undergraduate students, the following research questions were addressed:

- What are undergraduate students' perceptions of foreign language learning anxiety?
- What are undergraduate students' perceptions of stress factors?
- Does foreign language learning anxiety cause stress in undergraduate students?
- How do the stress factors perceived by undergraduate students affect their success?

2.3. Data Analysis

The units of analysis in the study consist of undergraduate students, and five themes were established to be used in analyzing the data obtained from the interviews conducted with these students. These themes are: sources of foreign language anxiety, stress triggers, coping strategies, methods for enhancing achievement, and the impact of anxiety and stress on academic success. In order to ensure that the transcripts were re-coded by two independent evaluators, they were asked to review the interview recordings and apply coding that included at least one of these five thematic codes. Cohen's Kappa analysis was conducted to determine the validity

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and reliability values of the data obtained from the participants. The results of the evaluation within the scope of the Kappa analysis, which was carried out

to test the reliability of the coding, are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of The Reliability Analysis of The Data

Evaluator A		Evaluator B					Total
		1	2	3	4	5	
	(1) Sources of foreign language anxiety	65	0	5	3	0	73
	(2) Stress triggers	4	54	0	0	0	59
	(3) Coping strategies	0	0	76	5	0	81
	(4) Methods to increase success	0	4	0	62	0	66
	(5) Effect of anxiety and stress on success	3	0	2	0	74	79

p<0,001

According to the results of the Kappa analysis, Evaluator A categorized 73 items related to foreign language anxiety, 59 items related to stress triggers, 81 items related to coping strategies, 66 items related to methods of enhancing achievement, and 79 items related to the impact of anxiety and stress. Evaluator B, on the other hand, categorized 72 items related to foreign language anxiety, 58 related to stress triggers, 83 related to coping strategies, 70 related to methods of enhancing achievement, and 74 related to the impact of anxiety and stress. Based on these evaluations, the results of the Kappa analysis indicated a very high level of validity and reliability for the

study (Kappa = 0.831; p < 0.001). In Kappa analysis, a value between 0.41–0.60 indicates moderate reliability, 0.61–0.80 indicates substantial reliability, and 0.81–1.00 indicates almost perfect reliability (Landis & Koch, 1977). Based on these results, it can be stated that there is a very strong consistency between the evaluations of Evaluator A and Evaluator B.

2.4. Sample

The demographic information of the undergraduate students who participated in the study is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Demographic Variables of The Participants

Demographic Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	33	50,0
	Male	33	50,0
Age	17-19 years	25	37,9
	20-22 years	38	57,6
Class Distributions	23-25 years	3	4,5
	26 and above	0	0,0
School Grade Point Average	1st Class	21	31,8
	2st Class	17	25,8
Family Income Status	3st Class	17	25,8
	4st Class	11	16,7
	0,00-1,00 average	9	13,6
	1,01-2,00 average	18	27,3
	2,01-3,00 average	33	50,0
	3,01-4,00 average	6	9,1
	12.500-32.500 TL	13	19,7
	32.501-52.500 TL	21	31,8
	52.501-72.500 TL	18	27,3
	72.501-92.500 TL	5	7,6
	92.501 TL and above	19	28,8

Number of People Living With The Selected Income Status	1-2 people	3	4,5
	3-4 people	44	66,7
	5-6 people	17	25,8
	7-8 people	1	1,5
	9 people and above	2	3,0
	Total	66	100,0

According to Table 3, when the gender distribution of the participants is examined, it is observed that there is an equal distribution between male and female participants. This indicates that the results are likely to be more measurable and consistent. When the age distribution of the participants is analyzed, it was found that the 20–22 age group had the highest number of participants with 38 individuals (57.6%), while there were no participants in the 26 and above age group. In terms of class distribution, it was determined that the highest participation was from first-year students with 21 individuals (31.8%), and the lowest participation was from fourth-year students with 11 individuals (16.7%). The main reason for the low participation of fourth-year students is the smaller number of classes in this group. When the students' grade point averages are examined, it was found that the GPA range of 2.01–3.00 was the most common with 33 students (50%), and the GPA range of 3.01–4.00 was the least common with 6 students (9.1%). Regarding the income levels of the students' families, it was determined that the income range of 32,501–52,500 TL was the most frequently reported (21 students), while the income range of 72,501–92,500 TL was the least reported (5 students). The income level of 92,501 TL and above showed a result (19 students) close to the most frequently

reported income level. The number of people living on the reported income levels is shown in Table 7. Accordingly, the highest frequency was found for households with 3–4 individuals (44 students, 66.7%), while the lowest frequency was for households with 7–8 individuals (1 student, 1.5%).

3. Findings

The responses provided in the semi-structured interview form concentrate around themes such as anxiety experienced while learning a foreign language, stress, coping strategies, and methods for enhancing achievement.

Based on the opinions of undergraduate students regarding foreign language learning anxiety and stress factors on the path to success, five themes were identified: sources of foreign language anxiety, stress triggers, coping strategies, methods of enhancing achievement, and the impact of anxiety and stress on success. These five themes were broken down into codes. Student opinions were provided for each code. The themes, codes, the number of students expressing opinions for each code, and sample responses are presented in detail in Table 4, Table 5, Table 6, Table 7, and Table 8.

Table 4. Theme of Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety, Codes, and Sample Opinions

Themes	Codes	Number of views (N)	Example Views
Foreign Language Anxiety Resources	Fear of Speaking	32	"Fear of making mistakes while speaking, anxiety about pronunciation." (K12) "Speaking English in front of a crowd makes me nervous." (K41) "It's like standing mute in front of 100 people." (K12)
	Academic Pressure	18	"If I can't improve my English, my job opportunities will be difficult." (K23) "I think I won't be able to pass the exams." (K38) "I have concerns about not being able to find a job after graduation because of my foreign language skills." (K18)
	Feelings of Inadequacy	25	"I forget words, I feel incomplete." (K4) "Everyone speaks better than me." (K17)
	Past Experiences	12	"I used to learn with wrong methods, now my self-confidence is broken." (K62) "I was affected by the foreign language learning I experienced before and this affected my foreign language learning." (K41)

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According to Table 4, there are four codes under the theme of sources of foreign language anxiety. These are fear of speaking (32 participants), academic pressure (18 participants), feelings of inadequacy (25 participants), and past experiences (12 participants). Fifty-five percent of the participants identified fear of speaking as the main source of anxiety.

Participant K12's statement, "Fear of making mistakes while speaking, concern about pronunciation," participant K41's remark, "Speaking English in front of a crowd makes me nervous," and participant K12's expression, "It's like standing speechless among 100 people," are examples reflecting the fear of speaking code.

The statements of participants (K23, K38, K18) clearly reveal the role of academic pressure on foreign language anxiety. This type of anxiety is particularly associated with exam performance and future career expectations. Participant K38's statement, "I think I won't succeed in exams," directly reflects this condition.

Participants' statements such as "I forget words, I feel inadequate" (K4) and "Everyone speaks better than I do" (K17) clearly indicate the feeling of inadequacy experienced during the foreign language learning process. The expression coded as K4 ("I forget words") shows that students experience memory anxiety.

The statements "I used to learn with wrong methods, now my confidence is broken" (K62) and "My past language learning experiences have affected me, and this affects my current language learning" (K41) reveal the lasting impact of past learning experiences on the current language learning process.

In K62's statement, it is clearly seen that incorrect learning strategies lead not only to technical but also to psychological consequences, resulting in a loss of confidence. K41's statement shows that previous learning experiences directly affect current learning motivation and attitude.

Participant K7's expression, "My heart races, I sweat when talking to foreigners. I feel like they will judge me," and participant K15's statement, "When I have to speak English in class, my stomach hurts. I'm afraid of making a mistake in front of the teacher," indicate a direct connection with physical symptoms (sweating, stomach pain) and the need for social approval. In participant K21's statement, "Speaking English on the phone is a nightmare for me. When I don't understand, I can't say 'pardon?' because I die of embarrassment," the inability to say "pardon?" reflects a sense of communicative helplessness. This indicates the intersection of social anxiety and the language learning process. These three participants' statements are examples of the codes fear of speaking and feelings of inadequacy.

Academic pressure is closely intertwined with family expectations and concerns about the future. Participant K5's statement, "If I don't graduate on time, I'll lose a year. My family can't handle that," and participant K25's remark, "English is a required course. If I fail, I'll have to extend my studies. Even thinking about it makes me panic," emphasize the fear of loss. Participant K18's statement, "If my TOEFL score is not enough, I won't have a chance for a master's degree abroad. This keeps me up at night," highlights perfectionism. For these participants, language learning is perceived not as a tool but as an obligation.

Table 5. Theme of Stress Triggers, Codes, and Sample Opinions

Themes	Codes	Number of views (N)	Example Views
Stress Triggers	Momentary Performance Anxiety	28	"I freeze when a question is asked." (K4) "When it is my turn in class, I forget because of excitement." (K28) "When it is my turn, I forget what I know because of excitement." (K9)
	Fear of Social Evaluation	22	"I get stressed because I think the other person will judge me." (K17) "I worry that if I make a mistake, I will be embarrassed." (K63) "My anxiety level increases a lot because I can't do it, I can't speak, I have trouble pronouncing, I will be embarrassed, the anxiety is very high." (K60)
	Time Pressure	15	"I have to learn in a very short time, I feel this pressure." (K23) "I am worried about my capacity because I am trying to learn in a very short time with very high expectations." (K26) "I started crying because I could not make time for the TOEFL exam. Now that panic comes back before every exam." (K39)

According to Table 5, there are three codes under the theme of stress triggers. These are momentary performance anxiety (28 participants), fear of social evaluation (22 participants), and time pressure (15 participants).

Participant K4's statement, "I freeze when asked a question," K28's remark, "When it's my turn in class, I forget due to excitement," and K9's expression, "When it's my turn, I forget what I know due to excitement," point to momentary performance anxiety, a situation frequently encountered in the process of foreign language learning. Such anxieties cause individuals to experience cognitive dissonance in sudden and attention-grabbing situations, despite having sufficient knowledge.

Participant K17's statement, "I get stressed thinking the other person might judge me," K63's expressi-

on, "I worry that if I make a mistake, I'll be humiliated," and K60's remark, "My anxiety level rises a lot because I worry I'll fail, won't be able to speak, will struggle with pronunciation, and end up embarrassed," clearly reveal the fear of social evaluation, which is commonly seen in the process of learning a foreign language.

Participant K23's expression, "I need to learn in a very short time, I feel this pressure," K26's statement, "Because I try to learn with high expectations in a short period, I feel anxious about my capacity," and K39's remark, "During the TOEFL exam, I couldn't manage the time and started crying. Now that panic feeling returns before every exam," show that time pressure faced by students during the foreign language learning process can significantly affect their levels of anxiety.

Table 6. Theme of Coping Strategies, Codes, and Sample Opinions

Themes	Codes	Number of views (N)	Example Views
Coping strategies	Practice	30	"I watch foreign TV series, I practice speaking." (K5) "I prepare English monologues for myself." (K46) "I practice with my foreign friend 3 days a week." (K5)
	Social Support	20	"I form English speaking groups with my friends." (K20) "I take private lessons, I ask for feedback from my teachers." (K39)
	Emotional Regulation	18	"I take deep breaths, try to calm down." (K8) "When I'm stressed, I listen to music and relax." (K15)
	Avoidance Behavior	10	"I stay away from situations where I have to speak English." (K10) "I try to avoid places where I have to speak a foreign language as much as possible." (K24)

According to Table 6, there are four codes under the theme of coping strategies. These are practicing (30 participants), social support (20 participants), emotional regulation (18 participants), and avoidance behavior (10 participants).

Participant K3's statement, "I listen to English news for 10 minutes every morning. As I get used to it, my listening improves," clearly reflects the coping strategy of "practicing," which is an effective method developed to manage anxiety and stress in the process of foreign language learning.

Participant K20's expression, "My friend and I made a 'speak only English' rule. We laugh when we make mistakes, and it makes me feel relaxed," serves as an example of the social support code. Such practices help reduce language anxiety by making the learning environment less threatening and enabling more relaxed communication. Additionally, sharing the responsibility of learning alleviates the individual's emotional burden and enhances linguistic self-confidence (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Moreover, these kinds of spontaneously developed rules with

a peer indicate how effective informal learning environments can be. The statement by participants K3 and K20, "Regular practice and social agreements work," shows that they apply coping strategies through active efforts.

Participant K8's remark, "I take deep breaths and try to calm down," and K15's comment, "When I'm stressed, I listen to music to relax," are examples of emotional regulation strategies used to cope with stress and anxiety encountered in the language learning process. These types of strategies are defined as efforts to regulate and control one's emotional state, which allow the individual to continue the learning process while maintaining psychological resilience (Gross, 1998). This is important because it directly affects the learner's motivation, attention, and academic performance.

Participant K10's statement, "I avoid environments where English is spoken. I keep my camera off on Zoom," and K24's comment, "I try to avoid places where I have to speak a foreign language as much as possible," clearly reflect avoidance behavior en-

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countered in the process of foreign language learning. Such behaviors can be directly associated with the individual's experience of anxiety, low self-efficacy, and expectations of negative outcomes in the learning process (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

The participant's conscious avoidance of English-speaking environments can be explained by their feelings of inadequacy in those settings. Participant K10's remark, "It helps in the short term, but hinders learning," reveals passive avoidance behavior.

Table 7. Theme of Methods for Enhancing Success, Codes, and Sample Opinions

Themes	Codes	Number of views (N)	Example Views
Methods to Increase Success	Active Learning	25	"I prepare word cards, I keep a diary." (K16) "I translate the lyrics of foreign music." (K34)
	Use of Technology	17	"I work regularly with apps like Duolingo." (K21) "I join online conversation clubs." (K1)
	Motivational Approaches	12	"I set small goals and reward myself." (K25) "I remind myself that I love learning English." (K63)
	Avoidance Behavior	10	"I stay away from situations where I have to speak English." (K10) "I try to avoid places where I have to speak a foreign language as much as possible." (K24)

According to Table 7, there are three codes under the theme of methods for enhancing success. These are active learning (25 participants), use of technology (17 participants), and motivational approaches (12 participants).

Participant K16's statement, "I prepare vocabulary flashcards and keep a diary," and K34's comment, "I translate the lyrics of foreign songs," demonstrate that students develop active, self-directed, and creative strategies in foreign language learning. Such individual efforts indicate that learners are not merely passive consumers of information, but active agents who structure the learning process. K34's engagement with song lyrics through translation supports both cultural and linguistic awareness. These active learning strategies not only enhance language skills but also positively influence learners' self-confidence and attitudes toward the foreign language. This highlights the value of constructive strategies in helping learners cope with anxiety.

Participant K21's statement, "I regularly practice using apps like Duolingo," and K1's remark, "I participate in online speaking clubs," show that individuals actively incorporate digital technologies into their foreign language learning processes and strategically integrate these tools to enrich their own learning environments. Additional examples inclu-

de K1's "I made a Japanese friend on HelloTalk. We message each other twice a week," K15's "I watch English-subtitled shows on Netflix at 0.75 speed," and K21's "I tell ChatGPT, 'Write me an English dialogue,' and then I memorize it." These usage examples support elements emphasized in contemporary language learning approaches, such as autonomy, personalized learning, and continuous practice.

Participant K25's statement, "I set small goals and reward myself," and K63's comment, "I remind myself that I love learning English," reflect the positive strategies individuals develop to maintain their intrinsic motivation in the face of the anxiety and challenges encountered during foreign language learning. Such approaches support the perception of the learning process not only as a task but also as a meaningful and personal experience. They are also influential in increasing individuals' intrinsic motivation. According to Deci and Ryan's (1985) Self-Determination Theory, when learners' motivation is intrinsic -meaning the learning process is satisfying in itself- their engagement increases, and their performance is positively affected. K63's statement shows a conscious effort to revive intrinsic motivation, while K25's statement demonstrates how goal-oriented and reward-based extrinsic motivation is used to reinforce intrinsic motivation.

Table 8. Theme of The Impact of Anxiety and Stress on Success, Codes, and Sample Opinions

Themes	Codes	Number of views (N)	Example Views
The Effect of Anxiety and Stress on Success	Negative Impact	35	"I forget what I know because of stress." (K9) "Anxiety causes me to skip classes." (K66) "I messed up everything I knew during the exam because of stress." (K8)
	Positive Impact	18	"Stress pushes me to work harder." (K11) "I accept my anxiety and work on it, and in this process I improve." (K14)

According to Table 8, there are two codes under the theme of the effect of anxiety and stress on success: negative effect (35 participants) and positive effect (18 participants).

Participant K9's statement, "Because of stress, I forget even what I know," K66's remark, "Anxiety makes me avoid classes," and K8's expression, "Due to stress, I mixed up everything I knew during the exam," clearly demonstrate that intense anxiety and stress in the foreign language learning process directly and negatively affect an individual's cognitive functions and academic performance.

Participant K11's statement, "Stress pushes me to study more," and Participant K14's remark, "I accept my anxiety and confront it, which helps me grow in this process," indicate that foreign language anxiety does not always negatively impact the learning process; on the contrary, it can function as an intrinsic motivator that fosters development in some individuals. Such approaches reveal that anxiety is not merely an element to be completely eliminated but rather an experience that, when managed constructively, can contribute to the learning process. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) classified individuals' coping strategies in response to stress as "problem-focused" and "emotion-focused." K14's statement exemplifies how stress can be transformed into a constructive experience through acceptance rather than denial. This demonstrates the individual's emotional awareness and perception of the stress management process as a learning tool. Similarly, K11's statement can be evaluated within the framework of facilitative anxiety, as in this case, anxiety acts not as a hindrance but as a triggering factor that motivates the individual (Alpert & Haber, 1960).

Additionally, Participant K7's statement, "I was so stressed during the exam that I forgot how to write 'hello,'" is an example of a negative effect. In contrast, Participant K22's (Positive) remark, "Stress became a driving force for me. I study an extra hour every day," illustrates a positive effect. These statements suggest that the impact of anxiety varies depending on the individual.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of participants' responses to open-ended questions revealed four main themes: sources of anxiety, avoidance behaviors, emotional regulation, social support, and individual coping strategies. According to the study results, a significant portion of students reported experiencing intense anxiety, particularly in situations such as making mistakes while speaking, performing in front of others, and taking exams under time pressure. This anxiety was often associated with low self-efficacy and fear of social evaluation. On the other hand, some participants transformed stress and anxiety into positive strategies, such as studying more, setting goals, practicing, and using technology-assisted tools.

A majority of participants stated that they experienced foreign language anxiety due to fear of making mistakes (especially while speaking), feelings of inadequacy, and concerns about being judged by others. While this anxiety led to decreased motivation and avoidance of learning environments for some participants, others developed active coping strategies. Techniques such as daily practice, listening to music, deep breathing, and establishing individual study routines were observed to help reduce stress levels. Additionally, some students reported feeling more comfortable and less fearful of making mistakes through social support (e.g., setting up English-speaking groups with friends). Conversely, individuals exhibiting avoidance behaviors were found to experience negative effects on their language development and a reluctance to engage in learning.

Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety model highlights that situations involving communicative anxiety and test anxiety create intense stress and a sense of failure in learners. To reduce academic pressure, counseling services could introduce "alternative pathways" (e.g., non-exam-based progression options), which might alleviate anxiety for participants like K5 and K25. Participants' statements clearly indicate that being called on in class, direct questioning, or

unexpected performance demands can lead to forgetting even known material. To reduce speaking anxiety, solutions such as role-play activities and emphasizing the "right to make mistakes" (potentially reducing shame, as experienced by K21) could be implemented.

To mitigate the fear of social evaluation, language instruction should foster a safe and supportive environment, where mistakes are treated as a natural part of learning. Such teaching strategies can enhance students' motivation to improve their language skills. Learners should be frequently reminded that making errors is integral to the learning process, and a non-judgmental, supportive communication atmosphere should be cultivated. Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) noted that fear of social evaluation is more pronounced among perfectionist learners, leading to harsh self-criticism. Such individuals tend to perceive minor mistakes as major failures, negatively affecting both performance and learning motivation.

Time pressure, particularly in exams and performance-based assessments, can undermine perceived competence and motivation. Therefore, flexible time management and self-paced learning methods are recommended in instructional processes.

Dörnyei (2001) emphasized the importance of clearly defined learning goals, learner autonomy, and reinforcement of success experiences for sustaining motivation in language learning. Participants' responses suggest that such approaches not only reduce anxiety but also encourage active engagement in learning. Some individuals reported that anxiety led to positive outcomes, such as self-regulation, increased motivation, and performance improvement—aligning with Dörnyei's (2005) concept of "motivational resilience." Conscious use of motivational strategies enables learners to cope more effectively with language anxiety and develop emotional resilience, highlighting the importance of learner autonomy in teaching approaches.

The findings indicate that foreign language learning involves not only cognitive but also emotional and psychological dimensions. Creating emotionally supportive and awareness-raising learning environments is crucial for learning efficiency. Anxiety stems not only from the learning process itself but also from external factors (e.g., exams, career expectations). These results support the need for educators to develop pedagogical approaches that account for affective factors and reduce student anxiety (Young, 1991).

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate that anxiety is not merely a threat to be suppressed but, when managed, can deepen learning and trigger personal growth. Educational environments should encourage constructive approaches, raising students' awareness of anxiety's normal and developmental

aspects. Rather than eliminating anxiety entirely, the primary goal should be to make it manageable.

A critical finding is the role of social support (e.g., Participant K20: "I form English-speaking groups with friends.") and acceptance (Participant K14: "I accept my anxiety and confront it, growing through this process.") in reducing anxiety. Educators can accelerate learning by fostering environments that normalize mistakes (Dörnyei, 2001). However, peer comparisons should be avoided; instead, educators should provide individual progress-focused feedback.

5. Discussion

One of the key findings emerging from the study is that students often enter this field due to an interest rooted in childhood. Additionally, English proficiency is understood to be a critical recruitment criterion. Furthermore, awareness of crisis management, communication skills, and teamwork indicates that students are equipped with both theoretical and practical knowledge. However, it is also noteworthy that some participants lack practical experience.

"Fear of making mistakes" and "pronunciation anxiety" are directly linked to the fear of negative evaluation (Young, 1991). "Discomfort speaking in front of a crowd" is a type of language anxiety that intersects with social anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). The metaphor "being left speechless" reflects psychological mechanisms such as communication apprehension and low self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), in defining Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), noted that students' fear of evaluation and concerns about academic failure trigger this anxiety. Statements from participants K23 and K18 ("If I don't improve my English, my job prospects will suffer" and "I worry about not finding a job after graduation due to my lack of foreign language skills") demonstrate that in societies where language proficiency is directly tied to employability, language learning is shaped by instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). This dynamic increases academic and professional pressure on students, particularly in contexts like Turkey, where English is perceived as a necessity in the job market (Andrea, 2021). Expressions such as "I forget words" align with MacIntyre's (1995) observation that language learners struggle with transferring new vocabulary into long-term memory. This also lowers self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), leading learners to feel inadequate. Participants' responses suggest that past experiences significantly influence foreign language learning (or the inability to learn), corroborating Horwitz et al.'s (1986) model, which posits that prior failure experiences heighten anxiety toward current performance.

MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) emphasize that mo-

mentary anxiety can restrict cognitive functions, impairing the ability to retrieve learned information. Participants' experiences support this finding; under performance pressure, students often experience a mental "shutdown." The fear of social evaluation, tied to concerns about being judged, criticized, or embarrassed while demonstrating language skills, can pose a major obstacle to learning. This fear not only hinders language production but also reduces willingness to communicate, leading to avoidance behaviors (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002). According to Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) stress theory, individuals develop stress responses when they perceive their resources as insufficient to meet task demands. Participant statements reveal that compressing learning into limited timeframes creates cognitive and emotional burdens, fostering anxiety and low self-confidence. Coping strategies reflect direct and systematic efforts to overcome challenges (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). For instance, integrating short but regular practice into daily routines is valuable not only for improving language skills but also for reducing anxiety, enhancing self-efficacy, and strengthening perceived control. Research confirms the benefits of low-pressure, consistent practice for individuals with high foreign language anxiety (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

In high-emotion domains like language learning, stress-management techniques (e.g., breathing exercises, calming music) reduce anxiety, freeing mental space for learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). These strategies, which are emotion-focused rather than cognitive, act as psychological buffers, enabling learners to persist.

Oxford (1990) defines language learning strategies as conscious techniques used to facilitate, accelerate, and solidify language acquisition. Participant examples align with cognitive strategies (e.g., flashcards, translation) and metacognitive strategies (e.g., journaling, planning learning). Godwin-Jones (2011) highlights that mobile technologies and online applications provide accessible and motivating tools for language learners. Gamified apps like Duolingo encourage vocabulary and structure repetition, while online speaking clubs offer effective social learning environments for communicative competence.

Eysenck and Calvo's (1992) Processing Efficiency Theory posits that anxiety, particularly in exam or performance contexts, depletes cognitive resources (e.g., attention, working memory), hindering effective use of acquired knowledge. Participant statements support this theory, illustrating stress as both an emotional and cognitive barrier.

6. Recommendations

Based on the study findings, several recommenda-

tions have been developed, which can be summarized as follows:

- **Creating Emotionally Safe Environments:** Foreign language classes should provide safe and supportive spaces where students can communicate without fear of making mistakes.
- **Increasing Speaking-Based Activities:** Since speaking is the primary source of anxiety for participants, they should be encouraged to practice in secure environments (e.g., small groups). Structured activities such as small group discussions, role-playing, and speaking clubs should be incorporated more frequently to reduce performance anxiety.
- **Providing Emotional Awareness Training:** Awareness-based training programs should be implemented to help students recognize their stress and anxiety and develop effective coping strategies. Workshops on anxiety management (e.g., breathing exercises, mindfulness) could be organized.
- **Promoting Technology-Assisted Learning:** The effective use of technology-based tools such as Duolingo, speaking applications, and digital platforms can enhance learning motivation and provide individualized learning environments.
- **Academic Counseling Support:** Universities should establish specialized support mechanisms within their counseling centers for students struggling with academic anxiety related to foreign languages. Providing information about the relationship between job opportunities and language skills could help reduce anxiety. Guidance on vocabulary learning strategies (e.g., mnemonic techniques, contextual learning) should also be offered.
- **Enhancing Practical Training:** Universities should increase sectoral collaborations to provide students with internship and simulation opportunities.
- **Conducting Interview Simulations:** Career centers should organize role-play activities to allow students to experience real interview scenarios.
- **Establishing Mentorship Systems:** Sectoral mentorship connections should be established between alumni and current students.

6.1. Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides a valuable foundation for understanding the effects of foreign language anxiety and stress on students. Future researchers could expand upon this work in the following ways:

- Comparative studies across different departments could be conducted. For instance, the

anxiety and coping strategies of Aviation Management students could be compared with those in other departments such as Tourism, English Language Education, or International Relations.

- Mixed-methods research incorporating quantitative data could more clearly demonstrate the relationship between anxiety levels and academic achievement through statistical evidence.
- Longitudinal studies could track students' progress over time and observe changes in their strategies.
- Incorporating instructors' perspectives would allow for a more comprehensive examination of how classroom dynamics influence language anxiety.

6.2. Limitations of The Study

While the findings of this study provide valuable insights, they are subject to certain limitations. First, the research was limited to undergraduate students in the Aviation Management department of a single university. This restricts the generalizability of the results to other departments, universities, or disciplines, as students from different faculties may exhibit different approaches to coping with foreign language anxiety.

Second, the study employed a qualitative methodology, utilizing semi-structured interview forms as the data collection tool. Although this method yields in-depth information, participants' responses may be open to individual interpretation and may contain subjective bias. Additionally, it should be considered that participants might have struggled to articulate certain emotional experiences or may have provided socially desirable responses.

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