



Foreign Language Anxiety: Exploring the Perspectives and Practices of Instructors of English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is an emotion that influences foreign language achievement. This qualitative study explored English as a foreign language (EFL) instructors' perceptions and practices of FLA in a Korean university. There has been a paucity of qualitative studies conducted on FLA in a Korean context and also a lack of qualitative studies on FLA that have focused on the instructors rather than the students. The participants in this study were 15 EFL instructors who all had experience teaching at a university in Korea. Each of the participants answered a short survey and was interviewed. Thematic analysis revealed that the participants understood the negative effects that FLA can have on learning a foreign language, however, it was also shown that they could benefit from having more knowledge on the cause and effects of FLA. The findings also showed that the participants found a variety of different practices to be effective at reducing FLA among their students. Recommendations included providing professional development and instructors sharing their practices with other instructors.

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INTRODUCTION

Anyone who has ever studied a foreign language knows that emotions affect the process of learning a foreign language. The emotion related to foreign language learning that researchers have studied the most is anxiety (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). In their seminal work, Horwitz et al. (1986) conceived that foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a form of anxiety unique to the foreign language learning process. Foreign language learners who suffer from FLA tend to respond with feelings of anxiety when they must deal with the demands of learning a foreign language (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019) such as beliefs about their intelligence and communication skills being challenged when they are not able to communicate as they would

in their first language (Horwitz et al., 1986). The vast majority of researchers have shown that FLA negatively affects foreign language achievement (Bielak, 2022; Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Gordon, 2022; Su, 2022). Many researchers who have shown that FLA harms foreign language achievement also provided recommendations to educators on how they could reduce FLA in their classrooms (Dewaele et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018; Pan & Zhang, 2023; Şimşek, 2022; Su, 2022). Although numerous researchers have discovered the negative effects of FLA on foreign language achievement and many have given pedagogical recommendations on how educators can reduce FLA in their classrooms, there has been a lack of studies done to determine if educators are aware of the causes and effects of FLA or if they are using any strategies to reduce FLA in their classrooms.

At many universities in South Korea, students are required to take EFL courses as part of their degree programs. FLA has been shown to have an impact on Korean English language learners' foreign language achievement (Gordon, 2022). Jee and Byun (2023) discovered that a majority of Korean university students felt anxious in EFL classes when they had to speak English, lead discussions, read a text out loud, and receive corrective feedback. Qualitative research enables the collection of narrative data that can provide a deep understanding of a topic of interest. There has been a paucity of qualitative studies conducted on FLA and even fewer that have been done in a Korean context. Also, the qualitative studies that have been done have focused on EFL students and there has been a lack of qualitative studies that have explored what instructors think about FLA and the practices that they use in their classrooms that are concerned with lowering FLA. Thus, there is a need for a qualitative study that explores the perceptions and practices related to FLA of instructors of English as a foreign language (EFL) at a university in Korea. The research questions that guided this study were as follows:

Research Question 1: What are instructors' perceptions of foreign language anxiety at a Korean university?

Research Question 2: What practices do instructors use to reduce levels of foreign language anxiety at a Korean university?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The role that FLA plays in learning a foreign language has been the topic of many studies and the findings of these studies are largely in agreement that FLA interferes with foreign language learning and foreign language performance (Jin & Dewaele, 2018). Şimşek (2022) explained that anxious learners of a foreign language feel so nervous and insecure that it results in poor performance, and in turn, those poor performances cause more FLA which leads to even worse performances. FLA is a complex emotion that is brought about through the interaction of different internal and external factors and research that evaluates the effects that different variables have on FLA is beneficial for enhancing one's understanding of how it affects learning a foreign language (Su, 2022). To get a clearer understanding of FLA, the internal and external factors that cause FLA, the effects of FLA, and pedagogical recommendations were examined.

Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety

To gain a clearer understanding of FLA, it was important to know what the causes of FLA are. FLA can be described as a convergence of both internal factors and external factors (Dewaele, 2017). When the number of possible internal factors and external factors that can affect levels of FLA and the different combinations of these factors is considered, then it can be argued that there are near-infinite causes of FLA (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020). As there are so many potential causes of FLA it is impossible to discuss all of them in this section, however, the main causes of FLA that have been revealed by scholars will be focused on. Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi (2019) conducted a review of the literature on FLA and identified the three primary sources of FLA (a) the learner, (b) the educator, and (c) instructional practices. The causes of FLA that were most prevalent in the literature related to each of the primary sources will be explained.

Learner Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

Many researchers have identified that FLA is mostly linked to self-factors (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2019; Su, 2022). The causes of FLA are often derived from fears that learners have. A common fear that foreign language learners have is that they are not as good as their peers (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2018; Koka et al., 2019). If language learners are aware that they are not as good as their peers, this is an obvious cause of FLA (Dewaele et al., 2018). When a learner feels that they are not as good as their peers, they may develop communication apprehension,

which impacts their ability to speak in class (Koka et al., 2019). A related fear that may cause FLA is that of being laughed at, embarrassed, or simply misunderstood (Liu et al., 2018; Nemati et al., 2020; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). In Asian contexts, the fear of losing face is a cultural obstacle that heightens the FLA of students when they are concerned that they could embarrass themselves with their foreign language use (Liu et al., 2018). Wu (2019) explained that the concept of face is valued highly by Chinese students, and when they are concerned that their oral performance might not meet their standards or that they could be judged negatively, they may be reticent to speak.

The most common cause of FLA that was identified in the literature was foreign language level and proficiency (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Gawi, 2020; Jin & Dewaele, 2018; Karatas et al., 2016; Özer & Altay, 2021). Gawi (2020) stated that language proficiency and level of language learning are the primary causes of FLA. In most of the studies, it was stated that foreign language level was a cause of FLA and found that the higher a learner's language level, the lower their levels of anxiety are expected to be (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Gawi, 2020; Jin & Dewaele, 2018; Özer & Altay, 2021). However, a study by Karatas et al. (2016) discovered that students with a higher language level experienced more anxiety, which they explained by stating that advanced students were under more pressure to do well in class. Closely linked to foreign language proficiency, another potential cause of FLA is low levels of achievement (Koka et al., 2019; Li & Xu, 2019; Toyama & Yamazaki, 2021). When a learner is getting poor results on their language tests or assignments, they will be more anxious about their future work, and when they get good scores in their language class, they will generally have lower levels of FLA (Koka et al., 2019).

When learners have a low level of achievement or if they feel that they are worse at the language than their peers, they can have lower levels of self-confidence. Self-confidence has been identified as one of the causes of FLA (Inada, 2021; Jin & Dewaele, 2018; Nemati et al., 2020). Jin and Dewaele (2018) stated that anxiety has a negative effect on learners' language proficiency, which reduces their self-confidence, which in turn raises their anxiety thus creating a vicious circle. In a study conducted in Japanese communicative English classes, Inada (2021) discovered that self-confidence was the strongest predictor of FLA. Nemati et al. (2020) conducted a study on English public speaking in an Iranian context and they found that a significant amount of speaking anxiety was caused by a lack of confidence when the learner had to give their presentation. When learners are not confident in their ability or the work that they have done, it would seem natural that they would be more anxious than students who have a lot of self-confidence in their ability or in the work that they have done.

A final learner-related cause of FLA that was identified in the literature was unpreparedness (Nemati et al., 2020; Pan & Zhang, 2023; Su, 2022). Nemati et al. (2020) found that when students did not study enough, they did not prepare for their presentation, or if they did not do their assignments or homework, then they were more anxious. Pan and Zhang (2023) also found that learners who did not adequately prepare for language class tended to have higher levels of anxiety, while those who were diligent in their studies were more likely to have lower levels of anxiety. Su (2022) explained that feedback from their participants revealed that a lot of the anxiety that was experienced in the foreign language classroom was due to their failures, such as not completing a task, not doing homework, or being unprepared for a presentation. As FLA is a situation-specific construct (Teimouri et al., 2019), it makes sense that being unprepared for a language class would be the kind of situation where a learner would have higher levels of FLA. There are numerous learner-related causes of FLA, but there are also many educator-related causes of FLA.

Educator Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

Many studies in the literature have found that there is a link between educators and their students' levels of FLA (Bielak, 2022; Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019; Dewaele et al., 2019; Gawi, 2020; Şimşek, 2022). One of the educator-related causes of FLA that is identified in the literature is the strictness of the educator (Dewaele et al., 2019; Gawi, 2020). Gawi (2020) found that when educators are too serious or strict in the classroom, the anxiety levels of the students increase as a result. In a different study, it was found that learners had lower levels of anxiety when their teachers were not strict and learners had the highest level of anxiety when they described their teachers as being rather strict (Dewaele et al., 2019). Learning a foreign language can cause a lot of anxiety and when learners are feeling anxious or stressed it is necessary to try and minimize their anxiety (Demir & Zaimoğlu, 2021), but educators being too strict is likely to make anxious learners even more anxious.

A related cause of FLA that was identified in the literature is the attitude that students have toward their language teachers. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019), investigated the different predictors of FLA and found that attitude towards the teacher was one of the strongest predictors of FLA. A study by Dewaele et al. (2019) also investigated the role that attitudes toward the teacher have on FLA, but they did not find any relationship between FLA and attitudes toward the teacher. Although the literature does not agree on whether attitudes toward the teacher affect FLA, the literature shows that the way that educators

correct students' errors is a significant cause of FLA (Bielak, 2022; Gawi, 2020; Inada, 2021; Şimşek, 2022).

Qualitative data collected by Şimşek (2022) indicated that immediate error correction was something that caused students to feel anxious and that grammar corrections were especially anxiety-provoking. Şimşek proved that error correction was anxiety-provoking by having a class in which the lesson revolved around immediate error correction, and they found that in that class the atmosphere was more anxious. Gawi (2020) explained that instructors at a university in Saudi Arabia believed that being harsh on their students and correcting students' errors would help increase their English achievement, however, being hard on students and correcting their errors had an extremely negative effect on the students' anxiety. Making mistakes is an important part of learning a foreign language and if an individual is too anxious about making mistakes because they are concerned about harsh error correction their learning of the foreign language will suffer. Inada (2021) described how it is not a good idea to pay too much attention to error correction in a communication class as that can lower a learner's self-confidence and increase anxiety. Closely connected to educator sources of FLA is anxiety caused by instructional practices.

Instructional Practice Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

A major cause of FLA identified in the literature is the environment or atmosphere in the classroom (Dewaele et al., 2018; Gawi, 2020; Li et al., 2021; Pan & Zhang, 2023). It has been shown that the classroom environment has a crucial and profound effect on anxiety, with students feeling less anxious in a classroom with a positive atmosphere (Li et al., 2021). Pan and Zhang (2023) explained that an intense atmosphere in the foreign language classroom induces anxiety. When it comes to creating a good atmosphere in the foreign language classroom, it depends on the learners and the educators and it is a crucial aspect of effective learning (Dewaele et al., 2018). EFL instructors should strive to use instructional practices that help to create a positive classroom environment for EFL learners.

Grouping is one of the potential causes of FLA found in the literature (Bielak, 2022; Koka et al., 2019; Liu et al., 2018). Koka et al. (2019) stated that working in groups or working alone may be an important factor in some learners' levels of anxiety. Bielak (2022) showed that changes in emotion can be brought about by contextual factors when it was demonstrated that students' level of FLA rose significantly between group work and individual monologues. Liu et al. (2018) explained that group work lowered students' levels of anxiety by reducing their worries about presenting their work to others. Students feel more confident when they know that what they say in a foreign language is understood (Inada, 2021), so giving students the chance to practice the same activity multiple times with different partners can increase their confidence and potentially reduce their anxiety (Gordon, 2021). Conversely, Toyama and Yamazaki (2021), found in their systematic review, that enhancing student-student communication was not something that always resulted in the reduction of FLA as they found instances where using peer feedback or group work as classroom intervention methods was unsuccessful at lowering levels of anxiety. Educators should be aware of how grouping students for activities can affect the students' levels of FLA.

Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety

Knowing the main causes of FLA in the literature can help educators recognize what may be causing their students to feel anxious. However, if educators do not know the effects of FLA they might not realize when their students are affected by FLA. The following sections will explain the effects that FLA can have on a language learner. Effects of FLA can be divided into physical responses, emotional responses, and performance-related effects of FLA.

Physical Responses to Foreign Language Anxiety

When a learner is feeling anxious their body shows that they are anxious in numerous ways. Horwitz et al. (1986) stated that physiological symptoms of FLA include having difficulty concentrating, forgetting things, sweating, and having heart palpitations. Zheng and Cheng (2018) listed increased sweating, heart rate, feelings of dizziness, and nausea as common physiological symptoms of FLA. Tian (2019) conducted a qualitative study in an English presentation course at a Korean university which revealed that the physiological symptoms of FLA included: (a) learners scratching their heads, (b) smiling, (c) a pounding heart, and (d) quick breathing. Some of the physiological symptoms of FLA that learners exhibit such as increased sweating, becoming forgetful, and scratching their heads are useful for educators to identify if their students are suffering from anxiety. However, when a learner has an emotional response to FLA it can be more difficult for the educator to notice that something is wrong, as there might not be any visible signs of the emotional response.

Emotional Responses to Foreign Language Anxiety

FLA can have a negative effect on the emotional states of foreign language learners. Nemati et al. (2020) wrote that anxiety is a negative emotion that can cause language learners to feel distressed, frustrated, or even depressed. Naser Oteir and Nijr Al-Otaibi (2019) stated that FLA can also cause learners to feel miserable and worried. Additionally, a language learner's motivation can be negatively affected by FLA (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019). Inada (2021) explained that students with higher levels of motivation are likely to spend more time studying the language on their own. The emotional effects of FLA may not always be as noticeable as the physiological responses to FLA, but their effects can be much more damaging.

Performance-related Effects of Foreign Language Anxiety

A major theme in the literature connected to performance difficulties for anxious foreign language learners is the issue of willingness to communicate. There was agreement among various researchers that learners who suffer from FLA are less willing to communicate in the foreign language that they are learning (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018; Inada, 2021; Jin & Dewaele, 2018; Koka et al., 2019; Nemati et al., 2020). Jin and Dewaele (2018) explained that when students are anxious, they might try to avoid speaking with others in a foreign language as they are worried that their use of the foreign language would be thought of as unauthentic, accented, or of poor quality. If students are unwilling to communicate, then their language learning progress might be severely limited.

The literature review revealed that it is widely accepted that FLA reduces performance (e.g., Bielak, 2022; Jin & Dewaele, 2018; Liu et al., 2018; Naser Oteir & Nijr Al-Otaibi, 2019; Özer & Altay, 2021; Su, 2022) and negatively affects achievement in the foreign language classroom (Bielak, 2022; Dewaele et al., 2018; Koka et al., 2019; Li & Xu, 2019; Özer & Akçayoğlu, 2021; Piniel & Zólyomi, 2022; Su, 2022; Teimouri et al., 2019). In their study, Özer and Akçayoğlu (2021) discovered that foreign language performance was negatively linked to their levels of FLA and that students' achievement decreased as their levels of anxiety increased. Dewaele and Alfawzan (2018) showed that students with higher levels of FLA were more likely to have lower English proficiency scores. FLA has a negative effect on foreign language achievement and performance, and educators should strive to get a better understanding of it so that they can limit the damage it causes to their students.

Pedagogical Recommendations

Throughout the literature, there were pedagogical recommendations given to help educators reduce their students' levels of FLA. Creating a positive, friendly, non-stressful classroom atmosphere was a recommendation that was made frequently in the literature (e.g., Dewaele et al., 2019; Dikmen, 2021; Gawi, 2020; Inada, 2021; Özer & Altay, 2021; Su, 2022). Dikmen (2021) stated that educators should create an atmosphere where students feel comfortable and therefore have less anxiety. Creating a positive atmosphere in the classroom is like preparing garden soil, in that it allows learners to develop and grow (Dewaele et al., 2019). To help create a positive classroom environment, teachers themselves need to have positive and agreeable personalities (Kun et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021; Liu & Wang, 2021; Pan & Zhang, 2023; Saito et al., 2018). Researchers also recommended that educators use collaborative group work activities to reduce FLA (Elahi Shirvan et al., 2021; Fathi & Mohammaddokht, 2021; Liu et al., 2018; Wang & Jiang, 2022). Many researchers have also stated that educators can reduce students' FLA by increasing the students' levels of foreign language enjoyment (Botes et al., 2022; Fathi & Mohammaddokht, 2021; Li & Xu, 2019).

METHOD

Qualitative methodology was selected as the most appropriate methodology based on the purpose of the study and the research questions. Qualitative methodology was chosen as it allows a researcher to focus on the individual meaning given to a situation by a participant, this enables them to report on complex situations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using a basic qualitative approach is appropriate when the focus of the research questions is based on the opinions, experiences, and reflections of past occurrences (Percy et al., 2015). The research questions in this study focused on the perceptions and practices related to FLA of EFL instructors at a particular university in Korea, thus making a basic qualitative approach an appropriate choice of methodology.

Participants

The participants in this study were 15 EFL instructors who all had experience working at a university in Korea, where they mostly taught first-year students English Communication and English Presentation courses. The participants were made up of instructors of different ages, educational backgrounds, years of experience, nationalities, and genders. The participants' demographic information can be seen in Table 1. Before data was collected, each instructor agreed to participate in the study and filled in an informed consent form.

Instruments

Two data-gathering instruments were used in this study, which were an online survey and a semi-structured interview. An online survey was used to collect demographic information about the participants. Demographic information that was collected through the online survey enabled the population to be accurately defined. The second instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview. An interview protocol was created that contained information on the interview, an introduction to the interview, the interview questions, reminders to use certain probes, and closing instructions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were conducted virtually using the video conferencing software, Zoom. Interviews were recorded using Zoom's recording feature so that an accurate representation of the interviews was available for data analysis. The virtual interviews involved asking open-ended and assumption-free questions that allowed the participants to give complex answers and conveyed to the participants that they were able to talk about both positive and negative experiences in the interview. Using open-ended questions provided the participants with the opportunity to give full and complex answers, which made it possible to get a greater understanding of the participants' perceptions and practices related to FLA in their classrooms. To help ensure that the instruments have content validity, three subject matter experts were asked to review and provide feedback on the survey and interview questions. Experts in this study were three professors who had experience teaching English at universities in Korea.

TABLE 1
Participants' Demographics

Demographic variable	<i>N</i>
Gender	
Male	7
Female	8
Highest degree	
Bachelor's	4
Master's	9
Specialist	1
Doctorate	1
Years of teaching experience	
1–5.5 years	4
6–10 years	5
11–15 years	2
15+ years	4
Nationality	
American	8
Canadian	2
British	1
Korean	1
South African	3

DATA COLLECTION

When each participant had signed an informed consent form, they were emailed a link to the online demographic survey. After completing the online demographic survey, the participants were contacted to arrange an online Zoom interview. An online interview was conducted with each participant and each interview lasted for approximately 20 minutes. The interviews were all recorded and transcribed using features on Zoom. To ensure the accuracy of the transcripts, the interview videos were watched and any errors in the transcripts were corrected. Data from the demographic survey were downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet for analysis. The interview transcripts were loaded into the data analysis program called QDA Miner for coding. The interview questions are included in the Appendix.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analyzed following the six-step thematic analysis process developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The Braun and Clarke method of thematic analysis is the most widely used analytic method in qualitative research and it is an effective method for searching for shared meaning among participants (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis is used for understanding emerging patterns in the data set (Roberts, 2020). The thematic analysis consists of six steps: (a) getting to know the data, (b) generating codes, (c) searching for themes, (d) reviewing the themes, (e) naming the themes, and (f) writing a report on the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

During the first step of the thematic analysis, the interview transcripts were read to increase familiarity with the contents of the data. The coding process began in the second step. To aid the coding process, the transcripts for each of the participants' interviews were loaded into QDA Miner. Each line of each transcript was carefully examined, and codes were given to lines that were related to FLA. At the end of the first round of coding a total of 30 emergent codes were assigned to lines in the transcripts related to FLA. Codes that were created included: (a) feeling nervous, (b) making mistakes, (c) Korean culture, and (d) speaking problems.

The third step involved looking for patterns, ideas, and themes that emerged from the interview data using the codes as a guide. Coded data were analyzed to identify how the final codes could be combined based on their shared meanings to form themes (Byrne, 2022). Eleven final codes were combined based on the ideas and concepts that they represented, and three themes were created. Codes named 'meaning of FLA', and the 'number of students with FLA' were combined to create the theme, 'definition and prevalence of FLA'. Codes called 'learner sources of FLA', 'instructional causes of FLA', 'teacher causes of FLA', 'emotional effects of FLA', 'performance effects of FLA', and 'physical effects of FLA' were combined to form the theme, 'causes and effects of FLA'. 'Instructional practices to reduce FLA', 'teacher's personality', and 'teacher talk' codes were put together to make the theme, 'instructors try to make their students less anxious'. The codes 'teacher's personality' and 'teacher talk' were included in the theme 'instructors try to make their students less anxious' as the participants explained that they displayed certain personality traits to create a more relaxed classroom environment which they felt reduced their students' FLA and they gave their students talks to make them feel more relaxed.

In the fourth step, the themes were reviewed based on the coded data. The themes were analyzed to determine if they interpreted the data meaningfully and if they were supported by information relevant to answering the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Upon review, six themes were determined to represent the collected data and appropriate for answering the research questions. The themes 'definition and prevalence of FLA' and the 'causes and effects of FLA' were suitable for answering the research question related to the instructors' perceptions of FLA. The research question concerning the practices related to FLA used by EFL instructors could be answered using the theme, 'instructors try to make their students less anxious'.

In the fifth step, the final themes were clearly defined, and the names of the themes were finalized. Clearly defining the themes requires examining the data items that underlie each theme and choosing extracts from the data items that provide a clear and powerful argument made by a theme (Byrne, 2022). Quotes from data items were chosen to represent each theme. The final themes were finalized as, the 'definition and prevalence of FLA', 'causes and effects of FLA', and 'instructors trying to make their students less anxious'. Step 6 was writing up an analysis of the data based on what was discovered during the thematic analysis process. A summary of the thematic analysis process can be seen in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Summary of the Thematic Analysis Process

Research questions	Emergent codes	Final codes	Final themes	Example quote
1: What are instructors' perceptions of foreign language anxiety at a Korean university?	Feeling nervous; afraid; uneasy.	Meaning of FLA.	Definition and prevalence of FLA.	It's just feeling nervous about using the language that you've learned or just learning a new language in general can be quite nerve-wracking (Instructor 15).
	A few; some; many; all.	Number of students with FLA.		
	Personality; Korean culture; making mistakes.	Learner sources of FLA	Causes and effects of FLA	The big groups would give them anxiety, and then, being in front of everyone would give them anxiety (Instructor 10).
	In front of the class; switching groups; bigger groups.	Instructional causes of FLA		
	Asking questions; walking close.	Teacher causes of FLA		
	Blocks out.	Emotional effects of FLA		
	Don't speak, speaking problems.	Performance effects of FLA		
2: What practices do instructors use to reduce levels of foreign language anxiety at a Korean university?	Negative body language; physical responses; blank stare.	Physical effects of FLA		
	Kind; funny.	Teacher's personality	Instructors try to make their students less anxious	I always tried to tell them you'll never be perfect at any language with your Korean. Your Korean is not perfect. My English is not perfect, so your English will never be perfect, my English will never be perfect, so I don't expect you to be perfect (Instructor 8).
	Okay to make mistakes; English is difficult; Korean education system.	Teacher talk		
	Grouping; more comfortable; praise; support.	Instructional practices to reduce FLA		

RESULTS

Instructors' Perceptions of FLA

The themes, 'definition and prevalence of FLA' and 'causes and effects of FLA' provided data that was suitable for discovering the instructors' perceptions of FLA. The examination of the data from the interviews showed that the instructors had a good understanding of what FLA is and that the instructors had a similar understanding of FLA. Instructor 11 stated that for them FLA is "when people are afraid or get nervous when they're trying to learn or speak a different language other than their native tongue." Instructor 15 remarked that FLA is "just feeling nervous about using the language that you've learned or just learning a new language, in general, can be quite nerve-wracking." The other instructors had a similar definition of FLA which corresponds with definitions of FLA found in the literature. The instructors knowing what FLA is means that they should be more likely to recognize FLA among their students.

Although the instructors had similar definitions of FLA, there was considerable disagreement among the instructors about the rates of FLA among students in their classes. When Instructor 13 was asked if they had students in their classes with FLA, they replied they "wouldn't be surprised if all of them said that they were anxious." Different instructors thought that FLA was something that many of their students had to deal with. Instructor 10 explained that they "would guess maybe 70% (of their students) would be a little bit anxious." Instructor 1 said that they had "5, 6, or 7 (students) at least" who had FLA whereas Instructor 4 mentioned they had "maybe one or two students" in every class who had FLA. One of the instructors did not believe that their students had a problem with FLA. Instructor 7 stated, "I don't really see anxiety in the normal day-to-day classroom level." The instructors having different opinions on the number of students in their classes who suffer from FLA could be a result of multiple factors, such as some instructors being better at recognizing the effects of FLA than other instructors, or students being more or less anxious in different instructors' classes. As it has been shown in other studies that many Korean students experience FLA (Gordon, 2021; Jee & Byun, 2023) it is more likely that there is a difference in the way that instructors recognize FLA rather than there being a big difference in the number of students who have FLA in each class.

In addition to knowing what FLA is, the perceptions of EFL instructors about FLA are affected by their knowledge of the causes and effects of FLA. During the interviews, instructors identified many causes of FLA among the students in their classes. Causes of FLA provided by the instructors fell into the categories of FLA caused by instructional practices, learner sources of FLA, and teacher causes of FLA. Instructional practices were the category of causes of FLA that were stated the most by the participants. The instructional practices the participants mentioned the most as causing FLA were having to talk in front of the class and being moved to a group where they do not know the other members. Twelve of the instructors said they noticed students becoming anxious when they had to talk in front of the class. Instructor 2 explained that when students "have to say something, while the entire class is listening, in like a lecture setting, that's when they don't, particularly like it." Instructor 14 remarked that students felt anxious "in front of the others, you know, when they were pointed out to speak alone in front of others."

About the moving groups, Instructor 12 stated, "We rotate partners or groups, or whatever, and all of a sudden everyone goes 'hohoho,' and there's that pressure to perform in front of people they are not comfortable with." Instructor 13 noted, "When they're in a group with somebody who is maybe not necessarily someone that they're close to, there seems to be a lot more anxiety of, you know, leading a conversation between their peers." When instructors know that their students feel more anxious when they have to talk in front of the class or when they move groups to one where they do not know the other group members then they can minimize the occurrences of those causes of FLA.

Learner causes of FLA noticed the most by the participants were causes related to Korean culture, such as the fear of making mistakes and the personality traits of the learners. A third of the instructors thought that FLA was caused in part due to Korean culture. Instructor 7 explained,

The way Korean society views, you know, performance is that if you're not going to perform well, you know, it's like a mark of shame against you like, "Oh, look at this guy, he doesn't even know how to like, you know answer a simple question."

Instructor 11 stated, "I think it's just how they were taught English, and it was always you need to get a good grade, and there's a lot of pressure from parents to grasp the English language, even if they haven't."

A common cause of FLA that emerged from the data analysis is that students suffer from FLA as they are afraid of making mistakes. Instructor 1 felt that FLA is caused by "the feeling that the other person that they're trying to communicate with will maybe think less of them or think they're stupid or an idiot because they can't say something properly." Instructor 11

remarked, “That a lot of students hesitate to say what they’re thinking because they’re afraid of making a mistake and that being afraid to make a mistake leads to increasing their anxiety.”

A final learner cause of FLA that the participants brought up was the personality of the student. Instructor 1 described how personality affects the language learning process by stating:

And so, extroverted people are much more willing to communicate and try and say something, and throw it out there, even if their competency isn’t that great, they don’t really mind that much. But students especially, who might be introverted and shy, I see them in my classes here at the university and at my previous jobs, and even though they might be very good in English and very competent, they are harder on themselves, I guess, and don’t want to take the risk of saying something that might be wrong or sounds silly or stupid.

A fifth of the instructors said students who are introverted are more likely to suffer from FLA. EFL instructors in Korea should understand that students can have FLA as a result of internal factors such as pressure caused by Korean culture, a fear of making mistakes, and having an introverted personality and instructors should do their best to alleviate the overall levels of FLA in their classrooms.

Teacher causes of FLA were the final category of FLA causes that were identified by some of the participants. The leading teacher cause of FLA was simply the teacher walking around the classroom and listening to what the students were saying. Instructor 8 noticed that “whenever I come closer, they are kind ... they either stop speaking or they start stuttering.” Instructor 4 explained, “What I see is when they approach me or when I approach them to speak, there’s an immediate kind of like shift in the body language, it becomes very small, and eye contact like becomes very like sporadic.” Instructor 6 had the opposite experience and stated, “If they’re speaking to a teacher, you know, like for them they feel more comfortable because the teacher is not really gonna judge them or anything like that.” Other instructors did not mention teacher factors as a cause of FLA, which could mean that instructors affected their students’ levels of FLA in different ways or that some instructors were unaware that their actions in the classroom could be affecting their students’ FLA. If EFL instructors are unaware that their actions in the classroom may be affecting their students’ levels of FLA, then receiving some form of professional development on FLA could be effective at reducing anxiety-causing behavior.

In the interviews, participants identified FLA’s physical, emotional, and performance-related effects. All of the instructors recognized some of the physical effects of FLA, such as body language, physical responses, and blank stares. Body language was the effect of FLA the participants most often identified. Instructor 11 explained, “When students are anxious, you can see it, you know their arms are crossed in front of their chest. You know they’re looking down. They’re kind of sitting back in their chair, maybe slumped.” Physical responses to FLA mentioned by the participants included going red, voice quivering, shallow breathing, hands shaking, sweating, and trembling. Students’ blank stares were another effect of FLA that participants discussed. Instructor 9 said, “There’s obviously the very well-known blatant stare of emptiness that you can just see, where there is absolutely nothing, nothing is going in.”

The main emotional effect of FLA that was given by the participants was that FLA blocks out what the instructors are saying. Instructor 8 explained, “It looked like, for that specific student his fear or anxiety, kind of overwhelmed him, and to such a point where he didn’t register my question.” Instructor 4 said, “I think sometimes when you are very anxious about maybe the idea of something it prevents you from hearing the information that would actually help you.” The final category of effects caused by FLA that were given in the interviews were performance-related effects.

Performance-related effects of FLA were the effects of FLA that were identified the most often by participants in their interviews. The two most commonly given performance-related effects of FLA given by the participants were students not speaking or students having speaking problems. Instructor 1 noted that for students with FLA, “a lot of times they just shut down and don’t say anything at all, or just say the bare minimum.” Instructor 15 stated, “Because they’re so anxious about speaking English, they choose not to speak English.” The speaking problems that are caused by FLA given by the participants included mumbling, hesitating, freezing up, and switching to Korean. When EFL instructors in Korea are aware of the common effects of FLA they can notice when their students are suffering from FLA and utilize certain practices to reduce their students’ levels of FLA.

Practices to Reduce FLA

Data analysis showed that instructors try to make their students feel less anxious in their classes. The instructors used a variety of different kinds of practices to reduce the FLA of their students. Three kinds of practices identified were instructional practices, practices related to the instructors’ personalities, and teacher talks given to the students. Instructional practices were by far the kind of strategy utilized most by the instructors to reduce their students’ FLA. Key instructional

practices mentioned by the participants were grouping, providing support, making students more comfortable, and praising.

The most frequently mentioned practice to reduce FLA by the participants was connected to how students are grouped to do an activity. Some grouping practices allowed students to practice before talking in front of the class. Instructor 11 stated, “I try not to have the students give out or call out answers in the beginning for the grammar, but they work on things together in their group.” Instructor 12 stated that the first group their students work in is always with their friends. Instructor 12 explained that FLA could be reduced by having the students work with people they feel comfortable with: “If you make mistakes, you can trust this person not to, you know, judge you based off your mistakes.” Another grouping practice described by the instructors was to slowly build up the number of people that the students were talking in front of. Instructor 10 said, “So we would always just practice something beforehand, especially with a partner first, and perhaps in the second session we would move to bigger groups.”

Supporting students during classes was a common strategy used by the participants to reduce FLA in their classrooms. Instructors provide support in a variety of ways such as speaking slower, giving the students more time to answer questions, providing time for preparation, and prompting students when necessary. Instructor 9 stated that when students are anxious when they are asked a question, they “track back a little bit, do it slower, maybe use a different example.”

Making students feel comfortable in the classroom is something that many instructors feel has a positive effect on their students’ levels of FLA. Instructors said they wanted their students to feel comfortable when making mistakes. Instructor 15 explained, “We’re just supposed to like sort of help slowly guide them into being comfortable with making mistakes and making errors.”

Instructor 8 described how they made students more comfortable with making mistakes by sharing,

And I also show them that I make mistakes. But whenever I make a mistake, I point it out to them, and I say, oh take a look at this. When I said this sentence, I made this mistake, let’s fix it together, and that’s one way. I show them my mistakes kind of as a way for them to feel more comfortable and say wait, if my professor is making mistakes that means I can also make them.

Instructors also strived to make their students comfortable overall in their classrooms. To help students have less FLA Instructor 5 said, “So I try to create a very comforting, welcoming, non-judgmental and mostly safe environment for the students.”

A final key strategy to reduce FLA that emerged from the data analysis was to give students praise. Few instructors stated that they praised students to help reduce FLA; however, it was added as a key theme as one of the instructors who mentioned it is the instructor who stated students feel comfortable talking to the teacher. Instructor 6 stated, “I try to repeat what they say, and then, you know, praise them for things that they do well, and I find that next time, you know, like they, they do feel more confident.” Praising students may have allowed students to feel more comfortable with their instructor.

Instructors also commented they tried to lower their students’ FLA by using certain personality traits. In particular, instructors stated that they reduced their students’ FLA by being funny and kind. Instructor 1 remarked, “The best way is if you can get someone to laugh or smile if you can somehow tell a joke or say something silly or funny because that puts people at ease. When we laugh, we become more comfortable.” Instructor 3 said that to decrease students’ FLA, their “general style was to sort of just treat them with kindness and care.” When instructors are kind and make students laugh, the students are said to feel more comfortable.

The last key practice that the instructors identified as one they used to reduce their students’ FLA was talking to their students. Talks that the instructors give to their students are on topics such as the importance of trying, it is okay to make mistakes, and the difficulty of English. Instructor 8 explained,

I always tried to tell them you’ll never be perfect at any language with your Korean. Your Korean is not perfect. My English is not perfect, so your English will never be perfect, my English will never be perfect, so I don’t expect you to be perfect. So, with some of them, when I said that I could see that they were more relieved when I told them your Korean is not perfect, and my English is not perfect. Then they realize, oh, wait it doesn’t have to be perfect, just keep trying, and I told them I just want to see you try.

By talking to the students, the instructors tried to make them feel better about their English proficiency and also tried to make them feel okay about making mistakes, thus reducing FLA.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of the study gave an insight into the perceptions of FLA of EFL instructors at a university in Korea. Collected

data showed that the instructors understood what FLA is, some of the causes of FLA, and some of the negative effects that FLA can have on students learning a foreign language. Data that emerged from the thematic analysis process showed that the participants recognized that FLA is feeling nervous, afraid, or uneasy when learning a foreign language and that FLA has an overall negative effect on learning a foreign language. However, the data revealed that there were some key differences in the perceptions of the EFL instructors about FLA, namely in how many students experienced FLA in their classrooms and in the effect that the instructors themselves had on students' levels of FLA. The number of students instructors thought experienced FLA in their classes ranged from every student to no students. As all instructors were teaching the same courses to similar students it is unlikely that there would be such a difference between the number of students experiencing FLA in different classes. The difference between instructors' beliefs about the number of students in their classes with FLA could be caused by instructors not being able to recognize the effects of FLA on their students. Some of the instructors mentioned that their actions in the classroom could cause FLA in their students, but other instructors did not state that their actions could cause FLA in their students. A possible reason for some instructors not mentioning their actions as a cause of FLA is that they did not notice that their actions caused FLA in their students. The study has shown that EFL instructors could benefit from having a greater understanding of the causes and effects of FLA so that they can reduce the levels of FLA in their students.

This study found that one of the main learner sources of FLA was found to be related to the students' Korean culture. The students' Korean culture affecting their levels of FLA confirms what was found in the literature. Asian students value the concept of face, and they are worried that their oral performance might not meet their standards or that others may judge them negatively (Wu, 2019). Participants also identified the Korean English education system as being a contributor to their students' FLA, which could add to the knowledge of the causes of FLA in Korean university students. In particular, there is the pressure from parents and the way that students study English at school where the focus is getting good grades. It has been shown that parental pressure negatively affects Korean middle school students' anxiety in EFL classes (Choi et al., 2019), so it is likely that parental pressure can continue to affect students' levels of FLA when they are at university.

The collected data provided answers to what kind of practices the participants use to reduce FLA in their classrooms. As EFL instructors who had experience teaching Korean university students, the participants were well placed to provide examples of the kind of practices that they have found effective at lowering their students' FLA. Each participant provided many examples of the practices that they found effective at reducing FLA in their students, but every participant had their own set of practices that they utilized. If a practice is effective at reducing FLA in Korean university students for one instructor, then it is likely that it will be effective for other instructors. EFL instructors in Korea would benefit from learning about the practices other EFL instructors in Korea find effective at lowering students' levels of FLA.

Most of the practices to reduce FLA that were revealed in the study aligned with practices mentioned in the literature, such as grouping (Fathi & Mohammaddockht, 2021), instructors being positive, supportive, and maintaining a good mood (Liu & Wang, 2021). However, not all of the practices mentioned by the participants appeared in the literature. A unique practice to reduce FLA that was discovered in the study is that instructors give talks to their classes to reduce students' levels of FLA. Giving talks to students appears to be a way for EFL university instructors to try and reduce the FLA caused by learner internal factors such as the fear of making mistakes. More than half of the instructors stated that they give talks to their students to reduce FLA, which indicates that they feel that giving talks is an effective way of reducing their students' FLA. EFL instructors working in other universities could try giving talks to their students to reduce their students' FLA.

Although the findings of this study have given an understanding of the perceptions and practices of EFL instructors related to FLA in their classroom at a university in Korea, it is important to note that this study is not without limitations. One limitation of the study was related to the transferability of the findings. The transferability of the findings could be negatively affected by the fact that the participants all worked at the same university in Korea. If participants were EFL instructors in different universities around the world, the transferability could have been enhanced. To help increase the transferability of the findings, the participants comprised individuals of different genders, nationalities, qualifications, teaching experience, and experience with FLA. The findings of this study could be used by EFL instructors in Korea and other countries that have EFL courses, such as Japan or China, to improve their teaching practices concerning FLA. A second limitation of the study was that it investigated the practices that EFL instructors use to reduce FLA, but the effectiveness of those practices was not investigated. The participants were experienced EFL instructors, and they proposed practices that they perceived as being effective at reducing FLA, however, getting students' perceptions on the practices would provide valuable information. Future research should gather data from EFL students at a Korean university to discover their opinions on the practices used by instructors to reduce FLA. A future study could use the practices described in this study to create a survey that could be used to gather quantitative data that shows how effective students think the instructors' practices are at reducing FLA. Future research could also gather qualitative data from students to discover how they feel about their instructors' practices to reduce FLA.

In conclusion, the findings of the study provide a greater understanding of the perceptions and practices of EFL instructors on FLA at a university in Korea. The study supported practical recommendations for EFL instructors, policy changes, and recommendations for future research. Two recommendations are that professional development about FLA should be given and that instructors should collaborate by sharing methods to reduce FLA. The findings of the study showed that instructors are aware of the negative effects of FLA when someone is learning a foreign language. Findings also demonstrated that the instructors had differing views on FLA and the best practices for reducing FLA and that instructors could benefit from having more knowledge on the causes and effects of FLA. Foreign language departments at universities should create and provide their instructors with professional development on the topic of FLA. Providing professional development on FLA would make sure that all instructors in a department are aware of the potential causes and effects of FLA and practices that they can use to reduce FLA.

In addition to the professional development organized by their departments, EFL instructors should be encouraged to collaborate by sharing their practices for reducing FLA. The findings of the study showed that each EFL instructor had practices that they have found to be effective at reducing their students' FLA. Instructors should share their strategies and practices with their colleagues, as the findings show that there may be effective methods for reducing FLA that are not known by some instructors. Foreign language instructors who have experience teaching students at the university are best placed to know which teaching practices are effective with the target group of students and sharing practices that each instructor finds effective at lowering FLA will enable all the instructors to improve their teaching practice.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. What does foreign language anxiety mean to you?
2. Do you ever have students in your classes who are anxious about speaking English?
3. How do you think having foreign language anxiety affects your students' English-speaking ability?
4. How do you know that a student is anxious? What symptoms of anxiety do your students show?
5. When do you notice your students becoming anxious in your class? What kind of classroom activities make them anxious?
6. Do you do anything in your classroom to help reduce your students' foreign language anxiety? What do you do? Is it effective at reducing their anxiety?
7. What does foreign language enjoyment mean to you?
8. How do your students show that they are enjoying an activity in your class?
9. How do you think enjoying foreign language classes affects your students' foreign language acquisition?
10. Do you do anything to raise your students' foreign language enjoyment in your classes?
11. What kind of classroom activities do your students appear to enjoy?
12. What kind of classroom activities do your students appear not to enjoy?