Greek University Students' Foreign Language Learning Classroom Anxiety

1*Ourania Katsara (iD)

1University of Patras. Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, Department of Food Science and Technology, Patras, Greece

*Corresponding Author: *okatsara@upatras.gr*

Article Info	Abstract
	This research paper investigates the impact of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) on the academic performance of first-year students enrolled in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses at the University of Patras. While existing literature has explored Greek students' perceptions of foreign language learning in state institutions, there is a noticeable gap in understanding anxiety sources for university-level Greek students. The study involved 175 participants from three university departments, and data were collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. in 1986. Results indicate that Greek students generally exhibit a neutral attitude toward anxiety-inducing situations but express notable concerns, particularly regarding the consequences of failing language tests and the fear of negative evaluation. Student comments reveal anxiety triggers related to teacher interactions, speaking in class, and the influence of Greek culture on the learning process. The findings provide valuable insights into the specific situations that contribute to FLA among Greek university students and highlight the importance of addressing anxiety in foreign language instruction at the tertiary level.

Introduction

Learners sometimes come to the foreign language classroom with certain perceptions about what language learning means, which in turn may influence their approach to the actual process of learning (Psaltou-Joycey & Sougari, 2010). Research has shown that reflection on emotional experiences during language instruction helps in the developmental process of motivation, encouraging students to become responsible learners (Méndez López and Peña Aguilar, 2013). Ross (2015) found that emotional experiences of tertiary language learning students were significant and diverse suggesting the need for more investigation of language learner emotions in the situated classroom environment. Despite the existing literature

addressing Greek university students' perspectives on foreign language learning, as evidenced by Faltzi (2017), there is shortage of consistent data regarding Greek students' anxiety levels in foreign language acquisition, particularly within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses (Karras, 2012; Tzoannopoulou, 2016). This inconsistency underscores the necessity for further research to comprehensively understand the dynamics of foreign language anxiety (FLA) within the Greek context. The current paper presents a survey conducted at the University of Patras, which specifically aims to investigate FLA among Greek undergraduate students within the context of ESP classes using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Specifically, the research questions of the paper are: a) How do Greek students perceive each item on the FCLAS in terms of its potential to induce anxiety? b) To what extent is FCLAS valid within the cultural context of Greece?

The paper begins with a comprehensive review of relevant literature pertaining to the conceptualization of FLA and the methodologies employed for its assessment. Subsequently, the study examines the intricacies of handling Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) within the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) courses, focusing on the contextual dynamics within Greek ESP settings. Moving forward, the paper outlines the methodology employed in the current survey in detail, followed by a thorough analysis and discussion of the findings. Finally, it concludes by highlighting the implications derived from the results and offering conclusive remarks on the topic.

Literature Framework

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Anxiety is present in nearly all facets of second/foreign language (SL/FL) learning, encompassing listening, speaking, reading, and writing [Horwich et al, 1986]. Among the diverse forms of foreign language anxiety (FLA), foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) has garnered significant attention, likely due to its close association with formal classroom instruction and learning (Zhang,2019). Foreign language anxiety (FLA) encompasses feelings of unease or nervousness during the process of learning or using a second language, with potential consequences on motivation, performance, and overall success in language acquisition (Horwitz et al., 1986.; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991). As exemplified by Cohen (1990) and Oxford and Nyikos (1989) this influence becomes pronounced during the input stage, where anxiety hampers the process of learning new words, phrases, and grammar. The distraction caused by anxiety persists into the output stage, hindering learners from effectively processing acquired knowledge and impeding their ability to communicate. Even when learners possess the requisite knowledge, the presence of anxiety often obstructs the expression of that knowledge, resulting in minimal output. This cumulative effect of anxiety negatively affects learners' motivation to engage with and master the language, thereby impeding their overall success in language learning. In terms of emotions, self-esteem, and

self-confidence, Clement (1980) delineated foreign language anxiety as a multidimensional concept that engages with the psychology of learners.

FLA has been classified into three concepts by Horwitz et al. (1986) who proposed three components that contribute to language anxiety. Firstly, Horwich et al. (1986) posit that communication apprehension arises when learners, despite possessing mature ideas, hesitate to genuinely communicate due to perceived deficiencies in their communication skills. Their emphasis is on the manifestation of shyness induced by the fear of interacting with others, particularly in stressful situations or when dealing with unfamiliar individuals. Concrete examples, such as difficulty in speaking in dyads, in groups or in public and listening to or learning oral messages illustrate their perspective.

McCroskey (1997) builds on this by categorizing communication apprehension into four distinct types—trait anxiety, context anxiety, audience anxiety, and situation anxiety. While trait anxiety covers various communication styles, including writing and performance anxieties, context anxiety is specific to certain situations, and audience and situation anxiety result from external barriers or situational factors. McCroskey attributes communication apprehension to heredity, environment, or a combination of both.

Expanding further, Kráľová (2016) contributes a conceptualization that precisely defines communication apprehension as the unease or fear individuals experience when participating in communication. Kráľová's definition encompasses both the transmission and reception of information, emphasizing the emotional and psychological dimensions with terms like "unease" and "fear." Unlike Horwich et al. (1986), Kráľová does not specifically tie apprehension to perceived skill deficiencies but focuses on the emotional and psychological aspects of unease and fear in communication.

In summary, Horwich et al. highlight the role of perceived deficiencies in communication skills leading to shyness, McCroskey categorizes apprehension types with a focus on external factors, and Kráľová emphasizes the emotional and psychological dimensions without explicitly linking it to skill deficiencies. Together, these perspectives offer a comprehensive view of the intricate interplay of emotional, psychological, and practical challenges inherent in communication apprehension.

Secondly, test anxiety encompasses the fear of academic evaluation tools such as exams and tests. It arises when students, influenced by previous poor performance, develop a negative attitude towards these assessments (Horwich et al., 1986). This apprehension related to exams, quizzes, and assessments designed to assess students' performance is a multifaceted phenomenon (Wu, 2010). It involves two key elements: the cognitive aspect, known as "worry," which includes concerns about evaluation and the potential repercussions of failure, and the affective aspect, termed "emotionality," relating to the perception of autonomic reactions triggered by the test scenario (Liebert & Morris, 1967). In essence, test anxiety extends to both less formal and more structured examinations, impacting students' academic experiences and attitudes toward assessment tools.

Finally, fear of negative evaluation is defined as 'apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively' (Watson & Friend, 1969, p. 449). As per Aydın (2016), the fear of negative assessment is a form of anxiety that arises when individuals fall short of making a positive social impact Although similar to test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation is not limited to test-taking situations, being broader in scope since it may occur in any social, evaluative situation such as interviewing for a job or speaking in a foreign language class.

In foreign language classrooms, students undergo continuous assessment by their teachers, with a heightened awareness of both actual and perceived evaluations from their peers (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). The apprehension of receiving negative evaluations, particularly from instructors, significantly contributes to foreign language anxiety. Learners harbor concerns about judgment from peers, instructors, and individuals within the language-learning setting. This anxiety can hinder active participation, self-expression, and overall language proficiency, thereby creating a challenging emotional environment for the learner (Chen, 2023). Focusing on the anxiety encountered by language learners in educational settings, Horwitz et al. (1986) defined FLCA as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128).

Navigating FLA in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) Courses: Understanding Contextual Dynamics

ESP courses are designed to teach English to learners who need it for specific purposes such as business, engineering, medicine etc. Learners in ESP courses may experience higher levels of FLA due to the technical and specialized nature of the language they need to learn and the high stakes associated with their profession (Basturkmen, 2010). Research on FLA among university students has been conducted in various countries, and the findings consistently demonstrate the negative impact of anxiety on language learning. For example, studies by Amengual-Pizarro (2018) and Strati Gjergo and Meçe (2022) used the FCLAS to measure students' FLA in public higher education institutions. The former found that FLA had a negative effect on students' speaking proficiency attending two ESP courses (English for Philology and English for Biology) at the university of the Balearic Islands (UIB). The latter investigated students attending various ESP study programs at the Aleksander Moisu University of Durres, Albania. It was found that FLA had a significantly negative correlation with the students' test results in ESP. In addition, in the context of a private vocational higher education in Indonesia, Ayuningtyas et al (2022) conducted a study where 171 ESP learners participated and found that Communication Apprehension was the predominant factor contributing to anxiety. The study involved students from Accounting, Business Administration, and Information Technology departments, spanning first to third-year students with beginner to pre-intermediate English proficiency. Across all academic years, anxiety was prevalent, especially linked to unprepared performances, self-negative evaluation,

and language test failures. The key takeaway is that the recurring results observed in studies utilizing the FCLAS in ESP settings emphasize the broader significance of addressing anxiety as a critical factor in enhancing the overall effectiveness of ESP language education.

However, it's essential to recognize that the impact of anxiety is not isolated; rather, it interacts with various contextual factors. Literature highlights the substantial influence of factors such as class methodology and the teacher's role on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). Hananingsih's (2023) study on ESP programs revealed notably high anxiety levels (92.3%). The primary sources of anxiety were communication apprehension, especially in speaking, and fear of negative evaluation. These findings distinctly emphasize the influential role of contextual factors in shaping FLCA experiences within specific language learning environments. Notably, test anxiety, though present, had the least impact, providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to FLCA in this particular context. This suggests that, in the studied environment, anxiety associated with language testing is not as significant as anxieties related to communication and peer evaluation.

The significance of exploring contextual factors is reiterated by Lee and Ye (2023) in their survey, emphasizing that employing research designs involving multiple occasions may be impractical in numerous second/foreign language educational contexts. Teachers grapple with constraints related to limited resources and time, making it challenging to administer the FLCAS on multiple occasions. Their research suggests that a learner's response to the FLCAS may lack consistency across different instances, influenced by various classroom activities triggering anxiety. Consequently, it is recommended that teachers acknowledge the dynamic nature of interpreting FLA levels in learners, advocating for an ongoing evaluation process rather than relying solely on a one-time assessment using the FLCAS. In essence, drawing conclusions about FLA based solely on FLCAS responses should not be considered a definitive diagnosis of the anxiety experienced by language learners in the classroom.

In a comparable context, Piniel and Zólyomi (2022) conducted a meta-analysis on gender's role in FLCA. Using the FLCAS, they analyzed 48 studies, finding a slight inclination of higher FLCA in females, but with no statistical significance. The meta-analysis concluded no clear association between gender and FLCA levels, and moderator analyses failed to establish links across variables. Acknowledging limitations, including a small study pool and issues of missing data the study emphasizes the need for quality in empirical studies and encourages further research on language learning phenomena through meta-analytic studies, considering additional variables.

Navigating Contextual Dynamics of FLA in Greek ESP Settings

After a thorough literature review in the Greek academic context, only two studies conducted in Greek university ESP settings were found to have employed the FCLAS. These studies demonstrated a contradiction concerning the level of stress experienced by Greek students in the ESP classroom. This finding aligns with the assertion made by Hananingsih (2023), who, through research, identified the significant influence of contextual factors in shaping FCLA

experiences. Specifically, Karras (2012) found that students exhibited low to moderate levels of anxiety while Tzoannopoulou (2016) found that the overwhelming majority of Greek learners reported stress. This finding implies that anxiety appears to be a key variable to take into consideration in ESP planning and teaching. The current Greek ESP case indicated that students might have interpreted the FCLAS items differently or perhaps ESP courses were, as someone might expect, different or more or less demanding among the departments in all universities involved highlighting thus the importance of departmental culture (Becher, 1994).

This contradiction reflects criticism by Park (2014) and Horwitz (2017) in relation to the validity of FCLAS. Park (2014) argued that since the FCLAS was developed in English and has been translated into various languages for students to understand the scale, the validity of the measure might vary with different cultures. Horwitz (2017) also agreed with Park stating that the scale was designed to measure anxieties based on American culture with English-speaking participants that might be different in other cultural contexts and suggested that the FCLAS measure should be investigated in different cultures because a different factor structure might be discovered. In other words, Horwitz (2017) argued that the components of foreign language anxiety are likely to vary in different cohorts and that foreign language anxiety has different triggers and manifestations in different cultures. The current study responds to this criticism and diverges from measuring students' overall anxiety levels. Instead, it focuses on elucidating how Greek students perceive each item on the FCLAS in terms of its potential to induce anxiety, with the aim of potentially guiding adjustments to the FCLAS to better suit the Greek context.

Methodology

Research setting: Overview of the ESP courses

At the university of Patras, students at the Agrinio campus are required to take two three-hour courses in ESP during their first two semesters. In the first semester the course is focused on English for General Academic Purposes (EGAP) and teaches students how to write academic essays. In the second semester, the course in focused on English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) and teaches students skills specific to their professional needs within their discipline, such as making public statements, debating and writing professional reports. Both courses are available for incoming ERASMUS students responding to one aspect of the university's internationalization strategy that is the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI).

Instrument

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) was distributed to students attending classes in all departments of the University of Patras (Agrinio campus). Some additional questions were added containing information regarding gender, department of study, foreign language qualifications, students' overall feelings in relation to foreign language anxiety and an open-ended question providing the opportunity to students to justify their responses.

Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 128) argue that the FLCAS is defined as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process". The FLCAS consists of a 33-item scale which integrates three components: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

The first factor, labelled as communication apprehension, contains 11 items reflecting the communication (1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, 32). The second factor, labelled as test anxiety, contains 15 items indicating anxiety (3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28). The third factor, labelled as fear of negative evaluation, contains 7 items indicating students' fear of evaluation in the foreign language classroom (2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, 33). Horwitz et al. (1986) designed the instrument which aims to measure anxiety. Higher scores indicate more anxiety in language learning behaviour; for example, for positively worded items, 'strongly agree' receives 5 points and 'strongly disagree' receives 1 point, while for negatively worded items, the reverse applies. Total score can range from 33 to 165 points.

Students were asked to respond using the Likert scale Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither agree nor disagree [neutral] (N), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) for every item of the scale. The frequency and percentage were processed to identify a) an interpretation of each FCLAS item as representing Anxiety, Non-anxiety, or neutral anxiety, b) the ranking of the FCLAS items which represents students' anxiety.

Participants and Data Collection

Sampling for the selection of students completing the FLCAS questionnaire was based on the notion of random purposeful sampling. According to Sandelowski (2000), this sampling is employed when there is a large pool of potentially rich-cases and no obvious reason to choose one case over another. In the current study, the purpose of the research was to make use of the students' responses in order to accumulate information on their attitude towards various situations that cause anxiety in the foreign language classroom in order to enrich our understanding of their approach to the learning process. Thus, it would be more useful to gather information from a large sample of the whole population of students registered for the course rather than from a small number of selected students.

One hundred and seventy-five (175) first-year students enrolled to attend ESP courses in all departments operating in the University of Patras (Agrinio campus)[1] participated in the survey. About 32% of the students were from the Department of Business Administration of Food and Agricultural Enterprises, 33.14% of them were undergraduates from the Department of Environmental Engineering, and 30.85% of them were undergraduates from the Department of Cultural Heritage and New Technologies Management. Regarding the students' gender, 56.57% of them were female and 43.42% of them were male.

On the first day of the winter semester, the ESP course tutor invited students attending the initial sessions to fill in the FCLAS. Attendance is not compulsory in Greek universities, so not all registered students were present. Informed consent was achieved by informing students 'what the research is about, why it is being conducted, what it involves for participants, explanations around voluntary participation and reinforcing the notion of withdrawing from the research at any-time' (Bourke and Loveridge, 2014, p. 154). The questionnaires were anonymous in order to maintain the principle of confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The study employed a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies to comprehensively explore foreign language anxiety among students. The primary data-gathering tool was the quantitative method, specifically employed to identify prevalent statements indicative of language anxiety in students' responses. The analysis of questionnaire data utilized descriptive statistics, aligning with Rosenfeld, Edwards, and Thomas's (1995) recommended approach for gathering self-report descriptive information.

Despite the predominant use of quantitative methods, a distinctive feature of this study was the inclusion of an open-ended question. This qualitative component aimed to provide students with an opportunity to offer in-depth explanations, reflecting the concept of 'complementarity' when a study 'seeks elaboration, enhancement, illustration, clarification of the results from one method with the results from another' as articulated by Greene et al. (1989, 259, as cited in Bryman, 2006, p. 105).

To achieve this, a beneficial approach involves content analysis, which can be divided into three phases: "immersion, reduction, and interpretation." (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Sandelowski, 1995a, as cited in Forman & Damschroder, 2007 p. 46). This method aims to generate new knowledge from raw, unorganized data by examining each case comprehensively throughout the process.

In the current survey, the researcher applied the three-phase content analysis—immersion, reduction, and interpretation. During immersion, students' comments underwent meticulous reading, categorization, and inductive coding. In the reduction phase, these emergent codes were systematically organized into themes, refining the data for thorough analysis. The

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[1] According to article 2 of 52/2022 (Gazette 131/7-7-2022, Vol. A) the departments operating in Agrinio either merged with other departments or moved to Patras

inductive development of codes, stemming from the data itself during immersion and preliminary coding, played a key role in ensuring a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the collected data. Subsequently, the researcher compared the categorized comments with insights from other surveys, adding contextual depth to the interpretation. It is important to note that in the context of this study, the mixed methods design incorporated "concurrent procedures" involved the simultaneous collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, with subsequent integration during the interpretation of overall results (Creswell et al., 2003, p. 171).

Findings

In this section, the responses provided by respondents were analyzed. The frequency and percentage were calculated to accomplish two objectives: a) to interpret each FCLAS item as indicating Anxiety, Non-anxiety, or neutral anxiety, and b) to determine the ranking of the FCLAS items reflecting students' anxiety levels. Thus, findings are displayed in tables in order to respond to the first research question in relation to Greek students' perception of each item on the FCLAS in terms of its potential to induce anxiety.

Findings as shown in Table 1 below indicated that most students (58.85%) overall showed a neutral feeling of anxiety in the foreign language classroom.

Table 1. Students' overall feelings of foreign language classroom anxiety

Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
6.28	10.85	58.85	14.85	13.71

Students were asked to indicate their level of English noting whether they were holders of any type of the available different English certifications based on the Common European Framework of Reference. As shown in Table 2, the majority reported that they were holders of a qualification of English corresponding to the B2 level.

Table 2. Level of English

Level of English	%
C2	23.42
C1	13.14
B2	84 48
B1	9.4
A2	2.85
A1	1.14
None	2.28

Students' responses in relation to communication apprehension are offered in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Overall ranking and interpretation for Communication Apprehension response values

FCLAS	SA %	A%	N%	D%	SD%	Interpretation	Ranking
Q1	12	29.71	36	6.28	6.28	Neutral-anxiety	
Q4	12.5	24.57	26.28	22.28	14.28	Neutral-anxiety	
Q9	18.85	24.57	22.85	24	9.71	Anxiety	4
Q14	27.42	24	26.28	13.4	9.14	Anxiety	2
Q15	14.28	27.4	28.57	21.14	8.57	Neutral Anxiety	
Q18	19.42	19.42	33.71	17.71	9.71	Neutral Anxiety	
Q24	15.42	19.42	30.28	20	14.85	Neutral Anxiety	
Q27	23.42	29.14	22.28	17.14	6.28	Anxiety	1
Q29	16.57	29.71	24	18.28	11.42	Anxiety	3
Q30	10.28	25.71	23.42	29.14	11.42	Non-Anxiety	
Q32	20.57	24.57	36	13.14	5.71	Neutral Anxiety	

It is shown that the respondents endorsed three items indicative of communication apprehension. Item 27 (*I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my foreign language class*, 52.56%), 14 (*I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers,*51.42%), item 29 (*I get nervous when I don't understand every word the foreign language teacher says*, 46.28 %) and item 9 (*I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in the foreign language class*, 43.42%)

Interestingly, even though students reported stress while speaking the foreign language in class, it was found that students did not seem to feel anxious when speaking the foreign language with native speakers which might imply that they might be interested in getting more exposure to standard native English (NE) pronunciation models. Students' responses to test anxiety are offered in Table 4.

Table 4. Overall anxiety ranking and interpretation of Test Anxiety responses

FCLAS	SA%	A%	N%	D%	SD%	Interpretation	Ranking
Q3	10.28	33.14	39.42	17.71	9.71	Neutral Anxiety	
Q5	25.14	32	24.75	15.42	2.85	Anxiety	2

FCLAS	SA%	A%	N%	D%	SD%	Interpretation	Ranking
Q6	16	18.85	26.28	25.71	13.14	Neutral Anxiety	
Q8	12	22.85	41.71	17.14	6.28	Neutral Anxiety	
Q10	18.85	42.28	14.28	17.14	7.12	Anxiety	1
Q11	18.28	22.85	33.14	17.14	8.57	Neutral Anxiety	
Q12	22.28	24	17.71	25.71	10.28	Non-Anxiety	
Q16	23.42	26.85	22.85	17.14	9.71	Anxiety	3
Q17	16	18.85	25.14	19.42	20.57	Neutral Anxiety	
Q20	21.71	22.28	22.28	20.57	23	Anxiety/ Neutral Anxiety	4
Q21	14.28	24	16	25.71	20	Non-Anxiety	
Q22	15.42	26.28	30.85	18.28	9.71	Neutral Anxiety	
Q25	13.71	16.57	21.14	30.28	18.28	Non- Anxiety	
Q26	19.42	17.71	26.85	23.42	19.57	Neutral Anxiety	
Q28	19.42	26.85	28.57	20.57	4.57	Neutral Anxiety	

As shown in Table 4 certain items were endorsed by students. Item 10 (*I worry about the consequences of failing the foreign language class*, 61.13%), item 5 (*It wouldn't bother me at all to take more language classes*, 57.14%), item 16 (*Even if I am well prepared for a foreign language class, I feel anxious about it,* 50.27%). It is important to note that Item 20 (*I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in a foreign language class*, 44.56%) was also found neutral in students' responses. These statistics imply that Greek tertiary students prioritize test results over learning in foreign language classes, revealing potential educational shortcomings. Students' responses to fear of negative evaluation are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Overall ranking and interpretation of Fear of Negative Evaluation responses

FCLAS	SA %	A%	N%	D%	SD%	Interpretation	Ranking
Q2	10.25	20	25.24	30.14	14.28	Non- Anxiety	
Q7	16.57	21.71	25.71	21.71	14.28	Neutral Anxiety	

Q13	13.71	32.57	22.28	18.28	13.14	Anxiety	2
Q19	16	26.85	24	19.42	12.57	Anxiety	3
Q23	15.42	19.42	32	21.14	12	Neutral Anxiety	
Q31	27.42	20	21.14	18.85	12.57	Anxiety	1
Q33	21.71	20	24.57	18.28	15.42	Neutral Anxiety	

It is shown that three items were endorsed by students. Item 31 *(I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language,* 47.42%), item13 (*It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my foreign language class,* 46.28%), item 19 (*I am afraid that my foreign language teacher is ready to correct every mistake,* 42.85%). The percentage on the negatively worded item 2 *(I don't worry about making mistakes in a foreign language class,* 44.42%) reflects students' fear for negative evaluation. The main implication is that students' apprehensions regarding negative evaluation and engagement in the educational process. and embarrassment in foreign language classes may hinder their active participation.

Taking into consideration the main purpose of the research, that is to seek an understanding of the FCLAS' components within the Greek higher education context, a further examination of the results was undertaken. Statistics in Table 6 show that some of the highest scores on FCLAS items that caused anxiety to Greek students were linked to language skills, especially those that involve comfort level with expressive or receptive language corresponding to Sparks's, and Ganschow's (1991) analysis of the FCLAS items in relation to items with language components. This finding shows that Greek students' anxiety appeared to stem from their linguistic deficiency.

Table 6. FCLAS items with language components

FCLAS	%	Language skills	Ranking
Q 27	52.57	Oral expressive	1
O 14	51.42	Oral expressive	2
O 31	47.42	Oral receptive	3
Q13/29	46.28	Oral receptive	4
Q 20	44.56	Oral expressive/ receptive	5
Q 2	44.42	Oral receptive	6
Q 9	43.42	Oral expressive	7
O 19	42.85	Oral receptive	8

Analysis of qualitative data

Students were given the opportunity to justify the reasons why they feel stressed when attending a foreign language class in the open-ended question. This open-ended question was useful to respond to the second research question in relation to the validity of FCLAS within the cultural context of Greece. It is important to note that due to the need to avoid redundancy, some students' similar responses, albeit expressed in different words, were omitted from inclusion here. An inductive analysis of the answers was carried out yielding the following themes.[2]

The first theme was language competence and students' relationships with other students as the excerpts below illustrate:

> I feel stressed when I am examined in class and I feel frightened because my fellow students are present. (Student 1)

> I find it hard to control myself when I get upset. When this happens, I might get verbally abusive towards others. As a result, there were times when I got punished by my English teacher because I swore at my classmates when I saw them laughing while I was asked by my teacher to respond to a question in class. (Student 2)

The above comments suggest that students fear making mistakes during speaking activities in a foreign language class, which could negatively impact their image as competent students. Teachers should be aware of this and seek to alleviate social anxiety by introducing methods that foster meaningful communication in less public environments, like pair or small group interactions.

The second theme of teacher behaviour revealed a lack of support as well as the importance of learning styles as shown in the excerpts below:

> Some English teachers are very demanding when they don't allow students to correct their mistakes by themselves. I was discouraged from speaking English (Student 3)

> I had an English teacher at school who was correcting our language mistakes with an ironic and aggressive tone in her voice. It was so hurtful. (Student 4)

> I learn better through visuals. My English teacher at school hardly ever wrote anything on the blackboard, let alone use any videos in class. (Student 5)

The primary inference is that teacher conduct, especially when it lacks assistance, is excessively critical, or neglects to address varied learning preferences, can profoundly impact students' educational journeys.

The third theme identified referred to the negative feelings towards learning English. These were the answers given by the students:

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[2] Even though an English version of the FCLAS questionnaire was distributed, students were asked to respond to the open-ended question in Greek for convenience. Their comments were translated into English

> Attending English was a nightmare for me when I was a pupil in secondary education. I got punished many times because I was struggling to learn English. However, now at university, I am willing to try to learn and I will attend all courses. (Student 6)

> When I am asked to answer questions and I am not prepared I am stressed and suffering from psychosomatic symptoms. I feel pain in my belly and I get an asthma attack. (Student 7)

The above comments highlight the need to address negative emotions and create a supportive learning environment that promotes positive emotions and attitudes towards learning English This is because teachers and students can benefit from understanding and managing emotions to enrich their knowledge and skills in learning and teaching.

The fourth theme that emerged was family pressure, which encapsulated students' stress, as evidenced by the following excerpts:

> My parents expect excellence and I am constantly stressed. Once, when my English language teacher who taught me privately in our house said to my parents that she is not sure whether I would succeed in passing the Proficiency exams, I wasn't allowed to go out with my friends that weekend (Student 8).

> When I failed the exam for the first certificate in English, my parents were very upset. All of my cousins passed the exam and I felt bad. They kept comparing my performance to my cousins' performance and I think I was depressed for some time. (Student 9)

> Comments by students regarding parental pressure to excel in English highlight the influence of social norms in the Greek community on their experiences, emphasizing the necessity for a more balanced approach to language learning that considers individual needs and capabilities.

The fifth and last theme Greek educational system/ job hunting contributed to students' FLA as shown below:

> Rote learning prevails in the Greek educational system. The same applies to foreign language learning. Our teacher at my coaching school was asking us to learn by heart extracts from books. This stressed me so much since these texts were hard to memorise. (Student 10)

> In Greece, certificates in English are always required during job hunting. Thus, I worry about the consequences of failing English exams. (Student 11)

These comments underscore the importance placed on gaining foreign language credentials for employment, indicating a broader need for educational reform to better align with students' needs and aspirations.

Discussion and Conclusion

In relation to the research questions posed, it was observed that the majority of first -year Greek students generally exhibit a neutral stance towards anxiety-inducing situations in the foreign language classroom, potentially due to skepticism about the effectiveness of language courses at state institutions (Katsara, 2014). However, a deeper analysis reveals nuanced findings. While students tend to report neutrality on the FCLAS scale regarding specific anxiety triggers, their responses and comments highlight sources of stress, such as fear of failing language tests and negative evaluations from teachers and peers. Factors contributing to this anxiety include teaching methods, language proficiency, parental involvement, and cultural norms. Notably, students fear negative evaluation due to the pressure to make a positive impression on their social circle, underscoring the significance of socio-psychological dynamics in education. Gougoulakis and Economou (2016) consider university pedagogy as a multidimensional process arguing among other things that counselling and educational psychology would enable university teachers to best communicate and build harmonious rapport with their students.

The impact of culture on students' academic performance was evident in their insightful remarks. Firstly, Greek students' apprehension of negative evaluation from teachers seemed to stem from a lack of supportive structures within the educational environment. This observation challenges the notion of power distance in Greek culture, as proposed by Hofstede (1986), which suggests a preference for hierarchical relationships in teacher-student interactions. Contrary to this, some students expressed a preference for a less authoritarian teaching style, indicating the value of guidance from teachers who don't assert absolute authority. This discrepancy supports McSweeney's (2002) critique of Hofstede's model, suggesting potential bias in prioritizing predetermined beliefs over critical assessment of empirical data. Additionally, this critique is also reflected by Katsara's (2021) research findings, supporting the idea of Greek ESP teachers acting as facilitators to help students overcome anxiety.

Secondly, the research unveiled that Greek students' learning attitudes and behaviors were shaped not only by their familial surroundings but also by the broader societal milieu. This emphasizes the significant correlation between parental influence on fostering educational and students' individual convictions and endeavors in learning. These observations align with Hofstede's (1986) analysis, indicating Greece's low score on individualism, reflecting strong community bonds, and high score on masculinity, indicating a societal inclination toward achievement and material rewards.

Finally, a subset of students' comments suggested that specific individual personality traits, such as difficulty in emotional regulation leading to verbal aggression, impacted their English language performance, contributing to their experience of stress. This underlines a notable link between students' emotional states, academic achievement, and their personality traits.

As Richards (2022) argue, there is a need for more attention to emotions in the theory, research, and practice of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL).

Synthesizing the findings, the current survey suggests that for Greek students, anxiety in the foreign language classroom primarily stems from the impact of inadequate language skills on their performance. Students' responses indicate that many fear underperforming in front of their peers, teachers, parents, and society, reflecting the importance of academic success in the Greek university context. This sentiment aligns with a survey by Kamtsios and Karagiannopoulou (2015), revealing that Greek undergraduates often feel pressured to excel in exams, linking their self-worth with grades. Additionally, previous studies by Angouri et al. (2010) and Tsiplakides (2018) shed light on how societal norms and family expectations drive the prioritization of foreign language certification, particularly English qualifications, further reinforcing the broader cultural ideals surrounding academic and career success in Greek society.

Consequently, these findings support Park (2014) and Horwitz (2017), emphasizing the need for a culturally specific approach in foreign language acquisition research, as anxiety factors vary depending on cultural context. Implementing English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) poses a challenge for ESP teachers in Greece, necessitating training in adapting instruction to meet learners' needs (Basturkmen, 2019). Pedagogical implications suggest that while teachers cannot control parental involvement, they can guide parents on supporting their child's learning and foster a supportive classroom environment. Moreover, teachers can tailor teaching approaches to address personality traits influencing student performance, as seen in Kamtsios and Karagiannopoulou's (2020) survey identifying distinct student profiles based on personality traits. However, effective implementation of these principles relies on ESP teachers receiving adequate pedagogical training, as noted by Akerlind (2003). Rotidi et al. (2020) found that Greek university professors recognize the importance of such training for enhancing communication skills and providing psychological support to students. Further research across departments and universities in Greece can uncover additional stress factors affecting student performance, potentially leading to modifications of assessment tools like the FCLAS to better measure Greek students' anxiety levels.

Conflict of interests

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