

Foreign Language Anxiety and Psychological Safety

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Abstract

While foreign language anxiety (FLA) has been a hot topic in second language acquisition (SLA), relatively little is known about the process of how language learners overcome the negative effects of FLA and obtain psychological safety. To fill this gap, this current study aims to examine to what extent language learners experience a change in FLA quantitatively, and what factors cause FLA and contribute to creating psychological safety in learners' minds. To meet these objectives, 42 Japanese English as a foreign language (EFL) learners took part in this research. This study comprises three survey instruments: a consent form, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) translated into Japanese, and a semi-structured interview. A one-way repeated measures ANOVA indicated that there was a statistically significant change in FLA levels during the academic year 2022. Furthermore, a qualitative data analysis suggests that interacting with peers, instructors' teaching approaches, and promoting resilience might play

an important role in easing EFL learners' FLA. In line with these findings, implications for EFL instructors are discussed.

Foreign Language Anxiety and Psychological Safety

Second language acquisition (SLA) is a process by which “people learn a second language not as a young child but rather later in life” (Dawson & Phelan, 2016, p. 345). Successful SLA can be determined by many affective factors. Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is one of the most researched psychological variables in linguistics research. FLA is a situation-specific anxiety construct that affects language learners in language classes (Horwitz et al., 1986). SLA researchers in the field of linguistics began to investigate the relationship between FLA and second language (L2) development using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) to understand L2 learners' FLA levels. Research has revealed that FLA has a negative impact on L2 achievement (e.g., Horwitz, 2001; Sanaei, 2015). More recent research throws light on creating a safe environment in

the language classroom where learners can reduce anxious feelings and freely express themselves (e.g., Dryden et al., 2021). Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) argue that creating a relaxed environment in the English classroom might allow L2 learners to reduce FLA. Yamakawa (2018) established a conceptual framework to understand how learners reduce their anxiety and obtain psychological safety in their minds in an educational setting. In this framework, the process of how learners reflect on themselves, develop a relationship of trust with others, and acquire psychological safety is explained. There is little research that examined if Yamakawa's framework can be applied to L2 learning environment. In order to provide insights into the applicability of Yamakawa's framework, further examination of the process of learners' emotional change is needed. This current study was conducted to find out: (a) to what extent FLA levels of college EFL learners change in a required English course; (b) what factors contribute to easing FLA and creating psychological safety that allows learners to feel emotionally safe and express their opinions freely. In addition to analyzing quantitative and qualitative data, the present study discussed Yamakawa's conceptual framework to understand the process of how English learners reduce FLA levels and obtain a sense of psychological safety.

Literature Review

FLA

According to Martin and Alvarez (2017), FLA is considered an emotional and individual characteristic that foreign language learners may possess. Dykes (2017) notes that this type of anxiety is unique to the language learning

process. Horwitz et al. (1986) are leading researchers in the field of FLA. They clearly articulated the concept of FLA. FLA was defined as "a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process" (p. 128). Horwitz and her colleagues classified FLA as 3 different types: (a) communication apprehension, (b) test anxiety, and (c) fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension refers to a type of shyness that is caused by fear or anxiety when communicating with people. For example, L2 learners might have difficulty in speaking or listening to the target language in pairs or groups. Test anxiety stems from a fear of failure in language tests. Some L2 learners might experience test anxiety if they think that non-perfect performance in tests means failure. These students tend to put unrealistic demands on themselves. Fear of negative evaluation is defined as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluation situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). It might occur when L2 learners feel less confident about meeting the proper social expectation by speaking the target language such as at a job interview.

Apart from the sources of FLA, researchers have paid attention to the effects of FLA on L2 learners' language achievement. There have been a number of studies which find a negative correlation between FLA and language achievement. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) has been widely used to examine FLA's influence on a number of language learning variables. This questionnaire was designed to measure general foreign lan-

guage classroom anxiety. According to Aida (1994), second-year American students learning Japanese with high FLCAS scores were likely to receive low final grades. The meta-analysis conducted recently by Botes et al. (2020) showed a negative relationship between FLCAS and academic achievement of four language skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

As well as revealing the effects of FLA on language performance, a number of studies are concerned with the general practice of language teachers. Horwitz et al. (1986) argue that educators hold the major responsibility for helping L2 learners dealing with FLA. They suggest that teachers use student support techniques such as “relaxation exercises, advice on effective language learning strategies, behavioral contracting, and journal keeping” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 131). Similarly, Tóth (2011) suggests that teachers should be aware that there are students who experience fears and worries triggered by teachers. While a number of studies revealed that oral communication activities could increase FLA levels (e.g., Horwitz et al., 1986; Woodrow, 2006), some other studies showed that English learners could reduce communication apprehension in a relaxed and supportive environment where continuous communicative-based teaching and cooperative language learning techniques which encourage students to speak English were implemented. (Nagahashi 2007; Suwantharathip & Wichadee, 2010; Dykes, 2017). A more recent study shows that educators are suggested to make plans or use techniques to boost learners’ resilience to help them cope with anxiety because the study revealed that improved resilience could allow students to encounter less anxiety (Shen, 2022).

Psychological Safety

As with cooperative language learning, student-centered learning approach has been paid attention to as a way to improve language skills (e.g., Lak et al., 2017; Kassem, 2019). Kassem defined a student-centered approach as “an instructional approach in which students influence the content, activities, materials, and pace of learning. The teacher is not a provider of knowledge, but a provider of opportunities from which learners can learn independently and from one another” (p. 140). The approach involves working on classroom tasks in pairs and/or groups (Emaliana, 2017). The major challenge that teachers face is to provide a safe environment for students because students might feel uncomfortable in a student-centered classroom if they are used to teacher-centered approaches (Catalano & Catalano, 1999). Teacher-centered approaches involve teachers providing information and monitoring students for correct answers. Students receive information from teachers and are encouraged to obtain the correct answers (Emaliana, 2017). Also, Alghonaim (2014) reported that student-centered activities could be anxiety-provoking to language learners. Alghonaim’s study revealed that Saudi EFL students’ FLA was caused by communicative activities such as oral presentations and role-plays in front of the class.

The idea of creating a safe environment in classrooms is new to SLA (Tu, 2021). The concept of psychological safety has been originally introduced by Schein (1993) as a component of facilitating organizational change. Schein claims that psychological safety helps people to overcome learning anxiety that is triggered when their opinions are different from other people’s expectations. Later, Edmondson (2014)

describes psychological safety as a shared belief among members of a team/community that it is safe to take interpersonal risks in a particular context such as a workplace. According to Tu (2021), from the viewpoint of SLA, psychological safety refers to “the safety that students and teachers feel in the classroom context for taking initiative, interact, and speak out their ideas without being embarrassed, humiliated, and punished” (p.2). Tu claims that a classroom culture that involves psychological safety for students can lead to more outstanding and positive outcomes such as active engagement and motivation. While the topic that focuses on easing FLA and promoting psychological safety in EFL/ESL contexts is less explored, Dryden et al (2021) found that the use of translanguaging has the potential to ease EFL students’ FLA-related negative emotions such as fear, distress, and embarrassment. Translanguaging refers to “a pedagogical practice in bilingual education which deliberately allowed for the interchangeable use of the languages of input and output” (Yasar Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022, p. 177). A more recent study revealed that instructors’ teaching approaches, pair and group work, and dialogue with peers contribute to alleviating FLA and creating a safe space in a language classroom (Tataka, 2023).

In order to comprehend how students develop a secure feeling and acquire psychological safety in the learning environment, Yamakawa (2018) established a conceptual framework. In this framework, Yamakawa hypothesizes that learners need to reflect on themselves, change their behaviors, and build a new reliable relationship with others to become autonomous learners. According to Yamakawa’s conceptual framework, first, students realize how differ-

ent they are from others (e.g., peers, instructors) and start to ask themselves if their current beliefs, mindsets, and behaviors are appropriate as they are exposed to a new world. Exposure to a new world means interacting with people in a classroom in an educational setting. Since the differences are uncomfortable for the learners, they want to change their mindsets and behaviors and try to adjust to the new environment (new world). Yamakawa claims that this flow of mindset is the same as the growth mindset which was popularized by Dweck (2016). Dweck notes that a growth mindset is a belief learners have that their talent or intelligence can be developed. Through interacting with others and reflecting on themselves, learners are expected to change their mindsets (growth mindset). According to Yamakawa, once they change their mindsets, they become more open-minded. These mental and behavioral changes lead to creating a new different relationship between the learner and other people. After the learners have succeeded in fixing the relationship, they can obtain psychological safety, start to take risks without fear or anxiety, and are willing to change their mindsets and behaviors more in a virtuous cycle. Yamakawa stresses that interacting with people through dialogue is crucial to make this positive mental development happen.

Although previous studies have revealed that continuous communicative based teaching and cooperative language learning techniques can help alleviate students’ FLA (Nagahashi, 2007; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010; Dykes, 2017), there are not sufficient studies that have explored the process of how L2 learners gain psychological safety in a language classroom. This gap exists because most studies have fo-

cused on factors that influence FLA levels using quantitative approaches. In addition, few studies have examined the conceptual framework established by Yamakawa (2018) in light of empirical evidence. Therefore, the present study tries to investigate if there is a statistically significant change in FLA between the three different points in time: the beginning of the spring semester, the end of the spring semester, and the end of the fall semester at a university, and also examine what qualitative factors influence students to make a change in FLA and to gain psychological safety. Finally, this study discusses how the empirical data lend support to the proposed Yamakawa's conceptual model.

Research Question

This study seeks to find the answers to the following research questions:

- 1) To what extent does a change in FLA occur in the English language classroom during the 2022 academic year?
- 2) What qualitative factors contribute to a change in FLA and feeling of psychological safety in the English language classroom?

Methodology

Research Design

An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed to gain a better understanding of students' changes in FLA levels and factors that influence their emotions in depth. The data was collected in two consecutive phases, quantitative and qualitative. The results of the quantitative analysis were followed up with a qualitative phase, which helped the author to explain the initial quanti-

tative results.

Participants

Participants were 42 university students who completed tests of administrations of FLCAS at three different points in time. The participants were undergraduate students from three departments at a university in Tokyo: Letters, Law, and Education. A convenience sampling method was used as a method for selecting participants. According to Etikan et al. (2016), this method is a type of nonprobability or nonrandom sampling that involves choosing participants that are readily available and easily accessible to the researcher without additional requirements. This sampling method was used in this study because all participants were enrolled in English courses in which all instructors implemented the same student-centered approaches using the same required textbook. Participants were enrolled in a mandatory two-credit English course held twice a week during the spring and fall semesters of the 2022 academic year. Four different instructors including the author covered the English courses with a student-centered approach, which encourages students to produce the target language in pairs and groups. Among the English instructors, two were native Japanese speakers, and two were native English speakers. The courses were offered for students with basic levels of English proficiency based on their TOEIC scores (280 and below). For the sake of confidentiality, each participant is identified with numbers in the present study.

Instruments

This study employed three sources of data: a consent form, FLCAS translated into Japanese by Yashima et al. (2009), and a semi-structured interview. The 5-point Likert scale is

used in the original FLCAS developed by Horwitz et al. (1986). However, the 5-point Likert scale was changed into a 6-point system used in Dyke's (2017) study to clarify the existence or non-existence of FLA because research has shown that Asian (Chinese and Japanese) people are more likely to avoid extreme responses and choose middle options (Wang et al., 2013). The modified FLCAS contains 33 items with the following measures and weights: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). For negatively worded anxiety items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32), scores were reversed

Another instrument was an open-ended semi-structured interview. Interview items comprised relevant items inquiring about participants' attitudes and feelings towards their English class. Items included the following five questions: (a) How did you feel about the English I and English II class?, (b) Did you feel a change in your feeling through the English I and English II class? Why or why not? How?, (c) Did you see your personal growth through the English I and English II class? Why or why not?, (d) How did you feel about working with your partner and with the members in your group?, and (e) Did you feel anxious during the English I and English II class? Why or why not? The interviews lasted for between 20 and 30 minutes. Interviews were conducted on Zoom in Japanese, which was both the interviewer and participants' first and dominant language, at a place and time the students preferred. Students who exhibited a significant increase or decrease in FLCAS scores were invited to participate in the interview. All participants' quotes were translated into English in this study.

Procedure

The author made a video explaining this

current study in Japanese which was shown to the participants in the beginning of the spring semester of the 2022 academic year. The students who signed a consent form participated in this study by the second week of May. Instructors asked students who agreed to this study to complete the FLCAS from the second week of May to May 24th. The students took a 15-week English course (English I) from the second week of April to the third week of July. The FLCAS was administered to the students again from the third week of July to July 22nd. After the fall semester began, students took another 15-week English course (English II) which continued to use the same textbook as the one used in the spring semester. Finally, they completed the FLCAS again from the second week of December to January 27th.

After the fall semester ended, six students were asked to answer the semi-structured interviews. The author chose students based on the results of the FLCAS. The difference between the FLCAS score gathered in May and the one at the end of the fall semester (December and January) and *z*-scores were calculated. The author tried to reach three students with the highest, second highest, and third highest *z*-scores, and three students with the lowest, second lowest, and third lowest *z*-scores in order to interview both students who increased and decreased FLA substantially. However, since some students with the high *z*-score and low *z*-score did not reply to the author's email, the author continued to ask another student with the next highest *z*-score and another student with the next lowest *z*-score until that student replied. The FLCAS scores gathered in May and at the end of the semester (December and January), and *z*-scores are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1
Interviewees' Scores of FLCAS in May, Scores of FLCAS in December and January, and Z-Score

Student	Scores in May	Scores in December and January	Difference	Z-scores of the difference
Student 1	110	60	-50	-3.75
Student 2	149	115	-34	-2.20
Student 3	128	102	-26	-1.72
Student 4	123	133	10	0.48
Student 5	124	139	15	0.78
Student 6	118	139	21	1.14

Interviews were conducted on Zoom from the fourth week of February 2023 to the third week of March 2023. All the interviews were recorded on Zoom after obtaining the participants' consent.

Analysis

There were two strands of the data analysis. The quantitative data was analyzed with SPSS program through descriptive and a one-way repeated measures ANOVA as the score data from the FLCAS collected at the beginning of the spring semester, at the end of the spring semester, and at the end of the fall semester was normally distributed. P values < .05 were considered statistically significant. To specify the variables influencing students' FLA, the qualitative data obtained through interviews was examined using the KJ method (Kawakita, 1967, 1970), which uses a four-step process: (a) card making, (b) grouping and naming, (c) chart

making, and (d) explanation to categorize participants' responses and identify themes and new insight. First, all responses were transcribed, and meaningful messages were written on postcards. Next, similar ideas or concepts from responses were grouped together. Each group was given a name with a single word or short phrase. In the third phase, the groups were arranged on a large sheet to classify the relations. Finally, each classified category was provided with an explanation provided in the result section. In addition to analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data, Yamakawa's (2018) conceptual framework was discussed based on the results to see if students can make a progress as a language learner as the framework explains.

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	95 % Confidence Interval for Mean		M	SD	Min	Max	Interquartile Range
		Lower Bound	Upper Bound					
FLCAS scores in May	42	116.77	129.85	123.31	21	78	166	31
FLCAS scores in July	42	115.93	129.74	122.83	22.15	72	165	26
FLCAS scores at the end of the fall semester	42	103.84	119.68	111.76	25.40	60	173	34

Results

Descriptive statistics were used to examine the basic features of participants' FLA levels at three different times. As shown by Table 2, the mean scores on FLCAS for May, July, and the end of the fall semester are 123.31, 122.83, and 111.76 respectively. The standard deviation (SD) was 21 for May, 22.15 for July, and 25.40 for the end of the fall semester, indicating that the scores gathered in May were less spread than the scores collected in the other two times. Since the mean scores collected at the three times were above 50% of the total FLCAS score (198), it seems that participants in this study had relatively high levels of FLA throughout the year.

To examine whether there was a significant difference between any timepoints, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was conducted. Before performing a one-way repeated measures ANOVA, certain assumptions needed to be met. These assumptions require that there are no outliers in any of variables, each data is normally distributed, and the variables have

equal variances (homogeneity of variances). After confirming that all the assumptions above were met, a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was run to compare the FLCAS scores at the beginning of the spring semester (May), end of the spring semester (July), and end of the fall semester (December and January). The mean FLCAS score at the beginning of the spring semester was 123.31 (SD = 21), 122.83 (SD = 22.15) at the end of the spring semester, and 111.76 (SD = 25.40) at the end of the fall semester. These scores are significantly different, $F(2, 82) = 14.95$, $p < .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .267$ (see Table 3). According to Cohen's (1988) recommendation of partial eta squared, benchmarks are small ($\eta_p^2 = 0.01$), medium ($\eta_p^2 = 0.06$), and large ($\eta_p^2 = 0.14$) effect. Therefore, the effect size of the results was large. Pairwise comparisons indicated that FLCAS scores at the beginning of the spring semester and at the end of the fall semester were significantly different (95% CI of the difference = 5.222 to 17.873), as were FLCAS scores at the end of the spring semester and at the end of the fall semester (95% CI of the difference = 5.057 to 17.086) (see Table 4).

Table 3
Test of Within-Subjects Effects

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Time	Sphericity Assumed	3586.111	2	1793.056	14.945	.000	.267
	Greenhouse-Geisser	3586.111	1.954	1835.267	14.945	.000	.267
	Huynh-Feldt	3586.111	2.000	1793.056	14.945	.000	.267
	Lower-bound	3586.111	1.000	3586.111	14.945	.000	.267
Error (Time)	Sphericity Assumed	9837.889	82	119.974			
	Greenhouse-Geisser	9837.889	80.114	122.799			
	Huynh-Feldt	9837.889	82.000	119.974			
	Lower-bound	9837.889	41.000	239.949			

Table 4
Pairwise Comparisons

(I) Test	(J) Test	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.b	95% Confidence Interval for Differenceb	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (May)	2 (July)	.476	2.216	1.000	-5.056	6.009
	3 (December and January)	11.548*	2.534	.000	5.222	17
2 (July)	1 (May)	-.476	2.216	1.000	-6.009	5.056
	3 (December and January)	11.071*	2.409	.000	5.057	17.086
3 (December and January)	1 (May)	-11.548*	2.534	.000	-17.873	-5.222
	2 (July)	-11.071*	2.409	.000	-17.086	-5.057

While a one-way repeated measures ANOVA found a statistically significant change in FLA during the academic year 2022, a qualitative analysis using KJ method showed what factors raised students' FLA levels and what factors contributed to easing FLA. Themes that emerged from trends in the data are shown below.

Anxiety-Provoking Factors

The analysis of the interview data revealed that some students reported more FLA when they realized that they lacked English language skills.

Student 1: *I was overwhelmed by the situation where the teacher speaks only English, and I can use only English. I have never experienced that before.*

Student 4: *I felt that I needed to study English more. When I got involved in a group discussion, I had something that I wanted to talk about. However, I couldn't say it because I didn't know how to say it in English.*

When asked what made her feel anxious in

the class, Student 5 said, "Grammar frightened me the most." What emerged from these students' opinions is that their anxiety seems to have come from lack of language proficiency because they did not feel confident about their language skills and became anxious. Conversely, once Student 1 felt comfortable listening to his teacher's English, she started to feel better.

Student 1: *At first, I didn't understand what he (his teacher) was talking about. Gradually, I became able to listen to his English. That was good.*

Another anxiety-provoking factor cited by a student concerned fear of making mistakes. Compared to other students, Student 3 was more unwilling to speak in the class. She hesitated to speak up even though she had an opinion.

Student 3: *I'm not confident about what I want to say. I wonder if this (her idea) is correct. Because of this, I feel nervous. [...] When I shared my opinions or thought, well, I thought, "What if I make a mistake?" I had that kind of anxious*

feeling.

Student 3 experienced FLA as being afraid of making mistakes such as saying words incorrectly. She had difficulty in sharing her ideas in the class.

Interacting with Peers

One common thread found in the interview sessions was support from their peers. Students' FLA was eased when they interacted with other students in pairs and groups. They mentioned that pair and group work made them feel relaxed and open-minded. All the participants had positive experiences of engaging in pair work and group work. Student 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 reported that their classmates supported them and contributed to creating a relaxed atmosphere.

Student 1: *Students around me was so considerate and talked to me in a way that I can understand.*

Student 2: *I think that group work makes it easier to speak up.*

Student 3: *In the fall semester, I could get along with everybody, and I felt comfortable. I felt like I've gotten less nervous.*

Student 4: *People in my class never blamed others for making mistakes, which made the classroom environment better. That was good.*

Student 6: *I enjoyed the English class very much thanks to my classmates. I felt that I could talk with them more friendly throughout the semesters. I'm glad that I could become friends with them.*

It appears that the relaxed environment

where students feel comfortable speaking up and less anxious is likely related to interacting with their peers. As Student 2 mentioned, pair work or group work implemented in these student-centered classes might have worked well with regard to developing relationships between students. Peers' attitude towards the participants appears to play an important role in reducing FLA.

Student 1: *We encouraged each other. This gave me the push. I did my best. [...] When I got the correct answer for a question, my partner acknowledged that I had good English abilities. This boosted my confidence.*

Student 2: *I didn't feel anxious because my classmates helped me solve difficult problems I could not understand on my own.*

Student 5: *There was a student who told me that it is okay to make mistakes. Then, I thought, "I'm not alone." I felt less anxious.*

Student 6: *Many of my classmates were nice. We enjoyed encouraging each other by saying, for example, "That was close." [...] I felt that some students listened to me closely because they made eye contact with me and nodded their head. These behaviors made me feel good.*

It was a common students' behavior shared by four participants that their classmates helped them and encouraged them. Student 1 and 6 reported that encouragement had a significant impact on their emotional state. In addition, it seems that peers' attitudes such as

helping students with English problems and comforting others by saying that making mistakes is acceptable contributed to reducing Student 2 and 5's FLA. Student 6 mentioned specific peers' behaviors that made her feel comfortable and relieved. It seems that showing interest by nodding, making eye contact, and listening intently made Student 6 feel psychologically secure. As the semester progressed and the participants interacted with their peers, they started to change their attitude.

Student 3: *I became more willing to speak. I've gotten less nervous. I feel that I want to speak first. That's because people around me were always cheerful. [...] I realized that my classmates' English skills are the same as mine. I'm afraid of answering a question in front of people with high skills. However, we all have the same English proficiency. I'm not so embarrassed if I made a mistake in my class.*

Student 6: *I realized that I don't have to be afraid of making mistakes because it seems that a lot of my classmates were not afraid of making mistakes and gave their opinions actively. This made me think that I should give it a try even though my grammar and vocabulary are not so good. [...] I thought, "I should feel free to say my opinion." because there was a mistake-friendly atmosphere in the classroom.*

Students 3 and 6 experienced emotional

change throughout the spring and fall semesters. They gradually became less concerned about making mistakes and more open to taking risks. The mistake-friendly relaxed atmosphere opened their minds and motivated them to speak up with less FLA levels. Student 1 felt a sense of community as he learned English with his classmates during the semesters and felt more comfortable. He said, "I realized that we are all friends in this class. Then, I started to feel less anxious."

While it was found that interacting with peers could alleviate participants' FLA levels, the analysis of the interview data revealed that opportunities to communicate with others such as group work could have negative effects on students' emotional state. Student 1, 4, and 5 mentioned loneliness, awkwardness, and pressure.

Student 1: *When the teacher asked to form groups, I didn't know how to join a group. I felt lonely because I was alone.*

Student 4: *I felt that my group members were unwilling to speak. So, we couldn't keep the conversation going. I liked group work, though.*

Student 5: *There was an atmosphere where everyone in my group depended on me. I was not confident about the grammar questions. But I did my best. [...] I thought, "Everyone depends on me. What if I made a mistake." I really worked hard.*

Even though interacting with peers helped participants ease their FLA, the results showed that group work could make some students feel uncomfortable in a language learning envi-

ronment. Student 1 felt nervous when he did not know how to join a group. Student 4's group members attitude demotivated him. Student 5 struggled to receive support from group members and was under pressure.

Resilience

Another noteworthy trend emerged from the interview data was that some students felt psychological safety by putting themselves in a tough condition. In other words, they started to feel more comfortable in difficult situations such as speaking in front of others after they got used to these environments. Anxiety-provoking experience made student 2, 3, and 4 psychologically stronger.

Student 2: *I felt less embarrassed in front of others [...] because I experienced being picked by the teacher, asked to say something, and doing the presentation in front of everyone. [...] After I moved forward and stood in front of everyone, I thought, "Oh, well, Whatever, I don't care." At some point, I felt less nervous and thought, "Just do it."*

Student 3: *Probably it is important to give it a try and get used to a difficult situation. [...] If you have feelings such as "Oh, it was easier than I expected." or "I felt nervous, but I could pull it off.", you can try it again without anxiety next time. [...] I'm not good at presentations, but I think I started to feel less nervous and anxious compared to the beginning of the (spring) semester.*

Student 4: *I think it was good for me to be*

forced to go to the Chit Chat Club by the teacher. [...] I realized that communicating in English is fun. I had positive feelings toward English learning in the fall semester.

As these students faced challenging situations, they became able to deal with negative emotions or stress effectively. Students 2, 3, and 4 stepped out of their comfort zones and placed themselves in challenging situations. One common thread running through their responses is that their instructors asked them to do challenging tasks. Student 2 was asked to speak up many times. Student 3 had to give presentations throughout the semesters. Student 4 had to go to the Chit Chat Club, which is a language support service in which students practice conversational English with international students. They had thought that these activities would frighten them before they engaged in the activities. However, once they jumped in the challenging situations, they realized that the tasks are enjoyable or easier than they had expected. The determination not to quit and endure helped Student 2, 3, and 4 alleviate their FLA and overcame their difficulty with English learning.

Instructor's Role

The findings revealed that students' FLA might have varied depending on how instructors conducted their class. Instructors who were thoughtful, brought familiar topics related to students' lives in their teaching, employed communicative teaching methods, and created a mistake-friendly environment seems to enhance participants' language learning experience.

Student 1: *In the beginning of the semester, I*

didn't know which group I should join. My teacher used random numbers to form different groups every time. This eased my anxiety.

Student 3: *The atmosphere in the classroom was good. [...] Probably that is because we have many chances to speak.*

Student 4: *My teacher used to say that we can make many mistakes. This led to creating a relaxed environment.*

Student 5: *The topics my teacher covered were related to our daily lives. This helped us get to know each other. That was good.*

Student 1's instructor decided how students form groups beforehand, which made him feel relieved because he did not know which group he should join. Student 3 seems to have enjoyed the communicative language teaching approach. As mentioned above, fear of making mistakes could increase FLA levels. However, according to Student 4, as the instructor encouraged students to make mistakes without it being a significant issue, the classroom atmosphere became more relaxed. The fact that familiar topics made the communication go smoothly and helped students connect with each other in Student 5's class suggests that instructors might be able to ease students' FLA by choosing familiar contents and /or materials in their class.

In short, while perceptions of L2 competence and fear of making mistakes had a negative impact on student's emotional state, it was found that interacting with peers, developing resilience, and instructors' support could overcome the negative emotions such as stress and

anxiety.

Discussion

This study examined to what extent change of university students' FLA occurred and what qualitative factors influenced students' FLA levels and contributed to amplifying psychological safety in student's minds. The first research question asked about the change in FLA over the 2022 academic year. The result of a one-way repeated measures ANOVA found a statistically significant change in FLA during the academic year 2023. Specifically, FLCAS scores at the beginning of the spring semester and at the end of the fall semester were significantly different, as were FLCAS scores at the end of the spring semester and at the end of the fall semester.

In order to answer the 2nd research question asking what factors cause FLA and help students to feel psychologically safe, qualitative data was gathered through a semi-structured interview and analyzed by the KJ method (Kawakita, 1967, 1970). The qualitative analysis revealed that some students felt anxious because they were dissatisfied with their L2 proficiency and were afraid of making mistakes. A similar result was reported by Tóth (2011). Tóth's qualitative study revealed that EFL students felt stressed when they tried hard to avoid mistakes and perceived their L2 competence to be insufficient.

On the other hand, this study found that some students appreciated mistake-friendly atmosphere created by their classmates where they felt comfortable sharing their opinions in the class. These findings are aligned with previous studies (Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; Tataka 2023). In the student-centered ap-

proaches, it seems that pair and group work were effective in reducing students' anxiety levels. The similar findings were found in previous studies (Young, 1991; Nagahashi, 2007; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2010; Dykes, 2017). Speaking L2 in pairs or groups was more comfortable for some students than speaking in front of everyone. The way peers approached affected Student 3 and 6's emotional state throughout the academic year. At the beginning of the spring semester, they were concerned about making mistakes and afraid of speaking English in the class. However, they became more open to taking risks and felt more comfortable speaking up. The results revealed that peers specific attitude helped reducing FLA; nodding, making eye contact, and listening intently. The process of these students' emotional change could be explained by Yamakawa's (2018) conceptual framework. Their initial mindsets were filled with fear and hesitation. However, Student 3 and 6 realized that people around them were similar to them in terms of English proficiency, but more active and made many mistakes. According to Yamakawa, this was the moment when they were exposed to a new world. The students might have felt discomfort with the difference between themselves and their peers, prompting them to make adjustments to their environment. To bridge the gap between themselves and their peers, they attempted to change their behavior and take more risks, emulating their peers. Therefore, they started to produce the language more actively. Peers' positive attitude such as nodding, making eye contact, and listening intently could play a significant role in maintaining students' psychological safety in mind. It might be possible to say that students in this study obtained the

psychological safety by engaging in dialogue with peers.

Another noteworthy finding is that students reached psychologically stable state as they put themselves in anxiety-provoking situations such as speaking in front of others. The anxiety-provoking experience made Student 2, 3, and 4 psychologically stronger. This result concurs with previous research which found resilience is mental power that can alleviate language learner's anxiety (Shen, 2022). The present study illustrates that while FLA raised concerns, apprehension, and stress, anxiety-provoking situations promoted perseverance and eventually secure feelings. The qualitative analysis also highlights that instructors might have a significant influence over the amount of anxiety each student experience. This study found that instructors' clear instructions, encouragement, helpful attitude towards mistakes, and use of materials that are familiar to students contributed to easing students' FLA. Correspondingly, Tóth (2011) argues that instructors who provide a supportive environment, and employ non-threatening teaching methods with relevant and enjoyable topics could help students reduce their FLA.

Conclusion

This study found that college EFL learners reduced their FLA levels during the 2022 academic year as they received the mandatory English course held twice a week. This study suggests that while L2 language competence and fear of making mistakes might increase students' FLA, interacting with peers, instructors' teaching approaches, and resilience might play an important role in easing FLA. The implications for language instructors need to be

considered. The results suggest that instructors should raise awareness that all L2 learners make mistakes, and that making mistakes should not be considered embarrassing. Implementing student-centered approaches are highly recommended in language classroom, but instructors should be sensitized to negative aspects of them. The findings revealed that if group members are uncooperative or dependent on others without participating in tasks, this could increase students' FLA. Students are expected to help each other and show interest by nodding, making eye contact, and listening closely and intently. Instructors might need to teach students how to behave and interact with others in groups.

The present study yielded new insights regarding the relationship between FLA and resilience. This study showed that having resilience allowed students to cope with FLA well. Therefore, instructors should find a way to cultivate students' resilience in order for learners to be more resilient and immune to FLA. However, communicative tasks should be implemented in class carefully because forcing students to engage in communicative activities could worsen their anxious feelings. There are not enough inquiries investigating the relationship between anxiety and resilience (Shen, 2022). The relationship between FLA and resilience should be investigated with a more precise research design. For future research, in addition to investigating how L2 learners reduce FLA, it is recommended to explore how L2 learners overcome negative effects of FLA from the perspective of resilience qualitatively.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale

- (1) 外国語の授業で話すとき自信がもてない。
- (2) 外国語の授業で間違えることは気にならない。
- (3) 外国語の授業で当てられると思うと体が震える。
- (4) 外国語の授業で先生の言っていることが理解できないととても不安だ。
- (5) もっと外国語の授業があってもよいと思っている。
- (6) 外国語の時間授業と関係ないことを考えていることがよくある。
- (7) 他の生徒の方が自分よりよくできている。
- (8) 外国語の授業中のテストではだいたい落ち着いている。
- (9) 外国語の授業で準備なしに話さないといけない時、パニックになる。
- (10) 外国語の単位を落としたときの影響が心配だ。
- (11) 外国語の授業で動揺する人の気持ちがわからない。
- (12) 外国語の授業では、緊張のあまり、知っていたことも忘れてしまうときがある。
- (13) 外国語の授業で自分からすすんで答えるのは恥ずかしい。
- (14) 外国語をネイティブスピーカーと話すとき緊張しない。
- (15) 先生が何を訂正しているのか理解できないとき動揺する。
- (16) 外国語の授業の予習を十分にしているにもかかわらず心配になる。
- (17) よく外国語の授業を休みたくなる。
- (18) 外国語の授業で話すのに自信がある。
- (19) 先生が自分の間違いをいちいち直しそうなので心配だ。

- (20) 外国語のクラスで当たりそうになると胸がドキドキする。
- (21) 外国語のテスト勉強をすればするほど、混乱する。
- (22) 外国語の授業の予習をよくしないといけないというプレッシャーは感じない。
- (23) 常に他の学生の方が外国語で話すのが上手だと感じている。
- (24) 他の学生の前で外国語を話すとき自意識がとて高くなる。
- (25) 外国語のクラスは進むのが速いのでついていけるかどうか心配である。
- (26) 他の科目よりも外国語のクラスの方が緊張する。
- (27) 外国語のクラスで話すとき緊張したり混乱したりする。
- (28) 外国語のクラスに向かうとき自信をもてるしリラックスしている。
- (29) 先生の言うことがすべて理解できないと不安になる。
- (30) 外国語を話すためにあまりに多くの文法規則を勉強しないといけないので圧倒れる。
- (31) 私が外国語を話すとき他の学生が笑うのではないかと思う。
- (32) ネーティブスピーカーに会うときおそらくリラックスしてられると思う。
- (33) 先生が、前もって準備していなかった質問をすると緊張する。