

English Anxiety and Course Achievement among Korean EFL Graduate Students in an Online English Course

Si Yeon Pyo¹

¹ Assistant Professor, School of Paideia, Sungkyul University, South Korea, syppy@sungkyul.ac.kr

Abstract: Language anxiety is notorious for having a negative effect on SLA. However, some studies have produced inconsistent results, which seems to be caused by socio-cultural differences. The present study explores a potential relationship between English anxiety and course achievement among Korean EFL graduate students taking an online English course. To this end, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a background survey, weekly learning logs, four assignments, and the final exam were administered to 142 participants enrolling a 15-week English reading course at a graduate school of professional studies in Seoul. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the FLCAS was compared with the final course scores. The results showed that test anxiety received the highest mean (3.72), followed by a fear of negative evaluation (3.71), and communication apprehension (3.61) was the lowest. In this regard, a number of students reported that they stopped or gave up studying English for a long time, had difficulty memorizing vocabulary, and felt pressure to take the final exam in real time. Moreover, students who obtained higher final grades exhibited higher anxiety than those who got lower grades, which implies that the higher the English course achievement, the higher the levels of English anxiety. However, all high-anxious students did not show higher final grades than low- and moderate-anxious students. In other words, significant differences in course achievement across the three levels of anxiety were not found. The findings demonstrated that advanced students who get high grades also experience high levels of English anxiety, and poor academic performance does not always stem from high levels of anxiety. In this regard, Korean EFL learners' high English anxiety is not seen as an index of low English course achievement.

Keywords: English Anxiety, Foreign Language Anxiety, Course Achievement, Korean EFL Learner, Graduate Students

1. Introduction

It is undeniable that a significant number of foreign language learners encounter some degrees of anxiety when communicating in a target language. Since the process of acquiring a new language is a highly unsettling psychological challenge [1], anxiety is viewed as a high ranking factor affecting language learning, regardless of whether the situation is formal or informal [2]. As an affective factor, foreign language anxiety (FLA) is viewed as a notorious factor with indirect impacts which impede L2 learners' successful performance in an L2 class. It has been pointed out that excessive self-evaluation, worries about potential failure, and concern about others' evaluation can all contribute to the decline of FLA [3]. This leads learners to hinder FL performance and acquisition, wasting cognitive energy and disturbing information processing [4].

The concept of FLA as an undifferentiated, negative emotional reaction in the FL classroom turns into situation-specific anxiety over time. Since anxiety is multi-faceted [5] as a complex construct [6],

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previous studies on the relationship between anxiety and language performance have presented inconsistent and mixed results[5]. A number of earlier studies concluded that the correlation between FL anxiety and FL achievement was strongly negative. However, different studies have revealed that some level of anxiety is not as deleterious as earlier thought[7][8]. Like facilitating anxiety which refers to an affective response that has a positive influence, some anxiety may foster FL learning in some ways[2], making learners keep alert. Such a multi-faceted nature of FLA causes a need to include further empirical evidence in the early studies on anxiety among FL learners, including Korean EFL learners of English.

To be sure, anxiety plays an important role in L2/FL learning. However, the impact of anxiety on FL learning is a complicated matter and is still under study[8][9]. A number of traditional studies regard FLA as a negative factor to be reduced, whereas some recent studies point out its positive effects on FL learning. Due to the mixed and conflicting results of previous research, the puzzle about the traits of FLA is still incomplete. In order to be further clarified or revised in the earlier studies, more research needs to be undertaken. Moreover, as socio-cultural background plays a crucial role in L2 acquisition research[10], it is necessary to examine the characteristics of FLA in various learning situations.

In Korea, not a few adults have suffered from “a fear of English” called “English nausea”. They appeal to FLA when they speak or use English although most of them have received formal English education, at least, for more than six years. Even some advanced learners of English are anxious about the chance of receiving unfavorable assessment from their instructors or others. From the perspective that a certain level of FL anxiety can be motivating and facilitative for language learning, the present study attempts to take a step further to a better understanding of whether FLA facilitates or debilitates L2 learning in the Korean EFL context.

The aim of this study is to investigate the correlation between English anxiety and academic performance among Korean EFL graduate students to identify the impact of FLA on L2 learning. This study seeks to explore potential differences regarding FLA across three levels of course achievement measured by final course scores, and differences in course achievement across three groups by FLA level. Examining how strongly English anxiety is related to course achievement can aid in understanding the dynamic nature of FLA. For this purpose, the following three research inquiries will be addressed:

1. What is the degree of English anxiety of Korean EFL graduate students taking a basic English reading course?
2. Is there a variation in the degree of English anxiety among students who achieve different final course grades in the course?
3. Do students with different degrees of English anxiety exhibit variations in their ultimate course grades?

2. Background

2.1 Anxiety and Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)

Anxiety is one of the significant affective factors pervading through a learning process. In a broad sense, anxiety refers to a feeling of fear, concern, and discomfort as a common psychological reaction[11]. In L2 learning, negative emotions such as embarrassment, nervousness, apprehension, and depression are believed to be associated with anxiety. Especially, FLA was conceptualized as a complicated psychological state specific to FL learning[6]. It denotes the anxiety or unease experienced by learners when using or learning an FL[11], and subjective feelings learners experience caused by FL learning contexts[12]. Also, FLA refers to the feeling of apprehension and tension in FL contexts, or the worry and negative emotional response when learning or using FL[13]. All this means that FLA is a form of situational anxiety related specifically to language situations by the distinctive characteristics

of the language learning process, which is different from anxiety in general[14]. Also, FLA is directly associated with performing in a target language, independent of general performance anxiety[2].

In the affective aspect of language learning, anxiety is viewed as a negative obstacle to be overcome in learning a target language[15][16]. Learners with greater English anxieties tend to feel nervous and afraid to use English, which makes them hesitate to express their thoughts accurately, escape the teacher's eye contact or sit in the last row, taking a passive attitude toward English learning. It was noted that some anxious learners believe that they are incapable of performing in English, which leads to forming a negative expectation for their learning[17]. Consequently, this makes them avoid opportunities to reinforce their communication skills with an unwillingness to participate in learning activities. Also, language anxiety was defined as "a cause of poor language achievement"[9]. That is why a number of studies have tried to demonstrate that high levels of anxiety has a negative impact on the process of language learning and language proficiency[18].

However, recently several studies have shown contradictory results on the relationship between FLA and proficiency levels, concluding that advanced learners also experience high anxiety[8][10][19][20]. It was reported that advanced learners of Japanese suffered from higher anxiety than elementary- or intermediate learners[20]. Another research found that advanced learners of Spanish also experienced anxiety although most of them preferred the upper-level courses of Spanish, searching for a major or minor in Spanish[19]. In an investigation of college students of Spanish, although advanced learners exhibited higher levels of anxiety compared to beginners and intermediate learners, it was not necessarily the case that students with high levels of FLA perform poorly in their academic performance[8]. They reported that higher anxiety does not necessarily lead to achievement. Similarly, another study in the context of Japan to investigate the relationship between FLA and proficiency in an English-speaking test concluded that FLA is a poor predictor in determining English proficiency[10]. Such contradictory results imply that lower anxiety levels may not necessarily be a predictor of high FL proficiency.

Anxiety in itself is not seen as a detrimental factor to FL learning because a certain degree of anxiety can motivate learners to learn a target language, keeping them vigilant. Thus, there was an assertion that some degree of anxiety is not as deleterious as initially believed[21]. Accordingly, recognizing L2 learners' anxiety in an unbiased view is conducive to managing their English anxiety effectively.

2.2 Types of Anxiety and Sources of Foreign Language Anxiety

Since anxiety is a complicated construct, FLA involves multi-faceted affective factors. For this reason, psychologists have classified a profusion of anxiety types and sources of FLA depending on different perspectives. The most representative types of anxiety are divided into two main categorizations. The first one falls into three types: *trait*, *state*, and *situation-specific anxiety*[22]. In the trichotomy, trait anxiety concerns a permanent tendency or a fixed propensity to become anxious across different situations, whereas state anxiety is a temporary apprehension experienced at a certain moment as a passing unpleasant emotion, which may differ in intensity and fluctuate over time. Finally, situation-specific anxiety is defined as a specific type of state anxiety as a moment-to-moment fear or apprehension experienced in a specific context, which is triggered by particular events such as test taking, or public speaking. Hence, language anxiety refers to a type of situation-specific anxiety because it occurs in the situation of learning a target language and communicating in it[23].

The other classification, *facilitating vs debilitating anxiety*, is also a well-known dichotomy of FLA. Facilitating anxiety is defined as "an optimal amount of anxiety" which mobilizes learners to respond swiftly and efficiently[24]. This anxiety may promote learners' performance by motivating them to make extra efforts to get over their feeling of anxiety and fight the new learning tasks. In contrast, debilitating anxiety pertains to an overwhelming amount of anxiety that has negative effects on learners' academic

performance. This type of anxiety may foster learners to flee from their learning task to get off the pressure of the anxiety. Thus, it is no doubt that some degree of anxiety seems to promote FL learning although an extreme degree of anxiety impedes EFL learners' performance.

Furthermore, research has attempted to establish the sources of FLA. Most prominently, three sources of FLA presented in *the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)* are communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation[25]. First, communication apprehension pertains to a personal level of anxiety or fear toward actual or expected communication with others, which occurs due to a lack of competent communication skills even though they have sophisticated thoughts and ideas. For instance, an immature L2 vocabulary with which to express their mature ideas would lead to apprehension and frustration. Next, test anxiety refers to an apprehension toward academic evaluation as a fear of failing tests. It stems from a concern about being viewed as a failure in test results, either consciously or unconsciously. The third component, fear of negative evaluation is a fear about others' evaluation and refers to apprehension about negative social evaluation. When L2 learners are unsure about their utterances, they may experience anxiety due to the fear of making an improper social impression, which is related to others' negative evaluation and avoidance of such evaluative situations.

Due to the two conflicting views of FLA impacts on FL learning, this issue needs to be further investigated in different cultural contexts, considering various situational variables. In addition, there is a lack of research on the facilitative roles of FLA on language learning, and it is difficult to find a study on the positive influence of FLA on English achievement in a Korean EFL context. Accordingly, the present study seeks to identify aspects of Korean EFL learners' English anxiety to get a better understanding of how FLA can affect FL learning.

3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between Korean EFL learners' degree of English anxiety and English course achievement based on empirical data. To obtain comprehensive insight into English anxiety, this research used an explanatory mixed method design by adding qualitative data to the quantitative results.

3.1 Participants and Instruments

The present study was carried out during the first semester of the academic year 2022. The participants were 142 Korean EFL learners who enrolled in a general English reading course at a graduate school of professional studies in Seoul. Out of a total of 150 students who originally joined this course, eight were excluded because they dropped out or did not fully participate in all the class requirements including the questionnaire survey. The participants from a variety of majors were all monolingual speakers of Korean, studying for a master's degree. There was no English-related major EFL student. The age range of the participants was between 25 and 63 years old, and only four were male and the rest 138 were female because the graduate school is attached to a women's university.

Through the university's course registration system, the participants enrolled in this English course on a first-come-first-served basis, without any placement test. Thus, the participants' English proficiency levels were mixed. However, most of them were assumed to be at a low level and some at an intermediate level, considering the self-reported English proficiency levels, exposure to English, and overseas experiences presented in the background survey as well as their assignments, weekly reflective learning logs, and final exam scores. A number of participants reported that they stopped or gave up studying English quite a long time ago, and had a difficulty in using English, expressing their strong English anxiety or even English phobia. Some commented that they recognized the importance of English learning but had no idea how to start studying English.

This English course was optional as a substitute for the English requirement compulsory for graduation. As for the English requirement for graduation, the students had three opinions: 1) achieving a particular threshold score on standardized English tests such as TOFEL or TOEIC, 2) scoring at least 60 on the on-campus English exam, or 3) passing this online English course. Unlike general graduate students, most graduate students of professional studies had a strong tendency to think their English is poor. Thus, this course was quickly full. The course run online for 15 weeks and focused on English reading comprehension on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis. English reading passages used in this course were taken from interesting English articles excerpted from various fields to capture students' attention and to improve their English vocabulary and grammar skills as well as reading.

The main instruments adopted to collect descriptive data consisted of two parts: "the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale(FLCAS)" and the participants' final course grades(the sum of scores in their final exam, assignments, and attendance). Additionally, qualitative data taken from weekly learning logs and a background survey were used to support the statistical results of the study. The FLCAS consists of 33 items categorized into three dimensions: "1)*communication apprehension*(items 1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 28, 30, and 32), 2)*test anxiety*(items 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, and 28), and 3)*fear of negative evaluation*(items 2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, and 33)" as mentioned in 2.2. Considering the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .93 confirmed by the developer[25], the FLCAS showed a high degree of internal consistency. Since this scale has been widely used abroad, its reliability and validity as a tool for measuring FL anxiety had already been proved in many previous studies[26]. The FLCAS employs a 5-point Likert scale for each question, which ranges from 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree) to evaluate the participants' anxiety regarding L2/FL learning. All items were translated into Korean to facilitate the students' clarity and comprehension by the researcher.

3.2 Procedure

Before starting the data collection, the researcher informed the students of the objective of this study and some rewards for the participants through the notice board on LMS. First, the background questionnaire was surveyed at the beginning of the semester. The questionnaire contained items to identify the participants' basic demographic information on their age, major, degree of exposure to English, overseas experiences, and self-rated English proficiency. The participants assessed their current level of English proficiency in the areas of English reading, vocabulary, and grammar by clicking one answer from "5(very good), 4(good), 3(moderate), 2(relatively poor), and 1(poor)". At the end of the survey, one open-ended question about what they want in this course was added.

In an identical way, on a voluntary basis, all the students were invited to participate in the FLCAS during the week 4 and 5, using Google forms online with prior consent and notice that all would be treated as confidential. Also, this study utilized the weekly learning logs reported by the participants. They were asked to post their answers to 4 questions about the lecture contents and reflective comments on their learning attitude on the LMS board after taking an online lecture on a weekly basis.

Finally, scores from the final exam and assignments were used to measure their course achievement. The final grades were marked by the sum of the scores from four assignments(10 points, 4 times), one final exam(40 points), and attendance(20 points). The assignments were a sort of take-home exam designed to review what they learned and prepare for the final exam. The participants were supposed to check the result of each assignment scored by the teaching assistant individually through the LMS after a week from each due day. The final exam consisted of 38 items with a mix of multiple-choice and short-answer questions as well as translation. It was implemented through Zoom in real time at the designated time and date of the 15th week which had been announced from the enrollment time, using a computer-based test function of the LMS. The exam was administrated under vigilant supervision by four teaching assistants after an identification process which started an hour before it.

The collected data was analyzed using SPSS 25.0 software program. Basically, descriptive statistics such as means, and standard deviations were computed for the items and the three anxiety factors in the FLCAS. To explore the relationship between English anxiety and the final course scores, the ANOVA and Pearson's bivariate correlation analysis were used.

4. Results and Discussion

The first research question was to investigate the degree of English anxiety of Korean EFL graduate students taking a basic English reading course. As mentioned in chapter 2.2, the FLAS was used to measure the students' English anxiety levels and sources. To answer this question, the data on the participants' responses to the FLAS questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics as [Table 1] shows.

[Table 1] Descriptive Statistics for Participants' English Anxiety Levels (N=142)

Sources of Anxiety	Num of Items	Mean	SD
Communication Apprehension	11	3.61	0.92
Test Anxiety	15	3.72	0.68
Fear of Negative Evaluation	7	3.71	1.07
Overall Anxiety	33	3.68	0.89

As seen in [Table 1], the results exhibited that the student's responses to overall English anxiety were moderately high with a mean of 3.68. The highest mean was test anxiety(3.72), followed by a fear of negative evaluation(3.71), and communication apprehension(3.61) factors. From the findings, it is revealed that what worries students most in the process of learning English is taking English tests, and by a very small margin, fear of negative evaluation is the second thing. Since fear of others' negative evaluation is defined as worries about others' judgments, avoidance of evaluative situations, and expectation of others' negative feedback[25], it is closely related to test anxiety. Based on the FLAS questionnaire results, the top five anxiety-provoking items were Item #10, 9, 12, 3, and 24. Three of the five statements belong to test anxiety, and the others refer to a fear of negative evaluation.

[Table 2] The Top Five Highest Anxiety-Provoking Items (N=142)

Statement	Mean	SD
10. "I worry about the consequences of failing my English course."	4.32	0.57
09. "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class."	4.21	1.07
12. "In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know."	4.17	0.62
03. "I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in English class."	4.13	0.65
24. "I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students."	4.12	1.03

As shown in [Table 2], the top anxiety-provoking statement was "I worry about the consequences of failing my English course." with a mean score of 4.32. Indeed, most students in this study worried mostly about the final exam because the exam was a conclusive factor for the students to pass this course. What is more, the final exam was conducted in real time under strict supervision at one go, whereas the students had one week to complete each assignment and attendance. As stated earlier, the four assignments were take-home exams as an open book test and the attendance was automatically checked whenever they watched each video lecture over a period of one week. Thus, they felt that burden heavily, which was confirmed by a number of student's comments in their weekly learning logs as follows:

"It's been a long time since I studied English. Each lecture is so fun and informative, but I'm so

worried about the final exam. I understand all when I take the lecture, but I can't remember when I close the lecture. Especially, because it is hard for me to memorize the vocabulary, I'm so anxious about the final exam. Can't you make the final exam an open-book test or a take-home exam? Please ~." [excerpt from the 5th-week learning log]

"At first, I was so scared to take this course because it's been almost 20 years since I studied English. However, I gradually became interested in English as I took lectures every week. I'm taking notes hard while taking lectures and reviewing well while doing assignments, but I'm afraid that I can't remember the vocabulary well after a few days. The final exam is too much pressure. It would be great if there was no final exam. [excerpt from the 9th-week learning log]

As mentioned previously, the final course grades were calculated by the sum of scores in attendance(20), assignments(40), and the final exam(40). Out of 100, the passing score of this course was above 60, with a mandatory score of 20 or above in the final exam. Under the pressure to get at least the mandatory minimum score in the final exam conducted in real time, a number of students reported that they were concerned about their poor vocabulary memorization in preparing for the final exam. Because the Korean education system has been exam-oriented for a long time[27], tests play an important role which results in a pass or fail. Accordingly, tests seem to have a great influence on students' anxiety in the Korean education environment.

In order to detect the participants' English anxiety levels, the FLCAS scores were calculated by adding the totals for each participant's rating. Since the scale consists of 33 items, the range of possible scores is 33 to 165. The score range observed in this study was from 58 to 156. The average FL anxiety score among the 142 students was 118.15(SD=25.33). Regarding the statements with negative wording, the answers were reversed and documented. Thus, a high score indicated high anxiety.

[Table 3] Descriptive Statistics for the Participants' FLAS Scores

N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
143	118.05	25.33	58	156

Based on the student's responses to the FLAS in the present study, the participants were classified into three anxiety levels: high-, moderate-, and low-anxiety groups. With reference to language anxiety levels classified in two studies[8][28], the researcher judged the participants whose scores were 131 to 156 as high anxiety students(36.6%), and those whose scores below 89 as low anxiety(14.8%). The other 69 participants who scored between 90 and 130 were classified as moderate-anxiety students(48.6%). As presented below in [Table 4], the distribution of scores shows that the largest group is a moderate anxiety level, followed by a high anxiety group.

[Table 4] Classification of Groups by Anxiety Levels and Course Achievement

Variables	Groups	Score Ranges	N(%)
Anxiety Levels by FLAS	High anxiety	131-156	52(36.6%)
	Moderate anxiety	90-130	69(48.6%)
	Low anxiety	56-89	21(14.8%)
Course Achievement Levels by final grades	High	Above 90	44(31.0%)
	Mid	75-89	69(48.6%)
	Low	Below 74	29(20.4%)

Next, to examine the correlation between English anxiety level and academic performance, the student's final grades were analyzed. The mean of the final grades for all participants was 80.75 with a standard deviation of 12.79. Out of the total 150 students, 7 dropped out, 3 did not meet the requirements and 1 did not participate in the survey. Considering the distribution of the final grades, the participants in this present study were classified into three groups. [Table 4] summarizes the classification of groups in terms of English anxiety and course achievement.

Regarding the second research question, which investigates the potential differences in levels of English anxiety among participants with different final course grades, the ANOVA results indicated that the group of high-achievers ($M=131.85$) showed greater anxiety levels in comparison to the mid- and low-achieving groups ($M=118.02$, $M=110.98$, respectively). A significant correlation between the final course grades and the FLAS was confirmed by Pearson's bivariate correlation coefficient ($r=.178$, $p=.045$, $p<.05$). This bears a claim that the higher the English course achievement, the higher the levels of English anxiety levels, implying that course achievement is related to anxiety.

[Table 5] Overall Correlation between the FLAS and the Final Course Scores

Pearson's Correlation Coefficients	Variables	Final Scores	FLAS
	Final Scores	1.00	.045*
	FLAS	.045*	1.00

* $p<.05$, $N=142$

Since final course grades have been world-widely used to measure language proficiency in previous studies[8], it is assumed that advanced learners who reached higher course achievement experience higher anxiety about English learning than those who obtained lower final grades. This finding aligns with the results of previous research, which concluded that advanced FL learners have higher FL anxiety levels than intermediate and beginning learners[8][19][20].

On the other hand, according to their anxiety levels, the relation between English anxiety and course achievement showed completely different results. High-anxious students' final grades were not higher than moderate- and low-anxious students' grades. Rather, the high-anxiety group scored lower final grades with a mean of 79.51 than the moderate- and low-anxiety groups ($M=82.02$, $M=81.98$, respectively) in course achievement. However, the ANOVA result did not indicate significant differences in course achievement among the three groups of high-, moderate-, and low-anxiety students ($p=.619$, $p<.05$). In other words, high-anxious students did not necessarily show lower final grades compared to low- and moderate-anxious students. This suggests that levels of FL anxiety may not be a predictor of FL course achievement, which is not consistent with the traditional view that FLA has a negative association with FL performance and achievement.

To sum up, the students who obtained higher final grades exhibited higher anxiety than those who got lower grades, but all the high-anxious students did not show higher final grades than low- and moderate-anxious students. The results of this study are incongruent with previous studies suggesting that the level of FLA is a significant predictor of FL achievement[29][30]. The findings imply that high levels of anxiety do not necessarily cause poor performance in the course, and advanced students who get higher grades in course achievement also experience high FL anxiety. One possible explanation may be that advanced learners tend to feel more pressure to do all requirements well and be more concerned about fulfilling their own expectations as well as their instructors' and classmates' anticipation. Possibly, this motivates learners to make extra efforts to get over their feeling of anxiety. The results of the current study add more weight to facilitating anxiety, demonstrating that FL anxiety may not have detrimental effects on FL performance and achievement.

5. Conclusion

This study examined potential associations between English anxiety and achievement in an English course among Korean EFL graduate students. First of all, the student's responses to the FLCAS items showed the highest on test anxiety, followed by fear of others' negative evaluation, indicating that most participants had moderate-high test anxiety and a feeling of apprehension about others' negative assessment. Also, it was observed that the most anxiety-inducing factor in the FLAS questionnaire was "the consequences of failing the English course". This seems to be not only because the final exam is crucial to their graduation, but also because the exam-oriented Korean education system has been deeply percolated in the students' learning process. Moreover, because the participants' ages ranged from mid-twenties to early sixties, a number of students reported that they stopped or gave up studying English for a long time, had difficulty in memorizing vocabulary, and felt pressure to take the final exam in real time, which may stem from fear of failure in the final exam.

Regarding the academic achievement in English courses among students with varying degrees of anxiety, a significant difference was found. Students who received higher final grades exhibited higher levels of anxiety compared to those with mid- and low grades. This implies that advanced learners experience high anxiety, and high anxiety does not necessarily lead to gaining lower final grades. However, differences in course achievement across levels of English anxiety were not found. Even though high-anxious learners showed lower final grades when compared to low- and mid-anxious learners, no notable differences were observed in course achievement among the three groups divided by anxiety levels.

The results of the present study suggest that some levels of anxiety seem to play a positive role in the complex process of L2 learning, keeping L2 learners alert and putting more effort to learn, which, in turn, may not result in poor course achievement. Indeed, this study demonstrated that Korean EFL learners' high English anxiety is not seen as an index of low English course achievement, but as facilitating anxiety. In this light, anxiety may not have as much debilitating impact as conventionally believed although excessive anxiety can impede FL performance. Accordingly, it is important to encourage learners to keep optimal tension. Further research needs to consider an optimized degree of anxiety to facilitate L2 learning which leads to successful L2 achievement.

The current study has some limitations. First, it may not be appropriate to generalize the results of this study to all Korean EFL learners since the participants were from one school. Second, this study focused on one learner's variable, course achievement, despite the complex nature of English anxiety. Thus, it is suggested that future studies include various students from different affiliations and a wide range of learners' variables such as self-rated English proficiency and learning ability, motivation, or self-efficacy. The findings of this study are expected to provide useful insights for English instructors and researchers to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of FL anxiety found in adult EFL learners who stopped or gave up studying English for a long time.

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