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EXAMINING THE INTERPLAY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENJOYMENT AND CLASSROOM ANXIETY IN GERMAN SPEAKING TASKS: A PILOT STUDY EMPLOYING A TASK-BASED APPROACH

This pilot study examines the relationship between Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) and Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) among undergraduate and graduate students of German studies at the University of Split, Croatia. Participants engaged in speaking tasks within a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework, designed to promote oral proficiency, reduce performance-related stress, and foster positive emotional experiences. FLCA and FLE were assessed using adapted instruments based on established theoretical constructs, capturing students' perceptions of anxiety, enjoyment, and engagement in classroom speaking tasks. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, grouping participants according to their anxiety and enjoyment levels, and non-parametric testing to examine differences across groups and academic levels. Results indicate that students generally experienced high levels of enjoyment, particularly regarding the relevance and perceived effectiveness of TBLT activities. Participants reported moderate to high levels of anxiety, particularly during unprepared or spontaneous speaking tasks, although overall FLCA appeared lower than in previous academic years. Statistically significant inverse associations were observed between enjoyment and specific dimensions of anxiety, with graduate students reporting lower anxiety levels and higher motivation for speaking activities compared to undergraduates. Qualitative responses further underscored the importance of a supportive classroom environment, ample speaking opportunities, and constructive feedback in enhancing enjoyment and mitigating anxiety. These preliminary findings provide insights into optimizing foreign language instruction and suggest directions for further research.

Keywords: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA); Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE); Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT); Oral Production; Communicative Competence

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: A MOTIVATIONAL PERSPECTIVE ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE ENJOYMENT

The introduction of Positive Psychology into SLA has shifted the scholarly focus toward positive emotional experiences, emphasizing that foreign language classrooms are environments in which learners experience diverse emotions such as enjoyment, anxiety, and boredom (MacIntyre & Gregersen 2012). Emotions play a key role in motivation, with positive emotions being inherently motivating, as they are closely linked to attitudes, behaviors, and social interactions that facilitate language learning. In contrast, negative emotions tend to have the opposite effect, often weakening motivation and engagement. Within this broader affective framework, learner emotions are increasingly viewed not as peripheral, but as central components of motivational processes in foreign language learning (MacIntyre et al. 2019).

This perspective is also reflected in the work of Zoltan Dörnyei, who acknowledges that emotions play an important role in language learning and argues that “some emotions do possess a certain amount of goal-directed quality” (Dörnyei 2020: 121). However, rather than viewing emotions as motives in themselves, he conceptualizes them as having motivational qualities, emphasizing that emotions can sustain and amplify existing motivation and support goal-directed behavior. This view is further reinforced by Dörnyei and Henry (2022), who highlight that emotions provide additional energy that helps maintain motivation over time.

Within this theoretical framework, Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) has emerged as a key construct. FLE is defined as a complex positive emotion arising from the interaction between perceived competence and the level of challenge, reflecting the human drive to succeed when facing demanding tasks (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2016). Unlike simple pleasure, which refers to a general feeling of enjoyment, FLE emerges when learners go beyond merely satisfying basic needs and instead achieve something new or unexpected. This element of challenge and accomplishment gives FLE pronounced motivational potential, enabling it to enhance both the intensity and sustainability of motivation in foreign language learning.

In contrast, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) represents a negative emotional experience that can hinder learning. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized

FLCA as a situation-specific form of anxiety composed of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety. Communication apprehension arises when learners perceive their communicative abilities as insufficient or struggle to understand others; test anxiety reflects fear of failure in evaluative situations; and fear of negative evaluation refers to concerns about being judged by teachers or peers. Consistent evidence shows a negative relationship between anxiety and language performance, as high anxiety levels impair concentration, memory, and willingness to participate (Horwitz et al. 1986). According to Young (1991), creating a low-anxiety classroom environment is essential for effective language learning, as research on language anxiety indicates that high levels of anxiety can significantly hinder students' motivation, participation, and overall language performance, making the careful management of emotional factors a critical component of successful language teaching.

A major empirical breakthrough demonstrated that FLE and FLCA, although moderately negatively correlated, constitute fundamentally independent emotional dimensions rather than opposite ends of a single continuum (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014). This finding underscored the complexity of classroom emotions, showing that learners may simultaneously experience enjoyment and anxiety. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2019) expanded their research focus to include both learner-internal and learner-external variables in relation to FLE and FLCA. In a mixed-methods study involving 750 foreign language learners worldwide, multiple regression analyses revealed that teacher-related variables were the strongest predictors of FLE, highlighting the central role of the teacher in fostering positive emotional experiences in the classroom. In contrast, FLCA was most strongly predicted by the personality trait of emotional stability versus neuroticism, suggesting that language anxiety is more closely linked to stable individual differences.

1.1. The Dynamic Interplay of FLE, FLCA, and Flow Across Contexts

The growing emphasis on positive emotions also brought renewed attention to Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) concept of *flow*. It is defined as an optimal state of intrinsic motivation characterized by deep immersion in an activity, intense concentration, engagement, a sense of competence and fulfilment, reduced awareness of external distractions, and often a distortion of time perception. It emerges when a learner's skills are well matched to task challenges, resulting in a harmonious integration of cognition, emotion, and action.

Building on earlier findings, research investigating the proportion of classroom time spent in flow revealed that FLE significantly predicted the frequency of flow experiences, whereas FLCA showed no significant effect (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2022). Beginner learners reported flow experiences only occasionally, while more advanced learners experienced flow more frequently, with greater intensity and duration. A comparative study of 1,589 learners (761 EFL and 825 learning Languages Other Than English – LOTE) found that LOTE learners exhibited slightly higher levels of FLE, spent more time in flow, and reported lower FLCA, although effect sizes were small (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2022). Notably, the relationship between FLE and flow was stronger among LOTE learners, indicating heightened emotional engagement in these contexts.

Longitudinal research further highlights the dynamic yet uneven development of classroom emotions. While FLCA tends to remain relatively stable, FLE is more variable and strongly influenced by developmental, motivational, and contextual factors (Dewaele & Dewaele 2017; Pan & Zhang 2021). Studies across diverse contexts show that the sources of FLE and FLCA evolve throughout the learning trajectory, shaped by attitudes toward the language, perceptions of the teacher, classroom social dynamics, and individual differences (Saito et al. 2018).

A systematic review of 49 longitudinal studies further supports the view that foreign language anxiety is a dynamic and malleable construct, fluctuating across macro- and micro-timescales (Sun et al. 2025). An important finding of the review is the dominance of English as the target language: out of 49 analysed studies, 39 focused exclusively on English, reflecting its global prevalence in language education research. Dewaele and MacIntyre (2022) argue that research predominantly centered on EFL learners in classroom settings, particularly in Asia, may lead to misleading conclusions by implying that findings based on English are universally applicable.

A small number of studies examined other languages such as French, Spanish, or Korean, and only a few investigated multiple target languages. Among these, research by Dewaele et al. (2022, 2023) stands out for including German alongside English and other languages in longitudinal FLA research, underscoring the relative scarcity of longitudinal anxiety studies beyond English contexts. Overall, the review concludes that FLA generally varies over time, with levels increasing, decreasing, or fluctuating depending on individual and contextual factors. Sun et al. (2025) argue that FLA should be conceptualized as a dynamic, malleable construct that future research should investigate using multi-timescale and mixed-method designs to fully capture its complexity.

1.2. Classroom Climate, Teacher Behavior, and Task-Based Language Teaching

Empirical research consistently highlights the importance of classroom climate and teacher behaviour in shaping learners' emotional experiences. Dewaele et al. (2022, 2023) conducted longitudinal studies with 360 university students learning English, German, French, or Spanish in Kuwait to examine how foreign language learners' emotions, motivation, and classroom experiences evolve over a semester. This longitudinal study showed that while overall FLE and FLCA remained relatively stable over a semester, teacher-related enjoyment and motivation decreased significantly. High levels of FLE were found to buffer declining motivation, suggesting that enjoyment can function as an intrinsic motivational resource. Teacher behaviors such as frequent target-language use, predictability, and humour positively influenced FLE and attitudes/motivation, but had a limited impact on FLCA.

Research specifically investigating German learners provides further insight. Rabadi and Rabadi (2022) conducted a quantitative study investigating the levels of FLCA among students of German as a foreign language and examining its relationship with various learner characteristics. The study involved 246 German language learners in Jordan, and data were collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The results indicated a moderate overall level of FLCA, with the highest anxiety related to classroom interaction, while anxiety associated with tests and reading tasks was comparatively lower. Significant predictors of FLCA included year of study, course grades in German, study abroad experience of more than six months, and total ECTS credits per semester, whereas gender and weekly contact hours were not significant predictors. The authors emphasized the importance of fostering a positive and supportive classroom environment to reduce anxiety and facilitate learners' engagement with the language. This study complements theoretical perspectives on FLCA and the motivational domain, highlighting that anxiety in language learning is not uniform but varies according to learners' experiences and contextual factors, supporting the notion that the motivational domain is closely linked to emotional experiences in foreign language learning (Dörnyei 2020; Dewaele & MacIntyre 2016).

Fear and anxiety have a significant impact on learners' emotional engagement and oral performance in foreign language learning. Students may avoid speaking due to low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, or concern about negative evaluation, creating obstacles even when their language knowledge is adequate. These challenges can be especially pronounced in online learning environments, where reduced non-

verbal cues and distractions make it more difficult for teachers to monitor learners' emotions and engagement. Lisnychenko et al. (2020) reported that the transition to online foreign language instruction altered students' anxiety profiles, leading to increased communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation compared to traditional face-to-face classes.

Chen et al. (2023) investigated both FLE and FLCA among 201 Chinese university students who were non-German majors learning German. Using a questionnaire, they assessed students' classroom emotions as well as learner- and teacher-related factors. Results showed that students experienced higher levels of FLE than FLCA, with a negative correlation between the two. Teacher-related variables were strong predictors of FLE, while learner-related factors mainly predicted FLCA. Qualitative data indicated that enjoyment was enhanced by a sense of achievement and frequent interactions with teachers and peers, while anxiety was increased by the linguistic complexity of German and the pressure of frequent exams. The findings suggest that diverse classroom activities and cultural content can enhance FLE, while flexible assessment methods and clearer instructions can help reduce FLCA.

Empirical research in Greece and Croatia highlights the importance of a supportive classroom climate and empathetic teaching practices. Greek learners reported that strict or unsupportive classrooms exacerbate anxiety, whereas collaborative and encouraging approaches reduce it. Similarly, Croatian students often experienced moderate levels of anxiety regardless of prior exposure to German-speaking environments, emphasizing the critical role of pedagogical strategies in shaping learners' emotional responses (Sidopoulou & Chatzidimou 2024; Sjauš & Miletić 2023).

Previous studies suggest that Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) can effectively mitigate FLCA while simultaneously enhancing FLE. Research indicates that participation in TBLT tasks boosts self-confidence and leads to increased motivation, with similar outcomes documented among Croatian students studying German (Kovač 2023). Research demonstrates that TBLT not only reduces anxiety and fosters willingness to communicate but also enhances self-confidence (Rodriguez-Peñarroja 2022; Malik & Pervaiz 2023).

This study examines the impact of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) on FLCA and FLE among Croatian undergraduate and graduate students of German studies, addressing a gap in the literature, given that most of the previous research has focused on English as a second/foreign language. By investigating German learners, this study provides valuable insights into how TBLT can shape affective and motivational experiences in a less-studied language context.

2. RESEARCH DESIGN

As this is a pilot study, the sample size was limited ($N = 28$), and the findings should be interpreted with caution. The primary purpose was to test the methodology and assess feasibility rather than to generalize to a wider population.

2.1. Participants

The study was conducted during the 2024/2025 academic year with undergraduate ($N = 17$) and graduate ($N = 11$) students of German studies at the University of Split, Croatia. As part of their compulsory coursework, participants engaged in speaking activities within a Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) framework, which provided opportunities for authentic communicative interaction while aiming to reduce Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) and foster positive emotions.

2.2. Survey and Data Collection

To assess Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), an adapted version of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) originally developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was employed. Following the approach of Rabadi and Rabadi (2022), the scale included items addressing Anxiety of Language Class, Communicative Anxiety, and Fear of Negative Evaluation, with a total of 20 statements.

Learners' enjoyment and engagement in speaking activities were measured using an eight-item questionnaire developed for the purpose of this study. The items were designed by the construct of Foreign Language Enjoyment as conceptualized by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014, 2016). Rather than employing the full Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES), a context-specific measure was used to capture enjoyment at the level of classroom activities, in line with previous research supporting adapted enjoyment measures in specific instructional contexts (e.g., Botes et al. 2021).

2.3. Study design

Undergraduate and graduate students participated in structured speaking tasks designed to support oral production and reduce performance-related stress. During the preparatory phase, undergraduate students watched a short film of up to five minutes and then retold its content using cue cards that provided frequently used formulaic

expressions. They also had access to a list of high-frequency formulaic expressions to encourage varied and accurate speech while minimizing repetition. Throughout the task, the instructor monitored performance in small-group interactions and offered implicit feedback by signaling errors through repetition of incorrect forms. Upon completing the tasks, undergraduate students filled out an online questionnaire.

Graduate students engaged in short presentations on current topics related to speech fluency, followed by post-task activities including discussions, role-plays, and debates. Similar to the undergraduate group, they had access to high-frequency formulaic expressions to support oral production. After completing the speaking tasks, graduate students also completed the same online questionnaire, ensuring comparability between the two groups.

2.4. Data Analysis

Participants completed two sets of statements, one measuring Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) and the other assessing Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”), allowing participants to indicate the degree to which they experienced anxiety or positive emotions in the classroom. Descriptive statistics, including response frequencies, percentages, median, and interquartile range (IQR), were calculated for each set. The mean score across relevant items was computed separately for FLCA and FLE. The median served as a reference point for participants with moderate levels, while the IQR was used to identify participants with low and high levels of the measured constructs.

2.5. Grouping and Hypotheses

Participants were classified into three groups—low, moderate, and high—based on their FLE and FLCA scores. Grouping was determined using the median and interquartile range (IQR) as reference points:

- Low group: scores below (median – IQR)
- Moderate group: scores between (median – IQR) and (median + IQR)
- High group: scores above (median + IQR)

This classification enabled a structured segmentation of participants within each dimension. Differences between groups were examined using the Kruskal-Wallis test,

a non-parametric method appropriate for comparing multiple groups given the sample size and data distribution.

The following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is a statistically significant difference in FLCA among students with varying levels of FLE (Low, Moderate, High).

H2: Graduate students exhibit significantly lower levels of FLCA compared to undergraduate students.

H3: Graduate students report significantly higher levels of FLE than undergraduate students.

3. RESULTS

a. Foreign language enjoyment

The findings revealed that students experienced high levels of FLE. The highest agreement (agree + strongly agree) was observed for items related to enjoyment of the lessons and the perceived usefulness of TBLT for improving speaking performance, with approximately 89% of students expressing agreement. Additionally, a large proportion of students reported actively participating and having their interests addressed, with agreement rates ranging from 64% to 86%. These findings indicate students' positive attitudes toward the instructional process and the perceived effectiveness of the activities (Table 1).

Table 1. Agreement with FLE statements

Items	N*	%
1. I enjoyed our classes.	25	89.29
2. This activity enhanced my enthusiasm for practicing speaking.	20	71.43
3. I felt highly encouraged to participate actively.	19	67.86
4. These lessons helped me improve my speaking skills.	25	89.29
5. I liked the activities because they met students' interests.	21	75.00
6. I look forward to further speaking practice.	21	77.78
7. The lessons effectively activated my prior knowledge of German.	24	85.71
8. I have sufficient opportunities to practice speaking in German.	18	64.29

Note: N represents the total number of students who selected “agree” or “strongly agree”; % indicates the corresponding percentage.

b) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

On the other hand, FLCA showed a moderate to high level of intensity among the participants, with approximately 21% to 75% of students agreeing with statements related to nervousness, worry, panic, and insecurity in various aspects of oral performance. Some aspects of anxiety received lower agreement rates (e.g., “*I am afraid that others will laugh at me when I speak German*” – 7.41%), whereas feelings of relaxation and the positive effect of a supportive classroom atmosphere on reducing anxiety were more widely acknowledged (Table 2). Table 2 also shows that as many as 75% of students felt nervous when speaking, often forgetting words due to fear. However, it is noteworthy that 82% of students reported a lower level of FLCA compared to previous academic years.

Table 2. Agreement rates for FLCA items

Item	N*	%
1. I felt nervous because I thought I did not speak well.	11	39.29
2. I feel nervous when I worry about speech performance.	21	75.00
3. When I don't know a German word, my interest decreases.	6	21.43
4. I feel nervous when I hesitate (use fillers/make errors).	19	67.86
5. I did not feel anxious because the atmosphere was relaxed.	15	53.57
6. I felt tense due to poor vocabulary knowledge.	13	46.43
7. I felt anxious because of a lack of confidence in speaking.	11	39.29
8. When I am anxious, I cannot remember the correct words.	21	75.00
9. When I am anxious, I only use simple sentences.	17	60.71
10. I feel less anxious compared to previous years.	23	82.14
11. I become anxious when I cannot pronounce a word correctly.	11	40.74
12. A relaxed environment reduces my anxiety.	16	57.14
13. When I am anxious, I don't have time to think about grammar.	18	64.29
14. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation.	13	46.43
15. I feel insecure when speaking in front of others.	11	39.29
16. I would be nervous if I had to speak with native speakers.	10	35.71
17. Even if I am well-prepared, I feel anxious when speaking.	12	44.44
18. I think other students are better speakers than I am.	17	60.71

Item	N*	%
19. I feel my heart pounding when I am asked to speak in class.	13	46.43
20. I am afraid that others will laugh at me when I speak German.	2	7.41

Note: N represents the total number of respondents who agreed (“agree” + “strongly agree”); % = percentage.

Students also provided descriptive, qualitative responses in this study, offering a more detailed insight into their attitudes and experiences related to FLCA. When asked about the main cause of anxiety, responses pointed to feelings of insecurity regarding their own speaking skills and insufficient preparation as the primary sources of fear. Other key factors mentioned were fear of making errors, limited vocabulary, and previous negative experiences.

The second question, concerning ways to reduce anxiety, resulted in a variety of suggestions. The most frequently mentioned strategies included increasing the number of speaking exercises, maintaining a relaxed learning atmosphere, better preparation, conversations with native speakers without judgment, and receiving positive feedback from instructors.

A particularly important question addressed whether FLCA receives sufficient attention in the context of foreign language learning. Many respondents felt that it does not, noting the difficulty of meeting all students’ needs and preferences in large groups. The importance of encouraging comments and feedback as part of standard teaching practice was emphasized.

Overall, the qualitative findings highlight the significance of emotional support and a positive learning environment in reducing FLCA in foreign language acquisition.

c) Differences in FLCA among students with varying levels of FLE

The participants were divided into three groups based on their levels of FLE (Low, Moderate, High). Grouping was determined using the median and interquartile range (IQR) as reference points. Table 3 presents the average agreement scores with statements related to FLCA for each student group.

Table 3: Average agreement scores with statements related to FLCA for each FLE student group

Group	N/%	Median	IQR
Low	13/46%	5.00	0.06
Moderate	12/43%	3.50	0.38
High	3/11%	4.25	0.16

Note: IQR – interquartile range, % – percentage

Table 3 presents a comparison of anxiety levels among FLE groups. Interestingly, the low FLE group has a median FLCA score of 5.00 with very little variability (IQR = 0.06), indicating that participants in this group generally reported experiencing pronounced foreign language anxiety. The moderate FLE group has a lower median (3.50) and greater variability (IQR = 0.38), suggesting more diverse levels of FLCA within that group. The high FLE group has a median FLCA score of 4.25, which falls between the other two groups, with moderate variability (IQR = 0.16).

The Kruskal–Wallis test was conducted to examine differences across the three groups for each FLCA item, as presented in Table 4. Statistically significant differences were observed for items related to classroom comfort and atmosphere ($p_5 = 0.006$; $p < 0.001$; $p_{12} = 0.002$; $p < 0.001$), fear or panic during unexpected speaking ($p_{14} = 0.007$; $p < 0.001$), and feelings of nervousness when speaking with native speakers ($p_{16} = 0.009$; $p < 0.001$).

Table 4. Differences across the three groups for each FLCA item

Items	H	p
1. I felt nervous because I thought I did not speak well.	5.55	0.06
2. I feel nervous when I worry about speech performance.	1.61	0.45
3. When I don't know a German word, my interest decreases.	2.41	0.30
4. I feel nervous when I hesitate (use fillers/errors).	2.25	0.32
5. I did not feel anxious because the atmosphere was relaxed.	10.13	0.006**
6. I felt tension due to poor vocabulary knowledge.	2.57	0.28
7. I felt anxious due to a lack of confidence in speaking.	0.81	0.67
8. When I am anxious, I cannot remember the correct words.	1.10	0.58
9. When I am anxious, I only use simple sentences.	0.78	0.68
10. I feel less anxious compared to previous years.	6.03	0.05
11. I become anxious when I cannot pronounce a word correctly.	2.74	0.25
12. A relaxed environment reduces my anxiety.	12.22	0.002**
13. When I am anxious, I do not have time to think about grammar.	2.32	0.31
14. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation.	9.83	0.007**
15. I feel insecure when speaking in front of others.	0.88	0.64
16. I would be nervous if I had to speak with native speakers.	9.41	0.009**
17. Even if I am well-prepared, I feel anxious when speaking.	3.14	0.21
18. I think other students are better speakers than I am.	1.45	0.48
19. I feel my heart pounding when I am called to speak in class.	2.68	0.26
20. I am afraid that others will laugh at me when I speak German.	0.82	0.66

Note: H – Kruskal-Wallis test; ** – $p < 0.01$

The results indicate differences in the average level of agreement across FLE groups for the selected statements (5, 12, 14, and 16), with the low FLE group generally showing higher agreement with anxiety-related statements than groups with moderate or high FLE.

The findings indicate a statistically significant association between FLE levels and specific dimensions of FLCA, particularly those pertaining to emotional experience and self-confidence during speaking. For the remaining statements, no statistically significant differences were identified among the FLE groups. Consistent with previous research, an inverse relationship between FLE and FLCA was observed, with lower anxiety generally corresponding to higher enjoyment. However, the high FLE group was very small ($n = 3$), so these results should be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive. Qualitative responses support this trend, highlighting the importance of a supportive classroom environment and meaningful speaking opportunities in enhancing enjoyment and reducing anxiety.

d) *Differences across years of study*

The results indicate that undergraduate and graduate students showed similar scores on FLE, with high mean scores for enjoyment of classes (undergraduate: 4.24; graduate: 4.18) and perceived opportunities to practice German (undergraduate: 4.06; graduate: 4.18). Graduate students, however, reported higher satisfaction with the activities conducted (4.09 vs. 3.41) compared to undergraduates. A significant difference emerged only for item 6, *I look forward to further speaking practice* ($U = 39.0$; $p < 0.01$), with graduate students expressing significantly greater anticipation for speaking exercises (Table 5).

Other aspects related to FLE remained relatively stable across study years, suggesting the development of specific expectations and attitudes, as well as a consistent baseline motivation for language learning and the enhancement of oral proficiency.

Table 5. Differences between undergraduate and graduate students in their level of agreement with statements related to FLE.

Statement	undergraduate		graduate		U	p
	M	IQR	M	IQR		
1. I enjoyed our classes.	4.24	1.0	4.18	1.0	88.0	0.79
2. This activity enhanced my enthusiasm for practicing speaking.	1.82	1.0	1.55	1.0	115.0	0.28
3. I felt very encouraged to participate actively.	3.94	2.0	3.82	1.0	97.0	0.88
4. These lessons helped me improve my speaking skills.	3.06	1.0	3.18	2.5	93.0	1.00
5. I liked the activities because they meet students' interests.	3.41	2.0	4.09	1.0	64.5	0.14
6. I look forward to further speaking practice.	3.53	1.0	4.36	1.0	39.0	0.006**
7. The lessons effectively activated my prior knowledge of German.	2.47	1.0	2.64	2.0	87.0	0.77
8. I have sufficient opportunities to practice speaking German.	4.06	0.0	4.18	0.5	83.5	0.59

Note: U – value for the Mann–Whitney test; ** – $p < 0.01$

The study on FLCA among undergraduate and graduate students shows that differences between years of study are most notable in aspects related to relaxation and speaking confidence (Table 6). Graduate students reported significantly lower anxiety than undergraduate students, both in feeling less anxious due to the relaxed atmosphere ($U = 180$, $p = 0.01$) and in perceiving that a relaxed environment reduces their anxiety ($U = 160$, $p = 0.005$). Graduate students also experience panic less frequently when speaking without prior preparation ($U=140$; $p=0.02$) and are less nervous if they had to speak with native speakers ($U=150$; $p=0.001$). Other statements related

to FLCA, such as worrying about poor speaking performance or feeling insecure in front of others, did not differ significantly between the two groups. These findings suggest that students' levels of FLCA decrease as they advance in their studies, potentially due to increased language proficiency, which enhances self-confidence and familiarity with using the foreign language.

Table 6. Comparison of undergraduate and graduate students' responses to FLCA-related statements

Items	UNDER		GRADUATE		U	p
	M	IQR	M	IQR		
1. I felt nervous because I did not speak well.	2.2	1.0	1.5	1.0	110.0	0.08
2. I feel nervous when I worry about my speech performance.	3.5	2.0	3.0	1.0	130.0	0.15
3. When I don't know a German word, my interest decreases.	1.0	0.5	1.0	0.5	75.0	0.25
4. I feel nervous when I hesitate (use fillers/make errors).	3.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	140.0	0.12
5. I did not feel anxious because the atmosphere was relaxed.	3.5	1.0	4.0	0.5	180.0	0.01*
6. I felt tension due to poor vocabulary knowledge.	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	95.0	0.30
7. I felt anxious due to a lack of confidence in speaking.	2.0	1.0	2.0	1.0	115.0	0.50
8. When I am anxious, I cannot remember the correct words.	3.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	120.0	0.45

Items	UNDER		GRADUATE		U	p
9. When I am anxious, I can only use simple sentences.	3.0	2.0	3.0	1.0	90.0	0.50
10. I feel less anxious compared to previous years.	4.0	1.0	3.5	1.0	125.0	0.05
11. I become anxious when I cannot pronounce a word correctly.	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	115.0	0.40
12. A relaxed atmosphere reduces my anxiety.	3.5	1.5	4.0	1.0	160.0	0.005*
13. When I am anxious, I don't have time to think about grammar.	3.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	80.0	0.35
14. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation.	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	140.0	0.02*
15. I feel insecure when speaking in front of others.	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.5	130.0	0.55
16. I would be nervous if I had to speak with native speakers.	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	150.0	0.001**
17. Even if I am well prepared, I feel anxious when speaking.	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.0	110.0	0.10
18. I think other students are better speakers than I am.	2.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	100.0	0.22
19. I feel my heart pounding when I am called to speak in class.	2.0	1.0	1.5	1.0	120.0	0.40
20. I am afraid others will laugh at me when I speak German.	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.0	90.0	0.60

Note: U value for the Mann–Whitney test; ** – $p < 0.01$

4. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among Croatian students of German studies, with particular attention to differences between undergraduate and graduate students and the pedagogical role of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). Given the small sample size ($N = 28$) and the limited number of participants in the high-FLE group, the findings should be interpreted with caution. As a pilot study, the results are indicative rather than generalizable and provide a foundation for further investigation with larger and more diverse samples.

The findings revealed generally high levels of FLE. A substantial majority of students reported enjoyment of lessons and perceived TBLT as beneficial for improving speaking performance, while most indicated active participation and recognition of their interests in classroom activities. These results are consistent with the Positive Psychology perspective in SLA, which conceptualizes enjoyment as emerging from meaningful engagement, supportive interaction, and cognitively stimulating tasks (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014; MacIntyre et al. 2019). They also align with research demonstrating that task-based, communicative approaches enhance intrinsic motivation and learner involvement (Malik & Pervaiz 2023; Rodriguez-Peñarroja 2022).

At the same time, FLCA was present at moderate to high levels, particularly in speaking-related contexts. A considerable proportion of students reported nervousness, worry, and insecurity, especially during spontaneous speaking. Qualitative responses identified insufficient preparation, limited vocabulary, fear of making errors, and previous negative experiences as primary sources of anxiety. These findings correspond to established conceptualizations of FLCA as a situation-specific construct closely related to self-perceived competence and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al. 1986; Dewaele et al. 2019; Pan & Zhang 2021). The coexistence of high enjoyment and notable anxiety further supports the view that positive and negative emotions can operate simultaneously within the same learning environment (MacIntyre et al. 2019).

Students emphasized increased speaking practice, a relaxed classroom atmosphere, and constructive feedback as key strategies for reducing anxiety. Many also expressed the perception that affective factors—particularly FLCA—do not receive sufficient pedagogical attention, especially in larger groups where addressing individual needs is more challenging. This perception echoes concerns in the literature that emotional variables, despite their impact on participation and performance, are not systemati-

cally integrated into language teaching practices (Dewaele et al. 2019). The emphasis on supportive feedback and emotional safety highlights the importance of emotionally responsive pedagogy.

With regard to the hypotheses, H1 received partial support. Students with lower FLE reported significantly higher anxiety in dimensions related to classroom atmosphere, spontaneous speaking, and communication with native speakers. This pattern supports the claim that FLE and FLCA are moderately negatively correlated yet conceptually distinct constructs rather than opposite ends of a single continuum (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014). However, because significant differences were not observed across all anxiety indicators, the relationship appears domain-specific rather than global.

H2 was supported, as graduate students demonstrated lower levels of situational speaking anxiety, particularly in relaxed classroom contexts and unprepared speaking tasks. These findings are consistent with research suggesting that FLCA decreases with increased proficiency, communicative experience, and academic maturity (Pan & Zhang 2021; Rabadi & Rabadi 2022; Zhang et al. 2020). From a developmental perspective, anxiety may be understood as a malleable construct shaped by growing linguistic competence and self-efficacy (Dewaele & Dewaele 2017).

H3 was only partially supported. Although graduate students reported slightly greater anticipation of future speaking practice and higher satisfaction with classroom activities, overall levels of enjoyment did not differ substantially between study years. This suggests relative stability of global enjoyment across academic progression, while certain motivational dimensions may intensify over time. From the perspective proposed by Dörnyei (2020), emotions possess a goal-directed quality; accordingly, enjoyment may function as a motivational mechanism that promotes sustained engagement beyond the influence of academic level alone. Overall, the findings point to a nuanced and context-dependent interplay between enjoyment and anxiety in foreign language learning. Consistent with contemporary affective research in SLA, FLE, and FLCA appear to interact dynamically within specific situational and experiential domains rather than across all aspects of classroom experience (Dewaele & MacIntyre 2014; MacIntyre et al. 2019).

5. CONCLUSION

This study explored the interplay between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) among undergraduate and graduate students of German studies, with attention to differences across enjoyment levels and academic progression. The results indicate generally high FLE, particularly in relation to lesson enjoyment, task-based activities, and active participation, while FLCA was moderate to high, especially in speaking-related contexts. Anxiety was most frequently linked to insufficient preparation and perceived lack of competence, whereas supportive classroom environments and constructive feedback were identified as key mitigating factors.

Graduate students exhibited lower situational speaking anxiety and slightly higher anticipation of future speaking practice, likely reflecting greater proficiency and confidence. Across FLE levels, higher enjoyment generally corresponded to lower anxiety, supporting the notion that positive and negative emotions coexist dynamically in language learning contexts. However, the very small high-FLE group limits the generalizability of these findings, which should therefore be interpreted as preliminary evidence for future research with larger, more diverse samples.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of emotionally supportive and interactive teaching practices, task-based activities, and constructive feedback in fostering positive emotional experiences. While anxiety may not be entirely eliminated, enhancing enjoyment and motivation through such pedagogical strategies can promote more balanced and effective foreign language learning outcomes.

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UNTERSUCHUNG DES ZUSAMMENHANGS ZWISCHEN FREMDSPRACHENFREUDE UND ANGST IM FREMDSPRACHENUNTERRICHT BEI DEUTSCHEN SPRECHAUFGABEN: EINE PILOTSTUDIE MIT EINEM AUFGABENBASIERTEN ANSATZ

Zusammenfassung:

Diese Pilotstudie untersucht den Zusammenhang zwischen Angst im Fremdsprachenunterricht (FLCA) und Fremdsprachenfreude (FLE) bei Bachelor- und Masterstudierenden der Germanistik an der Universität Split, Kroatien. Die Teilnehmenden nahmen an strukturierten Sprechaufgaben im Rahmen des aufgabenbasierten Sprachunterrichts (TBLT) teil, die darauf abzielten, die mündliche Kompetenz zu fördern, leistungsbezogenen Stress zu verringern und positive emotionale Erfahrungen zu unterstützen. FLCA und FLE wurden mittels adaptierter Instrumente erfasst, die auf etablierten theoretischen Ansätzen basieren und die Wahrnehmungen der Studierenden hinsichtlich Angst, Freude und Engagement in mündlichen Unterrichtssituationen abbilden. Die Analyse umfasste deskriptive Statistiken, die Klassifikation der Teilnehmenden nach Angst- und Freude-Niveaus sowie nichtparametrische Tests zur Untersuchung von Unterschieden zwischen Gruppen und Studienjahren. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die Studierenden insgesamt hohe Freude am Unterricht empfanden, insbesondere in Bezug auf die Relevanz und wahrgenommene Effektivität der TBLT-Aktivitäten. Die Angst zeigte ein moderates bis hohes Niveau, wobei die ausgeprägtesten Effekte in unvorbereiteten oder spontanen Sprechsituationen auftraten, obwohl das allgemeine FLCA niedriger war als in früheren Studienjahren. Es wurden statistisch signifikante inverse Zusammenhänge zwischen Freude und spezifischen Angstdimensionen festgestellt, und Masterstudierende berichteten über geringere Angst und höhere Motivation für Sprechaktivitäten als Bachelorstudierende. Qualitative Rückmeldungen

unterstrichen zudem die Bedeutung einer unterstützenden Lernumgebung, vielfältiger Sprechgelegenheiten und konstruktiver Rückmeldungen zur Förderung von Freude und zur Reduktion von Angst. Diese vorläufigen Befunde liefern wertvolle Hinweise zur Optimierung des Fremdsprachenunterrichts und geben Impulse für weiterführende Forschung.

Schlüsselwörter: Angst im Fremdsprachenunterricht; Fremdsprachenfreude; Aufgabenbasierter Sprachunterricht; Mündliche Produktion; Kommunikative Kompetenz

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