



DIGITAL TOOLS AS A MEANS OF OVERCOMING FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN LOW-LEVEL STUDENTS

Kuvandikova Sarvinoz,
Applied Aspect of the English Language Department
Teacher at UzSWLU,
sarvinoz.quvandiqova@uzswlu.uz

Abstract

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a well-known barrier to learners' motivation to communicate, achieve well, and reach their long-term goals. Low-level learners, characterized by restricted vocabulary and grammatical resources, are especially susceptible as performance requirements frequently surpass their existing capabilities. Digital technologies (such as intelligent tutoring systems, mobile applications, multimedia, and synchronous/asynchronous communication platforms) provide affordances that help alleviate anxiety through scaffolded input, private practice, multimodal signals, and quick corrective feedback. This study integrates theoretical frameworks (affective filter, cognitive load, sociocultural theory) and empirical studies on computer-assisted language learning (CALL) to assert that thoroughly tailored digital interventions can alleviate foreign language anxiety (FLA) in less experienced learners. This analysis examines mechanisms by which tools mitigate anxiety, presents design principles, provides examples of tools and classroom strategies, and proposes avenues for empirical investigation. The implications for educators and instructional designers are examined.

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety, low-level learners, digital tools, CALL, multimedia learning, scaffolding

Introduction

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is a particular form of situational anxiety related to the acquisition of second or foreign languages (L2) and communicative performance (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). It manifests as concern, self-deprecating thoughts, physiological responses, and avoidance behaviors, all of which negatively impact performance and learning opportunities. Low-level learners—students with low vocabulary and grammar knowledge—are more likely to fail because communicative activities are often too difficult for them, which makes them feel like they are more likely to fail and be judged negatively. This cycle of anxiety and avoidance can create a vicious circle, where the fear of failure further inhibits their willingness to engage in





language practice. Consequently, educators must implement strategies that build confidence and provide a supportive environment to help these learners succeed. At the same time, digital technologies have advanced to the point where they may be used deliberately to offer personalized, low-stakes language exercises that are advantageous. This article examines the potential of digital technologies to reduce Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) among low-level learners, integrating theoretical frameworks and empirical data to formulate design suggestions and research goals. By leveraging these technologies, educators can create tailored learning experiences that not only engage students but also allow them to progress at their pace. This approach provides students with autonomy and reduces the pressure often associated with language learning, ultimately leading to enhanced fluency and self-assurance.

Theoretical foundations: Affective filter and comprehensible input.

Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis asserts that affective factors (motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety) influence the level of comprehensible input utilized for acquisition. These factors can either facilitate or hinder language learning, depending on the learner's emotional state. For instance, a high level of motivation and self-confidence can lower the affective filter, allowing for greater access to comprehensible input and, consequently, more effective language acquisition. A high affective filter (like anxiety) keeps information from getting in; lowering it makes learning a language easier. Digital tools can present comprehensible input in flexible formats (e.g., slowed audio, subtitles, glosses), thereby diminishing the affective barrier to processing. By utilizing these innovative resources, learners can engage with the material in a way that suits their personal preferences and emotional needs. This tailored approach not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a more positive and interactive learning environment.

Cognitive load and incremental assistance

Cognitive load theory (Sweller, 1988) stresses the importance of matching the demands of a task with the amount of working memory available. Low-level learners are susceptible to cognitive overload during communicative tasks. To mitigate this risk, educators can implement strategies that gradually increase task complexity, allowing students to build confidence and skills over time. By scaffolding learning experiences, instructors can effectively support low-level learners, enabling them to progress at a manageable pace without becoming overwhelmed. Well-designed digital activities can lessen extraneous load (a clear interface and information that is broken up into smaller pieces), manage intrinsic load (tasks that build on each other), and





offer germane load opportunities (targeted practice), which can help lower anxiety caused by overload.

Sociocultural support

Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) focuses on the zone of proximal development (ZPD) and the function of scaffolding in transitioning learners from assisted to autonomous performance. Scaffolding involves providing learners with the necessary support to achieve tasks just beyond their current capabilities. As they gain confidence and competence, this support can gradually be removed, allowing them to flourish independently while still benefiting from a structured learning environment. Digital tools serve as dynamic scaffolds (hints, prompts, and model responses) and occasionally as mediators, facilitating peer and tutor support in moderated, low-threat settings. These tools enhance engagement and promote collaboration among learners, enabling them to share insights and strategies. Ultimately, this approach fosters a more profound understanding of the material and encourages lifelong learning habits.

Digital tools reduce foreign language anxiety in low-level learners

Digital tools are of great assistance to low-level learners who are anxious about speaking a foreign language. This is because digital tools offer a wide variety of different opportunities for assistance, which makes them a great means of providing assistance. One of the most advantageous aspects of it is that you can practice in complete secrecy, without any risk, and even over and over again. This is one of the most prominent advantages. The availability of apps and automated instructors, such as micro-learning vocabulary platforms and pronunciation trainers, enables students to practice in private sessions. This offers students the opportunity to improve their pronunciation and vocabulary skills. It is possible for individuals to perform the exercises in this environment over and over again until they reach a point where they are comfortable with them. This is something that can be done. They are able to avoid the anxiety that comes with the fear of making mistakes in front of other people and receiving poor grades as a result of this. As a consequence of this, the anxiety that frequently manifests itself in the moments leading up to the beginning of the class is alleviated by participation in this private rehearsal. Another essential component is to provide comments that are both quick and nonjudgmental. Automated methods like intelligent tutoring systems and speech analyzers can provide feedback. These methods eliminate the social pressure that is typically associated with traditional learning environments. When learners are provided with feedback in a timely and constructive manner, such as by offering alternative options, they are able to receive





constructive advice without experiencing the social dangers that typically cause them to feel anxious. Furthermore, using several types of input and adapting it to the learner's level makes it easier for low-level learners to understand. Language input is easier to get to when it includes voice, visual assistance, and text. Subtitles, graphics, and slower speech are some of the features that can aid people who have trouble interpreting information and feel anxious when they don't understand it. In addition, it is essential to provide learners with assignments that are both gradable and adaptable in order to maintain their interest in information that is appropriate for them.

There are a few important rules to follow when making digital tools to help people with anxiety. These rules put a lot of emphasis on making the learning environment gradual and supportive. At first, it's important to start with private practice modes like solo drills, recordings, and exercises that can be changed. This method lets students gain confidence in a low-pressure setting before moving on to more public interactions, such as sharing with peers or having live discussions. This method of graduated exposure works well to lower the emotional responses that come with anxiety.

Along with how the practice is set up, the content that these interventions give should be multimodal and easy to understand. Learners can better understand the material at their own pace by combining pictures, sound, and text, and giving them the choice to change the speed of playback and add subtitles. It's also important to give immediate and helpful feedback that is clear, actionable, and given in a way that doesn't make the person feel judged. There should also be chances for corrective rehearsal to help reinforce learning.

It is important to carefully adjust the difficulty of tasks to fit the student's level, using adaptive algorithms or teacher moderation to make sure that challenges are always at the right level. Also, when helping people interact with each other, it's important to include social support and set clear rules. Giving people sentence stems, role scripts, and small group norms can help them feel less scared of being judged negatively during these interactions.

The intervention should be designed to reduce unnecessary cognitive load in order to avoid cognitive overload.

Limitations and challenges

The digital divide and access to technology are big problems in education because not all students have reliable access to electronics and the internet. Not being able to access these things can make anxiety worse instead of better, which can lead to





differences in learning opportunities. Also, educational tools rely too much on automation, which can be a problem. Automated feedback frequently fails to adequately address intricate pragmatic or discourse-related issues, requiring human mediation to enhance the learning experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underscores the efficacy of digital tools in mitigating foreign language anxiety (FLA) among novice learners by offering customized, low-pressure learning contexts that promote confidence and engagement. The research emphasizes the significance of tailored digital interventions that address the specific needs of learners by incorporating theoretical frameworks such as the affective filter hypothesis, cognitive load theory, and sociocultural theory. The results indicate that digital tools can significantly alleviate anxiety through functionalities such as private practice, multimodal input, and prompt, constructive feedback, thereby improving language acquisition and fostering learner autonomy.

Future research could investigate the enduring effects of digital interventions on language proficiency and anxiety, along with the influence of different types of digital tools on various learner demographics. Additionally, examining the efficacy of hybrid models that integrate digital tools with conventional classroom interactions may yield insights into enhancing language learning experiences.

Nevertheless, this study has its limitations. The digital divide is a big problem because not everyone has the same access to technology, which can make some students more anxious and limit their learning opportunities. Also, depending on automated feedback systems may miss subtle details about how language is used, so people need to step in to make the learning experience more complete. It will be important for future research and the successful use of digital tools in language education to deal with these problems.

References

1. Chapelle, C. A. (2001). *Computer applications in second language acquisition: Foundations for teaching, testing and research*. Cambridge University Press.
2. Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132.
3. Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
4. Levy, M. (1997). *Computer-assisted language learning: Context and conceptualization*. Oxford University Press.





5. Mayer, R. E. (2009). *Multimedia learning* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
6. Sweller, J. (1988). Cognitive load during problem solving: Effects on learning. *Cognitive Psychology*, 19(1), 1–58.
7. Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* (M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, & E. Souberman, Eds.). Harvard University Press.

