

**Foreign language anxiety toward the English language among
Finnish primary school third and fourth grade students**

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Kun ahdistus vierasta kieltä kohtaan tulee esiin oppimistilanteissa, puhutaan ilmiöstä nimeltä vieraan kielen kieliahdistus. Kieliahdistus ilmenee jokaisella oppijalla yksilöllisesti, mutta aiemmat tutkimukset aiheesta ovat osoittaneet ilmiön aiheuttavan monipuolisia negatiivisia vaikutuksia kieltenoppimista kohtaan.</p> <p>Tämä tutkielma keskittyy selvittämään, miten ja missä muodossa vieraan kielen kieliahdistus englannin kieltä kohtaan ilmenee suomalaisen ala-asteen kolmannen ja neljännen luokan oppilaiden keskuudessa. Tutkielman tavoitteena on selvittää, missä tilanteissa kieliahdistus ilmenee, ja mitkä ovat kohderyhmän asenteet englannin kielen oppimista kohtaan. Tutkimuksen aineistona on Likert-skaalan kysely, johon vastasi 22 oppilasta. Aineistoa on analysoitu hyödyntäen määrällisiä menetelmiä.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa saatujen tulosten mukaan kohderyhmän asenteet englannin kielen oppimista kohtaan ovat positiivisia, eikä englannin kielen koeta aiheuttavan enemmän ahdistusta tai stressiä suhteessa muihin oppiaineisiin. Tulosten mukaan kohderyhmän keskuudessa nousi esiin kaksi tilannetta, jotka aiheuttavat muita tilanteita enemmän kieliahdistusta. Nämä suurinta ahdistusta aiheuttavat tilanteet ovat englannin kielen suullinen käyttö sekä pelko virheiden tekemistä kohtaan. Kieliahdistuksen ilmeneminen yksittäisissä tilanteissa oli kuitenkin vähäistä kohderyhmän keskuudessa, ja suuri osa tutkimukseen osallistuvista ei kokenut kieliahdistusta englannin kieltä kohtaan.</p> <p>Tämän tutkielman tulokset voivat olla hyödyksi kasvatus- sekä opetusalan ammattilaisille sekä yksityishenkilöille, jotka ovat kiinnostuneita kieliahdistuksesta ilmiönä. Koska Suomessa on tehty vähäisesti tutkimusta kieliahdistuksen parissa, olisi tulevaisuuden tutkimuksen hyvä keskittyä entistä syvemmin kieliahdistuksen ilmenemiseen suomalaisten keskuudessa. Tämän lisäksi tutkimus kieliahdistuksen ilmenemisestä suomalaisten ala-asteikäisten parissa on vähäistä ja tulevaisuudessa juuri tämän kohderyhmän perusteellinen tutkiminen olisi tärkeää.</p>	
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	4
2	BACKGROUND.....	6
	2.1 Definition of foreign language anxiety	6
	2.2 The effects and symptoms of foreign language anxiety	7
	2.3 Causes of foreign language anxiety	8
	2.4 The prevalence of foreign language anxiety	10
3	THE PRESENT STUDY	13
	3.1 Research aims and questions	13
	3.2 Participants	13
	3.3 Data collection and data	14
	3.4 Methods of analysis	15
4	ANALYSIS.....	16
	4.1 Students' perceptions of learning the English language	16
	4.2 Situations in which foreign language anxiety occurs	18
5	DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	24
	BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	27
	APPENDIX	31

1 INTRODUCTION

It is not uncommon, that feelings of nervousness and anxiety arise when encountering situations where foreign languages are present. According to previous research, as many as one third of all learners of foreign languages experience some levels of anxiety (Horwitz, 2001, as cited by Male, 2018, p. 170). The phenomenon of anxiousness and apprehension toward learning and using foreign languages within an educational context is also known as foreign language anxiety (FLA). The effects and symptoms of FLA can vary among individuals. However, both physical and emotional symptoms are generally associated with it, such as the feelings of tension and apprehension, combined with a rapid heart rate (Horwitz et al., 1986 p. 125). FLA can have profound effects on the process of learning, as it can both debilitate the learner from achieving the expected goals and deteriorate the welfare of the learner (Zhang Jun, 200, p. 74). Thus, research on the effects and manifestations of FLA is essential to acquire a profound understanding of the nature of the phenomenon.

Previous research on FLA in a Finnish context is limited. Thus, to acquire a deeper understanding of the prevalence and appearance of the phenomenon in Finland, there is a need for further research. Furthermore, the existing research has focused on FLA among students within upper-secondary schools and universities, and little to no research has been done among primary school students. In a study similar to the present research, FLA was found to exist among primary school students in a Swedish context (Nilsson, 2019). Additionally, previous research suggest that anxiety reactions may arise as early as at the age of seven, after which increasing year by year (Hills, 1972 as quoted by AY, 2010, p. 88). However, as FLA is a phenomenon that can be affected by variables, such as the position the language has in a country and the level of teaching English, conclusions drawn elsewhere cannot be generalized to apply to Finnish context. Bearing these aspects in mind, the aim of the present research is to acquire a profound understanding on how FLA affects the Finnish primary school third and fourth grade students. More precisely, the aim is to find out what are the situations that cause anxiety among the participants. Furthermore, as FLA can have an impact on how learning foreign languages is perceived,

the second aim of the present research is to find out what are the primary school students' perceptions of learning the English language.

The present research consists of five chapters. The introduction is followed by an overview of the previous research and the nature of FLA. Additionally, the effects and symptoms as well as the causes of FLA are presented in the second chapter. The third chapter consists of descriptions of the set-up and the data of the present study and the methods of data analysis. In the fourth chapter, the collected data of the present research are analyzed. Finally, in the fifth chapter the findings of this study are analyzed in comparison to previous research. Furthermore, in the last chapter the findings are also discussed in regard to possible future research.

2 BACKGROUND

In this chapter, the previous research on FLA is presented. The chapter begins with subsection 2.1, which presents the overall description and definition of FLA, including the presentation of FLA through the different anxiety reactions. In the subsection 2.2, the frequently occurring effects and symptoms of FLA are presented. Subsection 2.3 presents the causes of FLA as well as the ways of reducing it. Finally, subsection 2.4 focuses on the prevalence of FLA.

2.1 Definition of foreign language anxiety

Previous research has attempted to describe anxiety in a multitude of ways. Kralova and Petrova (2017, p. 110) define anxiety as a mental and physical state that is characterized by specific symptoms occurring on emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioral levels. When one experiences anxiety toward a foreign language in an educational setting it is the case of a phenomenon known as foreign language anxiety (FLA). As with FLA, when anxiety is limited to solely specific situations, it belongs to the category of specific anxiety reactions and should not be confused with general anxiousness (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125). Despite the multiple differing descriptions of the definition of FLA, it is agreed to be a phenomenon that can impede one's ability to successfully perform in foreign language classes (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125). Furthermore, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994, p. 284) define FLA as anxiety occurring specifically within second language contexts, such as ones that include speaking, listening, and learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, p. 284).

To acquire a more profound understanding of the nature of FLA it can be divided into three categories of performance anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986, p.127) define communication apprehension as a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety about communicating with people, whereas McCroskey (1984, p. 18) states it being a transitory orientation toward communication with a given person or a group of people. Although test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation are somewhat similar in nature, the effects of the fear

of negative evaluation go further, whereas test anxiety is limited to test-taking situations (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). In both cases anxiety occurs in situations where one fears of being negatively evaluated by others. Due to the ever present performance evaluation within an academic and social context, it is useful to consider these as contributing factors of FLA. However, it is proposed that FLA should not be seen as a mere combination of the three performance anxieties, but rather as a complex phenomenon with multiple components, including self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning situations (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 127).

2.2 The effects and symptoms of foreign language anxiety

The effects and symptoms of foreign language anxiety have been studied from different perspectives over the past decades. Due to the wide range of possible symptoms of the phenomena, it is essential to have a concrete understanding of the extent of the matter. FLA can have a wide range of differentiating symptoms, including both mental and physical features, such as the feeling of tension and apprehension as well as the arousal of the autonomic nervous system causing rapid heart rate, heavy breathing, and sweating (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125). In addition, cognitive symptoms, such as increases in distracting self-related cognition, expectations of failure, and decrease in cognitive processing ability are often perceived in FLA (Wine, 1980, as cited by MacIntyre, 1995, p. 91). As mentioned, the importance of distracting self-related cognition in relation to learning is consequential. In research conducted by Price (1991, p. 106, as cited by Young, 1991, p. 427) the majority of the participants believed to possess weaker language skills in comparison to those of others in the same class, evoking feelings that others looked down on them and that they should have done a better job and work more to have been able to succeed in the given task. Low self-esteem and constant expectations of failure in a foreign language classroom can lead anxious students to be unwilling to communicate with others (Price, 1991, as quoted by Young, 1991, p. 427) as well as in the English language in general (Horwitz et al., 2010) furthermore deteriorating the process of learning a second language.

Anxiety toward a foreign language can cause the arousal of negative feelings and attitudes toward the target language and learning. The arousal of anxiety can influence the quality

of performance as well as the amount of effort that is given to the learning (MacIntyre, 1995, p. 92). Previous research has demonstrated that the level of experienced FLA can impact directly on the academic performance. In research conducted by Horwitz, (1986) it was found that among students with high levels of FLA, both the expected and received grades were lower than the grades of students' who did not experience such high levels of anxiousness (p.561). In addition, according to research conducted by Bailey, Onwnegbuzie, and Daley (2003, as cited by Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019, p. 314), highly anxious students were more likely to drop out of their courses in comparison to the low anxious students. Anxious language learners are also reported to have trouble discriminating the sounds and structures of a target language message as well as experiencing difficulties in grasping the content of the given message, thus leading to poor understanding of the extended target language utterances (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 126).

2.3 Causes of foreign language anxiety

Despite the vast research done on the matter of the cause of FLA, multiple views have been proposed in order to explain where the phenomenon stems. MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) propose that FLA develops when a student is feeling uncomfortable or under pressure in a situation including a foreign language. As the feeling of pressure is personal it should be taken into consideration that not every learner experiences anxiety in the same situation. Nevertheless, research on the matter seems to have reached a consensus that variables including personal attitudes and previous experiences can influence the incidence of FLA. It has been discovered, that even within teaching approaches specifically created to help learners with anxiety, variation of the suitability of the approaches was found; according to Koch and Terrel (1991, as cited by Horwitz, 2001, p. 119). "in almost all cases, any task which was judged comfortable by some language learners was also judged stressful by other". Cultural differences can play a role on the suitability of certain classroom practices as well, for it is possible that a task perceived as comfortable by one group of learners may prove to be stressful for others coming from different cultural backgrounds who are used to different kinds of classroom organizations (Horwitz, 2001, p. 119).

Foreign language anxiety does not solely occur in specific situations, but its occurrence is largely connected to personality features. Furthermore, self-perceived abilities of language competence, self-esteem, and competitiveness seem to play a significant role in the development of FLA. According to research, the degree of perceived self-esteem is largely affiliated with the level of language anxiety, to such a great degree that students who perceive themselves having a low ability in a foreign or a second language are the most likely to suffer from language anxiety (Krashen, as cited by Young, 1991, p. 427). In addition to low expectations, perfectionistic features that include high levels of self-criticism and expectations of achieving fluency in a language without making mistakes can lead to the manifestation of FLA (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, pp. 563-569). For people with low self-esteem, it is typical to worry about the opinions of their peers and pleasing others, whereas people with perfectionistic features often fear making mistakes while similarly report greater distress regarding their mistakes (Krashen, as cited by Young, 1991, p. 427; Frost et al., 1995, as cited by Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, p. 569). Collectively, competitiveness can lead to FLA when language learners compare themselves to mutuals or an idealized self-image (Young, 1991, p. 427). It is characteristic for FLA to be based on negative expectations that further lead to worry and emotionality (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, as cited by Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, p. 564).

As the feelings of anxiety and stress vary to a great extent between the perceivers, the methods and tactics on reducing FLA are versatile. In the field of foreign language anxiety, previous research has come to a conclusion of the importance of creating a low anxiety classroom atmosphere to reduce the level of perceived anxiety (Young, 1991, pp. 430-431). Actions to achieve a low anxiety classroom atmosphere can be taken toward in class practices and instructor behavior. According to Grieger and Boyd (1980, as cited by Foss & Reitzel, 1988, p. 445), language anxiety can stem from irrational beliefs and by making these beliefs recognized, the students can choose to approach these anxiety-provoking situations instead of avoiding them. To help the students recognize these beliefs and anxiety-provoking factors in language learning, it is recommended for instructors to ask the students to come forward with their fears to see that they are not alone experiencing anxiety (Foss & Reitzel, 1988, p. 445). Additionally, it is suggested that the instructors should utilize a role as a language teacher in a learner-centered language environment: instead of reiteration of matters, the instructor should provide students with both input

and output opportunities to enable communicative language use in authentic situations (Young, 1991, p. 431).

Furthermore, the atmosphere of a classroom can have significant effects on the perceived anxiety levels. According to previous research, classroom atmosphere can decrease the level of anxiety to an even greater extent than specific instructional activities: when examining the effect classroom atmosphere has on the levels of FLA, Palacios found that the level of perceived teacher support had the most impact on the students' levels of anxiety. (Palacios, 1998, as cited by Horwitz, 2001, p. 119). Nonetheless, utilizing effective and motivating exercises can be helpful in decreasing anxiety and enhancing the classroom atmosphere. It is suggested that increased amount of pair work, playing games, and taking into consideration the specific needs of individual learners can be helpful aids in reducing learner anxiety (Young, 1991, p. 433).

2.4 The prevalence of foreign language anxiety

Previous research has come to different conclusions on the prevalence of foreign language anxiety. As multiple factors including personality type, expectations toward learning, and classroom atmosphere can influence the appearance of FLA, it is difficult to draw conclusions of the prevalence of the phenomenon that could be generalized to every target group. However, according to Horwitz (2001) as many as one third of all learners of a foreign language experience some level of language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001, as cited by Male, 2018, p. 170). Furthermore, Horwitz (2016), one of the inventors of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale, states that the most important finding of studies utilizing FLCAS is that a consistent 30 % to 40 % of language learners report at least moderate levels of language anxiety (p. 934). Furthermore, FLA has been found to exist within every culture where it has been studied (Tran et al., 2018, p. 216).

In a Finnish context, FLA has not been widely studied. However, existing research does acknowledge the existence of language anxiety among learners of English as a foreign language, although to varying extent. Koskenranta (2023) found that among the target group of upper secondary students, 40 % experienced low levels, 40 % medium levels,

and one-fifth high levels of anxiety in the context of learning English. On the contrary, Koivumäki (2023) found that although present in certain situations, among upper-secondary school students, high levels of language anxiety were not experienced.

Similarly, studies on FLA among primary school students are limited. In a Finnish context, there can be found one study on the affective factors toward foreign language learning among primary school students, which found that among the target group as much as 55 % experienced nervousness in their English classes (Jalkanen & Ruuska, 2007). Previous research has found similar levels of nervousness among Taiwanese elementary school students, with 40,8 % of the participants either agreeing or strongly agreeing to the statement: “In English class, I am so nervous that I forget what I know”, indicating significant levels of high anxiety (Chan & Wu, 2004). The findings of these research show significant levels of anxiety in comparison to similar research conducted elsewhere; Nilsson (2019) found that among Swedish primary school EFL students, nearly every fifth student belonged to group of high anxiousness. Additionally, in research investigating language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation among Turkish learners, Aydin (2008) found that the target group suffered from both language anxiety as well as from fear of negative evaluation. On the basis of previous research, it can be concluded that FLA is experienced among primary school students on a continuum, varying from low to high levels of anxiety.

Foreign language anxiety can have long lasting and profound consequences on the process of learning and on the attitudes toward foreign languages. Despite the commonness of the phenomenon, FLA is still an unfamiliar concept to many. Previous research focusing on the awareness and attitudes toward FLA found that there exists uncertainty toward FLA in the educational setting as well; in a public university in Vietnam, the existence of FLA was acknowledged among most of the teachers, but the high prevalence of the phenomenon was not comprehended (Tran et al., 2012). Additionally, FLA was not perceived as a serious problem and therefore was not taken into account in teaching. Research in the field of FLA is needed to bring awareness of the significance of the phenomenon to professionals of both education and pedagogy. There is a need for empirical evidence of FLA, which can further on be used in the context of foreign language learning as well as in teaching foreign languages. By utilizing evidence-based modes of operation, the teach-

ers and educational professionals can reduce the amount of FLA among students. Furthermore, bringing awareness of FLA can benefit those who struggle with anxiety and learning.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

In this chapter, the set-up of the present study is introduced. Subsection 3.1 presents the research aims and questions of the present study, in addition to which, the research gap is presented. In the following subsection 3.2, the participants and their criteria of selection is presented. Subsection 3.3 consists of the introduction of the data of the present study in addition to the description of the utilized data collecting methods. Finally, subsection 3.3 concentrates on the methods of data analysis.

3.1 Research aims and questions

The aim of the present study is to acquire a profound understanding of foreign language anxiety and its forms of manifestation among Finnish third and fourth grade primary school students. Previous research on FLA in Finland has concentrated on the experiences of students within higher grades, typically in upper-secondary schools. Although anxiety toward learning foreign languages is reported to exist among students at primary schools, little to no focus has been given to anxiety among younger students. Although not directly focusing on FLA as a phenomenon, Jalkanen and Ruuska (2007) found that there exists anxiety toward learning English among Finnish primary school students as well. These results suggest that FLA among younger target groups should be further researched. Thus, the present study aims to find out how learning English as a foreign language is perceived among primary school students and in which situations is FLA experienced.

To reach these aims, the present study seeks answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the students' perceptions of learning the English language?
2. What are the situations in which foreign language anxiety appears?

3.2 Participants

The target group of the present research consisted of 22 students from one third and one fourth grade of one Finnish primary school located in Kymenlaakso. Typically, in Finland

children are to start their education in primary school the year they turn seven (InfoFinland, 2024), making the participants of the present research between the ages of nine to eleven. In addition to the requirement of age, the native language of the participants was required to be some other than English. Thus, every participant studied English as a foreign language (EFL). Furthermore, at the time of research, all the participants had been studying English for at least three years, making the target group familiar with the nature of English as a school subject.

3.3 Data collection and data

The data of the research were collected via a paper document consisting of a questionnaire with Likert-type scale measuring frequency. The questionnaire consisted of twelve statements and five response options: always, usually, sometimes, rarely, and never. The questionnaire format was developed with the help of Likert-type scale response anchors (Vagias, 2016). To avoid any misconceptions and to guarantee the comprehension of the participants, the questionnaire including the statements and the response options was translated to Finnish. The questionnaire consisted of four statements concerning the emotions and attitudes toward the English language and eight statements concerning the specific situations and occasions where anxiety can be experienced. Due to the young age of the participants, open-ended questions were not used in the questionnaire to ensure mutual understanding of the purpose of the questionnaire. The statements were created with the help of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986), of which purpose is to help measure the level of foreign language anxiety that is experienced in a classroom. Due to the FLCAS being created to measure anxiety at the University level, the statements had to be simplified to better accommodate the situation. In addition, in the questionnaire, the participants' age and gender was asked.

Before conducting the research, a permission to conduct research had to be obtained from the municipality due to the research handling data of the citizens of the municipality. Furthermore, as the target group of the present research consisted of underage students, the permission to participate in research had to be gathered from both the participants as well as the guardians of the participants. The consent to participate in research was collected from the guardians via a written consent form, in addition to which the participants

were emphasized of the voluntary nature of the research prior to the conduction of the research. To ensure a mutually fair treatment of the participants, and to minimize the possibility of risks during the questionnaire, every participant of each class answered the questionnaire simultaneously, with both the researcher and the teacher of the class present. Lastly, as the aim of the present research is to draw conclusions of the existence and effects of FLA in a specific age group attending the same Finnish primary school, the participants' gender and age will not be taken into consideration when drawing conclusions of the data. That is, due to the research not aiming to draw conclusions of the differences within genders and ages among the target group.

3.4 Methods of analysis

As the data of the research are solely numerical with no open-ended questions, quantitative data analysis is used in order to explain the results. Furthermore, as there exists an ordered relationship between the response options, the data is ordinal (Denscombe, 2014, p. 251).

With ordinal data, the variables can be compared in terms of being higher or lower than the other variables, and numerical names, such as high, medium, or low can be used when describing ordinal data, to clarify the comparison of results (Hildebrand et al., 1977, pp. 8-10). In a similar manner, the responses to each statement are compared to the other response options in the present study. Additionally, ordinal data analysis is used in the present study, to enable the drawing of conclusions on the prevalence of each statement among the target group. Furthermore, the results of each statement are compared with the results of other statements, in order to reveal the most common attitudes and beliefs among the target group. The findings are presented by using percentages rounded to the nearest full number, to allow the comparison of results. Lastly, tables are used to present the findings of the research in detail.

4 ANALYSIS

The aim of this chapter is to acquire a profound understanding of FLA among the target group and answer both of the research questions. In order to address both of the research questions, the statements of the questionnaire are divided into two subsections concerning the students' perceptions toward learning the English language and the situations in which FLA appears. Subsection 4.1 focuses on the perceptions toward learning the English language and analyses the responses to statements 1 to 4. Furthermore, the first subsection aims to answer the first research question. Subsection 4.2 focuses on the situations in which FLA appears and analyses the responses to statements 5 to 12. Additionally, the second subsection aims to answer the second research question.

4.1 Students' perceptions of learning the English language

This subsection aims to answer the first research question: "what are the students' perceptions of learning the English language". In the questionnaire, there were four statements related to the feelings toward learning the English language (see Table 1). The responses to them are analyzed in this subsection. It should be noted that the analysis of the responses is based on different amount of obtained responses to each statement, with the total of responses varying between 20 to 22 (see Table 1). Broad conclusions about the attitudes and general feelings toward the learning of English are not difficult to draw from the data, as the participants have reached a consensus of opinion with the majority of the statements. Ultimately, learning English is mostly seen as a pleasant matter among the target group.

According to the data received from the questionnaire, it seems that the general attitudes toward learning the English language among the target group are mainly positive. Over half of the participants agreed with statement one: "I enjoy studying English", with 14 % having chosen the opinion always and 41 % the opinion usually. Merely 14 % of the participants chose the option rarely, and none felt like they never enjoyed learning the language. Previous research done in Finland supports these findings; a study of attitudes

toward English among upper secondary school students found that 60 % of the participants enjoy English as a school subject (Hämäläinen, 2016). Conclusions of the level of self-satisfaction toward language learning among the target group can also be drawn from the data; statement three concerns the participants' progress in the language in relation to their contribution toward learning. Over half (60 %) of the participants rarely or never felt like they did not learn any English even when doing their best. This would suggest that the majority of the target group also feels satisfied with their progress in the English language.

Among the participants, the feeling of nervousness and stress are rarely encountered, with the majority of the participants (68 %) agreeing on rarely or never getting nervous or stressed in the English lessons. This lack of stress and nervousness would furthermore suggest that learning the language is a satisfactory experience to the target group. In research concerning the prevalence of FLA among Finnish ninth grade students (Rautio, 2022), similar results can be found; from 19 obtained responses as many as 69 % of the participants felt that they have not felt nervous toward English as a school subject in the past year. However, contradicting results can be found as well. Research on FLA among Swedish primary school students between the ages of eight to twelve found that among the group of highly anxious students, English is the most anxiety-provoking school subject (Nilsson, 2019). In the present study, the situation seems not to be similar, as the majority (69 %) of the target group feels that they rarely or never get more nervous in English lessons in comparison to other school subjects' lessons. Furthermore, the findings of Koskenranta (2023) support the results of the present study, with over half (63,5 %) of the participants of the study either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with the statement "I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes".

Table 1. Finnish primary school 3- 4 grade EFL learners' (n = 20-22) responses to statements 1 to 4.

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	In total
I enjoy studying English. (1)	3 (14 %)	9 (41 %)	7 (32 %)	3 (14 %)	0 (0 %)	22
I get nervous or stressed in English lessons. (2)	0 (0 %)	2 (9 %)	5 (23 %)	8 (36 %)	7 (32 %)	22
I feel like I do not learn any English, even if I do my best. (3)	1 (5 %)	5 (25 %)	2 (10 %)	4 (20 %)	8 (40 %)	20
I get more nervous in English lessons than in other lessons. (4)	0 (0 %)	2 (9 %)	5 (23 %)	3 (14 %)	12 (55 %)	22

4.2 Situations in which foreign language anxiety occurs

This subsection aims to answer the second research question: “what are the situations in which foreign language anxiety appears”. The remaining eight statements of the questionnaire focus on the situations in which FLA could appear and the responses to them are analyzed in this subsection. The analysis of the responses is divided into three categories: speaking and presenting, writing, and test taking. The analysis of categories will be presented in the above-mentioned order. It should be noted that the analysis of the responses in each category is based on a different amount of obtained responses, with 22 responses to each statement in the first two categories, speaking and presenting and writing, and 21-22 responses to each statement in the last category test taking. Ultimately, the data suggest that high levels of anxiety are not present at the majority of the situations.

As seen in Table 2, there can be seen a great deal of division between the responses. However, it seems that speaking English is not particularly difficult among the target group, as over half (59 %) of the participants chose the opinion “rarely” or “never” to the statement seven “speaking English is hard”. This would suggest that although dissenting

opinions can be found, a large part of the target group sees speaking English as rather easy than difficult. Previous research has found similar results; in a study of the English oral skills of Finnish upper secondary school students, Hämäläinen (2016) found that of the target group of 120 students, merely seven participants found English to be difficult, whereas 81 found it to be fun, easy or enjoyable.

With the fifth and sixth statement measuring stress in relation to speaking English, out of all the response options, the one that got the most responses was “sometimes”, with 27 % of the participants having chosen it. As the opinion “sometimes” is the middle option on the scale, it could be interpreted that the participants who have chosen the opinion feel neutral about the topic. Furthermore, a greater proportion of participants perceived speaking English to not be stressful compared to those who found it to be stressful. Research among Finnish ninth grade students have come to similar conclusions; 47 % of the target group did not feel nervous speaking English to the whole classroom, and 79 % did not feel uncomfortable using English with partners or in small groups (Rautio, 2022). Interestingly, when inquiring the factors that cause nervousness in the English subject, Rautio (2022) also found speaking to be the most anxiety-provoking factor, with 83 % of the participants having chosen it. This would suggest that although among the target group speaking in English in smaller groups and in the classroom is not found to be particularly anxiety-provoking, speaking in English in general is a major cause of anxiety. These results differ from the present study, as speaking in English does not seem to be the major cause of anxiety among the target group in any of the aforementioned situations.

These results indicate that among the target group, speaking English is not seen as particularly difficult or stressful. The response rate to the option “never” was substantial, as well as higher than to the option “always” in all of the statements, which would furthermore suggest that a larger part of participants finds speaking English to not be stressful. However, when comparing the two situations described in the questionnaire, speaking English in front of others is seen as more stressful than speaking English in lessons (see Table 2).

Table 2. Finnish primary school 3-4 grade EFL learners' (n=22) responses to statements 5 to 7.

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	In total
I get nervous when having to speak English in lessons. (5)	2 (9 %)	4 (18 %)	6 (27 %)	3 (14 %)	7 (32 %)	22
I get nervous when having to speak in English in front of others. (6)	4 (18 %)	3 (14 %)	6 (27 %)	4 (18 %)	5 (23 %)	22
Speaking in English is hard. (7)	2 (9 %)	4 (18 %)	3 (14 %)	7 (32 %)	6 (27 %)	22

As seen from Table 3, there is not much division of responses in the statements eight and nine, focusing on the written form of English. Among the target group, writing in English does not seem to be a major factor causing stress. A majority of the participants (73 %) agree on rarely or never experiencing feelings of worry toward exercises where writing in English is needed. Furthermore, nearly as substantial number of participants agree that writing in English is not difficult (see Table 3). These results would suggest that among the target group, the feelings of stress and worry are not frequently present in situations where writing in English is expected. Furthermore, none of the participants chose the opinion “always” to the statements eight and nine, which would further suggest that the attitudes toward writing in English among the target group are positive.

There has not been much research done on the connection of writing in English and foreign language anxiety in Finland. However, previous research on FLA has found similar results which indicate that writing in English is not the major source of FLA. Among the target group of Finnish upper-secondary school students, Koskenranta (2023) found comprehension exercises, such as reading and writing to be the least anxiety-provoking factors in the English subject. In addition, Rautio (2022) found that among the target group of Finnish ninth grade students, merely a third (33 %) of the participants found writing to be an anxiety-provoking factor.

Table 3. Finnish primary school 3- 4 grade EFL learners' (n = 22) responses to statements 8 and 9.

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	In total
Exercises where I must write in English worry me. (8)	0 (0 %)	1 (5 %)	5 (23 %)	7 (32 %)	9 (41 %)	22
Writing in English is hard. (9)	0 (0 %)	5 (23 %)	4 (18 %)	8 (36 %)	5 (23 %)	22

As can be seen from Table 4, the responses to statement 10, “English tests are hard” are divided to both ends of the scale. The opinion “sometimes” has gathered the highest number of responses, which could indicate that the participants feel neutral about the topic. In addition, on both polars of the scale, the response number is significantly low, with none having chosen the opinion “always” and merely 5 % having chosen the opinion “never”. This would imply that the participants do not strongly oppose nor strongly support the statement. However, it is a slightly higher number of participants who feel that they usually think English test are hard, in comparison to those who rarely feel that way. Similar division of opinion can also be seen with statement 11, “English tests make me more nervous than other tests”. The responses can be seen to lean slightly more toward disagreement, with nearly half (48 %) of the participants having chosen the opinion “rarely” or “never”. However, nearly a third of the participants do agree with the statement, which makes the total number of responses on both ends of the scale higher than the amount in the middle, indicating neutrality.

Based on the responses, it seems that among the target group, English tests are seen as moderately demanding. However, a significant number of participants do not feel more anxious when facing English tests in comparison to tests in other subjects. Nevertheless, it should be taken into consideration that among the minority of the target group, English tests are seen as significantly anxiety-provoking. The dichotomy of results seems to be common with previous research having come to similar conclusions; a study of language anxiety among Finnish upper secondary level students between the ages of 15 to 19 found that 45,1 % of the participants either strongly agree or agree and 43,1 % either strongly

disagree or disagree to the statement: "I don't worry about making mistakes in my English class" (Koskenranta, 2023).

Thus far in this category, the opinions of the target group have been distributed between agreement and disagreement. However, among the target group the fear of making mistakes seems to be a major factor that causes anxiety. A significant number of the participants agree that making mistakes causes them to be worried, whereas a slightly lower number of participants have chosen the opinion "sometimes", which could indicate neutrality. The results would thus suggest that while among the target group, nearly a third of the participants feel neutral about the topic, an even larger group finds it to be anxiety-provoking. However, the opinion "never", indicating total disagreement, has gathered a substantial number of responses. This would suggest that among the target group, there can be found participants to whom the idea of making mistakes does not cause any anxiety.

Previous research has come to similar conclusions. A study conducted in Sweden found that among Swedish primary school students, fear of making mistakes was reported to be one of the factors causing the highest level of anxiety (Nilsson, 2019). Furthermore, Koskenranta (2023) found that among Finnish upper-secondary school students, over 40 % of the respondents disagree with the statement, "I don't worry about making mistakes in my English class". Interestingly, Rautio (2022) found that among a similar target group consisting of Finnish ninth grade students, 58 % of the participants do not fear making mistakes while using English. As the age of the participants is similar in both studies, the differences of results may be, for example, due to the preferred teaching styles or classroom atmospheres.

Table 4. Finnish primary school 3-4 grade EFL learners' (n= 21) responses to statements 10 to 12.

	Always	Usually	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	In total
English tests are hard. (10)	0 (0 %)	7 (33 %)	8 (38 %)	5 (24 %)	1 (5 %)	21
English tests make me more nervous than other tests. (11)	2 (10 %)	4 (19 %)	5 (24 %)	5 (24 %)	5 (24 %)	21
Making mistakes in English worries me. (12)	0 (0 %)	9 (41 %)	7 (32 %)	2 (9 %)	4 (18 %)	22

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The overall aim of the present research was to find out how learning the English language is perceived among the target group, and to finding out what the situations are that cause FLA. The first research question of the present study was: “what are the students’ perception of learning the English language?”. Based on the results acquired from the questionnaire, it seems that among the target group the feelings and attitudes toward learning the English language are positive. Over half of the participants agree that learning English is enjoyable, and 68 % of the participants report not having nervous or anxious thoughts in their English lessons. Drawing conclusions of the data and thus answering the first research question, proved to be a relatively straightforward process, due to the uniformity of the participants’ responses. With every topic over half of the target group either agreed or disagreed with the statements, which made it relatively easy to draw conclusions of the general attitudes toward learning English among the target group.

Another significant finding was that the target group did not find English lessons to be a greater source of anxiety in comparison to other school subjects. It is unclear, whether these results are due to the characteristics of the participants’ English lessons, or due to the other subjects being significantly more anxiety-provoking. However, in a similar study conducted among Swedish primary school students, among highly anxious learners, English was found to be the most anxiety provoking subject (Nilsson, 2019). Although in the present research the target group is not divided on the basis of the participants’ anxiousness, the differences of results within the same age group are worth looking into. The positive attitudes toward learning English in Finland may be due to the prominent position which English has in Finland; every student starts learning English in their first year of primary school (Opetushallitus, 2024). Furthermore, exposure to English in Finland has heightened by the media and television and its use is increasingly expanding in diverse medias, including education, business, tourism, and the mass media (Sánchez et al., 2014, p.102; Taavitsainen & Pahta, 2003, p. 5).

The second research question focused on the situations in which FLA appears among the target group: “what are the situations in which foreign language anxiety appears?”. Among the target group, fear of making mistakes was reported to be the most anxiety-provoking factor, with 41 % of the participants reporting on usually getting worried by it.

It is unclear and cannot be deduced from this data, whether the fear of making mistakes is caused by fear of negative evaluation, which research has proven to be significantly correlated with language anxiety, (Aydin, 2008) or by other factors such as perfectionistic personality type, which characteristic trait is excessive concern over making mistakes (Frost et al., 1990, pp. 449-453). The second highest source of anxiety among the target group was reported to be situations that require the oral use of English. Although the number of anxious responses was not significantly high, speaking English in front of others was found to be more anxiety-provoking, with 32 % of responses indicating anxiety, in comparison to speaking English in lessons, with 27 % of responses indicating anxiety.

Previous research on FLA among primary school students have come to similar conclusions. Chan and Wu (2004) found that among Taiwanese primary school students 49 % of the participants do not get nervous when having to speak English in class. Similarly, Aydin (2018) found that among Turkish primary and secondary school children, the majority of the participants experienced the feeling of happiness when having to speak English in lessons and with classmates, and merely 23,6 % felt negative about speaking English in the class. There can be found similarities within the aspect of fear of making mistakes as well; both Aydin (2008) and Chan and Wu (2004) found it to be a significant factor causing anxiety. Lastly, writing in English was not found to be anxiety-provoking among the target group, with the majority (73 %) of the participants rarely or never worrying about exercises where writing is required. Additionally, previous research of FLA among primary school students has not focused on writing as a factor of FLA.

In conclusion, the fear of making mistakes was the only reported situation in the questionnaire, in which the number of anxious responses was higher in comparison to those responses that did not represent anxiousness. Thus, even speaking in English which was reported to cause the second most anxiety among the participants, the number of non-anxious responses was higher. This would suggest that among the target group, the majority of participants did not experience anxiousness in most of the situations presented in the questionnaire. Thus, it can be proposed that the level of FLA among the target group is low.

There has not been much research done on foreign language anxiety in Finland. Furthermore, the existing studies have focused on the experiences of students within higher age groups, i.e. upper secondary school students (Hämäläinen, 2016; Koivumäki, 2023;

Koskenranta, 2023; Rautio, 2022.). The lack of studies on FLA among primary school students may be due to the shorter duration of the primary school students' English studies. However, in addition to the present study, previous research suggests that FLA can be found among primary school students (Aydin et al., 2018; Chan et al., 2004; Liu et al., 2014; Nilsson, 2019). The research and recognition of FLA among primary school students can help to better understand the concept of FLA and its multiple forms of manifestation. When FLA and the situations in which it appears are examined and recognized as early as possible, the results can be used to enhance the quality of learning among anxious students. The earlier the anxious learners of English are identified, the faster can the process of interfering and providing support begin. The results of the present research offer insightful knowledge of FLA to both educational professionals, as well as to the guardians of English as a second language learners.

As the target group of the present research was significantly small, the aim of this study is not to obtain results that could later on be generalized, but to rather draw conclusions of the existence and the effects of FLA in a specific age group. Additionally, all the participants attend the same school, located in southern Finland, which could affect the reliability of the results. Furthermore, the study concentrated on merely the main factors and situations affiliated with FLA. Thus, to acquire an even more profound understanding of FLA, future research on the matter utilizing the full scope of foreign language classroom anxiety scale would be necessary. Future research on FLA among a larger number of primary school students located in various schools, would also be beneficial in order to acquire generalizable knowledge on the matter. In conclusion, the present research offers insightful information of the manifestation of foreign language anxiety amongst a younger audience and indicates that further research on the matter would be necessary.

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APPENDIX

Vastamaalla tähän kyselyyn osallistut ” vieraan kielen kieliahdistus englannin kieltä kohtaan 3–4 luokkalaisten keskuudessa ” tutkimukseen.

Kirjoitathan ikäsi ja ilmoitat sukupuolesi valitsemalla sopivan vaihtoehdon.

Ikä: _____

Tyttö

Poika

Jokin muu

Seuraavilla sivuilla on listattuna 12 väitelausetta. Ympyröi vastausvaihtoehdoista: **aina**, **usein**, **joskus**, **harvoin** ja **ei koskaan**, sopiva vaihtoehto.

1. Pidän englannin kielen opiskelusta.

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

2. Minua jännittää tai hermostuttaa englannin kielen oppitunneilla.

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

3. Minusta tuntuu, että en opi englantia, vaikka yritän parhaani

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

4. Minua jännittää enemmän englannin kielen oppitunneilla, kuin muilla oppitunneilla.

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

5. Minua jännittää tai hermostuttaa puhua englanniksi ääneen oppitunnilla.

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

6. Minua hermostuttaa tai jännittää muiden edessä englanniksi puhuminen

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

7. Englanniksi puhuminen on vaikeaa

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

8. Minua jännittää tai hermostuttaa tehtävät, joissa pitää kirjoittaa englanniksi.

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

9. Englanniksi kirjoittaminen on vaikeaa

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

10. Englannin kielen kokeet ovat vaikeita.

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

11. Minua hermostuttaa tai jännittää englannin kielen kokeet enemmän kuin muut kokeet.

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan

12. Minua haittaa virheiden tekeminen englannin kielen oppitunnilla.

Aina Usein Joskus Harvoin Ei koskaan