



The Impact of Foreign Language Anxiety on Self-Perceived Employability among Moroccan professionals

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Abstract

Emotion is one of the various factors that influence not only language learning but also language use. While this variable has been extensively approached in educational settings, its impact is not confined to learners but it can extend to professionals. Therefore, this study aims at investigating the correlation between Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Self-Perceived Employability (SPE) in Moroccan professionals using English in the workplace. It also seeks to identify the extent to which FLA predicts Moroccan professionals' job-related speaking confidence, to investigate whether these professionals attribute their career advancement to their language anxiety, and finally to explore whether FLA levels differ among different sectors. Using a qualitative approach, a structured online questionnaire was adapted from the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). The study targeted 88 participants working in various sectors such as education, healthcare, business, engineering, and government. The results showed a significant negative correlation between FLA levels and self-perceived employability on the one hand and speaking confidence at work on the other hand. However, while the participants did not report any significant links between their FLA and career advancement, their anxiety levels did not seem to differ across sectors. The study highlights the importance of managing anxiety in both academic and professional settings and offers practical recommendations to policy makers, educators and employers to help optimize language learning and use.

Keywords: Foreign Language Anxiety, Self-Perceived Employability, Moroccan professionals, workplace communication, job-related speaking confidence.

تأثير القلق من اللغة الأجنبية على قابلية التوظيف الذاتية بين المهنيين المغاربة

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ملخص

العاطفة هي أحد العوامل المختلفة التي تؤثر ليس فقط على تعلم اللغة ولكن أيضاً على استخدام اللغة. ورغم أن هذا المتغير تم تناوله على نطاق واسع في البحوث التعليمية، فإن تأثيره لا يقتصر على المتعلمين بل يمكن أن يمتد إلى المهنيين. لذلك، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من العلاقة بين قلق اللغة الأجنبية (FLA) وقابلية التوظيف المتصورة ذاتياً (SPE) لدى المهنيين المغاربة الذين يستخدمون اللغة الإنجليزية في مكان العمل. كما يسعى إلى تحديد مدى تنبؤ FLA بثقة المهنيين المغاربة في التحدث المرتبط بالعمل، للتحقق فيما إذا كان هؤلاء المهنيون يعززون تقدمهم الوظيفي إلى قلقهم اللغوي، وأخيراً لاستكشاف ما إذا كانت مستويات FLA تختلف بين القطاعات المختلفة. باستخدام نهج نوعي، تم تكييف استبيان منظم عبر الإنترنت من مقياس قلق اللغة الأجنبية (FLCAS) الذي طوره هورويتز وهورويتز وكوب (1986). واستهدفت الدراسة 88 مشاركاً يعملون في قطاعات مختلفة مثل التعليم والرعاية الصحية والأعمال والهندسة والحكومة. وأظهرت النتائج وجود علاقة سلبية كبيرة بين مستويات FLA وقابلية التوظيف المتصورة ذاتياً من ناحية والثقة في التحدث في العمل من ناحية أخرى. ومع ذلك، في حين لم يبلغ المشاركون عن أي روابط مهمة بين FLA والتقدم الوظيفي، لا يبدو أن مستويات القلق لديهم تختلف عبر القطاعات. تسلط الدراسة الضوء على أهمية إدارة القلق في كل من البيئات الأكاديمية والمهنية وتقدم توصيات عملية لصانعي السياسات والمعلمين وأصحاب العمل للمساعدة في تحسين تعلم اللغة واستخدامها.

الكلمات الدالة: القلق من اللغة الأجنبية، قابلية التوظيف المتصورة ذاتياً، المهنيون المغاربة، التواصل في مكان العمل، الثقة في التحدث المتعلق بالوظيفة.

1. Introduction

English, as an international language, is becoming one of the most crucial pre-requisites in today's globalized job market, where hiring decisions heavily rely on the proficiency in this language especially in oral communication. In the Moroccan professional context, given that English serves as a lingua-franca in different professional sectors, it is now necessary to have a certain level of proficiency in this language particularly in communicative tasks such as job interviews, meetings, and presentations. However, when psychological factors like motivation, personality, attitude, or anxiety interfere, the process of language acquisition and performance becomes challenging not only in academic settings, as frequently reported in the literature, but also in the workplace. Foreign Language anxiety (FLA), defined as the psychological stress that individuals experience when using a second language, can have an adverse impact on language performance in professional settings where mastery of the foreign language can help individuals climb the professional ladder and avoid career stagnation. Besides, Self-Perceived Employability is defined as the ability to obtain, sustain and advance in employment. Individuals with high FLA tend to feel less employable and thus miss potential professional opportunities. Knowing that research investigating the relationship between FLA and SPE worldwide remains scarce, this study aims to fill this gap by bringing this relationship into light particularly among Moroccan professionals whose jobs may require frequent use of English.

In order to better understand this phenomenon, this paper seeks to examine the relationship between FLA and SPE among Moroccan professionals, identify the extent to which FLA predicts Moroccan professionals' job-related speaking confidence, understand whether Moroccan professionals with higher FLA levels attribute career advancement or limited job opportunities to their language anxiety, and compare their levels of FLA to determine whether they differ across sectors. By approaching these questions, the study will add to the limited literature on FLA's impact on employability worldwide and especially in the context of Morocco. It also comes with recommendations to policy makers, educators, as well as employers on ways to handle the psychological challenges Moroccan professionals encounter due to their language anxiety.

For a more coherent and accurate investigation of the subject matter, the study is organized into several sections. The section that follows the introduction is a literature review outlining the theoretical and empirical background of the study, then the research methodology, followed by results and discussion and a final conclusion that offers implication and recommendations.

Literature Review

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA): Definitions, History and Scope

From a psychological perspective, in his state-trait theory, Spielberger (1985) defines anxiety as "the tendency to perceive threatening situations as stressful or harmful, and to respond with increased emotional tension or nervousness. In the context of foreign language learning, anxiety is defined as "a distinct

complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz et al. 1986, p. 128). In a similar fashion, MacIntyre (1995) defines Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) as a situation-specific response that emerges when individuals are required to use a foreign language in which they lack proficiency. Further, Young (1991) conceptualized FLA as a psychological discomfort and a feeling of worry experienced by non-native speakers in a foreign language environment.

With an attempt to understand how anxiety as an emotional factor impacts language speaking and listening performance

in educational contexts, researchers like Macintyre and Gardner (1989, 1991) stressed the multidimensionality of FLA by introducing the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This model posits that FLA concerns not only the classroom context but also real-time speaking situation (Macintyre & Gardner, 1991). To support the multidimensionality of FLA, Young (1991) examined the factors that contribute to individuals' language anxiety such as the learners' attitudes about foreign language learning, negative past language experiences, and fear of negative evaluation. Although most of the FLA definitions originate from educational contexts, this type of anxiety is not confined only to the classrooms, as individuals may experience it in professional environments where English use is a must which in turn directly impacts their employability.

Surprisingly, while FLA research was abundant in the academic context, this phenomenon has been under-researched in professional settings where English proficiency may guarantee a living. As a matter of fact, it can be clearly noticed that in multilingual environments or in countries where English is not a native language, such as Morocco, professionals may be required to use English in various situations like job interviews, professional meetings or presentations, etc. (Kassim & Ali, 2010; Evans, 2013). These professionals are also likely to experience as much anxiety as students do. Thus, the present study aims to fill this gap in the literature and highlight the potential impact that FLA may have on the self-perceived employability Moroccan professionals.

Foreign Language Anxiety and Self-Perceived Employability: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives

In order to thoroughly understand the link between FLA and SPE, two theoretical models can be adopted. The first is McCroskey's (1977) Communication Apprehension (CA) theory which explains how fear of real or anticipated communication can cause foreign language speaking avoidance and therefore potentially limit career growth (McCroskey, 1984). The second model is Krashen's (1982, 1986) Affective Filter hypothesis which states that emotional factors such as self-perception, motivation, attitudes, and anxiety can hinder the processing of the input and therefore weaken performance in the target language (Krashen, 1982). According to this model, when language learners experience higher levels of anxiety and low self-esteem, the target language cannot have access to the brain's language acquisition device which in turn impacts language performance. Similarly, particularly in the professional setting, anxiety may still interfere in skilled professionals' linguistic performance despite their high technical

qualifications. Later on, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) also adopted this approach in their studies and highlighted the significance of affective factors in not only language learning but also real-world interactions.

Given the multilingual and competitive nature of the global labor market, English is becoming one of the most essential skills to master. In fact, communicating effectively in a foreign language is a critical employability skill, especially in domains such as engineering, business, and international trade. However, for many professionals, meeting this challenging parameter provokes high levels of anxiety especially in contexts requiring high fluency and accuracy (Hu & Zhang, 2017). These settings may resemble some stressing classroom communication tasks such as presentations, and teacher-learners interaction but differ in consequences, as failing to communicate effectively results in career stagnation, loss of professional credibility, or even dismissal (Charles, 2007). Although FLA has been often associated to classroom specific settings, it is under-explored in workplace contexts (MacIntyre, 2017). This critical relationship between English proficiency and self-perceived employability has been explored, although not profoundly, in some regions in the world including the middle east, Asia, and Europe where English is considered as a dominant language in business communication.

For instance, in Malaysia, Kassim & Ali (2010) conducted a study on engineers' communicative tasks at work, such as presentations and teleconferencing, and realized that their workplace success was attributed more to their fluency rather than written accuracy. Likewise, in Oman, as a middle eastern country, a study conducted by Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2014) concluded that learners with better oral English proficiency had more employment opportunities and could progress in their careers later on. In a more recent study in Thailand, Perrodin et al. (2022) found that language anxiety went beyond classrooms to impact professional careers. Likewise, Tang (2023) showed that highly anxious professionals reported lower creativity and failure in handling advanced professional tasks. Further, more empirical evidence highlighted anxiety as a hindrance to efficient professional performance, such as that generated by Sato and Hodge (2015) who found that Japanese exchange students with higher FLA avoided taking part in oral tasks, namely classroom presentations, group discussions requiring higher English proficiency. Despite the abundant focus of these studies on the academic setting, it is worth noting that individuals may experience equally intimidating situations where FL use is expected. In the recent years, multinational companies have seriously considered using English as “the company language”. In this regard, Aichhorn and Puck (2017) examined the impact of standardizing language mainly on the expatriates in these international work-settings, and underscored the massive impact FLA has on both performance and work relationships. Similarly, in the Chinese context, Xia et al. (2023) found a significant negative correlation between Chinese employees' language anxiety and their innovative performance, concluding that higher levels of language anxiety impeded performance and creativity in the workplace. A recent survey conducted by Babbel for Business (2025) highlighted that accent anxiety and fear of judgement reduced productivity in the workplace. Although the above studies jointly agree on the significance of English proficiency at work, they mostly target the middle east and Asian populations. This limitation

leaves a significant gap in the global literature. In Morocco for instance, where English is gaining more prominence in the workplace, English Language Anxiety may persist in professionals, especially those who did not receive adequate formal training in it. The present endeavor aims at exploring this connection empirically.

Research Objective:

The present study aims to examine the impact of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) on Moroccan professionals' Self-Perceived Employability. It also highlights the extent to which FLA affects communication related tasks at work such as interviews, meetings, and professional interactions.

Research questions:

- 1) Is there a statistically significant relationship between FLA and SPE in Moroccan professionals?
- 2) To what extent does FLA predict Moroccan professionals' job-related speaking confidence?
- 3) Do Moroccan professionals with higher FLA levels attribute career advancement or limited job opportunities to their language anxiety?
- 4) Do FLA levels among Moroccan professionals differ significantly across professional sectors?

Methodology:

In order to examine the relationship between Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) and Self-Perceived Employability (SPE) of Moroccan professionals, the study employs a quantitative, descriptive and correlational research design using a structured questionnaire. The latter was not translated into Arabic or French as the target population are already expected to be using English in their workplace. As for the sample, a total number of 88 Moroccan professionals currently working in various fields such as business, education, healthcare, and engineering and using English for communication in their workplace. The self-administered questionnaire was designed and forwarded via Google Forms, and included two main sections. The first section aimed at collecting demographic information, namely gender, sector, years of experience, and frequency of using English at the work place. The second section included questions that highlighted the two main research constructs: (FLA) and (SPE). The instrument was adapted from Horwitz et al.'s (1986) Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and rephrased to better suit the Moroccan professional setting.

To reach a wider range of professional audience, the survey was shared through different online professional platforms, mainly email, WhatsApp and LinkedIn groups. The respondents, answered anonymously and within their own convenience to ensure relevant and precise responses. However, convenience sampling was used as the survey could reach more males than females. In this study, data analysis was conducted using Google Sheets which proves to offer reliable statistical analyses. First, descriptive statistics was used to collect informants'

demographics, then Pearson test was performed to highlight any correlations between FLA and SPE. Finally, simple linear regression analysis was utilized identify the existence of predictive power of FLA on speaking confidence at the work place. Additionally, Google Sheets was a reliable and practical tool in the quantitative data analysis of this study. Thanks to its user-friendly interface and smooth visual representation, the questionnaire could be directly analyzed without the need of additional statistical softwares. Finally, both the results and discussion sections were intentionally merged due to both the exploratory nature of this study and the limited literature on FLA and SPE in the Moroccan context.

Results and discussion

This section introduces the results of the study based on the four research questions outlined in the methodology section.

The aim is to examine the impact of foreign language anxiety (FLA) on Moroccan professionals' Self-Perceived Employability (SPE). It also highlights the extent to which (FLA) affects communication-related tasks at work such as interviews, meetings, and professional interactions, etc. The figures demonstrated in this section provide valuable insights about the participants' personal experiences and perceptions, which in turn leads to a thorough understanding of the implications of foreign language anxiety in the Moroccan professional setting.

As demonstrated in Figure 1, participants were randomly selected from diverse gender groups (63.6% males and 36.4% females) representing different sectors such as engineering, business, government, and others.

1. Is there a statistically significant relationship between FLA and SPE among Moroccan professionals?

In order to explore the relationship between (FLA) and (SPE) among Moroccan professionals, a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted. Regarding the work-related anxiety questions (1,2,3,6,10,11,13), (FLA) was computed as the mean score, whereas (SPE) was calculated using employability-perception questions (8,9,12,15). A statistically significant negative correlation ($r = -.61$, $p < .001$) was found between (FLA) and (SPE) implying that Moroccan professionals who experience high degrees of language anxiety tend to perceive themselves as less likely to be employed in their domains. This finding goes in line with theories that corroborate the psychological impact language anxiety can have on individuals not only in academic settings but also in real-world contexts (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Dewaele, 2010).

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations between FLA and SPE (N=88)

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA)	14.69	3.87	-	-

2. Self-Perceived Employability (SPE)	57.82	9.51	-.61***	-
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2. To what extent does FLA predict Moroccan professionals' job-related speaking confidence?

After running a Pearson correlation test which showed a strong negative correlation between (FLA) and speaking confidence ($r = -.70$, $p < .001$), it was found that the more anxious the respondents were, the less communication confidence they had at work. Besides, a simple linear regression analysis was necessary to explore whether FLA significantly predicts Moroccan professionals' English-speaking confidence in professional settings. (FLA) was computed with reference to questions 1,2,3,6,10,11, and 13. As for speaking confidence, questions 4,5,7, and 8 were used to evaluate the participants self-perceived capacity to use English efficiently in professional tasks that require mastery of the English language. The analysis confirmed that FLA significantly predicted job-related speaking confidence as indicated in the following summary: $\beta = -0.72$, $R^2 = 0.49$, $F(1, 86) = 82.74$, $p < .001$. This clearly demonstrates that English language anxiety levels predicted 49% of the variance in job-related speaking confidence.

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and Correlation between FLA and job-related Speaking Confidence.

Variable	M	SD	1	2
1. Foreign Language Anxiety	14.69	3.87	—	-.70***
2. Speaking Confidence	16.25	4.02	-.70***	—

3. Do Moroccan professionals with higher FLA levels attribute career advancement or limited job opportunities to their language anxiety?

In order to examine participants' self-perceptions on whether limited career growth can be attributed to their FLA, the last question in the survey "I believe I can grow professionally despite my English anxiety" was reverse-coded. Pearson correlation test was used to calculate the mean score of FLA and the reverse-coded career attribution score. Surprisingly, as indicated by the results ($r(86) = -.06$, $p = .574$), there was no significant relationship between FLA and the extent to which Moroccan professionals attribute limited employability to their anxiety. In other words, Moroccan professionals view FLA only as a personal challenge rather than an obstacle to their employability. This finding tends to contradict Dewaele's (2010) discussion on how individuals view and feel about their anxiety, where he stated that "anxiety can undermine performance and distort self-perception" (p. 178), and this can be due to two possible reasons, the first of which is the specificity of the Moroccan professional context where Arabic and French are still

prevalent compared to English. The second reason can be the participants' lack of knowledge of the potential life-changing impact English can have on their career in the long run.

4. Do FLA levels among Moroccan professionals differ significantly across professional sectors?

Table 4. (FLA) Scores by Professional Sector

Professional Sector	Mean (FLA)	SD	N
Education	2.88	1.0	6
Engineering/Tech	2.76	0.58	17
Freelance/Entrepreneurship	3.43	0.61	11
Government	2.69	0.76	21
Healthcare	2.63	1.11	15
Other	2.49	0.78	9

To explore whether (FLA) levels among the respondents differ depending on the professional sector, a one-way ANOVA

was conducted. The sectors in the study were broadly classified as follows: Education, Business/Marketing, Government, Engineering/IT, healthcare, and freelance/entrepreneurship. The results indicated that there is no statistically significant difference between the respondents' (FLA) levels and the six professional sectors $F(5, 58) = 1.32, p = .26$. That is to say, Moroccan professionals' levels of foreign language anxiety are about the same irrespective of their domain. This conclusion joins earlier (FLA) research such as that of MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) who viewed language anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety, different from trait and state anxiety. This implies that anxiety arises not only in academic settings but also in other environments where the language is used.

Conclusion

The present study explored whether there is a significant relationship between foreign language anxiety (FLA) and Self-Perceived Employability (SPE). The data gathered from the study revealed the main conclusion that (FLA) correlates negatively with Moroccan professionals' job-related speaking confidence as well as their self-perceived employability. Highly anxious professionals tended to consider themselves as less likely to be employed and thus showed less confidence in tasks that involved English communication. As Arabic and French are still dominant in professional settings, the participants did not seem to attribute their career stagnation to FLA. Also, the levels of FLA in Moroccan professionals do not show any statistical difference across sectors.

Regarding its theoretical implications, the study brings into light the impact of psychological

factors particularly in the workplace, which suggests the necessity to extend research to professional settings beside academic ones. Additionally, the study corroborates both Krashen's (1977) affective filter hypothesis, and (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Dewaele, 2010) studies which jointly underscore the impact of anxiety on language speaking performance.

Practically speaking, the findings appeal to the ministry of education, schools and universities to consider affective

factors in teaching starting from primary school up to higher studies which can in turn guarantee a more favorable academic training for the students before integrating the job market. Further, the results suggest the importance of a new approach in professional training worldwide, an approach that takes into account not only the technical, but also the psycholinguistic aspect of professionals particularly in domains that involve recurrent English use. These in-job trainings could be held in different forms such as self-development workshops, group or one-to-one coaching sessions.

Although the current study was carefully pre-planned, it comes with a few limitations that need to be considered while

interpreting its findings. Given the time constraint, the relatively limited sample size may not be that representative of the whole target population. Further, adopting solely a self-rated questionnaire as the main research instrument for data collection may have led to self-selection bias as overly confident participants may have engaged more in filling out the survey compared to those with anxiety issues. Also, not using triangulation method, mainly interviews and focused groups, limited the richness and validity of responses reported by the participants who could have demonstrated more real-world experiences. Another limitation in this study lies in the narrow operationalization of (SPE). That is, despite the existence of validated multi-dimensional scales (e.g., Rothwell & Arnold, 2007), the current study used a smaller set of items that were primarily focused on self-assessed employability and communication confidence related to the job. The study's particular emphasis on English usage in the workplace served as the driving force behind this decision. Finally, due to the scarcity of the literature addressing (FLA) and employability in Morocco, it was difficult to make contextual comparisons to thoroughly understand the psychological patterns in the Moroccan professional setting.

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