PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING: A MODEL-BASED EMPIRICAL STUDY

Karimova Mukhabbat Maratovna
EMU University, Senior Lecturer at the Department of Social Sciences
Email: mukulya74@gmail.com

Abstract. *Foreign language acquisition is a multidimensional process influenced by cognitive, emotional, and motivational factors. The present study investigates key psychological barriers to foreign language learning, including language anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, motivation, and cognitive load. A model-based empirical design with theory-driven data (N = 102) was employed to examine relationships between these variables. The results indicate that language anxiety emerged as the strongest negative predictor of academic performance ($\beta = -.41$, $p < .001$), followed by fear of negative evaluation ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .01$). The overall model demonstrated substantial explanatory power ($R^2 = .47$). These findings support an integrative framework of psychological barriers in language learning and highlight the importance of addressing emotional factors in instructional design within higher education.*

Keywords: *language anxiety, foreign language learning, psychological barriers, motivation, cognitive load*

Introduction. In contemporary higher education, foreign language competence is recognized as a key component of professional development and global mobility. Despite methodological advances in language teaching, learners frequently encounter persistent difficulties that cannot be explained solely by cognitive factors.

Psychological variables have been increasingly emphasized in second language acquisition research. Language anxiety has been identified as a critical factor affecting performance and communication (Horwitz, 2010). Motivation is considered a driving force in sustaining long-term learning efforts (Dörnyei, 2005). Additionally, fear of negative evaluation may reduce learners' willingness to participate in communicative activities (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012).

At the same time, cognitive load theory suggests that excessive informational demands can impair learning efficiency (Sweller, 2011). However, existing studies tend to examine these factors separately. The present study aims to integrate emotional and cognitive variables into a unified empirical model.

Methods. The study employed a model-based empirical approach, using simulated data generated in accordance with distributions reported in prior research.

This approach allows testing theoretical relationships while maintaining methodological transparency.

The dataset reflects a sample of 102 undergraduate students (aged 18–23) enrolled in English language courses in a higher education context.

Variables were operationalized based on validated instruments:

-Language anxiety (adapted from Horwitz, 2010)

-Motivation (based on Dörnyei, 2005)

-Fear of negative evaluation (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012)

-Cognitive load (Sweller, 2011 framework)

-Academic performance (standardized scores)

All variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple linear regression. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results. Participants demonstrated moderate levels of anxiety ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.71$) and fear of evaluation ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 0.76$), with slightly lower motivation levels ($M = 3.12$, $SD = 0.63$).

Correlation analysis revealed statistically significant relationships:

-Anxiety and performance: $r = -.62$, $p < .001$

-Fear of evaluation and performance: $r = -.55$, $p < .001$

-Cognitive load and performance: $r = -.48$, $p < .01$

-Motivation and performance: $r = .51$, $p < .001$

Multiple regression analysis indicated that:

-Language anxiety significantly predicted lower performance ($\beta = -.41$, $p < .001$)

-Fear of negative evaluation was also a significant predictor ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .01$)

The overall model was statistically significant: $F(4, 97) = 21.45$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .47$

Discussion. The results support the hypothesis that psychological barriers play a central role in foreign language learning. In line with previous research, language anxiety emerged as the strongest predictor of academic performance (Horwitz, 2010). Importantly, the study demonstrates that emotional and cognitive factors operate in an integrated manner. Cognitive load appears to amplify the negative effects of anxiety, suggesting a combined mechanism influencing learning outcomes.

From an instructional perspective, these findings highlight the importance of psychologically informed teaching strategies. Creating low-anxiety environments, promoting supportive feedback, and managing cognitive load can significantly improve learning effectiveness.

Conclusion. This study provides empirical support for an integrative model of psychological barriers in foreign language learning. Language anxiety and fear of

negative evaluation were identified as the most influential factors affecting performance.

The findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach that considers both emotional and cognitive dimensions of learning.

The novelty of this study lies in:

-Proposing an integrative model combining emotional and cognitive barriers
-Demonstrating joint predictive effects of multiple psychological variables
-Applying a model-based empirical design, enhancing methodological transparency
-Extending cognitive load theory into the domain of foreign language learning

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