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## FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL COMPARISON: A STUDY OF GENERATION Z LEARNERS

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*This article discusses the anxiety of students belonging to Generation Z in the process of mastering a foreign language in continuity with the phenomenon of social comparison. In today's digital environment, the student faces not only the teacher's assessment, but also the success of his peers on social media, perfect speech patterns and continuously visible success images. As a result, there is an increased fear of making mistakes, tightness in speech, insecurity in reading and listening, and internal pressure arising from comparing oneself with others. The study analyzes the relevance of the problem, its theoretical foundations, its reflection in empirical research and ways of practical solutions. As a result, it becomes clear that foreign language anxiety needs to be explained not only by language competence deficit, but also in connection with digital culture, social network, FoMO, self-assessment and the level of pedagogical support. The article presents methodological recommendations adapted to the practice of a higher educational institution and school.*

**Keywords:** foreign language anxiety, social comparison, Generation Z, social media, digital environment, English teaching, language insecurity, pedagogical support.

## **Introduction**

In the modern educational space, the study of a foreign language is not just a process of mastering grammar and vocabulary, it has become a complex psychological and pedagogical phenomenon, which also includes the emotional stability of the student, the way he evaluates himself and his behavior in a digital environment. Especially for Generation Z, this issue is of particular importance, since said generation spends its daily life linked to the social network, online communication and continuous digital comparison. In such a situation, the language learner feels pressure not only from mistakes in the audience, but also from the image of other students who speak better, write better, look more relaxed. As a result, anxiety increases in the actions of speaking, listening, reading and writing in a foreign language.

The purpose of the article is to identify the nature, causes and pedagogical mechanisms for reducing foreign language anxiety in Generation Z students in the era of social comparison. Research objectives: to clarify the concept of foreign language anxiety in the modern digital context; to analyze the influence of social comparison on language learning; to show the main trends based on the research of recent years; to propose effective ways that can be applied to educational practice. The object of the study is the educational activity of foreign language learners belonging to Generation Z. The subject of the study is social comparison and manifestations of foreign language anxiety in the context of the digital environment. The relevance of the study lies in the fact that the problem of effectiveness in teaching a foreign language is now directly related not only to methodology, but also to emotional security. The theoretical significance lies in the interpretation of the phenomenon of anxiety in relation to the culture of social networks. The practical significance lies in the fact that it provides the teacher and teacher with ways to create a reliable, supportive learning space in a language environment with less pressure to compare.

## **Methods**

The study was carried out of a qualitative and analytical nature. The article was built according to the logic of IMRAD, and the works published in 2023-2025 were considered using the methods of content-comparative analysis, interpretive compilation and pedagogical generalization. The selection of materials was guided by three criteria: the relevance of the topic to foreign language anxiety, the proximity to the social network and social comparison, as well as the disclosure of the digital experience of modern students. At the same time, the article transferred the conclusions from the literature to practical learning situations and developed applied recommendations.

## **Results**

In the context of digital transformation, it is observed that language learner anxiety has evolved from a traditional auditory pressure to a broader phenomenon. In M. S. Al-Harbi's study on the psychology of online learning, it is revealed that

students with weak technological and language training experience anxiety at the same time as flexibility, that is, if the digital environment allows some student, it puts additional psychological weight on some [1]. When this conclusion is considered together with the pressure of comparison on social media, it seems that for Generation Z, the screen is not just a learning tool, but a platform for self-assessment.

The fact that a specific type of language anxiety increases in listening is also seen in Kazakhstan materials. In the work of D. N. Babakhanova, which analyzed the anxiety at the hearing of students studying English as a foreign language, it is shown that the perception of various pronunciation patterns, the hanging of the verbal flow and the fear of being misunderstood cause high anxiety [2]. This becomes even more complicated when combined with the skill of modern youth to perceive short videos, fast content, fragments. Because when a student listens to real language material, he involuntarily compares himself to the "perfect" English-speaking content creators on social networks.

Z. Gog, I. Go, and J. Tan, who analyzed the impact of social media on the academic environment, point to the role of social anxiety and "fear of falling behind in something" as a chain mediator in explaining the relationship between social media use and learning outcomes [3]. This is very important in mastering a foreign language. This is because the student sometimes begins to perceive language learning not as an educational process, but as a platform for public expression. For example, one student compares his pronunciation with his fluent peers on Instagram or TikTok and feels weak, even if he is not yet fully prepared. As a result, he rarely participates in speech practice, avoids making mistakes, refuses to answer in front of the camera.

Anxiety during reading is not limited to speech. In a study by D. Zhuman, S. Tulepova and K. Zhampeis on reading anxiety in a foreign language, vocabulary limitations, text complexity, lack of time, self-doubt and external pressure are described among the main difficulties; it is also shown that digital tools, peer support and prior training can reduce such an obstacle [4]. This fact makes us notice that in the age of social comparison, the lack of understanding of the text becomes not just an academic gap for the student, but an internal conclusion: "others understood, only I did not understand."

J. Le Blanc-Brion, J.-S. Forten, L. LaFrance and S. Etyu prove that highly directed comparisons in the social network reduce self-esteem and negatively affect the psychological state [5]. If we transfer this statement to language learning, the student will compare his speech, accent, writing and language speed with those that seem "better" than him, ignoring his actual progress. Here the problem lies not in objective weakness, but in the perceived difference. That is, social comparison enlarges the language error, and each delay seems to the student as proof of his ability.

At the same time, high digital literacy does not automatically eliminate anxiety. I. S. Margaretta, Z. Rohma and P. D. D. D. indicate that although the digital literacy of

Generation Z Representatives is high, foreign language anxiety remains moderate, and direct support from the teacher is still needed [6]. Therefore, the modern student may master the platform, but needs professional pedagogical accompaniment in terms of managing his emotions, tolerating mistakes, realistically assessing his progress.

### **Discussion**

Summarizing the above data, three cores of foreign language anxiety in Generation Z are identified. The first is the fear of being seen publicly. In an online lesson, actions such as turning on a camera, speaking into a microphone, sending a video are perceived as a risk of exposing the error to the public. The second is a highly directed comparison on the social network. The student compares his path with someone else's finished result. The third is that digital literacy and emotional stability are not the same thing. Free use of the platform does not guarantee fluency in the language.

From a practical point of view, in a foreign language lesson, it is necessary to strengthen the principle of "safe action", and not "perfect result". It is effective for the teacher to immediately reduce public assessments in speech tasks, first in pairs, then in small groups, and only then switch to a general class format. In order to reduce the pressure of social comparison, the student's self-comparison should be strengthened: comparing today's pronunciation with the record of a month ago, seeing the previous text and the current one at the same time, keeping a personal progress diary will help him. It is also important to make it clear that most of the videos on social media that appear "as if they immediately speak English" are edited, prepared, filtered products. When the teacher normalizes the error in the lesson as a sign of development, and not as a flaw, the student's internal pressure subsides.

### **Conclusion**

Thus, in the age of social comparison, Generation Z's foreign language anxiety is not only caused by a lack of language knowledge. It arises from the confluence of factors such as being forced to show up in the digital environment, continuously seeing the success of others, undervaluing oneself, FoMO, social anxiety and lack of pedagogical support. Therefore, an effective methodology for teaching a foreign language should be combined with emotional security, competent management of social comparisons and determination of the student's personal progress. Only in this case, Generation Z perceives language learning as a gradually developing competence, and not as a race that becomes counterproductive.

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## **ТРЕВОЖНОСТЬ ПРИ ИЗУЧЕНИИ ИНОСТРАННОГО ЯЗЫКА В ЭПОХУ СОЦИАЛЬНОГО СРАВНЕНИЯ: ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ УЧАЩИХСЯ ПОКОЛЕНИЯ Z**

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*В данной статье рассматривается тревожность студентов, принадлежащих к поколению Z, в процессе освоения иностранного языка в контексте феномена социального сравнения. В современной цифровой среде студент сталкивается не только с оценкой преподавателя, но и с успехами сверстников в социальных сетях, идеализированными образцами речи и постоянно демонстрируемыми «картинами успеха». В результате усиливается страх совершения ошибок, возникает скованность в речи, неуверенность при чтении и аудировании, а также внутреннее давление, связанное со сравнением себя с другими. В исследовании анализируются актуальность проблемы, её теоретические основы, отражение в эмпирических работах и возможные пути практического решения. В*

*результате становится очевидным, что тревожность при изучении иностранного языка следует объяснять не только недостаточным уровнем языковой компетенции, но и влиянием цифровой культуры, социальных сетей, феномена FoMO, самооценки и уровня педагогической поддержки. В статье представлены методические рекомендации, адаптированные к практике высшего образования и школы.*

**Ключевые слова:** тревожность при изучении иностранного языка, социальное сравнение, поколение Z, социальные сети, цифровая среда, обучение английскому языку, языковая неуверенность, педагогическая поддержка.

### **ӘЛЕУМЕТТІК САЛЫСТЫРУ ДӘУІРІНДЕГІ ШЕТ ТІЛІН ҮЙРЕНУ КЕЗІНДЕГІ МАЗАСЫЗДЫҚ: Z БУЫНЫ БІЛІМ АЛУШЫЛАРЫНА АРНАЛҒАН ЗЕРТТЕУ**

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*Бұл мақалада әлеуметтік салыстыру феноменімен сабақтастықта шет тілін меңгеру процесіндегі Z буынына жататын студенттердің мазасыздығы қарастырылады. Қазіргі цифрлық ортада студент тек оқытушының бағалауымен ғана емес, сонымен қатар әлеуметтік желілердегі құрдастарының жетістіктерімен, мінсіз сөйлеу үлгілерімен және үнемі көрсетіліп отыратын «жетістік бейнелерімен» бетпе-бет келеді. Соның нәтижесінде қателік жасаудан қорқу күшейеді, сөйлеуде қысылу пайда болады, оқу мен тыңдау барысында сенімсіздік байқалады, сондай-ақ өзін басқалармен салыстырудан туындайтын ішкі қысым артады. Зерттеуде мәселенің өзектілігі, оның теориялық негіздері, эмпирикалық зерттеулердегі көрінісі және практикалық шешу жолдары талданады. Нәтижесінде шетел тілін үйренудегі мазасыздықты тек тілдік құзыреттіліктің жеткіліксіздігімен ғана емес, сонымен қатар цифрлық мәдениет, әлеуметтік желілер, FoMO феномені, өзін-өзі бағалау және педагогикалық қолдау деңгейімен байланыстыра түсіндіру қажеттігі айқындалады. Мақалада жоғары оқу орны мен мектеп тәжірибесіне бейімделген әдістемелік ұсыныстар ұсынылған.*

**Кілт сөздер:** шетел тілін үйренудегі мазасыздық, әлеуметтік салыстыру, Z буыны, әлеуметтік желілер, цифрлық орта, ағылшын тілін оқыту, тілдік сенімсіздік, педагогикалық қолдау.

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