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THE IMPACT OF ANXIETY ON LANGUAGE PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

Arab ESL postgraduate students who are studying at universities also experienced anxiety problems due to their educational environments at home that the researchers paid little attention to oral skills. The researcher reviewed the literature on the theoretical arguments of language anxiety as proposed by Horwitz et al., (1986) in relation to three performance anxieties: apprehension of communication, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. It has reviewed the past research on studies found that adult ESL language learners especially at an advanced level of study are anxious when communicating that language in front of other terms of the language anxiety construct.

The chapter has also explored the literature on studies about Language learning. Furthermore, it investigated the ways of anxiety manifestation in the learners and how it can be reduced. These topics have been enhanced by the related past studies so as to reveal a number of anxiety-provoking factors associated with them.

Key words: Anxiety, Proficiency, enhanced, Teaching English Language, Performance

Introduction

Nowadays, learning English as a foreign (EFL) or second language (ESL) is turning to be an essential and unavoidable matter all around the world. The spread of English throughout the world has led many students to register in these courses. Receiving additional information about different issues that result in effective second or foreign language learning is an aim that anyone within the area is interested in. From among these issues, anxiety and learner performance play a significant role in language learning (Balcikanli, 2010).

Learners of a second/foreign language commonly feel anxious, apprehensive, and nervous while learning to speak it. Such feelings could have a possible negative effect on performance in the second/foreign language. The modern methods that are used in the process of teaching a second/foreign language along with the extensive use of English Language contributed to improve the language performance. The ways of learning and teaching English language based on some skills, such as speaking, make learners' feelings reach them to their aims; however, learners who have such feelings .

Problem statement of the study

Students' speaking proficiency is considered as one of the main factors, which shape students' academic performance in a greater way. In learning a second language (L2), particularly speaking, second language learners feel anxiety while communicating with others. The level of anxiety grows more during

speaking test. Students who experience communication apprehension try to avoid speaking to others. In other words, anxiety is quite pervasive in foreign language classrooms and can negatively affect learners' achievement in the target language. Anxiety is a major problem for learners in learning second/foreign language while learning speaking and many recent methods in second/foreign language learning, e.g. community language learning, are clearly focused on lessening learners' anxiety. Anxiety is a problem in social contexts; and the language anxiety could happen because of external motivators, e.g. varied cultural and social environments, especially those where the process of learning L1 and L2/FL happens.

Research Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate students' perceptual learning styles preferences and tolerance of ambiguity in their respective English class. The research objectives are as follows,

1. To examine the levels of foreign language anxiety among Arab EFL postgraduate students at University Utara Malaysia.
2. To examine the levels of English performance proficiency among Arab EFL postgraduate students at University Utara Malaysia.
3. To examine the difference in the levels of FLA among Arab EFL among Arab EFL postgraduate students at University Utara Malaysia.
4. To examine the difference in the levels of English proficiency among Arab EFL postgraduate students based on gender.

Research questions

The questions of the study are to diagnostic the answers of the following research questions:

1. What are the levels of foreign language anxiety among Arab EFL postgraduate students at University Utara Malaysia?
2. What are the levels of English performance proficiency among Arab EFL postgraduate students at University Utara Malaysia?
3. Is there any significant difference between FLA among Arab EFL postgraduate students based on their gender?
4. Is there any significant difference between English proficiency among English Arab EFL postgraduate students based on gender?

Definitions of terms

Anxiety: Idri (2012) has defined anxiety as ranges from an amalgam of overt behavioral characteristics that can be studied scientifically to introspective feelings that are epistemologically inaccessible.

English language learners (ELL): (Cheng, Klinger et al. 2007) mentioned that EFL are students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English¹ that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario's schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English.

English as a Foreign Language (EFL): EFL is defined as "language that is not a native language in a country .A foreign language is usually studied either for communication with foreigners who speak the language, or for reading printed materials in the language." (Richards and Schmidt 2013).

English proficiency: (McLaughlin, 2013) mentioned that language proficiency or linguistic proficiency is the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language.

Communication apprehension CA: It is defined as an individual's anxiety level related to either actual or predicted communication with other persons (McCroskey, 2012).

The theory of constructivism

The theory of constructivism is employed as theoretical framework for the current study. The theory of constructivism relates to the present study as the current study discusses the anxiety and competence of foreign language learners in terms of their speaking skill. Constructivism comes under communication theory. The purpose of the theory is to illustrate the prevailing difference in individuals when they make an attempt to communicate skillfully; thus, the theory of constructivism is very much connected with the present study. During 1970s, under communication disciplines, (Kudryavtsev, 2013) who have worked at the University of Illinois have taken the initiative to develop the theory of constructivism. Keeping the constructivism approach

to human communication into consideration, the pioneers of developing constructivism have concentrated on understanding how the interpretations of the people regarding social world might have an impact on their communicative behavior. During the last 30 years, researchers have seen the application of constructive theory and its successful penetration into many communication events and behavior. Today, the constructivism theory is applied in different disciplines and getting refined day by day. Out of many disciplines, constructive theory or framework is used as a foundation theory of language acquisition and communicative development, but fundamentally it remains a general theory for communication skill. Firstly, the aim of constructivism is to offer descriptions and elucidations of individual differences in communication skill. Secondly, constructivism identifies the reasons for individual differences caused in their communication skills. Thirdly, constructivism accounts for the basis or origins of individual differences regarding the characteristics of people, and the characteristics are responsible for making some people more skillful in common.

Theory of Language learning process

Universal Grammar (UG): One important issue in current language acquisition research is whether the acquisition of a second language is fundamentally different from that of the first language. Researchers approaching second language acquisition (SLA) from the linguistic perspective often relate this issue to the availability of Universal Grammar to second language acquisition. Universal Grammar (UG) mentions to a grammar which is genetically endowed to all social beings and which all languages have in public. If second language learners have access to Universal Grammar, grammar of the second language (L2) would not be fundamentally different from that of the first language (L1), which is guided by UG. There have been many debates about whether UG plays a role in second language acquisition.

The hypothesis of full access argues that UG is an essential causative factor in SLA, but it is not the only one. Researchers who adopt the view of full access (e.g., Flynn, 1987 cited in White, 2003) contend that more than L1 UG impacts on the process of second language learning. As well, they argue that principles which are not relevant to L1 but required for L2 learners will limit the L2 learners' inter-language. For instance, Subjacency principle which limits the permitted WH-movement is not associated with languages that lack WH-movement. Therefore, those adopting the approach of part entrance would argue that the Subjacency Principle would not affect a Korean native speaker learning English because it is unrelated to Korean, whereas those adopting a full access approach would assume that the principle of Subjacency constrains the Korean learner's inter-language grammar. Concerning parameter re-setting, contrary to the partial access, the position of full access proposes that the possibility of passing through a phase in which the setting of L1 is applied to L2 will eventually make the learner attaining the setting of L2 proposing a sufficient quantity of related input. A study on Japanese learners of English by Flynn (1996, cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004) has enhanced the view that L2 acquisition is constrained by UG. Thomas (1991) and White, Travis and Maclachlan (1992) (both cited in Mitchell and Myles, 2004) provide studies claiming to support the full access to the hypothesis of UG. In contrast, Bley-Vroman, Felix, and Ioup's (1988 cited in Ellis 1994) study on Korean learners of English revealed that it is very difficult to sustain such hypothesis that Universal Grammar is available for adult learners. A study by Meisel (1997 cited in Mitchell & Myles, 2004) on negation acquisition in France and Germany by learners of L1 and L2 revealed that the structure-dependency principle in UG is not achievable to L2 learners. However, Schachter's (1989) test about Subjacency found more uncertain findings than that of White's who said that it constituted a "serious challenge" to the view that UG is achievable to adult learners.

Language Learning: The interaction between internal and external factors is represented by language (Boeckx and Leivada, 2014). Language learning is a mental activity based on processes of encoding, storage, and recovery; thus anxiety can affect each process by forming a scenario of distributed attention for anxious learners. Anxious learners are focusing on their task and how they react to it (Bensoussan, 2012). For instance, if the teacher asks the anxious student a question in the classroom, s/he will focus on responding it and estimating the social implications of the answer.

Theories of Language learning

The Mechanism of Language Learning: Language learning is a significant task. As it the case with other schemes, the linguistic scheme consists of numerous parts. This can be addressed by constraining the schemes that could be acquired by the learner. Therefore, in order to learn the language(s), the learner must develop a

finite set of parameters. Once the complexity of the system to be learned is considered, then understanding the language learning mechanism becomes vital. Such issues have attracted researchers' attention in both fields: linguistics and psychology; hence, the current dissertation concentrates on the way of accomplishing such difficult task of language learning by children with the unconscious ease. Learning is an interesting system, easy for children; however, it is often effortful for adults (Cook and Newson, 2014).

This serves to simplify the learning process since only systems with particular features will be regarded. Nevertheless, the language learning problem still exists. For instance, assume that the potential systems a learner could acquire are described by n binary parameters; thus, the learner has to choose from the remaining 2^n possible systems that are considered as a large number definitely (Pearl and Lidz, 2013). This reflects the aim of the language learning mechanism theory. Based on two conditions of the linguistic representations and language learning course, the means that enhances learners to acquire the system parts can be explored. Conducting an experimental research can provide the acquisition signs, including age and the behavior of children as though they know certain parts of the linguistic system.

In order to investigate the language learning mechanism, one should recognize two things, namely the designed system and the course time of acquisition. The description of the acquisition object is provided by theoretical linguistics as the linguistic system that is used by adults and must be acquired by children. Even for n as low as 10 or 20 (Wang, 2010).

Language Development

Constraints on the hypotheses developed by the learner are considered to be the only interpretation of internal factors. Such constraints are represented by linguistic parameters (Chomsky, 2005). However, the learner's hypotheses might be constrained by other ways. It is important to define the learner's hypothesized space by the time the learner is trying to select which hypothesis is appropriate for the exposure language. The hypothesized space may be defined in terms of parameters, with one parameter value per hypothesis (Yang, 2002). However, it does not need to be identified in such way; otherwise the learner might have a hypothesized space defined over the amount of structure posited for the language: linear vs. hierarchical (Pearl and Lidz, 2013). The main point is that the learner's hypothesized space is defined, however that may be instantiated. The learner's beliefs will be then shifted to various hypotheses through the external linguistic experience.

Studies about Language learning: Studies undertaken by (Bemat and Gvozdenko 2005) extended their research into different contexts. (Bemat, 2006) investigated the beliefs of 54 overseas learners in Australia, by (Bemat and Gvozdenko 2005) examined almost 140 respondents in New Zealand (Bemat and Gvozdenko 2005) identified the beliefs of 664 EFL learners in Korea.

English as a foreign language EFL: ELF (Jenkins, 2013) denotes English learning by nonnative speakers living in a non-English-speaking country.

English Second Language: Jenkins and Leung (2013) stated that individuals who learn and teach English while being in a society that speaks native English language are defined as learners and teachers of ESL.

Language anxiety/FLA: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz et al., 1986). This kind of self-report instrument, eliciting responses of anxiety specific to foreign language classroom settings, triggered an avalanche of similar studies. Research of this kind (Akbari and Sadeghi 2013). Martin and Masangya, 2013 includes research studies aimed at exploring the extents and levels of FLL anxiety as well as the types of anxieties in a wide variety of EFL contexts. One of the earliest and most prominent scholars to investigate second/foreign language anxiety is Horwitz who claimed that language-anxious students often study more than low-anxious students; however, their level of achievement does not reflect that effort.

Although EFL learners often assess their own learning ability, considerable research has suggested that errors in self-assessment do occur; EFL students sometimes underestimate or overestimate their language ability (Shang, 2013). Part of the reason is that the affective factor of language anxiety may particularly bias the self-perceptions of second/foreign language competence (Elkhafaifi, 2005). As mentioned earlier by (Liem, Lau et al. 2008, perceptions of self-efficacy determine the amount of effort expended in pursuing a goal. Accumulating evidence has also indicated that anxiety leads to lower writing performance. The study

conducted by Heng, (Jusoh, Abdullah et al. 2014) examined the language anxiety dimensions in alignment with the major sub-constructs proposed by Horwitz et al.

Dwivedi, (2011) also mentioned the effect of “unpreparedness” on students’ speaking anxiety. In this situation, a student reported that s/he feels weird, and prefers to keep his/her silence during whole class. In the study of a high percentage of students reported that it was easy for them to become anxious when they spoke in English.

Foreign language Apprehension is a major element which affects performances and acquisition of FL learners. FLA occurs more in output language abilities such as writing and speaking than in input abilities (Awan, Azher et al. 2010). In the study of (Awan, Azher et al. 2010)., a high percentage of students reported that it was easy for them to become anxious when they spoke in English.

Sources of foreign language classroom anxiety

Sources of Language Anxiety: Consistent with Horwitz et al., the influence of anxiety on the L2/foreign language learning is still under investigation. Researchers have attempted to found the sources of language anxiety as well as highlighting that anxiety could be a motivation for L2/foreign language learning. However, previous studies found that anxiety could impact on the development of language skills in different areas, including: reading comprehension, communication apprehension, and communicative skills. Yet, there are other factors that might cause language anxiety, e.g., the fear of stage or being laughed at, learner's character, styles of teaching and learning, context of learning, L1 skills, and the entire process of foreign language learning. Three sources of foreign language classroom anxiety have been identified:

Communication apprehension (CA): More often the learner will avoid communication if s/he has a high level of CA so as to avoid the anxiety feeling as learned to associate with communication encounters. However, the learner’s performance in this case will be less frequent than the one with lower levels. As well, the learner might be called as a "reticent" individual.

Test anxiety: Test anxiety is a psychological condition in which people experience extreme distress and anxiety in testing situations (Eysenck, 2014).

Fear of negative evaluation

Leary, (2013) mentioned that (FNE) was first defined by Watson and Friend in 1969 as “apprehension about others' evaluations, distress over negative evaluations by others, and the expectation that others would evaluate one negatively.”). As proposed by (Wang, Hsu et al. 2012) FNE is related to specific personality dimensions, such as anxiousness, submissiveness, and social avoidance. People who score high on the FNE scale are highly concerned with seeking social approval or avoiding disapproval by others, and may tend to avoid situations where they have to undergo evaluations. According to (Raghuvanshi and Kumari 2014) High FNE subjects are also more responsive to situational factors. This has been associated with conformity, pro-social behavior, and social anxiety).

Jahin, (2012) indicated that low levels of English linguistic knowledge could cause more writing apprehension. Writing apprehension is among the factors that impacted on writing skill in English. However, such issue might be reduced by training on peer review. Based on the above review, most researches were basically correlational and exploratory in concept. They emphasized on identifying the degree to which there is correlation relationship between writing performance and writing apprehension. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that no study has tried to determine the potential effect of peer reviewing on the potential essay writing ability of EFL teachers (Jahin, 2012).

Additionally, American Psychological Association (McReynolds, 2015) defines anxiety as "an emotion characterized by feeling of tension, worried thoughts, and physical changes.(Weinberg and Gould 2014). Also views anxiety as "a negative mood of apprehension accompanied with physiological characteristics.(Hammad and Ghali 2015).“Anxiety in this study is defined as a negative feeling accompanied by low thinking ability, physical changes, and negative behaviors. Speaking According to Bailey (2008), speaking is the productive aural/oral skill that includes conveying meaning through producing verbal utterances systematically.(Hammad and Ghali 2015).

In this respect, the interview results in a certain study indicated that linguistic difficulties (vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation) increased language anxiety of 30 Turkish EFL students. ((Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel

2013). Moreover, Melouah (2013) investigated the sources of oral performance anxiety of 54 Algerian EFL university students, and the study concluded that among such sources was low language proficiency. (Melouah, 2013). Additionally, the observations and interviews data in Zhiping and Paramasivam's study (2013) indicated that anxiety of negative evaluation and communication apprehension caused anxiety among 8 EFL international postgraduate students of a Malaysian university. (Zhiping and Paramasivam 2013). (Hammad and Ghali 2015) showed that the causes of language anxiety as perceived by three Iranian EFL adult learners included lack of preparation and the types of activities being implemented. Furthermore, Ferdous examined sources of language anxiety among 60 EFL university students in Bangladesh, and the study indicated that the most disturbing aspect was related to teachers. (Ferdous, 2012). Likewise (Subaşı 2010) investigated the sources of English anxiety among 55 Turkish university learners in oral practice. The study revealed that teachers' manners and teaching procedures were core bases of learners' apprehension in English verbal exercise.

Impact of anxiety on language performance

Growing mass of research has offered valuable insights into the fact that anxiety is not limited to any specific theoretical discipline but it is create amongst the students of numerous disciplines. (Javid, 2014) has introduced the term academic anxiety as "a unifying formulation for the collection of anxieties learners experience while in schools' It has also been reported that there is some commonality in terms of the nature and consequences of anxiety, the type of anxiety triggered in and suffered by learners from each specific discipline is, to a certain extent, unique to that specific discipline (Trang, 2012).

It has been reported that EFL anxiety has powerful impact on foreign language learning process and learners' scope of success and achievement and language learning process is negatively proportionate to high level of FLA (Wu, 2010). Wu, (2010) has reported that several studies were carried out to explore the correlation between FLA and the process of language learning. As well, it is observed that early studies that were undertaken to investigate this construct didn't show consistent results and seemed unable to analyse this emotional and psychological construct.

Nahavandi and Mukundan (2013) investigated Iranian EFL learners to identify their FLA. They administered Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale FLCAS. The members of the research to measure anxiety of Iranian EFL learners in the four sub scales of FLCAS, i.e., communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of English classes. The findings of the study revealed that the participants exhibited high level of FLA in all four sub-scales. Among the four subscales the results showed that communication anxiety was the most predominant anxiety component. It has also been reported that no significant differences were reported along mother tongue and gender.

Yahya, (2013) also investigated the speaking anxiety of Chinese EFL learners as well as the relationships of speaking anxiety with other domains, including trait anxiety, unwillingness to communicate, language achievement, speaking self-efficacy, language class risk-taking, and language class sociability. The findings of the study indicated that more than 50% of all students recorded undergoing high or moderate levels of anxiety in speaking. Moreover, this affective problem did not vary meaningfully completed gender, and then changed significantly over proficiency sets. Personality aspects were also originated to be the main grounds of language anxiety; and reciprocal influences occur between language attainment and talking apprehension.

Level of Anxiety among postgraduate students

The first research question of this study is "What are the levels of foreign language anxiety among Arab EFL postgraduate students at Universiti Utara Malaysia". To answer that question mean score for the overall anxiety level was calculated. Shabani (2015); Mohammadi, Biria, Koosha and Shahsavari (2013) rated FLCAS scores obtained by the students in three categories groups such as students with scores between 33 and 66 were considered as having a low level of anxiety whereas the students with scores between 133 and 165 were accepted as quite anxious. This study also followed the same process to evaluate the level of anxiety as given in table 1.

Table 1: The Levels of Anxiety

Levels	Scores
Low Anxiety	33-36
Average Anxiety	67-132
High Anxiety	133-165

The mean value of the anxiety level ranges from minimum 69.0 to maximum 154.0. FLCAS scores ranged between 50 (the score indicating the lowest anxiety level of the whole group of participants) and 132 points (the score indicating the highest anxiety level of the whole group of participants), with the total mean score of 109.76. The mean value 109.76 showed that the anxiety level is average for the students in the UniversitiUtara Malaysia. Shabani (2015) used Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to assess the level of anxiety among EFL learners. Descriptive statistics showed that in terms of FLA, the majority of students (n=126) had average levels of anxiety. The results of the current study are in line with the study of Shabani (2015). The details are shown in table 2.

Table 2: The Levels of Overall Anxiety calculated

Anxiety Level overall		
N	Valid	50
	Missing	0
Mean		109.7600
Std. Deviation		20.29231
Minimum		69.00
Maximum		154.00

Level of Anxiety among Male and Female students

In order to answer the second research question "Is there any significant difference between FLA among Arab EFL postgraduate students based on their gender". Descriptive statistics were used to compute Mean and Standard Deviation (SD) and F-statistics have been calculated using the independent sample t-test. The mean value calculated for male postgraduate students (mean=104.555684) showed that the male students are perceived that an average level of anxiety.

The mean value for females which is (mean= 115.8696) showed that female student have anxiety on average high level of anxiety is bit higher than males. Shabani (2015) also documented that average levels of anxiety and female students were found to be a little more anxious than male students. The test score for Levene's test showed that the F-test value (1.373, p=0.247) with p<0.05 showed that there is no statically difference exist between male and female students level of anxiety. Park and French (2013) investigated gender differences in language anxiety and the possible influence of gender and anxiety on L2 performance.

The study conducted with the final grade of 948 university students learning English in Korea indicated that females had higher anxiety level compared to males, at the same time, females and the students with high anxiety received higher grades than males and the students with low anxiety. Shabani (2012) also analysed the difference of anxiety level between Male and Female EFL student. The result of independent sample t-test showed there was no significant difference between males and females in the levels of anxiety.

The results of the current study are in line with study Shabani (2012). The data representing the overall scores of students on the FLCAS instrument is shown in Table 3.

Table 3: The Levels of Overall Anxiety for male and female students

	N	Means	Standard Deviation	F-statistics	Sig.
Male	27	104.5556	17.26787	1.373	0.247
Female	23	115.8696	22.19194		

Level of Anxiety among Master and PhD program students

In order to answer the for third research question, the questionnaire was distributed among students. After getting the questionnaire, students' anxiety scores were computed by adding up all the numbers

corresponding to each choice on the scale. The mean value calculated for master students (mean=112.3200) showed that the male students are perceived that an average level of anxiety. The mean value for PhD students which is (mean= 107.2000) showed that female student have an average level of anxiety.

Table 4: Level of Anxiety among postgraduate students

	N	Means	Standard Deviation	F-statistics	Sig.
Master	25	112.3200	23.3125	2.278	0.138
PhD	25	107.2000	16.8399		
Total	50	3.3261			

The test score for Levene's test for equality of variances showed that the F-test value (2.278, $p=0.138$) with $p<0.05$ showed that there is no statically difference exist between master and PhD students level of anxiety. The data representing the overall scores of students on the(FLCAS) instrument is shown in Table 4.

Conclusion

Language learning difficulties could predict anxiety in foreign language learning settings (Chen & Chang, 2004). As previous research has suggested, anxiety has a great effect on second language acquisition and may be a part of the difficulty that learners have in acquiring another language. This study corresponds to Young's (1999) description of foreign language anxiety as "worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language" (p. 27) among EFL learners in the investigation of foreign language anxiety. That is, second language acquisition in second language learners is related to a high level of anxiety in comparison with other university courses (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991). The results indicate that there is average level of anxiety among EFL students in Universiti Utara Malaysia. There is no significant difference found between male and female postgraduate students level of anxiety, but as per mean value the female have a bit higher level of anxiety than males. It's also been found that there level of anxiety is same for PhD and Masters Students.

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