

The Impact of Anxiety in Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: *Debilitating anxiety is a psychological and mental barrier that blocks foreign language learners from acquiring the foreign language and might lead to having bad outcomes. While on the other hand, facilitating anxiety plays a strong predictor in language achievement over time, and it might lead to having positive outcomes on learners' motives and attitudes. Thus, the primary purpose of this review is to explore the existing literature on foreign language anxiety. Second, to give further details on its relationship with other variables, and also its types. Finally, it clarifies the causes of language anxiety and how it affects language learners' abilities.*

Keywords: Anxiety, Foreign Language Anxiety, Causes of Anxiety

1. Introduction

Anxiety is of interest because of its role in determining success or failure in acquiring second or foreign languages. Therefore, here in learning languages, it is easy to predict whether learners will be successful or unsuccessful in obtaining the target language according to the level of the anxiety. Remarkably, if learners are possessed by anxiety, fear of speaking, confusion, and lack of self-confidence, they will not be able to move further in learning languages. As for those who don't impede any of the previous psychological problems, it is easy to say that those learners will be able to acquire the language in a broad way. Even they will be at a level to be compared to the native speakers.

Over the past century, there has been an increasing interest and claims in language anxiety. These claims are supported by numerous experiments and studies in human learning and provide a clear concept of what anxiety is and what its sub-components are? What does it mean to predict someone with anxiety? How do learners control anxiety and overcome it? Therefore, all learners, teachers, material developers, and researchers agree that anxiety is a critical turning point and an essential part of acquiring a second language (SL) or a foreign language (FL).

According to (E. K. Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), anxiety is the feeling of being worried, anxious, afraid of speaking, which affects the nervous system. With the developing concern being dedicated to learning foreign languages. Anxiety seems to be a significant challenge to language students. Language specialists nearly concur that nervousness rose out of the language learning process is quite possibly the essential obstacle that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students experience when learning a second or foreign language. According to (Alrabai, 2014) and (Wu, 2010). Anxiety does not affect just beginners or the newcomers of language learners, as it assures that nearly most language learners experience the effect of anxiety in their language learning period (Elaine Horwitz, 2001). While (EK Horwitz) proved that the number of language students who feel anxious, worried, or afraid of speaking in public or in front of their peers has recently increased.

1.1 Definitions of Anxiety

Thomas Scovel firstly presented anxiety in 1959; as the abstract sensation of pressure, apprehension, worry, and nervousness that related and affected the nervous system of the person exposed to the anxiety situations (E. K. Horwitz et al., 1986). According to that, more definitions of language anxiety are accessible and available to the current studies. As mentioned by (Ortega, 2014), the two definitions that have been improving our insight into language anxiety were proposed by (E. K. Horwitz et al., 1986) and (MacIntyre, 1999). Furthermore, (E. K. Horwitz et al., 1986) characterizes that language anxiety to be a particular complex of self-insights, convictions, sentiments, and practices related to classroom learning language context which taking in emerging from the uniqueness of the language learning process (p. 128). And that is in similar to (MacIntyre, 1999) who depicts that language anxiety as a sensation of stress, apprehension, and stress connected to a second/foreign language learning situation.

According to (Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2001), anxiety is a psychological phenomenon that ranges from mixed behavioral factors and characteristics to a process of reflective feelings which is epistemology inaccessible.

Then again, based on (Tahernezhad, Behjat, & Kargar, 2014), language anxiety relates to distress and worry or even the dread delivered by any scary event in the learning process which impedes learners' production the learning acquisition.

Two key concepts of anxiety are broadly explained in the field of anxiety; Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) which is "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language" by (MacIntyre, 1994), and on the other hand; Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) which is "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (E. K. Horwitz et al., 1986). So, to say that, anxiety's definitions since past decades and until now all have same common shared perspectives of anxiety. Learners or non-learners have been into this feeling of anxiety, either psychologically or physically. It could be the same anxiety factors among second language learners, but how learners overcome this psychological issue differs.

2. Literature review

2.1 Foreign Language Anxiety

Much previous literature on anxiety has focused on learners and how it correlates to other issues, such as motivation, achievement, performance, behaviour, gender, etc. Thus, many studies proved that anxiety could correlate positively or negatively with other variables.

A study was conducted to investigate motivation and its relation to emotional influence in L2 writing achievement to 85 university learners learning English in Iran as a Foreign Language. The result showed that the ideal L2 writing self was positively predicted L2 writing joy, achievement, and motivation, whereas ought L2 writing self was positively predicted L2 writing motivation and anxiety; while L2 writing joy and anxiety both were predicted L2 writing motivation positively; and L2 writing anxiety was expected L2 writing achievement negatively, but L2 joy did not. So, these relations could play an essential role because of the learner's qualitative differences (Tahmouresi & Papi, 2021). Furthermore, anxiety could be positively or negatively correlated with motivation, such as (Kirova, Petkovska, & Koceva, 2012) who proved that anxiety and motivation are negatively correlated in learning foreign languages, while on the other hand. (Chapell et al., 2005), who proposed that anxiety and motivation are positively related to each other. So, the interrelationship between both variables should be focused on and discussed further (Alico, 2016).

Another study investigated learner's performance and its relation to anxiety among the 5th semester of teaching and education learners of a study program using a questionnaire, observation, and interviews at Dayanu Ikhsanuddin University showed that learners experienced anxiety during their speaking presentation and that because of their fear of speaking especially in front of public, so it predicted that learners lack motivation, which will help them to reduce their anxiety filter (Ritonga, Nasmilah, & Rahman, 2020) and this result as not similar as a previous study conducted to find out the relation between anxiety, attitude and motivation of tertiary learners learning English as a second language among undergraduate learners in Malaysia since results showed that there was no link to be found between the three variables (Jain & Sidhu, 2013). At the same time, a prior study of Chinese university learners conducted to seek the relationship between motivation and anxiety and its relation to student's performance found a strong correlation between motivation and anxiety towards students' performance (Liu & Zhang, 2013).

Moreover, Anxiety and gender also have a good relationship, as reported in a longitudinal study among Chinese learners, which found that Anxiety is problematic, especially among female students. In contrast, male learners tended to feel depressed more than female students, leading to their psychological well-being (Gao, Ping, & Liu, 2020). Comparing this result to another study in Saudi Arabia of 487 students learning English as a foreign language found out that both male and female learners experience the same level of enjoyment and anxiety and the correlation between anxiety and enjoyment was found to be negatively correlated with each other (Bensalem, 2021).

Relatively, (Elaine Horwitz, 2001) suggested that specific anxiety, which is called foreign language anxiety, was responsible for learners' uncomfortableness during their language classes. Therefore, findings related to anxiety and achievement were found to have a moderate negative relationship. Some researchers (Sparks and Ganschow and their colleagues) predicted that poor language was the reason and not the result of anxiety.

Until present, very little attention has been addressed to finding out the correlation between behaviour and anxiety. So, a study investigated the links between anxiety and learning difficulties using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) of 1,187 college students were learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Taiwan indicated that English language difficulties found to have 36.80% of the variance in anxiety. Also, results showed that most anxious students

generally have a history of English learning issues, get low grades, endure challenges in the classroom, and display poor formative abilities (Chen & Chang, 2004).

A study conducted among Saudi undergraduate learners to find out the causal relationship between anxiety and achievement suggests that achievement can reduce language anxiety. Thus, achievement precedes anxiety. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the learners' role motivational profiles on the achievement–anxiety. For example; higher achievement always leading to the decreasing of anxiety among learners, while if learners do not show progress in their language learning they would experience much anxiety over time. Achievement lead to a positive relationship with language anxiety (Alamer & Lee, 2021).

2.2 Types of Anxiety

By and large, anxiety in the second/foreign language learning scope, psychologically divided into three different aspects; trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Scovel, 1978; Speilberger, 1983; Woodrow, 2006).

While state anxiety plays a role of apprehension of momentum action in a specific time, specific situation and it's not an individual characteristic as trait anxiety as mentioned previously. Furthermore, the higher the level of trait anxiety you possess, the higher the level of state anxiety you experience (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Lastly, situation-specific anxiety which defines as situationally occurring, so you feel anxious in a particular event during a continuum situation (Zheng, 2008). As a second language class, in the middle of a test, to speak in public (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). In aggregate, it spotlights the specific types of anxiety that happen efficiently over time (Oteir & Al-Otaibi, 2019).

In different words (Scovel, 1978) has discussed two types of anxiety; facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety. Facilitating anxiety, which is also called helpful anxiety, helps learners increase their motivation to learn a second or a foreign language. So, if a learner is worried and anxious about the final exam, they should prepare hard, study over and over, practice; all these are considered motives. While on the other hand, debilitating anxiety which described as a decreased emotion that does not help learners during their learning but also causes learners to stop trying and doing harder. For example, a student gives a classroom speech, and then most learners leave the classroom in the middle of that. There is no doubt that facilitating anxiety is a helping characteristic that increases learners' motivation. It does not matter the type of anxiety is; facilitating or debilitating. What's important is the ways of tension. For example, the tensions between learners' and teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching (Young, 1991). Or what occurs between the reality of the language abilities and the desired language abilities (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009) or the desire to incorporate into a culture and that societies cultures to be accepted in the outsider (Dörnyei, 2014; Gardner, 1985)

2.3 Causes of Anxiety

Several researches have been investigated to find out the causes of anxiety among second language learners. Three primary sources are the causes of anxiety in language learning acquisition; the teacher, the learner, and the instructional practice. These three sources are divided into six sources, and these Anxieties arise from; 1) interpersonal and personal anxieties, 2) learners' belief about the target language, 3) instructors' belief about teaching the target language, 4) interaction between learner and instructor, 5) classroom procedures and 6) language testing (Young, 1991).

Similarly, the language learning atmosphere and the instructor's role are also considered causes of language anxiety among learners. Literature reviews found that learners feel anxious when teachers call on their names in the classroom to participate or to perform any activities, and that is similar to what also proved by (Aydin, 2008) that the way of correcting learners' mistakes in the classroom is a significant source of causing anxiety. Attitudes and teachers' personalities are among the characteristics which either cause anxiety or lower the anxiety level among language learners, and these studies are revealed by some recent researchers like (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002; Aydin, 2016; Kruk, 2018; Sammephet & Wanphet, 2013; Yoon, 2012).

So far, much attention has also been given to interpersonal issues and personal characteristics for their significant roles in causing anxieties, such as fear of speaking and in front of the public and low self-esteem (Young, 1991) and (Mahmoodzadeh, 2013). As well as, (Liu & Jackson, 2008) indicated that making mistakes, instructors' correction, and speaking in public, in front of peers or teachers all are sources of causing anxieties for learners. While learners' perception is considered a fundamental cause of anxiety, that's suggested by (Dewaele, Petrides, & Furnham, 2008).

Additionally, what is mainly and currently investigated in the language anxiety in the language learning acquisition is what revealed by (E. K. Horwitz et al., 1986) three main factors are vital components related to performance and that lead to cause anxiety; such as 1) fear of negative evaluation: fearing of others' evaluation, avoiding evaluative situations, expecting to be evaluated negatively

among others (E. K. Horwitz et al., 1986), 2) communication apprehension: is what related to interpersonal features, and orally spoken situations (Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989), and 3) test anxiety: generally most learners are being involved in this type of anxiety, fear of getting low marks, and fear of failure in exams (E. K. Horwitz et al., 1986).

4- Conclusion

Anxiety is recognised as an inverse issue through all the studies reviewed here. This systematic review searched to find the gaps between them. Studies indicated that anxiety had been a complicated and challenging problem in learning foreign languages for decades until recent time. It has significantly positively correlated to some variables, such as; motivation, performance, achievement, gender, and behaviour. At the same time, few studies have shown a negative correlation between anxiety and other variables. Avoiding the causes of the anxiety and understanding the effects of this issue will allow learners to improve their actual learning perspectives in reducing the anxiety filter and encourage them to be highly competitive motivated learners. Thus, based on this review, it is recommended that further studies are needed to conduct in linking the gaps to prove the effect of anxiety either positively or negatively to the conducted previous studies and to reveal the ambiguity of language anxiety.

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