



Oh no! Not ready to speak! An investigation on the major factors of foreign language classroom anxiety and the relationship between anxiety and age

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Abstract

Despite the numerous studies investigating the nature of anxiety and its relationship with several age groups in the context of foreign language classroom anxiety, these two subjects are still in need of further quantitative investigation. Accordingly, the current study investigated the major factors that lead to students' foreign language classroom anxiety levels, and the possible relationship between anxiety and age. To do this, Horwitz's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was distributed to the third-year students of the English Language and Literature Department of a state university in the Oral Communication II course. The data obtained were investigated by both descriptive and inferential statistical procedures to reveal the major factors of foreign language classroom anxiety and its possible relationship with age. The results indicated unusual findings which are due to be beneficial for the interests of foreign language teaching researchers.

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1. Introduction

For more than three decades, anxiety has been paid utmost importance by foreign language teaching researchers among all other affective factors that influence language learning. Although numerous studies were implemented to understand its true nature (Tallon, 2009), it was not until the development of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) in 1986 that foreign language teaching researchers attained a new reliable and valid way for measurement of foreign language anxiety (Wu, 2010). This scale developed by Elaine K. Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz, and Joann Cope made it possible to differentiate foreign language anxiety from other forms of the concept. Therefore, it became possible to detect a clear association between anxiety and foreign language learning in multifarious studies (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Campbell & Ortiz, 1991; Aida 1994; MacIntyre, 1999; Saito, Horwitz & Garza, 1999; Bailey, Onwuegbuzie & Daley, 2000; Nitko, 2001; Ewald, 2007; Ansari, 2015).

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One of the three fundamental types of anxiety – trait, state, and situation specific – classified by Spilberger in 1966, foreign language classroom anxiety, as a kind of situation specific one, has long been a case of investigation in terms of four skills of language teaching - reading, writing, listening, speaking- (Sellers, 2000; Cheng, 2002; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Phillips, 1992). Either about its source or its effects on foreign language teaching, considerable research has targeted anxiety (Young, 1991a; Vogely, 1998; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey & Daley, 1999; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Liu & Chen, 2015). There is, nevertheless, still additional need for further investigations to determine the extent to which anxiety plays its role in foreign language teaching.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to contribute to the literature with the new findings for the following research questions:

Q1. Which factors of FLCAS play the major role on students' FLCA levels?

Q2. Is there a statistically significant relation between the students' FLCA levels and their ages?

1.1. Literature review

The association between anxiety and foreign language learning is generally reported to be negative (Krashen, 1985; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Price, 1991; Gregersen, 2003; Woodrow, 2006; Awan, Azher, Anwar & Naz, 2010; Lien, 2011; Mohammadi Golchi, 2012; Liu, 2013; Tallon, 2014; Liu & Chen, 2015). However, it is also possible to list some research that reports the positive aspects of anxiety as far as foreign language learning is concerned (Kleinmann, 1977; Bailey, 1983; Young, 1986; Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2006; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Lian & Budin, 2014), which highlights the necessity for further investigations on the subject.

It is also possible to classify the research in terms of four skills of language teaching. Although less frequent than other skills reading skill is also affected by anxiety in foreign language teaching contexts (Saito, Horwitz & Garza, 1999; Sellers, 2000; Brantmeier, 2005; Rajab, Zakaria, Rahman, Hosni & Hassani, 2012; Javanbakht, & Hadian, 2014). More frequent than reading but not prevalent as speaking, anxiety also affects listening skill during foreign language teaching (Young, 1992; MacIntyre, 1995; Vogely, 1998; Campbell, 1999; Chang, 2008a;2008b; 2010; Kimura, 2008; Gonen, 2009; Arnold, 2000; Kim, 2000; Atasheneh & Izadi, 2012; Mohammadi Golchi, 2012). Writing being the case it seems to be a little bit problematic than listening skill (Daly & Miller, 1975; Wu, 1992; Bruning & Horn, 2000; Schweiker-Marra & Marra, 2000; Hassan, 2001; DeDeyn, 2011; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Kara, 2013; Yastibaş & Yastibaş, 2015). As generally acknowledged speaking sticks out to be the most problematic skill that anxiety inhibits in the context of foreign language teaching (Young, 1991b; Philips, 1992; Zhanibek, 2001; Huang, 2004; Wilson, 2006; Woodrow, 2006; Balemir, 2009; Sioson, 2011; Bozavlı.& Gülmez, 2012; Mahmoodzadeh, 2012; Suleimenova, 2013; Çağatay, 2015).

2. Method

The aim of this study is to explore the factors which play a major role on students' FLCA levels and shed light on the relation between students' foreign language classroom anxiety and their ages. In this sense, Oral Communication II course of the English Language and Literature Department of a state University was selected as a model. Following a 14-week Oral Communication II course, FLCAS was handed in to the third-year students of the abovementioned department. The data showing students' attitudes concerning their anxiety levels were examined through statistical procedures to

explore the factors that play a major role on students' FLCA levels and investigate the relation between students' foreign language classroom anxiety and their ages.

2.1. Sample / Participants

The number of the participants in the present study was 146. Generally, the majority of the English Language and Literature Department usually consist of female students. Hence, the majority of the participants were females (n=93). It is obligatory that the students of the program be successful in a placement test that justifies their level of proficiency regarding English before their admission to the department. In this sense, the participants of the current study were all acknowledged to be proficient in English despite their label of non-native speakers. Accordingly, all of the participants were supposed to be almost at the same proficiency level.

2.2. Instrument(s)

The data of the current study were gathered through Horwitz's FLCAS. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to determine the factors that play a major role on students' FLCA levels as well as any possible association of the students' attitudes towards their foreign language classroom anxiety and their ages. Horwitz's Foreign language classroom anxiety scale consists of 33 questions each of which was responded to as 1) Strongly Disagree 2) Disagree 3) Not Decided 4) Agree 5) Strongly Agree in line with their evaluation of their anxiety levels associated with the Oral Communication II classes. The original scale was constructed by Elaine K. Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz, and Joann Cope for a similar study in 1986.

2.3. Data collection procedures

Before the distribution of the questionnaire the third-year students attended Oral Communication II course for 14 weeks. At the very beginning of the course the students were informed that they were expected to feel free to commit mistakes during their communication attempts. In this way, a more compromising tone was provided to make students feel both confident and fervent for participation in the class. During each class, in a sincere tone of conversation concise grammar revisions were realized where necessary. To overcome the students' grammar gap and to integrate the new information with its contextual usage, this was supposed to be more effectual than long boring grammar lessons. Furthermore, an additional self-study guide-book was recommended with the intention to develop their academic vocabulary.

All in all, following the permission procedure of the related University in the Fall term of 2016-2017, the third-year students of the English Language and Literature Department were distributed 146 copies of a three-page questionnaire. All of the questionnaires were returned to the researcher without any loss.

2.4. Data analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0. was used during the data analysis of the current study. The original scale was constructed for a well-known previous study carried out by one of the choice experts in the field. Thus, neither the reliability nor the validity of the scale was exposed to additional statistical procedures. The statistical results attained from the study are all submitted in the tables with the abbreviations: statistics frequency with (f); number of participants with (N), mean with (Mean), mean difference with (Mean Diff.), standard deviation with (Std. D.), standard error with (Std. Err.), standard error mean with (Std. Err. Mean), standard error difference with (Std. Err. Diff.), F statistics with (F), degrees of freedom with (df), significance (p) value of Levene's Test with (Sig.),

95% Confidence Interval of the Difference with (95% Con. Inter. Diff.), the two-tailed p value associated with the t-test with (Sig. (2-tailed)).

3. Result

3.1. Q1. Which factors play a major role on students' FLCA levels?

The results submitted in Table 1. signify that the majority of the participants (35) evaluate the most prominent factor for FLCA as the first item of FLCAS which is about speaking without preparation in language classes. The second highest frequency (26) is about students' anxiety about failing foreign language class while the third highest frequency (23), very similar to the second one, designates students' anxiety about questions asked by their teacher requiring instant answers without giving time for preparation. As for the fourth highest frequency (20), it is concerned with students' anxiety about peer competition which makes them feel their peers are better in speaking performance. Finally, the fifth and last highest frequency (20) points to their worry against their listening comprehension ability which may sometimes make them fall short of understanding spoken foreign words by their teacher. Table 1. embraces only the highest frequencies among the 33 items. Therefore, only five frequencies that outstripped the others with the most striking frequency values are listed in the table.

Table 1. Students' views on the source of their anxiety

Categories	f
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language classes.	35
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	26
33. I feel nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	23
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	20
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	20

3.2. Q2. Is there a statistically significant relation between the students' FLCA levels, and their ages?

Table 2. screens no significant correlation between the students' age and FLCA levels [Mean = 3.04 (Group A); m= 3.02 (Group B)]. The similar mean values of the two groups denote minor differences for the students in terms of age differences. This indicates no significant correlation between the students' FLCA levels and their ages.

Table2. Descriptive Statistics for FLCA levels and Age

Age Groups of the Participants	N	Mean	Std. D.	Std. Err. Mean
Group A (from 18 to 22)	121	3.04	0.41	0.03
Group B (23 and above)	10	3.02	0.38	0.12

As the variances of Group A and Group B are checked by Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, Table 2 reveals no diversity between the two groups with a p value=0.55 which is within the limits of the confidence interval with a value above p=0.05. Then, the t-test for Equality of Means reveals a

similar p value=0.86 which again stays within the limits of the confidence interval with a higher value than $p=0.05$. These results conclude that there is no significant correlation between the students' FLCA levels and their ages.

Table 3. t-test for two Independent Samples in terms of Age

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances			t-test for Equality of Means						
Attitudes Mean	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Err. Diff.	95% Con. Inter. Diff.	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	0.35	0.55	0.17	129	0.86	0.23	0.13	-.24	0.29
Equal variances not assumed			0.18	10.779	0.86	0.23	0.12	-.26	0.30

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study revealed that of the majority (5) of the most effective factors that cause anxiety speaking skill sticks out to be the most striking one with three highest frequencies respectively: item 9 ($f=35$), item 33 ($f=23$), item 23 ($f=20$). This situation is no surprisingly consistent with the findings in the literature (Sioson, 2011; Bozavlı & Gülmez, 2012; Mahmoodzadeh, 2012; Suleimenova, 2013; Çağatay, 2015). As for the second highest factor that leads to anxiety, it appears to be the students' anxiety against performance which has direct association with their achievement scores: item 10 ($f=26$). Yet, this factor is valid for all types of other courses and it can refer to all other branches aside from foreign language teaching. Thus, it cannot be a definite indicator of FLCA exclusively. Finally, the last highest frequency points to the students' anxiety against listening skill: item 29 ($f=20$). The students' anxiety about listening skill may be complimentary to their anxiety about their speaking skill. Therefore, this may be due to a close relationship with their FLCA levels of speaking and listening tasks in the classroom.

Table 4. Students' views on the source of their anxiety

Categories	f
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language classes.	35
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	26

33. I feel nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	23
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	20
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	20

There is little if any research in the literature that investigates any possible relationship between age and anxiety in the context of foreign language teaching (Er, 2015) although age is acknowledged to be an important factor in learning a new language among the foreign language teaching researchers (Krashen, 1985; Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Yet, several studies have shown both positive and negative correlation between age and foreign language speaking anxiety (Onwuegbuzie et al., 1999; Chan & Wu, 2004; Xiuqin, 2006; Huberty, 2004; Ay, 2010).

The findings of the current study reveal no significant correlation between students age and their FLCA levels. This leads also to the conclusion that there is no difference in terms of different age groups when anxiety is the case on the subject of foreign language teaching. In other words, the age groups attending the same course share the same anxiety level in the face of FLCA. The results may most likely result from the homogeneous age distribution pertaining to the students that attend the course. Still, even slight differences regarding age among students at university level are due to bring about different anxiety levels (Onwuegbuzie, et al., 1999). What is more, there is a conception among researchers that the older the students the more they are exposed to anxiety even though the findings of the current study is not consistent with this acknowledgement.

5. Conclusions

There are three fundamental limitations regarding the present study:

In the first place, the current study rests on a Likert scale, an ordinal scale which is usually substituted for interval scales in the field of social science. Such an application is so common among researchers that most often they disregard the fact that it would be more stable to use such scales for descriptive statistics only. Likert scales would not be just as good selections as ordinal scales for inferential studies as they cannot be precise to an equal extent with ordinal ones. Nonetheless, some part of the current study involves inferential statistics, and thus, the findings of the study may not provide the results with a perfect precision.

Then in the second place, the current study is limited to merely at university level students which would not be an indication for college or primary level evaluations since there is a widely accepted acknowledgement that age factor does affect the anxiety level of the participants of a study although this was not valid for the present study.

Last but not least, the current study is realized in an EFL environment, which would naturally give discrete results in an ESL context. Therefore, the factors that play the major role on students' FLCA levels would inevitable show divergence in such an environment depending on the students' self-confidence.

Consequently, taking the abovementioned limitations into consideration, it may be asserted that the unusual findings of the present study would contribute to the literature especially when the gap regarding the age factor in the literature is taken into consideration.

As an implication for further studies again age factor may be recommended that it be investigated at different levels of education such as primary or high school courses or with students at different university years.

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Ah hayır! Konuşmaya hazır değilim! Yabancı dil sınıf kaygısının başlıca etkenleri ve kaygının yaşla ilişkisi üzerine bir araştırma

Öz

Kaygının doğasını ve yabancı dil sınıf kaygısı bağlamında çeşitli yaş grupları ile ilişkisini araştıran sayısız çalışmaya rağmen bu iki konu hala ilave nicel araştırmaya ihtiyaç duymaktadır. Böylelikle, mevcut çalışma öğrencilerin yabancı dil sınıf kaygılarına neden olan başlıca etkenleri ve kaygı ile yaş arasındaki muhtemel ilişkiyi incelemiştir. Bunu gerçekleştirmek için Horwitz'e (1986) ait olan Yabancı Dil Sınıf İçi Kaygı Ölçeği bir devlet üniversitesinin İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü'nün üçüncü sınıf öğrencilerine Sözlü İletişim II dersinde dağıtılmıştır. Elde edilen veriler yabancı dil sınıf kaygısının etkenlerini ve yaşla muhtemel ilişkisini ortaya çıkarmak için betimsel ve çıkarımsal istatistik yöntemleri ile incelenmiştir. Sonuçlar, yabancı dil öğretimi araştırmacılarının ilgisine faydalı olabileceği düşünülen, sıra dışı bulgular göstermiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Kaygı; yabancı dil sınıf kaygısı; bireysel farklılıklar

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