



Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Among China Chinese Students Undergoing The Laureate English Programme in INTI International University, Malaysia

Meghavaani d/o Ampalagan (Corresponding author)
University Putra Malaysia
E-mail: smogana28@yahoo.com

Mogana d/o Sellupillai
University Putra Malaysia

Yap Sze Sze
University Putra Malaysia

Doi:10.7575/aiac.all.v.5n.5p.28

Received: 13/06/2014

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.5n.5p.28>

Accepted: 12/08/2014

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety (communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation) among Mainland Chinese students undergoing the Laureate English Programme in INTI International University, Malaysia. The participants of this study consisted of 75 students (44 male students and 31 female students). The results showed female students have a higher value in all three components compared to male students. As for fear of negative evaluation, both male and female students showed a slight or almost no difference in the level of anxiety. The findings of this study might help teachers who are engaged in the programme to have a better grasp of how they could help the students lessen the level of foreign language classroom anxiety.

Keywords: foreign language classroom anxiety, communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, language proficiency, gender.

1. Introduction

According to S.S. Abdullah and M.L. Chaudhary (2012), in the recent years, English language is desired to be understood by almost every individual and every nation on the globe who want to enjoy access to the latest developments, whatsoever field it may be. With the increased numbers of immigration, chances to study and travel abroad, and political and alliances interest, the importance to communicate with other cultures, is an extremely important skill (Humphries, R.,2011). Being the global lingua franca, communicating efficiently in this language is vital in the current era. Due to this reason, many worldwide are currently studying English as either a second language or foreign language. However, as many Researches have shown, learning or teaching English as foreign language is no simple task. There are many issues involved with learning a language such as motivation, age, aptitude, attitude, personality, learning styles and affective factors. (Humphries, R.,2011).

When students do not perform well in class, are frequently absent from class, hardly completes their homework, unable to answer questions posed to them and practically drag themselves to come to class is not a doddle for teachers to handle. Some students may excel in other subjects, but gets a mental block when it comes to learning a foreign language. One area that addresses this problem is anxiety. Language anxiety hinders students from being successful in foreign language learning. According to Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986., anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system. This explains why students do very well in certain subjects but perform poorly in others, especially in learning a foreign language.

INTI International University has a large population of students who learn English as a foreign language. This research paper addresses the anxiety issues of students from China who is currently pursuing the Laureate English Program (LEP). LEP is a program that was newly launched on August 2013. This research is conducted to shed lights to the issues of anxiety among China students pursuing the LEP program that makes up 88% of the student intake every semester. The aspects that are looked at is anxiety among students at different proficiency levels, anxiety level between male and female students and the distribution of the level of anxiety among students; which would provide teachers a head start to deal with anxiety problem in future.

1.1 Significance of the study

This study is aimed to investigate the foreign language classroom anxiety of Chinese students from China as measured by their scores in three different aspects which are Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety and Fear of Negative

Evaluation. The secondary purpose of this study is aimed to find out whether gender and level of proficiency have a significant relationship in affecting the level of anxiety in the three components measured.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What is the difference in anxiety among the students at different proficiency levels?
2. Is there a difference in anxiety level between male students and female students?
3. What is the distribution of the level of anxiety among students?

2. Literature Review

The study of language anxiety and its effects on classroom learning have been conducted by many researchers throughout the years in many different countries and languages. This is a topic which has never ceased to interest scholars and educationalist, but instead has continued to gain if not attracted more studies to be done regarding this issue in language acquisition.

The theory of language anxiety was explored by scholars as early as in the mid-1960s, and gained more interest especially after a specific anxiety construct known as Foreign Language Anxiety which is said to be responsible for hindrances and obstacles in language classes (Howritz, Howritz and Cope, 1986) was introduced.

Anxiety, according to Oxford Online Dictionary, is defined as a feeling of worry, nervousness or unease about something with an uncertain outcome. Scovel (1978) defined it as “apprehension, a vague fear that is only indirectly associated with an object” (p. 134) even though anxiety is elusive in the psychological construct.

Howritz et al. (1986) in the study of Foreign Language Anxiety, extended the definition to “a distinctive complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). Foreign Language Anxiety also encompasses three components: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Characteristics of language anxiety is seen clearly when students forgets the vocabulary and grammar learned in assessments, avoid passing on complex messages in the foreign language, and display lack of confidence or froze up in role-play activities.

Based on the research done in Malaysian context with several Malaysian teachers in the EFL classrooms, most teachers agree that though female students have relatively high level of anxiety while learning the languages compared to male students, females students usually perform better in the final grading. This is supported by early studies (Aida, 1994; Kissau, 2006; MacIntyre et al., 2002), which also indicated that female students tend to outperform male students in class due to several factors including motivation. Park and French (2013) also concluded in their research done in Korea that female students though possessing higher level of anxiety received a better grade than males before matching on anxiety levels.

However, in the case of Chinese students in Mainland China, male high school students were found to experience a higher rate of anxiety compared to female high school students in the Chinese EFL classroom (Cui, 2011). This is similar to another study done among 115 Chinese EFL students that reported results of male students had higher anxiety level in English Foreign Language classes than female students (Na, 2007).

In the case of whether Language Proficiency plays a role in affecting Foreign Language Anxiety, Onwuegbuize et al.'s (1999) stated that there is no change in the level of language anxiety as the students' proficiency increases. Instead, it has a linear rise in anxiety as the students advance in their studies of the foreign language. Similar finding were also reported when Cheng (2002) reported that students' anxiety level increases with their years of studying the foreign language.

On the contrary, there are also studies that contradict in the findings above. Alemi, Daftarifard, and Pashmforoosh (2011) reported in their research on the relationship between language anxiety and language proficiency is negative which indicates that with higher language proficiency, students' amount of anxiety decreases. This result is similar to Young's (1991) which reported anxiety as affecting both foreign language learners with low level of oral proficiency and high levels of proficiency, but those with low level of oral proficiency seems to be more affected by Foreign Language Anxiety.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The sample of the study was the 75 participants randomly selected from which the response rate was 77.92% as some questionnaires were incomplete where the students either did not answer some of the survey questions or did not include their demographic data.

Table 1. General information about survey respondents

Total Respondents (60)			Age Range	Average Age
LEP 102	LEP 103	LEP 104	17 – 24	19.95
20	20	20		

A total of sixty students (34 males and 26 females) who are undergoing The Laureate English Programme at three different level of proficiency in INTI International University answered a set of questions. The students were streamed to levels based on their English Placement Test results (EPT). Most of them are students intending to pursue their studies in degree. They need to pass six levels of English Programme to be granted an admission into their desired degree programmer. Duration of each level is two months. The general information about these participants is summarized in Table 1.

3.2 Research Design

The instrument used in collecting the data for this study is Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which was developed by Howritz et al. (1986). This instrument consist of 33-items survey adapted from the original Spanish version of FLCAS and was administrated to the students to measure their anxiety levels in their English classroom following The Laureate English Programme in INTI International University. The Laureate English Programme is designed to ensure an outcome driven learning experience and to encourage students' autonomy. The learning content of this programme is developed jointly with the Cambridge University Press. The Touchstone course offers blended learning for English language learning. The FLCAS is designed on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree with values of 1-5 assigned to them respectively. A total number of 11 questions are set to address Communication Apprehension (Item 1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, 32), 15 questions to address Test Anxiety (Item 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28) and 7 questions to address fear of negative evaluation (Item 2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, 33). Questions such as gender, age and level in the programme are added to obtain demographic data of the students.

3.3 Reliability and Validity

The internal reliability by Howritz et al. (1986) is acceptable since the Cronbach's alphas for communication apprehension were .93, for test anxiety were .84 and for fear of negative evaluation .79. Test-retest coefficients over eight weeks were an $r = .83$ ($p < .001$)

Aida (1994) also tested the instrument by validating FLCAS for Japanese students and obtained an internal consistency of .94 ($X = 96.7$ and $SD = 22.1$) using Cronbach alpha coefficient. The details and data of both research are stated in Table 2.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity of FLCAS based on Aida and Howritz

	Aida (1994)	Howritz et al. (1991)
Sample size	96	108
Language	Japanese	Spanish
Cronbach's alpha	.94	.93
Mean	96.7	94.5
Standard deviation	22.1	21.4
Test-retest reliability	$r = .80, p < .01$ ($n = 54$; over one semester)	$r = .83, p < .01$ ($n = 108$; over eight weeks)

3.4 Results and Discussion

Data analysis was conducted by the use of SPSS version 19. The data was collected to find out the: (i) differences in anxiety level among the China Chinese students undergoing the Laureate English Programme in INTI International University, Malaysia at different proficiency levels, (ii) difference in anxiety level between male and female students in the programme, and (iii) the distribution of the level of anxiety among the students based on the three factors mentioned, communicative apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Table 3. Statistics for the distribution of the level of anxiety among students.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Apprehension	60	1.75	3.67	2.8069	.45630
Test Anxiety	60	1.67	3.93	2.9411	.48868
Fear of Negative Evaluation	60	1.00	4.33	2.7611	.74242

Based on the results obtained, it is clear that of all the three components that causes anxiety in a foreign language class, Test Anxiety has the highest value (2.9411). The results could be such because this survey was conducted a week prior to their final evaluation which will determine if they would proceed to the following level. Besides this, the lack of time for preparation also could have contributed to the high level of test anxiety as this is an intensive programme. In

addition, the final exam which the students will undergo is considered a high-stake test as failure to pass the final examination will cause the students to be unable to further their studies in their desired course. This is also part of their proficiency requirement for the entry to the university.

Table 4. Statistics for the distribution of the level of anxiety among male students.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Apprehension	34	1.75	3.67	2.7745	.44596
Test Anxiety	34	1.80	3.73	2.8941	.45545
Fear of Negative Evaluation	34	1.17	4.33	2.7647	.77429

Table 5. Statistics for the distribution of the level of anxiety among female students.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Apprehension	26	1.75	3.67	2.8494	.47494
Test Anxiety	26	1.67	3.93	3.0026	.53182
Fear of Negative Evaluation	26	1.00	4.00	2.7564	.71372

Based on the results, female students showed a higher value in all three components compared to the male students. It is especially prominent in the value of test anxiety where female students scored a value of 3.0026 and male students scored 2.8941. According to Deaux (1977) cited in Test Anxiety: The State of The Art by Moshe Zeidner, "Men may be socialized to view test situations as presenting a challenge to be instrumentally coped with and overcome, whereas for women it may present a threat which required mainly emotion focused coping or escape behaviours."

Besides that, female students also showed a slightly higher value of 2.8494 in Communication Apprehension compared to male students with the value of 2.7745. This is because female students tend to show more anxious attitude than male students and try to shy away from social interaction in foreign language learning classroom because they are brought up and educated in a society where male students are prioritized. Furthermore, it is also socially accepted for females to express their anxiety. Besides that, a higher ratio of male students could also discourage female students to be more outspoken.

As for Fear of Negative Evaluation, both male and female students show a slight or almost no difference in the value of anxiety.

Table 6. Statistics for the distribution of the level of anxiety among students in level 102.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Apprehension	20	2.33	3.67	2.9667	.30277
Test Anxiety	20	2.60	3.73	3.0567	.26515
Fear of Negative Evaluation	20	2.00	3.83	2.9000	.47264

Table 7. Statistics for the distribution of the level of anxiety among students in level 103.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Apprehension	20	1.75	3.42	2.5583	.55019
Test Anxiety	20	1.67	3.93	2.6800	.63966
Fear of Negative Evaluation	20	1.00	4.00	2.4250	.84548

Table 8. Statistics for the distribution of the level of anxiety among students in level 104.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Apprehension	20	2.25	3.67	2.8958	.38981
Test Anxiety	20	2.20	3.73	3.0867	.39238
Fear of Negative Evaluation	20	1.50	4.33	2.9583	.77020

Based on the data obtained, it is obvious that Test Anxiety is high across all the levels; however, it is highest among the students in Level 104 (3.0867) which has the highest level of proficiency among the samples. Contributing factors to this high value are students in this level are faced with a higher level of difficulty in test where their reading passages are more complex and they are required to produce a lengthier essay with the same amount of as the other levels. This is then followed by the group of students with the lowest proficiency among the samples, Level 102 (3.0567). Major contributing factor to this value is the lack of language proficiency. Interestingly, the group of students that showed the lower value is the sample from Level 103 (2.6800). This could be due to their good performance in their mid-term test compared to other levels which did not do as well; hence, this has boost their ego and decreased their test anxiety.

The group with the lowest proficiency, Level 102, showed the highest value of Communication Apprehension with the value of 2.9667, whereas Level 103 showed the lowest value with the value of 2.6800. Lack of language proficiency could be highest contributor to the reason why Level 102 has the highest value in Communication Apprehension. This is because the lack of knowledge of the language may cause the students to be shy or become uncertain when using the language. On the contrary, the students in Level 103 may have already adjusted themselves in using the language and become more motivated in using the language.

On the component of Fear of Negative Evaluation, both Level 102 and Level 104 showed a significantly similar values with values of 2.9000 for Level 102 and 2.9583 for Level 104. These are higher compared to Level 103 with the value of 2.4250.

Surprisingly, looking at all the values of the three components across the levels, Level 103 has the lowest values in all the components. As mentioned in the above discussion, Level 103 may have shown lower values due to their good results in the mid-term test. This shows that good test result could indeed lower the level of foreign language classroom anxiety in all the three aspects.

4. Conclusion

This research focused on the level of foreign language classroom anxiety between students of different genders and also different level of English proficiency. Based on the data presented above, female China Chinese students undergoing the Laureate English Programme are found to suffer from a higher level of foreign language classroom anxiety in all three categories (communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation). This shows that male China Chinese undergoing the same programme in the same environment are not as affected by such anxiety significantly. The students in general exhibits an average level of anxiety when it comes to using the language in smaller group discussions or activities, whereas they, especially the female students, show a more reserved attitude when it comes to using the language on their own for either presentations or answering the teacher's questions. This reserved attitude is very much prominent when these students are not prepared or are randomly selected to participate. This implies that though students may have the necessary skills to participate in the classroom activities, they will inevitably feel more nervous and anxious when they are not given ample time to formulate their responses or are to answer to the teacher.

Since this was a small scale study, the questionnaire's results cannot be generalized as the sample (N = 60) selected cannot represent the entire population at large. The study also faced limitation in the sense other aspects such as students' age, results, achievements, parental and peer support, motivation and learning environment. For future research, it is advisable that a larger sample is collected and the age of the participants as well as their motivation is taken into account.

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