

Anxiety and Student Attitudes: Why me teacher?

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Abstract: Anxiety is one of the major factors that affect foreign language teaching. Accordingly, the role of anxiety in foreign language teaching and its nature is especially important for foreign language teaching researchers. Nevertheless, despite the numerous studies carried out in the field for about three decades, the relation between anxiety and gender still remains an issue in need of clarification. What is more, the relation between anxiety and foreign language learning achievement is also another ambiguous issue with its mostly positive but occasionally negative findings. Therefore, the aim of the current study was to make a contribution to the literature with a clear-cut projection via investigating the relation between students' foreign language classroom anxiety levels, and their gender as well as their achievements. The participants of the study were the third-year students of the English Language and Literature Department of Selçuk University. Horwitz's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was distributed to the third-year students in Oral Communication II course and, then their anxiety levels were juxtaposed with their gender differences and their achievement scores respectively. The results indicated unusual findings that are expected to serve new benefits for the interests of foreign language teaching researchers.

Keywords: Anxiety, Foreign Language Teaching, Individual Differences

Kaygı ve Öğrenci Tutumları: Neden Ben Hocam?

Öz: Kaygı yabancı dil öğretimini etkileyen başlıca faktörlerden biridir. Böylelikle, kaygının yabancı dil eğitimindeki rolü ve doğası yabancı dil öğretimi araştırmacıları için özellikle önemlidir. Bununla beraber, aşağı yukarı son kırk beş senedir alanda gerçekleştirilmiş olan çok sayıdaki çalışmaya rağmen, kaygı ve cinsiyet arasındaki ilişki açıklanmaya ihtiyaç duyan bir konu olarak durmaktadır. Dahası, kaygı ile yabancı dil öğrenimindeki başarı arasındaki ilişki de çoğunlukla pozitif ama zaman zaman negatif bulgularıyla bir diğer muğlak konudur. Böylelikle, mevcut çalışmanın amacı öğrencilerin yabancı dil sınıf kaygısı seviyeleri ile başarılarının yanısıra cinsiyetleri arasındaki ilişkiyi araştırmak yoluyla literatüre açık bir projeksiyon sağlayarak katkıda bulunmak olmuştur. Çalışmanın katılımcıları Selçuk Üniversitesinin İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümünün üçüncü sınıf öğrencileridir. Horwitz'e (1986) ait olan Yabancı Dil Sınıf İçi Kaygı Ölçeği Sözlü İletişim II dersinde üçüncü sınıf öğrencilerine dağıtılmış ve ardından kaygı seviyeleri, sırasıyla cinsiyet farklılıkları ve başarı notları ile karşılaştırılmıştır. Sonuçlar, yabancı dil öğretimi araştırmacılarının ilgisine yeni kazanımlar sağlayabileceği düşünülen, sıra dışı bulgular göstermiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kaygı, Yabancı Dil Eğitimi, Bireysel Farklılıklar

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I. Introduction

First identified by Kierkegaard (Kierkegaard, 1847/1957) with a clear-cut definition that distinguishes it from fear, the concept of anxiety has been a case of discussion for social and educational psychology circles (Freud, 1920; Tillich, 1952; Berthold-Bond, 1995; Magrini, 2006).

Correspondingly, foreign language teaching researchers have paid much attention to its role and source as it is acknowledged to be one of the most significant affective variables in learning a foreign language. Indeed, anxiety has long been on the agenda as the primary factor that affect language learning aside from cognitive, meta-cognitive and individual differences, as well as other affective factors (Skehan, 1989; Tallon, 2009). To be more precise, for about three decades researchers investigate either the effects of anxiety on language acquisition or its source (Liu & Chen, 2015). Thus, while a group of researchers followed a deep focus on its effects on language teaching (Elkhafaifi, 2005), some others sought potential sources for anxiety (Young, 1991a; Vogely, 1998; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley, 1999; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). At this juncture, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Elaine K. Horwitz, Michael B. Horwitz, and Joann Cope is acknowledged to be a threshold as it was the first reliable and valid criterion to measure the students' anxiety level on a stable plane (Wu, 2010). Following this scale many researchers realized various studies regarding four skills-reading, writing, listening, speaking- (Sellers, 2000; Cheng, 2002; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Phillips, 1992). Yet, although today foreign language researchers are capable of labeling foreign language anxiety (FLA) as a kind of situation specific anxiety which falls into one of the three categories – trait, state, and situation specific – devised by Spilberger (1966), foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA) still seems to be quite different a case which is in need of further scientific investigation.

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

Q1. *Is there a statistically significant relation between the students' FLCA levels, and their gender?*

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

II. Literature Review

A direct association between anxiety and foreign language learning was repeatedly reported in various 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). This association is acknowledged to be negative in its true nature (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) although there is little if any evidence the other way round (Kleinmann, 1977; Bailey, 1983; Young, 1986; Mills, Pajares & Herron, 2006; Oxford & Ehrman, 1995; Lian & Budin, 2014).

More recently, it is possible to examine anxiety in terms of its relation with four skills of language teaching; reading (Saito, Horwitz & Garza, 1999; Sellers, 2000; Brantmeier, 2005; Rajab, Zakaria, Rahman, Hosni & Hassani, 2013; Javanbakht, & Hadian, 2014), writing (Daly & Miller, 1975; Wu, 1992; Bruning & Horn, 2000; Schweiker-Marra & Marra, 2000; Hassan, 2001; DeDeyn, 2011; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Kara, 2013; Yastibaş & Yastibaş, 2015), listening (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), and speaking (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).

It is the most reliable prognostic when performance is concerned (Hill & Wigfield, 1984; Saito & Samimy, 1996; Marcos-Llinás & Garau, 2009; MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012). The association between performance and anxiety contributes to two types of anxiety; beneficial or inhibitory (Alpert and Haber, 1960; Oxford, 1999; Dörnyei, 2005), which, therefore, can also be interpreted as coexisting states of mind (Scovel, 1978).

III.Methodology

The aim of this study is to explore the role of students' anxiety on their achievement. 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 determine any relation of their FLCA levels with their gender and achievement scores.

A.Participants of the Study

The number of the participants in the present study was 146. Usually, the majority of the English Language and Literature Department usually consist of female students. Therefore, the majority of the participants were females (n=93). Prior to their admission to the department, it is obligatory that the students of the program be successful in a placement test that justifies their level of proficiency regarding English. Thus, the participants of the current study were all acknowledged to be proficient in English albeit their label of non-native speakers. All in all, all of the participants were supposed to be almost at the same proficiency level.

B.Data Collection

The data of the present study were obtained through Horwitz's FLCAS. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used to determine any possible association of the students' attitudes towards their foreign language anxiety and their achievement scores.

C.The Questionnaire

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.

D.Procedure

The third-year students attended Oral Communication II course for a period of 14 weeks before the distribution of the questionnaire. During the first day of the course, the lecturer informed the students that they are supposed to feel free to commit mistakes in their own way of speaking the foreign language. In this sense, through implicit feedback the lecturer followed a more compromising tone in each class, which made the students feel more confident and fervent to participate in the conversations. Additional instant and concise contextual grammar revisions applied where necessary enabled the students to overcome their grammar gap which impeded their fluency in conversation. Still, these grammar revisions were just like reminders provided in a conversation tone rather than long boring explicit grammar lessons. Also, an additional self-study guide-book for developing their academic vocabulary in a contextual form was recommended by the lecturer. The purpose of the book was explained to the students as a source to meet their needs for the new vocabulary which they would utilize in the lesson or at least a source that would help in decoding the academic patterns their lecturer employed during academic conversations. Above all, the most important issue was to create a constructivist environment in each lesson so that the students would feel free to participate in each conversation with a reduced level of anxiety.

Ultimately, 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. Having been answered by the students, all of the questionnaires were returned to the researcher without any loss.

E.Data Analysis

The data analysis of the current study was realized using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0. Since the original scale was constructed for a well-known previous study carried out by one of the choice experts in the field, neither the reliability nor the validity of the scale were additionally verified through statistical procedures. The statistical results attained from the study are all submitted in the tables with the abbreviations: 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)).

III.Results

1.Q1. Is there a statistically significant relation between the students' FLCA levels, and their gender?

Table 1. reveals no significant correlation between the students' gender and FLCA levels (m= 2.96 for males; m= 3.09 for females). The similar mean values of the two groups indicate minor difference between the male and the female students. This indicates no significant correlation between the students' FLCA levels and their gender.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics for FLCA levels and Gender

Gender of the Participants	N	Mean	Std. D.	Std. Err. Mean
Male	52	2.96	0.37	0.05
Female	93	3.09	0.41	0.04

As the variances of males and females are checked by Levene's Test for Equality of Variances, Table 2 reveals no diversity between the two groups with a p value=0.37 which falls in the limits of the confidence interval with a higher value than p=0.05. Then, the t-test for Equality of Means gives a similar p value=0.65 which again falls in 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 gender.

Table 2. t-test for two Independent Samples in terms of Gender

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Err. Diff.	95% Con. Inter. Diff.	
Equal variances assumed	0.78	0.37	-1.86	143	0.65	-.12	0.69	Lower	Upper
								-.26	0.007
Equal variances not assumed			-1.91	113.97	0.59	-.12	0.67	-.26	0.004

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

Table 3. reveal similar mean values for successful and unsuccessful students (m= 3.05 for successful students; m= 2.96 for unsuccessful students) with a slight difference, which indicates no significant correlation between the students' FLCA levels and their achievement.

Table3. Descriptive Statistics for FLCA levels and Achievement

	Successful / Unsuccessful	N	Mean	Std. D.	Std. Err. Mean
Attitudes Mean	Successful	135	3.05	0.41	0.03
	Unsuccessful	11	2.96	0.29	0.08

When Levene's Test for Equality of Variances in Table 4 is checked, no significant difference is noticed between the variances of two groups in terms of achievement (Sig. value= 0.16). Then the t-test for Equality of Means becomes necessary to test the H_0 – null hypothesis- that assumes no relation between the students' FLCA levels and their achievement. Since the Sig. (2-tailed) value (0.45) is greater than p value=0.05, the H_0 hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, no significant correlation is determined between the students' FLCA levels and their achievement.

Table 4. t-test for two Independent Samples regarding FLCA levels and Achievement

Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	t-test for Equality of Means								
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.	Std. Err. Diff.	95% Con. Inter. Diff.	
Equal variances assumed	1.98	0.16	-0.75	144	0.45	-0.09	0.12	Lower	Upper
								-0.34	0.15
Equal variances not assumed			-1.006	13.42	0.33	-0.09	0.09	-0.30	0.10

IV. Discussion

The findings of the present study revealed no correlation between students' gender and their FLCA levels, which indicates both genders suffer from foreign language classroom anxiety almost at the same level. This situation appears to be both consistent and inconsistent with the findings in the literature in that the correlation between gender and FLCA still seems to be a controversial issue due to research supporting both its existence and non-existence (Salim, 2004; Çağatay, 2015). While a body of research suggests gender's direct correlation with anxiety (Dörnyei & Shoaib, 2005; Csizer, & Dörnyei, 2005; Awan, Azher, Anwar & Naz, 2010; Wu, 2010; Tsai, 2013), others appear to report no significant correlation between these variables (Matsuda & Gobel, 2003; Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Hashwani, 2008; Tianjian, 2010; Heng, Abdullah and Yosaf,

2012; Luo, 2013; Zhao & Whitchurch, 2011). Yet, it seems not clear which gender suffers from FLCA more. While there is research asserting higher anxiety levels for females (Bensoussan & Zeidner, 1989; Awan, Azher, Anwar, & Naz, 2010), there is also research reporting higher anxiety levels for males (Mejías, Applebaum, Applebaum & Trotter, 1991; Daly, Kreiser, & Rogharr, 1994; Wu, 2010, Çağatay, 2015). Hence, the current study is supposed to provide new data for the relation between gender and FLCA.

The present study detected no correlation between students' achievement and their anxiety levels. This situation exposes a controversial situation when compared to previous research in the literature (Hill & Wigfield, 1984; Petridou & Williams, 2007; Kao & Craigie, 2010; Zhao & Whitchurch, 2011, Luo, 2013). Although similar results are existent in the literature (Çubukçu, 2008; Uzun, 2016), the findings of these studies do not precisely match with the current one. While the findings of Çubukçu reveal no significant correlation of anxiety and self-efficacy levels of foreign language students, the focal point of Uzun's study is the correlation between students' anxiety levels and self-directed learning readiness in language learning. Thus, it is hardly probable to associate the findings of the current study to those of previous ones in the literature.

V.Limitations and Conclusion

It is necessary that the present study be taken into assessment within two main limitations concerning its foundations.

First and foremost, the current study is based on a Likert scale, and statistically speaking, Likert scales are ordinal scales which are substituted for interval scales by social scientists. This situation is so prevalent that researchers most often disregard the fact that it would be more stable to use such scales for descriptive statistics instead of inferential ones. All the same, the current study depends on inferential statistics, and therefore, the findings of the study may not monitor the results at an utmost precision.

Second, the findings of the present study should be taken into account in terms of EFL environment only. The results of the same study may turn out to be more or less different in terms of anxiety in an ESL environment very similar to the results Luo reached investigating U.S. heritage learners with Chinese background (2013).

Ultimately, within the aforementioned limitations, the uncommon results of the current study are expected to serve new benefits for the field literature especially in regard to the relation between anxiety and achievement.

Also, the present study would have new implications for further studies in that the impact of individual differences such as age and gender on anxiety levels in different content-based courses or achievement levels vs. anxiety levels for different age groups of students attending content-based courses would be new cases in dealing with foreign language classroom anxiety.

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