

Investigating the effect of language anxiety of secondary English language learners on online interactions from the perspective of language learning centers in Tehran

Farnosh cosedghi

Affiliation : Times New Roman 8 pt bold (centered)

Email@daneshpajooohan.ac.ir Times New Roman 10 pt

Second Author Times New Roman 10 pt bold (centered)

Affiliation : Times New Roman 8 pt bold (centered)

Email@daneshpajooohan.ac.ir

Third Author Times New Roman 10 pt bold (centered)

Affiliation : Times New Roman 8 pt bold (centered)

Email@daneshpajooohan.ac.ir

Abstract

This study was conducted with the aim of investigating the opinion of Iranian secondary English language learners about language anxiety. To achieve the goals of this research, 180 secondary English language learners were selected from Aref Language Institute and Ishraq Language Institute in Tehran. Skill level was determined by OPT. They participated in five virtual test sessions twice a week through WhatsApp and answered one of the mentioned questionnaires in each session and sent their answer sheet as soon as they finished. In data analysis, steps were applied. First, the questionnaire was distributed to the participants through WhatsApp. Second, after they finished answering the questionnaires, their answers were collected through WhatsApp. Then the quantitative data was processed and the results of the questionnaire were presented as a percentage. Thirdly, the telephone discussion was conducted and recorded. Fourth, group discussion transcripts were analyzed and compared with quantitative data. The goal was to find out if the qualitative data supported the quantitative data. Regression analysis was used to analyze the data and to evaluate the strength of the relationships between the variables. A mixed design was used to conduct this research. That is, this study collected qualitative data as well as quantitative data. The study concluded that anxiety may increase because students may feel that other students speak English better than them. In some cases, learners were afraid that other students would laugh at them when they spoke. In addition, some of them may worry about their English grammar problems and the quality of the teacher's correction. Learners who had more experience in challenging tasks were more willing to learn new interesting and useful things. According to the results of the research, most of the learners will be able to solve their problems if they put in the necessary effort and rely on their coping abilities, but most of them did not have enough motivation to do so.

Keywords: Language anxiety, mixed-methods design



19th International Conference on

Language , Literature ,
Culture and History Studies

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1-Introduction

Language learning should prepare learners to use the target language communicatively (McIntyre, 1996). According to Peng (2012), student participation is inexorably applauded in a communicative language class. Yet, the extent to which classroom interaction is successful may rest on the degree of students' willingness to speak the target language. Second language (L2) learners' willingness to communicate (WTC) has been extensively researched recently (McIntyre & Doucette, 2010; Cao, 2011). There is an unassailable presumption that students' active and meaningful participation is necessary for learning a language (Gas, 2003). Also, some researchers have concluded that the ultimate goal of language instruction should be the correction of WTC in the language learning process (McIntyre, 2003). The construct of anxiety is often believed to be the affective factor with the greatest potential to pervasively affect the learning process (Horwitz, 2001). Social anxiety is defined as "a state of anxiety resulting from the prospect or presence of interpersonal evaluation in real or imagined social settings" (Leary, 1983, p. 67). Social anxiety is a milder form of a social phobia that can have debilitating symptoms for people who are faced with social situations. The symptoms of social anxiety often include anxiety, depression, and an overall uncomfortable feeling that affect one's ability to interact in social situations. Individuals are often motivated by a need to feel a sense of belonging (Baumeister & Leary, 1995); however, those with social anxiety may find it difficult to fulfill this social need because of their fear of face-to-face interactions and may, therefore, turn to the Internet. For socially anxious individuals, the Internet and other socially interactive technologies (text messaging) can have both positive and negative results (Pierce, 2009).

The importance of learners' attitudes towards language anxiety has been highlighted in recent research. For example, the importance of paying attention to language anxiety is emphasized by researchers working from a socio-cultural theoretical perspective. From this perspective, learners are viewed as active agents (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006) who assign relevance and significance to things and events in their life. Moreover, earlier models of motivation just focused on forces operating at the macro level (e.g., integrative or instrumental orientation); the more recent process model (Dörnyei & Otto, 1998) focuses on situation-specific forces which can better explain learner behavior observed in the classroom. The study conducted by Dörnyei and Kormos (2002) in British and Hungarian classes found that students' engagement in classroom oral activities (measured by a number of words and turns) correlated significantly with attitudes towards the language tasks they were asked to perform.

Moreover, the early studies on language anxiety, have tended to rely on data collected at one point in time. These collected data are often achieved through a single instrument (i.e. one questionnaire); thus, they just consider the quantitative method. Thus, it is important to shed more light on mixed-methods (quantitative and qualitative methods).

- Purpose of the Study

- The importance of identifying various factors affecting learners language anxiety. serves as useful tools that can be used inside the classrooms and because the affective factors play a crucial role for higher educational level learners, they need to be more familiar with factors affecting their anxiety. Many recent researches indicate the importance of learners' familiarity with these affecting factors in the classroom context (micro level). On the other hand, other researches show the importance of learners' familiarity with these affecting factors in their lives and wider social contexts (macro level). Therefore, there has been a controversy over the more effective way of focusing on life context versus classroom context. Also, there are many studies that were conducted concerning life context, and its affecting factors on anxiety. Finally, the present study attempts to expand the current understanding of classroom context and how it affects anxiety.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate language anxiety, among intermediate EFL learners in face-to-face and online interactions from learners' viewpoints. Therefore, the following research question are addressed:

Q: What are learners' views about language anxiety in face-to-face and online interactions?

2-Review of Literature

Most often, anxiety is defined as "an unpleasant emotional state or condition which is characterized by subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, and worry" (Spielberger, 1972, p. 482). Anxiety as a state varies in individuals and can change in intensity over time. On the other hand, anxiety is also referred to as a personal trait that is relatively stable (Spielberger, 1972).

Trait anxiety manifests itself in many different circumstances, which means that a person with a high level of trait anxiety might experience it in a variety of situations (McIntyre & Gardner, 1991). In addition, as an alternative to state anxiety, a situation-specific type of anxiety has been identified (McIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Spielberger et al., 1976). Situation-specific anxiety refers to anxiety experienced in well-defined situations like public speaking, a math class, and tests (Spielberger et al., 1976); In other words, it is "limited to a given context" (McIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 90). Foreign language anxiety, however, as a unique type of anxiety was not defined until the

mid-1980s. Horwitz et al. (1986) conceptualized foreign language anxiety and considered it a situation-specific, not trait-specific anxiety.

Richards (2010) believes that foreign language anxiety may be situation-specific. Anxiety is similar in that respect to public speaking anxiety. Furthermore, McIntyre (1999) defined language anxiety as the apprehension experienced when a situation requires the use of a second language with which the individual is not fully proficient. It refers to the propensity for an individual to react nervously when speaking, listening, reading, or writing in a second language. Foreign language anxiety is the feeling of tension, fear, and apprehension associated with such foreign language contexts as speaking, listening, and learning.

Foreign language anxiety is different from the other academic subjects' types of anxiety because "no other field of study implicates self-concept and self-expression to the degree that language study does" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128). Thus, the researchers defined foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 128).

Three components related to foreign language anxiety were identified by Horwitz et al. (1986): communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension is categorized as a type of anxiety about communicating with another person (Horwitz et al., 1986). Test anxiety is connected to a fear of failure while being assessed (Horwitz et al., 1986). Finally, fear of negative evaluation is defined as "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and the expectation that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Bollinge, 2017).

Moreover, Young (1990) listed six potential factors of foreign language anxiety- personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language testing. There are different factors influencing the anxiety level of learners in classroom performances. These factors fall into two general categories: individual and environmental. In the individual category, factors have been used such as gender, age, computer experience (Potosy, 2002), computer self-efficacy (Chen et al., 2000), and goal orientation (Brown, 2001). This research seeks to examine several environmental factors which affect learners' levels of anxiety. The second factor, anxiety has been included in technology research since the 1980s (Martin, McCaughy, Kulinna, Cothran, & Faust, 2008; Weil, Rosen, & Sears, 1987). Social Learning Theory suggests that repeated computer exposure without the benefit of anxiety-reducing mechanisms would cause a feedback loop that could result in higher and higher levels of anxiety (Marakas et al., 1998). Some scholars note that anxiety management techniques can be used to control such anxiety (Bloom & Hautaluoma, 1990; Weil et al., 1987). Identifying the anxiety management techniques that can be implemented in the educational setting would certainly be of benefit to the educator (Hauser et al., 2012). According to Hasan and Ahmed (2012), technology anxiety is a negative emotional response, such as fear or discomfort that people experience when they think about using or using technology (Jon-Chao et al., 2012). Anxiety, which is considered a personality and behavioral factor, operates as a stimulus-response (SR) phenomenon. The fear of a particular object or situation is a direct outcome of a certain influencing element or stimulus. Stimulus Response Theory is a concept in psychology that refers to the belief that behavior manifests as a result of the interplay between stimulus and response (Brandford & Umar, 2018).

have investigated the effects of language anxiety on WTC. For example, Pierce (2009) examined the Social anxiety and technology in face-to-face communication versus technological communication among teens. This study examined teens' use of socially interactive technologies (SITs), such as online social sites, cell phones/text messaging, and instant messaging (IM), and the role that social anxiety plays on how teens communicate with others (technologically or face-to-face). Participants included 280 high school students from a large western city. On average, 35–40% of teens reported using cell phones/text messaging and online social sites between one and four hours daily, 24% reported using IMs one to four hours daily and only 8% reported using email between one and four hours daily. In assessing social anxiety, analyses revealed a positive relationship between social anxiety (not comfortable talking with others face-to-face) and (1) talking with others online and (2) talking with others via text messaging. In contrast, there was a positive relationship between the lack of social anxiety (feeling "comfortable" talking with others) and making friends online. Assessing gender differences and social anxiety also revealed significant differences. Results revealed females reported more social anxiety (not comfortable talking with others in person) than did males. In addition, females, more than males, reported feeling more comfortable using SITs (text messaging and online social sites only) rather than talking with others in face-to-face manner.

In another study, Baralt and Weiss (2011) compared learners' state anxiety during task-based interaction in computer-mediated and face-to-face communication. This research aimed to investigate for the first time social connectedness derived from the use of Facebook. The first study investigated whether offline social connectedness and Facebook connectedness were separate constructs. Participants were Facebook users (N = 344) who completed measures of offline social connectedness and Facebook social connectedness. Factor analysis (Maximum Likelihood analysis with Oblimin rotation) revealed Facebook connectedness to be distinct from offline social connectedness. The second study examined the relationship between Facebook social connectedness and anxiety, depression, and subjective well-being in a second sample of Facebook users (N = 274) in a cross-sectional design. Results suggested

that Facebook use may provide the opportunity to develop and maintain social connectedness in the online environment and that Facebook connectedness is associated with lower depression and anxiety and greater satisfaction with life.

Furthermore, Gembeck et al. (2021) investigated face-to-face and cyber-victimization: a longitudinal study of offline appearance anxiety and online appearance preoccupation. The participants of this study were 650 adolescents aged 15 to 19 years (M age = 17.3 years, 59% female) who completed two surveys over one year. Correlations identified both forms of victimization as associated with offline appearance anxiety and online appearance preoccupation. Yet, in a structural equation model, face-to-face peer victimization, but not cyber-victimization, was uniquely associated with increased offline appearance anxiety and online appearance preoccupation from T1 to T2. Offline appearance anxiety and online appearance preoccupation strongly covaried and were bidirectionally associated over time. Female gender and age were associated with more anxiety and preoccupation. When gender moderation was tested, only the stability in appearance anxiety was moderated, with greater stability in females than males. Overall, offline and online appearance anxieties are highly interrelated and share a common risk factor in face-to-face appearance-related victimization by peers.

Moreover, Shalom (2015) investigated social anxiety and physiological arousal during computer-mediated vs. face-to-face communication. Although survey results suggest that socially anxious individuals may use computer mediated communication (CMC) differently from others and feel differently about CMC relative to face to face (FTF) communication, little is known about their experience during CMC. Using an experimental interaction task, we assessed ($N = 73$) high and low social anxiety participants during CMC and FTF. In addition to self-reported social anxiety, arousal, and perception of success and control, we assessed heart rate and skin conductance which are physiological indices of arousal. Both CMC and FTF interaction tasks were associated with significant increases in physiological arousal compared to baseline. Although subjective anxiety and arousal were higher in FTF compared to CMC, physiological arousal showed no significant differences across conditions. An interaction effect was found for perceived success those who were high in social anxiety perceived greater success in CMC than in FTF while those who were low in social anxiety showed no differences across conditions.

In addition, Bervell and Umar (2020) investigated "Blended learning or face-to-face. They tried to explain whether tutor anxiety prevents the adoption of learning management systems for distance education in Ghana or not. Learning Management System (LMS) which has enabled blended learning has been adopted by higher educational institutions for promoting accessible and effective pedagogical practices. The introduction of this mode of learning has altered traditional face-to-face interaction. However, the lack of actual usage and online presence by instructors in an LMS-enabled blended learning environment seems to be a major setback for its success. Consequently, LMS-related anxiety has been cited as one of the behavioral challenges hindering its usage in Africa. Hence, this paper is focused on unraveling the antecedents of tutors' anxiety toward actual LMS usage based on a Technology Related Stimulus-Response Theoretical Framework (TR-SR-TF). Because of this, the study employed a survey design, adopting a questionnaire as a data collection instrument from 267 distance education tutors across study centers within Ghana. The results from Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) technique revealed three underlying factors determining LMS anxiety, namely; colleague influence, outcome expectation and use support. However, the result of the Importance Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) showed that colleague influence was the most important indicator while outcome expectation was the highest performance indicator of tutors' LMS-related anxiety. The study recommended that such factors as colleague influence, outcome expectation and use support should be consciously addressed to reduce (if not eliminate) anxiety towards LMS use for blended learning.

Furthermore, Weidman et al. (2012) investigated compensatory internet use among individuals higher in social anxiety and its implications for well-being. The social compensation hypothesis states that the internet primarily benefits individuals who feel uncomfortable communicating in face-to-face situations. In this research, the researchers tested whether individuals higher in social anxiety use the internet as a compensatory social medium and whether such use is associated with greater well-being. In Study 1, individuals higher in social anxiety reported greater feelings of comfort and self-disclosure when socializing online than less socially anxious individuals, but reported less self-disclosure when communicating face-to-face. However, in Study 2, social anxiety was associated with lower quality of life and higher depression most strongly for individuals who communicated frequently online. The results suggest that, whereas social anxiety may be associated with using the internet as an alternative to face-to-face communication, such a strategy may result in poorer well-being.

3-Methodology

This study employed mixed-methods design. Dens com be (2007) defines mixed method strategy as one that uses both qualitative and quantitative methods in research. The quantitative data are taken by distributing the questionnaire to the participants. Then, there is a follow-up interview with the informants which is interpreted as qualitative data.

Initially, 180 EFL male and female participants at the intermediate level of proficiency, aged between 16-18, enrolled in the study. Participants were selected from the language institution which are located in BOSHEHR Iran.

To ensure participants' homogeneity in terms of proficiency level, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered. Those who happened to obtain a score between 37-47 were chosen to take part in this study.

The instruments employed in the study included Oxford Placement Test as a proficiency test, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

The proficiency test was administered to measure the participants' level of proficiency to ensure the homogeneity of the sample. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was also administered to measure the extent of participants' anxiety in face-to-face and online interactions.

To assure the homogeneity of participants, they were given the Oxford Placement Test (OPT). Due to the scores obtained from OPT, the participants who obtained 37-47 were selected as intermediate learners

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

The instrument that was used to measure language anxiety is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz, and Cope (1986) and the Anxometer (Macintyre, 1991). The reliability and validity of this questionnaire have been corroborated by Horwitz. It is a widely used questionnaire in data collection relating to language anxiety. It consists of 33 items on a five-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 "never true of me" and 5 "always true of me". By using this questionnaire, the participants will choose the item based on their opinions.

4-Results

Table 1 presents the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS).

Table 1; *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)*

Based 4.1, the	Questions	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Very often	Always	on Table largest
	1	2.5%	5%	14.17%	62.5%	15.83%	
	2	15%	8.33%	42.5%	31.67%	2.5%	
	3	85%	0%	5%	3.33%	6.67%	
	4	1.67%	0%	3.33%	5.83%	89.17%	
	5	11.67%	50%	21.67%	13.33%	3.33%	
	6	6.67%	3.33%	50%	31.67%	8.33%	
	7	29.17%	0%	7.5%	52.5%	10.83%	
	8	35%	6.67%	21.67%	20.83%	15.83%	

percentage is shown in item number four on a five-point Likert scale. There were 89.17% of the learners agree that they are afraid the other students will laugh at them when they speak English. Meanwhile, the next largest percentage is reached by the third item. There were 80% of learners agreed that they don't feel good when they have to speak English in front of their classmates.

In order to determine the mean and standard deviation, a descriptive analysis was performed on the data, the result of which is shown in Table 1.

Table 2 :Average, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores obtained related to research variables

Maximum score	Maximum score obtained	Maximum score	Deviation	Average	standard
۱۳۲	۱۲۷	۴	۲۱/۱۳	۵۸/۷۶	language anxiety

Language learners' views on language anxiety in face-to-face and online interactions

According to the results of the observation of language learners about language anxiety in face-to-face and online interactions, it was concluded that most of them feel that they lose their confidence when they present their answers in the classroom. They become nervous and uncomfortable in class because sometimes they get worried because of English grammar problems and teachers' feedback. Therefore, some learners try to hide behind active students in the class and avoid speaking in front of their classmates.

5-Discussion

The experiences of the EFL learners influence their anxiety, in face-to-face and online interactions. Many studies on L2 anxiety suggest that a high level of anxiety is associated with low-class participation and low motivation (e.g.,

Cle'ment et al., 1994). The purpose of this research was to seek the Iranian intermediate learners' attitudes towards anxiety, motivation, self-efficacy, and WTC in both online and face-to-face mediums.

-Research question

What are learners' views about language anxiety in face-to-face and online interactions? According to the questionnaire's result, in item number three, don't feel good when they have to speak in front of their classmates because them, according to item number four, agreed that they are afraid the other students will laugh at them when they are speaking. Also, most of them in item number one, expressed that they feel other students speak English better than they do; thus, based on what they admitted in item number two, they often feel that they lose their confidence and get nervous when they provide their answers in the classroom; Accordingly, they stated in items number six, seven, and eight that they are not comfortable in class because they sometimes get worried because of their English grammar problems and the of teacher feedback. Besides, through the interview results, it was also found that some of the learners try to hide behind the active students in the classroom and avoid speaking in front of their classmates.

6- Conclusions

The present study aimed to figure out the Iranian intermediate EFL learners' views about language anxiety, motivation, self-efficacy, and willingness to communicate. The result of this study shows that anxiety may have been raised communicate in face-to-face and online interactions? because students may feel that the other students speak English better than they do. In some cases, learners are also afraid that other students will laugh at them when they speak. Moreover, some of them get worried about their English grammar problems and teacher correction. Many related studies have been conducted in the past decades. These studies on L2 anxiety suggest that a high level of anxiety is associated with low-class participation and low motivation (e.g., Cle'ment et al., 1994). In brief, the environment generates such high anxiety. Thus, anxiety is a context-bund phenomenon. When learners' anxiety decreases, their ability to assess themselves more accurately increases. According to Le'gera and Storch (2009), small group discussions are often seen as a means of reducing learners' performance anxiety and providing greater opportunities for communicative interactions. Yet research by Cao and Philp (2006) suggests that not all learners prefer small group work to whole class discussion. Some learners reported that they enjoyed speaking French with their peers in small group discussions, as it brought a more relaxed and informal kind of interaction, whilst others felt that it was awkward .

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