

Teacher's Perspective Toward Students' Foreign Language Anxiety In Efl Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This research looks at teachers' perspectives or suppositions on language anxiety, particularly in the matter of how they have seen and managed students' language anxiety in their actual teaching practices. In reference to the characteristic features of student anxiety reported in the relevant literature This research additionally talks about the teachers' perspectives as far as whether there are any gaps or inconsistencies with the students' affective needs in language classroom. In this sense, this research can be considered as an endeavor to give some elective bits of knowledge into language anxiety from a different point of view. Similar to the interview study by Young (1992) concerning the points of view of language specialists (Krashen, Omagio, Terrell, and Rardin) on language anxiety, this research likewise utilizes a qualitative in-depth interview format to examine the two experienced EFL teachers' viewpoints on the circumstance. As the interview result show, a considerable lot of the records from the participants appear to for the most part validate the discoveries offered by past research on language anxiety, however there are likewise a few contrasts or gaps between the teachers' and students' point of view on the part of tension in the EFL classroom context.

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INTRODUCTION

The broad utilization of English language globally has put EFL students on a challenging tract of gaining effective communicational abilities. This test is delineated as an ensured 'transitional experience' inside advanced education and consequent accomplishment in the activity advertise. anxiety that is related with taking in an EFL is alluded to as language anxiety (LA). LA is a psychological develop specific to language learning and can be described as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, convictions, and behaviors identified with classroom language learning taking in emerging from the uniqueness Cohen and Norst, 1989). In any case, anxiety research from different perspectives, for

of the language learning process" (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). For teachers, the difficulties are showed in the capacity of teachers to advance a tranquil learning condition that causes in students an enthusiasm for taking in an EFL. From a hypothetical perspective, this is definitely not a basic errand to grasp. possible gaps between the teachers' perspectives or To date, language anxiety has been examined for the most part from the learners' point of assumptions on view, giving a great deal of experiences into the idea of tension that they may feel in language learning and achievement (e.g., Bailey1983; Koch and Terrell, 1991; Price, 1991; example, those of teachers, still remains to be addressed completely, particularly with regards

to the students' anxiety and the students' effective psychological needs (Young, 1992). For instance, the students' endeavors to manage their anxiety by utilizing different sorts of emotional procedures either deliberately or unknowingly may not generally be showed in their evident practices in the classroom with the goal that the instructor can without much of a stretch notice (Ehrman, 1996). As a result of such a secretive nature of students' anxiety, the educator's evaluation on the students' anxiety probably won't be coordinated with the students' real mental state. Therefore, such perceptual holes between the educator and students in the EFL classroom may be in charge of bringing about additional tension among understudies.

This study, thus, examines the teachers' viewpoints on the issue of language anxiety, especially as to how they have perceived and dealt with student anxiety in their actual teaching practices. In reference to the characteristic features of student anxiety reported in the relevant literature, this study also discusses the teachers' viewpoints by focusing on whether there are any gaps or discrepancies with the students' affective needs in the language classroom.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign language anxiety (FLA) is one such unique type of anxiety. There is a considerable body of research indicating that foreign language anxiety is not merely an abstract construct studied by theorists or by researchers under laboratory on induced anxiety conditions, but a reality for many students (e.g., Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2001; Coryell & Clark, 2009; Kostić-Bobanović, 2009; Liu, 2006; Liu & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994a; Tallon, 2009; Von Wörde, 2003). Research has shown that anxiety is not uncommon in almost all disciplines of learning. Recently, Cassady (2010) introduced the term academic anxiety as “a unifying formulation for the collection of anxieties learners experience while in schools” (p. 1). While it seems that there is some commonality in terms of the nature and consequences of anxiety, the type of anxiety triggered in and suffered by learners from each specific discipline is, to a certain extent, unique to that specific discipline.

In terms of definition, several researchers have offered definitions of foreign language anxiety. Clement (1980) defined foreign language anxiety

as a complex construct that deals with learners' psychology in terms of their feelings, self-esteem, and self-confidence. Emphasizing the distinctive feature of FLA, Young (1992) defined it as a complicated psychological phenomenon peculiar to language learning. More specifically, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) defined FLA as the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second or foreign language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning, or the worry and negative emotional reaction arousal when learning or using a second or foreign language (MacIntyre, 1999). Similarly, Zhang (2001) defined anxiety as the psychological tension that the learner goes through in performing a learning task. These definitions, in fact, are built around the claim made by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) that FLA is “a phenomenon related to but distinguishable from other specific anxieties” (p. 129). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope were the first to conceptualize FLA as a unique type of anxiety specific to EFL learning. Their theoretical model of FLA plays a vital role in language anxiety research, which has made them influential researchers in this area.

According to Horwitz and Young (1991, p. 1), there are two general approaches to identifying language anxiety; 1) language anxiety can be viewed as a transfer of other general types of anxiety (e.g. test anxiety or stage flight); 2) language anxiety occurs in response to something unique to language learning experiences. These two approaches represent different perspectives of how language anxiety can be conceptualized, and they are not necessarily taking opposing stances with each other, but the efforts of both sides are considered complementary to the mutual goal of understanding the phenomenon more thoroughly.

The first perspective views language anxiety as a manifestation of other forms of anxiety, such as test anxiety or communication apprehension in the various language learning experiences. This approach has an obvious advantage in its basic assumption that vast knowledge gained from research into other types of anxiety can be applied to explaining language anxiety as well.

Some of the early studies in this approach were mostly correlation in nature, investigating the relationship between some forms of anxiety and

language learning and performance. For example, Kleinmann (1977) and Chastain (1975) examined such relationship by focusing on test anxiety and its influence on language learning. Similarly, Daly (1991) and Mejiias, Applbaum, Applbaum, and Trotter (1991) studied the ways in which communication apprehension can operate in a second language context.

The second approach to identifying language anxiety views it as a unique type of anxiety or "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning a second language" (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 27). In the previous studies by MacIntyre and Gardner (1989, 1991b), it was found that performance in the foreign language was negatively correlated with language anxiety but not with more general forms of anxiety. That is, a total of 23 different anxiety scales were clustered into three categories of anxieties by using a statistical method called factor analysis; 1) the first category or "factor" was found to include most of the anxiety scales (i.e. measures of trait anxiety, communication apprehension, interpersonal anxiety and so on) and was then labeled "General Anxiety" or "Social Evaluation Anxiety"; 2) the second factor was found to be "State Anxiety" (e.g. novelty anxiety, the physical danger scale, etc.) and; 3) the third factor was labeled "Language Anxiety", for it was composed of two measures of French test anxiety, French use anxiety, and French classroom anxiety. Such results of factor analysis clearly indicated that language anxiety could be separated from other forms of anxiety, as evidenced by the procedure of factor analysis that specified no correlations among the factors.

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or by researchers under laboratory on induced-anxiety conditions, but a reality for many students (e.g., Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2001; Coryell & Clark, 2009; Kostić-Bobanović, 2009; Liu, 2006; Liu & Jackson, 2008; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994a; Tallon, 2009; Von Wörde, 2003).

METHOD

Similar to the interview study by Young (1992) concerning the perspectives of language specialists (Krashen, Omagio, Terrell, and Rardin) on language anxiety, this study also uses a qualitative interview format to investigate the experienced EFL teachers' perspectives on the phenomenon, especially in reference to their own experiences in the language classroom that they have perceived significant or highly relevant to the development of language anxiety among their students. The rationale behind the use of interviews as a data source is that it can provide access to things that cannot be directly observed, such as feelings, thoughts, intentions, or beliefs (Denzin, 1989; Merriam, 1998). In other words, interviews allow the researcher to obtain a special kind of information, or what is "in and on someone else's mind" (Patton, 1990, p. 278). As Seidman (1998) clearly notes, "at the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience" (p.3). Thus, the process of interviewing provides participant with opportunities to select, reconstruct, and reflect upon details of her experience within the specific context of her live.

Given that the primary goal of this study is to explore and describe experienced EFL teachers' perspectives on language anxiety, in reference to their beliefs or assumptions on language learning and teaching, interview seems quite appropriate as a way of understanding their unique perceptions and interpretations of the phenomenon. I interviewed two experienced EFL teachers. Each of the participants has a different teaching background in terms of the length of teaching, the context in which they taught English EFL, or the levels of students they taught. One of the participants is (D), an experienced EFL teacher who has a teaching background for 5 years at the eighth grade of SMP Muhammadiyah 2 Godean. Another participant is (F) who has a teaching background for 3 years at the ninth grade of Mts Ali Maksum Kranyak. For descriptive

convenience, I used pseudo-initials for each participant. Before starting the interview, the respondent had been informed about the purpose of the study and their right during the interview. Participation was voluntary and the informant was informed about this.

Interview Questions:

What's your opinion on student anxiety in EFL learning? (What sorts of part do you think anxiety play in EFL learning?)

Can you ascribe a positive perspective to anxiety?

Do EFL student encounter an equal measure of anxiety in every one of the four skill areas?

How do you see anxiety showed in your students?

What sort of measures or method do you use to decrease students' anxiety in the classroom?

How are those methods relevant with your philosophy of teaching?

Although a variety of other questions related to the interview questions above were asked, I followed those 5 questions as a framework for developing our interviews. Question 2, 3, and 4 were adapted from a similar interview study done by Young (1992, p. 158).

This interview was conducted by face-to-face in semi structured interviews method. The interviews were furthermore recorded with a hand phone recorder application to ensure that the respondent's answers were reported as accurately as possible.

This data collection method, according to Bryman (2008), offers a flexible way of obtaining information within relative boundaries. In semi-structured interviews, the focus lies on "how the interviewee frames and understands issue and events", and thus, what he/she gives most importance (p. 438). This focus relies on the flexibility of the semi structured interview: questions are relatively open-ended to allow different replies, and there is opportunity to ask respondents follow-up questions that do not appear in the interview schedule (Bryman, 2008). As the purpose of this research is to investigate learner language anxiety from the perspectives of the interviewed teacher, I found semi-structured interviewing to be the golden meant to collect data: it offers flexibility, but within boundaries.

While the data collection method suggests an emphasis on the participant's views and experiences, the research approach additionally recognizes the researcher as interpreter of the

same data. This leads us to the explanation of how the analysis of the teacher transcripts was carried out.

I strived towards transcribing what the participant said – word by word. However, I did not pay attention to how things were said as informal speaking is out of scope of this research. The transcriptions include pauses as well as false starts/unfinished thoughts. Words like "um" and "eh", which indicate thinking, were on the other hand, omitted.

Lichtman (2006) and her explanation of "the three Cs [sic] of analysis: from Coding to Categorizing to Concepts" (p. 167) served as a guide when analyzing my interview data. Dividing the process of analysis, she suggests six steps. The first step is to generate different codes as one reads the transcripts. The second step involves modifying the earlier codes by, for example, renaming them to make comparisons easier (Lichtman, 2006). Almost every line of the four transcripts was coded paying specific attention to what was said about speech anxiety: what it is, its consequences, reasons and how to overcome the issue at hand.

Even though this method may at first glance "seem like an arbitrary exercise because not every line contains a complete sentence and not every sentence may appear to be important" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 50), it can, at the same time, prevent the researcher from imposing his or her "preconceived notions on the data" (ibid, p. 51). To Charmaz (2006), line-by-line coding is an analytical tool which encourages the researcher to stay "open to the data and to see nuances in it" (ibid, p. 50). Line-by-line coding is furthermore more focused and produces more ideas compared to reading an interview as an entire narrative (Charmaz, 2006). Moving on to Lichtman's (2006) the next step in the process of analysis was placing the codes in categories, then modifying the categories and lastly: modifying these modified categories. Then the final step is to produce concepts (or themes) based on the categories.

FINDING

What's your view on student anxiety in EFL learning?

All the participants agreed on the idea that anxiety, in general, can play an important role in EFL learning. This general view on anxiety

seems to be a reflection of her concern about the negative impact of anxiety on her students' EFL performance in class and also their further EFL learning processes. Participant F shared negative viewpoint on student anxiety, to the effect that anxious feelings associated with the students' EFL performance may have a tremendous impact on their subsequent learning processes, in terms of the amount or types of input that the students could have access to otherwise. Participant F clearly pointed out this negative side of anxiety, by saying:

If students become emotionally disturbed or imbalanced, they will not tap their potential ability to the fullest level, and their perception of failure to do so might make them more anxious about their own ability and lead to lowering their self-esteem.

Similarly, Participant D expressed the same concern about student anxiety as she argued, "If students feel anxiety in classroom activities, they cannot perform well in the class, which finally reduces their learning motivation". However, the participant also adds some argument at the positive side of student anxiety, reflecting her own experiences as EFL learners: "Anxiety can be either helpful or devastating, depending on the individual students. But in general, if they don't feel any pressure or anxiety, they would not do anything at all."

Can you attribute a positive aspect to anxiety?

In relation to the question 1, the participant D agreed that anxiety might have a positive aspect in itself, she also claimed that it depends how the students resolve their anxiety, it could be a strong motivational drive to some students, especially when recognized as a chance for their learning, but too much anxiety might have a quite adversary impact on their psyche, as it triggers their defense mechanisms even before they try to deal with it consciously. "I know that some of my students are more resistant to some edgy circumstances than others, but it doesn't mean that they would never feel anxiety in the language classroom. Maybe they might know how to optimize their negative affectivity for their own good, somehow"

Besides such highly reflective comment above, the participant F pointed out several factors of individual learner differences that might affect the possibility of whether student anxiety could

become facilitative or debilitating, such as the levels of anxiety, the student's different personality, task difficulty, the students' perceived level of English proficiency, cultural differences, etc. But it should be noted at the same time that she expressed her inability to assess all these individual differences of the students as well. The participant F noted, for example, "We all know that different students feel anxious for different reasons, but we cannot simply tell whether their anxiety is facilitating or debilitating".

Do language learners experience an equal amount of anxiety in all 4 skill areas?

All the participants seemed to share the same view on this question, in the sense that the level of anxiety for each language skill (listening, writing, reading, and speaking) can vary, depending on the individual student differences, such as their personality traits, levels of EFL proficiency, or learning style preferences.

For example, they argued that some students who would perceive themselves as shy and quiet and prefer an independent learning style might think of speaking tasks in class as the most stressful of all the other skill areas, while others viewing their disposition as rather out-going and self-expressive might prefer speaking tasks to the other learning tasks that would require them to work by themselves. As the two participants noted, however, they found it quite difficult or sometimes impossible to detect which skill areas were more anxiety-provoking than the others, because of the uniqueness of individual students. In other words, they were quite aware that a variety of factors pertaining to the individual learner differences might underlie the actual manifestations of student anxiety, but at the same time they had also acknowledged the reality that they could not possibly attend to all the psychological as well as affective needs of each individual student in the classroom.

While all the participants expressed shared feelings of difficulty in assessing or detecting student anxiety as to which skill areas could be more stressful than the others, they also noted that one of the key factors that might influence student anxiety the most, regardless of different skill areas, would be the involvement of evaluation. The participant, for example, claimed in a quite assuring manner, "If some kind of evaluation,

either from the teacher or other students, is involved, students may feel anxiety in all the skill areas."

How do you see anxiety manifested in your students?

Some of the physical or psychological symptoms they had noticed in their students as a sign of anxious feelings were: playing with their hair, avoiding eye-contact with the teacher, sweated palms, blushed faces, nervous facial expressions, trembling, shaky body movements, etc. In general, however, many of the participants said that they would not be able to notice the real anxious feelings of their students unless their anxiety was manifested as obvious physical symptoms as in the examples above. Participant D and F expressed their honest attitudes toward student anxiety, as represented by F saying, "I always try to be sensitive to their anxious feelings in class, but I cannot always tell whether they are nervous or not just by their physical behaviors."

What kind of measures or techniques do you use to reduce student anxiety in class?

Both participants illustrated various kinds of techniques they had used or they would use to reduce student anxiety in the classroom, and it was found that the particular emphasis was often placed on the following two points;

Creating a comfortable classroom environment
A lot of fun activities so that students can relax, such as games or songs

Letting students laugh by telling jokes

Playing some background music

Instructional procedures

More use of display questions (open-ended) than of referential questions

Encouraging group works

Setting different expectations for different students (asking different questions according to their proficiency levels)

More use of recasting for error-correction rather than direct error-correction

How are those techniques related to your philosophy of teaching?

As is apparent from these classroom techniques presented above, both of the participants seemed to share the same underlying assumption about teaching, as in the participant F saying, "The classroom should be student-centered rather than teacher-centered, and otherwise the students

would remain totally dependent for their own development as learners, which naturally diminishes their further chances of self-directed learning and growth in the long run". Similarly, the participant D argued:

The teacher should provide a comfortable learning environment for the students to maximize their learning potential. Although the context of language classroom itself inevitably involves some elements of evaluation and competition, which might induce anxiety in some students, the very attitudes of the teacher to recognize such a reality can be a basis for creating a non-threatening learning environment in the classroom.

Thus, in general, it was found that the ways of dealing with student anxiety were closely related to their own teaching philosophy as a reflection of their images of good teachers. However, some differences were also found in terms of the role of the teacher they should assume or wanted to assume in the classroom. participant F said that the role of the teacher should be that of counselor, care taker, facilitator, or friend, while participant D maintained that the teacher should keep the stance of authority even if they could assume the role of facilitator.

DISCUSSION

First and second question. Descriptions of the two experienced teachers' perspectives on language anxiety and its possible effects on EFL learning and acquisition seem to be mostly corroborating the findings offered by previous research on language anxiety from the students' perspectives. But there were also some differences or discrepancies found between the teachers and students' perceptions on the role of anxiety in the classroom EFL learning. For example, commonly cited psychological constructs in defining language anxiety, such as test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz et al, 1986), were expressed by both participants as potential sources of student anxiety in the classroom. These perceptions, thus, are considered to be a clear indication that the teachers can recognize that language classroom could become a highly anxiety-provoking environment for students (Tsui, 1996).

At the same time, however, both participants maintained that some of the language anxiety

experiences could have a positive or facilitating effect on L2 learning and acquisition, which is also in line with the theoretical contention proposed by many anxiety researchers that "some 'edge' is necessary in language learning" (Omaggio, 1986). According to Terrell and Rardin (as interviewed in Young, 1992), a positive aspect of anxiety can be interpreted as a state of "attentiveness" or "alertness" so that the learner's attention to the needed input can be facilitated.

Third question. As both participants expressed their inability to assess which language skill areas could create more anxiety in students than the others, previous research on language anxiety also provided quite inconsistent results on this issue. Although some of the studies suggest that students experience the highest level of anxiety in speaking (Bailey, 1983; Horwitz et al., 1986), there are still little research available that has investigated which of the four skill areas would contribute to student anxiety the most. As the interview responses from the participants suggest, it is rather conceivable that any of the four language skill areas could become a source of student anxiety, depending on the individual learner differences, which include one's previous experiences with the TL and its culture or the general attitudes or beliefs toward second/foreign language learning (Gardner & Lambert, 1972; Schumann, 1986).

Fourth question. The various manifestations of anxiety that the participants noticed in their students seem to correspond to what has been reported in the previous research on language anxiety. Some of the student behaviors in the classroom that they described as signs of anxiety seemed rather obvious (e.g., trembling, playing with their hair, nervous laughter, stuttering or stammering as they spoke), while others were quite subtle and might have been interpreted otherwise without specific socio-cultural contexts (e.g., short responses, avoiding eye-contact, joking, indifferent posture, reticence).

Although both participants expressed a concern about their inability to notice all the instances of student anxiety, their perceptions of the students' anxious behaviors or feelings generally corresponded to the research findings on manifestations of student anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Young, 1991). This result seems to indicate

that experienced teachers' perceptions of anxious behaviors in students are accurate and credible enough to identify the symptoms of student anxiety. With regard to the teacher's attitudes toward the students' anxious behaviors, Young (1992) presents a couple of suggestions; a) "be sensitive to the signals students provide, b) recognize the behaviors for what they are, c) trust your perceptions, and d) work to reduce language anxiety" (p.169).

Fifth and sixth question. As shown in the responses to the question 5 and 6, the participants' views on language anxiety management seem to be fairly in accord with their own philosophy of teaching and their assumptions about the role of the language teacher.

Commonly shared assumptions about the role of the language teacher expressed by the participants were that the teacher's role should be that of facilitator, care taker, counselor, or motivator. Thus, these assumptions are considered to be a reflection of their underlying philosophy of teaching, as the participant D, for example, argued:

The primary emphasis should be placed on promoting positive learning experiences in the classroom, so that the students are more encouraged to build up their confidence in a foreign language. Small bits of success or accomplishment in the classroom can be a corner stone for their further learning, especially as they become more self-directed learners by themselves.

Although the participants maintained their desire to be respected as an authority figure while at the same time assuming the facilitative roles mentioned above, both participants claimed that they could reduce student anxiety by being sensitive to individual differences of their students, or by being aware of their own verbal behaviors (i.e. personalized evaluative statements or questioning types) as they might induce anxiety in some students.

CONCLUSION

Although the existing research has provided valuable insights into language anxiety from the student's perspective, the phenomenon, because of its complex and multi-dimensional nature, still requires further investigation from a variety of perspectives or approaches. This study,

conducted through in-depth interviews with two experienced language teachers, is considered one of such attempts to provide some alternative insights on language anxiety from a different perspective.

As the interview results clearly indicate, the participants seem to generally corroborate the findings offered by previous research on language anxiety, but there are also some differences or gaps between the teachers' and students' perceptions on the role of anxiety in the EFL classroom contexts. Although the teacher's efforts to sensitize themselves to the students' anxiety might not always converge with the students' actual perceptions, the teacher's very attitudes of trying to understand the students' affective needs can provide a basis for creating a comfortable, learning-conducive environment in the classroom.

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