ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY: INFLUENCE ON PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The second language teaching and learning perspective is drastically changing these days. The pragmatic shift is by changing the focus from teacher-centered to the individual learner. The learners' perspective of language learning depends on the motivation, de-motivation factors, learning strategies and style, and learners' beliefs about second language learning. Nowadays affective factors are considered more important for second language learning. And different affective strategies are helpful to reduce the learners anxiety of learning. This research paper intends to examine the effect of anxiety on the performance of second language learners. The research uses a standardized inventory to measure the role of all these factors contributing to language acquisition. The data is collected from schools having regional language as a medium of instruction and where English is introduced in primary school.

Key words: anxiety, learning strategies and style, and learners' beliefs

Introduction:

The research in the field of second language acquisition has advanced a lot in the last three decades. These advances have contributed to the content of language acquisition and also the role of teacher and student. The second language teaching focused on the nature of language and language learning. This perspective is very well illustrated by Anthony's model. This model has three perspectives viz., structural view, functional view and interactional view. These three views of language teaching reflect on how the language teaching started with the traditional view that is structural view, "that language is a system of structurally related elements for coding of meaning" (Richards, 20). The research in the field empasised that language learning is not to know about language but use of language. In other words, accuracy is not only important but appropriate use of language is an essential part of language communication. Cognitive theory emphasizes the creative aspect of language. "This creativity

would not be possible if we had to rely on individual bits of learnt behaviour. It is only possible because we have internalised the underlying system of rules. The knowledge of these rules is our linguistic 'competence', which is different from the 'performance that we can actually observe."(Littlewood,5). It is crucial to understand deeper meaning or underline meaning of language, so the shift of considering the function of language is an important element of language learning. Wilkin's functional-notional syllabus defines language function and notions are important. These theories influenced the next model, that is, the functional view of language "the theory emphasizes the semantic and communicative dimensions rather than merely the grammatical characteristics of language " (Richards & Rodgers, 21) The last view of language is the interactional view. "Language is seen as a tool for the creation and maintenance of social relations." (Richards & Rodgers, 21). These three views emphasize on the nature of language and language learning. Simultaneously, the second language acquisition research is trying to find out other factors which influence the learning process such as motivation, beliefs and anxiety. The focus on individual learners increased in the 80's. Numerous research tries to find out the distinguishing factors between learners who perform more effectively and those who perform less effectively. The "Good Language Learner" study by Rubin (1975) Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, and Todesco (1978) onwards. This research has resulted in continuing interest in the areas of learning strategies and style. The learning strategies play a crucial role in enabling learners to develop approaches that facilitate a flawless learning experience. Oxford aptly defines that learning strategies as "specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations" (Oxford, 1990, p. 8). The researcher argued that foreign language anxiety is 'a specific syndrome that can be related to language use and fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and communication apprehension. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined FLA as, "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to language learning arising from the uniqueness of the (foreign) language learning process" (p. 128).

The Second language learning is a traumatic experience for many learners. According to Worde (1998), one third to one half of students examined reported experiencing debilitating levels of language anxiety. (cited in Ying Zheng) . The review of literature indicates that research in the area of anxiety and language learning is mostly focused on anxiety in the classroom. In the 1980s research in the field of anxiety in foreign language learning increased. The prominent research works are Jennifer Lucas (1984) research focuses on the problem of communication apprehension and its effects on teaching ESL. MacIntyre, P. D., & Gardner, R. C. (1991)

studies language anxiety as well as other forms of anxiety. Dolly J. Young tries to find out the relationship between anxiety and foreign language oral proficiency ratings. This study focuses on subjects' foreign language proficiency ~~was~~ assessed through a self-appraisal of language proficiency questionnaire and a dictation test~~.~~ 'Foreign Language Anxiety and Learning Style' by Philip Bailey, Christine E Daley and Anthony J Onwuegbuzie (1999). "This paper attempts to fill this gap by identifying foreign language anxiety as a conceptually distinct variable in foreign language learning and interpreting it within the context of existing theoretical and empirical work on specific anxiety reactions.". (P.125)

The data was collected from eight standard Marathi medium students. English is one subject and it is the second language. The researcher used a scale called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by (Horwitz et al., 1986). The items on the FLCAS describe specific situations that could prompt anxiety in students, making the FLCAS an assessment of anxiety specific to those situations. The procedure that the study followed involved collecting data from students and analysing and discussing the findings. While collecting data the researcher interchanges the word foreign language with English language.

While collecting data, the researcher was personally present; whenever she observed that the learners had problems with understanding the English language the researcher used the mother tongue as well as examples to explain and ensure that each item was comprehended by the learner. The research used a quantitative approach to collect and analyse data.

The participants were 39 students of eight standard ~~students~~ from non-English medium (i.e. medium of instruction is regional language mostly Marathi) from the school located in Thane. ~~The sample size is 39 participants from eight standards.~~ The age of the participants is 14 to 15. They study other subjects from regional languages and English is one of the Core Component Paper (i.e. Compulsory). The focus of the syllabus of English is on four language skills development, grammar, vocabulary and to develop the learners' general proficiency in English and use of language, etc.

This study used a scale called the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by (Horwitz et al., 1986.This assessment scale includes 33 questions in Likert Scale format. The Likert Scale items used a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The aim of the scale is to provide an assessment tool that effectively measures the specific anxiety that arises in the context of the foreign language classroom.

The assessment scale mainly focuses on five factors, such as, first factor is speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, second factor is fear of failing the class, third factor is

comfortableness in speaking with native/English speakers, the fourth factor is negative attitude towards the English class and the last is test anxiety.

Factor I: Speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Scale items: 3,13,27,20,24,31,7,12,23,18,33,16,1,21,29,4,8,9

The scale includes items relating to communication apprehension. According to McCroskey (1978), communication apprehension is defined as a person's level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons. Further McCroskey states that people who are communicatively anxious frequently display defining behaviours such as distancing themselves from others and avoiding conversation. People who have communication anxiety are less likely to initiate discussions and seek out social contacts than those who do not. Individuals are most likely to have fear and hesitation to communicate with others or expressing themselves in a language that they are not completely comfortable in.

The data indicates varying anxiety levels in language class. The first factor is about speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. In this group, a total of 18 questions are included out of 33 questions from the assessment scale. These questions are related to different kind of anxiety situations related to the classroom context, such as, Fear of speaking in class, Reluctance to Volunteer, Self-Consciousness and fear of Judgment, Comparison with Peers, Test Anxiety, Preparation and Spontaneity, Confidence levels, Impact of preparation on anxiety and Impact of understanding. Approximately [67.7%] of students express high anxiety (SA and A), while [32.3%] indicate lower anxiety (D and SD). The first subpoint is 'fear of speaking in class'. A significant [66.7%] of students experience fear or nervousness about being called on in class (SA and A categories), suggesting a common challenge in the class dynamic. The items relating to fear of speaking in class or communication apprehension, for example, 'I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in the language class'. The data indicate that 37% of students agreed when the teacher called on in the language class and 29.4% of students strongly agreed. The data indicates that 44.6% of the students feel that 'I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.' Next question responses indicated that 47.5% of the students disagree that 'I feel very self-conscious about speaking the English language in front of other students.' For item 18, the majority of students (52.5%) disagree that 'I feel confident when I speak in English language class. Only (5%) students strongly agree that they feel confident when they speak in English language class.

It is observed that around students (74.6%) are reluctant to volunteer. They find it embarrassing to volunteer answers, indicating a prevalent reluctance to actively participate in class discussions. For item 13, the majority of students (47.5%) agree and (27.1) strongly agree that it embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class. The next subpoint is dealing with self-consciousness and fear of judgment. The data shows that a notable (72.3%) section of students feels self-conscious about speaking in front of peers, with [42.6%] expressing fear of being judged or laughed at by others. Few questions added to the earlier point that the comparison with peers. Some students, [64.8%], tend to compare themselves to their peers, thinking that others are better at languages. This comparison may contribute to feelings of inadequacy or heightened anxiety. Test-related anxiety is mixed, with (54.4%) expressing ease during tests and (45.6%) suggesting some level of anxiety during assessments. Majority (74.1%) of students express anxiety when faced with unprepared questions or spontaneous speaking opportunities, indicating a preference for prepared scenarios. In the language classroom the students should believe in their ability. The confidence levels play an important role and allow students to take risks. The data indicate that confidence levels vary across students, surprisingly (77.5%) feeling confident when speaking in class, while (22.5%) struggle to feel sure of themselves. Another very crucial factor of learning is the ability to prepare for a language classroom. Without continuous use of language and preparing for language class the confidence level does not increase. Item 16, 'Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it'. (17.6%) students strongly agree and (22.5%) agree that the percentage indicates roundabout (47.1%) students disagree. It is fair to suggest that a considerable percentage of anxiety may not be reduced by preparation alone. Anxiety is a contributing factor in the classroom for (47.5%) of students who find it difficult to grasp the teacher and the content.

In summary, the percentages demonstrate a broad range of emotional reactions in language classes, emphasizing the need for customized techniques to address specific anxiety reasons. The primary objectives of techniques ought to be to encourage participation, reduce fear of judgment, and provide a range of chances for language practice.

1. Factor I: Speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation

		SA	A	NA/ND	D	SD
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	29.4	37.3	17.6	12.7	2.9
13	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	27.5	47.1	12.7	7.8	4.9

27	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	5.0	44.6	9.9	37.6	3.0
20	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	9.9	47.5	9.9	32.7	0
24	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the English language in front of other students.	5.0	24.8	22.8	47.5	0
31	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the English language.	0	42.6	19.8	22.7	9.9
7	I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	9.9	42.6	14.9	19.8	12.9
12	In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	29.7	47.5	3.0	19.8	0
23	I always feel that the other students speak the English language better than I do.	2.9	37.3	29.4	22.5	7.8
18	I feel confident when I speak in English language class.	5.0	0	19.8	52.5	22.8
33	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	5.0	34.7	12.9	39.6	7.9
16	Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	17.6	22.5	7.8	47.1	4.9
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my English language class.	0	32.7	37.6	29.7	0
21	The more I study for a language test, the more con- fused I get.	34.7	34.7	14.9	7.9	7.9
29	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	5.0	34.7	12.9	47.5	0
4	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the English language.	29.7	22.8	3.0	29.7	14.9
8	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	3.0	14.9	9.9	44.6	27.7
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	12.7	19.6	17.6	42.2	7.8

Factor II: Fear of failing the class

Scale items: 10,25,26,22

Just a small portion of respondents strongly agree that they are concerned about what would happen if they failed their English language course. The majority (40%) agreed that there is general worry about the possible consequences of failure and also 37.3% do not agree or disagree (NA/ND). These responses might vary due to individual differences. There are possible reasons such as personal experiences, learning style, coping strategies, class performance, cultural and educational background. Item 25 significant portion strongly agrees, indicating a significant concern about the pace of the language class. (50%) half of the students agree that they are worried about keeping up with the pace of the class or getting left behind.

Item 26, a notable (27.7%) portion of the class strongly agrees indicating that they feel more tense and nervous in language class. Item 22 indicates that a significant majority of class (56.9%) disagrees that they don't feel pressure to prepare well for language class.

It is observed that there is a general worry about the pace of class. The responses indicate that a significant number of students feel continuous pressure to prepare and perform well in the language class. This reflects that the students are facing varied challenges and have difficulty.

2. Factor II: Fear of failing the class

		SA	A	NA/ND	D	SD
10	I worry about the consequences of failing my English language class.	40.0	37.3	2.9	2.9	7.8
25	Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	15.0	50.0	10.0	20.0	5.0
26	I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	27.7	5.4	7.9	5.0	5.0
22	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	2.9	17.6	7.8	56.9	14.7

Factor III : Comfortableness in speaking with native/English speakers

Scale items: 32,11,14

One of the expectations in second language learning is that the student should be able to feel comfortable speaking with English or native speakers. Item 32, the significant (59.4) feels unforgettable around native speakers of the English language. This suggests that the students feel conscious and have lack of confidence to face such situations. The students do not like or get upset over second language classes. The majority (59.4)of the students disagree with people get upset about second language classes.

Item 14 significant number (57.4%) of the students would be nervous speaking with native speakers. This reflects lack of confidence and communication apprehension.

In conclusion, the new data highlights a recurring issue among respondents on their unease, ignorance, and anxiety regarding interacting with native speakers and their overall assessment of English language instruction. These feelings could be a factor in the prior concerns regarding the language class's performance and pace.

3. Factor III : Comfortableness in speaking with native/English speakers

		SA	A	NA/ND	D	SD
32	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the English language.	5.0	12.9	14.9	59.4	7.9
11	I don't understand why some people get so upset over English language classes.	5.0	7.9	7.9	59.4	19.8

14	I would not be nervous speaking the English language with native speakers.	3.0	14.9	9.9	57.4	14.9

Factor IV : Negative attitude towards the English class

Scale items: 5,17

A majority (59.4)showed willingness to take more second language classes with a significant (32.7%) unwillingness to take more language classes. Item 17 examines the feelings of the students about attending language classes. (80%) students strongly agree and agree that they often feel like not going to language classes. The reason might be lack of motivation.

In result, the updated data indicates that the majority of individuals are willing to continue taking English language classes, although a sizable percentage express resistance or a lack of interest in going to their language class on a regular basis. Considerations like perceived difficulty, discomfort, or discontent with the lesson could have an impact on this contradictory response. The underlying causes of these feelings might be better understood with additional research or context.

4.   Factor IV : negative attitude towards the English class

5	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English language classes.	19.8	39.6	7.9	14.9	17.8
17	I often feel like not going to my language class.	50.0	30.0	5.0	10.0	5.0

Scale items (2,6,15,19,28,30) deal with worry about mistakes, mind wandering in class, upset with understanding challenges, fear of continuous correction, feeling overwhelmed by rules. 47.5% of respondents believe that their concern is making mistakes in language class. This suggests that a sizable portion are worried about mistakes. In language class, 49.5% of students believe that their thoughts drift to unrelated topics. This implies that students frequently encounter distractions in the classroom. Of those who agree, 37.3% say that they get frustrated when they don't grasp what the teacher is correcting. This highlights the emotional responses to understanding limitations. 42.2% of the participants agree that they are worried the language instructor wants to correct every error, while 14.7% strongly agree. This reveals a significant anxiety of constant correction. On the approach to language class, approximately 3.0% strongly agree and 29.7% agree that they feel very confident and at ease. This implies that students' confidence levels varied before class. 42.2% of respondents agree that they are confused by the amount of rules involved in learning an English language, while 2.9% strongly agree. This suggests that a sizable percentage finds the rules challenging. In conclusion, the data points to a variety of opinions, with prominent concerns among students making mistakes, interrupts during class, frequent feelings of distraction, emotional responses to comprehension

difficulties, fear of being corrected, differing degrees of confidence, and a sense of being overcome by language rules.

Not included in the factor solution:

		SA	A	NA/ND	D	SD
2	I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	9.9	47.5	7.9	29.7	5.0
6	During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	0	49.5	5.0	3.0	42.6
15	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	4.9	37.3	22.5	32.4	2.9
19	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	14.7	42.2	17.6	17.6	7.8
28	When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	3.0	29.7	27.7	24.8	14.9
30	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak the English language.	2.9	42.2	17.6	29.4	7.8

Conclusion:

The learners' perspective of language learning depends on the motivation, de-motivation factors, learning strategies and style, and learners' beliefs about second language learning. Affective factors are now considered more crucial in second language learning. Language classroom anxiety is a significant variable that influences the performance of the student, and different affective strategies are helpful to reduce the learners anxiety of learning. Teachers should develop the potential strategies to create more supportive classroom environments for students to manage their anxieties effectively. It is possible to use different learning strategies and understand individual differences, including learning style, can help to reduce the anxiety in the language classroom.

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