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Second Language Anxiety among Diploma Students in Technical University (Universiti Malaysia Perlis).

INTRODUCTION

English is the most prevailing used language in this infinite boundaries era. It is a popularly conceived key to the acquisition of academic knowledge, access to the worldwide trade and the instrument to the abundant, diverse information on the Internet. In Malaysia, English stands as one of the most widely used language especially in the urban areas in addition to its status as the second language of the nation. It is a compulsory subject starting in the primary schools up to the higher learning institutions. The score in English examination would also serve as a key determiner in deciding pursuing studies. Students need to get a credit in their SPM (High School Certificate) and at least a score of band two in MUET (Malaysian University English Test) for them to enroll in a degree program. Moreover, for global competitiveness, more companies and job requirements place an emphasis in having graduates with a certain level of competency in English language. Therefore, due to the ever increasing demand on English proficiency, there is a need to delve into the factors that affect language learning and from that point it is perhaps clearer understanding and implications could serve beneficially for both the learners as well as educators.

There are many factors that influence the learning of second language learners such as cognitive styles, motivation and anxiety. Cognitive styles of second language learners clearly affect the pathways that learners will take in successfully or unsuccessfully reaching their goals (Jamieson, 1992). In terms of instrumental/integrative motivation, studies found substantial support for the effectiveness of an integrative orientation for successful language acquisition (Gardner&MacIntyre, 1991). Anxiety plays an important role in second language learner's classroom performance. Specifically this study sought to investigate the four variables of anxiety in Diploma English course semester achievement among university students with different levels of anxiety. In reference to the curriculum for English language courses, students are expected to acquire certain level of competencies before they graduate and must participate in various activities such as discussions and role playing. These activities are supposed to give them more opportunities to use the language. In addition to that, they will be evaluated on communicative ability, language use as well as the task fulfillment, which consist a substantial part in their overall assessment. Therefore, the necessity arises to

examine on the second language anxiety of students to see whether it is one of the reason for their mediocre performance. The participants for this study will involve 55 first semester students enrolling for their Diploma, chosen randomly from various engineering programs offered at Universiti Malaysia Perlis

Literature Review

Anxiety is one of the best predictors of success in learning a second or foreign language (Gardner, 1985). Therefore, various research studies for the past two decades have been devoted to discovering the role of foreign language anxiety in foreign language learning. According to Price (1991), foreign language anxiety research can be divided into three directions. One direction is to reexamine the anxiety proficiency relationship using measures designed to assess the specific construct of foreign language anxiety (Young, 1990). The focus of the second direction is the examination of the effects of anxiety and learner variables. The present study follows the third direction which is the examination of effects of anxiety on the foreign language learner (Kleinmann, 1977).

Scovel (1978) regarded affect as a general term covering a wide range of disparate constructs and behaviors. In the rubric of affective variables are various categories such as cognitive style, ego boundaries, reversed versus outgoing personality, and adventures ness. In second or foreign language learning, different learners may prefer different solutions to their own learning problems. These terms mentioned above are all about the various affective variables. Anxiety is one of them because affective factors are generally assumed to influence second language acquisition. In a second language learning situation anxiety poses several potential problems for the student of a foreign language because it can interfere with the acquisition, retention, and production of the new language. According to Gardner & McIntyre (1991), the studies that are directly related to anxiety and language learning can be delineated into three perspectives from which anxiety has been investigated in a number of areas. The first perspective considers anxiety as a general personality trait that is relevant across several situations. A second perspective is interested in the here and now experience of anxiety as an emotional state. The third approach examines the specific forms of anxiety that occur consistently over time within a situation. Thus, these perspectives are respectively referred to as trait, state and situation specific viewpoints. Anxiety can be situational or state anxiety, but it can be a major character trait (Oxford, 1999)

Although some language researchers asserted that a positive mode of anxiety exists, most language research showed negative relationship between anxiety and performance (Oxford, 1990). The negative type of anxiety is sometimes called "debilitating anxiety", because it does harm to learners' performance in various ways both indirectly and through worry and self-doubt and directly by reducing participation and creating overt avoidance of the language (Oxford, 1999). Studies showed negative the negative correlation of anxiety with grades in language courses, with proficiency test performance in speaking and writing tasks. For example, in her study on foreign language anxiety of students of Japanese, Aida (1994) found that language anxiety was negatively related to students' performance in Japanese.

According to Tobias (1986), interference may occur at three levels; input, processing, and output. At input, anxiety may cause attention deficits and poor initial

processing of information. In short, not as much information is registered. For example, people with higher anxiety seem easily distracted from the task because time is divided between processing of emotion-related and task related cognition at process, if the task is relatively simple, anxiety may have little effect on it. The more difficult, the task becomes, relative to ability, the greater the effect of anxiety on processing. Interference with the rehearsal of new information would be an example of this type of effect. At output, anxiety may interfere with the retrieval of previously learned information. The experience of “freezing” on a test can be attributed to the influence of anxiety at the time of retrieval.

Horwitz et al. (1986) developed a renowned theory of foreign language classroom anxiety, which contended its uniqueness to foreign or second language learning. In this theory, foreign language anxiety is composed of three subcomponents: 1) communication apprehension, 2) test anxiety, and 3) fear of negative evaluation.

Daly (1991), described communication apprehension as “the fear or anxiety an individual feels when communicating”. The term “communication apprehension” refers to an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (Mejias et al., 1991). Communication apprehension includes oral communication anxiety, such as difficulty in speaking in groups, stage fright, and receiver anxiety, i.e., difficulty in listening to or learning a spoken language. Test anxiety is considered as a situation-specific trait or state referring to examinations and apprehension over academic evaluation (Gardner&MacIntyre, 1989). Test anxiety refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure. Finally the fear of negative evaluation which refers to as an apprehension about others’ evaluative situations, and the anticipation that others would evaluate oneself negatively (Watson & Friend, 1969, as cited in Horwitz et al., 1986)

Limitations of the Research

First, due to the restrictions of available time, resources and the manipulation of the research design, the homogeneous sample used in this study was limited to students belonging to Universiti Malaysia Perlis. The generalization of the findings for this study is limited to the students who have similar background of those studying pre-degree programs and mostly are Malays. Therefore, generalization for this study should be made with caution.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to find out the relation between learner’s second language anxiety and English Consolidating Language Skills course semester achievement in speaking assessment for first semester students at Universiti Malaysia Perlis. Based on the study purpose, the research questions addressed as follows:

1. Do students in UniMAP Diploma programs experience second language anxiety??
2. What is the relationship the four anxiety traits as experienced by the students?

Methodology

This study was designed to identify and compare the perceptions of first semester university students towards feelings of anxiety experienced during second language learning as measured by the FLCAS scale. Specifically, the objective of this study was to investigate students' level of anxiety surveyed at Universiti Malaysia Perlis. The research question were postulated and tested to determine if there was second language anxiety according FLCAS thirty-three variables towards anxiety in foreign language learning. If the levels of anxiety at the students are high, then which of the four traits of anxiety have the more significant effect to the Diploma students? Then most important of all, does second language anxiety is a phenomenon for students of UniMAP? It could be argued that anxiety is specific to beginning foreign language learning and that it does not necessarily diminish with increased experience and proficiency during their study of foreign language acquisition.

The sample consists of 55 first semester students enrolling for their Diploma, chosen randomly from various engineering programs offered at Universiti Malaysia Perlis. Although there was no attempt in the study to control for potential independent subject variables, it was expected that the random selection of courses (and therefore students and instructors) would allow for equal distribution of the sample.

This comparative study possesses the characteristics of descriptive/analytical research in that it is concerned with the perceptions of respondents. The type of descriptive research was the survey method whereby we looked into the mean scores for each anxiety traits of the students.

Two instruments were used for this study. They were a questionnaire assessing students' anxiety level and an achievement test. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. One was intended to collect personal information of the participants, such as their name, age, gender, etc. e version of FLCAS that was designed by Horwitz (1986). This questionnaire consists of 33 statements, of which 8 items were for communication anxiety (1, 9, 14, 18, 24, 27, 29, 32), 9 items for fear of negative evaluation (3, 7, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 31, 33) and 5 items for test anxiety (2, 8, 10, 19, 21). As for the remaining 11 items, they were put in a group which was named anxiety of English classes. The respondents were asked to rate each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strong disagreement") to 5 ("strong agreement"). In trying to get the best result, the FLCAS has been translated and adapted into Malay version as being the first language for most students.

Findings

Descriptive Statistics

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|----|---------|---------|-------|----------------|
| communication | 55 | 12 | 28 | 17.93 | 3.150 |
| Test | 55 | 5 | 13 | 6.91 | 1.543 |
| Fear | 55 | 10 | 30 | 19.89 | 3.515 |
| Classroom | 55 | 28 | 50 | 38.25 | 5.060 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 55 | | | | |

From the above means, communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation seems to affect students who took part in the survey. The mean score for communication apprehension is 17.93 which indicate a strong tendency towards the anxiety. The other variables which are test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation showed the same trend with communication apprehension at the score of 6.91 and 19.89 respectively. However, classroom anxiety does not show a strong inclination as the mean score move towards disagreement.

Correlations

| | | communic ation | Test | Fear | Classroom |
|---------------|-----------------|-------------------|-------|----------|-----------|
| communication | Pearson | 1 | .044 | .581(**) | .548(**) |
| | Correlation | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | . | .748 | .000 | .000 |
| | N | 55 | 55 | 55 | 55 |
| Test | Pearson | .044 | 1 | .083 | -.175 |
| | Correlation | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .748 | . | .544 | .202 |
| | N | 55 | 55 | 55 | 55 |
| Fear | Pearson | .581(**) | .083 | 1 | .496(**) |
| | Correlation | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .544 | . | .000 |
| | N | 55 | 55 | 55 | 55 |
| Classroom | Pearson | .548(**) | -.175 | .496(**) | 1 |
| | Correlation | | | | |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | .202 | .000 | . |
| | N | 55 | 55 | 55 | 55 |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

From the findings, there are strong correlation between the three variables namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and classroom anxiety. The first correlation is between fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension. The second is between classroom anxiety and communication apprehension. Finally the correlation is between classroom anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The correlation is at 0.581, 0.548 and 0.496 respectively. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion

The significant positive correlation, the one between fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension, seems make sense interpret. It indicates the following relationships: the higher the fear of a person, the higher communication anxiety, and vice versa. It is possible that such individuals would tend to be low achievers in general and in the foreign language as well. In our opinion, high achievers in English may be individuals who monitor their language comprehension and production and who have highly developed language awareness. Such foreign language users are more critical of their own performance as their expectations (in terms of accuracy, for example) are higher than the expectations of low achievers. All this leads to higher language use anxiety in high achievers. This seems like a plausible explanation of why students who have the fear of negative evaluation would result in a halt of communication.

It is no surprise that classroom anxiety is correlated with communication apprehension. Communication apprehension is defined as the feeling of fear or anxiety caused by real or anticipated communication with others. Language use implies communication by definition, and individuals who are prone to feel anxious at the prospect of having to communicate with other people or during real communication can be expected to feel even more anxious while communicating in a second or foreign language. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) stress that communication apprehension is a component of foreign language anxiety, just like fear of negative social evaluation and test anxiety. It is important to add, though, that foreign language anxiety is not a mere sum of the three but a specific type of anxiety in its own right.

It seems that language learners and users are, generally, objective assessors of their own skills. In our study the correlation between classroom anxiety and fear of negative evaluation as the last correlation shows that individuals with high classroom anxiety will have low willingness to communicate or rather affect their performance ability. What we could interpret from this phenomenon is that it may be taken as a consequence or possibly, a cause of unwillingness to communicate. Hereby, the fear of classroom would overwhelm the students that it will raise the fear of negative evaluation or vice versa. The higher the fear of negative evaluation the more classroom anxiety would increase. There were instances in the classroom which mirrored this phenomenon as the students would take a conscious approach in avoiding questions and the opportunity to utilize the second language in fear of being judged negatively by their peers and instructors

The most significant finding of the research is that the students showed a high score in two of the traits of foreign language anxiety which are test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation as well as communication apprehension. It reflects the biggest dilemma faced by most second language learners in Malaysia as a whole and the university in particular. The fact that students are more worried about failing the exam would probably halt the output process which is essential in the process of language acquisition. Rather than focusing on ways to polish and enhance their language, the students would dwell on unrealistic expectations in which they are to produce a flawless language. These kinds of negative traits would surely bring

impacts in how they behave and respond in second language classroom that consequently debilitate the learning.

Conclusions and Implications

Instructors who already recognize that many students suffer from general second language anxiety may find it useful to broaden their understanding to include specific anxiety related to foreign language. Steps could be taken to reduce the level of tension and anxiety in the classroom. Another ramification is that instructors may teach specific strategies to help students become better in spoken discourse. Sharing of common feelings of nervousness or frustration with the group may elicit creative ways to solve problem for the whole class. A teacher who is dealing with anxious students should be aware that apprehensive learners may underestimate their ability. (McIntyre et al, 1997). If these factors could be delved in, then probably measures could be taken in aiding the learning process. Because anxiety seems to be inherent in the learning process of beginning university students of foreign languages, reducing language apprehension should be an intrinsic part of any such program. With reference to the case in UniMAP, instructors must pay closer attention on reducing the fright of exam and negative thoughts. Some of the affective techniques to alleviate feelings of anxiety cited by modern-language teaching experts are:

- * Making students aware that being fluent and getting a good accent in the target language take in most cases several years of study and practice.
- * Providing students with positive reinforcement and creating a relaxed classroom environment.
- * Helping students that have a mental block towards language learning by providing them with out-of-the-classroom individual assistance.

Some teaching methods that can also be adopted to reduce classroom anxiety may be

- * Conducting class activities in groups.
- * Explaining grammar concepts in beginning and elementary classes in the native, not in the target language.
- * Forming support groups for performance-concerned students so they can discuss concerns and difficulties encountered in language learning.
- * Using smaller classes to help instructors identify students experiencing anxiety and give them special attention and support.

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