



RESEARCH PAPER

Language Stress and Anxiety among the ESL Students: A Case Study of First Year Students in Pakistani Context

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to explore the causes of anxiety level amongst the Pakistani ESL students. A review of the literature was conducted to examine the variables, which were affecting English language learners. The researchers selected quantitative research method and gathered data from 100 participants. The data was analyzed through statistical software namely SPSS; and presented in numerical form by using figures and tables. The results of the present study showed that the level of anxiety differs amongst different ESL students. They feel anxious if they go unprepared in the class. Some of them have fear of communicating with their classmates. Many of them experience anxiety symptoms. Some students avoid classrooms because they lack confidence of communicating in English in a better way. The stakeholders are recommended to understand basic needs of the students. They are recommended to design the English language learning courses in a manner that could reduce their anxiety among these students.

Keywords: ESL Learners, Higher Level, Language Stress, Level of Anxiety, Standard English

Introduction

In the current scenario, English language has become a universal language for communication beyond national and international borders (Kubota, 2015). The individuals belonging to any culture or country pave all barriers and communicate in this language. However, the language learners are placed with several challenges. They face a challenge in learning new language and encounter second language learning stress and anxiety. In the current study, the researchers discussed the issue faced by the English language learners of academic institutes. Language learners experience anxiety recurrently and there are multiple factors associated to it (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Common factors that lead to anxiety include; self-awareness about their performance and oral reproduction, self-consciousness of the learner, mistaken beliefs and perceptions about different approaches, etc. Some learners have anxiety for the target language culture and distinct social statuses of the speakers. These types of fears and anxiety are deterrent and cause damage to individual's self-identity. Therefore, it is crucial to pay attention to the anxiety levels of language learners. Language learners have a significant role in influencing these students in learning English language and accomplish their expected academic performance goals (Moshia, 2014). Poor command of the target language is another factor that leads to anxiety among these students'. Language learning turns out to be complicated for the learners (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). The language learning challenges can be associated with the linguistic barriers and difficulties in understanding target language. Research conducted by Asikhia (2010) revealed the factors associated to language learning and anxiety amongst Arab language learners. The learners within and outside classroom environment were engaged in semi-structured, and qualitative interview process based on the social context. The research recommends how to manage these problems amongst language learners in Arab. Learners often face an anxiety due to they do not have command over the target

language. Learners may have linguistic difficulties, for instance; L2/FL learners encounter a challenge while learning target language. Extrinsic factors as cultural, social and environmental factors also impact the learning abilities of language learners.

The students who face difficulty in understanding English often stay quiet, they face sweating palms, they feel thirsty during their examination sessions, and unfortunately, the mentors are unaware of such problems of their students (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011; Cabansag, 2020). There is a need to raise awareness of the anxiety associated to the English language learning (Hakim, 2019). Additionally, the role of teaching strategies and methods must be investigated, which could significantly play a vital role in managing student anxiety levels during language learning sessions.

There are some limitations in the present study, as this was conducted only on the 1st year ESL students of a college in Rawalpindi district, which is not corresponding the all ESL students of Pakistan. In Pakistani educational setting there are also other levels of study as (secondary schools, universities) which are ignored in this study. The sample size is also small only 100 ESL students were selected as participants; moreover, small number female participants were given chance to participate as research contributors, the study was also limited to a district, can be conducted on divisional, provincial and national level. Although this study has some limitations but yet it is significant.

Literature Review

There are various researches conducted on language stress and anxiety which are unveiling its significance. The researchers of different places in different times conducted researches on this topic, some of these researches are presented in the literature review. The Previous scholars, psychologists, and educationists believe that student attitudes and accomplishments are greatly influenced by a set of affective factors (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). These factors threaten the academic performances of the students in their academic institutions. There are limited investigations carried out, on the English language learning process in a locale context that highlighted the role of anxiety amongst students acquiring education. Empirically, impact of anxiety on English language learners has been investigated by many scholars (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011; Mosha, 2014; Asikhia, 2010). Anxiety is deemed as a state of apprehension, in which individual's encounter a vague fear about an object (Kamarulzaman, 2013). Anxiety, as a multidimensional construct, involves association with many other independent factors. For instance, it has become the reason to lower the self-esteem, attention and motivation (Zeidner, & Matthews, 2010). Moreover, classroom anxiety is inclusive of multiple factors as; peers, classroom practices and instructors. Each of these variables can influence the students in a different manner. Instructors have a direct interaction with the language learners. Instructors as a major variable that can lead to anxiety amongst language learners (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011; Mosha, 2014; Mosha, 2014; Asikhia, 2010). However, it has four sub-variables; method of error correction, perceived support from the instructor, beliefs of instructor about language teaching and teaching style. English language learners have an interaction with their teachers on regular basis. They get exposed to instructor's beliefs and have certain expectations from their instructors.

Ay (2010) argued that language learner's anxiety levels increase when their instructors have an error-corrector behavior on continuous bases. In this situation, the instructors are more of a "drill sergeant" instead of a "facilitator. Papi and Abdollahzadeh (2012) argued that students who encounter difficulties in learning native language are prone to experience challenges in learning foreign languages. As a result, these students get higher levels of anxiety. Notably, the instructors of language learners reveal about the behaviors of their students. They highlighted the passive behavior of their students during the lecture. Such a reserved attitude restricts them to learn effectively. Gilakjani (2012) conducted a research on French language learners based on three different levels of

competencies; intermediate, beginners and advanced learners. The result of their study is contrary to previously mentioned research investigations. The authors reveal that better understanding along with the fluency to speak the second language reduces anxiety amongst learners. The learners feel satisfied with their language learning performances. Xu (2012) argued that higher anxiety does not always lead to poor language learning proficiency. Hence, the main cause are the language learners themselves, as they consider themselves as less competent than their counterparts and are unable to accomplish good performances.

Empirically, it has been found that student's self-perceptions about their competencies let them get in difficulties (Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011; Mosha, 2014; Mosha, 2014; Asikhia, 2010). Xu (2012) conducted a qualitative study and revealed that anxious learners develop a self-perception that they are less proficient, low in capabilities, in contrast to their peers. This led to a decline in their academic performances. Classroom is a potential variable that may induce anxiety amongst English language learners. There can be multiple variables within the classroom that can induce anxiety amongst language learners. Instructors play a significant role in anxiety management amongst English language learners. They can increase or decrease learner's anxiety based on their behaviors (Asikhia, 2010). Instructors error correction method is a factor that influence the perceptions of the English language learners. A rise of anxiety can be visualized in the foreign language students when a conflict appears between learners learning style and style of language instructor. Kamarulzaman et al., (2013) argued that teaching styles and learner styles conflict can increase the levels of anxiety amongst English language learners. They can get engaged in behaviors that can affect them negatively. A rise in the learner's anxiety levels are proportional to lower academic grades. This is a scenario when learners are having a communication gap with their teachers, face a challenge in developing language skills and have a lower language proficiency. The perceptions of the learners towards the supervisors are the main gap that must be catered. There must be strategies and teaching pedagogies that could assist these students in dealing with the language learning challenges and teaching pedagogies. However, this research is specifically concerned with the context of language learning and anxiety amongst learners of Rawalpindi.

Material and Methods

Research methodology comprises methods, which are used in research to complete study, these methods are contained on the design used in research, population and sampling, instruments, and how data was gathered and analyzed in the research. Research methodology is an essential part of research. It enables a researcher in selecting appropriate research methods and accomplish purpose of research (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015; Yvonne Feilzer, 2010). The purpose of this research is to examine the level of stress and anxiety amongst the English language learners. There are three types of research methods; qualitative, quantitative & mixed method (Fielding, 2012; Berkowitz, 2013). In this study, quantitative research designs was used. Quantitative research method was applied for collecting data from the Pakistani students. Their English language learning stress and anxiety levels are gauged. Population for this study includes the students of 1st year who were learning English language in Rawalpindi, the exact number of population data is not available at source. These students are acquiring education in different colleges and have different social and family backgrounds. Probability and non-probability sampling are two types of sampling strategies commonly applied by the researchers (Uprichard, 2013; Setia, 2016; Taherdoost, 2016). In this study, data was collected through non-probability sampling technique; convenience sampling. The first year students acquiring education in Rawalpindi are the main target for this research. A quantitative closed ended questionnaire is devised to collect the information from the students (Woo, O'Boyle & Spector, 2017; Walliman, 2017). Out of total sample 68% were male and 32% were female students. All students were 1st year college students. A Likert scale questionnaire namely; the foreign language anxiety scale (FLAC) designed by Horwitz et al. is used to understand the anxiety levels and causes of stress amongst second language learning students.

Demographic analysis

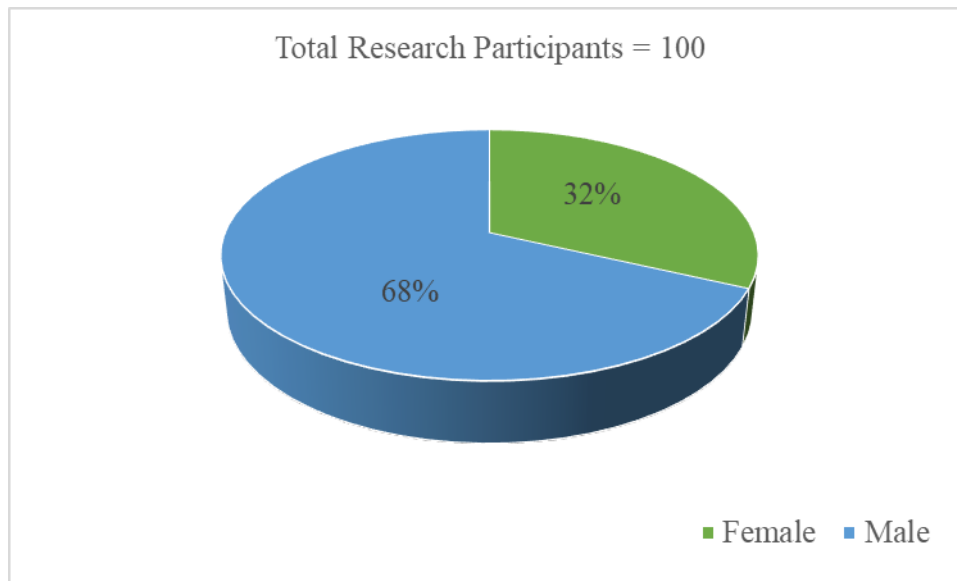


Figure: 1: Genders of the Participants

The figure above showing the percentage of the research participants, as there were a total of one hundred students participated in this research, out of these 68 (68%) were male and 32 (32%) were female students.

Results and Discussion

The research has been conducted to examine the factors that cause anxiety levels amongst the students learning English language. A total of 100 sample of participants are included in this study. The quantitative data was entered into SPSS version 23 and analysis was performed. A Likert scale has been applied based on five options (1 to 5 rating) and frequency analysis has been performed and shown below:

Table 1
Frequency and Descriptive Analysis

Statements	SA (1)	A (2)	N (3)	D (4)	S D (5)	Mean	SD
1. I don't know about making mistakes in language class.	6	38	42	19	5	1.66	0.977
2. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	5	35	37	17	6	1.84	0.972
3. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	11	29	43	14	3	1.69	0.950
4. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	7	27	42	20	4	1.87	0.950
5. During language class, I find my self thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	7	28	43	17	5	1.85	0.957
	11	29	43	14	3	1.69	0.950

6. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than me.	13	28	42	14	3	1.66	0.977
7. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	11	29	43	14	3	1.69	0.950
8. I started panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	11	30	43	13	3	1.67	0.943
9. In language class, I get so nervous and forget things I know.	14	29	40	14	3	1.63	0.991
10. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	11	29	43	14	3	1.69	0.950
11. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	11	29	43	14	4	1.69	0.950
12. Even though I'm well prepared for language class, I feel nervous about it.	7	27	42	20	5	1.87	0.950
13. I can feel my heart beating when I'm going to be called on in language class.	7	28	43	17	3	1.85	0.957
14. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	14	29	40	14	3	1.63	0.991
15. I feel more tense and nervous in my language than in my other classes.	11	29	43	14	3	1.69	0.950
16. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	13	31	44	9	3	1.58	0.934
17. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.							

The students were asked whether they worry about making mistakes during English language learning classes. Out of 100 students, 28 agreed, 42 stayed neutral and 19 disagreed. The students acquiring English language education often feel tremble before they attend the class. Around 35 individuals agreed, 5 strongly agreed and 17 disagreed to this question. Analysis has revealed that students get frightened when they don't understand what their teacher is explaining them in foreign language. This case was found in 29 (agree) and 11 (strongly agreed) responses. However, nearly 43 of them were confused what to respond in this question and kept neutral. The analysis has shown that most of the respondents kept neutral (42) when they were asked that foreign language classes doesn't bother them. However, 20 of them disagreed to the opinion. During language class around 28 students agreed that they think about things that have nothing to do about the course. However, there were 14 students who disagreed to this question. The results of the study showed that many students (29 agreed, 11 strongly agreed) that they keep thinking that other students are better in language than they are. Additionally, 43 of them stayed neutral, and were not sure to answer this question. Majority of students agreed that they are at ease during language test (28 agreed responses). However, there were 42 of them, who find it difficult to answer this question and stayed neutral. During the survey, 29 respondents agreed and 11 strongly agreed that they start to panic when they attend the English language learning class without preparation. These responses clearly show that the students are anxious while they go unprepared in their class.

The next question gauged the anxiety levels and nervousness of the students enrolled in English language learning courses in Rawalpindi. Analysis revealed higher levels of anxiety amongst these students (Agree:30, Strongly Agree: 11). The analysis has shown that students get nervous (agree: 30) during English language learning classes, however, some of them try to cope (disagree: 13). The students were inquired that if they are prepared for the class still, they get nervous or not. Majority respondents agreed (29) and stayed

neutral (43) to the question. It was found that 27 students agreed and 7 strongly agreed that they get their heart beating higher during their language class. Along with the symptoms of increased heartbeat, the analysis revealed that students get highly self-conscious (agreed: 28) during the English language learning lessons. The students experience nervousness and get tense during their classes, as obvious from the survey (29 agreed, 14 strongly agreed and 40 neutral). Surprisingly, students get nervous during the class and reason is that they have a fear that classmates will laugh at them, if they don't speak English well. To this question, there were 29 agreed, 11 strongly agreed and 43 neutral responses. 44 students were unclear about their response, when they were asked whether they would feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.

Overall, it has been found that students feel anxious due to their fears that they cannot perform well during the English language learning class. Even they feel conscious before the lecture of the English language. They get frightened when they don't understand what their teacher is explaining to them in a foreign language. They experience higher self-consciousness and higher blood pressures when they attend the class unprepared. They get more nervous in their language class as compared to the other classes. They equally give neutral and agreed responses against they would feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language. These anxiety levels must be monitored and the class instructor needs to take appropriate steps for managing the anxiety levels of these students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the causes of anxiety amongst English language learners, specifically amongst students in Rawalpindi. The literature review helped the researcher in selecting the variables for the study and designing the research instrument. A total of 100 participants are included in the study. These includes the students going to Rawalpindi colleges. The results of the study revealed that language anxiety is reflective of an individual's personality. Some of the students feel really anxious when they learn English language. Many of them have internal fears that they cannot accomplish good grades. The review of literature revealed that language anxiety is faced by students living all across the globe. However, different students behave differently, with some having higher anxiety and others experiencing lower levels.

The analysis has shown that anxiety is caused due to many reasons. One reason is self-perception. These English language learners considers themselves as less competent in contrast to other students. They fear that they cannot accomplish good grades, because they perceive that they are not good at communicating English with their peers and their supervisors. These students have a perception that they are low in capabilities and less proficient. This leads to a decline in their academic performances. The study conducted from the students of Rawalpindi revealed similar results. It has been found that students are anxious that they will make mistakes while they speak English (28 responses). 35 agreed that they tremble during their language class. There are around 40 students (11 agreed and 29 strongly agreed) that have a feeling that other students are better than them in the language learning classes and they panic. It has been found that these students often feel nervous, regardless of the fact that they are well-prepared during the class. Many student's experiences higher heart beats (27 agreed) during their language learning classes.

Recommendations

The analysis has shown that English language teachers can play a significant role in reducing the anxiety levels of these students. They can interact with the students individually and take those students into confidence. The next task is to understand the needs of these students facing anxiety. These supervisors are suggested to take appropriate options based on the individual needs of these students. The supervisors need to design their language learning courses based on the student's needs. They can engage the students in

different ways in order to increase their confidence so that the students of Rawalpindi acquire language learning courses with minimal anxiety levels.

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