

A Study on the Relationship between Anxieties with Learning Grammar in Public and Private Schools

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Abstract: For most of the students, learning a language is full of challenges. Affecting factors in general and anxiety in particular is one of the worthy of mentioning factors that language learners face in learning a second language. Anxiety with learning grammar has not received adequate attention in the literature especially in public and private schools to date. Therefore the present study endeavors to find out the difference between the anxieties of the EFL learners in the language class in the two public and private schools. In so doing, the researchers tried to seek 102 female students' attitudes on their anxiety in the grammar class in two public and private schools in Iran. Using an anxiety questionnaire by Horvitz et al. (1986), the results of the study revealed that in some cases differences could be observed between the anxieties the learners felt in terms of the schooling system where they studied. In fact, the school environment could influence the anxiety that the learners felt.

Key terms: Anxiety; EFL learners; language teaching, grammar.

Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest on the affective factors in learning environments (Ehrma et. al., 2003; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Sparks & Ganschow, 1991). Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1991) define anxiety as “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Horwitz & Young, 1991, p. 27).

Language teachers and researchers have been aware of anxiety-provoking potential of learning a foreign language for a number of years. Krashen (1985) maintained that stressful classroom environment works as a filter preventing easy acquisition and inhibiting learner's ability to take in and process incoming

information. An emerging body of research revealed that anxiety may impair foreign language production and achievement and its negative impact has also been identified at the specific stages of language learning: input, processing, retrieval, and output stage. What is more, anxiety was found to cause problems related to self-confidence, self-esteem, risk-taking ability, and ultimately hampering proficiency in the second language. Therefore, it is important for language teachers to identify the sources of language anxiety in the foreign language classroom to be able to implement appropriate methods to help students in overcoming it.

Statement of the problem

Anxious learners of foreign languages cannot perform successfully in classroom situations because they prefer to avoid difficult or complex tasks in order not to get embarrassed in front of the class. They find it particularly stressful to learn a foreign language and because they feel insecure and helpless they build some psychological barriers to communication (Horwitz & Young, 1991). In fact the learners who suffer from a great deal of anxiety may face difficulty in learning their language, and this can have serious impact on their participation and learning. On the other hand, if the learners are concerned with language components such as learning grammar, they feel more anxiety and are threatened by the dominant role of the teacher in the language class (Mohamed & Wahid, 2009). In other words, one of the sources of the anxiety is the difference that can be observed in two different schooling system of private and public schools. In fact, as it can be observed, too much attention is given to the learners and their roles in private schools while this kind of attention is lowered for the learners in public schools. In other words, since the learners in these two schooling systems are treated differently, they may suffer from different amount of anxiety in their grammar class (Hawkes & Koff, 1970). On the other hand, lack of adequate ability among some EFL learners may exert some type of behavior such as avoidance and escape from participation. Kleinmann (1977) and Steinberg and

Horwitz (1986) found that anxious learners tended to avoid certain linguistic structures and certain kinds of topics. When examining students' performance in a second language, many factors come into play namely confidence relaxation. Besides, any excessive stress may function in a negative manner because it may lead to the dominance of negative attitude toward learning. Moreover, anxiety associated with language use can affect the academic success of students.

Affective factors

In the learning process, affective variables have become an important issue. They include a vast area of factors that may be the goal of a great deal of research and investigation. Considering the significance of this area, Noels, Pelletier, and Vallerand (2000) argued: "In fact, affective variables, such as attitude, orientations, anxiety, and motivation, have been shown to be at least as important as language aptitude for predicting L2 achievement" (p. 35). Oxford (1999), doing a lot of research in this area, asserts that the affective side of the learners is the most influential aspect in language learning success or failure.

Language learning and anxiety

Researchers interested in the study of language anxiety distinguished six major sources of anxiety present in the foreign language classroom. They are closely linked to oral-oriented activities, competitiveness, isolation, the feeling of being judged and losing control, teachers characteristics. Research conducted on anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Koch and Terrel, 1991; Price, 1991; von Wörde, 2003) revealed that students have extremely negative experiences with oral activities in a language class. VonWörde (2003) noticed that the fear of public speaking has long been acknowledged as a phenomenon in psychology. Daly (1991) underlined that it may even exceed such phobias as fear of snakes, elevators, and heights. The task of speaking in a foreign language is more difficult since it involves learning a new language and performing in it (Foss and Reitzel, 1988). Strong evidence of the negative influence of oral activities on language anxiety may be first observed in the

research conducted by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). They noted that students with high language anxiety were mainly afraid to speak in the foreign language.

In terms of competitiveness, as the second source, Bailey (1983), through analysis of diary studies, recognized that too much competitiveness among language learners can lead to increased states of anxiety. She examined the diaries of eleven learners and noticed that they tended to become more anxious when they compared themselves to others or to an idealized self image, which can be rarely attained and found themselves less proficient. On the other hand, when learners perceived themselves becoming more proficient and better capable of competing their anxiety diminished (Ellis, 1985). She identified other signs of competitive behavior, such as hostile reactions toward other students based on comparisons, a desire to outperform other classmates, a desire to gain teacher's approval, an emphasis on tests and grades with regards to other student performances, and a mental or physical (temporary or permanent) withdrawal from the language learning (Young, 1991). Scarcella and Oxford (quoted in Oxford, 1999) are of the same opinion that competitiveness may relate to language anxiety but they suggest that it largely depends on the learner himself, his learning style preferences, the nature of the competition, demands and rewards of the environment and culture. Those learners, especially in competitive cultures, may enjoy competition and in such a situation it would not have any impact on their feelings of anxiety.

In terms of being judged in the classroom, Davies and Rinvoluceri (1990) focus on the problem of anxiety by observing classroom environment. They noticed that the situation of being judged in the class either by the learner or by the teacher may make them feel insecure and anxious. Turula (2004), in the investigation of classroom dynamics, found that teachers very often show approval or disapproval verbally and by body language. She gives examples of teachers who mocked students openly or praised them without smiling, or making the eye contact, which gave the impression of insincerity.

Another factor contributing to the feeling of anxiety is isolation in the classroom (Davies and Rinvoluceri, 1990). Learners may experience isolation when

they are made anonymous. Therefore, Prodromou (in Turula, 2004) stresses the importance of using students' names from the beginning of the course. In addition, teachers should gently enquire about the learners' lives and get others interested in them, which helps to make them feel at home during lessons (Turula, 2004).

An additional factor affecting foreign language anxiety is the feeling of the loss of control in the classroom. According to Turula (2004), students feel deprived of control in several classroom situations. First, learners may feel losing control over their role in the classroom interactions when it comes to managing the discourse. This is the consequence of a situation in which learners are not fast enough to answer teacher's questions or repeatedly appropriated by others. Moreover, comparable feelings may be experienced when learners are openly disinterested in each other's utterances and even interrupt the speaker.

In terms of instructors' characteristics and behaviors, A significant number of researchers relate language anxiety to interactions between an instructor and a learner. Among the most important interactions causing anxiety are harsh error correction, ridicule and inappropriate manner of handling mistakes in front of a class (Oxford, 1999). Instructors' beliefs about language teaching have also a major impact on language anxiety. Brandl (in Young, 1991, p. 428) reported that the majority of teachers believed a little bit of intimidation (to be) a necessary and supportive motivator for promoting students' performance. What is more, they perceived themselves to be in a classroom "less a counselor and friend and objected to a too friendly and in authoritative student-teacher relationship" (Brandl, in Young, 1991, p. 428).

Grammar in the language class

Along the history of second language teaching, the role of grammar has been an issue of controversy. According to Richards (2002), it has even been the most controversial. Thornburry (2001) asserts that in fact, no other issue has so preoccupied theorists and practitioners as the grammar debate. Roughly, the debate has brought about an extreme split of attitudes, namely, those who hold that grammar should receive a central attention in language teaching and those who hold that

grammar should not be taught at all. The former is reflected in Grammar Translation Method and Cognitive Code Learning and the latter is applied in Natural Approach and deep end or strong version of Communicative Language Teaching.

Aims and research questions

The study seeks certain objectives to fulfill, the most important of which is that it means to identify if the EFL learners in the two schooling system of private and public schools suffer from certain amount of anxiety and that if any kind of relationship can be identified between the anxiety these learners have and their grammar achievement. The present study is guided by the following question:

- What is the relationship between the EFL learners' anxiety and the two schooling systems?

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of the study is on the ideas proposed by Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model. The SLA framework developed by Gardner's (1985) socio-educational model is a common reference point to gain insight into L2 situational anxiety. Gardner's

Model identifies four main stages, namely, social milieu, individual differences, SLA contexts and outcomes which determine the SLA process. According to Gardner, individual differences, i.e., intelligence, language aptitude, motivation and situational anxiety are affected by cultural beliefs in society and, in turn, such personal learner features condition the formal and informal SL contexts which determine linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes. The model, therefore, suggests that L2 situational anxiety exerts a direct influence on both the formal and informal SL learning contexts and, consequently, on the linguistic outcomes. While Gardner's (1985) linguistic and non-linguistic outcome stage covers overt performance anxiety which has been probed through the FLCAS (Horwitz et al., 1986), it is also equally important to identify the forms of anxiety which may occur in the other three stages with reference to VLEs. When first introduced to synchronous text-based environments, individuals

are usually unfamiliar with the virtual social milieu and its norms. Their individual differences and personality traits are no longer conditioned by real-world conventions. In this input phase, learners receive new stimuli and accustom themselves with the multi-user community. It can be envisaged that this initial strive creates some level of acceptance anxiety. In the processing phase, when learners are operating in the virtual SLA context to carry out required activities, they may experience orientation anxiety, communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. In the output phase when learners' products are presented to the whole virtual community, performance anxiety may occur.

Literature review

There are some studies on the effects of anxiety and L2 performance. Many researchers seem to agree that anxiety is linked directly to performance in L2 and it is one of the crucial factors affecting language learning regardless of learning contexts (Dornyei, 2001; Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Krashen, 1982; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Oxford, 1990; Young, 1991). Many studies have examined the relationships between anxiety and specific tasks in the L2. The belief that foreign language learning might induce anxiety is not a new concept. A group of scholars studied the effect of anxiety on L2 listening performance. Bacon (1989) states that listening in the foreign language can induce anxiety. Specifically, Saito, Garza, and Horwitz (1999) investigated foreign language reading anxiety in groups of students studying Spanish, Russian, and Japanese as a foreign language. Their study revealed that reading in a foreign language might invoke anxiety to some learners, and levels of reading anxiety varied according to the foreign language and different writing systems.

More studies on anxiety have been centered on the relationships between anxiety and oral performance. Mejias, Applbaum, Applbaum, and Trotter (1991) investigated communication apprehension among Mexican American students and found that there were significant positive correlations between the students'

communication apprehension in Spanish and English. They also observed that positive correlation in the level of oral communication apprehension between the L1 and L2. In other words, the students whose communication apprehension level in the L1 was high also felt more difficulties in learning a second language. Steinberg and Horwitz et al (1986) examined the effect of induced anxiety on the content of ESL learners' oral descriptions on pictures. They tested the hypothesis that there would be differences in the content of description made by two groups of students, one with an anxiety treatment and the other without such treatment. They found that students in the treatment group showed poor oral performance in comparison with those in a control group without an anxiety treatment. Aida (1994) explored the relationship between anxiety and language performance in FL among students of Japanese at a university. On the basis of the students' final course grades, she found significant factors affecting students' anxiety in learning Japanese. Some of those factors were speech anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and degree of comfort when speaking with native speakers of Japanese. Phillips (1992) investigated the effects of anxiety on American university students' performance on oral tests in French as a FL. The oral tasks involved free talking about a given cultural topic and performing a role-play. She found that anxious students tended to receive lower exam grades than less anxious students. In addition, it was found that students frightened by oral evaluation did not show positive attitudes toward their language class.

Methods

The study tried to seek the participants' attitudes on the role of anxiety in the grammar class and the differences that might exist between the two schooling system in this regard. Below the details of the participants, the instruments, the procedure and data analysis techniques will be discussed.

Procedure and participants

The population of the study was composed of all female language learners in two high schools, grade three: the public and private schools. They were a

combination of 132 learners who were studying in these two schools and attended language classes. To homogenize the participants, the researcher used Nelson Test of grammar. Any subject whose score fell one standard deviation above and below the mean were selected. The table below demonstrates the data about the participants in terms of their schools and numbers for each. Altogether, 102 participants made up the samples belonging to two different schools. In fact, these learners studied in four language classes, but the teacher, level, and materials for all of them were the same. The reason for selecting these learners was based on the idea that the learners of the study had already studied English in the given schools for two or three years before and were naturally familiar with the problems and obstacles that were imposed to them as a result of over-anxiety they felt in the grammar class. They could interpret the role of anxiety in the language class and answer the questions about exercising that they felt as a result of the teaching learning processes. Since the two genders study in separate schools in Iran, it is not possible to include both genders in the study.

To carry out the survey, the researcher personally attended the classes and distributed the questionnaires. The researcher first of all described the goal of the study to the students in each group and asked them to give their response to the questions one by one. The second source of data was the grammar test taken to assess the grammar knowledge of the subjects of the study.

The Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) for Microsoft Windows version 21 was used to analyze the collected data. Two types of data analysis were used: descriptive and inferential. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, standard deviations and percentages, were implemented in order to investigate the demographic data, and the questionnaire about the anxiety of the learners. Besides, T-Test was used to discover the relationship between the scores and the question items.

Instrumentation

Two types of instruments were used to collect the data of the study. As the first step, Nelson placement Test was used to determine the level of the subjects and

homogenize them. It was a 60-item test containing some multiple-choice and fill-in-the-blank tests of grammar. The second instrument was using the questionnaire belonging to Horvitz et al (1986). It used five point Likert scale to estimate the views of the participants using 1) strongly agree, 2) agree, 3) disagree, 4) strongly disagree, 5) undecided as the points of estimation. In fact the questionnaire is a self-report tool used to elicit the participants' anxiety responses towards language learning EFL in language classes. The original questionnaire contained 33 items and after some modification, ten of them which were irrelevant to the context of the study were excluded and the remaining 23 were used to collect the required information. On the other hand, some modifications were used to adopt the questionnaire to the objectives of the study by adding grammar as the scale to be investigated. To assist the participants to understand the questionnaire items, it was preferred to translate it into Farsi. The questionnaire contained all related items about the degree of EFL felt anxious about grammar as well as possible causes attributed to it. In fact, the questionnaire was a modified version of the original Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) which originally was composed of 33 items. After these modifications, the researcher estimated the validity of the questionnaire by an expert to translate the questionnaire into fluent Farsi and then back translated into English. In case any ambiguous points were noticed, they were modified and finally the final form was developed. A pilot study was run with similar subjects to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire using test-retest method and its reliability was proved to be reliable at .83.

The design of the study

The study being a descriptive study aimed at investigating the anxious of the EFL learners in the grammar class in the two schooling system. This method of investigation is selected when the goal of the study is observing a topic from the views of a large number of participants and when the goal is investigating the attitudes of the EFL learners in large scales. The dependent variable of the study was

the level of anxiety of the learners and the independent variable was the two schooling systems. Besides, it was a cross sectional study which was carried out in a short period of time.

Results

Descriptive data

Table 1 presents all of questions and the mean of the responses to each one which had been answered by 102 subjects, only female. In fact, each question item is followed with the relevant mean that can indicate the degree the participants felt to agree or disagree with the point. For instance, in terms of the second question, the two groups showed their agreement with the given question item. The mean of 3.17 shows that they subjects disagreed with the idea that they don't worry about the mistakes they make in the language class. The low means show that the participants were in agreement about most of the investigated question items.

	N	Mean	S.D.
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am in the grammar class.	102	2.06	.830
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in the class.	102	3.1765	.89456
3. I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in the class.	102	2.0588	.91005
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying.	102	1.8627	.83297
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English grammar classes per week.	102	1.9902	.99000
6. During the English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	102	4.0588	.62653

7. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well to my grammar knowledge.	102	3.1765	.87214
8. I am usually at ease during the grammar class.	102	3.7647	.59994
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my English class.	102	1.3922	.49064
10. In the grammar class I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	102	2.5392	.91923
11. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers grammar questions.	102	2.1471	.53394
12. It would not be nervous learning English grammar.	102	2.8627	.70415
13. I often feel like not going to the grammar class.	102	1.6471	.91896
14. I feel confident when I learn grammar.	102	2.7255	.82242
15. I am afraid my English teacher is ready to correct every grammar mistake I make while speaking.	102	1.6471	.73991
16. I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in the grammar class.	102	1.9804	.90083
18. I feel very self-conscious about grammar of English in front of other students.	102	2.8922	.76956
19. I feel more tense and nervous in the grammar class than other classes.	102	1.4314	.51722
20. I get nervous and confused when I am working on English grammar.	102	1.9608	.70249
21. When I am on my way to the grammar class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	102	3.4608	.62413
22. I am afraid the other students will laugh at me	102	1.5784	.63614

when I am in the grammar class.

23. I feel nervous in the grammar class when the English teacher asks me questions and I must reply. **102** **1.5490** **.57381**

Table 1. Overall data.

Data analysis

Table 2 demonstrates the correlational data between the students' school type and their responses to the question items. The data is achieved by correlating the data of the question items and the schools using Pearson Chi-Square ratio. As it can be seen, the data shows relationship between eleven question items and the learners from two school types. In fact the data shows the difference that may exist between the views of the participants from the two schools and the given question items

No.		df.	Sig.
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in the grammar class.	6	.001
2	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the grammar class.	9	.000
3	It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English grammar classes per week.	9	.000
4	During the grammar class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	9	.000
5	I don't feel pressure to prepare very well to my grammar presentation.	12	.000
6	I am usually at ease during the grammar class.	12	.000
7	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in my English class.	9	.002
8	In the grammar class I can get so nervous I forget things I	9	.001

	know.		
9	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my grammar class.	9	.008
10	I feel confident when I speak in the oral class.	6	.000
11	I am afraid my English teacher is ready to correct every grammar mistake I make while speaking.	9	.000

Table 2. The correlational data between the school type and questions.

In other words, the data in table 2 signifies the idea that the respondents with different schools offered different views in terms of the 11 statements stated above, but in other cases, they presented the ideas without much difference between them.

Discussion

The present study first proposed the problems and significance of the study as well as the most important objectives of the study, because of which the study is going to be carried out. On the other hand, the researchers proposed the reasons because of which there is a need to explore the attitudes concerning the role of anxiety in the language class. Then the studies carried out on anxiety and its' impact on the performance of EFL learners in the language classes were discussed. It shed light on the impact of stress and anxiety on the linguistic performance of different types of EFL learners. The researchers then presented the required information about the participants, their level, procedures and the implemented questionnaire, the data gathering procedures, and data analysis techniques. It showed how the researchers submitted the questioners and collected the necessary data. It presented the information about the type of the participants and the reasons why they were selected. Finally, the researchers discussed the achieved data obtained through the questionnaire. All of the statements and the responses given by the participants were presented in separate tables one by one and the discussions were followed. This was followed by the discussion of the correlational relationship between the responses and the school types of the subjects. Finally it was revealed that the respondents with different schools offered different views in terms of the 11 statements stated above, but in other cases, they presented the ideas without much difference between them.

The results of the study are in line with other similar studies that were carried out in other countries. For instance, Price (1991), Young (1991), and Scarcella and Oxford (quoted in Oxford, 1999) found that students react in an anxious way in the language class. Scarcella and Oxford (quoted in Oxford, 1999) discussed that a source of anxiety can be competitiveness and may relate to language anxiety but they suggest that it largely depends on the learner himself, his learning style preferences, the nature of the competition, demands and rewards of the environment and culture. Those learners, especially in competitive cultures, may enjoy competition and in such a situation, it would not have any impact on their feelings of anxiety. The type of the school and classroom setting may also affect the degree of anxiety among the learners. On interpreting the influential role of the school in evoking or removing anxiety some studies were done. Turula (2004), as an example, in the investigation of classroom dynamics, found that schools and classrooms have serious role in evoking and increasing anxiety. She gives examples of the learning environments where teachers who mocked students openly or praised them without smiling, or making the eye contact, which gave the impression of insincerity. Over all, It is evident that the education policy in a school highly effect the level of the students' anxiety.

Implications

The results may assist practitioners to pay due attention to the roles given to the teachers and learners and to implement the most suitable teaching methods in a way that they can lower the anxiety level of the learners. The study came to definite results in terms of the EFL learners' attitudes on the sources of anxiety. These achievements can help administrators and managers in different areas to pay more attention to their teachers' characteristics in relation to the sources of anxiety producing. Besides, the study may help the learners to find more ideas about their desired teachers, classroom environment, interactional behavior, error correction strategies, examinations and all other sources of anxiety. More attention should be given to teaching methods, and other qualifications of the teaching-learning

environment. More research in this area may reveal some of the weaknesses in the educational system and their deficiencies. The results can be used as a scale to judge the idea that learners are highly affected by their teachers, and their social and cultural environment and thus each of them need their own studies to prove their effects.

Conclusion

The study investigated the students' perceptions about the sources of anxiety and the effect of collaboration on their anxiety level. To this purpose, a survey study was carried out with a group of subjects. The present chapter presented the detailed discussion on the presented data which led the researcher to achieve some sort of conclusion about the achieved attitudes provided by the participants.

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