The Association Between Students' English Language Learning Anxiety And Their Academic Performance

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at studying the association between university students' English learning anxiety and their academic performance. The study selected 380 students from universities of the capital of Pakistan, using purposive sampling technique. It utilized the following two instruments to collect the relevant information: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale poll (FLCAS) in order to decide the students' level of uneasiness on a Likert scale which had five-point; and the academic performance which was managed at the completion of the final exams (CGPA). The quantifiable assessments showed a significant association between the students' academic performance and their Anxiety in their English Classes, the anxiety scale test, and the scale of communication anxiety and the fear of negative assessment. The study concludes that with the increase in the students' anxiety level their academic performance decreases. The research

recommends that educational counselor need to intervene regularly to help students in reducing English learning anxiety and thus enhancing their academic performance.

Keywords: English learning, university students, anxiety, academic performance

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning a second language involves complex linguistic cognitive and metacognitive factors. All these factors result in and increase the learner's anxiety in learning that second language, which significantly impacts their performance. Studies, for example (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), have attempted to investigate from multiple perspectives the connection between this anxiety and the academic performance.

Testing anxiety involves the assessment of unpleasant encounters, feelings and stressful feelings that the individual comes to develop before and during their performance is being evaluated. The anxiety test implies any form that makes a person feel intimidated about their capacities for adapting distressing conditions, such as the condition of test taking. Studies, for example Cheraghian et al. (2008) agree that anxiety in the individual diminishes their performance and that an individual with much adequate knowledge but experiencing test anxiety will perform much more poorly than those who have inadequate knowledge but no or little anxiety. Additionally, the individuals with anxious feelings perform half-heartedly and feel significantly more concerned and less certain before the assessments (Fathi Ashteini & Emamgholiv and, 2002). The following major factors components increasing anxiety and, so, cause poor performance: lack of self-confidence, inadequate knowledge, negative feelings about the institute, the fear of failure, and bitter experiences in the past (Cassady & Johnson, 2002).

Identifying and managing these major factors can help the individual in recognizing their potential and letting it dominate the negative feelings of anxiety and, thus, result in expediting the process of learning and accomplishing the task better.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety has incurred investigations from manifold perspectives. Moreover, its multiple aspects and domains have been explored. The present research focuses on its association with academic performance of university students. The study examines how the anxiety in the process of the English language learning impacts the students' performance in their tests.

A. What is Anxiety?

Explanations of anxiety depend on its different levels and types. The Encyclopedia Britannica (2008) defines it as a habitual feeling fear which often remains inexplicable. Scovel (1978) terms

it to be an unclear dread and suggests that this feeling has no explicit and direct connection with any object (p. 34). Similarly, Spielberger (1972) considers it an unpleasant emotional state considered by a feeling of pressure, fear, and uneasiness, and by an automatic nerve system stimulus (p. 482) In connection with the second language learning, anxiety arises from the subtle complications that second language involves (Horvitz, 1986, p. 128). Horvitz also takes into consideration learning measures taken and applied in the class.

B. Students' Anxiety and their Academic Performance

Anxiety, from one of the perspective, is classified into three types that include trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation specific anxiety. The first type, which is trait anxiety, is, according to Eysenck (1979), a personality trait. Similarly, Scovel (1978) considers it "a more permanent predisposition to be anxious". State anxiety implies the experience of fear at a specific moment, whereas the situational anxiety is experienced in distinct situations (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Moreover, Brown (2001) recommends that the state and the situation-specific anxieties result from experiences in certain conditions or events. Scovel (1978) and Alpert and Haber (1960) also see anxiety from the perspective its being facilitative and debilitative. The former, as the names suggests, becomes a cause of the improvement in the students' learning and academic performance and makes them conscious, while the latter hampers both, learning and performance.

C. Causes of the Language Learning Anxiety

Studies have attempted to identify a range of factors that cause anxiety in the second language learning. Bailey (1983), for example, finds anxiety to be significantly linked with the students' stress for the class and their assessments and also with their terms with their instructors. Horwitz and Cope (1986) agree that anxiety majorly stems from the pressure of taking examinations and from the fear of being negatively assessed. Moreoverin (1991) lists the following factors to be causing anxiety: the level of difficulty in the second language class; the student's own impression and perception of the second language; the student's being hesitant and fearful towards taking part in the class; and the physical conditions of the class. Young (1991) emphasizes on the following factors as major causes of anxiety: the student's relations including the class fellows, the instructor, and the classroom; the student's perception about the second language learning; the instructor's perception about and methodology of teaching; and the student's perception about their assessments.

D. Foreign Language Anxiety

MacIntyre (1999) finds out that while learning the second language stress and negative emotional responses are stimulated. Similarly, Horwitz, & Cope (1986) take such anxiety as a specific complex of self-discernments, sentiments, convictions, and practices which are linked with classroom learning developing from the unique learning measure (p. 128). Awan et al (2010) also saw a significant connection between the foreign language learning anxiety and the academic performance.

Cheragian et al. (2008) investigated the relationship between the students' test anxiety and their academic performance. Their research concludes that the most of the students experienced either a low or a moderate level of anxiety. Moreover, they saw no major relationship between the students' test anxiety and their total average score. High anxiety, however, did result in increasing the poor performance by the students. The researchers recommended that further studies need to be done in order to identify other related causes and find strategies to decrease such anxiety among students.

Ataei Nakhaei et al. (2010) conducted a similar study in psychiatry clinic where they examined group therapy. They based this therapy on the overall consciousness which was established through the students' study skills. The therapy was meant to reduce the test anxiety level of the students. The results revealed that the group which was based on an overall consciousness in experimental group experienced a less anxiety during the test taking as compared with the one which was based on similar study skills but in control group.

English language, being a foreign/second language in Pakistan, continues to remain complex for the majority of the university students. Moreover, since this language is almost the only medium in university education, students face difficulty in expressing their content in this language, which significantly impacts their academic performance.

III. METHOD

The present study is quantitative and analyzes the collected data in measurable units. The study uses Pearson Product Movement coefficient of correlation as the primary measurement tool to view the relationship between factors that affect leaning and performance. It identifies the following variables:

1. English Class Anxiety
2. Communication Anxiety
3. The fear of being negatively assessed
4. The anxiety of taking test

Population and Participants:

The study uses a sample of three hundred and eighty individuals. The sample is further divided into one hundred and eighty-eight male participants and one hundred and ninety-two female. Moreover, the study also takes into consideration socio-economic statuses of the participants. Seventy students belonged to a higher status, three hundred and one participants were from middle class, whereas only nine students came from a lower stratum. Similarly, the study also considered the family construction of the individuals, while collecting and analyzing its data. In this connection, one hundred and seven students were living in a joint family system, whereas two hundred and seventy three students came from a single family set-up. All the participants were the

university students from the final semester of their Bachelor's. Additionally, the study also took into account the GPA of the students to assess their academic performance.

The study present collected its data on random basis from the following public and private sector universities of Islamabad and Rawalpindi: Quaid-e-Azam Univeristy, Allama Iqbal Open University, Fatima Jinnah University, Arid Agriculture University, and Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto University of Science & Technology. It selected fifty participants from the last mentioned institute and sixty from the rest of the universities. Moreover, the study selected ten different classes from every university, using fish bowl sampling method. The names of the students were written on a paper and placed in a container for random selection so as to give equal chances of selection to every student and minimize the risk of biased sample.

Unit of Analysis:

The study used two instruments to collected the data. It, first, employed the Persian version of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale questionnaire. This questionnaire was completed while the students were taking the test. The questionnaire was aimed to find out the level of the students' anxiety on a Likert scale that had five-point. The scale ranged from a 'completely agree' to a 'completely disagree' points. The scale consisted of a 33-item questionnaire. Its items were grouped into five parts: communicative anxiety, test anxiety, fear of negative assessment, and the anxiety of the foreign i.e. English class. More specifically, the questionnaire consisted of 33 statements which were placed into the following groups: eight items concerned the communication anxiety; nine items were related to fear of negative assessment, whereas five items were linked with test anxiety. The rest of the items, which were 11, were grouped in the anxiety of English class (Zhao, 2007). The scale was reliable because it had already tested in a pilot study before the data collection.

Academic performance

The study assesses the students' academic performance accumulatively based on their GPA they had achieved till last semester.

Ethical Considerations:

The study follows all the ethical considerations before, during and after the completion of the research. It assured the participants that their identities would be kept confidential and the data would be used only for this research, which the study completely abides by. Moreover, the individuals were also given the choice to give up their assessment at any level during the research. In addition, the participants were duly guided the schedules and the venues of their assessment meetings. Their convenience was also given due respect.

IV. RESULTS

The study, in its examination of the participants, found a negative connection between the English language anxiety and the academic performance of the students. The results reveal that with the

increase in anxiety, the academic performance diminishes. The following table shows a quantitative interpretation of the results:

Table 1: Demographic features of the Sample

Variables	Frequencies	Percentages %
Gender		
Female	192	50.5
Male	188	49.5
Status (Socioeconomic)		
Upper class	70	18.4
Middle class	301	79.2
Lower class	09	2.4
Family Structure		
Joint family system	107	28.2
Nuclear family system	273	71.8
Mean Age = 20.78	**Standard. Deviation**	**= 2.345**

Table 2: Pearson Product Movement Coefficient of Correlation – the English learning anxiety and the students' academic performance

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Class Anxiety		$.250^{**}$	-.001	$.203^{**}$	$.644^{**}$	$-.385^{**}$
2. Communication Anxiety			.001	$.282^{**}$	$.673^{**}$	$-.362^{**}$
3. Fear of being negatively evaluated				.030	$.387^{**}$	$-.163^{**}$
4. Anxiety of test taking					$.640^{**}$	$-.391^{**}$
5. Total scores						$-.559^{**}$
6. Grade point Average						

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

V. DISCUSSION

This study investigates any potential connection between the English language learning anxiety of the students of Pakistani universities and their academic performances. Besides, it also examines the relationship between the students' academic performance and the FLCAS segments.

The present research revealed that there is significant negative association between English specking anxiety and academic performance. The finding significantly corresponded with the previous studies (Awan et al. 2010; Chen and Chang, 2009; Horwitz, 2001; Shahnaz and Bhatt, 2014; Jadoon et al. 2022). The negative impact of the English language anxiety and the language learning is also established through the findings. Additionally, the present study found a negative connection between anxiety and achievement. It is a finding which is in accordance with those of certain other studies (Aida, 1994; Isselbaecher, 2004; Cheragian et al., 2008; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Chen & Lin, 2009; Nisi and Yamini, 2009; and Yazdani & Soleimani, 2011). Few studies such as (Liu, 2006) and (Oxford, 1999), however, concluded with a positive connection between language anxiety and language achievement.

Moreover, the anxiety found in the evaluations of the students who belong to farfetched regions is significantly more prominent. This is because such students have issues in their basic skills related to the English language. The analysis of the study shows that the students with the weaker English language skills feel more stressed when they try to participate in the presence of other classmates. Their basic fear is that they will fail to speak in the English flawlessly. This fear results in their anxiety and culminates into frustration in assessments as well. Moreover, their perception that they will not be able to speak and communicate appropriately in the English language strengthens their established conviction about themselves and, thus, remains prevalent.

Zhaoand (2007) and Yamat and Bidabadi (2012) concluded by recommending that the learners of the second language such as English need to be provided with a friendly, informal and encouraging environment so that they could reasonably participate in the learning process. Their investigations also recommended that the students should not be forced to participate directly in the second language. The emphasis should, instead, be laid upon accommodating them to the class environment and encouraging to take part in discussions according to their comfort and convenience so as to save them from developing anxiety that could intimidate them from furthering their skills. Similarly, they should not be mistakes should be made feel embarrassed on their mistakes; their mistakes should be made a positive part of their learning (Jones, 2004). Likewise, the instructor need to eliminate the student's fear of being evaluated negatively, and for this purpose, the teacher need to plan the assessment criteria of their students accordingly Daly (1991). The teacher should also inculcate in their students a feeling to accept anxiety as something indispensible and conducive to the learning process (Scovel 1991). Besides, the students should be instructed with a methodology that fits best to their needs and caters to varying temperaments (Anwar et al. 2010).

The study reflects that all the elements of FLCAS including communicative anxiety, the apprehension of being evaluated negatively, anxiety of test taking anxiety, and fear of being in the

class of the second that is English language adversely impacted the students' academic performance. Moreover, as this anxiety intensified of students identified, the students' scores in their assessments reduced significantly. In its findings, this study agrees with the studies by Zhao (2007), Mac Intyre and Gardner (1989), and Chastain (1975).

VI. CONCLUSION

The present study intended to investigate the association between the students' English language learning anxiety and their academic performance in the universities in the capital of Pakistan. It, in its examination of the participants, found a negative connection between the English language anxiety and the academic performance of the students. The research on the basis of a quantitative interpretation of the results concludes that with the increase in anxiety, the academic performance diminishes. It, therefore, in the light of its discussion, safely infers that there exists a negative association between the students' anxiety in the process of learning a foreign language such as English and their academic performance. All the elements of FLCAS including communicative anxiety, the apprehension of being evaluated negatively, anxiety of test taking anxiety, and fear of being in the class of the second that is English language adversely impacted the students' academic performance.

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