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Pre-service EFL teachers' expression of uneasiness and anxiety

Taye Emmaneul Akinmulegun^{a*}, Department of Foreign Language, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, North Cyprus via Mersin 10, Turkey.

Naciye Kunt^b, Department of Foreign Language, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, North Cyprus via Mersin 10, Turkey.

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Abstract

Language learning anxiety is a reoccurring phenomenon in language learning because of its sensitivity to impart language learning and teaching. From this perspective, the present study investigates the language anxiety level of EFL pre-service teachers in an international university in North Cyprus. The participants were from different countries (e.g. Turkey, Russia, Germany, Iran etc.) in undergraduate English language teaching programme. Horwitz's, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and a set of semi-structured interview questions were administered. The results of the study reveal that pre-service EFL teachers experience foreign language anxiety. Based on the findings of this study, several teaching implications could be considered for teacher education. For example, support and empathy is needed for future language teachers in foreign language context since they are also susceptible to language anxiety like foreign language learners. Through this, pre-service teachers will be able to cope with, if not totally eliminate their foreign language anxiety prior to their teaching career.

Keywords: Foreign language anxiety, pre-service teachers' anxiety, teacher education; FLCAS, teacher anxiety.

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **Taye Emmaneul Akinmulegun**, Department of Foreign Language, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, North Cyprus via Mersin 10, Turkey.

E-mail address: akinmulegunt@yahoo.com / Tel.: +90 392 630 2616

1. Introduction

The study on anxiety has gained much interest in years, with the rise in the issue of affective factors significant impact on foreign language learning, dealing with “the emotional responses and motivation of learners”, as these factors indicate “the stimulation of the body system and its direct interference in the learning task” (Scovel, 1978: 16). Amidst the other affective factors pointed out by Brown, (1994): self-esteem, risk-taking, inhibition, empathy, and motivation, anxiety is considered to play an influential role upon learners' foreign language learning, performance and achievement, as supported in a variety of research works on anxiety in educational psychology and second language learning. Many research conducted on foreign language (FL) anxiety for many years yielded inconsistent results in determining the relationship between FL anxiety and achievement in the target language. This is due to the fact that studies on FL anxiety were not specific on the type of anxiety measured (Scovel, 1978). The conclusion was therefore that there is need to specify the type of anxiety being measured in the future (Scovel, 1978).

The study on anxiety in foreign language took a new perspective after Horwitz's, (1986) study which put forward the concept Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), with the notion that foreign language anxiety is a situational-specific anxiety unique to foreign language classroom, putting into consideration the three foreign language anxiety factors: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. This brought a ripple-effect in the field as more research work began to rush into studying foreign language learning anxiety in various situations and contexts (Horwitz, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Kunt, 1997; Sellers, 2000; Yan & Wang, 2001; Kunt, 2005; Yan & Horwitz, 2008; Kunt & Tum 2010; Al-Shboul, Ahmad, Nordin & Rahman, 2013). Furthermore, effects of foreign language anxiety has also been analyzed (Cheng, 1998; Horwitz, 2001; Argaman & Abu-Rabia, 2002; Elkhafaifi, 2005; Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Aydin, 2008; Huang & Hung, 2013; Khodadady & Khajavy, 2013). Sources and factors influencing the different degrees foreign language anxiety learners go through have been studied likewise in diverse studies (Young, 1991; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey & Daley, 2000; Gregerson & Horwitz, 2002; Von-Worde, 2003). In addition, ways of reducing and alleviating feelings of foreign language anxiety have been looked into in addition to anxiety management strategies for creating classroom environment that prevents learners from debilitating foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 1986; Young, 1991; Young, 1992; Kondo & Ying-Ling, 2004; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009).

Research conducted so far has looked into the experience of students on foreign language anxiety. Little has been done on pre-service foreign language teachers (Horwitz, 1996; Ameen, Guffey & Jackson, 2002; Kunt & Tum, 2010) as it is sometimes disregarded that pre-service teachers of foreign language also fall under the category of foreign language learners. Though we may consider them as experienced language user, notwithstanding, since the process of language learning is never complete (Horwitz, 1996). It is imperative that studies should be invested into it because anxieties developed by foreign language teachers have the innate potency of aggravating such in learners which might negatively influence teachers' teaching especially their pedagogical choice and general well-being (Tum, 2012; Tum & Kunt, 2013; Tum, 2015).

With the overpowering dominance of English language, survey about the future of English language shows that it will not be replaced by any other languages as a lingual franca for the next 50 years (Graddol, 1997). It is therefore certain that the population of non-native foreign language teachers would be on the increase every year globally (Borg, 2006). A call into the anxiety level of non-native foreign language pre-teachers is therefore necessary. Through conducting empirical research on foreign language anxiety of pre-service teachers, this study shed more light on this phenomenon.

2. Method

This paper is a fragment of a larger study with limited scope based on descriptive statistics and a qualitative analysis of data on the pre-service teachers' response to the interview questions designed to look into the levels of foreign language anxiety and expression of uneasiness of pre-service teachers in teacher education programme.

3. Participants

Participants in the study were pre-service teachers in foreign language teaching department under English language teaching programme in an international university in North Cyprus. The participants were from five different countries (Turkey 23%, North Cyprus 48%, England 13%, Russia 7%, Germany 3%, Saudi Arabia 3%, and Iran 3%). The participants were enrolled in different courses under the teacher education language programme.

4. Instruments

A widely used and reliable questionnaire instrument (FLCAS) developed by (Horwitz, 1986) was administered to the participants. The FLCAS consists of 33 items of five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 'Strongly Agree' to 5 'Strongly Disagree' which elicits the pre-service teachers self-reports of anxiety in a foreign language classroom. FLCAS has been proven to be a reliable measuring instrument in terms of Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Horwitz (1986) sample work with 108 students showed the reliability measure of the FLCAS alpha coefficient to be .93 and the test-retest reliability after a period of eight weeks was $r = .83$. Likewise, different studies that used FLCAS had also conceded high reliability scores (Aida, 1994; Truitt, 1995). In Aida (1994) report, internal consistency on 96 subjects measured was found to be .94; Likewise Truitt's (1995) report measured on 198 subjects was .95. For the present study, Cronbach alpha coefficient for 31 participants was .88. Furthermore, a semi structured interview session was conducted with a randomly selected few of the participants to further elicit participants' self-reports of foreign language anxiety.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

After obtaining permission from the teacher education programme department, the questionnaire was distributed to the participant with the consent form which was signed in good faith, after which the researchers randomly select some of the participants for the interview session. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used to elicit the FLCAS data for descriptive analysis. The semi-structured interview on the other hand was analyzed thematically and the results were summarized.

6. Findings and Discussion

The FLCAS for the 33 items yields a composite score ranging from 33 (not anxious at all) to 165 (extremely anxious). This shows that the higher the total points were, the more anxious the students were. The composite scores in this study shows the range of fluctuations of the foreign language anxiety levels among the pre-service teachers with the minimum anxiety score measured being 68 and the maximum score being 136.

In accordance with Horwitz (1986) definition, foreign language anxiety is "a discrete complex of self-perceptions, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom learning originating from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 128) and its construct which underline three associated performance anxieties: 1) communication apprehension, 2) test anxiety, and 3) fear of negative evaluation. This eleven items factor represents students 'communication apprehension' (1, 4, 9, 14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30, and 32). The next factor representing student 'test anxiety' is fifteen items (3, 5,

6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, and 28). And the last factor that matched to students' fear of negative evaluation' is seven items (2, 7, 13, 19, 23, 31, and 33).

Table 1. Frequency responses (in %), means and standard deviation for the FLCAS items

Items	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	23	26	23	19	10	3.3	1.3
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	32	23	13	29	03	2.5	1.3
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	32	23	26	16	03	3.7	1.2
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	13	39	23	23	03	3.4	1.1
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes	13	65	13	07	03	2.2	0.9
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	16	16	29	26	13	3.0	1.3
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am	1	32	23	16	10	3.4	1.3
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class	26	19	42	10	03	2.5	1.1
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class	26	16	26	26	07	3.3	1.3
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class	13	23	16	36	13	2.3	1.3
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language class.	13	42	26	10	10	2.6	1.2
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know	16	19	26	23	16	3.0	1.3
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class	26	29	16	23	07	3.5	1.3
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers	16	45	10	23	07	2.6	1.2
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting	7	29	26	32	07	3.0	1.1
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it	16	29	16	23	16	3.1	1.4
17. I often feel like not going to my language class							
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class	23	48	16	10	03	3.8	1.0
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make	16	45	16	23	-	2.5	1.0
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class	13	45	23	13	07	3.5	1.1
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get	19	26	32	16	07	3.4	1.2
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class	19	48	13	19	-	3.7	1.0

23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do	13	45	13	26	03	2.6	1.1
24. I feel very self – conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students	16	36	16	26	07	3.3	1.2
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind	07	23	29	36	67	2.9	1.1
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes	13	45	16	23	03	3.4	1.1
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class	13	45	19	23	-	3.5	1.0
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed	16	48	16	16	03	3.6	1.1
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says	23	52	23	03	-	2.1	0.8
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language	13	32	19	29	07	3.2	1.2
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language	13	13	42	26	07	3.0	1.1
32. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language							
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance	23	42	10	16	10	3.5	1.3
	26	29	26	10	10	2.5	1.3
	13	39	10	29	10	3.2	1.3

Note: 1= strongly agree; 2= agree; 3= neither agree nor disagree; 4= disagree; 5= strongly disagree
M= mean, SD= Standard deviation. Frequency of responses (%) in this table is rounded up to the nearest whole number. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Thus, as shown in the table above, the summation of the mean scores based on Horwitz's division shows a mixed result on communication apprehension as some of the students are highly and slightly anxious. The participants' report also shows that they are highly anxious regarding fear of negative evaluation. Furthermore, their responses regarding items that relate to test anxiety reflect a mixed result; while some indicated high level of anxiety toward text some showed slight level of anxiety.

The participants' response from the interview session elicits different themes which simultaneously explain some of the anxiety prone beliefs of the participants. The first theme categorized was "Language Skills". A considerable number of the pre-service teachers interviewed reported that it is explicit to focus more on speaking skills in language learning while other skills can be secondary. Some of the responses were:

For me I think it is speaking because you need to be able to speak so as to express yourself in any language (Bilge).

I think it is speaking, because you need to communicate and understand and for information you need to speak (Hazan).

It depends on the situation, why do you need to learn English, so depending on one's situation one can focus on the skill. But in my opinion, I will go with speaking because mostly one needs it, when one learns a language ones speaking counts (Ceren).

They were therefore more concerned about the amount of speaking practice in the program and were worried this would negatively affect their speaking ability in the long run. It is pertinent to note that their responses depicts their beliefs about language learning and may contribute more to their tension and frustration during communication and also make them focus more on speaking skills to the detriment of other language skills. According to Horwitz (1986), certain beliefs about language learning may create anxiety and prevent the development of second language fluency and performance. The beliefs learners have about language learning can have critical effects on their ability and expectation of a language (Kunt, 2007) thereby creating anxiety. These sets of beliefs are considered to be an important anxiety-provoking factor especially when some unrealistic ideas about language learning and focus are not synonymous to the reality in language classrooms.

Another theme categorized was the participants "Concern about Students' Judgment". Concern over negative evaluation is the distinct characteristics of foreign language anxiety (Horwitz, 2010). Therefore concern over errors is strongly linked with phobia of negative evaluation. Some of the respondents explained their concern over other students' judgments of their language errors while speaking while others care less. Some of the interview responses were:

Yes I am concerned, if I am making unexpected comments to teacher's questions my fellow students reaction makes it more memorable which makes it a very negative experience and I try to run away from similar cases (Danyal).

Yes sometimes I feel concerned, when they concentrate and focus on how I speak and judge me (Banu).

The participants were anxious mainly because of the negative appraisers of their class mates and the risk of looking foolish which might have a resulting effect on their perception and reactions in language learning classes while speaking. This is synonymous with the study of Gregerson and Horwitz (2002) on foreign language student-teachers as the findings show that anxious participants were very much concerned about the errors they made and the way others react to their limitations in the target language which can be anxiety provoking.

Furthermore, from the interview session, another theme categorised was the pre-service teachers "Nervousness Regarding Speaking in Front of Native Speakers and Teachers". The timidity the participants have about speaking in front of teachers and other students especially native speakers might probably be influenced by the judgemental tendencies they felt from other students especially those more fluent than them. The responses were:

When you first start speaking a language to native speakers they really get exited like wahoo, you can speak our language. They overlook your performance and just a little time after that they go too cruel about your performance because they put too much expectation on you. First they exaggerate and they become judgmental (Adile).

Actually when I speak in front of my teachers or native speakers, I feel like speaking more formally, so my English gets more formal with more errors. I feel like I am kind of trapped and I should push myself to be able to say everything right (Ceren).

Conclusively, the findings from the interview gave an insight into the participants' differentiations toward foreign language learning anxiety.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

Considering previous studies, anxiety in foreign language is one of the principal predictors of L2 acquisition and it can negatively affect performance and achievement of foreign language learners (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Phillips, 1992; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). From both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study there are several indications that the pre-service teachers who participated in this study experience foreign language anxiety at various levels which may have a negative influence on them and their teaching performance.

In consideration of the findings reported in this study, it is therefore necessary for instructors to recognize pre-service teachers' feelings of foreign language anxiety and help them to ameliorate them instead of simply evaluating them. Furthermore, language teacher programme should avail pre-service teachers support to overcome whatever anxiety they may have because of different beliefs that might have influenced their language learning processes so that prior to the start of their teaching career they would be well informed and equipped.

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