A Study on the Relationship Between Students' Anxiety and Achievement in English Language Learning in EFL Classes

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Abstract
The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between students' English language learning anxiety and their English language achievement. For this purpose, 197 grade ten students were involved. The students were selected using stratified sampling technique. The instruments used to collect data were questionnaire and achievement. Then, the collected data were analyzed using quantitative methods of data analysis. The study revealed that there was statistically significant negative relationship between students' English foreign language learning anxiety and their English achievement test result with a correlation coefficient of (r=-.194, p=>0.05). In addition, the participants of the study were found to anxious because of fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension and test related anxieties. .The study also indicated that female students mean score was less than the mean score of male students when their anxiety levels were measured. But the independent sample t-test indicated that there is no statistically significant difference between male students and female students in their learning anxiety in EFL classrooms. However, a significant mean difference between male and female students was observed on test anxiety with (P<0.05). Therefore, this result is consistent with the findings of Tang (2005). Finally, the researchers recommended that EFL teachers should provide advice for the learners to avoid anxiety in their English language class.
Keywords: Anxiety, English foreign language, achievement result, gender, anxiety level

1. INTRODUCTION

Language researchers have identified a number of learner factors which are thought to have a considerable influence on language learning. Anxiety has been regarded as one of the most important affective factors that influence second language learning. Anxiety, according to Macintyre and Gardner (1994), can be defined as the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language learning contexts, including speaking, listening and language learning as a whole.

Research findings by many scholars (e.g., Aida, 1994; Horwitz, 1986; Macintyre and Gardner, 1994) had consistently revealed that anxiety can impede foreign language production and achievement. It has been observed that students in English classroom experience anxiety that results in stuttering and feeling of uneasiness. Students of all levels of academic achievement and intellectual abilities are believed to be affected by anxiety in learning the language. This anxiety occurs in varying degrees and is characterized by emotional feelings and worry, fear and apprehension. Horwitz, et al. (1986) and Macintyre and Gardner (1994) conducted a research which revealed that foreign language anxiety is responsible for students' negative emotional reaction to language learning. Batumlu and Erden (2007) and Cubuku (2007) also conducted research on this context to see classroom language anxiety and language achievement correlations and found that anxiety and achievement were correlated negatively.

There are some studies conducted locally. One of the studies conducted locally was Abate's (1996) study which investigated the extent and direction of the relationship between English language anxiety and learner's performance on first year students of the Ethiopian Civil Service College. He used mid semester test and scales for assessing speaking and writing skills. His findings indicated that most of the students were highly anxious in different kinds of language performance activities in the two skills such as speaking and writing. And the learners' anxiety scores were negatively and significantly associated with their language performance. In this study he saw only the two skills: speaking and writing.

Similarly, a research conducted by Melesse (2007) was another local study on language writing test anxiety with particular reference to Admas and St. Mary's private university colleges' students taking Sophomore English courses. The main objective of the study was to know the major factors which cause students to be in a state of anxiety when they take writing tests. His findings indicated that the large majority of the participants of the study were found to be poor in their writing because of their poor background of writing activities before they joined

university colleges. As a result, their level of anxiety was high when taking the writing tests. In this study, the researcher evaluated only the writing skill. These local studies were conducted on colleges and some language skills. High school students are still at a comparatively low level of English proficiency and may easily experience a feeling of uneasy suspense and anxiety. However, they were not the focus of these studies.

Therefore, the researchers were highly inspired to conduct a study on examining the relationship between English language learning anxiety and students' achievement at high school level. To achieve the objectives of this study, the researchers formulated the following research questions.

1. What is EFL students' level of anxiety?
2. Is there a relationship between English language learning anxiety and achievement?
3. Is there a difference in anxiety level between female and male students?

2.   METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Design

The study mainly used correlational research design that involves quantitative technique of data analysis.

2.2. Target population of the study

This study was conducted on Damot General Secondary School students. There were a total of 1310 grade ten students in the school in the 2019 academic year. Among these, 625 of them were male while the remaining 685 students were female.

2.3. Samples and Sampling Techniques

The sample school was purposefully selected to be the setting of the study because the school is relatively near the residence of the researchers and was accessible to collect data for the study. Ninety seven male and 100 female students were selected to be the participants of the study using stratified sampling technique. However, 10 students (six male and four female) did not respond to all items of the questionnaire and therefore were rejected from the sample.

2.4. Data Gathering Instruments

In this study, questionnaire and achievement test (students first semester English result) were employed.

2.4.1. Questionnaires

To elicit the necessary data about anxiety level from the participants, questionnaire was used and administered. According to Kothari (2004) questionnaire is the most common data gathering tool which helps to collect a great deal of information within a limited time and helps to reach large group of research participants. Most of the items were adapted from Howitz (1986), Kavara (1996) and Alemayehu (2008). Some of the items were designed by the researchers in line with literature review.

The questionnaire contained close-ended items which were divided into two parts. Part one aimed at gathering their background information (gender). Part two had items of different anxiety levels which contained five point Likert Scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". Since the researchers felt students might not adequately understand and respond to the questions, the questionnaire was translated into students' mother tongue.

2.4.2. Achievement Test Results

As indicated earlier, the main objective of this study was to explore the relationship between English Language learning anxiety and English Language achievement. To this effect, it was necessary to examine English achievement test results. Thus, students' first semester English language result was taken from the school's registrar and used to see its relationship with students' anxiety level.

2.5. Reliability and validity

The researchers validated the questionnaire as follow. Before the actual data collection was started, the questionnaire was given to colleagues so as to get valuable comments on the strengths and weaknesses of the items. Based on the comments obtained, necessary modifications were made. Then, it was tried out in small-scale study on nearby school students who are similar in every aspect with the sample school students. After administering the instrument, some participants were asked for their feedback about the instrument. Hence, some of the items were refined. The reliability of the instruments was tested using Cronbach alpha. The computed reliability of the instruments was 0.82. Thus, the questionnaire was found reliable to collect data for the main study.

2.6. Data gathering procedures

Prior to the administration of the questionnaire and document analysis, the researchers made a series of contacts with the school principals. Then, the data collection sessions were arranged at times suggested by school principals' permission and willingness of the participants.

The sample students selected from each section were taken into suitable place to avoid disturbance. Then,

short orientation was given about the purpose of the study and how the questionnaire can be filled. Students who needed explanation about the items were given a clarification.

Finally, the questionnaire was distributed among 197 students of which 187 were correctly filled in and returned. The administration and collection of questionnaire was done by the researchers themselves and by the help of colleagues in the study area. Concerning achievement result, the researchers took first semester English result from the school registrar.

2.7. Methods of Data Analysis and Interpretation

A quantitative method of analysis was employed to analyze the data. The data collected through questionnaire was tabulated and computed using SPSS version 20. The correlation was used to show the relationship between students' achievement and English language anxiety; whereas the independent t-test was computed to compare language anxiety between male students and female students. All these were illustrated using tables.

3.   DATA ANALYSES AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the data collected using the above data gathering instruments are organized as follows. The first section presents EFL students' level of anxiety in learning the language. Here the degrees of anxiety levels have been analyzed. Then, the correlations between students' achievement, gender and English language learning anxiety have been discussed.

3.1. Students' anxiety

On the questionnaire, students were asked to rate the level of different types of language anxieties. The following tables present data from questionnaire on students' anxiety levels.

Table 1: Communication Apprehension level

No	Item	Responses						mean
		SA(5) & A(4)		U(3)		D(2) & SD(1)		
		F	%	F	%	F %	%	
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in EFL class.	149	68.9	4	2.1	34	28.5	3.79
2	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	147	79.2	11	5.8	28	14.9	3.81
3	I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	40	21.3	12	6.2	135	72.1	2.25
4	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class	112	60	5	2.6	70	37.6	3.28
5	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	106	56.6	13	6.9	68	36.3	3.19
6	I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	114	60.9	15	8.0	58	31	3.42

N=187   aveg. mean=3

As table 1 above depicts, item 1 was concerned about if they feel self-confident when they are speaking in EFL class. According to their responses, the majority (68.9 % , with mean 3.79) of them stated that they never feel sure of themselves when they are speaking in EFL class. Only 28.7 % of opposed the claim while 2.1% of them remained neutral. In responding to item 2 which asks students if panic seizes them when they have to speak without preparation in language class, the majority of the participants (79.2 %, with mean 3.81) agreed with the claim. As it is depicted on the table, only 14.9% of them disagreed with it while 5.8% of the reported "undecided".

As shown in table 1 above, for item 3, only 21.3 % of them of the respondents replied that they feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students. The majority of the students, i.e. 72.1 % (mean 2.21) rejected this claim while 6.2% of them could not decide.   In replying to item 4, 60% (with mean 3. 28) respondents described that they agreed with the claim which asks them if they get nervous and confused when they are speaking in their language classes . On the other hand, 2.6 % of the respondents remained undecided while 37.4 % of them disagreed with the claim.

When students were asked if they get nervous when they don't understand every word the language teacher says in item 5, 56.6% of them (with mean 3.19) agreed with the idea while 36.3 % of the respondents disagreed with this claim. Item 6 was about if they would feel comfortable when they communicate with native speakers of

the language. As shown on the table, 60.9% (with mean 3.41) the respondents replied that they agreed with the claim. While only 31% of them disagreed, 8% of them reported "undecided".

As a whole based on the data obtained under each item, it was possible to conclude that students are anxious in many measures of communication apprehension. Students, for example, are not confident when they speak in class. In addition to this, they are nervous as they try to understand every word the language teacher says. Students' answer to item 6 is quite interesting because they think they feel happy if they communicate with native speakers of the language. This might be because of their perception that speaking with native speakers improves their language as compared to talking with non-native speakers.

Table 2: Fear of negative evaluation

No	Items	Responses						Mean
		SA(5) & A(4)		U(3)		D(2& SD(1)		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called out in class.	129	68.9	4	2.1	37	19.7	3.47
2	I keep thinking that other students are better than I am in learning the language.	128	68.4	11	5.9	32	17.1	3.51
3	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	128	68.4	5	2.6	34	18.6	3.49
4	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	116	61.5	10	5.3	38	20.8	3.39
5	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called out in language class.	133	76.2	12	6.1	27	14.4	3.62
6	I always feel that the other students speak the language better than I do.	112	59.8	10	5.3	32	17.1	3.31
7	When language classes move so quickly I worry about getting behind.	60	31	13	6.5	114	60.9	2.43
8	I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	179	95.7	0	0	8	4.2	4.32
9	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I am not prepared for.	176	94	0	0	11	6	4.22

SA=strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Undecided, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

The items in table 2 above were about how anxious students were because of fear of negative evaluation. To the first item which says "I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called out in language class", 68.9% (with mean 3.47) of the respondents reported that they agreed to the claim, whereas 28.7% of them disagreed. In item 2 when students were asked if they keep thinking that the other students are better in language, 67.9% (with mean 3.51) of them agreed with the item while only 25.6% of them disagreed. The other 5.9% of the respondents could not decide.

In connection to item 3, 68.4% (with mean 3.49) of the respondents replied that they agreed when asked if it embarrasses them to volunteer answers in language class. On the other hand, 28.7 % and 2.6 % of them disagreed and remained undecided to the issue respectively.

As shown in the table, 61.5 % (with mean 3.39) agreed and 32.9% disagreed respectively with the fourth claim which says "I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting". In replying to item 5, which requests students' views if they experience heart pounding when they are going to be called out in language class, the majority of the respondents, i.e. 72.6 % (with mean 3.62) confirmed that they experience such incidences. On the other hand, while only 22.4% of them denied this experience, 6.1% of them remained neutral.

In item 6, students were asked if they always feel other students speak the language better than they do. Accordingly, 59.8 % (with mean 3.31) of them replied that they agreed to the item while less than half of them, i.e. 37.9% disagreed. Item 7 was about if they worry about getting behind when language classes move so quickly. To this item, 31% of the respondents replied that they strongly agreed and agreed to the claim respectively, while the majority of the respondents 60.9% (with mean 2.43) disagreed. This data tells us the only instant where students are relaxed.

In item 8, almost all the respondents, i.e. 95.7% (with mean 4.32) confirmed that they are afraid of being laughed over by other students when they speak the foreign language. On the other hand only 4.4% of them responded that they disagreed. The last item asked students if they get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which they are not prepared for in advance.

To this item again, almost all of the respondents, i.e. 94 % (with mean 4.22) replied that they feel anxious when they are suddenly requested to answer teacher questions, while 6% of them denied this experience.

Based on the analysis of the data in the above table, except for item 7 which requests students' view if they worry about getting behind when classes move so quickly, it is possible to conclude from students' responses that most of them are anxious because of fear of negative evaluation. However, their responses to item 7 could be interpreted as a sign of poor language learning since many students get anxious and hence become de-motivated if they think what is going on in the classroom is not achievable.

Table 3: Test Anxiety

No	Items	Responses						mean
		SA(5) &A(4)		U(3)		D(2)& SD(1)		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	I don't worry about making mistakes in language classes.	39	19.8	13	6.9	**135**	72.4	**2.14**
2	I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	68	36.3	13	6.9	106	**56.6**	**2.58**
3	I worry about the consequences of failing/ repeating class.	120	64.1	27	14.4	40	**21.3**	**3.78**
4	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	116	62.7	10	5.3	61	**32.5**	**3.39**

SA=strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Undecided, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

As shown in table 3 above, in the first item students were asked if they do not worry about making mistakes in language classes. However, 72.4 %(with mean 2.14) opposed the claim while 6.9% of them remained undecided. Only 19.8 % of them agreed that they do not feel any worry in making mistakes. This shows that the majority of students worry about making mistakes when they use the language.

Regarding item 2, which asks students if they are relaxed during exams, more than half of them (56.6% ,with mean 2.58) reported they are not relaxed during exams while 36.3% of them agreed respectively. Item 3 was about if they feel fear of failing or repeating class. As shown in the table, the majority of the respondents, i.e. 64.2 % (with mean 3.78) claimed that they worry about failing/repeating classes. Only 21.3% of the respondents disagreed with the claim while 14.4 % of them remained neutral.

In item 4, when students were asked if they are afraid of teachers' corrections, 62.7% (with mean 3.39) of them described that they agree with the claim while 5.3% and 32.6% of them reported that they remain undecided and disagree with the claim respectively. The data on the four items under test anxiety scale informs us that students have anxieties in test related factors such as getting a fail grade.

Table 4: Students' over all English Language Anxiety

No	Item	Responses						mean
		SA(5) & A(4)		U(3)		D(2)& SD(1)		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	
1	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying.	129	68.9	4	2.1	54	21.9	3.47
2	In language classes, I get so nervous when I forget things I know.	113	60.3	12	6.1	62	33	3.30
3	When I'm in English class, I don't feel sure and relaxed.	112	59.8	5	2.6	70	37.4	3.28
4	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules I have to learn to speak/write in a foreign language.	106	56.6	13	6.9	68	36.3	3.19
5	Even if I am well prepared to learn the language, I feel anxious about it.	135	72.1	11	5.8	41	21.8	3.67
6	I often feel like not going to my language class.	106	56.6	13	6.9	68	36.3	3.21
7	I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes.	106	56.6	19	10.1	62	33.1	3.16

The first item in table 4 asked students if they get frightened when they do not understand what is said in English language. As the data shows 68.9 % of the students (with mean 3.47) replied that they are stressed when they find what their teachers say unclear. On the other hand, 28.8% of them disagreed with this issue. Regarding item 2, 60.3% of the respondents replied that they agreed when they were asked if they get nervous when they forget things they know whereas few respondents (37.4%) disagreed.

In replying to item 3, 59.8% of the respondents (with mean 3.28) described that they do not feel sure and

relaxed when they are in English class while 36.3% of them reported the opposite. In item 4, 56.8% (with mean 3.19) of the respondents reported they are overwhelmed by the number of rule they have to learn to speak or write the language while only 36.3% responded they disagree with the claim. This shows that students found learning many rules of the language tiresome and confusing.

Their responses to item 5 show that although they are well prepared to learn the language, they feel anxious about it. As depicted on the table, 72.1 % of them (with mean 3.67) feel that they find it difficult to get relaxed in spite of how well they are prepared for their language class. Only 30.5% rejected this claim while 7.4% reported undecided.

Item 6 asked students if they are discouraged to go to class to learn English language. In connection to this item, 56.6 %(with mean 3.21) of them claimed that they feel so while 36.3 % of them said they are happy to go to class to learn the foreign language. With 6.9 % undecided, this data shows that students feel pressurized and unhappy to learn the language.

The last item asked students to compare the level of their anxiety in learning English with other subjects. As it is described on the table, 56.6 % (with mean 3.16) of the respondents claimed that they feel more tense and nervous in their English class than in other classes. Thirty three point one percent of them disagreed while the other 10.1% of them remained undecided.

So the data here shows that students found learning English language more apprehensive than learning other subjects. Thus, it is possible to conclude that students' over all language anxiety level is high.

3.2. Relationship between students' achievement and anxiety in English

The second research question was checking if there was correlation between language learning anxiety and students over all language achievement. To do this, the grand mean of students' anxiety was correlated with students' first semester English result. The following table shows this.

Table 5: The relationship between students' language learning anxiety and achievement

		Language learning achievement	Language learning anxiety
Language learning achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	-.194
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.034
	N	187	187
Language learning anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.194	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.034	
	N	187	187

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

Before the calculating correlation, preliminary analyses were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality, linearity and homoscedasticity. After this Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted. As the above table reveals there was an average negative significant relationship (r= -.194, p=.034) between students' Language learning achievement and language learning anxiety among secondary school students. The relationship was found to be statistically significant at p<.05 level of significance. Therefore, it was concluded that the anxiety in English classroom has significant negative effect on the students' achievement of English in secondary schools.

3.3. The correlation between male and female students English Language learning anxiety

The study also investigated whether there was any significant difference between male and female students' language learning anxiety. Male sstudents and female students were administered a questionnaire in order to see whether the two groups were at a similar level of anxiety, or not

Table 7: English Language learning anxiety between male and female students

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
									95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Lower	Upper
anxiety	Equal variances assumed	.313	.577	.311	185	.756	.03725	.11965	-.19881	.27332
	Equal variances not assumed			.313	181.5	.755	.03725	.11916	-.19785	.27236

Group Statistics

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety	female	96	3.8118	.79424	.08615
	male	91	3.7745	.83140	.08232

As can be seen from the above tables, the mean scores of male students (M=3.7745, SD=.83140, N=96) was slightly smaller than female students' mean (M=3.8118, SD=.79424, N=91). In order to conclude whether this difference is significant or not, an independent sample t-test was sought. An independent sample t-test revealed that there is no statistically significant difference in the language anxiety between male students and female students (t=.311, p>.05) with no violation of the assumptions of equal variance. The magnitude of the difference was very small (eta squared =.005). Therefore, it can be concluded that the mean score difference between male and female students' English language learning anxiety was likely due to chance.

3.4. Discussion of the Findings

The main objective of this study was to examine the relationship between English language learning anxiety and students' English achievement. The study also explored EFL learners' levels of anxiety.

The first research question was intended to explore students' English language levels of anxiety. In line with this point, the obtained result revealed that many of the students have test, communication and over all language learning anxiety. In addition to this, the data in table two above tells us that students are anxious in learning the language because of fear of negative evaluation by others. This result supports the findings of Horwitz, et al. (1986), Chan and Wu (2004), Hedge (2000) and Gardner (1988) who stated that communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation emerge due to negative experience when using the language.

The second research question was proposed to explore the relationship between students' English language learning anxiety and achievement. The study revealed that there was a significant negative relationship between students' EFL learning anxiety and achievement. Concerning this point, the obtained result revealed that students' English language learning academic result decreases as their anxiety increases or vice versa. Therefore, this result is consistent with the findings of Tang (2005) who suggested that usually, high anxiety can make learners get discouraged, lose faith in their abilities, escape from participating in classroom activities, and even give up the effort to learn a language well. Therefore, the learners with high anxiety often get low achievement. And low achievement makes them more anxious about learning. However, this result is inconsistent with the findings of Cheng (2002) and Chan and Wu (2004).

The third research question was intended to determine differences in anxiety level between male and female students. With regard to this point, the findings indicated that there is no significant difference between male and female students in communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and anxiety of English class since p value is greater than 0.05(p>0.05).

3.5. Conclusions and Pedagogical implications

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions have been made:

The four scales used to find out EFL students anxiety status were fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, test anxiety and overall English language anxiety. As the findings from tables 1-4 show students

have anxieties in all scales they were measured.

In addition, the independent t-test indicates that English language classroom levels of anxiety and students English achievement result were negatively correlated. Thus, anxiety has a negative impact on language learning. This point indicated that the students with higher level of anxiety might have an influence on their achievement.

The third research question was intended to determine if there was significant difference between male and female students in level of anxiety. With regard to this point, the findings indicated that there is no significant difference between male and female students in terms of anxiety with p>0.05.

Thus, it is necessary to give EFL learners advice and training on how to handle their nervousness since anxiety has a negative impact on their language learning. This can be done by teachers and students. Further research should be performed to examine the students' anxiety in each specific English language skills and with large sample size in different grade level, scope and subjects.

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