

Factors Provoking FL Anxiety of Speaking English Among the Yemeni Students at the Faculty of Education in Hodeidah University

Dr. Shameem Ahmad Banani
Assistant Professor, Faculty of Education, Hodeidah University
shameembanani@yahoo.com

Abstract

Affective variables are one of the various variables that influence foreign language learning, and foreign language anxiety is among several outstanding factors that often have a debilitating effect on the oral performance of students learning English as a foreign language. The present study investigates the level of anxiety among the Yemeni students in the Faculty of Education in Hodeidah University and the influence of gender by focusing on two main factors that cause anxiety. The factors under investigation are lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. The instrument used for the study was adapted from Horwitz's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which includes 32 items. The researcher modified some of the items included in (FLCAS) and reduced it to 12 items. The developed questionnaire was given to 198 students in the four levels of the English Department at the Faculty of Education in Hodeidah University. After analyzing the collected data, the findings indicated that foreign language speaking anxiety was very high among first-year students and female students experienced high – level of anxiety whereas male students experienced a moderate level of anxiety. This paper ends with some implications to assist teachers in encouraging speaking and strive for a pleasant atmosphere where students can feel comfortable and relaxed to communicate orally.

Key words: Anxiety, Foreign Language, Factors, gender

Introduction

In the educational world speaking is seen as a necessary, positive personal characteristic (Daly, 1991: 7). However, foreign language learners often express feelings of stress, nervousness or anxiety while learning to speak the target language and claim to have 'mental block' against learning. Campbell and Ortiz (1991:159) found language anxiety among university students to be 'alarming' and estimated that up to one half of all language students experience debilitating levels of speaking anxiety. FL anxiety has been

claimed to be also true for many non-native teachers (see Horwitz, 1996 and Kim & Kim, 2004 for comprehensive account of the discussed issues). That is, granted that before non-native teachers get engaged in language teaching they are non-native learners whose language is not perfect, such lack of confidence can "inhibit a teacher's ability to effectively present the target language interact with students and serve as positive role model as a language learner" (Horwitz, 1996:366). In recent years, foreign language teaching anxiety has been explored among pre-service EFL teachers in few countries such as Turkey (see Merc, 2011 for detailed sources of foreign language student teacher anxiety in Turkish context). As a result some general sources of language teaching anxiety have been identified such as limited English proficiency, lack of confidence, class management, insufficient class preparation, teaching procedures, fear of negative evaluation and lack of teaching experience.

This study identifies foreign language speaking anxiety among Yemeni students in the Faculty of Education in Hodeidah University. It has been noticed that when the students in the English Department at the Faculty of Education are requested to prepare a topic for presentation in the Spoken English classroom, they feel nervous and anxious. Therefore, it has been attempted to investigate the main factors that cause speaking anxiety among the students in the English Department in the Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University. A questionnaire based on Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et. al. (1986) was adapted then administered to the students. This scale has been used by many researchers because it measures the four major skills (reading, writing, listening and mainly speaking) and found to be a highly reliable and valid tool of measurement. To meet the needs of this study 12 items from this questionnaire that are related to speaking were chosen. The selected items were classified into two categories, items related to lack of confidence and items related to fear of making mistakes.

Questions of the Study

1) What is the level of anxiety according to the factor of lack of confidence among the students in the Faculty of Education in Hodeidah University?

2) Is there any significant difference among the students regarding lack of confidence according to: a) gender b) level of students?

3) What is the level of anxiety according to the factor of fear of making mistakes among the students in the Faculty of Education in Hodeidah University?

4) Is there any significant difference among the students regarding fear of making mistakes according to: a) gender b) level of students?

Literature Review

Anxiety is a state of unease, a kind of troubled feeling in the mind marked by excessive uneasiness. It is also defined by Spielberger (1983, cited in Awan et.al. 2010:33) as “a subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an aroused of automatic nervous system”. In addition, Sillamy (1996 cited in Idri,2012) described anxiety as an effective state characterized by a feeling of insecurity, a diffused trouble. On the other hand, research into language anxiety has consistently shown that anxiety could have a detrimental effect on L2 performance (Aida,1994, Elkhafai,2005, Horwitz & Cope,1986, Humphries, 2011, Moclntyre,1999, Moclntyre & Gradner,1994, Liu & Jackson,2008). In line with this hindrance, learners are reported to demonstrate a worse performance than usual (Herwitt & Stephenson 2012). They usually pass comments such as “I feel so dumb in my English class”, and “sometimes when I speak English in class, I am so afraid I feel like hiding behind my chair”. Students also worry that others will think that they are “stupid” because they are having trouble using simple vocabulary and grammar structure. Furthermore, many investigators (e.g. Aida, 1994; Subasi,2010) have examined the effects of FL anxiety on the oral performance in EFL classroom. To elaborate more on these studies, two of them are particularly discussed here. Granschow et.al (1994) did the study exploring differences in foreign language anxiety and native oral and written language skills among college students. The result of the study revealed that students significantly do differ in their English oral and written achievements in terms of the amount of FL anxiety they suffer from. In another study, Young (1990) investigated the students perspective on anxiety and speaking. The results of this study indicated that speaking in FL was not exclusively the source of student anxiety but speaking in front of the class was. Some Asian studies e.g. Truitt (1995), Ohata (2005) found that FL anxiety is influenced by culture. In many Arab countries the limited exposure to English is a serious obstacle in the development of the learners’ communicative competence (See e.g. Lightbown and Spada, 2006). FL

students normally practice English only in the classroom, they lack chances to practice English outside the class and this makes EFL learners feel anxious while speaking English.

The present study focuses on the main factors that cause anxiety among Yemeni students while speaking English. It has been noticed that when first and second year students of the English Department in the Faculty of Education are asked to prepare a topic for presentation in the Spoken English class, they feel very anxious and nervous. This feeling of anxiety hinders their oral performance. But this is normal because students graduate from schools with very poor spoken English. In other words, the speaking skill is totally neglected at schools and this makes them poor communicators and reluctant to participate in classes or share their thoughts and comments and even prefer to use Arabic in class. Most importantly, these students appear fearful and stressed when asked to answer questions and resort to silence during the whole oral session and avoid interacting with the teachers in other courses with oral work.

These observations were the starting point of this study.

Methodology and Procedure

Instrument

For the purpose of this study, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et. al. (1986) was adapted. The FLCAS was developed by Horwitz in order to examine the scope of severity of FL anxiety. The items that are presented in FLCAS are reflective of communicative apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. It is a well known scale for measuring FL classroom anxiety due to its high validity and reliability.

However, in this study, the researcher adapted the questions relevant to the items of negative evaluation, communicative apprehension and general feeling of anxiety because they focus on speaking anxiety.

In the inventory of FLCAS, some items were totally deleted and some were modified to meet the aims of this study and increase the suitability of the item construction (see Appendix). After modification the number of items was reduced to 12 items each on a 5 point scale ranging according to

Strongly Agree (scale point 5) Agree (scale point 4) Undecided (scale point 3) Disagree (scale point 2) Strongly Disagree (scale point 1). The anxiety factors were divided into two perceptible categories: 1) lack mistakes and negative evaluation. In this way, it was felt possible also to explore the impacts of gender – related issues of EFL classrooms on learners' FL anxiety in the Yemeni context represented by the students in the Faculty of Education in Hodeidah University.

The items are classified as following:

* Items related to lack of confidence and communication comprehension:

1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 11

* Items related to the fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation:

2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 12

Sample and Population

This study was conducted in the Department of English at the Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University. The overall number of students in the English Department was 719 during the academic year(2013-2014). The sample was selected randomly and the description of the sample is illustrated in Table (1).

Table (1) *Sample Description*

Level	Female	Male	Total
First Year	36	14	50
Second Year	40	9	49
Third Year	37	12	49
Fourth Year	39	11	50
Total	152	46	198

It is worthy to note that the number of female students is more than male students in the Faculty of Education.

Result and Discussion

To answer the questions of the study, the main factors that make speaking English more stressful among students in the Faculty of Education in Hodeidah University were classified into two categories, items related to lack of confidence and items related to fear of making mistakes. The effect of gender regarding each category was also studied then the average mean scores of participants' response to the questionnaire items were calculated

within the range of the scale respectively. The results of quantitative data analysis are illustrated below:

Table (2) *Items related to factor of lack of confidence among male students in the four levels.*

Item No.	Items Descriptions	Levels				Total	X-
		1	2	3	4		
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in my language class.	3.35	2.3	3	2.6	11.25	2.81
3	In my language class I get so nervous that I forget things I know.	3.5	3.7	3.41	3.4	14.01	3.50
5	In my language class it embarrasses me to volunteer for answer I know.	2.14	3	2.66	2.4	10.2	2.55
7	In my language class, I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.	2.28	3.2	3.25	2.5	11.23	2.81
9	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in my language class.	3.35	3.1	2.83	3.2	12.48	3.12
11	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of my classmates.	3.92	3.8	2.66	3.2	13.58	3.40
	Total	18.85	19.1	17.81	17.3	72.75	18.1
	\bar{X}	3.09	3.18	2.97	2.88	12.13	3.03

second year male students have the highest level of anxiety regarding lack of confidence, the second high level of anxiety is among first year students and then the level of anxiety reduces among third and fourth year students.

Table (3) *Items related to lack of confidence among female students in the four levels*

Item No.	Item Description	Levels				Total	\bar{X}
		1	2	3	4		
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in my language class.	3.22	3.3	3.21	3.3	13.03	3.26
3	In my language class I get so nervous that I forget things I know.	3.55	3.73	3.29	3.8	14.37	3.59
5	In my language class it embarrasses me to volunteer for answer I know.	2.94	3.1	3.35	3.1	12.49	3.12
7	In my language class, I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.	2.38	2.95	3.21	3.4	11.94	2.99
9	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in my language class	3.16	2.2	3.21	3.3	11.87	2.97
11	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of my classmates	3.08	3.5	3.21	3.5	13.29	3.32
	Total	18.33	18.78	19.48	20.4	76.99	19.25
	\bar{X}	3.06	3.13	3.25	3.4	12.83	3.20

It is clearly that the level of anxiety among female fourth year students is the highest regarding lack of confidence, then comes the second year students , after that first year students and finally fourth year students.

Table (4) *Difference in the factor of Lack of confidence between male and female*

Item No.	Items	Male Scores	Female Scores
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in my language class.	2.8	3.26
3	In my language class, I get so nervous that I forget things I know.	3.50	3.59
5	In my English class, it embarrasses me to volunteer for answer I know	2.55	3.12
7	In my language class, I keep thinking that other students are better at English than I am	2.81	3.99
9	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on in my language class	3.12	2.97
11	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front my classmates	3.40	3.32
	Total	18.19	19.25
	\bar{X}	3.03	3.20

The previous table displays that the level of anxiety regarding lack of confidence is higher among female students than male students.

Table (5) *Statistics of the participants of the four levels*

Level	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year
Total	39.72	37.88	37.29	37.7
\bar{x}	3.31	3.17	3.11	3.14

So the first year students have the highest level of anxiety according to lack of confidence. Then the level of anxiety is reduced among second, third and fourth year students.

The other set of items i.e. items related to fear of making mistakes are presented in the following tables:

Table (6) *Items related to fear of making mistakes among male students*

Item No.	Items Description	Levels				Total	\bar{X}
		1	2	3	4		
2	I feel embarrassed when I don't say English words correctly.	3.57	3.2	2.8	2.55	12.12	3.03
4	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting .	3.64	3	4	2.55	13.19	3.298
6	It frightens me when my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	2.92	3.1	3	3	12.02	3.01
8	I get nervous when I cannot speak English correctly in my language class	2.57	3.2	3.08	1.82	10.67	2.67
10	I don't volunteer answers in my language class because I am afraid from making mistakes.	2.5	2.7	2.33	2.18	9.71	2.43
12	I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I make mistakes.	3.14	2.8	2.33	2.36	10.63	2.66
	Total	18.35	18	17.54	14.46	68.34	17.09
	\bar{X}	3.06	3.0	2.92	2.41	11.39	2.85

It is clear from the table that the anxiety level among male students regarding the fear of making mistakes is high among first year students followed by second year, students then third year students and finally fourth year students. So the level of anxiety moves gradually.

The same items were asked by female students and the result is given below:

Table (7) *Items Related to the factor of fear of making mistakes among female students*

Item No.	Items Description	Levels				Total	\bar{X}
		1	2	3	4		
2	I feel embarrassed when I don't say English words correctly.	3.13	3.28	3.51	3.9	13.82	3.46
4	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting .	3.72	3.73	3.10	3.6	14.15	3.54
6	It frightens me when my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	2.86	3.4	3.18	3.6	13.04	3.26
8	I get nervous when I cannot speak English correctly in my language class	3.5	3.8	3.54	3.7	14.54	3.64
10	I don't volunteer answers in my language class because I am afraid from making mistakes.	3.0	2.58	2.97	3.4	11.95	2.99
12	I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I make mistakes.	3.25	2.98	2.70	3.5	12.43	3.11
	Total	19.46	19.77	19	21.7	79.93	19.98
	\bar{X}	3.24	3.29	3.17	3.62	13.32	3.33

Table (7) indicates that the level of anxiety regarding fear of making mistakes among fourth year female students is high followed by second year students then first year students and finally among third year students.

The descriptive statistics to compare between of male and female participants was made and the results are displayed in table 8.

Table (8) *Difference between male and female students regarding fear of making mistakes*

Item No.	Items Description	Male scores	Female scores
2	I feel embarrassed when I don't say English words correctly.	3.03	3.46
4	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	3.29	3.54
6	It frightens me when my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	3.01	3.26
8	I get nervous when I cannot speak English correctly in my language class.	2.67	3.64
10	I don't volunteer answers in my language class because I am afraid of making mistakes.	2.43	2.99
12	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I make mistake.	2.66	3.11
	Total	17.09	19.98
	\bar{X}	2.85	3.33

We can clearly notice that female students experience higher level of anxiety than male students regarding the factor of fear of making mistakes.

Finally a descriptive statistical analyses was made to study the level of anxiety among the participants regarding the factor of fear of making mistakes and the result is displayed in table (9).

Table (9) *Participants scores regarding the factor of fear of making mistakes*

Levels	First Year	Second Year	Third Year	Fourth Year
Total	37.8	37.77	36.54	36.16
\bar{x}	3.15	3.147	3.045	3.013

It can be noticed that the anxiety level is very high among first year students regarding the factor of fear of making mistakes. This is reduced gradually among students in the higher levels. This is a natural result because the third and fourth year students don't have any courses of spoken

English. Moreover, the first year students suffer more from speaking anxiety because of their limited vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. These linguistic difficulties are reflected on their oral performance.

Based on the results reached in the study some recommendations are suggested to educators, teachers and decision makers in the Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University:

- 1- The number of students accepted in the English Department should be reduced for better outcomes.
- 2- Spoken English courses should continue till fourth year.
- 3- The entrance exam should include oral assessment.
- 4- Teachers should make students more comfortable in the classroom while speaking English by creating a pleasant anxiety-free and friendly atmosphere.
- 5- Teachers need to avoid negative error correction and humiliation of students.
- 6- Teachers should help anxious students outside the classroom
- 7- Presentations and seminars should be encouraged.

Conclusion:

To sum up, the present study attempted to investigate the main factors that cause speaking anxiety among English language students in the Faculty of Education at Hodeidah University through using a modified version of Horwitz et. al. (1986). The results of the study demonstrated that many first year and second year students suffer from speaking anxiety due to lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. The study also revealed that the feeling of speaking anxiety is higher among female students than male students. On the basis of these results, several implications were proposed to raise teachers and educators' awareness about the negative impacts anxiety has on students' ability to speak English. It is hoped that these implications will encourage the teachers to identify students with high level of anxiety and create a safe supportive environment so that they feel motivated to communicate orally and practice the English language which is their major more effectively.

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Appendix

Statements (1) through (12) describe how you feel about English in language class. Please read the statements carefully and give your first reaction by choosing an answer for each statement: (1) Strongly Disagree (2) Disagree (3) Undecided (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree

No.	Items	Levels			
		1	2	3	4
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in my language class				
2	I feel embarrassed when I don't say English words correctly.				
3	In my language class, I get so nervous that I forget things I know				
4	I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting				
5	In my language class, it embarrasses me to volunteer for answers I know.				
6	It frightens me when my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.				
7	In my language class, I keep thinking that other students are better than I am				
8	I get nervous when I cannot speak English correctly in my language class.				
9	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called in my language class.				
10	I don't volunteer answers in my language class because I am afraid from making mistakes				
11	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of my classmates.				
12	I am afraid that other students will laugh at me when I make mistakes				