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The Effect of Foreign Language Anxiety between Female and Male Students in English Classroom with Reference to Grade Nine Students of Wolayta Sodo Secondary School

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to compare the effects of foreign language anxiety between male and female students in EFL classroom and to suggest the essential strategies the students and teachers employ to cope with the negative effect of foreign language anxiety. The study was conducted at Wolaita Sodo Secondary School on the sample of grade 9 students. Mixed research design was employed in this study. The sample sizes of the study were 25 students in the academic year 2009 E.C. The students were selected using a random sampling for questionnaire and purposive sampling was employed for interview. To collect data from the sample group, questionnaire and interview were used. Data were analyzed quantitatively by percentage, and qualitatively by description data. The findings indicated that there has been a significant foreign language anxiety difference observed between male and female students; female students were more anxious than males because most of them needed help from their fellow students and teacher as coping strategies of anxiety, whereas male students participate in class with a positive attitude to cope with language anxiety. Again both male and female students need more practice to speak English confidently. There anxiety level is the same unless they practice to speak in English in advance. In addition, foreign language anxiety is a common debilitating feeling which affects students in a variety of ways: the students identified a multitude of variables such as low English proficiency, lack of practice, difficulty of the task, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and incomprehensible input as factors provoke foreign language anxiety.

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Anxiety, Foreign language, Foreign language anxiety, English proficiency

Introduction

A great number of female and male students in English classroom in Ethiopian context experience a tremendous amount of anxiety when communicating in English. The researcher's personal observations of the above problem have been supported in the studies of many authors who have examined anxiety in foreign language learning students. Macintyre and Gardner, (1991a), for example asserted that "Anxiety poses several potential problems

for the students of foreign language because it can interfere with the acquisition, retention and production of the new language" (p. 86). Anxiety, as an important affective factor, influences second language learning particularly speaking skill. Males and females have different levels of anxiety and it might delay the development of their speaking ability. Therefore, learners have to make use of some learning strategies to overcome this problem. Oxford (1990) maintains that learning strategies are the specific actions which are

taken by the learners to make learning easier, faster, more effective, more enjoyable, and more transferable to new situations (p. 8). Language teachers try to find the main sources of students' language learning anxiety in order that they organize their class in a way which minimizes their students' anxiety.

Gender is one of the factors that affect anxiety in second language learning particularly second language speaking skill. Gender-related anxiety research has yielded conflicting results and doesn't present a homogenous picture either. However, considering the role of language anxiety and gender and L2 performance are intricately related to each other. Gender has been found to cause anxiety in male and female interactions both within and out of the class situation.

Speilberger (1983) examined state anxiety in different conditions and discovered that "females are more emotionally stable than males in their reactions to highly stressful or relaxing circumstances" (p.19). Pappamihiel (2002) found that language anxiety experienced by female in the mainstream class was related to "social performance and was a type of performance anxiety more related to interaction with peer, whereas in the ESL class it was more related to academic anxiety and worries about achievement" (p.33-34). This is due to the superior strategy used in females. The study of the role of gender in L2 acquisition has found that in general females perform better compared to males because females tend to have an advantage over males due to higher levels of motivation (Lan, 2010). A logical assumption is that male may be more anxious compared to female, which may lead to their lower L2 performance. Contrary to the aforementioned studies, Machida (2001) examined foreign language Japanese class anxiety based on gender, first language, and foreign language experience. She found significant difference for gender, female learners are more anxious than male counterparts. In the field of language learning, Cheng (2002) who investigated English writing anxiety in Taiwanese learners discovered that females were significantly more anxious than males.

Some studies about anxiety have looked into its association with language learner variables as age, gender, learning style, year of study and so that gender is considered important and cited here. Possible differences between male and female as regards anxiety level and in achievement have been examined in some language anxiety studies.

This study, therefore aimed to compare the ways how and to what extent this anxiety hinders the ability of male and female students to speak and participate autonomously in the English classroom and to identify whether males or females who are more anxious. Furthermore, the study explores how can students, teachers and support staff best address these issues of anxiety and confidence to assist language learners in moving beyond such limitations.

Statement of the problem

According to MOE (2002), English has played a prominent role in the field of education. Thus, English is not only one of a world language, but it is also thought in Ethiopia at all schools and higher institution. It is a medium of instruction in high schools to higher learning institutions. In addition, it is also used for practical purposes of communication. It service as the language of education, science and technology and as a necessary link with the outside world. Thus, students who are in different levels of education are required to use productive skill such as speaking and writing effectively in order to meet the above goals.

From this, it seems that teaching and learning of EFL has been placed high on the agenda to ensure that Ethiopians would play active and important role in the world political and economical and social activities. This all immense role is expected to be acquired through practicing speaking activities in school settings. The fact that language teaching and learning is for the sake of communication which would be acquired through practicing speaking activities, the reality existing in the class room indicates that there may be impediments affecting the delivery and the practice of speaking activities in the EFL class room. Especially, most of the learners at secondary and preparatory schools levels have problems with spoken proficiency. Concerning this, MOE (Ibid) also say that it is a widely held belief that the status of English is low in Ethiopian schools at all levels. Although the problem is common for all language skills, the problem of the speaking skill is worth noticing.

Though the aim of language teaching and learning is with the aforementioned purposes, the existing reality let alone in high schools but in higher institutions, students are restrained in EFL classroom. Likewise, they stagger to participate in speaking activities in EFL class room. Mean while, in high schools in English language classroom learners tend to be reluctant to participate in speaking activities and respond in EFL classroom.

Therefore, what reinforced our curiosity to study on the proposed topic is that the fallacies between the aim of language teaching and learning and the existing reality in EFL classroom. Students are anxious to use English language in EFL classroom though the aim of language teaching and learning is to equip learners with communicate competency. As the researchers experienced, students are not interested to deal with speaking activities. Consequently, it seems that their academic achievement is lesser than other subjects and their language competency is very weak. The researchers thought that in order to improve learner's language competency and their English language performance, it is crucial to focus on the effect of foreign language anxiety between male and female students of EFL learners in speaking activities.

Therefore, the researchers are interested to check what happens in high schools concerning the topic effect of foreign language anxiety between male and female students in EFL class room. Generally, this study highly focused specifically on exploring factors causing speaking anxiety which quiet learners from participating in foreign language classroom activities and the effect of anxiety between male and female learners' language achievement.

- 1.2. Objectives of the study
- 1.2.1. General objective

The general objective of the study was to find out the effect of foreign language anxiety between male and female students in English classroom

- 1.3.2. Specific objectives

- To identify the differences in foreign language anxiety between female and male students in English classes
- To find out the underlying factors of anxiety with regard to female and male students in foreign language classes
- To forward essential strategies the students and teachers employ in order to cope with the negative effect of speaking anxiety in EFL classroom

Materials and Methods

The research design

This study was primarily designed using mixed research method. The purpose was to investigate causes for

speaking anxiety in EFL classroom in speaking activities between male and female students and the influence it casts on learners' speaking skills. The investigation of the proposed problem was expected to generate information which would help the researcher to recommend ideas so that learners and English language teachers might use the recommendation to alleviate the proposed problem. Furthermore, it would help teachers to endorse their students with communicative abilities. Meanwhile, the investigation would help teachers to minimize difficulties learners face in their speaking activities.

The research method

In order to avoid subjectivity and to validate the findings, the researchers used three data collecting instruments. These data collecting instruments include questionnaire, interview (semi structured interview) and classroom observation. This was done using the crosschecking of the results obtained from each data collecting tools so as to validate the findings.

Population, sample and sampling techniques

Subject of the study

The primary source of data for this research was the sample of grade 9 students who enrolled for the academic year 2016/2009 E.C. and English language teachers teaching English in the proposed school.

To investigate the effect of foreign language anxiety in EFL class room in speaking activities the researchers involved grade 9 male and female students and as well as their English language teachers of Wolayta Soddo secondary school. This is done because the issue related to speaking competency of learners is primarily the concern of learners themselves and their teachers. Likewise, the problems affecting learner speaking skills in turn affects the language proficiency of learners and their academic performance. Furthermore, in order to innovate the best way of teaching, it is expected that information could be best obtained from teachers and students.

Sample and sampling techniques

The reason for selecting Wolayta Soddo High school is that it is near to the resident of the researchers in general and the present kind of research has not been conducted in the school in particular. The researchers used 25% of

the total population as the representative sample for the questionnaire of the study and the respondents were selected using random sampling technique. The reason behind using random sampling and fixed number of students in this study is for inconvenience and unmanageable. The researchers also believes that the samples represent the whole students of the target study. The total population of the study was 100 students. Among them 25% that is 25 respondents were selected as a representative sample. Since the study is a comparative study between male and female students' foreign language anxiety, the researchers used 12 female respondents and 13 male respondents for questionnaire. Samples for interview were selected purposely.

Data collecting instruments

To investigate the effect of foreign language anxiety between male and female students and to enhance their communicative competency at Wolayta Soddo high School the researchers employed two data collection instruments: namely, questionnaire and interview.

Questionnaire

Questionnaire was one of the data collecting instruments used by the researchers. A questionnaire for teachers included the role of the teacher in speaking activities, way of giving correction, the way he/she facilitates class room activities so as to make the objectives of the lesson clear and students could freely communicate with the target language were the main points in the study. The questionnaire (both teachers and students question) was designed primarily to meet the objectives of the study and the items would be in line with the literature review.

Interview

In assessing causes for speaking anxiety in EFL class room in speaking activities, a semi structured interview was prepared for the sample students who were selected from proposed grade. The semi structure interview was used to obtain data related to the speaking activities difficulties students perceive while practicing speaking activities and then the information helped the researcher to see clearly factors provoking speaking anxiety in learners for their speaking proficiency. This data collecting instrument is preferred because according to Salinger and Shohamys (1989) the use of semi structured interview as a data collecting instrument helps the researchers to get adequate information, free discussion and response and flexibility that cannot be obtained by

other data collection instruments. In addition, there is a chance of flexibility to rephrase the questions, modify them and add some new questions to the list on condition and it helps the researchers to focus on the main points (Kaul, 1984). Questions were prepared based on factors causing speaking anxiety that impede speaking ability of students so that interviewees were freely responded and suggested solutions.

Data collecting procedure

The researchers intended to collect data at times suggested by the high schools permission and the willingness of the participants. Likewise, questionnaire was distributed to the sample students of the study with the presence of the researchers at the normal class time and all were returned. During attempting the questions students who need explanation about the question or the way they should make their answers was given clarification.

The interview session for students was also held on the basis of purposive selection and was proposed to last for about one hour depending on the duration of the respondents' responses. To do this first the respondents of the interview were informed the purpose of the interview. The responses of the interviewees were audio taped (recorded) for later analysis. In addition, the researchers also wrote respondents' response.

Data analysis procedure

In order to investigate the effect of foreign language anxiety between male and female students in EFL class room the data gathered through questionnaire and interview were analyzed using the following procedure. Descriptive analysis was used for items to identify the cause and consequence of speaking anxiety in WolaytaSoddo High School. The data aimed to be obtained through questionnaire was analyzed in such a way that frequencies were counted for each anxiety sources. Then, these anxiety sources were ranked based on their frequencies from the best frequent to the least. This was further validated with the result obtained from interview. After that the data was interpreted, analyzed, and discussion was given. And then conclusions and recommendations were provided.

Results and Discussions

This section outlines the results of the study conducted for the purpose of investigating the effect of foreign

language anxiety between male and female students learning English as a foreign language in Wolayta Soddo Secondary School. In this section, the data collected from all the subjects using questionnaire, and interview were analyzed. The researchers employed sequential analysis of data in this study. Therefore, the data analysis began with the results obtained both from male and female students' questionnaire, and went to interview results in order to indicate the current problem on foreign language anxiety.

The differences in foreign language anxiety between female and male students in English classes

This section outlines the data gathered through questionnaire based on Horwitz et al. (1986) FLCAS. The discussion was made on the bases of students' response for each item in terms of percentage, mean, variance and standard division. The reliability of the slightly altered Puškar's (2009) translation of the FLCAS turned out to be high, with Cronbach's alpha of .933.

With possible scores on the FLCAS mean ranging from one to five, the following criteria for measuring language anxiety were established:

- Less than 2.5 – low language anxiety
- 2.5-4 – moderate language anxiety
- More than 4 – high language anxiety

As stated in the above table item 1, both male and female respondents would equally feel more confident about speaking in class if they practiced more. This is why because above half percent of male and female respondents confirmed their agreement and strong agreement. For example, 30.8 and 53.84 percent of male and female respondents respectively forwarded their agreement and strong agreement. Based on the data obtained, both male and female students need more practice to speak English confidently. Therefore, it is possible to suggest that both male and female learners' anxiety level is the same unless they practice to speak in English in advance.

Table.1 Students' response based on foreign language classroom anxiety scale (horwitz et al., 1986) Note: SD (Strongly agree), DA (Disagree), UN (Undecided), A (Agree) SA (Strongly agree): R (Responses) B (boy)

Item no	R	SDA(1)		DA(2)		UD(3)		A(4)		SA(5)		Total No	Mean	Var	Std
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%				
1	M	2	15.38					4	30.8	7	53.84	13	4.08	8.80	2.97
	F	3	25					3	25	6	50	12	3.75	3.00	1.73
2	M	9	69.23	3	23.07	1		1	7.69	5		13	3.62	11.20	3.35
	F	1	8.33	3	25		8.33	2	16.67		41.66	12	3.58	2.80	1.67
3	M	1	7.69			1	7.69	6	46.15	5	38.46	13	4.08	6.92	2.63
	F	1	8.33	3	25	1	8.33	3	25	4	33.33	12	3.50	1.80	1.34
4	M	4	30.76	2	15.38	1	7.69	2	15.38	4	30.76	13	3.00	1.80	1.34
	F	3	25	1	8.33	3	25	1	8.33	4	33.33	12	3.17	1.80	1.34
5	M	3	23.07	4	30.8			5	38.46	1	7.79	13	2.77	2.92	1.71
	F			3	25	1	8.33	3	25	5	41.66	12	3.83	2.67	1.63
6	M	2	15.38			1	7.69	3	23.07	7	53.84	13	4.00	6.92	2.63
	F	1	8.33			2	16.66	6	50	3	25	12	3.83	4.67	2.16
7	M	3	23.07			1	7.69	5	38.46	4	30.77	13	3.54	2.92	1.71
	F	1	8.33	3	25			5	41.66	3	25	12	3.50	2.67	1.63
8	M	4	30.77	4	30.77			5	38.46			13	2.46	0.33	0.58
	F					2	16.66	7	58.33	3	25	12	4.08	7.00	2.65
9	M	5	38.46	4	30.77			3	23.07	1	7.69	13	2.31	2.92	1.71
	F	4	33.33	6	50	1	8.33			1	8.33	12	2.00	6.00	2.45
10	M	4	30.77			1	7.69	4	30.77	4	30.33	13	3.31	2.25	1.50
	F	5	41.66			1	8.33	3	25	3	25	12	2.92	2.67	1.63
11	M	2	15.38			1	7.69	7	53.84	3	23.07	13	3.69	6.92	2.63
	F	2	16.66	1	8.33	1	8.33	6	50	2	16.66	12	3.42	4.30	2.07

12	M	4	30.77	4	30.77	1	7.69	3	23.07	1	7.69	13	2.46	2.30	1.52
	F	3	25	4	33.33	2	16.66	1	8.33	2	16.66	12	2.58	1.30	1.14
13	M	2	15.38	4	30.77	2	15.38	1	7.69	3	23.07	13	2.69	1.30	1.14
	F	3	25	1	8.33	3	25	1	8.33	4	33.33	12	3.17	1.80	1.34
14	M	2	15.38	2	15.38	1	7.69	4	30.77	4	30.77	13	3.46	1.80	1.34
	F	2	16.66	1	8.33			5	41.66	4	33.33	12	3.67	3.33	1.83
15	M	1	7.69	2	15.38	1	7.69	7	53.85	2	15.38	13	3.54	6.30	2.51
	F			3	25	2	16.66	5	41.66	2	16.66	12	3.50	2.00	1.41
16	M	1	7.69					7	53.85	5	38.46	13	4.15	9.33	3.06
	F	2	16.66			2	16.66	3	25	5	41.66	12	3.75	2.00	1.41
17	M	4	30.77			1	7.69	4	30.77	4	30.77	13	3.31	2.25	1.50
	F	3	25	1	8.33	1	8.33	7	58.33			12	3.00	8.00	2.83
18	M	2	15.38	1	7.69			8	61.54	2	15.38	13	3.54	10.25	3.20
	F	7	58.33					3	25	2	15.38	12	2.42	7.00	2.65
19	M	3	23.07	1	7.69	1	7.69	3	23.07	5	38.46	13	3.46	2.80	1.67
	F	2	16.66	2	16.66			6	50	2	16.66	12	3.33	4.00	2.00
20	M	1	7.69	1	7.69			8	61.54	3	23.07	13	3.85	10.92	3.30
	F	2	16.66	2	16.66	2	16.66	4	33.33	2	16.66	12	3.17	0.80	0.89
21	M	1	7.69			2	15.38	5	38.46	5	38.46	13	4.00	4.25	2.06
	F			1	8.33			5	41.66	6	50	12	4.33	7.00	2.65
22	M	2	15.38	1	7.69			7	53.84	3	23.46	13	3.62	6.92	2.63
	F	2	16.66	3	25			4	33.33	4	33.33	12	3.67	0.92	0.96
23	M	2	15.38	2	15.38			4	30.77	5	38.46	13	3.62	2.25	1.50
	F	2	16.66	2	16.66			3	25	5	41.66	12	3.58	2.00	1.41
24	M	7	53.84	2	15.38			3	23.07	1	7.69	13	2.15	6.92	2.63
	F	5	41.66	1	8.33			5	41.66	1	8.33	12	2.67	5.33	2.31

Item 2 was intended to see whether the learners would feel less self-conscious or embarrassed about speaking in class in front of others if they knew them better. As the data from both subjects depicted, there was discrepancy between male and female students' anxiety level. To this item 69.23 % and 23.07% of male respondents strongly disagree and disagree respectively. This indicates that male students are not anxious to speak English in front of strange people. On the other hand, female students feel less an anxious when they speak English in front of people they know better. This means that female students' anxiety level is increased when they speak English in front of people they do not know well. This has been confirmed by the response given from female respondents because 16.67% and 41.66% more than half of them forwarded agreement and strong agreement to the given proposition. Therefore, female Students want to avoid any kind of competitiveness with their fellows and they admit to being more relaxed if they know the rest of the class. In respect of this, most of the students report they would feel less anxious about speaking in

class in front of their classmates if they knew them better (Item 2). Speaking in the foreign language in front of the classmates put students in a vulnerable position where weaknesses in the L2 may rarely be hidden.

Item 3 was proposed to check if the learners feel very relaxed in class when they have studied a great deal the night before. According to data from both subjects, they feel relaxed in English class when they have studied earlier. Consistent with Young's findings (1990: 543) students explain they feel more relaxed in class when they have studied a great deal the night before (Item 3). This has been evidenced by the response from both subjects. More than half percent of both male and female subjects responded their agreement and strong agreement to the give item. For example, 46.15% and 38.46% of boy subjects respectively indicated that they agree and strongly agree to item 3. Similarly, about 58.33% of female subjects showed their agreement and strong agreement to the same item. Referring to item 1 and 3, it is possible to conclude that both groups of students are

very careful about their preparation. Young's students put great emphasis on this aspect: eighty-seven, ninety-six and ninety-five of her students agree with Item 14 (1990: 544). Horwitz et al.'s (1986: 129) report that forty-nine percent of the students interviewed endorse the Item "I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class". More than fifty percent of Aida's students (1994: 160) affirm that "I get nervous when the Japanese teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance". Therefore, it is possible to conclude that both male and female students need practice in advance if they do not want to be anxious in English class. Item 1 and item 3 have similar idea, and there has been no significant difference between male and female students' anxiety level because both subjects responded the same answer to the given items.

Item 4 of the above table was aimed to investigate if the learners feel less anxious in class when they are not the only persons answering a question. As it is shown in the above table, 30.76% and 15.38 p% totally 46.16 percent of male students respectively claimed their strong disagreement and disagreement on the above assertion. In agree and "strongly agree" categories, there were 15.38% percent and 30.76 percent respondents respectively, together making 46.16 percent account similar number of male subjects. On the other hand, number of female respondents who showed their strong disagreement, disagreement and agreement and strong agreement were proportional. However, only 1 of male and 3 of female subjects were unable to decide. From this data we can decide that half number of participants from both subjects encourage competitiveness with their fellow students.

In addition, students are less anxious in class when they have debate scheduled (item 15). Data from both groups confirm this reality because more than half percent of male and female subjects agree and strongly agree to the item "I am more willing to speak in class when we have a debate scheduled." Based on this report, one can assert that male and female students are equally less anxious if they are given debate scheduled.

Fear of being negatively evaluated or corrected in a harsh manner are feelings experienced by several students in the present investigation. Many of them report, in fact, that they consider themselves able to speak the foreign language pretty well, but when they know they are being graded, they mess up (Item 5). However, about 66.66% of female subjects reflected that they agree and strongly agree to item 5 above. Therefore, the anxiety level of

male and female students is different according to data obtained from both subjects to item 5. In this case female students more anxious than male students when they know they are being graded even if they speak English pretty well. As Koch and Terrell (1991) asserts, Fifty-nine and thirty seven percent of their subjects worry about the evaluation of their oral performances.

According to Item 6 of the above table, 23.07% and 53.84% of male students agree and strongly agree with the Item "I would be more willing to volunteer answers in class if I weren't so afraid of saying the wrong thing". Similarly, 50% and 25% of female respondents reflected their agreement and strong agreement on the same item. Congruent results have been found by Young (1990: 545) and Horwitz et. al (1986: 129). Interestingly enough, most students affirm they feel uneasy when their fellow students are asked to correct their mistakes in the foreign language class. Therefore, one can confirm that both male and female students in the school equally anxious fear of committing mistakes.

In the light of the answers above it is relevant enhancing activities which put students in a relaxed atmosphere. Some of them may be easily identified by the analysis of students' answers: 38.46 % and 30.77% (more than 50 percent) of male students agree and strongly agree with the statement "I enjoy class when we work in pairs" (Item 7). Surprisingly, about 66.66% of female students reflected their agreement and strong agreement on the same item. Therefore, both male and female students are relaxed when they work with other students according to the data from both subjects.

Concerning item 8 female students are more anxious than male because 16.66 58.33% of female respondents expressed their agreement and strong agreement to proposition "I feel more comfortable in class when I don't have to get in front of the class." On the other hand, 61.56 percent of male respondents strongly disagree and disagree. This indicates that male students do not bother whether they get in front of the class. Therefore, female students are anxious than male when they get in front of the class.

Item 9 was to check whether learners would enjoy class when they weren't corrected at all in class. When we compare the results, the majority of both male and female subjects reflected similar answer to the item. About 38.46% and 30.77% of male students asserted their strong disagreement and disagreement respectively. In the same way 83.33% of female respondents

confirmed strong disagreement and disagreement to the same item. This implies that both male and female students in the school did not bother about being corrected by others. Additionally, item 22 was aimed to know if the subjects would feel uncomfortable when the teacher never corrected their mistakes in class. According to data from both subjects, the students were comfortable when their teachers corrected their mistakes. Therefore, it is possible to conclude making correction of students' error is not sources of foreign language anxiety in the proposed school.

Getting the attention and interest of students might be relevant enough to make them comfortable.

A great number of learners express agreement with the Item 10 "I am more willing to speak in class when we discuss current events." It is possible to understand that anxious students judge this activity as important in order to be involved in speaking practices. More than 60% of male and 50% of female respondents forwarded their agreement and strong agreement. Therefore it is possible to suggest getting students discuss about current issues is one of coping mechanism of foreign language anxiety.

Class dimensions are, in fact of great importance for most of the students of the present study: sixty-two percent and fifty-eight percent endorse Item 13: "I would feel better about speaking in class if the class were smaller". These findings give support to Young's results (1990: 543); forty-six, thirty-five and forty-one percent of her students agree with the same Item.

Even doing skits in class is an activity which students do not fear very much. More than fifty percent of both groups of students express agreement and strongly agreement with this practice (Item 11). Interestingly 15.38% of male and 16.66% of female students strongly disagree with this Item. Similarly, a practice which particularly comfortable for both groups of students is the role playing situation. More than 60 percent of male and 58 percent of female respondents agree and strongly agree with Item 17 "I like going to class when we are going to role play situations. Consistent results have been found by Koch and Terrell (1991), Young (1991), Woodrow (2006: 317).

Covering much material in a short period of time does not result as particularly stressful for students of both groups (Item 11) because more than 50 percent of respondents from both groups forwarded their strong disagreement and disagreement.

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

The purpose of the study was to explore whether there is foreign language anxiety difference between male and female learners, to identify the underlying factors of anxiety with regard to female and male students in foreign language classes, and Essential strategies the students and teachers employ in order to cope with the negative effect of speaking anxiety in EFL classroom.

The participants of the study were 25 students (13 male and 12 female) randomly selected from grade 9. In addition, five participants 3 female and 2 male purposively selected were involved in the interview. After collecting the data by using the mentioned tools, both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods were employed to arrive at the results. The data that was gathered through questionnaire and interview were first integrated by bringing the interview results to questionnaire data and then analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively together so as to create the holistic picture of the study.

Students surveyed in the present study demonstrated that speaking a foreign language in the class was a fairly stressful activity. Learners surveyed reported medium levels of anxiety and not very high as expected; however, they demonstrated that speaking activities are indeed the in-class practices which made foreign language students most nervous and tense. Students show to experience communication apprehension in the context of the English class. As it was indicated in the analysis section, females were becoming a little more anxious than males; most of students feel worried in those activities with a high self exposure requirement, as already found by Lucas (1984), Horwitz et al. (1986), Price (1991) and Young (1991). Making oral presentations, speaking spontaneously in front of the classmates, writing one's own work on the board turn out to be in-class practices which put the student in a very stressful situation. In these cases, learners may feel uncomfortable because they fear teachers' and their class mates' harsh ways of correcting errors and the possibility to make mistakes.

A considerable number of students affirm to be more willing to give volunteer answers if they are sure to say the right thing, thus demonstrating a worry about taking risks. Ely (1986) has explained that high levels of "Language Class Discomfort" are negative predictors for "Language Class Risk-taking". Although the anxiety

about making mistakes is one of the main reasons for students' reticence, learners are conscious about the importance of being corrected as a good way to improve English, in line with Wenden's findings (1986). One of her students declares that an efficient strategy for gaining a better ability in the L2 is learning from his friends' correction of the mistakes he makes when he speaks. However, as reported by the students of the present survey, in the formal context of a classroom, being corrected by the classmates is an uncomfortable activity, which may increase competitiveness among students and which should be avoided by teachers. Activities which should be promoted, instead, are those ones rated by a high number of students as comfortable and not anxiety-provoking. Students report to feel more relaxed when they work in small groups, or in pairs, conducting interviews with each other; all practices which give students the opportunity to Language Class Discomfort indicates students' anxiety for speaking the foreign language. Practice speaking without being spotlighted in front of the rest of the class and which give students the opportunity to know the classmates at the same time. Calling students equally or giving them the possibility to answer spontaneously is an activity rather useful to create a comfortable atmosphere in the class. Students report to be more willing to participate by discussing current events or interesting topics. Activities which create contradictory reactions are the role play practices: some students evaluate this type of activity as stressful, while others affirm to feel comfortable. Understandably, students tend to be less stressed in those practices with a low self exposure requirement. Writing answers in the book, reading silently in the class do not threaten students self esteem.

On the other hand, the underlying factors of foreign language anxiety with regard to male and female students implied in the investigation were low English proficiency, lack of practice, difficulty of the task, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and incomprehensible input, similar to previous studies (Hilleson, 1996; Jackson, 2002; Tsui, 1996).

Recommendations

The debilitating feeling of foreign language anxiety during speaking activities is frequent. We think the awareness of such a feeling should be heightened and not be undervalued by teachers and learners. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were forwarded:

- ✓ This could be realized through workshops or the adoption of certain teaching methodologies aimed to create a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom especially during speaking practices (e.g. Communicative Language Teaching; Natural Approach).
- ✓ Making students comfortable by avoiding activities which increase competitiveness or which threaten students' self esteem is very important.
- ✓ Working in small groups and discussing interesting topics are good activities that allow students to know each other and to practice the foreign language.
- ✓ Teachers could use gentle and flexible approaches of error correction, being friendly and with a good sense of humor.
- ✓ At the same time students might cope with their anxiety by talking with their classmates about this problem since they are not the only ones to experience it and by consulting with their teachers, themselves "successful" language learners for many students, about their points of view towards the foreign language learning process, a process where difficulties and debilitating feelings as anxiety are unavoidable sometimes.

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