
Are Arabic language learners Anxious to Speak Arabic?

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ABSTRACT: Anxiety in a foreign language is not a current issue but it is multidimensional and construct which always happens and a never-ending story for decades hence worth to be revisited. This study on anxiety involved 280 student respondents from 18 Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur lower secondary schools that offer the Arabic Language as a Foreign Language. The main purpose of this study was to investigate the levels of anxiety among the students learning Arabic Language as a Foreign Language, particularly the Arabic speaking skill. Horwitz's FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) was adapted to assess the levels of types of anxiety, namely; communication apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and test anxiety (TA). The findings show that appearance of anxiety in the 3 dimensions and the level of anxiety recorded in these three is all high while the highest is fear of negative evaluation. In conclusion, anxiety in the Arabic Language as a Foreign Language subject does exist, especially in terms of speaking skill.

Keywords: Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation, Test Anxiety and Arabic Speaking Skill, Foreign Language.

I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language anxiety is not a recent trend in educational research. This issue is evergreen and never disappears. Researchers like (Aida, 1994) and (Salehi & Marefat, 2014) found the connection of foreign language anxiety with language skills. Among recent examples of anxiety in language skills are speaking skill (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017), listening skill (Lili, 2015), writing skill (Osmani & Osmani, 2018), and reading skill (Paci, 2018). Previous studies have shown that learners experience anxiety the most in productive skills especially speaking skill Horwitz (2001), Kitano (2001), Gregersen & Horwitz (2002), Tsiplakides & Keramida, (2009), Subaşı (2010), Fang-peng, Gai & Dong (2010), Fang-peng & Dong (2010) and Melouah (2013). Anxiety is considered as a significant factor that influences oral communication performance among the learners and affects foreign language speaking and learning (Woodrow, 2006; Inthakanok, 2009; Mak, 2011; Heng, Abdullah, & Yusof, 2012; Agudo, 2013; Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014). Foreign language learners experience anxiety when they are not able to communicate effectively and persuasively, whether inside or outside the classroom. They also fail to convey the message or meaning in speech activities. Simsek (2015) explains that it is a kind of emotion that is difficult to explain.

Moreover Kruk (2017) also claimed that students get confused quickly and ashamed easily in learning a foreign language in the classroom due to anxiety. They are unable to understand the conversation during the learning session and have speaking difficulty. Elkhafaifi (2005) stated that also stated that the study on language anxiety is fewer in Arabic language speaking skills compared to other foreign languages especially English. This study examines the level of language anxiety in the areas of communication

apprehension (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE), test anxiety (TA), regardless of the difference of the anxiety in terms of gender and age among Arabic language learners in selected secondary schools in Malaysia.

Communication Apprehension (CA)

Communication apprehension or CA is defined as a type of shyness characterized as fear of, or anxiety about, communicating with people (Horwitz, 1986). Bensalem (2017) stated that CA is shyness and the feeling of insecurity in speaking with others. CA is a significant factor of anxiety in foreign language learning (Horwitz, 2001; Sparks & Ganschow, 2007; Arnaiz & Guillén, 2012; Dewaele & Al-Saraj, 2015). In addition, Latiff Azmi & Mohd. Sham (2018) claimed many studies found that communication apprehension had been recognized as a contributing factor to the difficulty in speaking a foreign language among foreign language learners. CA can be noticed in learners who tend to avoid communication and feeling of fear during the classroom environment (Abou El-Goukh, 2013). CA is not only observed among learners at school but also noticeable among university students as reported by Mohamed Noor, Rafek, Megat Khalid, & Mohammad (2015) that CA among undergraduate students studying at public universities in Malaysia was at a high level.

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

Horwitz (1986) defined fear of negative evaluation FNE as apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations. FNE includes fear from being evaluated in any setting, not just in the classroom, by instructor as well as by peers, especially when they aware that there is speaking evaluation going on in the classroom (Horwitz et al., 1986; Aida, 1994; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Kao & Craigie, 2010; Liu & Huang, 2011; Shabani, 2012). Abou El-Goukh (2013) stated that students who are anxious about speaking commonly tend to prevent communicating. He further explained that this issue may stem from either the student's lack of confidence in his/her second language capacity or from his/her anxiety about speaking. According to Bux (2019) the sign of FNE is identifiable from the feeling of scare of failure and shyness with negative judgement from others and feeling worried about doing and saying wrong things while communicating.

Fear contributes to apprehension and uneasiness in learning a foreign language or second language and thus causing to inability to speak well in the foreign or second language (Peter D. MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). The ability to speak a foreign language is closely linked to the level of anxiety that students face in the study of foreign language courses. However, there is nevertheless a certain degree of 'reasonable anxiety or stress which can drive the quality of learners in foreign language speaking skills.

Test Anxiety (TA)

Horwitz (1986) defined TA as the type of anxiety resulting from a fear of failure in an academic evaluation setting. Normally it happens before, during and after the test especially when learners are aware that they are going to be orally assessed (Yahya, 2013). According to Sari (2017) TA is the second main factor for anxiety in speaking in English as foreign language. Based on her finding, 48 percent from her samples was having TA. The findings show that TA was an essential factor to influence anxiety in foreign language learning, especially in speaking skills. In addition, she also claimed that TA can be observed when learners are feeling scared and uneasiness during the oral examination, such as a speaking test. The learners felt stressed during the test even though they make perfect preparation before the speaking test. They did feel nervous after the test because of the possibility of failure of the test.

II. METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENT

The present study is quantitative using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) with three main of constructs; communication anxiety (CA), fear of negative evaluation (FNE) and test anxiety (TA) as instrument to collect the data. FLCAS has been adopted and established in the empirical study of anxiety in

a foreign language such as speaking (Cheng et al., 1999), reading (Saito et al., 1999) and (Sellers, 2000), writing (Cheng et al., 1999) and listening (Elkhafaifi, 2005). The researcher did not conduct a reliability test on the established instrument and items used in this study as they were stable and highly reliable. The researcher adapted all of the items used in this study from the same source. The researcher used Cronbach's alpha to determine reliability scale. The value that reached 0.7 and above indicated that the items were very reliable thus can be used in the actual research. The estimated reliability for the FLCAS (Cronbach's alpha) was .94 ($n = 233$). Validity and reliability data for this scale have appeared in the reports of several other studies (e.g., (Horwitz et al., 1986; Saito et al., 1999; Saito & Samimy, 1996; Sellers, 2000). For (Horwitz et al., 1986), the internal consistency was .93 ($n = 75$), and the test-retest reliability over 8 weeks yielded $r = .83$ ($p < .001$), with all items showing significant corrected item-total scale correlations. The construct validity of the FLCAS suggest that Foreign Language (FL) anxiety may be distinguished from other types of anxiety. The maximum range for the FLCAS is 33 to 165, with lower scores indicating lower anxiety while higher scores indicating higher anxiety. Due to this fact, reliability on this instrument was not an issue for this research. Content validation is already established by Horwitz (1986) hence it is also applicable for this study. This questionnaire consists of 33 items, of which eight items are on communication anxiety (CA) (1, 9, 14, 18, 24, 27, 29, 32), nine items on fear of negative evaluation (FNE) (3, 7, 13, 15, 20, 23, 25, 31, 33) and five items on test anxiety (TA) (2, 8, 10, 19, 21). The remaining 11 items measured general anxiety in the classroom. The survey form required the respondents to rate each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strong disagreement) to 5 (strong agreement).

POPULATION AND SAMPLES

The population of this study is Arabic language learners in 18 secondary schools in Kuala Lumpur combining 3 zone administrations; The Office of Education Keramat Territory (PPWK), The Office of Education Bangsar/Pudu Territory (PPWBP) and The Office of Education Sentul Territory (PPWS). Based on the numbers of secondary schools at hand, it is safe to assume that the size of the population was 1000 with 280 learners as samples. Using purposive sampling, the population was selected from lower secondary one and two only. The rule of the sample of the population is as per the existing policy of (Ahmad, 2020) Educational Planning And Research Division (EPRD), Ministry of Education (MOE). The purpose of the policy is to have zero external interruption or interference to those who are sitting for national examination classes. The research used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26.0 to analyse the data to explain the phenomenon of anxiety in speaking a foreign language.

III. RESULT

Level of anxiety in terms of CA

Communication apprehension did appear among respondents with high percentage. However, in comparison to another 2 factors, CA recorded the lowest scores. Item number 32; *"I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of Arabic."* reported more than 35% respondents agreed that they probably feel uncomfortable around native speakers of Arabic while 49.6 % respondents reported 'not sure' assuming that they never encounter any situation speaking with the native speakers. As for item number 29; *"I get nervous when I don't understand every word the Arabic teacher says in Arabic."* 49.3 % respondents agreed and 13.2 % strongly agreed that they would get nervous when they do not understand every Arabic word communicated by the Arabic teacher during the class time.

Respectively, in items number 18; *"I feel confident when I speak Arabic in Arabic class."* and 14; *"I would not be nervous speaking Arabic with native speakers."*, more than 70 % respondents agreed that they will feel nervous while speaking Arabic language with native speakers and do not feel confident when speaking Arabic in the classroom.

Item number 9 also showed that the CA level was significant as more than 60 per cent of respondents agree with the statement whereby 47.5 per cent choose to 'agree' with the statement, and another 26.4 per

cent choose the 'strongly agree' answer. The statement for item 9 is *"I start to panic when I have to speak in Arabic without preparation in Arabic class."*

Lastly, items number 1; *"I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking Arabic in my Arabic class."* 24; *"I feel very self-conscious about speaking Arabic in front of other students."* and 27; *"I get nervous and confused when I am speaking Arabic in my Arabic class."* recorded more than 35 % respondents agreed that they do feel self-conscious negatively about speaking Arabic in front of the other students and they agreed that they feel confused when speaking Arabic in the classroom.

Level of anxiety in terms of FNE

Among the 3, it is obvious that fear of negative evaluation recorded higher scores than the others. Item number 7; *"I keep thinking that the other students are better at Arabic than I am."* recorded a high percentage of 43.6% respondents chose to agree and 33.9% respondents chose to strongly agree that they feel unconfident during speaking Arabic and always think their peer is always better than them. In addition, item number 23; *"I always feel that the other students speak Arabic better than I do."* recorded the highest score with 46.8% of respondents chose to agree and 26.1% chose to strongly agree that they always feel other people can speak Arabic better than them. 44.3% respondents reported that they agreed and 24.3% of them strongly agreed that they cannot speak Arabic spontaneously without preparation when their teachers instruct them to speak in the classroom as reported for item number 33; *"I get nervous when the Arabic teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance."*

Level of anxiety in terms of TA

The appearance of test anxiety among respondents is proven in the following items. About 45.7% respondents chose to agree and 34.6% chose to strongly agree that they feel apprehension if they fail in the examination, including Arabic Language oral examination or assessment as reported in item number 10; *"I worry about the consequences of failing my Arabic class"*. The possible reason would be the feeling of uneasiness during the Arabic test including the oral test as reported by more than 51% respondents in item number 8; *"I am usually at ease during tests in my Arabic class."* Items number 2; *"I don't worry about making mistakes in Arabic class."*, 19; *"I don't worry about making mistakes in Arabic class."* and 21; *"The more I study for an Arabic test, the more confused I get."* respectively recorded above 49% respondents feel scared and afraid when the Arabic teachers correct their mistakes in the examination and feel worried about making mistakes during the Arabic class.

Levels of anxiety

Based on these findings, the researcher attempts to show the data in a more straightforward form which contains three categories or levels of anxiety: low, moderate, and high for each CA, FNE, TA. The researcher used median value in the mean data distribution of CA, FNE, TA categorised into three levels of anxiety: low, moderate, and high. The researcher can find the distribution of a dataset by comparing the median to the mean. Based on table 1 until 3, it is justifiable to conclude that the anxiety level among the 280 respondents is high while speaking Arabic as a foreign language in the classroom.

Table 1 Level Anxiety for CA

		Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low Anxiety	88	31.4	31.4
	Moderate Anxiety	66	23.6	55.0
	High Anxiety	126	45.0	100.0
	Total	280	100.0	

CA's median value in data distribution is 3.38 based on the Likert scale from 1.00 to 5.00. Thus, from the Likert scale, the range for low anxiety level category value is from 1.00 – 3.00; range value for moderate

anxiety level is from 3.10 – 3.50; and range value for high anxiety level is 3.51 – 5.00. The numbers in Table 4.8 explain the percentage of high anxiety, which is 45 per cent, whereby 126 respondents strongly agree that they have anxiety during Arabic as a foreign language in the classroom and it does occur.

Table 2 Level Anxiety for FNE

		Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low Anxiety	89	31.8	31.8
	Moderate Anxiety	73	26.1	57.9
	High Anxiety	118	42.1	100.0
	Total	280	100.0	

Second, the median value for FNE in this data distribution is 3.44 as per the Likert scale from 1.00 to 5.00. So, from the Likert scale, the range for the low anxiety level category is from 1.00 – 3.00; range value for moderate anxiety level is from 3.10 – 3.56; and range value for high anxiety level is 3.56 – 5.00. Based on the numbers in Table 4.9 which show the percentage for high anxiety that is 42.1 per cent or 118 respondents strongly agree that they feel uneasiness, scared, and pessimistic perception to others while speaking Arabic in front of peers and teachers in the classroom.

Table 3 Level Anxiety for TA

		Frequency	Per cent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low Anxiety	125	44.6	44.6
	Moderate Anxiety	30	10.7	55.4
	High Anxiety	125	44.6	100.0
	Total	280	100.0	

Third, the median value for TA in the standard curve is 3.00 from the Likert scale from 1.00 to 5.00. Hence, from the Likert scale, the range for the low anxiety level category is 1.00 – 2.80; range value for moderate anxiety level from 2.81 – 3.20; and range value for high anxiety level 3.21 – 5.00. Based on the numbers in Table 4.10 which display the percentage for high anxiety as 44.6 per cent or precisely 125 respondents strongly agree that they feel nervous, afraid and anxious before, during and after the test in the classroom. Nevertheless, this is similar to low anxiety percentage among the respondents, and possibly they think that nobody will monitor or look during the examination session.

IV. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Similar to other foreign or second languages, anxiety in speaking is also observed in Arabic speaking skills. In this present study the researchers attempt to examine and investigate the appearance of anxiety in 3 dimensions namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety including oral tests and assessments.

It is observed that anxiety appears in all 3 dimensions and the level of anxiety recorded in these three is all high. That means Arabic language learners in Malaysia face big challenges to speak Arabic as they have to overcome their anxiety not only from themselves; CA and TA but also from the surroundings and environments; FNE. In other words, the anxiety is internal as well as external. This is also supported by a recently publish article Rajitha & Alamelu, (2020) where is stated four external factors namely; language factor, grammar factor, pronunciation factor and peer factor.

It is also observed that among the three dimensions, learners are more anxious with the peer's evaluation, the external one. This is worrying because it is related to emotional, psychological factors of the learners. Learners always feel scared to speak because they are worrying they would be corrected by teachers and ridiculed by peers, they feel like their language is not as good as other people and thus hinder them to try.

As mention by Rajitha & Alamelu, (2020) one of the causes for anxiety is peer factor whereby the inner feel and thought of peer or classmate evaluation would always create anxiety among students. According to Mokhtar & Haron, (2020) it is also known as social anxiety where the students will tend to avoid speaking or make conversation in the group because of fear of negative evaluation. Hence, anxiety, fear, uneasiness and nervousness will appear and discourage the confidence of the learners when delivering a speech in a foreign language either inside or outside the classroom. Therefore, teachers and educator have the role to play in reducing anxiety levels during the process of foreign language learning including Arabic especially in managing the external factor specifically on the other students' attitude toward the speakers (Mokhtar, 2020).

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