

Language Anxiety among Selected Grade 7 ESL Learners in the Division of Northern Samar, Philippines

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Introduction

Second language anxiety is a phenomenon that is experienced by students of second language classroom worldwide. In a language setting, a child who exhibits enthusiastic attitude can easily learn and master a second language. However, language teachers accept the claim that not all L2 learners are expressive and eager to master the target language. The environment for learning is where learners can freely express themselves through learning and mastering the target language. But anxious and nervous learners will not surely succeed in the arena of language learning. Moreover, English teachers have to be passionate and committed especially to those anxious learners who are affected by this kind of problem.

Language anxiety is a problem which has been researched and studied several years ago, but due to the fact that language learning is a dynamic process, language learners are affected by their negative feelings because anxiety is an affective filter that negatively influence learner's ability to acquire another language. According to Krashen (1998), the affective filter limits how much input an individual student is aware of and how much of that input they process and acquire. Learners receive comprehensible input when they feel confident or relaxed (Krashen, 1998).

ABSTRACT

This descriptive-correlational study determined the language anxiety experienced by Grade 7 ESL learners from four selected junior high schools in the first district of the Division of Northern Samar, Philippines for School Year 2018-2019. The respondents of the study were 286 Grade 7 students who were determined using Slovin's formula. The instrument used in the study was composed of three parts: the socio-demographic profile of the respondents; the factors causing second language anxiety; and the language anxiety scale adopted from Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) model of language anxiety. The English performance of the respondents was based on their grades in the English subject. The data were treated statistically using frequency counts, percentages, weighted mean and Pearson r correlation. The findings revealed that in the English performance of the respondents, a majority of them obtained very satisfactory rating in English. Students' second language anxiety especially on language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation were found to be "either anxious or relaxed". On the test of relationship, a significant relationship was found between demographic profile and their English performance. There was also a significant relationship between the demographic profile and the respondents second language anxiety. Age and sex were found significantly related with classroom-related factors and teacher-related factors. English performance was also found significantly related with communication anxiety and test anxiety.

Keywords: language, anxiety, ESL, performance

According to Spielberger (1966), anxiety is a "subjective, consciously perceived feelings of apprehension and tension, accompanied by or associated with activation or arousal of the automatic nervous system. Anxiety can be either facilitating or debilitating. Facilitating anxiety motivates learners to adopt an approach attitude and is willing to confront the new learning task, and debilitating anxiety motivates learners to assume an avoidance attitude and therefore tends to escape from the learning task (Scovel, 1978). The factor of task difficulty affects learners to develop a facilitating or a debilitating anxiety. When a given task is relatively simple, language anxiety could be facilitating but once the task is too difficult, anxiety will impair performance (MacIntyre, 1995).

Ganschow et al. (1994) proved that high levels of anxiety could significantly influence second language acquisition negatively. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), anxious students might skip classes and refuse to complete homework. Learners who felt anxious might find their learning experience less enjoyable which might lower also their motivation (Gregersen, 2000). It was emphasized by Brophy (1999) that the success of language learners is often

impeded because they spend their energy avoiding mistakes rather than focusing on learning.

In light of the negative effects of anxiety on language learning, some researchers and educators in the field of second language learning have been trying to identify the sources of second language anxiety so as to help learners reduce anxiety in learning a second language. Some of the sources of second language anxiety are associated with the learner, some with the teacher, and some with the instructional practice.

This study focused on the anxiety experienced by the Grade 7 ESL learners of selected junior high schools in the first district of the Division of Northern Samar. Specifically, this study attempted to: determine the socio-demographic profile of the respondents; determine the performance of the respondents in their English subject; determine the factors causing second language anxiety; determine the second language anxiety experienced by the respondents; find out significant relationships between the profile and English performance, profile and second language anxiety, profile and the factors causing language anxiety, and English performance and language anxiety.

METHODOLOGY

This study used the descriptive-correlational design focusing on determining the second language anxiety of ESL learners in the Division of Northern Samar, Philippines. The respondents of the study were 286 Grade 7 students representing four selected public secondary schools in the division for School Year 2018-2019. The number of respondents were determined using Slovin's formula. The instrument used in the study was composed of three (3) parts. The first part is on the socio-demographic profile of the respondents, the second part is on the factors causing second language anxiety, the third part is the language anxiety scale adopted from Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) model of language anxiety. The English performance of the respondents was based on their grades in the English subject. The data were treated statistically using frequency counts, percentages, weighted mean and Pearson r correlation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

Regarding the profile of the respondents, a majority of them or 61.89% were 12-13 years old and considered to be an appropriate age to attend the 7th Grade. From the 286 respondents, 143 of them were male and another 143 were female. Most of them or 47.20% reported to have a monthly family income lower than Php5,000, while there was only 4.90% who reported to have a family income of Php20,000.00 above per month. The data also revealed that a majority of the respondents or 94.06% attended public elementary schools and only 5.95% attended private elementary schools.

English Performance

The data on the English performance of the respondents were taken from their final grade in the English subject. From the 286 respondents, 9.44% got an average of 90-100 or outstanding, 18.88% with 85-89 or very satisfactory, 41.26% with 80-84 final grade or satisfactory, 30.42% with 75-79 grade or fairly satisfactory. Nobody got a grade below 75.

Factors Causing Second Language Anxiety

Factors causing second language anxiety are categorized into classroom-related and teacher-related factors. Based on the computation of the weighted mean for each indicator for classroom-related factors, the highest mean is 3.68 or "much expected" on noisy learning environment as one factor that triggers language anxiety. For teacher-related factors, the highest mean is 3.56 or "much expected" on the indicator "high standard teaching practices" as the most expected to cause language anxiety. The lowest mean is 3.38 or "expected" for the teacher who demonstrates annoying gestures and facial expressions as the factor that causes the least second language anxiety.

Second Language Anxiety

Second language anxiety is categorized into: communication anxiety, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and anxiety of English classes.

As regards communication anxiety, the students were "anxious" when they are in their English class. It has the highest mean which is 3.88. Grade 7 students were not quite sure of themselves while using the language during their class. They exhibit shyness and they are afraid to speak in the target language in their class. On the contrary, the statement which describes that Grade 7 students are not nervous when they do not understand every word the English teacher says had the lowest mean of 2.0 and is interpreted as "moderately relaxed". In other words, they are not nervous whenever they do not understand what their teacher in English is saying. In general, the communication anxiety of the Grade 7 respondents was "either anxious or relaxed" with a grand weighted mean of 3.03.

On test anxiety, the Grade 7 students were anxious having a weighted mean of 3.62. Specifically, students worry so much about making mistakes in English tests. It has a weighted mean of 3.80 interpreted as "anxious". The lowest mean is 3.38 interpreted as "either anxious or relaxed" for the statement that if they study for a language test, the more that they get confused.

On the fear of negative evaluation, the respondents were either anxious or relaxed with a weighted mean of 3.31. The highest mean is 3.70, that is, students were anxious when they know that they are going to be called on in an English class.

With regard to the anxiety of English classes, the respondents were anxious, with a weighted mean of 3.44. This means that the students were in the state of panic and they get nervous setting in an English class. The highest weighted mean falls on the statement that they get frightened when they do not understand what the teacher is saying in the English language. It has a weighted mean of 3.78 interpreted as either anxious or relaxed".

Generally, the Grade 7 students were "either anxious or relaxed" of the second language with a grand mean of 3.34. It tells that the Grade 7 students agree and disagree with some of the statements indicated in the second language anxiety scale. It shows that they are anxious particularly when the atmosphere of the classroom is threatening. However, they are relaxed and confident when supportive learning environment is fostered.

Tests of Relationships

On the relationship between the demographic profile of the respondents and their English performance, the study revealed that age and sex were significantly related to English performance. On the relationship between the profile and their second language anxiety, age was found to be significantly related to fear of negative evaluation. Sex was significantly related to communication anxiety and anxiety of English classes.

Age, sex, English performance and last school attended were significantly correlated to classroom-related factors of anxiety. Meanwhile, sex was significantly correlated with teacher-related factors.

It was also found out that English performance was significantly related to communication anxiety and test anxiety.

The results of the survey clearly reveal that most anxiety-provoking areas were test anxiety and anxiety of English classes. It was acknowledged in this study that most of the respondents feel anxious and nervous while speaking English in front of others. Some respondents agreed that they feel anxious when they cannot speak English well.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusion were drawn:

The language anxiety of Grade 7 ESL learners of the selected schools in the Division of Northern Samar, Philippines is significantly related to their demographic profile, final grade in English subject, and factors causing second language anxiety.

English performance of ESL learners is related to classroom factors because when students have poor English performance that means they are poorly engaged in their English class. The main reason is due to environmental factors such as disorganized management, exposure to different kinds of noise, and unfavorable atmosphere due to hot classroom temperature and poor facilities.

English performance of the learner is negatively affected by the anxiety experienced of the learner in communicative situations. One of the reasons why a learner fail in the

English subject is because of the test anxiety that they experience. They will not be able to attain outstanding performance in the subject because they showed fear of failing in language tests.

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