

Investigating the components of English Listening Learning anxiety and English Language Classroom Anxiety in Predicting Adolescents Students' English language Academic Performance

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Abstract

Introduction: Anxiety has long been a crucial factor affecting second language acquisition. The present study sought to identify and evaluate the effective factors of listening anxiety and English language classroom anxiety, which can have influence on students' English language academic performance.

Methods: The sample population included all the female students in the age range of 13 to 18 years old studying in Shokouh language institutes located in Sari, Ghaemshahr, Babol, Babolsar, and Amirkola in the summer trimester of 2016, out of which a sample of 545 language learners was selected through multi-stage random sampling. To collect the data, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale and Spielberger State-Trait Anxiety Inventory were used and to assess the students' English academic performance, their final scores was used.

Results: Findings indicated the negative and significant correlation between the components of English language class anxiety, listening anxiety and academic performance in the English language lesson ($p < 0/01$). Also step-wise regression showed these variables explained 41% of the changes of academic performance. Given the Betta coefficients, tension and worry over English listening had the highest predictive power for academic performance.

Conclusion: Considering the effective factors of tension and worry over listening, fear of negative evaluation, concern about insufficient prior knowledge, lack of self confidence hinder learners' attempts to achieve academic success, training plans and various exercises should be performed to control and decrease important factors of students' anxiety in English language class and anxiety in listening skill.

Declaration of Interest: None.

Key words: Listening, anxiety, academic performance, adolescents.

Introduction

One of the best predictors of emotional differences and one of the main obstacles in the academic achievement of English language courses is foreign language anxiety (1-2). In fact, anxiety is one of the most prominent variables and emotional

filters that affect all three stages of learning (3). Many language teachers have reported the apparent symptoms of anxiety such as trembling hands, trembling voice, insisting sitting in the back rows of the classroom in spite of sitting in the empty

chairs in the front rows, avoiding doing the assignments in Iranian schools and institutes (4-5). Chastain (6) & Scovel (7) were the first researchers to separate the important role of anxiety from the other variables affecting foreign language learning. They have stated that language learners who experience high levels of anxiety in the classroom tend to have lower motivation, self-efficacy, and independence that finally lead to poor academic performance (8).

Researchers assert that anxiety can prevent learning in high levels (2- 9). According to Oh (10), foreign language anxiety refers to special situation anxiety. Zhao (11), Aydin (12), Amiri and Ghansooli (1) and Alshahrani and Alandal (13) proposed the fear of negative evaluation as the most common reason for anxiety among the students. Given the distribution of anxiety measuring methods in the classroom, Horwitz et al. (4) have introduced the subject of foreign language anxiety on the basis of communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation as three aspects of language anxiety scale. Studies have shown that anxiety in English learning condition is more observed as to other oral activities (4-14-15). Students who are afraid of negative evaluation in foreign language classes tend to sit passively in the classroom (16).

Many researchers asserted that the items of this scale were the best predictor for the evaluation of anxiety among language learners (17-18-19-20-21-22). Previous studies by Luo (23), Okon Effiong (24), Kimura (25) showed that the components of this scale only measure the anxiety in dialogue positions and speaking skills of students and can't be proper to evaluate the anxiety in other language skills. This subject has not been attended in many of the studies carried out in Iran and only the components of FL class anxiety scale has been brought into the light as the reasons of language anxiety (26- 27- 28). Kim (29) found out that listening skills are separated from the general anxiety scale and the

reasons for anxiety should be sought in other language skills. Besides the negative effects of speaking anxiety, listening anxiety (30-31- 32- 33) have negative effects on the language performance of students.

Studies in listening anxiety are not satisfactory as compared to a large volume of studies done in speaking skills. Listening skill is the most fundamental language skill (34). Vogley (35), also believe that listening anxiety is the most disabling and neglected kind of anxiety . Flowerdew & Miller (36) asserted that listening skills is often overlooked in language classrooms because the highest level of concentration is on speaking skills. Listening is a complicated mental activity and doing this complicated process in a limited time, the fear of not understanding or misunderstanding and its consequent embarrassment may cause listening anxiety (37). Students get anxious when they do not understand different pronunciation, accents ,dialects and some of the words and vocabularies because they believe that every word they hear should be understood distinctly (38). Wang (33) knows the speaker's speaking speed and a large volume of unprocessed data as the reasons of listening anxiety. Vandergrift (34) has recommended that language learners should learn how to listen in order to learn better. Chang & Read (35) reported that learners' worry over the score, fear of getting compared with other classmates, one time of listening to the text and lack of confidence are some of the factors that give rise to listening anxiety among learners. Rasti (36) reports the listening section as to be the most difficult part in IELTS exams according to the viewpoint of participants due to the high speed, being played only

once and the fear of losing some parts of the text. Kurita (37) knows listening as one of the most important skills in learning the language and also the most difficult language skill. Kim (29) reported three factors that caused foreign language listening anxiety, tension and worry over English listening, lack of self confidence in listening and concern about insufficient prior knowledge. Given the high prevalence of foreign language anxiety as one of the emotional reactions of students and its undue interference in the process of learning and also regarding the research gap in studying the essential elements of listening and speaking anxiety together in the explanation and prediction of educational performance among Iranian EFL learners, the present research seeks to predict the students' English language performance based on their anxiety in the classroom & listening skill.

Methods

The present research employed a correlational method. The statistical population included all the female students in the age range of 13 to 18 years old studying in Shokouh language institutes located in Sari, Ghaemshahr, Babol, Babolsar, and Amirkola in the summer trimester of 2016. 10 language institutes (3 institutes from Sari, 3 institutes from Babol, 2 institutes from Ghaemshahr, 1 institutes from Babolsar & 1 institutes from Amirkola) were randomly selected through Multi-stage cluster random sampling method. Then, 2 classes in the age range of 13-14 years old, 2 classes in the age range of 15-16 years old and 2 classes in the age range of 17-18 years old were randomly selected from each institution. Totally A sample of 572 language learners were selected through multi-stage cluster sampling. 9 questionnaires were eliminated due to their incomplete information. Moreover, inclusion criteria

in this study was age between 13 to 18 years and exclusion criteria was scores above 76 in Spielberger's State Anxiety Inventory and scores above 73 in Spielberger's trait Anxiety Inventory. Finally, the sample decreased to 545 language learners. The instruments used in this research were as followed:

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale: Horwitz et al.'s (5) scale, is a 33-item with three dimensions, communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. This scale has demonstrated internal reliability, achieving an alpha coefficient of .93 with all items producing significant corrected item-total scale correlations. Test-retest reliability over eight weeks yielded an $r = .83$. Cronbach alpha was obtained to be .79 by Farsian et al (26) in Iran & in this research obtained to be .96.

Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Scale: Kim (29) designed the 33 items with three underlying factors including tension and worry over English listening, lack of self confidence in listening and concern about insufficient prior knowledge. The reliability of the scale on 452 Japanese learners using test-retest and Cronbach alpha are .84 and .93, respectively. The reliability of FLLAS was equal to .81 in Iran (38). Mohammadi (39) reported its internal consistency to be equal to .84. The result of Cronbach alpha was .97 in this research.

State-Trait Anxiety Inventory: has 40 items that measures two types of anxiety, state anxiety and trait anxiety (40). The score between 70 and 80 indicates individual's severe anxiety. Spielberger et al. (41) have reported Cronbach alpha coefficient to be equal to .92 for state anxiety and .90 for trait anxiety. In Iran Mahram (42) has reported Cronbach alpha to be .91 and .90 for state and trait anxiety. Cronbach alpha in this research was .85 and .90 respectively.

Educational performance: students' final scores were used to assess their academic performance.

Results

Students in the age range of 13 to 18 years old and with the mean age of 15.60 years and standard deviation of 1.64 was studied. The result of correlation matrix in table 1 showed that there were a negative and significant correlation between components of English language classroom anxiety and listening anxiety and their academic performance ($p < 0/01$). Before applying regression analysis, the univariate and multivariate outliers were modified. The relationship between the

variables is linear. Residuals are normally distributed. Distribution of data is normal ($p > 0/05$). The assumption of variances' equality was also studied that show the similar variances. The assumption of independence is established ($DW = 1.65$). The minimum of tolerance and maximum of variance inflation were equal to .252 and 3.975 respectively that showed there is no multicollinearity between the independent variables.

Table 1. Correlation matrix of the communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, Concern about insufficient prior knowledge, lack of self confidence in listening, tension and worry over English listening, academic performance

variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
communication apprehension	35/13	9/70	1						
fear of negative evaluation	23/53	8/40	0.799**	1					
test anxiety	45/65	13/64	0.758**	0.853**	1				
Concern about insufficient prior knowledge	22/47	7/17	0.576**	0.432**	0.569**	1			
lack of self confidence in listening	22/68	6/59	0.750**	0.643**	0.694**	0.776**	1		
tension and worry over English listening	70/59	22/17	0.810**	0.722**	0.621**	0.353**	0.618**	1	
academic performance	83/96	9/47	-0.479**	-0.531**	-0.416**	-0.108**	-0.381**	-0.588**	1

The results of the table 2 showed that, tension and worry over English listening, fear of negative evaluation, concern about insufficient prior knowledge, lack of self confidence have explained 41 percent of the total variance of academic performance in the English language. The Standardized

and unstandardized regression coefficients have been presented in Table 3. As observed, Betta coefficients are negative for the variables that indicate the reverse relationship between the predictive variables and academic performance in the English language.

Table 2. Summary of the regression model & variance analysis of tension and worry over English listening , fear of negative evaluation, concern about insufficient prior knowledge, lack of self confidence

Model	variables	Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	p<	R	R ²
1	tension and worry over English listening	Regression	14352.175	1	14352.175	240.329	0.0005	0.586	0.343
		Residual	27470.674	460	59.719				
		Total	41822.848	461					
2	tension and worry over English listening , fear of negative evaluation	Regression	15482.825	2	7741.412	134.901	0.0005	0.608	0.370
		Residual	26340.024	459	57.386				
		Total	41822.848	461					
3	tension and worry over English listening , fear of negative evaluation, concern about insufficient prior knowledge	Regression	16522.755	3	5507.585	99.702	0.0005	0.629	0.395
		Residual	25300.093	458	55.240				
		Total	41822.848	461					
4	tension and worry over English listening , fear of negative evaluation, concern about insufficient prior knowledge, lack of self confidence	Regression	16989.046	4	4247.261	78.160	0.0005	0.637	0.406
		Residual	24833.803	457	54.341				
		Total	41822.848	461					

Table 3 . The standardized and unstandardized regression coefficients in final regression model for academic performance

variables	B	Std.Error	Beta	t	sig
Constant	99.613	1.357		73.413	0.0005
tension and worry over English listening	-0.164	0.024	- 0.383	- 6.948	0.0005
fear of negative evaluation	-0.277	0.061	- 0.250	- 4. 531	0.0005
Concern about insufficient prior knowledge	- 0.397	0.078	- 0.300	-5.113	0.0005
lack of self confidence	- 0.302	0.103	- 0.211	-2.929	0.004

Conclusion

The results showed that a negative and significant correlation was observed between components of listening anxiety and English language classroom anxiety and their academic performance. In this regard, it can be stated that learning a language is a cognitive process based on coding, storing and retrieving and anxious students can't learn as fast as those who do not experience anxiety. Anxious students are unable to show their learned information and their anxiety increases when they experience failure (31). Kim (43) in an Asian EFL context, found that a significant negative relationships between

FLCAS especially in conversation class and foreign language achievement. Because language classrooms, which require oral communication are more anxiety provoking than traditional classrooms. In fact, when Students experience feeling of uneasiness and anxiety while speaking English in the class for many reasons like making oral errors and mistakes and quick error correction by teacher, having wrong pronunciation during speaking, standing in the competition with fellow learners and speaking in front of their classmates, getting low marks or even getting failed in their exams ,so they show less efforts and

have poor academic performance. This finding is in line with the results of the research by Saito and Samimy (44). The results indicated that there is a significant and negative relationship between listening anxiety, listening comprehension and academic performance of language learners. The students may show symptoms of explicit anxiety when listening to a listening section and may be unable to show acceptable performance and may not understand any parts of the listening due to their anxiety and despite its simplicity (34). Listening anxiety arises in a situation when learners feel that a task they are faced with is either unfamiliar or too difficult for them. This anxiety might be intensified if the learners are under the false assumption that they have to understand each and every word they hear. This finding was in line with the results of the research by Serraj & Noordin (45), Ghasemi; Mohammadkhani and Hosseini (46), Mohammadi Golchi (39).

Data analysis also indicated that tension and worry over English listening has the highest contribution in the prediction of students' academic performance. Most students stated when they might not be able to understand what people talk too fast or listening test passages are read just once and they have little time to think about them, they get worried. Some of the input features such as the nature and rate of speech, difficulty level of written text or speech, obscure information & unprocessed data, lack of visual support, non-repetition and not enough time for listening and misunderstanding of some words and vocabularies, speaker's accent, pronunciation, grammar and misinterpretation of listening texts lead to higher levels of anxiety. In listening skills, learners are often worried about being misunderstood and misinterpretation of listening texts & losing some of the sentences and points of the speaker and wrongly believe that they should understand each separate word. Some other reasons are the fear of being teased and the

inability to convey their intended meaning (47). This finding was in line with the results of the research by Wang (33) & Kim (43). This result is not aligned with Lili's research (48) in which lack of confidence was the first factor to make listening anxiety.

Findings also indicated that fear of negative evaluation has contribution in the prediction of learners' academic performance. Apprehension about others' evaluations, distress over their negative evaluations, and this expectation that others would evaluate one negatively, are affective variable in learning English. Students with fear of negative evaluation tend to sit passively in the classroom & don't consider language errors as a natural part of the learning process, but as a threat to their image, and a source for negative evaluations either from the teacher or their peers. They sit in the back row and avoid eye contact with the teacher, to name a few. They are afraid to speak in front of other and feel worried when they can't speak English well because they think it is more likely to influence their end-of-course results. When they encounter a situation in, which they exposed to questions immediately without preparation, they experience embarrassment. Ansari (49), Rafada & Madini (50) found that fear of peers negative evaluation was one of the major causes of speaking anxiety. This finding was consistent with the results of research conducted Mahdinejad Gorji (51) in which fear of negative evaluation has highest average among the components of English language classroom anxiety. This result is not aligned with Hassani & Rajab's research (52) in which communication apprehension was the most important factor for English language Class anxiety. Findings also indicated that concern about insufficient prior knowledge is another negative factor in the prediction of learners' academic performance. Insufficient prior knowledge and unfamiliarity with topics of listening

passages are also some causes of anxiety in learners that ultimately disrupt listeners' perception. Knowing the context of a listening text helps the listeners to reduce the burden of comprehension. Successful comprehension in listening takes place when the listener has schematic knowledge, knowledge of the context and systemic knowledge (53). Background knowledge helps the learners to match new information with what they already know about the text. Listening requires the interaction between top-down and bottom-up cognitive processes partly mediated by attention and memory mechanisms in top-down processing, learners use their prior knowledge to make predictions about the text. In bottom-up processing, learners rely on their linguistic knowledge to recognize linguistic elements, vowels, consonants, words, sentences to do the construction of meaning (54). If the learners have prior knowledge, prior understanding of the subject (content schema), their prior knowledge will trigger different schema to help them predict the text content so as to make reasonable guesses about the meaning of the listening texts. This finding was in line with the results of the research by Chang & Read (55), Huang et al.(56);but the result of factor analysis in Kim's research (29) revealed only two factors (tension and worry over English listening & lack of self confidence in listening).

Lack of self-confidence in listening is the next negative factor in the prediction of academic performance. Most respondents believed that they didn't have self confidence in listening skills, and their past experiences of failure was effective in decreasing self-confidence. In fact, self confidence in listening as a psychological factor, has a positive relationship with students' English language listening comprehension.learners with low self confidence, are afraid of committing mistakes and receiving negative feedback which hinder their acquisition of new knowledge or skill .In conversation, they

also worry that they may not be able to answer the questions as a result of misunderstanding and its consequent embarrassment. Fear of getting compared with other classmates give rise to anxiety among learners with low self confidence. Because these learners are not sure about their general ability to learn English, they show less effort to acquire language skills. This finding was in line with the results of the research by Ahour & Hassanzadeh (57), Hayati & Ostadian (58) & Serraj (3). This result is not consistent with the findings of Chang (59) in which low confidence in comprehending spoken English was the main and first source of listening anxiety.

According to the results, it is suggested that awareness of foreign language anxiety be heightened and taken seriously by teachers and students alike. Since listening anxiety is a fundamental factor in understanding language learners' fear and frustration in communication, some suggestions in order to reduce listening anxiety are necessary. Listening comprehension strategies (like metacognitive strategies) are the particular techniques that learners use to try to reduce or lower students' listening anxiety and improve their listening comprehension ability; therefore indirect listening strategies training should be introduced to listening classrooms. Also language learners need the emotional strategies to overcome their learning problems due to the lack of self-confidence, negative self-concept. Regarding the decrease of English language classroom anxiety, teachers strive to create a low stress, friendly and supportive learning environment, be sensitive to students' fears and insecurities and help them to confront those fears, use gentle or non-threatening methods of error correction and offer words of encouragement & foster a proactive role on the part of the students themselves to create an atmosphere of group solidarity and support. Overall, the results indicate that tension and worry over English

listening as the main factor of listening anxiety and fear of negative evaluation as the important factor of English language class anxiety had the highest effect on students' academic performance. There was also some limitations, which means that generalization of the results should be with cautious. Conducting research on female students, conducting research among Shokouh language institutes & cities just located in Mazandaran Province are the present research limitations, So these findings cannot be generalized to the broader community based on this study alone.

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