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Language Anxiety In Indian L2 Learners: Male or Female Learners - Who Scores High?

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ABSTRACT

This papers deals with the investigation on the levels and causes for anxiety in Indian L2 learners. It focuses on finding the differences in the levels of anxiety in both male and female learners and on whether the learners' background has an impact upon their level of anxiety.

Keywords : language anxiety, learners' background, fear, worry

Introduction

Second language anxiety refers to the apprehension that the learners have in learning a second language or Language 2 (L2). With the increasing need for learning a language like English, it has become mandatory for the teachers to focus on learners and their psychological problems in learning it. One of such problems is anxiety that is commonly found with everybody but when its level of existence increases, it leads to poor performance in learners.

Literature review

Anxiety leads to poor performance in second or foreign language (Aida, 1994; Bailey, 1983; Crookal and Oxford, 1991; Ely, 1986; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Horwitz & Young, 1991; Ganschow & Sparks, 1996; Krashen, 1985; Macintyre, 1995; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, 1991; 1994; Price, 1988, 1991; Trylong, 1987; Young, 1991, 1992; Liu & Huang, 2011). Indeed, one-half of all language learners experience a starting level of anxiety (Campbell & Ortiz, 1991). Language anxiety poses potential problems in L2 learners because it can interfere with the acquisition, retention and production of the new language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). So it is thought necessary to undertake an investigation on the levels of anxiety in Indian L2 learners.

Method

This study consists of two levels of analysis. First level deals with the data collection and second language level lies with the analysis of the data, giving statistical descriptions and finding the results.

Participants & instruments

The participants of the study are 56 first year L2 learners from Kongu Engineering College, Perundurai, Tamilnadu, India among which 21 are male learners and 35 are female learners. They are between the age 18 and 21. They study language for improving their academic activities. The instrument used for the study is Horwitz et al. (1986)'s Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) from which 11 questions that focus on anxiety of learners alone are taken up. The focus group of learners are asked to mark their responses ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neither Agree nor Disagree (N), Disagree (DA) to Strongly Disagree (SDA) to each question based on their level.

Procedure

First, learners and their regular classroom performances are observed. Then, to find the reasons behind the learners'

poor performance in the L2 like anxiety and to find its level in each learner, questions on anxiety is issued to the learners to which the learners are asked to mark their responses. Finally, all the responses are analyzed to find out the level of anxiety in the target learners.

Testing and evaluation

Learners' level of anxiety is tested by calculating the percentage of responses of learners to each question both for learners with L1 and learners with L2 background and for male and female learners separately. If the learners mark strongly agree or agree to questions 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 11 and disagree or strongly disagree to questions 2, 4 & 10, it would be considered that the learners are high in their anxiety and if the learners express disagree or strongly disagree to 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 & 11 and strongly agree or disagree to questions 2, 4 & 10, it would be considered that the learners have less or do not have anxiety. If the learners express neither agree nor disagree, it would be considered that these learners are unable to analyze their level of anxiety.

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics, numerical representations of how participants performed on a test or questionnaire (Brown, 1996), of the responses are also given. These descriptive statistics, averages for each participant of all the items in the corresponding measures, is calculated using the existing calculators. The statistics in table 1 include the number of participants (N), number of items (k), Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD), Minimum (MIN), and Maximum (MAX), Median (MDN), Mode (MODE) and Skewness (SKEW).

ANXIETY								
N	k	M	SD	Min	Max	Mdn	Mode	Skew
56	11	96.6	27.8801	71	132	90	71	0.251

Table 1 Statistical description

Group anxiety

Responses are divided into five categories: SA, A, N, DA & SDA to measure frequency of group anxiety shown in table 2.

Group anxiety	Frequency
71-84	2
84-97	1
97-110	0

110-123	1
123-136	1

Table 2 Frequency of group anxiety

L1 / L2 learners?

To the first question, 20.1% of learners with L1 and 15.3% learners with L2 agreed. To the second question, 11.4% learners with L1 and 21.9% learners with L2 expressed their agreement. To the third question, 7.7% learners with L1 and 53.3% learners with L2 revealed their agreement. To the fourth question, 2.9% learners with L1 and 23.8% learners with L2 agreed. To the fifth question, 18.2% learners with L1 and 42.9% learners with L2 expressed their agreement. To the sixth question, 28.6% learners with L1 and 58.1% learners with L2 agreed. To the seventh question, 18.2% learners with L1 and 14.3% learners with L2 revealed their agreement. To the eighth question, 13.4% learners with L1 and 29.5% learners with L2 agreed. To the ninth question, 5.7% learners with L1 and 18.1% learners with L2 noted their agreement. To the tenth question, 15.2% learners with L1 and 30.5% learners with L2 agreed. To the eleventh question, 28.6% learners with L1 and 78.1% learners with L2 expressed their agreement.

It is noted from the above analysis that for questions 1 & 7, learners with L1 scored high while for questions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 & 11, more learners with L2 scored high. It is obvious from this that more learners with L2 background are anxious than the learners with L1 background because they lack exposure in the target language.

Male / female learners?

To the first question, 23.8% male learners and 11.6% female

learners agreed. To the second question, 19.0% male learners and 14.3% female learners revealed their agreement. To the third question, 38.1% male learners and 22.9% female learners expressed their agreement. To the fourth question, 9.5% male learners and 17.2% female learners agreed. To the fifth question, 28.6% male learners and 22.9% female learners revealed their agreement. To the sixth question, 52.4% male learners and 45.8% female learners expressed their agreement. To the seventh question, 23.9% male learners and 8.6% female learners agreed. To the eighth question, 28.6% male learners and 14.3% female learners expressed their agreement. To the ninth question, 9.5% male learners and 14.3% female learners agreed. To the tenth question, 28.5% male learners and 17.2% female learners agreed. To the eleventh question, 52.4% male learners and 54.3% female learners revealed their agreement.

To questions 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, male learners scored high while to questions 4, 9 & 11, female learners scored high. It is clear from this analysis that more male learners are highly anxious than the female learners.

Conclusion

Teaching a language like English requires a better understanding of the learners so that a strategy that suits at least two-fourth of the learners can be adopted. Anxiety has been an important factor that has been focused in the recent researches. It is found in the current study that the language background of learners has an impact upon the acquisition of L2. Moreover, anxiety exists in learners and there is a vast difference in the levels of language anxiety in both male and female learners. It is hoped that the results of the current study would be more applicable to all the modern language teaching contexts.

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