

A Factorial Investigation into the English Language Learning Anxiety of First-Year University Students in Japan*

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Anxiety in the foreign language classroom is an individual difference among learners that can have a direct impact on the success of learning a foreign language. Through factor analysis this study aimed to classify different types of anxiety present in the English language learning classroom at a rural private Japanese university. Using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), 146 English language learners were surveyed. A five-factor solution was found with the factors interpreted as: anxiety related to oral production, attitudes regarding course enjoyment, degree of comfort when communicating with L1 speakers of English, comparison anxiety, and the fear of being unsuccessful or falling behind. It was found that this particular group of learners experience anxiety when forced to produce unprepared language output, when communicating with native speakers, and when there is potential to be compared to classmates.

Key Words : TESOL, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Language Learning Anxiety, FLCAS

1. Introduction

The foreign language classroom can often be described by learners as uncomfortable, scary, difficult, or stressful. The nature of the foreign language classroom often forces students out of their comfort zones, and for some individuals this is a frightening experience. High levels of anxiety in the classroom can lead directly to decreased motivation and therefore also decreased language gains (Oxford, 1999a). It is the responsibility of language instructors and program administrators to be aware of such anxiety and minimize it in order to increase the effectiveness of language learning in the classroom. On that premise, the purpose of this study is to investigate what types of language learning anxiety are present in this particular group of first-year university students. Therefore, the two research goals of this study are:

- ① To classify different types of language learning anxiety for this specific set of English language learners and;
- ② To identify what types of anxiety are most prevalent for this group of learners

This study also aims to build on Lee & Pirotto (2017a and 2017b), who investigated the individual learning styles and motivational factors of first-year engineering and science majors enrolled at the same university that this study was conducted. Adding to the results of these previous studies by classifying and identifying different types of English language learning anxiety will lead to a more accurate and detailed English language learning profile of the students progressing through this specific university's English language program. With this knowledge, instructors can then implement pedagogical changes that will have a positive impact on the language learning process.

2. Review of the Literature

Foreign language learning anxiety has been a widely researched topic in second language acquisition (SLA) literature. Brown (1973) was one of the first researchers to identify anxiety as a variable that affects the language learning process. However, it was not until the creation of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986) that the amount of research into foreign language learning anxiety increased considerably. Horwitz, Horwitz, and

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Cope (1986) originally proposed that there were three types of anxiety specific to foreign language learning: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. However, Aida (1994) disagreed with this interpretation and argued that there are actually four specific types of foreign language learning anxiety: speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, fear of failing the English class, degree of comfort when speaking to native speakers, and attitudes towards the L2 class. This type of discussion has also been continued in the literature by the likes of Zhao (2007) and Pae and Misieng (2012).

One of the issues in attempting to classify different types of foreign language learning anxiety is inherent in the broader discussion of anxiety in general. Anxiety can be classified in many different ways, but broadly speaking anxiety is classified into two different types: trait anxiety and state (or situational) anxiety. Trait anxiety is specific to the individual and refers to the amount of nervousness or tension that a particular individual feels in any given situation. On the other hand, state anxiety is brought upon by an outside force or stimulus that causes an increase in an individual's nervousness or tension (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1989). Therefore, the types and levels of anxiety present in language learners differ between the individual and the situation.

Research specific to foreign language learning anxiety has been conducted on the individual differences between learners, researching variables such as gender, culture, age, and learning styles (Bailey, Daley, and Onwuegbuize, 1999; Gardner, Day, and McIntyre 1992; Gregersen and Horwitz 2002; Oxford 1999b) in an attempt to better understand trait anxiety. Research has also focused on aspects of state anxiety in the language learning classroom with research into variables such as curriculum, level of difficulty, instructor behavior, classroom environment, and teaching methods (Oh, 1992; Oxford, 1999a; Powell 1991; Young 1991). Through this research, the most important conclusion is that each foreign language learner, classroom, and program are different and each warrant its own specific investigation into anxiety.

There has also been research into the effects of foreign language learning anxiety. Anxiety usually has negative effects on the physical or mental state of language learners (Bailey et al., 1999; Oxford 1999a). Some examples of the negative physical effects include: increased heartbeat, sudden sweating, dry mouth, muscle tension, and in extreme cases fainting or panic attacks. Anxiety can affect learners' mental states by causing sudden memory loss, feelings of fear or helplessness, or decreased memory retention. If left untreated, anxiety has the potential to lead to decreased participation in class, poor performance, absence from class, and even withdrawal from the course. Therefore as Young's (1999) guide to creating a low anxiety learning environment points out, the language learning success of learners is often dependent on the instructor's ability to eliminate or minimize the factors that cause anxiety. Williams and Andrade (2008) found that Japanese English language learners often attribute feelings of anxiety to the instructor, adding even more of a moral obligation for instructors teaching in Japan to be aware of their students' anxiety.

3. Study Design

3.1 Participants

This study was conducted at a small private university in rural Japan. All 146 participants were first-year university students who represented five course majors, three courses from the Faculty of Environmental and Information Sciences and two courses from the Faculty of Engineering. First-year curriculum requires all students enrolled at the university to take two English as a foreign language (EFL) classes which strongly emphasize oral communication. Both classes are taught by instructors whose L1 is English. The classes usually contain around 25-30 students, and participants in this study came from five separate classes. All participants placed in the top half of their respective departments' English placement test at the beginning of the academic year. At the time of data collection all participants were in their second semester of the program, therefore already familiar with the course curriculum, the instructors' expectations, and their classmates.

3.2 Instrument

The instrument used to measure and investigate the English language learning anxiety of the participants was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS; Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). The FLCAS was translated into Japanese

by the researcher of this study and then back-translated into English by two L1 Japanese speakers proficient in English to check for accuracy (please see the appendix for a Japanese version of the survey). It was then piloted by a small group of intermediate-to-advanced level English language learners. Each item was discussed openly as a group with the researcher present, allowing for immediate feedback on the accuracy of the translation. The results of the pilot study are not included in this paper as the point of the pilot study was to check the accuracy of the translated FLCAS.

The FLCAS has 33 questions which all pertain to various aspects of potential English language learning anxiety. Participants were asked to respond to each question via a Likert scale ranging from '1' to '5' where '1' represents strong disagreement with the statement and '5' represents strong agreement.

3.3 Data Collection

The questionnaire was explained and administered during normal class hours. Participants were informed that participation was voluntary, would not affect their class grade, and was for their instructor's research. Consent was received via a consent form, which also promised anonymity to all participants. Participants were also instructed to place their completed questionnaires in a manila envelope, completed or not. This allowed participants to have full confidence that it was optional and anonymous. In total, 146 questionnaires were completed. Several individuals chose not to partake in the study and they are not included in the participant count.

3.4 Data Analysis

All questionnaire data was entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) v. 24. An exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was then run to identify the most widely held factors of anxiety among this group of English language learners. EFA, as opposed to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), was used as the researcher had no prior knowledge of what kinds of anxiety were present within this group of learners. The type of EFA used was principal axis factoring (PAF), instead of principal component analysis (PCA), since Gorsuch (1990, as cited in Loewen and Gonulal, 2015) argues that PAF produces better solutions. In addition, Huffcutt (2003, as cited in Loewen and Gonulal, 2015) states that PAF is better for understanding the structure of the data and PCA should only be used when reduction of variables is the goal.

An oblique rotation was applied to make the results more interpretable. The decision to use an oblique rotation instead of an orthogonal rotation was because orthogonal rotations assume there are no correlations between factors, which is usually not a safe assumption to make in language learning (Loewen and Gonulal, 2015). Brown (2016) states that factor loadings of less than 0.30 are usually ignored outright and Pett et al., (2003, as cited in Loewen and Gonulal, 2015) argues that factor loadings less than 0.40 can be ignored; therefore after initial data analysis the researcher's decision to accept factor loadings greater than 0.38 as significant is acceptable.

4. Results

4.1 Factor Analysis Results

The results of the initial PAF produced seven factors with eigenvalues over 1.0 and an overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.81. After examining communalities, Item 11 was removed from the analysis due to its low communality score. Once this item was removed, the analysis again produced seven factors with eigenvalues over 1.0. However, after analyzing the Scree plot and the produced seven factors, it was determined that a five-factor solution accounting for 55.3% of variance would be most appropriate. These results can be seen in Table 1, along with the mean and standard deviation (SD) of each item in the five factors. A KMO score of 0.88 was also reported, which signifies meritorious sample adequacy (Field, 2009, p. 679), Bartlett's Test of Sphericity proved significant at 0.00, and the correlation matrix was checked for multicollinearity and none was found. All of this provides evidence that correlations were present in the analysis and the assumptions necessary to conduct a PAF had been met.

Table 1 – Rotated Factor Loadings with Descriptive Statistics

Items	Mean / SD	Factors				
		1	2	3	4	5
<i>I. Anxiety Related to Oral Production</i>						
20) I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on.	2.77 / 1.13	.65				
15) I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting	2.93 / 1.08	.64				
13) It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.	2.95 / 1.26	.63				
27) I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.	2.89 / 1.11	.59				
2) I don't worry about making mistakes in English class.	2.66 / 1.12	.53				
33) I get nervous when the teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	3.36 / 1.08	.53				
24) I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.	3.15 / 1.23	.45				
9) I start to panic when I have to speak in English without preparation.	3.54 / 1.15	.44				
12) In English class I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	3.19 / 1.17	.41				
<i>II. Attitudes Regarding Course Enjoyment</i>						
21) The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get..	2.21 / 1.04		.80			
17) I often feel like not going to English class.	2.19 / 1.15		.56			
6) During English class I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	3.12 / 1.07		.48			
5) It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English courses.	3.77 / 0.98		-.45			
<i>III. Degree of Comfort when Communicating with L1 Speakers of English</i>						
32) I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of English.	2.51 / 1.03			.78		
14) I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers.	2.71 / 1.01			.71		
28) When I'm on my way to English class I feel very sure and relaxed.	2.67 / 0.98			.46		
18) I feel confident when I speak in English class.	2.12 / 0.86			.46		
<i>IV. Comparison Anxiety</i>						
23) I always feel that other students speak English better than I do.	3.39 / 1.05				.70	
7) I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.	3.10 / 1.16				.62	
1) I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in class.	3.54 / 1.05				.44	
<i>V. Fear of being Unsuccessful and Falling Behind</i>						
22) I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for English class.	3.31 / 1.01					.48
19) I am afraid that my teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	2.47 / 1.11	.41				-.42
10) I worry about the consequences of failing my English class..	2.43 / 1.17					-.40
25) English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	2.51 / 1.02					-.39

4.2 Interpretation of Factors

The first factor, 'anxiety related to oral production', consists of nine questionnaire items which are all related to language output. While students on the whole remained rather neutral in their overall anxiety levels for Factor One, there is evidence that anxiety is present among most participants when they are asked to speak in English without preparation. This is seen in Items 9 and 33, which refer specifically to the instructor eliciting immediate responses from the learners.

Factor Two, labeled 'attitudes regarding course enjoyment', contains four items that are directly related to the learners' enjoyment of the course. The consensus among participants is that they do not dislike going to class and the material they are studying does not necessarily make them frustrated. In addition, there appears to be agreement that most participants would not mind taking more English classes.

The third factor, ‘degree of comfort when communicating with L1 speakers of English’, contains four items. The two questionnaire items with the highest factor loadings refer directly to how comfortable and nervous participants would be when communicating with native speakers. While Items 18 and 28 may not refer directly to communicating with native speakers they do refer to the English course where a major aspect is communicating with the native speaking instructor.

Factor Four, labeled ‘comparison anxiety’, has three items that refer to the participants’ fear of speaking in class while being compared to their classmates. Participants responded that they were worried about being compared to their peers, were afraid that their peers were better than them, and these beliefs may lead participants to be unsure of the language they are producing.

The final factor, ‘fear of being unsuccessful and falling behind’, refers to the participants’ feeling of making mistakes in class, which could cause them to fail or fall behind. Overall, this group of learners reported that they are not worried about falling behind in class and do not feel that the pace of the class moves too quickly. There is even a reported non-pressure to prepare ahead of time for class. All of this points to confidence that the students are not worried about the difficulty of their current English program.

5. Discussion

The result that producing language output is the most widely agreed upon category for English language learning anxiety is not surprising. However, the degree to which this group of learners responded to this factor is rather surprising. Besides the exception of reported anxiety when learners are prompted for immediate responses, most items in this factor had mean scores very close to the neutral score of ‘3’. Learners reported that several aspects of language output do not make them anxious. One possible explanation for this is that participants are already in their second semester of the program and therefore are accustomed to the course. It is possible that if this study were rerun during the beginning of the academic year, responses for items in Factor One would have been higher. That being said, having the knowledge that learners experience stress and anxiety when asked for immediate oral production is an important finding. This can lead to immediate pedagogical changes to make the class environment more anxiety-free.

The mean scores of all items in Factors Two and Five are very promising for the course administrators and instructors of this English program. As discussed in the literature review in Section Two, many learners deal with different types of state anxiety, which have negative effects on the language learning process. With participants reporting enjoyment towards the English course and also not reporting a fear of failure or falling behind, state anxiety stemming from these factors appear to not be an issue for this university’s English language program.

Factors Three and Four, degree of comfort when communicating with L1 speakers of English and comparison anxiety, provide evidence that this group of participants has areas of English language learning anxiety that need to be addressed. In order to further increase learners’ degree of comfort when communicating with native speakers it is necessary for the English program’s administrators and instructors to work to increase the number of opportunities that students have to practice English with native speakers. This may be difficult to do in Japan, but some possibilities include; increasing opportunities to interact with native English speaking instructors outside of class, study abroad programs, exchange programs, or inviting native speaking researchers to conduct short-term seminars with students.

In order to address comparison anxiety in the classroom, it is important for instructors to be aware of situations that may put a spotlight on learners allowing for the opportunity for others to judge them (Okada, 2015). As mentioned in Section Two, it is important to keep in mind that Japanese learners of English tend to place the blame for anxiety on the instructor. Therefore, it is important for the instructors to take into consideration the position of the learners and think about how to make the classroom as comfortable an environment as possible. Two ideas that Okada (2015) suggests are to: increase the amount of group or pair work done in class and shift from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom. By doing these, they decrease the number of situations where learners may be singled out in class. In addition, these changes would also decrease the number of situations where students would need to provide immediate responses, therefore also helping to decrease the anxiety identified in Factor One.

The results concluded from this data are only a snapshot of the anxiety levels of learners at a specific moment in time. Therefore, it is entirely possible that the English program at this university has led to overall decreased levels of anxiety across all factors, but without a longitudinal study it is impossible to either confirm or deny this claim.

6. Limitations and Further Research

This study classified and identified the language learning anxieties for this particular group of learners. Therefore, the results of this study should be taken with a grain of salt when attempting to apply the results to a different group of learners. Much care was taken into ensuring participants were not pressured into participating and answered each question truthfully, but there is always the possibility that the reason some participants completed the survey was just to please the instructor. There is also the possibility that participants did not read the questions thoroughly before responding. Other issues with questionnaire-based research stem from the instrument used, in this case the FLCAS. The FLCAS, as explained previously, has been widely used in the SLA field, and is considered a reliable instrument to measure language learning anxiety. The researcher took several steps to ensure that the translation of the FLCAS to Japanese was done as accurately as possible, but there is always the possibility that different translations might be more accurate. Finally, this study also has limitations with the analysis of the questionnaire data. Factor analysis, despite being quantitative in nature, has several steps where the researcher needs to make subjective decisions that could affect the results. For example, another researcher may choose PCA over PAF, a different rotation, consider lower factor loadings significant, consider including factors with lower eigenvalues, or even interpret factors differently. This study laid out the reasons for each decision made in this process, but it is important to point out that different decisions could lead to a different factor solution or interpretation.

The findings of this study open several doors for future research. When considering that one of the goals of this particular English program is to prepare students to be global citizens that can communicate with native speakers of English, tracking the longitudinal comfort levels of communicating with L1 speakers could prove to be very valuable study. With the five-factor classification of anxiety it is also now possible to test this model with future students via a CFA. If CFA data proves the model valid, it would then be possible to track changes in anxiety over time for the students of this specific language program.

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Appendix

(全く思わない・そう思わない・どちらもない・そう思う・強くそう思う)

- | | |
|---|-----------|
| 1. 英語の授業で、自分が発言する時に自分の言っていることに自信がない。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 2. 英語の授業で、間違えることを気にしない。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 3. 英語の授業で、自分が先生にあてられた時怖くて震える。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 4. 英語で先生が言っていることが理解できず恐怖心を感じることがある。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 5. より多くの英語の授業を履修することは決して問題ではない。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 6. 英語の授業中に、授業とは関係のないことを考えていることがある。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 7. 他の生徒が自分よりも外国語ができていて、常に思っている。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 8. 英語の授業のテストでは、心配せず気楽に感じている。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 9. 英語の授業で、事前の準備なしにその場で話さなければならなくなった時、混乱してしまう。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 10. 英語の授業を落としてしまうのではないかと不安になる。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 11. どうして英語の授業で動転してている人がいるのか、理解できない。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 12. 英語の授業で、とても緊張してしまい、知っていることを忘れてしまうことがある。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 13. 英語の授業で、自発的に答えることはとても恥ずかしく思う。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 14. 英語のネイティブスピーカーと話をしても緊張しない。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 15. 先生から自分の言った事を訂正された内容が理解できないと、動揺してしまう。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| 16. 英語の授業の準備を事前にした時でも、不安を感じることもある。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 17. 英語の授業に行きたくないと感じることがよくある。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 18. 英語の授業で話す時、自分に自信がある。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 19. 自分の先生から全て訂正されるのではないかと不安を感じる。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 20. 英語の授業で自分の名前が呼ばれる時に、心臓がドキドキする。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 21. 英語の試験に向けて勉強すればするほど、嫌になる。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 22. 英語の授業に向けてたくさん準備をしなければいけないとプレッシャーを感じることはない。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 23. ほかの生徒の方が自分よりも外国語を上手に話していると感じる。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 24. 他の学生の前で英語を話す時に、他人の目を気にし過ぎてしまう。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 25. 英語の授業は進むのが速く、おいて行かれるのではないかと不安になる。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 26. 他の授業より英語の授業の方が緊張してる。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 27. 英語の授業で話をする時に、緊張し、混乱してしまう。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 28. 英語の授業を受けている時、自分の発言や行動に自信を持ち、リラックスした状態にいる。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 29. 英語の授業で、先生の言っている事が分らないと、緊張する。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 30. 外国語を話す際に知らなければならぬルールの数に圧倒されてしまう。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 31. 私が英語を話す時に、他の生徒に笑われるのではないかと不安になる。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 32. 私は、ネイティブスピーカーの中にいても特に問題なく気楽に過ごせるだろう。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |
| 33. 先生から自分が事前に準備していなかった質問を聞いてきた際、緊張する。 | 1・2・3・4・5 |

(平成 30 年 3 月 31 日受理)