

LANGUAGE ANXIETY, MOTIVATION TO LEARN AND PEDAGOGICAL PREFERENCES: THE CASE OF MALAYSIAN PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

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Introduction

Language anxiety

In recent years, research has confirmed the existence of language anxiety and its effects on foreign and second language (L2) learning, pointing to reciprocity between anxiety and proficiency (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Language anxiety is generally defined as an emotional state during which a person has “subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986: 125). These negative feelings can have both negative and positive effects, and can motivate and facilitate as well as disrupt and inhibit cognitive actions such as learning. Although there is still controversy concerning whether language anxiety is the cause (Scovel, 2001; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001) or consequence of poor language learning (Sparks, Ganschow & Javorsky, 2000), numerous empirical studies have proven that there is a negative relationship between anxiety and language learning. High anxiety often takes the form of distraction or self-related cognition, such as excessive self-evaluation, worry over potential failure and concern over the opinion of others. Such concerns impair task performance through cognitive interference in performing specific tasks. Learning a foreign or L2 language is therefore a psychologically unsettling process for those who experience language anxiety. A review of the literature shows that the notion of language learning anxiety in pre-service teacher settings has not been clearly defined nor has it been deeply investigated even though it is an accepted fact that it does exist, particularly with non-native speakers of English (Horwitz, 1996; Kim & Kim, 2004; Merç, 2011). Malaysian pre-service teachers, who are non-native speakers of English and L2 learners, are no exception, as shown in a recent study concerning anxiety coping strategies of pre-service teachers by Wong (2012). One of the aims of the present study therefore, was to investigate the extent of

English pre-service teachers’ language learning anxiety. It is important to assess their extent of Language anxiety early in the pre-service program so that appropriate measures can be taken to remedy the situation if necessary.

Anxiety and motivation to learn

Motivation has been widely researched and agreed to be an important affective variable that influences L2 learning (Dörnyei, 2001; Dörnyei & Skehan, 2003; Liu, 2007). Previous research has shown that motivation determines the degree of effort the learner puts into foreign or L2 learning (Benson, 2001; Brown, 2000; Noels *et al.*, 2000). Pintrich and Schunk (2002: 5) defined motivation as “the process whereby goal-directed activity is instigated and sustained.” Motivation is one of the factors that influence the rate and success of language learning. Language anxiety, however, often works against motivation to learn. Research findings show that L2 anxiety and motivation to learn English are negatively correlated with each other (Liu & Huang, 2011; Yang, Liu & Wu, 2010). Clément, Dörnyei and Noels (1994) found that learners who are more motivated to learn a L2 are usually less anxious learners who have better previous experiences, who evaluate their own proficiency more highly, and who consider the learning tasks as less difficult. According to Noels, Clément and Pelletier (1999), the more learners feel amotivated, the less effort they will expend and the more anxiety they will feel. Nonetheless, there are few documented studies that examine the relation between anxiety and motivation to learn English among pre-service teachers of English. Being diligent in one’s efforts to improve proficiency in English is very important, as pre-service teachers themselves need to be competent in English before they can be effective teachers of English in school. However, language anxiety may affect pre-service teachers’ motivation to learn English. Another aim of the present study was to gain insights into HLA and LLA pre-service teachers’ motivation to learn English through

investigating their efforts in improving their proficiency in English.

Pedagogical preferences in learning English

Pedagogical preferences refer to the learners' preferred choice of teaching and learning activities carried out in the classroom. Pedagogical preferences of learners influence their quality of learning in the classroom. A review of previous research shows that the relation between anxiety and language pedagogy has been left largely unresearched although there have been some studies on the relation between student motivation and pedagogical preferences (Jacques, 2001; Ockert, 2011; Schmidt & Watanabe, 2001; Schmidt, Boraie & Kassabgy, 1996). For example, Schmidt *et al.* (1996) reported that students who scored high on the affect dimension of motivation welcomed communicative classes, while those low on that dimension tended to reject the communicative classroom and that determined learners preferred classes in which there was a balance among different skill emphases and between teacher control and learner-centeredness. Meanwhile, Schmidt and Watanabe (2001) found that a liking for challenging activities in the classroom was most affected by motivation to learn. Although the literature shows a link between anxiety and motivation to learn, it cannot be assumed that the findings for the relation between motivation and pedagogical preferences reflect the relation between anxiety and pedagogical preferences, nor can it be assumed that the above findings are true also for pre-service teachers of English. A further aim of this study was to advance research in the area of pedagogical preferences of pre-service teachers of different English language anxiety levels.

The present study

In view of the powerful influence that anxiety has on motivation in language learning, there is a need for continuing research to find ways to help pre-service teachers who are facing this problem. While there have been extensive studies on what strategies can be used to reduce anxiety and increase motivation to learn among school students, there are relatively few studies which document L2 anxiety and motivation to learn English among pre-service teachers of different levels of language anxiety. Furthermore, there is generally a lack of studies elsewhere or locally that investigate pre-service teachers' views regarding the types of learning activities they would like to be involved in while

learning English. This need to gain insights into pre-service teachers' extent of language anxiety and motivation to learn English and their pedagogical preferences in learning English becomes even more compelling when they are being trained to be future teachers of English. This study, therefore, aimed to advance research in these areas so that teacher educators will be better able to create more effective lessons tailored according to the needs and preferences of pre-service teachers. Specifically, this study aimed to investigate:

- the extent of language anxiety of pre-service teachers;
- pre-service teachers' efforts to improve their proficiency in English; and
- pre-service teachers' pedagogical preferences in learning English

Methodology

Participants

Participants were 60 (17 males, 43 females) pre-service teachers in the first semester of the first year of a B. Ed. (TESOL) program. The age of the participants ranged from 19 to 22 years (mean age = 20.22 years, $SD = .49$). They were in three intact classes of 20 pre-service teachers each. All the pre-service teachers were L2 learners and non-native speakers of English; however, they have studied English as a subject in school and in the B. Ed. (TESOL) Foundation Program for at least 12 years. These pre-service teachers were undergoing training to teach English in primary school. During the first semester of the B. Ed. (TESOL) program, their English and Language Studies courses included English Literature, Linguistics, and Introduction to English Language Teaching.

Data Collection

Language Anxiety Scale

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986), which consists of 32 items, was used to assess pre-service teachers' language anxiety. Horwitz *et al.* (1986) developed the FLCAS, which consists of three related anxieties: communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. According to Horwitz (1986), the internal consistency measure of FLCAS showed an alpha coefficient of .93, test-retest reliability over eight weeks showed an $r = .83$ ($p < .001$), and the

predictive validity coefficient for final grade was .49 ($p < .003$). This scale has been widely used in its adapted and translated version to assess language anxiety among L2 learners of different nationalities and academic levels including pre-service teachers (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, 1991; Merç, 2011; Rodríguez, 1995). The Alpha reliability coefficient for the present sample ($N = 60$) is .83. As in the original FLCAS, pre-service teachers were required to indicate their level of agreement with each of the statements based on a 5-point Likert scale, that is, 1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *disagree*, and 5 = *strongly disagree*. Pre-service teachers' extent of language anxiety was obtained by summing up their scores on the scale after reverse scoring had been done for the appropriate items in the scale.

Questionnaire on learning English

A free-response questionnaire consisting of two parts was drawn up to guide pre-service teachers in doing reflections on how they learn English. In Part 1, pre-service teachers were required to report on (i) how often they used the four basic language skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing), and (ii) what steps they took to improve themselves in each skill. Meanwhile, in Part 2 of the questionnaire, pre-service teachers were given a chance to give their opinion concerning their preferences regarding teaching and learning activities in English class. Pre-service teachers' responses were content-analysed by the researcher in this study and coded into categories using the 'framework' technique of qualitative data analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994), which involved reading and identifying recurring themes or categories and coding responses according to the themes or categories identified. As a check on the consistency of the coding of responses, the scripts were blind-coded after three weeks by the researcher in this study. Cohen's (1988) kappa value, an index of intra-coder reliability that corrects for chance agreement, was computed to determine the agreement level between the two codings. The κ value obtained was .85, showing that there was moderately high consistency in the coding.

Procedure

The language anxiety scale was administered to each intact class by the researcher in this study. To reduce sensitization effects, pre-service teachers were told that they were involved in a study on how they felt about learning English and the instrument was entitled "How I feel in English Class" instead of "Language Anxiety Scale." They were advised to read the statements carefully and respond honestly to each of them. Most of the pre-service teachers managed to complete the scale in 15 minutes. Following that, pre-service teachers were given the questionnaire on learning English to complete. They managed to complete the questionnaire in about 20 minutes.

Findings and discussion

Extent of language anxiety

Based on their scores in the language anxiety scale, pre-service teachers were placed into one of three levels of language anxiety. Low language anxiety (LLA) pre-service teachers were those who attained a score of more than one standard deviation (SD) below the mean ($M = 97.75$; $SD = 17.75$). Moderate language anxiety (MLA) pre-service teachers were those who attained a score within the range of one SD below and one SD above the mean while high language anxiety (HLA) pre-service teachers were those who attained a score of more than one SD above the mean. Table 1 presents the range of scores and number of pre-service teachers for each level. The fact that 15% of the pre-service teachers experienced high levels of anxiety in English class is not surprising as they are still in the first semester of the training program and all of them are L2 learners and non-native speakers of English (Horwitz, 1996). These findings suggest the need for immediate steps to address the problem, as these pre-service teachers are being trained to teach English. Being pre-service teachers of English could have resulted in increased pressure on them to do well in English, thus adding to their feelings of anxiety in learning English. However, the fact that pre-service teachers experience some measure of

Table 1: Distribution according to level of language anxiety.

Language Anxiety Level	Range of scores	<i>n</i>	Percentage
Low Language Anxiety	58-80	9	15
Moderate Language Anxiety	81-115	42	70
High Language Anxiety	116-135	9	15

Table 2: Category and frequency of responses for efforts to improve proficiency in English.

No.	Category of responses	No. of responses		
		LLA (n = 9)	HLA (n = 9)	
1	<i>Frequency of conversing in English:</i>			
	- all or most of the time	5	3	
	- occasionally	3	5	
	- seldom/only when I have to	1	1	
	<i>Steps taken to improve speaking skill:</i>			
	- do lots of reading/read aloud when no one is around	2	2	
	- use it more often/practise speaking English in class	2	6	
	- watch a lot of English movies/listen to English songs	2	1	
	- attending phonetics courses/look up in the dictionary	2	-	
	- think in English	1	-	
	2	<i>Frequency of writing in English:</i>		
		- most of the time	6	1
		- occasionally	3	4
- seldom		-	4	
<i>Steps taken to improve writing skill:</i>				
- keep on practising and ask friends/parents/lecturers		2	-	
- through lots of extra reading		2	-	
- communicate a lot in English		1	-	
- read/write more and be aware of my mistakes		1	-	
- refer to the dictionary for the words I don't understand		2	-	
- applying new words into my writing		1	1	
- try to read more books/watch English movies		-	4	
- doing assignments and homework		-	4	
3	<i>Frequency of using listening skill:</i>			
	How often do you listen to English songs/radio programs or watch English movies on TV/DVDs or watch the news in English?			
	- most of the time	9	8	
	- seldom	-	1	
	<i>Steps taken to improve listening skill:</i>			
	- reading more to expand my vocabulary/increase confidence	1	1	
	- watch English movies/apply it in my daily life	4	4	
	- ask people about words I don't understand	1	-	
	- listen carefully/analyse	1	2	
	- listen to English songs/news/programs	1	1	
	- learn to concentrate/avoid distractions	-	1	
	- have not done anything so far	1	-	
	4	<i>Frequency of reading English materials:</i>		
- often		6	3	
- seldom read materials in English		3	6	
<i>Steps taken to understand what is read:</i>				
- check with my friends/lecturers		1	1	
- search in the dictionary/jot down the meaning		5	2	
- guess the meaning of the words		3	6	

language anxiety can also be interpreted in a positive way in that in future, they will be better able to understand the problems faced by school students who have language anxiety.

Efforts to improve proficiency in English

This study also aimed to gain insights into pre-service teachers' efforts to improve their proficiency in English. Table 2 presents the categories of responses of the two groups of pre-service teachers. Generally, the findings show that compared to HLA pre-service teachers, LLA pre-service teachers were more

diligent in trying to improve their proficiency in English.

Perusal of the findings shows that there was a marked difference in LLA and HLA pre-service teachers' reported frequency of conversing in English. Only three of the HLA pre-service teachers communicated in English most of the time, while five out of nine LLA pre-service teachers reported that they did so most of the time. While three LLA pre-service teachers reported of conversing in English, five of the HLA pre-service teachers reported of doing so occasionally. Low Language Anxiety pre-service teachers also reported of more

efforts to improve in this skill through reading aloud, daily communication with others, watching English movies or listening to English songs, attending specific courses or checking things in a dictionary, and thinking in English. Most of the HLA pre-service teachers (6 out of 9), however, reported that they used English in daily communication in class only.

A similar pattern was observed regarding pre-service teachers' frequency of writing in English; Six out of nine LLA pre-service teachers reported that they wrote in English most of the time while only one out of the nine HLA pre-service teachers did so. Most of the HLA pre-service teachers reported that they seldom (four out of nine) or occasionally (four out of nine) write in English. Judging from their responses, LLA pre-service teachers made extra efforts to improve themselves in this skill through activities such as practising writing, checking oneself or checking with more knowledgeable teachers or referring to the dictionary, extra reading, and communicating more often in English. High Language Anxiety pre-service teachers, however, did not report of such extra efforts. Four of them said they "try to read more books or watch more English movies" while another four cited routine activities such as doing assignments and homework as examples of efforts to improve in this skill.

Regarding the use of listening skills, the findings show that all of the LLA pre-service teachers and eight of the HLA pre-service teachers used this skill a lot. Both categories of pre-service teachers reported of efforts to

improve themselves in this skill through listening to more English radio programs, watching English movies or the News, reading more materials in English and checking out the meaning of words through asking friends or referring to a dictionary.

Finally, regarding reading English materials, there was again a marked difference between the two categories of pre-service teachers. A majority of the LLA pre-service teachers (six out of nine) read English materials often while only three out of nine HLA pre-service teachers reported of doing so. Compared to HLA pre-service teachers, LLA pre-service teachers also put in more effort at understanding what they read. Generally, LLA pre-service teachers were more meticulous in improving in this skill as five of them said they checked the meaning of new words in the dictionary while six HLA pre-service teachers reported of guessing the meaning of the words when they encounter new words.

The above findings concur with the findings of other researchers regarding motivation in language learning (Clement *et al.*, 1994; Liu, 2007) and the effects of language anxiety on efforts to learn (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986; Noels *et al.*, 1999). Learners' motivation and subsequent learning behaviour can be affected by their feelings of anxiety regarding the language they are learning (Brown, Robson & Rosenkjar, 2001; Gardner *et al.*, 2004). It is possible that HLA pre-service teachers' reports of not doing much to improve themselves in the four skills reflect this effect.

Table 3: Category and frequency of responses of pre-service teachers' pedagogical preferences.

Category of responses	No. of responses		
	LLA (n = 9)	MLA (n = 42)	HLA (n = 9)
More opportunities to use the language through activities such as discussions, sharing, writing songs, presentations, debates or forums instead of just learning theory	5	11	2
Should have more interesting, exciting or fun activities (games, drama, role play, watching movies, presentations) instead of just listening to the lecturer teaching	3	18	6
Opportunities to listen to the right pronunciation so that we can learn the correct pronunciation and new vocabulary	-	3	-
More and different ways of explaining things to help us understand through a variety of activities/use multimedia/visual aids	-	5	-
Give more exercises on writing essays	-	1	1
Prohibit the use of languages other than English during English class/encourage everyone to speak in English	-	2	-
Pre-service teachers themselves should change their attitude and be more actively involved in the lesson	-	1	-
I like the way things are/I am comfortable with the way it is being carried out	1	1	-

Pre-service teachers' pedagogical preferences in learning English

Another aim of this study was to investigate pre-service teachers' pedagogical preferences in learning English. Table 3 presents the suggestions put forward by the pre-service teachers in the three levels of language anxiety.

The findings show that many of the pre-service teachers (5 LLAs, 11 MLAs, 2 HLAs) prefer learning activities where they have more opportunities to practise speaking in English instead of just learning theory. However, having more interesting, challenging, exciting or fun activities during an English class appeared to be most often suggested by the pre-service teachers (3 LLAs, 18 MLAs, 6 HLAs). They preferred to be actively engaged in learning activities such as games, drama, role play and presentations, and in watching movies instead of just listening to the lecturer. It is interesting to note that there were more HLAs (6 persons) putting forward this category of responses compared to the number of HLAs (only 2 persons) who suggested that there be more opportunities to practise using English. It is possible that the latter provides a more relaxed, less challenging and therefore less threatening learning environment for the HLAs. There were also pre-service teachers (3 MLAs) who were concerned about learning the right pronunciation and increasing their vocabulary while some (5 MLAs) suggested that a variety of ways be used to help them understand what they were learning. Other suggestions included more essay-writing exercises and getting everyone to converse in English. It is possible that some of the pre-service teachers were rather passive in class, judging from the suggestion that pre-service teachers themselves should change their attitude and be more actively involved in learning activities in the English class. Finally, there were two pre-service teachers who were satisfied with the way English classes had been conducted.

Conclusion

Summary

Apart from providing a glimpse into the extent of language anxiety of the pre-service teachers, the findings also provide valuable insights into pre-service teachers' efforts to

improve their proficiency in English. Generally, LLA pre-service teachers appeared to be more motivated to learn English, judging from reports of more effort at improving themselves in the four basic skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing. The findings on pedagogical preferences show that most of the pre-service teachers were in favour of more opportunities to practise speaking in English and also more interesting, challenging, exciting or fun activities.

Implications

A number of pedagogical implications can be drawn from the findings of this study. Some of the suggestions put forward by pre-service teachers, especially those in the HLA category regarding learning English, through interesting, exciting and fun activities should be considered by English lecturers in the Teacher Education Institute. These kinds of activities will help to provide pre-service teachers with a more relaxed socio-emotional environment for learning. Young (1990), in a study involving university and high school students, found that teachers who used humour and created a friendly, supportive and relaxed classroom atmosphere that encouraged risk-taking were helpful in alleviating language anxiety and facilitating learning. These steps could also be employed by English lecturers to reduce language anxiety among HLA pre-service teachers. Steps can also be taken to alleviate stress through relaxation activities or instruction on stress management. Oxford (1990) suggested three types of affective strategies that can be used to regulate learner attitudes, motivation, and emotions, namely strategies for anxiety reduction, self-encouragement and monitoring emotions.

Positive affirmations, encouraging words and suitable teacher behaviour would also go a long way towards helping relieve stress. A study by Hsu (2010), involving students in Taiwan, showed that among other teacher behaviours, smiling, using gestures, having a relaxed body position, and using a variety of vocal expressions, enhanced students' motivation to learn English. In addition, efforts have to be made to raise their confidence and courage in learning English. English lecturers should provide HLA

students with opportunities to succeed at learning tasks and thus build up their self-confidence regarding learning English. According to Bandura (1997), enactive mastery experiences will strengthen students' self-efficacy and enhance their performance attainments.

The findings on pre-service teachers' efforts to improve their proficiency in English show that some of the HLA pre-service teachers may need to be instructed on how to improve their proficiency in English. English lecturers could help by instructing them in the use of cognitive, memory, metacognitive, social and affective strategies (Oxford, 1990). When English lecturers implement these teaching-learning strategies among pre-service teachers, this will also serve to inform them concerning how they can alleviate language anxiety among school students in future. In addition, lecturers could perhaps provide more opportunities for HLA pre-service teachers to practise using English in a non-threatening, risk-free classroom environment where it is alright to make mistakes. Indeed some of the responses regarding pedagogical preferences show that pre-service teachers prefer to have more opportunities to practise using English in the classroom.

English lecturers may also want to take up pre-service teachers' suggestion that more and different ways of explaining things be used to help them understand what is taught, such as using a variety of activities, multimedia presentations or visual aids. Studies by Plass *et al.* (1998), Yeh and Wang (2003), and Yoshii (2001) consistently showed that dual presentation types of vocabulary annotations (text + visual aids) were most effective in vocabulary learning. Yeh and Wang (2003) found that presenting new vocabulary, especially for concrete objects, with a still picture alongside its English explanation and Chinese definition was the most effective type of vocabulary annotation. If English lecturers employ dual presentation methods in teaching new vocabulary, this may take care of pre-service teachers' concerns about learning the correct pronunciation for new vocabulary.

Suggestions for further research

The findings presented in this study are limited to the pre-service teachers involved in the research. A replication of this study involving pre-service teachers in other Teacher Education Institutes in Malaysia would provide further support for the generalizability of the findings. Future researchers might want to gain greater insights into related areas of research, such as reasons for language anxiety, anxiety coping strategies, motivation to learn and pedagogical preferences of pre-service teachers and employ other methods of data collection, such as interviews and observations. Alternatively, the categories of responses identified through the present study could also be used in developing a rating scale to measure the degree of agreement regarding pedagogical preferences of pre-service teachers.

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