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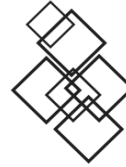
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TOPIC

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RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM ANXIETY AND AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES USED BY LEARNERS AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the link between anxiety in the foreign language classroom and productive strategies used by graduate-level students in the Pakistani context. The instruments used for this research consist of FLCAS prepared by Horwitz (1986) and SILL refined by Oxford (1990). The study involves 116 participants who are currently enrolled in graduation-level programs at a private college in Multan, Pakistan. The findings of this research indicate that 60% of learners are active users of these affective strategies, with a mean score of 18.64 out of a total score of 30. The higher levels of use of affective strategies are found to be related to lower levels of English language anxiety, although insignificantly. Moreover, female participants (mean score = 19.34) were found to use affective strategies more than their male counterparts. (mean score = 17.44). A negative relationship is also observed between FLCA and affective strategies used by the students at graduation level programs in Pakistan.

Keywords: Affective Strategies, Foreign Language Anxiety, Learning English Language.

Introduction

Language learning is generally considered a complicated phenomenon, and this perspective becomes more concerning when we talk about foreign language learning. There has been a vital change in the perspective of learning a foreign language over the last many decades. Apart from teaching methodologies and strategies adopted in the classroom, considerable stress has been granted to learners and learning strategies. Among the many variables that influence EFL,

anxiety is considered a major factor, and multiple studies have been conducted regarding it. Oxford (1999) granted chief status to anxiety among the factors that influence foreign language learning.

Kazi (2017) argues that anxiety in foreign languages has remained a glaring manifestation among Pakistani students when it comes to learning EFL/ESL in the classroom. Most of the time, mastery over English as a foreign language is measured as mastery over the speaking skills in English. Frequent encounters of inefficiency in speaking English in the classroom have been the outcome of uneasiness, nervousness, embarrassment, poor confidence and the threat of negative evaluation in the EFL classroom.

Studies show that besides methodology, there exist many important factors that affect the language learning process, and vital ones are the language learning strategies practised by the learners. Chamot (2005) views such strategies as “procedures that facilitate a learning task” (p.112). Oxford’s (1989) scale of Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) holds remarkable status in evaluating the language learning strategies adopted by learners. Considering FLCA as the major hurdle in the way to acquire mastery of English, it is pertinent to research what kind of strategies are employed by the learners to counter FLCA in the Pakistani context. The major concern of the research is to explore how frequently students make use of affective strategies to tackle foreign language classroom anxiety in Pakistan and to what extent the variable of gender influences the use of affective strategies in this regard. It further takes into account the correlation between foreign language classroom anxiety and affective strategies used by learners.

Research Questions

For the sake of the present study, the following research questions are formed:

1. How frequently do Pakistani graduate-level learners use affective learning strategies in an EFL setting?
2. Does any connection exist between FLCA and affective strategies used by the learners in a Pakistani EFL classroom at the graduate level?
3. Are there any differences regarding the frequency of use of affective strategies by EFL learners in terms of gender in the Pakistani context?

Literature Review

Cohen (1998) holds the viewpoint that learning strategies are the ways to acquire mastery over learning or using a language. Such strategies are very supportive for students to further their perception, reception, storage, retention and retrieval of language information. Oxford (1990)

mentioned that strategies “make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations” (p.8).

Allwright (1990) and Little (1991) advocate the perspective of Oxford and express that learning strategies can provide great assistance to learners in becoming more individualistic, self-directed and long-term learners.

Strategies for learning are “specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques – such as seeking out conversation partners, or giving oneself encouragement to tackle a difficult language task – used by students to enhance their own learning” (Scarcella and Oxford 1992, p.63). In the case of language learning, strategies that a student adopts define the pace and efficiency of success. A strategy well suited to the conditions and level of the students is key to learning it efficiently.

Nyikos and Oxford (1993) highlighted the fact that L2 learning strategies work as a catalyst and make the process of learning speedy and more effective. At the same time, learners may not be mindful of using learning strategies knowingly.

According to Oxford (1989), there are many strategies that learners adopt considering their requirements. She constructed six major categories in the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). In the Affective Strategies of SILL, factors such as emotions, attitudes, motivations, and values are included, and affective strategies provide valuable assistance in achieving control over these factors. She further relates that the conflict between learning style and strategy may result in significant anxiety on the part of the students.

Dreyer and Oxford (1996) piloted a research work related to the efficacy of affective strategies in L2 learning. They concluded the fact that proficiency in L2 is greatly associated with the techniques of discovering mood and nervousness, relating personal feelings, and valuing the satisfactory performance oneself.

Foreign language learning is not without shortcomings. Among the most significant limitations, anxiety grabs a considerable area in this process. The majority of language learners are exposed to what is known as FLCA, a theory that constitutes fear of negative evaluation, apprehension of communication, and test anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope, 1986). Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) is measured with a particular scale known as FLCAS, which is a standardised tool and holds great acknowledgement.

Different research works have also been performed related to FLCA while focusing on only one particular language skill. Mak (2011) conducted his study to analyse anxiety involved in speaking in foreign language classrooms. He inspected this kind of nervousness in university-level students in China. He highlighted five factors (out of FALCAS items) which found

speaking anxiety in learners. The factors included uneasiness while interacting with the natives, speech anxiety and fright of negative evaluation, negative self-evaluation and fear of facing the consequences of personal failure in the English class.

FLCA has also been viewed from the perspective of language learning strategies practised by the learners in learning English. Herwitt and Stephenson (2011) discovered that bad performance and grammatical errors are the outcome of language learning anxiety.

Gregersen (2003) and Sheen (2008) found that errors encountered in speaking by anxious learners were more frequent as compared to those with no anxiety. They were usually subjected to great difficulties in self-correction when exposed to classroom practice.

Horwitz et al. (1986) presented the fact that an increased level of anxiety may lead to noticeable irregular routines on the part of students. They might “skip classes, overstudy, or seek refuge in the last row in an effort to avoid humiliation or embarrassment of being called on to speak (p.130).” The level of language anxiety displays variation inside and outside the classroom. There exists variation in the level of language anxiety inside the classroom and outside the classroom. Moreover, the deviation has also been noticed in language use while communicating with familiar and unfamiliar people (Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham 2008).

From the perspective of the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL), numerous factors may affect language learning strategies and result in a high level of anxiety on the part of the learners in foreign language learning. Gu considered gender as an imperative factor that influences largely on language learning strategies (2002). Zoghi, Kazemi, and Kalani (2013) also backed that outcome enormously. They surfaced the finding that gender greatly influences the acquisition of a second language. Similar findings surfaced by Matsuda and Gobel (2004) in their study aimed to investigate the anxiety level while learning EFL in Japanese university learners.

Language learning anxiety is found as the chief affective factor in ESL/EFL. Gopang et al. (2015) concluded that there exists a high level of anxiety in learning English in Pakistani students at university-level programs.

During a project related to using language learning strategies, Ali et al. (2016) explored medium frequency by Pakistani university-level learners. This may indicate that students are subject to language learning anxiety and thus consciously or unconsciously use language learning strategies to overcome that.

Kazi (2017) stated in his study about the noticeable connection between gender and language learning strategies. He also reported greater strategy use by the female participants in the Pakistani context as compared to male participants.

Methodology

This study is descriptive and correlative in nature. It focuses on exploring the existence of any correlation between FLCA and affective strategies adopted by the students. The data has been collected through survey methods from students of graduation-level programs. The sample population includes both genders. The target population of the study comprised students in the EFL settings at the graduation level programs in private colleges of Multan City. The convenience/opportunity sampling technique was applied to collect data. The research population consisted of 116 students, including 73 girls and 43 boys from private-sector colleges.

Instruments

Two questionnaires were adopted for data collection, titled Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). Details of both questionnaires are given below.

1. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

Horwitz's (1986 in Al-Sibai, 2005) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) has been utilised in many research works conducted on language learning anxiety. FLCAS was crafted skillfully to inspect the anxiety in language learners that caused fear of communication and negative evaluation in the learners (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1991).

Each item in the anxiety scale of foreign language was responded to on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "a. strongly agree" to "e. strongly disagree". A subject's endorsement in a) "strongly disagree" was equated with a numerical value of 1; b) "disagree" was 2; c) "neither agree nor disagree", 3; d) "agree", 4; and e) "strongly agree" was 5. Total anxiety score of every member of the study was computed through their responses respectively to the thirty-three items. FLCAS ranges from 33 to 165 theoretically.

2. Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) was used as the second questionnaire. Rebecca Oxford designed it in 1989. Since the time of its construction, this questionnaire has been used in many studies across the world and has shown high validity and reliability. It contains six sub-scales with a total number of fifty (50) items. For the present study, the portion dealing with the affective strategies only has been used.

Each item in SILL was responded to on a five-point Likert scale that ranged from "Always true of me" to "Never true of me". The title "Always true of me" was represented with a numerical value 5, "Generally true of me", 4, "somewhat true of me" 3, "Generally not true of me", was

2, and “Never true of me” with 1. The total score of every participant regarding the use of affective strategies was computed through the aggregate of all six items, respectively. SILL ranges from 1 to 30 theoretically.

Data Analysis

The data was screened, tabulated and analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences). All the responses were entered into the SPSS software. It was ensured that the data was equally distributed (see Figure 1.1). Descriptive statistics was used to calculate mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores. A detailed analysis of the obtained data is given below.

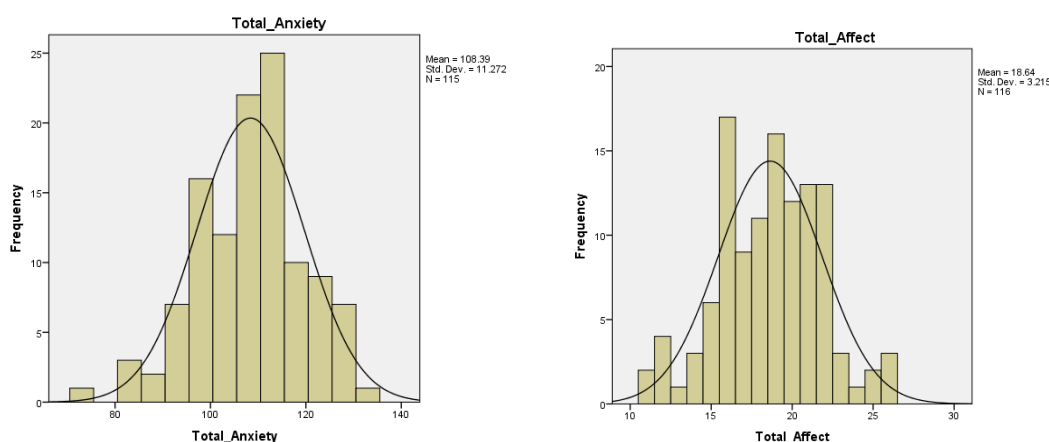


Fig. 1.1 Equal distribution of total scores of anxiety and affective strategies

Research Question 1: How frequently do Pakistani graduate-level learners use affective learning strategies in an EFL setting?

Total Affective Strategies Score	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)	Min. Score	Max. Score
	18.64	3.215	11	26

Table 1.1: Mean score of total affective strategies

Sr. No.	Affective Strategies	Mean Score	SD
1	I put effort into easing myself in case I get anxious about using English.	3.22	1.080
2	Despite committing mistakes in speaking English, I buck up myself to continue.	3.63	1.205
3	I appreciate myself through reward whenever I perform in a good manner in using English.	3.38	1.381
4	I put a check in whenever I feel confused or stressed in using English.	2.57	1.210
5	I practice the language by writing a diary to express my feelings.	2.35	1.334
6	I engage in conversation with others to express my feelings about learning English.	3.48	1.146

Table 1.2: Mean score of individual items on affective strategies scale

The answer to the first research question is obtained by computing the mean score of the total affective strategies (see Table 1.1). Table 1.1 displays the total mean score of affective learning strategies used by Pakistani EFL learners is found as 18.64 with a standard deviation of 3.215. It is above 60% and holds significant consideration. Table 1.2 shows the mean score of individual items of affective strategies used by the participants of the study. The highest frequency is found in strategy related to self-motivation. Its value is 3.63. The next strategy, which is in medium use by the participants, is related to sharing of learning experiences with others, and its mean value is 3.48. Other strategies that are also in medium use hold the mean scores of 3.38 and 3.22. These are related to external motivation on the part of the learners and attempt to relax oneself while learning a foreign language, respectively. Strategies that are least used by the participants hold mean scores of 2.57 and 2.35. These are related to the realisation of tension or nervousness while learning a foreign language and writing down feelings related to language learning in a diary. Both the least used strategies strongly indicate that the learners are less concerned about noticing their nervousness and writing diaries.

Research Question 2: Does any connection exist between FLCAS and affective strategies used by the learners in a Pakistani EFL classroom at the graduate level?

	FLCAS	SILL
FLCAS	-----	-.024
SILL	-.024	-----

Table 1.3: Relation between foreign language classroom anxiety and affective strategies used

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

c. Unless otherwise noted, bootstrap results are based on 1000 stratified bootstrap samples

The answer to the second research question is described in Table 1.3. It shows the negative relationship between FLCA and affective strategies used by learners, although this correlation is not statistically significant. In other words, this negative correlation indicates that anxiety and affective strategies are inversely proportional to each other, as the increase in one results in a decrease in the other. It determines that the students with higher levels of FLA tend to practice affective strategies at the least. It points out that greater use of affective strategies may relate to experiencing less anxiety among learners.

Research Question 3: Are there any differences regarding the frequency of use of affective strategies by EFL learners in terms of gender in the Pakistani context?

Sr. No.	Affective Strategies	Mean Score	
		Male	Female
1	I put effort into easing myself in case I get anxious about using English.	2.98	3.37
2	Despite committing mistakes in speaking English, I buck up myself to continue.	3.30	3.82
3	I appreciate myself through reward whenever I perform in a good manner in using English.	2.67	3.79
4	I put a check in whenever I feel confused or stressed in using English.	2.63	2.53
5	I practice the language by writing a diary to express my feelings.	2.65	2.18
6	I engage in conversation with others to express my feelings about learning English.	3.21	3.64

Table 1.4: Mean Score of Affective Strategies used by male and female participants

Table 1.4 shows female participants as high users of affective strategies as compared to male participants. In Four out of six items of affective strategies, the mean scores of female participants are comparatively greater than those of the male participants. The obtained results show that females are found to be more self-encouraging, externally motivated, experience sharing, and relaxing while learning the English language. Male participants are found to be a bit more frequent in realising nervousness and in writing feelings in a language diary as compared to female participants.

Gender	Mean Score	SD (Standard Deviation)
Male	17.44	3.418
Female	19.34	2.888

Table 1.5: Mean scores and SD of total affective strategies used gender-wise

The total mean score of affective strategies used by male participants is found as 17.44 out of 30 with SD 3.418 (see table 1.5). Besides, the total mean score of affective strategies used by female participants is found as 19.34 with SD 2.888. There exists a difference of 1.9 between the two gender-based groups in their use of affective strategies while encountering foreign language anxiety. It is notable that female participants are more inclined towards using affective strategies as compared to male participants.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the results of this research, language anxiety appears to be a definite occurrence in the case of learning EFL. Findings reveal that students of graduation level at private colleges in Multan are inclined to use affective strategies of language learning in response to foreign language classroom anxiety. Their percentage of applying affective strategies is above 60% to tackle foreign language classroom anxiety, which holds a percentage of up to 40%. This confirms the presence of FLCA encountered by the students. Gopang et al. (2015) obtained

high levels of English language anxiety among Pakistani students of university-level programs. Their research study quantified FLA as above average from students' perspective.

It has been observed that students are self-motivated about learning English. However, they do not achieve the desired results in English language learning and experience anxiety on a large scale. Moreover, they share their language-learning experiences with others and reward themselves for doing well in English learning. (Rephrase). It is considerable to relate that the students are least concerned with maintaining their language diaries or jotting down personal feelings. They also express valid signs of nervousness while learning or using English. This indicates that all four skills of the English language are not equally focused in the learning process.

It surfaces the fact that there is an insignificant connection between foreign language anxiety and affective strategies. It strongly indicates that the higher the language anxiety, the lesser will be the use of affective strategies by the learners. It means that the relationship is causal, with FLA being independent and learning affective strategies as dependent. It is pertinent to mention here that the greater the use of affective strategies, the lesser language anxiety will be. According to the research study conducted by Fei (2019) also discovered that negative relationship between FLA and the use of learning strategies in Chinese learners.

There exists a marginal difference on the basis of gender regarding language anxiety and the use of affective strategies. Female participants are inclined towards using affective strategies more frequently as compared to the male participants. However, there seems to be a possibility that students are unaware/less aware of using affective strategies of language learning that may counter to eliminate or reduce foreign language classroom anxiety. According to Kazi (2017), females are noticed using strategies more frequently, which marks a noteworthy relation between gender and strategies of language learning when dealing with various learning contexts. Other research works (Ehrman & Oxford, 1988; Green & Oxford, 1995; Sheorey, 1999) also prove the higher frequency of females using strategies. The previous research studies suggest that there is a need to tackle learners' foreign language learning anxiety in order to put an increased number of foreign language learning strategies into practice efficiently. It is highly recommended that students be provided with an awareness of the utility of using affective strategies. This may lead them to tackle foreign language classroom anxiety in a more confident way and may also result in improved language learning.

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