Title:
LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND MOTIVATION TO LEARN ENGLISH: A GLIMPSE INTO THE FORM 4 CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the findings of a study on Form 4 students' anxiety and motivation in learning English. One hundred and seventy-seven Form 4 students (90 males, 87 females) from a government secondary school in Kuching participated in this study. Scores from a language anxiety scale showed that 17.5% of the students were at the low language anxiety (LLA) level while 68.4% were at the moderate language anxiety (MLA) level, and 14.1% were at the high language anxiety (HLA) level. Independent samples *t*-test showed that overall there was no significant gender difference ($p > .05$) in language anxiety. However, girls were significantly more anxious than boys were when it came to 'volunteering answers', 'speaking in English', and 'afraid of being laughed at.' Content analysis of students' responses to a questionnaire on learning English revealed that HLA students reported of less effort at improving their proficiency in English compared to LLA students. Students' responses regarding how they felt in English class and why they felt that way provide valuable insights into the 'unobservable' dimension of classroom interaction. In conclusion, pedagogical implications of the findings are put forward.

INTRODUCTION

There is now a considerable body of work in both the second language (L2) acquisition and general educational psychology literature about the impact of affective factors on learning. This emphasis on psychological aspects of language learning came about in the early 1980s with the awareness that the learner is an individual with affective needs and reactions. Since then, many language researchers have highlighted the importance of attention to affect in L2 acquisition. Indeed an understanding of the psychological dimension of teaching and learning is as important as having a grasp of the linguistic dimension. Over the years, a number of language researchers have emphasized this point: Stevick (1980), a strong proponent of humanism in language teaching, argued that '…..[language learning] success depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom' (p. 4); Krashen (1982), in his affective filter hypothesis posited the existence of an internal barrier that interferes with L2 acquisition when learners are anxious or bored; Stern (1983) argued that, 'the affective component contributes at least as much and often more to language learning than the cognitive skills' (p. 386); Oxford (1994) emphasized that L2 research should not just focus on the intellectual but also the social and affective aspects of language learning as learners are not just cognitive or metacognitive machines but whole persons; Ehrman and Dörnyei (1998) said that social factors such as the relationship between teachers and learners and between learners and learners, and psychological processes at both conscious and unconscious levels have a powerful effect on learning. Cross-disciplinary research in disciplines like sociology and psychology show that social and affective variables have significant influence on language achievement (Bernat, 2006; Gardner & MacIntyre, 1992; 1993). Among the psychological processes that have received much attention in such studies are affective factors such as anxiety, motivation, self-regulation, and self-efficacy (Ehrman, 2000; Ehrman & Dörnyei, 1998).

Research in the past three decades has confirmed the existence of language anxiety and its effects on L2 learning, pointing to reciprocity between anxiety and proficiency (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). Spielberger (1972, p. 24) described language anxiety as a 'transitory emotional state or condition characterized by feelings of tension and apprehension and heightened autonomic nervous system activity.' This state can have both negative and positive effects, and it can motivate and facilitate as well as disrupt and inhibit cognitive actions such as learning. According to Horwitz et al. (1986, p. 125) 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. further stated that there are three types of related performance anxieties, namely communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. 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 is therefore a psychologically unsettling process for students experiencing language anxiety. Campbell and Ortiz (1991) estimated that up to half of all language students experience debilitating levels of language anxiety. Atay and Kurt (2006) found this observation to be true in a recent study on writing anxiety involving Turkish prospective teachers of English.

Therefore, there has been quite a good deal of research on language anxiety over the past three decades. There have been studies on what anxiety is, the types, traits, and components of anxiety (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993; Horwitz et al., 1986), causes of anxiety (Horwitz et al.; Price, 1991), effects of anxiety (Horwitz et al.; MacIntyre, 1995), and how to reduce language anxiety (Horwitz et al.; Young 1990). Correlation studies show that high language anxiety is related to low achievement in language learning. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), in a study involving college students learning French, found that high anxiety students experienced difficulty in expressing their views and tended to underestimate their own abilities. Zhao (2007) made a similar observation with high school students in China. Anxiety concerning English class affected students' achievement in English. There are also studies that revealed a negative correlation between anxiety and ability in basic language skills, particularly the skills of speaking and listening. According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), high anxiety students performed worse than low anxiety students in these skills.

In the area of gender differences, male students have generally been found to be more adept than females in language learning. Previous research (Baxter, 1999; Pappamihiel, 2001; Selami Aydin, 2008) has found that female students are usually more anxious than males are in English classes. Baxter (1999, p. 83), in her review of studies carried out in the United States and Britain said "much previous research connecting classroom talk with gender has demonstrated that boys dominate the public area of the classroom, especially in teacher-directed interactions with the class." Pappamihiel (2001) found that while there was no gender difference in ESL classes, Mexican middle school girls were significantly more anxious about using English in their mainstream classes. Selami Aydin (2008), in a recent study involving Turkish EFL students found that gender was among the factors that had significant effects on both foreign language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The study showed that female students were more worried about English language tests than males were. The present study aimed to investigate the situation in the local context.

Another important factor that affects L2 acquisition is motivation to learn. Many researchers believe that motivation is the key element in language learning (Brown, 2000; Dornyei, 1996;

Noels, Pelletier, Clement & Vallerand, 2000; Oxford & Shearin, 1996; Schumann, 2001). Motivation to learn a language can be influenced by self beliefs such as self-concept, self-confidence, anxiety, expectancy and the need to achieve (Bernat, 2006; Dornyei, 1998). Anxiety works against motivation to learn (Geen, 1994). Anxiety interrupts behaviour, focuses attention on what is being done wrong, and causes the person to seek another course of action. Students' motivation and subsequent learning behaviour can be affected by their anxiety regarding the language they are learning. Those who are confident enough to try and take part in learning activities learn a lot more compared to those who are overcome with anxiety and don't dare to participate. If students are too scared to speak up in class, they can't have any opportunities to practice and improve their oral skills. Feelings of discomfort and anxiety in the classroom do not enhance learning. 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 and who evaluate their own proficiency more highly. Unlike high anxiety learners, low anxiety learners also consider the learning tasks as less difficult.

In Malaysia, as in other parts of the world, it is apparent that language anxiety and its negative effects on motivation to learn also exist in English classrooms. However, there is still paucity in local literature on this area of study. A review of the literature showed that generally, research on language learning tend to focus on issues concerning either language learning strategies or academic performance of students (Abdul Raof & Masdinah Alauyah Md. Yusof, 2006; Lim, 2006; Mohamed Amin Embi, 2000; Rosna Awang Hashim & Sharifah Azizah Syed Sahil, 1994). The self- processes governing the interrelationships between knowledge and action have been largely neglected. This study aimed to advance research in this area through investigating the extent of language anxiety among secondary school students. There is also generally a lack of studies that investigate classroom events from the participants' (i.e. students') perspective rather than the observer's perspective. Therefore, in addition to assessing the extent of language anxiety through administration of a Language Anxiety Scale, this study also elicited first-hand information from students through administration of a self-report questionnaire on students' experiences that reflect their motivation to learn English. Their responses would provide valuable insights into an aspect of learning English that is not easily apparent to teachers. The findings would enable English teachers to better understand their students' learning behavior and the problems they face in learning English.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study therefore aimed to investigate the extent of English language anxiety and its relation to motivation to learn among local secondary school students. Specifically, this study aimed to: (i) investigate the extent of English language anxiety of Form 4 students, (ii) investigate gender differences in language anxiety, (iii) investigate how HLA and LLA Form 4 students improve their proficiency in English, and (iv) gain insights into how HLA and LLA Form 4 students feel in English class and why they feel that way.

METHOD

Participants

Participants were 177 (90 males, 87 females) Form 4 students from an urban co-educational government secondary school in Kuching, Sarawak. They were in five intact classes randomly selected from seven classes available at that Form level. The age of the participants ranged from 15 to 18 years (mean age = 15.95 years, *SD* = .40). They consisted of 50.8% Chinese (*n* = 90), 16.9% Malays (*n* = 30), and 32.2% Bumiputra (*n* = 57). Bumiputra consists of ethnic groups of Sarawak such as Iban, Melanau, Bidayuh and Dayak. All the students have been studying English as a subject in school for at least 10 years.

Instruments

Language Anxiety Scale

A Language Anxiety Scale (adapted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, Horwitz et al., 1986; Horwitz, 1991) was constructed to assess students' language anxiety. The scale, with an initial pool of 32 items, was constructed in both English and Bahasa Malaysia (the official medium of instruction in schools in Malaysia) to facilitate students' understanding of the items in the scale. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the statements based on a 4-point scale (1 = *strongly agree*, 2 = *agree*, 3 = *disagree*, and 4 = *strongly disagree*). The three-step back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1986) was carried out to ensure equivalence in the two versions of the instrument. The scale was piloted on a representative sample of Form 4 students (*N* = 31) in an urban co-educational government secondary school not involved in this study. Two experienced English secondary school teachers (who have more than 10 years experience teaching secondary school English) were asked to scrutinize the scale and comment on the suitability of the items. Following the pilot study, 16 of the 32 items that correlated less than .50 with the total were removed from the scale. Among these were two items concerning communication with native speakers of English, which the school teachers felt were inappropriate as school students rarely find themselves in such a situation. For the 16 items selected for the scale, item-total correlations ranged from .53 to .84, the test-retest stability (after three weeks) was .90, $p < .01$ (2-tailed), and the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient was .93. The Alpha reliability coefficient for the actual sample (*N* = 177) was .91. This consistently high value shows that the Language Anxiety Scale constructed has high reliability in measuring language anxiety.

Questionnaire on Learning English

A free-response questionnaire was drawn up to guide students in doing reflections on learning English. Students were required to respond to questions on the following aspects: (i) how often they used the four basic language skills (reading, listening, speaking, and writing), (ii) what steps they took to improve themselves in each skill, and (iii) how they felt in English class and why they felt that way. In order to facilitate students' understanding, the questions were worded in both English and Bahasa Malaysia. The three-step back-translation procedure (Brislin, 1986) was again used to check on the equivalence of the two versions of the questions. Students were also informed that they could respond in either English or Bahasa Malaysia as the aim of the questionnaire was to inquire into how they learn English and not to assess their language proficiency. The questionnaire was piloted on the aforementioned

representative sample of secondary school students. Students' responses showed that usable data could be obtained through the questionnaire. Immediately after the pilot testing, the researcher took time to discuss with some of the students concerning the meaning and clarity of the questions in the questionnaire. Following that, minor adjustments were made to the wording in some of the questions.

Procedure

The Language Anxiety Scale was administered to each intact class in turn by the researcher in this study. The students were told that they were involved in a study on how they felt about learning English. Most of the students managed to complete the scale in 15 minutes. Following the administration of the Language Anxiety Scale, students were given the questionnaire on learning English. They were told that they could respond in either English or Bahasa Malaysia. Most of the students completed the questionnaire in about 20 minutes.

Data Analysis

Students' Language Anxiety score was obtained through summing up their scores in the scale after reverse scoring had been done for the items in the scale. Independent samples *t*-test was carried out to investigate gender differences in language anxiety. Students' responses in the questionnaire were content analyzed using the 'framework' technique of qualitative data analysis (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). This method is systematic, thorough, and grounded in the data. This involved (a) initially reading through all the transcripts in order to be familiar with the data, (b) re-reading the transcripts and identifying recurring themes or categories, (c) indexing or coding data into themes or categories, (d) charting or creating a framework of categories, (e) refining and reducing categories through grouping them where appropriate, and (f) checking and re-coding responses using the refined framework of categories. As a check on the consistency of the coding of students' reflections, approximately 50% of the scripts (i.e. 10 scripts of HLA students and 10 scripts of LLA students) were blind-coded after two 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 of the two codings. The *k* value obtained was .83, showing that there was high consistency in the coding.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Extent of Language Anxiety of Students

This study aimed to investigate the extent of language anxiety of Form 4 students. Students' language anxiety score was obtained through summing up their scores in the Language Anxiety Scale after reverse scoring had been done on the items in the scale. Students' scores were then placed into one of three levels of anxiety, namely low language anxiety (LLA), moderate language anxiety (MLA), and high language anxiety (HLA). Low language anxiety students were those who attained a score of more than one standard deviation below the mean (Mean = 36.23, *SD* = 8.81). Moderate language anxiety students were those who attained a score within the range of one standard deviation below and one standard deviation above the mean while HLA students were those who attained a score of one standard deviation above the mean. As shown in Table 1, based on these three ranges of scores, 17.5% of the students were in the LLA level, 68.4% in the MLA level while the remaining 14.1% were in the HLA level.

Table 1

Distribution of Students According to Level of Language Anxiety

Anxiety Level	Range of Scores	*n*	Percentage
Low Language Anxiety	16 – 27	31	17.5
Moderate Language Anxiety	28 – 45	121	68.4
High Language Anxiety	46 - 60	25	14.1

Gender Differences in Language Anxiety

Independent samples *t*-test revealed that overall, there was no significant difference in boys' and girls' language anxiety (p = .15), although girls' mean language anxiety score (M = 37.20) was higher than that of boys (M = 35.28) (see Table 2). Meanwhile, the results of mean comparisons for individual items in the Language Anxiety Scale showed that for three of the 16 items in the scale, namely Items 7, 12 and 15, girls' scores surpassed that of boys. Girls were more anxious than boys were when it came to 'volunteering answers', 'speaking in English', and 'afraid of being laughed at.' Perusal of the means for each item in the scale showed that for 14 of the 16 items, girls' mean scores were higher than that of boys. These findings suggest that generally, girls were more anxious than boys were in English class. The findings concur with those of other researchers elsewhere (Baxter, 1999; Pappamihiel, 2001; Selami Aydin, 2008) that females tend to be more anxious in English classes.

Table 2

Means, Standard Deviations and *t*-tests of Language Anxiety Scores by Gender

Item No.	Item	Gender		*t*
		Male (n = 90)	Female (n = 87)	
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in English class.	2.31 (.66)	2.26 (.97)	.38
2	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.	2.47 (.82)	2.61 (.99)	-1.04
3	It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English.	2.08 (.81)	2.14 (.92)	-.46
4	I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than I am.	2.76 (.81)	2.89 (.84)	-1.04
5	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	2.71 (.85)	2.90 (.95)	-1.37
6	In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	2.20 (.85)	2.16 (.91)	.30
7	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.	2.21 (.87)	2.48 (.95)	-1.99*
8	The more I study for English language test, the more confused I get.	1.62 (.55)	1.69 (.78)	-.66
9	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.	2.29 (.77)	2.52 (.99)	-1.71
10	English class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	1.84 (.77)	1.91 (.86)	-.53
11	I feel more tense and nervous in English class than in other classes.	1.73 (.65)	1.74 (.72)	-.02

12	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my English class.	2.02 (.73)	2.30 (.86)	-2.30*
13	I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says.	2.04 (.82)	2.22 (.89)	-1.35
14	I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English.	2.31 (.73)	2.32 (.81)	-.09
15	I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English.	2.01 (.84)	2.28 (.96)	-1.95*
16	I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	2.70 (.76)	2.79 (.88)	-.76
	Overall	35.28 (7.09)	37.20 (10.23)	-1.45

Note. $df = (1, 175)$, * $p < .05$, Standard deviations are in parentheses

Students' Efforts to Improve Proficiency in English

This study also aimed to gain further insights into how LLA and HLA students improve their proficiency in English. Students were given questions to guide them in doing reflections on how they learn English. Students' responses were content analyzed and subsequently coded into categories. Table 3 presents the categories of responses given by 20 HLA students with the highest language anxiety scores and 20 LLA students with the lowest language anxiety scores. Generally, the findings show that compared to HLA students, LLA students made greater efforts to improve their proficiency in English. High language anxiety students reported more incidences of not doing anything or not knowing how to improve their proficiency in English.

Perusal of the findings show that there was a marked difference in LLA and HLA students' reported frequency of conversing in English. Only one of the HLA students communicated in English most of the time while 17 out of 20 LLA students reported that they did so most of the time. Low language anxiety students also reported of more efforts to improve in this skill while 13 out of 20 HLA students reported that they didn't do anything. The two LLA students who did not take any steps to improve in their ability to converse in English wrote that 'It comes naturally' and 'I just speak whatever comes to my mind, I don't have any problems'.

A similar pattern was observed regarding students' frequency of writing in English; Eighteen out of 20 LLA students reported that they wrote in English most of the time while 10 out of the 20 HLA students seldom wrote in English. All of the LLA students reported efforts to improve their writing skill while nine of the HLA students reported that they didn't do anything to improve in this skill. In fact, two of them revealed that they didn't know how to.

Table 3

Summary of Responses on Learning English

No.	Category of Responses	No. of Responses	
		Low LA (n = 20)	High LA (n = 20)
1	*Frequency of conversing in English:*		
	- All or most of the time	17	1
	- Occasionally	2	5
	- Seldom/only when I have to	1	14
	Steps taken to improve speaking skill:		
	- Try to communicate in English with friends/family members	9	4
	- Listen to English songs/watch English movies	3	1
	- Read more books/refer to dictionary	6	1
	- Don't know how to	-	1
	- Don't do anything	2	13
2	*Frequency of writing in English:*		
	- Most of the time	18	7
	- Occasionally	2	3
	- Seldom	-	10
	Steps taken to improve writing skill:		
	- Practice writing essays/emails/letters/do more exercises	5	5
	- Read more books/refer to the dictionary/reference books	15	4
	- Don't know how to	-	2
	- Don't do anything	-	9
3	*Frequency of using listening skill:*		
	- Listen to English songs/watch English movies/News most of the time	19	17
	- Seldom listen to English songs/watch English movies/News	1	3
	Steps taken to improve listening skill:		
	- Listen to more English radio programs/watch English movies/News	7	7
	- Listen carefully/read the subtitles /listen or watch more then once	4	6
	- Check the meaning with friends/teacher/family members/dictionary	8	4
	- Don't do anything	1	3
4	*Frequency of reading English materials:*		
	- Often (read newspapers/magazines/story books/comics)	19	9
	- Seldom read materials in English	1	11
	Steps taken to understand what is read:		
	- Ask friends/teacher/family members the meaning of words	6	6
	- Find out the meaning of words using the dictionary/the internet	14	11
	- Don't do anything	-	3
5	*How students felt in English class:*		
	- Excited/interested	2	-
	- Happy/confident/comfortable	3	2
	- Normal	10	2
	- Bored	5	5
	- Confused/miserable	-	2
	- Nervous/shy	-	6
	- Very anxious	-	3

Note: LA = Language Anxiety

Regarding the use of listening skill, the findings show that most of the students (19 out of 20 LLA students, 17 out of 20 HLA students) used this skill a lot. However, LLA students (8 out of 20) made greater efforts to improve themselves in this skill through checking out the meaning of words by consulting others or by referring to the dictionary. As for the HLA students (6 out of 20), they had to put in more effort at understanding what they heard through listening carefully or reading the subtitles in movies or listening or watching more than once. One LLA and three HLA students, however, reported that they didn't do anything when they couldn't understand what they heard.

Regarding reading English materials, again there was a marked difference between the two categories of students. Low language anxiety students read English materials more often (19 out of 20 students) while only nine out of 20 HLA students did so. Compared to HLA students, LLA students also put in more efforts at understanding what they read. Three HLA confessed that they didn't do anything when they could not understand what they read.

The above findings support the findings of other researchers regarding motivation in language learning (Clement, Dornyei & Noel, 1994), effects of self-beliefs on motivation to learn (Benson, 2001; Geen, 1994; Oxford, 1992) and the effects of language anxiety on efforts to learn (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre, 1995). Learners' motivation and subsequent learning behavior can be affected by their anxiety regarding the language they are learning. It is possible that HLA students' reports of not doing anything to improve themselves in the four skills reflect this effect.

Insights into how students felt in English class and why they felt that way

Students' responses regarding how they felt in English class not only provide valuable insights into the unobservable dimension of English classes but also explanation for their learning behavior in English classes. As shown in Table 3 (No. 5), most of the LLA students (15 out of 20) revealed that they felt excited/interested, happy/confident/comfortable, or normal in English classes. However, only four HLA students reported they felt that way. Eleven out of 20 HLA students revealed that they found English classes stressful (they felt confused/miserable, nervous, or very anxious).

At this point, it is worthwhile to examine some of the reasons that the students gave for how they felt in English class. High language anxiety students' responses that were given in Bahasa Malaysia were translated into English (marked with an asterisk) by the researcher in this study. The two LLA students who were excited in English classes wrote that this was because 'It's fun and interesting' and 'Because I can learn new things'.

Low language anxiety students who were bored in English classes gave the following reasons for their response:

> *'Because the teacher talks too much at times'*
> *'They restrict students too much when it comes to expressing thoughts, ideas, speaking or writing'*
> *'The teacher needs to be more fun and creative'*
> *'It's because the text book is boring and the teacher teaches boringly'*
> *'The lessons are not interesting'*

Meanwhile, HLA students' reasons for being bored in English classes were quite different:

'Because I cannot really understand'
*'Because it is not an interesting subject'**
*'Because I cannot understand what the teacher is teaching'**
*'Because I cannot understand and the teacher teaches too fast'**
*'Don't understand English and don't know how to talk in English'**

The reasons the two HLA students gave for feeling confused or miserable were 'Because the teacher always pays more attention to those top students in English and usually ignored those poor in English' and 'Most of my classmates are cleverer in English'.

The nine HLA students who were nervous/shy or very anxious in English classes, all of whom were female students, gave the following reasons for how they felt:

'This is because I face problems speaking fluently in English'
*'Because I don't understand English'**
'Because my English is very poor'
'Because I'm afraid if the teacher asks me a question that I do not understand…'
*'I cannot answer or talk well in English'**
*'Afraid other people will laugh at me or tease me when I talk in English'**
*'Many words or questions I cannot understand'**
*'Because afraid the teacher will ask me difficult questions'**
'Because I am very poor in English'

The above responses of HLA students who were anxious in English class can be grouped into four categories, namely, problems in understanding English, problems conversing in English, low self-confidence, and afraid of being laughed at. These responses provide a glimpse into the discomfort and anxiety that HLA students face in English class. This could be the reasons why HLA students are reticent, self-conscious, fearful, or even panicky in English classes. The findings concur those of Chen and Chang (2004) who stressed that it is important not just to identify language anxiety but also to diagnose which of the factors associated with it (e.g., classroom climate, particular teachers, and learning activities) could have brought about anxiety.

CONCLUSION

Summary

The findings show that a large number of the students (68.4%) experienced moderate levels of language anxiety while 14.1% of them experienced high levels of language anxiety and the remaining 17.5% experienced low levels of language anxiety. Overall, there was no significant gender difference in language anxiety. However, girls were significantly more anxious than boys were when it came to 'volunteering answers', 'speaking in English', and 'afraid of being laughed at.' Generally, LLA students put in more effort at improving themselves in the four basic skills of listening, reading, speaking and writing. Consistent with the findings from the Language Anxiety Scale, HLA students were the ones who reported that they felt anxious in English classes.

Implications

A number of important pedagogical implications can be drawn from the findings of this study. These implications are also in line with the theme of this conference, which is, "Rejuvenating the passion for teaching and learning of languages." The findings on students' efforts to improve their proficiency in English show that some of the HLA students need to be instructed on how to improve in the skills of speaking and writing in English as they revealed that they did not know how to do so. English teachers could have learning activities where these students are given more guidance on how to talk or write about themselves, their family, their interests and their culture. Teachers should also try to create a non-threatening, relaxed learning environment in which HLA students can take risks and make mistakes without fear of embarrassment or negative repercussions.

Both LLA and HLA students' reports of not doing anything show that they may need to be motivated to improve themselves in the four basic skills. The reason for HLA students not doing anything may be because they have given up hope of being able to improve in English. This sense of helplessness should be addressed by English teachers first before HLA students can benefit from learning activities to help them improve in language proficiency as learned helplessness can affect students' motivation to learn (Stipek, 1988). English teachers could create learning environments with a definite potential for success through setting attainable goals and reasonable challenges for HLA students. Opportunities for success and celebrating success will enhance their self-confidence (Bandura, 1993).

Teachers could introduce anxiety reduction strategies to help HLA students feel more relaxed in the English classroom. Oxford (1990, p. 163) put forward three types of affective strategies that can be used to regulate learner attitudes, motivation and emotions. These include strategies for anxiety reduction (using progressive relaxation and deep breathing exercises, music, and laughter), for self-encouragement (making positive statements, taking risks wisely, and administering self-rewards), and for monitoring emotions (listening to the body, completing a checklist, writing a language learning diary, and discussing feelings with peers). It is also important to avoid tension-causing activities such as surprise quizzes, overly competitive activities, and putting students in front of their peers without prior warning or chance for preparation. Kondo & Yang (2004) in their study with Japanese students put forward 72 different tactics, which were clustered into five strategy-groups namely preparation, relaxation, positive thinking, peer-seeking and resignation, to help lower students' levels of anxiety.

Low language anxiety students' responses regarding finding English classes boring point to the need to make language learning more interesting and fun for them. For example, teachers could provide opportunities for LLA students to do projects on topics of interest to them and get them to present their work in various ways such as through oral presentations, portfolios, composing songs/poems, drama, story telling, and creating websites. Wu and Wu (2008) suggested including opportunities for fun extracurricular activities such as inviting foreign bands, English language speakers, or hosting English language plays, karaoke, or films to provide students with a non-academic setting for learning and practicing English. Meanwhile, HLA students' responses that they found the English classes boring because they just could not keep up with what was happening suggest that there is need for remedial activities and more attention from the teachers to help them catch up with the other students.

The findings on how students felt in English classes suggest that English teachers need to consider how HLA students feel and try to provide a risk-free environment in English classes where students don't feel afraid or shy to make mistakes. In addition, efforts have to be made to raise their confidence and courage in learning English. Teachers should provide HLA students with opportunities to succeed and thus build up their self perceptions regarding learning English. Enactive mastery experiences will strengthen HLA students' self-percepts of efficacy and enhance their performance attainments (Bandura, 1993). Steps can also be taken to alleviate stress through relaxation activities or instruction on stress management (Benson et al., 2000). Positive affirmations and encouraging words from teachers would also go a long way to helping relieve stress. Teachers' supportive attitude towards students and efforts to understand the affective needs of students can make a significant contribution towards making students, especially the HLA ones, feel comfortable and motivated to learn in English classes.

Teachers can help female students overcome their anxiety and shyness about speaking in English class by providing more opportunities for them to interact in safe groups in which they feel comfortable. In addition, teachers must make a conscious effort to ensure that these students have the opportunity to participate in class, not just the ones who take the initiative. Wait-times should also be lengthened to ensure that these students have enough time to respond without interruption.

The findings presented in this paper are limited to the students of the school involved in this study. A replication of this study involving students from schools in other parts of Malaysia would provide further support for the generalizability of the findings.

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