Foreign Language Anxiety among Ethiopian University EFL Students

Berhane Gerencheal, Deepanjali Mishra

Abstract: The study was designed to investigate anxiety level of Ethiopian university students who were studying English as a major. It was also aimed to examine if anxiety level is significantly varied by gender. Background information questionnaire and FLCAS which was developed by (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) were used to gather the necessary information for further analyses. 103 respondents from four EFL classes of two Ethiopian universities were successfully participating in the study. In this study, the mean anxiety level of the students was 3.47 (SD=0.45) which is above the average i.e., 3.00, and the descriptive analysis revealed that large number (83.5%) of students were suffering from some levels of anxiety ranging from medium- to high level. The analyses also showed that most students had higher level of communication apprehension compared to the other domains of anxiety proposed by Na (2007). Lastly, the independent t-test analysis revealed that female students were found significantly higher level of English language anxiety (t=-4.049, p=0.000).

Key Words: Foreign Language Anxiety; Ethiopian University EFL Students; Affective Variables; Gender and FLA; Level of FLA

I. INTRODUCTION

Following the work of Horwitz and her associates in 1986, language anxiety has been received a considerable attention over second/foreign language learning. Before this influential study(Horwitz et al., 1986), many researchers had come with conflicting research findings on the association between language anxiety and language learning difficulties. In this regard, a number of scholars and researchers believe that the diversified findings were caused by the fact that there were no clear definition, conceptualization, and measurement of language anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Trang, 2012). During that time, language anxiety was seen from the trait-state anxiety point of view which was not specific to language learning context. However Horwitz and her colleagues (1986) defined foreign language anxiety (FLA-hereafter) as a 'conceptually distinct variable in foreign language learning' than simply a general anxiety or trait-state anxiety. They also conceptualized the three related components of FLA (communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety), and they finally came up with the most reliable self-report Likert-scale FLA measurement(FLCAS-Horwitz et al., 1986).

Since then, research findings on the role of language anxiety in language learning have become consistently reported.

Therefore, extensive research investigations has proved the negative influence of FLA on language learning achievement (Horwitz, 2001; Spielmann & Radnofsky, 2001) In this sense, it can be said that after the seminal work of Horwitz and her colleagues, the question about the relationship between FLA and foreign language learning achievements has been adequately answered with a reliable findings. However, many scholars and researchers recently believe that FLA can be varied over different educational contexts and cultural groups (Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz, 2016; Kim, 2009, 2010; Koch & Terrel, 1991) According to Horwitz, for example, "It[FLA] is entirely possible that some practices perceived by one group of learners as comfortable may prove stressful for learners from a different cultural group who are used to different types of classroom organisations"(Horwitz, 2001, p. 119). It has also been stated that FLA is not context free, but it is context dependent (Horwitz, 2016; Kim, 2010). Following those recommendations, many researchers have been trying to conduct their studies almost throughout the world.

Unlike other settings like Asian and American educational contexts, very scanty research findings are available in the Ethiopian context mainly focusing on the association between language achievement and FLA. In the Ethiopian context, for instance, at the tertiary level (Gerencheal, 2016) and at the secondary level (Abay, 2009; Firew, 2008) were investigated. All those studies were conducted at a single grade level, and they consistently revealed that the negative correlation between the two variables.

This study,   however, was conducted at two study levels of EFL students in two Ethiopian universities because foreign language class is dominated by anxiety provoking situations (e.g. Horwitz et al., 1986; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, & Daley, 1999),   and highly advanced English foreign language learners also feel anxious while learning and particularly speaking English in some situations, both in and outside the classroom settings (Woodrow, 2006).

To this end, the current study attempted to answer the following basic research questions:
What level of FLA do EFL university students in Ethiopia have?
Is anxiety significantly varied by gender?

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II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptualization of FLA

In the 1970s, researchers were using state-trait anxiety perspective to evaluate the relationship between anxiety and language learning because the basic assumption behind the idea was that language anxiety is assumed as the transfer of other more general anxiety. Hence, research findings on the relationship between FLA and language learning performance or achievement were not consistent (Chastain, 1975; Tucker, Hamayan, & Genesee, 1976; Young, 1986) until the work of Horwitz et al. (1986) has become into existence.

After critically reviewing the inconsistency of the literature on the effect of anxiety on language learning, Scovel recommended for upcoming researchers to be specific about the type of anxiety they wish to study(Scovel, 1978). And he also concluded that the conflicting results found in early anxiety studies were mainly come from the ambiguity in the conceptualization and scales of anxiety. For making such strong recommendations and conclusions, Horwitz believes that his work can be recognized "as a turning point in the study of anxiety and language learning (Horwitz, 2010, p. 156)". Similar to Scovel's viewpoint, Gardner also affirmed that all types of anxiety would not affect second or foreign language learning and teaching (Gardner, 1985). He believed that the construct of anxiety which is only specific to the language learning setting is associated with second or foreign language learning-and-teaching success.

Taking the conclusions and suggestions given by Scovel (1978) and other earlier studies (e.g., Gardner 1985), Horwitz and her associates have conceptualized that FLA is the composition of three related situation-specific FL anxieties: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). After this seminal work introduced the construct of FLA as a situation-specific anxiety and the standardized measurement (FLCAS), research findings on the negative effect of FLA on achievement/performance have been consistent across different languages and students (Horwitz & Young, 1991; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1988, 1989, 1991; Tallon, 2009)

Gender and FLA

Various studies on the association between FLA and gender have shown mixed results. Some findings indicated that being male or female does not have any association in one's anxiety level on learning FL. For instance, in 74 male and 231 female Iranian university students, Taghinezhad and his associates reported that gender could not predict FLA since the level of FLA on the male and female students was not significantly varied(Taghinezhad et al., 2016).

Some research findings have also shown that male students are significantly anxious compared to female students(Fariadian, Azizifar, & Gowhary, 2014; MacIntyre, Baker, Clément, & Donovan, 2003). In a private EFL institute at Iran, it is reported that gender and FLA had statistically significant relationship where male students (n=39; FLCAS m=83) were found more anxious than female students(n=41; FLCAS M=80.11), (Fariadian et al., 2014, p. 2018).

On the contrary, some studies showed that female students are more anxious than their male counterparts (Koul, Roy, Kaewkuekool, & Ploisawaschai, 2009; Park & French, 2013; Wei & Yodkamlue, 2012). In the Korean context, Park & French (2013) reported that female students were found more anxious compared to males after a research was conducted on 948 Korean university students. The t-test,(t =-7.372, p < 0.01), of this study indicated that female students showed significantly higher language anxiety compared to male students with the mean scores of the FLCAS for males2.67 and females 3.001.

Hence, it is possible to summarize some implications from the above mentioned contrasting findings on the relationship between gender and language anxiety. Cultural differences could have its own contributions on the relationship between FLA and gender. So, conducting the same topic across different research contexts could have different findings. The relationship between the two variables could not also consistent over time. So, time factor could also be taken into considerations. Considering other confounding variables should also be considered in order to see the nearest possible relationship between FLA and gender.

III. METHODOLOGY

Sample

The participants of this study were 103 (n=60 males and n=43 females) students who were studying English as a Foreign Language (EFL-hereafter) at two batches (n= 49 year II, and n= 54 year III) at both Adigrat University (n=48) and Aksum University (n=55) in Ethiopia. Since the total students who were studying English as major were manageable enough, all the students in both batches were invited to participate in this study. However, year I students were not included in the study since they were new to learning English at University level, and they would not have enough exposure for language anxiety at tertiary level when the data was collected.

Instruments

In this study, two different questionnaires were used: the FLCAS and the background information questionnaires. To measure the students' level of foreign language anxiety, the FLCAS questionnaire, which was developed by Horwitz et. al (1986), was used. This questionnaire is a 5-point Likert scale consisting of strongly *Disagree, Disagree, neither Agree nor Disagree, Agree, and Strongly Agree* with the values 1,2,3,4 and 5 assigned to the options respectively. In FLCAS, higher total scores always indicate higher levels of anxiety.

In addition, some words and phrases (language/foreign language into English language) were adapted to fit to the immediate purpose of the questionnaire. This standardized scale is the most reliable measurement with high internal consistency, and in this study the internal consistency was .93 Cronbach alpha value.

To collect the participants' relevant background information (like their origin, grade level, and gender), and to compare with the students' level of language anxiety, background information questionnaire was also used.

Data collection procedures

The questionnaires were administered to 125, but only 103 were found eligible for further analyses. 22 questionnaires were discarded either the students did not reply or did not complete all the items in any of the questionnaires. All the items were carefully translated into local language (Amharic), and the tools were also piloted with other departments before administering to the actual participants. The necessary data was collected within a day by asking the participants to complete the background data questionnaire first, and then the FLCAS questionnaire next.

Data analysis procedure

All the necessary data were coded into IBM SPSS version 20 for statistical analysis. Every participant was given a code, and all the necessary data which were associated with every student like grade level, gender of each student, the FLCAS questionnaire responses were encoded into SPSS. Then the FLCAS data was analyzed to investigate the anxiety level of the participants. In order to examine if FLA would be significantly varied by gender, independent-sample t-test was also used. Finally, Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a] significance value of .200 confirmed that the FLCAS data was normally distributed and fit for further analyses (p=.200>0.05

To clearly describe the level of English language anxiety among the Ethiopian University EFL learners, descriptive analysis of the FLCAS and its four domains was calculated. As mentioned earlier, the four domains of the FLCAS was taken from the four model FLCAS proposed by (Na, 2007). This model has been used by many researchers in different educational contexts (Berowa, 2018; Fariadian et al., 2014; Gerencheal, 2016; Na, 2007; Shabani, 2012) According to Na, this scale includes all the 33 items of Horwit et al. (1986), and from which 8 items are related to communication apprehension, 9 items to fear of negative evaluation, and 5 items to test anxiety, and the remaining 11 items are put in a group named anxiety of English classes. All the positively worded FLCAS items were also reversed to fit with remaining majority items.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

English Language Anxiety Level among the Students

In her recent book, Horwitz suggested her readers on how to determine the students' anxiety level created from learning the foreign/second language by saying that all the response of each participant should be added up and then divided by the total number of 33-items in the FLCAS (Horwitz, 2008). By doing this, she advised that students whose FLCAS mean score are below 3 can be considered as not very anxious; on the other hand, those students who score around and above 3 should be considered anxious. With those two suggestions, she also recommended that the higher the averages the more anxious the students are. Hence, to determine the students' anxiety level according to Horwitz's recommendation, as stated above, the mean, standard deviation, median, and mode of the FLCAS and its four domains were calculated using SPSS version 20 (See table 1).

Table. 1 The Overall Situation of University Students' Anxiety in the English Classroom as measured by Mean, Standard Deviation, Median, and Mode

Domain	Mean	SD	Median	Mode
Communication Apprehension	3.77	.44	3.88	4.00
Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.45	.51	3.44	3.78
Test anxiety	3.25	.53	3.20	3.60
Anxiety of English Classes	3.63	.50	3.63	3.27
Overall FLCAS	3.47	.45	3.45	3.76

As shown in the above table 4.1, the communication apprehension had a mean score of 3.77 (SD= .44), a median of 3.88, and a mode of 4.00. At this point, all the three parameters (mean, median, and mode) were found above the average mean score of 3.00. The most frequently value found in this domain was 4.00. Frequency analysis also confirmed that 94.14% (n=97) of the students had an average score of 3.00 and above with 38.83% (n=40) scoring 4.00 and above.

Fear of negative evaluation had a mean score of 3.45 (SD=.51), a median of 3.88, and a mode of 3.78. Similarly, all the parameters were also found above the average mean score of 3.00. Frequency analysis also revealed that 81.55% (n=84) of the students had average score of the FLCAS 3.00 and above, and 15.53% (n=16) of whom had a mean score of 4.00 and above.

Test anxiety had a mean score of 3.25 (SD=.53), a median of 3.20, and a mode of 3.60. This is also similar to the above two factors in which all the parameters were found above the mean 3.00. Frequency analysis was also calculated to see the extent of students found above the mean 3.00 and 4.00 using percentile and frequency. And this also revealed that 68.93% (n=71) of the students scored average of 3.00 and above, of whom 14.56% (n=15) had a mean score of 4.00 and above.

The fourth domain was anxiety of English classes with 11-items of FLCAS. This domain had a mean score of 3.63(SD=.5), a median of again 3.63, and a mode of 3.27. All the three parameters were also found above the mean 3.00. For this component, the frequency analysis revealed that 78.64% (n=81) of the students had average score of 3.00 and above, of whom 10.68% (n=11) had average score 4.00 and above.

Finally, the statistics of the 33-item FLCAS revealed a mean score of 3.47 (SD=.45), a median of 3.45, and a mode of 3.76. Similar to the above domains of the anxiety, all the three parameters were also found above the mean 3.00. The descriptive analysis also revealed 84.47% (n=87) of the students had average score of 3.00 and above, with 15.53% (n=16) of them scoring 4.00 and above. Those results were the overall image of the students on the extent to which they suffer from English language anxiety.

So, the mean score of the FLCAS for all the students was 3.47 indicated that the students were suffering from some degree of anxiety learning English as a foreign language since it is found above the average score of 3.00 and it was also higher comparing to other studies.

In this study, all the 33-items of the FLCAS were supported by at least one third of the student participants of which 19 statements were also supported by more than 50% of the participants. More specifically, 7-items were again supported by more than two-third of the students. Similarly, 84.47% (n=87) of the students had average score of 3.00 and above, with 15.53% (n=16) of them scoring 4.00 and above. This finding is much higher than with the finding of (Tran, Baldauf, & Moni, 2013) in which 29-items of the FLCAS were supported by more than one third of the Vietnamese university students. In Tran et al. (2013) study, 68.7% (n=288) of the participants had scores of 3.00 and above, and the investigators concluded that those students were suffering from some degree of anxiety. However, the present study could indicate that the students were suffering from wide range of FLA. The students deemed also suffering from more communication anxieties comparing to the other three domains of the FLCAS (See table 1). This was also consistent with other findings in which oral production in general and speaking skills in particular are more anxiety provoking skills(Fariadian et al., 2014; Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991; Woodrow, 2006; Young, 1990). In the Ethiopian context, it was reported that most students were anxious on speaking in front of their classmate in the formal English classes more than the other language skills (Gerencheal, 2016).

Table. 2 Comparing the Current finding with other research findings which used four-model FLCAS proposed by Na (2007)

Studies	Information about the participants	Mean	ED
Current Study	**English Majors at Ethiopian Universities (n=103)**	**3.47**	**0.45**
Berowa (2018)	Non-English Major students at Philippines (n=60)	3.05	0.18
Gerencheal (2016)	English Majors at Ethiopian University (n=78)	3.15	0.47
Fariadian et al. (2014)	English Majors at Iranian College(n=80)	2.47	0.44
Shabani (2012)	English Majors at Iranian University (n=61)	3.05	0.55

The above table clearly shows that students in the current study had higher level of anxiety in language learning comparing to the four studies conducted in different contexts using the four-model FLCAS proposed by Na (2007). This could be resulted in by the fact that students were forcefully assigned to study English major since almost all the students did not select it. From the outset, students were coming with negative attitude to the field of study believing that studying English is most difficult one comparing to other studies.(Gerencheal & Mishra, 2019)

In order to create relative basis for examining the level of students' anxiety based on the results of FLCAS mean, each student's raw score was also converted to z-scores. This helps to classify the students into low-, medium-, and high anxiety group levels. This method has been used by many researchers (e.g. Marcos-Llinás & Garau, 2009; Tran et al., 2013) . Students whose z-scores were one or more than one standard deviation above the mean of the FLCAS were considered as highly-anxious, and those whose z-scores were one or more than one standard deviations below the mean were considered

as least-anxious. On the other hand, the students whose z-scores were within a standard deviation of the mean were considered as moderately-anxious students.

Table. 3 Mean FLCAS Scores by Anxiety Group using z-score

Anxiety Group	n	percentile	Mean	SD
High Anxiety	20	19.42%	4.11	.13
Medium Anxiety	66	64.08%	3.45	.24
Low Anxiety	17	16.5%	2.79	.16
Total	103	100%	3.47	.45

The above table shows that majority (83.5%) of the students were suffering from moderate to high degree of English language anxiety among the learners. Nearly two third (64.08%) of the students were experiencing moderate level of anxiety (m=3.45; SD= .24). 19.42% (n=20) of the students were also suffering from high level of anxiety (m=4.11; SD=.13) while learning English in the classroom. However, small number of students i.e., 16.5% (n=17) had low levels of anxiety. This finding was found similar to the study of Tran et al. (2013) in which they found 14.56% , 68.97%, and 16.47% of the Vietnamese University students experienced high-, medium-, and low level of anxieties respectively. In the USA context, Marcos-Llinás & Garau (2009) finding was also very similar to the current study in which they reported that large number of (67.91%) students who were learning Spanish experienced moderate level of anxiety, 17.16% and 14.93% were also high- and low levels of anxiety respectively. In conclusion, this investigation   found that more students at least eight among ten students were experiencing English language anxiety ranging from medium- to high levels. Hence, this finding revealed that more Ethiopian University students learning EFL were seriously suffering from FLA far beyond the finding of Horwitz and her colleagues in which they reported that one third of University students were experiencing some degree of anxiety(Horwitz et al., 1986).

Gender and FLA

In the below table 4, the FLCAS score of the students are classified by gender. This statistics shows that girls had higher degree of anxiety level (m=3.33; SD=.42) compared to the boys (m=3.67; SD=.42). And to determine if those differences were statistically significant, an independent-sample t-test was also used.

Table. 4 Mean anxiety scores, standard deviations, T–Value and level of significance for the variable of gender

Gender	n	percent	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig(2tailed)
Male	60	58.25	3.3273	.42059	90.489	-4.049	.000
Female	43	41.75	3.6681	.42171			
Total	103	100	3.4695	.45174			

The independent t-test also reveals that anxiety was significantly varied by gender in which females were found more significantly varied than males (t=-4.049, p=.000). So, it could be safe to conclude that anxiety levels between male and female Ethiopian EFL university students is significantly varied by gender in which females had statistically significant higher level of anxiety. So this study was found similar to

some research findings conducted over different contexts in which females were found more anxious compared to males (e.g, Gerencheal, 2016; Koul et al., 2009; Park & French, 2013; Wei & Yodkamlue, 2012)

On the other hand, this study was also contrasted with some other studies conducted on different contexts in which they reported males were more significantly anxious compared to their female counterparts(e.g Fariadian et al., 2014; MacIntyre et al., 2003) and again with studies which showed no statistical significance were found between male and female anxiety levels (e.g Aida, 1994; Razak, Yassin, & Mohamad Maasum, 2017; Taghinezhad et al., 2016). This is true

V. CONCLUSION

The study aimed at investigating the level of anxiety in Ethiopian university students who studied EFL as major. This objective attempted to see the level and extent of English language anxiety experienced by the students. It was also attempted to classify the students in to three groups of anxiety: high anxiety, medium anxiety, and low anxiety using the z-score analysis. The second objective was also to examine gender differences in the level of anxiety among Ethiopian university EFL students. The result of the first objective showed that most students (83.5%) were suffering from language anxiety while learning EFL ranging from moderate anxiety level to high anxiety level. The overall mean of all the students (m=3.47, SD=0.45) also indicated that the students were found at risk zone. Among the four domains of the FLCAS recommended by Na (2007), most of the students were suffering from communication apprehension. The result of the second question showed that there was statistically significant difference between females and males on which female students were more suffering from their counterpart males in learning EFL in the classroom. And this finding supported to Gerencheal's finding in which he found that the Ethiopian culture does not encourage youngsters especially females in front of others mainly elders because most Ethiopian families mainly from rural areas assumed that silence is golden(Gerencheal, 2016). It is true that FLA is highly context oriented, so the result in the relationship between FLA and gender a controversial matter which varies from culture to culture.

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