Students' Language and Reading Anxieties and English Achievement

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Abstract-Anxiety in learning English is given consideration by language teachers in the teaching-learning process over the years. With much apprehension, it will hinder students' interest and thus prevent them from learning the language smoothly. This case is evident in the male and female students of Sta. Lucia National High a School Pagadian City. Because of this, the three variables namely: Language Anxiety, Reading Anxiety and students' Achievement will be determined in this study along with its relationships. This investigation used the questionnaires of Horwitz which are the (FLCAS) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale and the (FLRAS) Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale. School records, particularly two grading grades in English subject served as basis in determining their English achievement. Using the Pearson Coefficient of Correlation, significant relationships between variables were determined. Using descriptive statistics statuses of the two variables were also established. In the study, it was found out that, male students have high language and reading anxieties. While female students have low language anxiety and high reading anxiety. As to the achievement in English, male students' performance is fair while good for female students. A significant relationship was established between students' English achievement and their language and reading anxieties.

Keywords- Language Anxieties, Reading Anxieties, Communication, Negative Evaluation, Test, Anxiety, Grammar-Letter Symbol, Comprehension, Achievement, Speaking Anxiety

I. INTRODUCTION

Apprehensions second language acquisition is an area which is given a great deal since it was found out that it can hinder the language acquisition among students. (Steinberg & Horwitz, 1986). Various studies on anxiety have addressed different types of target language anxiety and their effects on speech. However, there are only very few studies that center on how anxiety in the second language can give an effect on group work and teacher-fronted environments (Gregerson, 1999). The study claimed that students get apprehended especially when doing an oral recitation in their classes. On the other hand, there are also studies that relate to the various aspects of the second language to the many mentioned environments. But there were no or only very few studies that focus on pronunciation in the group and teacher-fronted environments and its possible influence on the environments.

Communication apprehensions refer to situational anxieties which both include interpersonal communication and oral expression. Anxiety, which is regarded as a personality factor, plays a significant affective role in learning the second language. This study would like to find out whether reading comprehension and anxiety will have an effect to the following independent variables namely: family background, gender, and others and they will discover more of the sources of such anxiety in learning a second language.

Second language apprehensions have been pointed out as one of the biggest factors that greatly affect the learning of English (Aida, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994b). Among the skills namely: listening, writing, reading and speaking, it was in speaking were studied on language anxieties focus on since it is known to be an anxiety-provoking skill in the said areas (e.g., Aida, 1994; Phillips, 1992; Young, 1986). It was too found out students vary their anxiety levels in the macro-skills mentioned and thus, numerous studies were then conducted in connection to language skills emerge aside from speaking (e.g., Cheng, Horwitz & Schallert, 1999; Saito, Horwitz, & Garza, 1999; Vogely, 1998). There was a little attention given to reading anxiety but until recently (Saito et al., 1999; Shi & Liu, 2006). Reading doesn't require interaction but begins in the brain of a person that refers to us an individual activity. (Bernhardt, 1991). Readers were regarded to have a lot of advantages since they can do rereading if possible along with thinking. Anxiety in such area is neglected.

Readers always play an important role known role in the comprehension of text since, in reading, the reader will actively construct meaning from a socio-cognitive perspective (Bernhardt, 1991). Readers can produce different interpretations creatively when interacting with it this is because of his schema or background knowledge that helped him relate to the text and not to mention his language knowledge as well. In reading performance, major factors that affect it was the second language knowledge such as grammar, word recognition skills, discourse knowledge, and background knowledge. (Coady, 1979; Grabe, 1991). Bernhardt (2005) found that about 50% was accounted for second language knowledge and first language literacy in reading performance and such factors fail to explain the inconsistency of reading

performance. She emphasizes that previous models in reading, the effect such as anxiety were neglected that relates to the discrepancy of performance in reading. Indeed, studies in different target languages shown that there exists anxiety in reading among learners that make it related to the performance of language reading. For instance, Yamashita (2004) found that students' reading anxiety L2 was higher than that in reading L1. The American students learning Japanese, Russian and French as their foreign languages in Saito et al. (1999) reported that the levels of their reading anxiety vary. Students whose second language is Spanish in Sellers' (2000) study also experienced anxiety in reading. Because of this, reading anxiety had an effect on reading strategies use and passage content recall. Shi and Liu (2006) in their study found that reading anxiety in the second language had no correlation between scores in general language proficiency and reading comprehension among learners of English in China. Reading comprehension performance of students is very low based on the standardized and national tests administered to high school and elementary students in the NEAT and NAT. Mathews (1996) described the reading instruction in the Sessional School in Edinburgh, Scotland, which was reported to American educators in 1831:

Notions on reading say that it is the power of right utterances to specific sounds in relation to the observation of certain figures, and it is in the mouth of a reader where those sounds utter succeeds and where fluency is manifested. Child's exposure to book and other helpful materials that will build his foundation on specific areas such as on colors, letters, and others is indebted to him and not to the one who teaches him. (p. 55, as cited in Resnick & Resnick, 1977, p. 380).

Moving from the early stage, many forward-looking educators advocated reading (interaction) to derive meaning. The "reading for deriving meaning" concept appeared in the sixteenth century but thrived in the nineteenth century in the books by Putnam (1986), Farnham (1995) noticed that the success of a reader laid in the comprehension of the author's thought. In *The Sentence Method of Teaching Reading, Writing and Spelling: A Manual for Teachers,* Franham (1995) defined reading (interaction) from its two-fold function: Reading (interaction) consists: ─first, in gaining the thoughts of an author from written or printed language: ─ second, in giving oral expression to these thoughts in the language of the author, so that the same thoughts are conveyed to the hearer. It is important that this two-fold function of reading (interaction) should be fully recognized."

Previous studies have also shown that reading anxiety levels unlike second language anxiety in class, vary depending on different target languages (Saito et al., 1999; Sellers, 2000; Shi & Liu, 2006). Second languages like Spanish, French, English, Japanese and Russian have been studied as the target languages in relation to foreign language reading anxiety. Saito et al. (1999) found that students experienced more anxiety in reading Japanese than in French and Russian. Shi and Liu (2006) evidenced that Chinese students who study English gained high reading anxiety than students who are AmericanSaito et al. The inclusion of unexplored target languages such as Chinese will enrich and expand what we have already known about second language reading anxiety.

In the Philippines especially in Mindanao performance of students in their English classes is deteriorating because of many factors including poor background knowledge and available reading materials. In Pagadian City, it is clear in the results of the achievement tests given to students in elementary and high schools where reading comprehension scores were very low and alarming which means high school English teachers should do something to increase students' performance in reading comprehension.

Sta. Lucia National High School is one of the public schools under the supervision of the superintendent of the Division of Pagadian City where achievement in English is low. The researcher also noticed in her own classes that students have anxieties in learning the target language; they seemed hesitant and afraid of tackling the subject. That is why this study is to be undertaken to help improve the students' achievement in English particularly their grades.

The researcher assumed that numerous studies already existed that investigated the performance and anxiety of learners in the target language. However, few local studies are conducted regarding the aforementioned variables.

The conduct of this investigation is timely and of great help because the result of this endeavor would give additional enlightenment to the stakeholders in second language acquisition. For the research subjects, this would examine their language and reading anxieties and their English achievement. For language teachers, this would be our basis for designing teaching strategies and methodologies that will lessen the anxieties of students to maximize the learning language.

To the researchers, the result of this study would be a beneficial source for future studies that would relate to the variables investigated. In general, the conduct of this investigation is beneficial as far as second language acquisition is concerned.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this paper is to look for significant relationships existed among variables namely: students' language and reading anxieties and English achievement of fourth-year students both male and female of Sta. Lucia National High School.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study focused on language and reading anxieties and English achievement of the student responses. Language anxieties include communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and anxiety of language classes. Reading anxieties include letter, symbol and grammar anxiety, speaking-reading anxiety, pre and while reading anxiety and comprehension anxiety English achievement is based on students first and second grading grades. The descriptive type of research was used in the investigation with the survey as the main method in generating the data on

language and reading anxieties. The respondents of this study were the male and female fourth-year students of Sta. Lucia National High School.

The instruments used were the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz. Each item of the questionnaire required the students to show the extent of their agreement or disagreement on the statements that explains their experiences in learning the second language in their respective classes. Of the 33 items included in the questionnaire, eight items are for communication, nine for fear of negative evaluation, five for test anxiety and eleven items for anxiety of English classes. Each item offers 4-point Likert-type responses: Strongly agree (SA)=4; Agree (A)=3; N; Disagree (D)=2; Strongly disagree (SD)=1. The next instrument was the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) developed by Horwitz. It has 16 items which allowed students to share the degree of their agreement from the statements on how they feel when reading English. Among the 16 items 4 of them are for the letter, symbol and grammar anxiety, another four items for speaking-reading anxiety, three items for pre and while reading anxiety and 4 items for comprehension anxiety. Each item offers 4-point Likert-type responses. Strongly Agree (SA)=4; Agree (A)=3; Disagree (D)=2; Strongly disagree (SD)=1School records, particularly the first and second grading grades in English of the students served as basis in determining their English achievement.

The following steps were observed in gathering the data of this study. First, permission from School Principal was sought first and upon approval, the test was then administered, those who were present were given the questionnaire. The undersigned personally administered the questionnaires to ensure that students understood what was expected by them and that if there were questions and or clarifications raised she was able to immediately answer. The directions were read aloud for clarity and any questions were answered along the way. The students were instructed not to put their name on the survey. The researcher read each question aloud and the responses. The researcher collected the completed questionnaires from each participant.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data gathered the following results were seen:

Male respondents themselves high in all of the four predictors of anxiety in language-communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and anxiety in English class. Their overall mean response indicates high level of language anxiety while female respondents rated themselves high communication anxiety and fear of negative evaluation while the low for test anxiety and anxiety in English classes. Their overall mean result showed that female respondents have low language anxiety (cf Table 1).

TABLE I. SUMMARY OF THE LEVEL OF STUDENTS' LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Predictors	Male		Female	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
1. Communication Anxiety	2.66	High	2.70	High
2.Fear of Negative Evaluation	2.65	High	2.65	High
3. Test Anxiety	2.65	High	1.81	Low
4. Anxiety of English Class	2.64	High	2.09	Low
Over-all Mean Response	2.65	High	2.31	Low

*Hypothetical Mean Range: 3.26 – 4.00: Very High, 2.51 – 3.25: High, 1.76-2.50: Low, 1.00-1.75: Very Low

Another is, male respondents, rated themselves high in the following predictors: letter, symbol, grammar anxiety; speaking-reading anxiety and comprehension anxiety. They rated themselves low in pre and while reading anxiety. Their overall mean response of 2.56 revealed that they have high reading anxiety while female students rated themselves high in speaking-reading anxiety and comprehension anxiety while low in the letter, symbol, grammar anxiety, and pre and while reading anxiety. Their overall mean response of 2.55 showed that students have high reading anxiety (cf Table 2).

Finally, students' English achievement level based on their grade point average based on was 81.52 (Fair) for males and 84.55 (Good) for females (cf Table 3).

TABLE II. SUMMARY OF THE LEVEL OF READING ANXIETY OF THE STUDENTS

Predictors	Male		Female	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
1. Letter, Symbol, Grammar Anxiety	2.54	High	2.50	Low
2. Speaking-Reading Anxiety	2.63	High	2.66	High
3. Pre and While Reading Anxiety	2.49	Low	2.34	Low
4. Comprehension Anxiety	2.58	High	2.70	High
Over-all Mean Response	2.56	High	2.55	High

*Hypothetical Mean Range: 3.26 – 4.00: Very High, 2.51 – 3.25: High, 1.76-2.50: Low, 1.00-1.75: Very Low

TABLE III.   LEVEL OF STUDENTS' ENGLISH ACHIEVEMENT BASED ON GRADE POINT AVERAGE

Predictors	Male		Female	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
95 – 100 – (Excellent)	1	1.03	1	0.76
90 – 94 – (Very Good)	15	15.46	30	22.90
85 – 89 – (Good)	20	20.62	45	34.35
80 – 84 – (Fair)	20	20.62	25	19.08
75 – 79 – (Poor)	28	28.87	26	19.85
74 & below – (Very Poor-Failed)	13	13.40	4	3.05
Total	97	100	131	100
Overall MPS	81.52 (Fair)		84.55 (Good)	

Relationships of the variables were also established. For *Students' Language Anxiety*, the testing yielded a Pearson "r" value of 0.8105 and 0.039 probability value suggest a lower level of significance which accepted the hypothesis and established a significant relationship between students' language anxiety and English academic achievement of the students. On the other hand, for *reading anxiety,* the testing yielded a Pearson "r" value of 0.7924 and probability value of 0.041 that is lower than the level of significance which accepted the hypothesis and established a significant relationship between students' reading anxieties and English achievement of the students.

V.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results, it was found out that male students have high language and reading anxieties. On the other hand, female students have low language anxiety and high reading anxiety. As to the academic achievement in English of the two groups of students, male students' performance is fair while good for female students. A significant relationship was established between students' English achievement and their language and reading anxieties.

With this, some recommendations followed in order to address anxiety in the target language. For the purpose of improving the performance of students in the language, it is important that teachers and learners take meaningful measures in order to overcome anxiety levels especially the males whose anxiety level was high since language anxiety affects students' performance in English.

In order to reduce the anxiety levels in language some important reminders such as setting of realistic and meaningful goals; providing a helpful and conducive environment; letting students open up themselves by making them experience creative strategies that would allow them to gain experiences that will strengthen them, and providing learners chances of using the language in a meaningful situation in expression and negotiation of meanings. A relaxing and pleasant learning atmosphere or environment is important to reduce students' anxiety. When a teacher becomes a facilitator or director, it is helpful to create a learner-friendly, supportive and secure classroom atmosphere. In such a class, the teacher and the students are all actors and all the students are actively involved in classroom activities such as playing games, singing English songs, role-playing, etc. These can make students relax in class and concentrate on learning tasks. Role-playing is an extremely useful method to lessen anxiety in learning the language. According to Tompkins (1998), role-playing lets students learn and practice the new language in a non-threatening setting, which can encourage students' thinking and creativity, and help them develop and improve their language skills. (Young, 1991), playing games with the language can reduce language anxiety. The teacher is encouraged to use corrective feedback strategies when correcting students' errors when using the language, for example, using encouraging words and minimizing criticism. Teachers can reduce language anxiety by believing that mistakes are just a normal part in language acquisition and that everyone has to make certain mistakes to become fluent in language communication. Therefore, students can take an optimistic view of language errors and realize that making mistakes during language learning is evitable and normal. Students feel more at ease when the manner of his teacher's correcting his mistakes is not harsh and when the teacher does not overreact to mistakes (Young, 1991).

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