Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety: A Case Study Of Anxiety Faced By IELTS Preparatory Learners In Writing English Text

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Abstract

An individual may face anxiety in the process of learning English as a foreign language. This paper is set to bring into focus anxiety that affects the English writing skills of IELTS preparatory learners at International Islamic University, Islamabad and Oxbridge Institute of English Language, Rawalpindi. This paper collects data from 40 learners of the aforementioned institutions through close-ended questionnaire adapting Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz et al. (1986), for investigating the anxiety that is being faced by these learners in writing English. These learners were selected through simple random sampling. The data is represented quantitatively in terms of frequency (percentage) through column charts. The findings of this study reveal that these learners feel anxious while writing in English as they face the fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. It is also noted that the academic reasons causing anxiety for these learners in writing English text include insufficient knowledge about the topic and lacking vocabulary. The anxiety can be minimized if the teacher plays the role of facilitator more than an instructor, gives these learners enough time to prepare before writing task, and provides them an intimate environment. This paper could help the IELTS trainers not only at the aforementioned institutions but working anywhere, to bring such an environment in classroom that helps the IELTS preparatory learners to cope with anxiety. However, there is a need to explore further studies by increasing the number of students, considering both male and female, adapting other FLCAS, and focusing on skills other than writing.

Keywords: anxiety, FLCAS, IELTS preparatory learners.

Introduction

These days English language plays different roles. First, English has become a global language. Besides enjoying the status of a global language, it has become foreign, official, semi-official, and associated language in various parts of the world. The language if holding various roles makes it significant to investigate that how much a learner feels anxious or comfortable in those particular moments when he or she learns it as a foreign language. In Pakistan, English language enjoys its glory as an official language and it is used widely as a medium of instructions across educational institutes. Since anxiety affects the learning process, so equally it can affect the learners' goals. These could be IELTS (International English Language Testing System) preparatory learners. IELTS is a test conducted for those looking to migrate to English-speaking country. Various educational institutions in

Pakistan such as university and academies provide IELTS training. These institutions help enhancing the language skills of learners such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Learners in such training may face anxiety when they find themselves in the process of learning English as foreign language. Hence, the basic aim of this study is to explore how anxiety affects the English writing skills of IELTS preparatory learners at International Islamic University, Islamabad and Oxbridge Institute of English Language, Rawalpindi. This issue can be explored by adapting Horwitz et al. (1986), Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This study aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. To bring into focus how anxiety affects the IELTS preparatory learners at International Islamic University, Islamabad and Oxbridge Institute of English Language, Rawalpindi, specifically when they write an English text.

2. To know the academic reasons behind facing anxiety by these learners while writing English text.

3. To give these learners various solutions to cope with anxiety.

Review of Literature

According to Brown (2000), anxiety refers to those factors which affect our emotional being. MacIntyre & Gardner (1989, p.284) view it "as the feeling of tension and apprehension associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning". Horwitz et al. (1986, p.31) conceptualizes foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process.'' Machan (2009) defines foreign language anxiety as language's distinctive characteristics which present single label English for fifteen hundred years, but thousands of miles of linguistic variations. These linguistics

variations can be studied in terms of grammar, style, strategies, and discursive conventions. In addition, Tooth (2010) state that language anxiety is a multilayered concept because we have many types of anxiety such as trait and state-specific anxiety, situation-specific anxiety, and anxiety in social contexts and instructional situations.

Anxiety can be of different types. MacIntyre & Gardner (1991) define trait-anxiety as one of the features of an individual's personality which can be applicable to a wide range of situations. It is the type of anxiety that an individual faces moment to moment which can change over time and also vary in intensity. Horwitz et al. (1986) illustrates situation-specific anxiety as a type of anxiety that is produced in a language learning contexts. The researcher also describes that foreign language anxiety operates on three related performance anxieties: communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (FNE). Aida (1994) develops her own scale based on different aspects: speech anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of failing the class.

Plethora of research has been conduct to address foreign language anxiety. Saito et al. (1999) believe that facilitating language anxiety motivates learners to accept new learning tasks and challenges so that they could improve their performance. To address foreign language anxiety, Koul et al. (2009) makes comparison of male and female motivational goals of Thai college students for learning English language and they conclude that females are more academic oriented, and instrumental than males towards learning English language. But they also investigate that females show high level of anxiety than males in spite of being more instrumental. This study highlights that fear of negative evaluation and fear of failing English class produce anxiety in females. Similarly, Hosseini and Khazali (2013) notice after using Reynolds and Richmond's Anxiety Scale (RCMAS), that at elementary schools in Tehran,

females show high level of anxiety than males and are found more worry. In addition, Nunez-Pena et al. (2016) also highlight that females are found more anxious than males but show great academic achievements. They arrive at this conclusion after collecting data from 168 students at university of Barcelona. Zarie and Feizollahi (2018) seem more interested in finding out the different ways that could affect anxiety. In this regard, they investigate the concept of mapping and brainstorming that affect writing anxiety and accuracy by conducting experimental study. They notice that based on lexical accuracy, the two experimental groups got the same mean score, but on grammatical accuracy and in writing anxiety, the concept mapping group obtained the highest mean than brainstorming group.

Foreign language anxiety has been explored by various researchers in the Pakistani context. Hussain et al. (2011) examine foreign language anxiety of 10th grade students and their attitude towards foreign language learning. They note that Girls are found less anxious in English language class but hold more attitude towards English than male. Similarly, Azher et al. (2010) conclude after collecting data through questionnaire from 146 undergraduate students of second and sixth semester of different departments at University of Sargodha that female students are less anxious in learning a foreign language than males. On the other hand, Dar and Khan (2015) assess the foreign language anxiety of both public and private-sector university students and notice that these students show an average level of writing anxiety. Khattak et al. (2011) bring into focus that university students face anxiety while learning English language because they feel worry about making mistakes and they also worry about failing the exam. Aziz and Asih (2023) add that English self-confidence scale can be used as valid and reliable tool to assess Pakistani students experiencing language anxiety.

According to Masood (2019), anxiety and stress among university student are alarming and can be resolved by counseling the students and also teachers and administration need to play their role by giving them motivation and providing them unstressed environment. Aamir (2018) suggests that to get rid of anxious and depressed environment, the individuals need to challenge and trust their own, and they need to stay away from isolation by making reading and writing as their hobbies.

In the light of available literature, it is significant to understand that anxiety has been found very influential in foreign language learning. This issue has been investigated by various researchers at national and international level. Their studies arrive at a conclusion that anxiety affects the process of learning a foreign language. Based on the current studies, it is noticed that most of researches have been conducted to assess the anxiety faced by the learners at school or university level but not much attention is given to study the anxiety that could be faced by IELTS preparatory learners. Therefore, this study aims at studying the anxiety in writing English faced by IELTS preparatory learners at International Islamic University, Islamabad and Oxbridge Institute of English Language, Rawalpindi by adapting FLCAS given by Horwitz et al. (1986).

Research Methodology

Participants of the study

Participants of this study are the 40 male students of IELTS preparatory learners at International Islamic University Islamabad, and Oxbridge Institute of English Language, Rawalpindi. These learners are in different range of years such as 19-23, 24-29, 30-35, and 36-40, and are having different educational backgrounds Such as MBA(finance), BS in Biotechnology, BSC in Agriculture (Hons), PhD in Arabic, MS in Biosciences, BBA, BS in Computer Science, MSC in Microbiology, and BSC in Engineering.

Data collection tool

To collect the data for the study, questionnaire is used as a data collection tool. The questionnaire consists of 5 points Likert scale that is adapted from Horwitz et al. (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The options provided to the learners are Strongly Agree, Agree, Uncertain, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. These five points Likert Scale questions are 14 in numbers.

Procedure for Collecting Data through Questionnaire

The questionnaires were distributed among 40 IELTS preparatory learners at International Islamic University, Islamabad and Oxbridge Institute of English Language, Rawalpindi during their normal class sessions. These learners were selected through simple random sampling. The researchers first instructed them for filling questionnaire and were collected upon completion.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data collected from the questionnaire is quantitative in nature and it is analyzed through textual analysis. The researcher uses the descriptive statistics in the form of percentages. The results obtained through questionnaire have been presented in different sections that are discussed below:

Analysis of Questions Regarding Fear of Negative Evaluation

These IELTS preparatory learners are asked questions regarding fear of negative evaluation. These questions are 4 in numbers. The responses of learners to those questions are expressed in term of frequency (percentage) via column charts that are discussed below:

Column Chart 1

Frequency (percentage) Distribution of Learners' Responses about Fear of Negative Evaluation
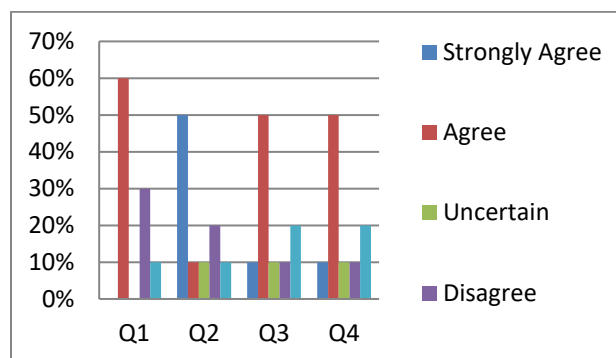
Q1 is coded for the question, "I feel nervous when I write in English."

Q2 is coded for the question, "I feel anxious when my teacher asks me to write English text."

Q3 is coded for the question, "I fear that other students in class will laugh at me if I do mistake in writing English."

Q4 is coded for the question, "It pressurizes me when the teacher asks me to write on board in front of class.

The above column chart demonstrates that these learners feel anxious when they write in English and so the percentage of the option ''Agree" and "Strongly Agree" is recorded 60 and 10 respectively. Few of those learners (30%) disagree with it. Majority of learners (60%) agree that it makes them anxious when their teacher asks them to write English text. It is also noticed that the majority of learners (60%) are afraid of the fact that other students in class will laugh at him if he makes mistakes while writing English text. In addition, writing in front of class also pressurizes majority of these learners (60%).

Analysis of Test Anxiety

These learners are also asked questions regarding test anxiety. These questions are 3 in numbers. The responses of learners to those questions are expressed in term of frequency (percentage) via column charts that are discussed below:

Column Chart 2

Frequency (percentage) Distribution of Learners' Responses Regarding Test Anxiety
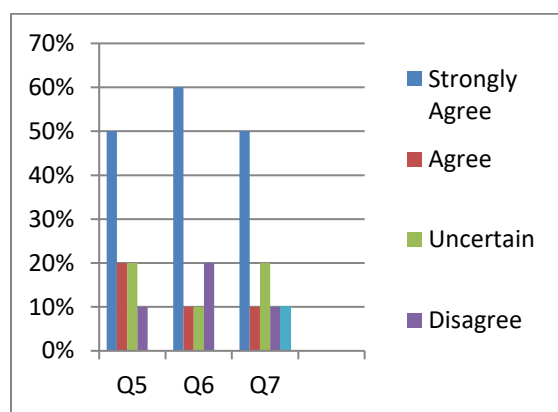
Q5 is coded for the question, "It is anxious for me when I do not understand the correction made by teacher in English writing."

Q6 is coded for the question, "I get nervous when the teacher asks me to take participation in writing activities."

Q7 is coded for the questions, "I get nervous when I forget things while writing English."

The above column chart shows that these learners get anxious when they do not understand the correction made by their teacher in their English writing and so the percentage of the option ''Agree" and "Strongly Agree" is recorded 50 and 20 respectively. Majority of learners (70%) agree that it makes them nervous when their teacher asks them to participate in writing activities. Moreover, majority of these learners (60%) get nervous when they forget ideas while writing English.

Analysis of Academic Reasons Causing Anxiety in Writing English

These learners are also asked questions regarding academic reasons that could cause anxiety in writing English text. These questions are 3 in numbers. Again, the responses of learners to those questions are expressed in term of frequency (percentage) via column charts that are discussed below:

Column Chart 3

Frequency (percentage) Distribution of Learners' Responses Regard Academic Reasons Causing Anxiety in Writing English
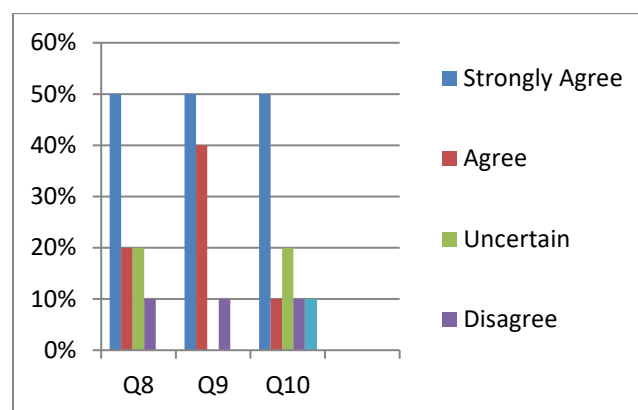
Q8 is coded for the question, "Insufficient knowledge about the topic makes me uncomfortable in writing English."

Q9 is coded for the question, "Lacking vocabulary makes it irritating for me to organize thoughts in English writing".

Q10 is coded for the question, "I feel more nervous in writing English for academic than recreation purposes."

The above column chart demonstrates that these learners feel uncomfortable when they do not have sufficient knowledge about the topic; hence the percentage of the option "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" is recorded 50 and 20 respectively. Majority of learners (90%) agree that they do not organize their ideas in English writing as they do not have enough vocabulary. Moreover, majority of these learners (60%) get nervous when they feel nervous while writing in English for academic purposes rather than recreation purposes.

Analysis of Given Solutions Regard Coping with Anxiety in Writing English

These learners are also given solutions to cope with anxiety they face in writing English. They are given 4 solutions. The responses of learners to those solutions are expressed in term of frequency (percentage) via column charts that are discussed below:

Column Chart 4

Frequency (percentage) Distribution of Learners' Responses to Given Solutions Regard Coping with Anxiety in Writing English
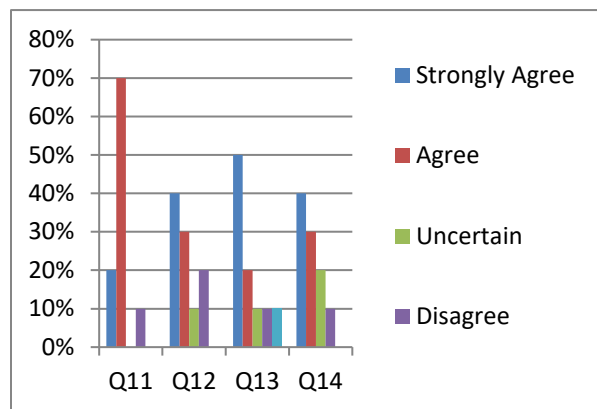
Q11 is coded for the question, "It is comfortable for me when the teacher gives time to prepare before a writing task."

Q12 is coded for the question, "I feel comfortable when the teacher plays the role of facilitator than instructor."

Q13 is coded for the question, "I feel relax if the teacher asks me to write on topic of my choice."

Q14 is coded for the question, "I feel comfortable in classroom if the teacher adopts an intimate environment for us."

The above column chart shows that these learners need time to prepare before a writing task, so the percentage of the option "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" is recorded 70 and 20 respectively. Majority of learners (70%) agree that they feel more comfortable when their teacher plays the role of facilitator more than an instructor. Similarly, majority of these learners (70%) agree that they feel relax when teacher asks them to write about topic of their choice. In addition, they also agree (70%) that they will feel relax if the teacher adopts an intimate environment in class.

Discussion

Based on the questions asked from these IELTS preparatory learners, it can be asserted that these learners face anxiety in writing English as they face the fear of negative evaluation. The fear of negative evaluation makes them anxious when they write English text and they also feel the fear of making mistakes while writing in English. Furthermore, these learners find themselves in much pressure when their teacher asks them to write English text on board in front of class.

Besides facing the fear of negative evaluation, these learners also face test anxiety. The test anxiety makes them anxious when they do not understand the correction made by their teachers and they also worry in a situation when the teacher asks them to take participation in English writing activities. In such situation, they forget things when they start writing in English.

There could be some academic reasons that may cause anxiety for these learners when they write English text. This study concludes that insufficient knowledge about the topic and lacking vocabulary make it uncomfortable for these learners to write English text. They find it difficult to organize ideas in writing English. They get nervous when they write for academic purposes. They think they would feel comfortable if they are asked to write for recreational purposes. Additionally, this study recommends the following solutions to encounter anxiety when these learners write English text;

A) The IELTS preparatory learners must be given enough time to prepare for writing activities in English.

B) These learners would be more relax if the teacher plays the role of a facilitator rather than an instructor. This solution is parallel with studies conducted by Tanveer (2007) and Pappameheil (2002) as both the studies recommend that the learners will perform better if their teacher facilitates them. Moreover, this study recommends that for better learning outcome, the teacher needs to bring an intimate environment for learners.

C) These learners might be given freedom to write in English about the topic of their choice.

Conclusion

This study concludes that anxiety affects the English writing skills of IELTS preparatory learners at International Islamic University, Islamabad and Oxbridge Institute of English language, Rawalpindi. The anxiety is investigated by adapting Horwitz et al. (1986), Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). By adapting this scale, it is noted that these learners face anxiety as they face the fear of negative evaluation. Along with it, they also face test anxiety. It is also brought into focus that lacking vocabulary and insufficient knowledge about the topic make these learners uncomfortable when they write in English. It is also significant to consider that learners might be indulged in recreational writing activities so that anxiety could be minimized. Also, they must be given enough time to prepare for English writing task and their choices must be considered. The anxiety could be minimized if the teacher integrates intimate environment in classroom for learning.

This study is significant in a sense as it brings into focus anxiety that affects the English writing skills of IELTS preparatory learners at the aforesaid institutions by adapting FLCAS by Horwitz et al. (1986). It could help the IELTS trainers or teachers not only at the aforesaid institutions but also all over Pakistan, to bring such environment in classroom that helps the IELTS preparatory learners to cope with anxiety. It could help the trainers working anywhere to improve those different academic reasons associated with learners that bring anxiety in their way of learning a foreign language.

This study was limited to International Islamic University, Islamabad and Oxbridge Institute of English Language, Rawalpindi but ignoring other institutions in Islamabad and Rawalpindi, and also in other areas of Pakistan. This study was based on collecting data from only 40 students but future researchers can further explore this study by increasing the number of students. They could also adapt the foreign language classroom anxiety scale other than Horwitz et al. (1986). Future researchers can also consider the gender differences pertinent to anxiety in foreign language learning as this study collected the data only from male respondents. Future studies can also recommend various other solutions that could help the IELTS preparatory learners to minimize anxiety. Moreover, studies in future can focus on other language skills as this study focused on writing.

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