Lower Secondary Students' Arabic Speaking Anxiety: A Foreign Language Literacy Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Speaking in a foreign language classroom can be extremely anxiety provoking for some students. There are many studies on foreign language anxiety (FLA). The studies show that anxiety influences achievement and performance in speaking. However, most of the previous research have investigated FLA in English speaking contexts. Hence, this study aims to investigate speaking anxiety among Arabic Language learners in secondary schools from the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The students (n=40) were selected following the random sampling method. The established questionnaire of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was used for collecting the data. This questionnaire consists of four factors namely test anxiety, communication apprehension, anxiety in the classroom and fear of negative evaluation. The researcher followed descriptive statistical methods including means and standard deviation values to address the research questions. The study shows that the process of learning the Arabic Language has significant impact on students in learning a foreign language especially in daily secondary schools. The findings show several concerns exist among the students while speaking Arabic in the classroom. The results can help Arabic Language teachers to understand students' anxiety in the process of teaching the language in the daily/non-boarding secondary schools which will contribute to literacy of Arabic Language at large.

Key words: Anxiety, Language Anxiety, Communication Anxiety, Arabic Speaking Skill

INTRODUCTION

Arabic Language is one of the foreign languages in Malaysian society which is offered in the Malaysian schools as an elective subject. The language has a long history related to the Muslim community in Malaysia. Thus, to appreciate the emergence of Arabic Language in the Malaysian system of education, understanding the background of how the Arabic language has developed in Malaysia is important.

The Emergence of Arabic Language in Malaysian System of Education

Arabic Language is one of the foreign languages that is offered at secondary schools in Malaysia especially for the Muslim community. Teaching and learning of Arabic in this country started way before the Independence Day at small institutions, known as "*Madrasah*" and "*Pondok*" and continued until today at secondary schools. Nowadays, the Arabic Language is treated as a formal subject at the secondary schools, as a foreign language subject and an elective subject for those in the religious schools. Under the direction of the Ministry of Education Malaysia, there are many initiatives taken to improve and empower the Arabic Language as a Foreign Language in the Malaysian education system. Such processes include developing a dynamic and global curricular, revising textbooks, encouraging the usage of teaching aids (including the utilisation of technology), offering a scholarship, providing appropriate budgets or funds and widening the opportunity for students to further studies in the Arabic Language related courses. According to Febrian et al. (2017), all these are the processes to make Arabic language as a common language for Muslims in general.

Arabic Speaking Skill and Anxiety

Like other languages, there are four essential skills needed to be acquired in learning Arabic among high school students; namely, reading, writing, listening and speaking. Among these skills, speaking skill is considered the most challenging skill by some. Besides, Bailey et al. (2003) state that speaking skills are generally a combination of some real-time, aural, verbal and productive skills. According to Kusnierek (2005), speaking skill designates a productive skill as it involves the production of one's language skill.

In explaining the real-time element, Ahmad et al. (2019) justified it by explaining that an interlocutor is required to wait for a speaker to speak the language and the speaker cannot subsequently revise his speech as he might do in

writing which connotes the real time element. The productive element is when the language being spoken is a direct output itself. In terms of the aural element, the response being received is interrelated with the input received aurally.

According to Winn and Olsen (1997), the level of speaking ranges from the highest to the lowest level. These levels can be identified in one's speech by being able to take apart into text, revelation, clause, phrase, word, morpheme and phoneme. Among these, being able to take apart the text is the highest level whereas only reaching the phoneme is the lowest level in speaking. In determining the success rate of speaking, Ahmad et al. (2019) stated that success in speaking is when one is able to communicate and present the message accurately while utilising the language at an acceptable level throughout these levels. For assessment purpose, knowing about these levels will help a test maker to understand what to expect from the test-takers' performance.

Anxiety is a very complex topic for discussion and many aspects are often associated with language learning. Since the 1970s, research on the consequence of anxiety as a second language has been widely done in the West. Horwitz et al. (1986) have conceptualised angst or apprehension in the process of learning the language as expressing the complexities of self-observation, beliefs, emotions and practices identified with the introductory language taken from the emergence of the language learning process.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anxiety is a constructed variable for any research. It is dynamic when related to foreign languages such as English and Arabic. There are many studies which focus on English as a foreign language and anxiety. However, the study on Arabic language and anxiety is just a few and limited. As for the feeling of anxiety itself, it could contribute both positively or negatively to the students' achievement in speaking the Arabic language.

Anxiety

According to MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), the combination of stress and fear contribute to apprehension and uneasiness in learning a foreign language or second language. Also, Gardner (1985) stated that the leading cause of failure in speaking foreign languages is anxiety. Researchers like Aida (1994) and Phillips (1992) found the connection of anxiety with the speaking skills in a foreign language. Following that, there are many studies carried out that discuss on anxiety and fear in the ability of words such as for listening (Elkhafaifi, 2005), reading (Saito et al., 1999; Sellers, 2000), and writing (Cheng et al., 1999).

Foreign Language Learning Anxiety

Language anxiety is a familiar topic in academic research on education. Students begin to realize their anxiety when they are unable to communicate effectively and persuasively whether in or out of the classroom. Previous studies, such as Horwitz (2001), Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) and

Melouah (2013), have shown that speaking skills are the most common factors of anxiety among students. The students' failure to convey a message or meaning in speech activities involving more than one friend is one of the causes of language anxiety. According to the discussion of Foreign Language Anxiety by Şimşek (2015), he concluded that it is an emotion that is difficult to be explained and is complicated. Thus, the results of these literature reviews had shown and indicate that anxiety is multidimensional which is also supported by MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), Horwitz (2001) and Young (1990). In recent years, researchers have started to investigate FLA more specifically in terms of language skills; for example, speaking skills by Leong and Ahmadi (2017), listening skills by Lili (2015), writing skills by Daud, Daud, & Kassim (2016), and reading skills by Paci (2018). Many of these empirical studies of language skills like speaking, reading and listening adopt the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as their instrument for studying Foreign Language Anxiety.

Tóth (2006) stated that the study on language anxiety is also present in English as a foreign language. However, there were not much found. Hence, for the Arabic language, there were even fewer studies on anxiety for instance by Elkhafaifi 2005). Among the studies found are in the area of learning language strategy (Che Haron et al., 2016); macro-skills in learning of Arabic (Abdullahi et al., 2018a); and technology in teaching Arabic (Abdullahi et al., 2018b).

This could be because the process of education in the second language is challenging and not merely as a native language (Pinter, 2006). There have been studies that have successfully identified some of the problems faced by learners in learning a foreign language. Similarly, according to Pan and Yan (2012), there are numerous suggestions put forward for better learning processes based on the level of skills required by students.

Education and Literacy in Foreign Language

Generally, the Education System in Malaysia which are comprised of the Primary, Secondary and Higher Education have embedded the National Education Philosophy which focuses on a balanced education system in four (4) aspects namely; physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual balance (Chew, 2018). According to Chew (2012), the level of literacy among secondary school students is at a satisfactory level which necessitates the Ministry of Education Malaysia to implement the appropriate literacy interventions especially for the secondary school students.

In the Era of 21st century, acquisition of foreign languages such as English and Arabic among these students is essential to develop and produce better nations. Besides that, language literacy and education will be able to contribute to the nation's development in many aspects such as to the national safety, economic development and international relationship following the citizens ability to communicate effectively in many languages (Lacorte, 2013; Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011).

According to Zakaria et al (2019), the way to improve language and literacy skills in foreign languages

can be done through interactive activities, namely through communication. This will also lead to the student's soft skills development such as teamwork and speaking competency in foreign languages. Based on their findings, students had reduced their level of anxiety in speaking when they were given the opportunity to cooperate with their friends in foreign languages classes with fun learning contents.

Research Questions

This paper seeks to answer the following research questions:
1. Is there a concern in communication apprehension (CA) while speaking Arabic Language?
2. Do students developed anxiety during tests/examination for Arabic Language (TA)?
3. What is the level of fear of negative evaluation (FNE) when the students are practicing to speak the Arabic?
4. Do students developed anxiety during the Arabic Language classroom sessions (CA)?

METHODOLOGY

The study is a quantitative method which used descriptive analysis to show the anxiety phenomenon in speaking Arabic, a foreign language. The descriptive approach will be able to show the condition of the interest in the research conducted at secondary school in Kuala Lumpur offering Arabic language as a foreign language. The researcher has chosen the stratified random sample population to display the real phenomenon of anxiety in speaking Arabic as a foreign language among the respondents.

Participants

This study involved participants who learned Arabic as a foreign language in their classroom. All participants were selected based on data provided by Jabatan Pelajaran Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur/Kuala Lumpur Federal Territory Education Department (JPWP KL). The probability sampling employed in this study aims to achieve a significant result and non-biased data. The sample of the population utilize a random probability selection method which is based on stratified sampling methods as the data is obtained from a valid source. The participants age between 13 and 14-years-old who learn Arabic as a foreign language in the Daily Secondary School (Religious Classes) in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur. They were 40 students consisting of male individuals from secondary 1 (N = 10), female individuals from secondary 1 (N = 10), male individuals from secondary 2 (N = 10) and female individuals from secondary 2 (N = 10). This proportion of samples intended to provide a significant and non-biased effect on gender.

Instrument

The set of the questionnaire used in this study had two different sections, namely Section A and Section B.

Section A: Demographic background

This section includes the demographic information of the respondents which tells about the respondent's age, gender and hours in learning Arabic per week in the classroom.

Section B: Set of questionnaire (FLCAS)

The second questionnaire was a set of questionnaire developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) also known as the Foreign Exchange Emergency Scale instrument (FLCAS). According to Horwitz, it is used by researchers to assess their students' level of concern in speaking Spanish as a foreign language in classroom learning. Therefore, in this current study, the researcher uses this questionnaire to study the level of anxiety in Arabic speaking skills as a foreign language. This is because the items in this questionnaire are very authoritative as it has been used extensively in previous researches on the same concern; speaking foreign languages. Besides, in this study, words for foreign languages has been changed to Arabic to enable the researcher to collect sufficient data and to facilitate participants in responding to the survey.

This questionnaire which was developed by Horwitz had 33 items. It used the Likert scale as a measuring tool. The scale was constructed using numbers to facilitate participants to answer and choose the answers accordingly starting with a scale of 1 for "strongly disagree"; scale 2 for "disagree"; scale 3 for "not sure or unknown"; scale 4 for "agree", and scale 5 for "strongly agree". The set of questions posed in this questionnaire identifies four (4) primary constructs of communication - communication anxiety, test anxiety, fear of negative assessment and anxiety in a foreign language classroom (Table 1).

Data Collection Procedures

The data collection process took place since early July 2019 with 40 participants consisting of 20 randomly selected male and female students. They were asked to respond with honesty and had understood that their answers would have a significant impact on the research. The researcher tried to make sure the participants understand each question in the instruments by translating them into the Malay language hence the questionnaire was bilingual, which contained English and Malay language (the national language of Malaysia) during the data collection.

Data Analysis

All the answers and reaction received from the participants in the questionnaire were analysed descriptively. This study approached the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) which was version 26.0 software used in analysing the data. The results of the analysis were interpreted unambiguously by observing the mean and standard deviation of each questionnaire which indicate the anxiety and anxiety of learning a foreign language. The researcher's findings were then presented in the form of a table to facilitate the presentation and understanding of the results. The researcher used the median

values in the findings to determine the cut-off points for the three categories of low, average, and high anxiety.

RESULTS

According to the result of internal reliability test, the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.87 indicated that the elicited data were consistent. This section reports the results of the study. First, the students' overall anxiety is reported followed by a more specific account of each component of their anxiety in speaking Arabic as a foreign language.

Overall Speaking Anxiety in Arabic

This section presents the overall results of students' anxiety in speaking Arabic. According to Table 2, the standard deviation values are more than 1, which indicates that the data were spread out normally.

Based on Table 2, the highest mean score was recorded for the fear of negative evaluation (FNE), having a value of mean 3.12. The total number of items for fear of negative evaluation (FNE) variable was the nine (9) items included in this questionnaire. Based on the items in the questions, it can be seen that participants had anxiety problems such as feeling nervous whenever the teachers asked questions. Besides, they felt shy in answering questions voluntarily when asked by their teachers and felt that others could speak Arabic better than themselves. Moreover, the participants felt frustrated if they fail to understand the language when their teachers corrected them while at the same time felt ashamed and afraid of being rejected by their classmates. In short, participants felt that they were evaluated and were given a poor perception by their teachers and peers in the classroom during their Arabic language learning sessions.

Table 1. Variables distribution in the instrument

Set of Questionnaire (FLCAS)		
	Frequency	**Number of items**
Communication Apprehension (CA)	8	1,9,14,18,24,27,29, 32
Test Anxiety (TA)	5	2,8,10,19,21
Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)	9	3,7,13,15,20,23, 25, 31,33
Anxiety in Classroom (AC)	11	4,5,6,11,12,16,17,22,26,28, 30
Total	33	33

Table 2. Total of Mean and Standard deviation distribution FLCAS

Component	Mean	Standard deviation
Communication Apprehension (CA)	3.01	1.01
Test Anxiety (TA)	2.97	1.17
Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)	3.12	1.07
Anxiety in Classroom (AC)	3.04	1.19

Next, anxiety in the classroom ranked second in the ranking list with a mean score of 3.04. These levels of fear and anxiety in the classroom could potentially cause the students to forget what they had learned. On average, there students were usually scared if they did not know what the teacher was saying in class during the study session. Besides, participants also felt anxious during classes were conducted even though they had prepared well.

Communication anxiety ranked in the third place with a mean value of 3.01. The results showed that participants could feel anxious when they were asked to speak or speak in front of other friends without careful preparation. They were uncomfortable and self-conscious to talk in the presence of their classmates. Moreover, the students felt unsure of themselves, in that they presumed that they did not have an adequate level of confidence when they wanted to speak the language in the foreign language class. They also felt the need to understand every word spoken by the language teacher in the classroom.

Lastly, the test anxiety had the lowest mean value (2.97) as compared to the other three components of anxiety. Logically, tests can cause anxiety and apprehension for students. Their relatively low test anxiety mean score may be due to the fact that during the test other than the teacher no one also was observing them.

Communication Apprehension (CA)

Table 3 shows that the communication apprehension among the participants in this study is significant, with 42.5 per cent showing high levels of CA.

It is considered as a high level anxiety among the participants. The researcher uses the value of the median from the findings to determine the levels. The median value is 26 in the data distribution. In short, the range for low anxiety value from 0.00 – 23.00; the range for moderate anxiety from 24.00 – 28.00; and the range for high anxiety 29.00 – 35.00. The highest mean value was recorded for item 29, which had a value of 3.50 and 80 per cent. Most participants felt anxious, uneasy and scared when they found it was difficult to comprehend the words the teacher was saying when interacting in a classroom. It shows that they were very anxious when learning a foreign language because it can cause misunderstanding and confusion of what the teacher was saying during the learning process. This was also followed by item 9, which stated that participants would begin to feel consternation when asked to speak in front of the teacher without any preparation.

Test Anxiety (TA)

Table 4 shows that the level of test anxiety is also high with 42.5 per cent of the participants indicating high levels of TA.

Test anxiety achieved the lowest score in comparison with the other three constructs. The median value is 14 in the data distribution. The range for low anxiety value is from 0.00 – 13.00; the range for moderate anxiety from 14.00 – 18.00; and the range for high anxiety 19.00 – 35.00. The majority of participants remained anxious and concerned

Table 3. Communication Apprehension (CA)

Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Low	8	20.0	20.0
Average	15	37.5	57.5
High	17	42.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

Table 5. Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Low	9	22.5	22.5
Average	13	32.5	55.0
High	18	45.0	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

Table 4. Test Anxiety (TA)

Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Low	9	22.5	22.5
Average	14	35.0	57.5
High	17	42.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

Table 6. Anxiety in the Classroom (AC)

Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
Low	6	15.0	15.0
Average	13	32.5	47.5
High	21	52.5	100.0
Total	40	100.0	

about learning a foreign language. Item 10 had the highest value of mean in the table of finding below, having a value of 3.75 and 50 per cent chose the statement "agree", while 22.5 per cent selected statement "strongly agree." The meaning of statement item 10 was that almost all participants felt anxious, afraid and concerned if they get a result or grade "not pass" a foreign language class.

Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE)

Table 5 displays that 45 per cent of the participants suffered from high levels of fear of negative evaluation (FNE).

These results show that the participants preferred more statements of agreement (SA + A) as an answer than the statements of disagreement (DS + D). The participants felt anxious and uncomfortable when they knew their teachers and peers evaluated their speaking ability. The median value is 28 in the data distribution. The range for low anxiety value from 0.00 – 25.00; the range for moderate anxiety from 26.00 – 32.00; and the range for high anxiety 33.00 – 45.00.

Anxiety in the Classroom (AC)

Table 6 shows, 52.5 per cent agree that they experience a high level of anxiety when they have to speak in Arabic in the classroom.

The median value is 29 in the data distribution. In short, the range for low anxiety value from 0.00 – 25.00; the range for moderate anxiety from 26.00 – 31.00; and the range for high anxiety 32.00 – 40.00. This means that the test indicated that participants were scared, fearful, apprehensive and worried that they would not be ready to present their language skills to the public when the teacher requested them to do so. Nevertheless, a closer look into one of the items (item 28), indicated that the students were willing and had the motivation to attend the Arabic Language classes even though they knew that they would be dealing with anxiety in speaking the Arabic language. This points to a promising attitude among the students as the majority of them felt very sure and relaxed when they were on their ways to Arabic classes.

DISCUSSION

According to the findings, it can be seen that anxiety in Arabic speaking skills is quite common among students learning Arabic as a foreign language. This study demonstrates that anxiety levels in speech among lower secondary school students in Malaysia are high and should be reduced. Speaking skills is a productive skill in the field of linguistics because it requires confidence and knowledge in practising the skill. The education system in Malaysia has influenced and contributed to the level of literacy of a foreign language in the country.

There are many studies on anxiety being conducted worldwide that involve languages since the 1970s such as English, Spanish, Japanese and Arabic. However, there are only a few being conducted in Malaysia. Based on the researcher's literature review, those studies primarily focused on the study of a foreign language or second language such as English in Malaysia (Rafek et al., 2018) and (Mohamed Noor et al., 2015). For anxiety in Arabic language, the sample of the population in the study only focused on students in the Malaysian universities. There was no study done on secondary school students in assessing the anxiety level in speaking the Arabic language. Nevertheless, recently, there is a study which discussed on the implication of anxiety in speaking Arabic, such as by Mohamed Mokhtar (2020) for secondary school in the Malaysian context.

In line with the findings of the current study, recent research results have shown and reported that students who study a foreign language experience heart palpitations, nervousness and fear of laughter for all types of anxiety. Thus, teachers are encouraged to use methods such as deep breathing, relaxation and positive affirmation among students as they learn foreign language skills. Teachers for foreign language subjects, primarily Arabic language teachers, are also encourage to use creative ways of teaching, such as by incorporating humour as a way to reduce tension among students in the classroom.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that anxiety in speaking skill exists in any languages learned by humans, including the Arabic

language. This research is expected to contribute to the educators to understand anxiety phenomenon and the level of fearless in speaking skill among lower secondary students in Kuala Lumpur. The findings indicate that teachers are encouraged to reduce anxiety levels in the process of educating a foreign language including Arabic as a second language. Based on the findings, students' academic achievement in speaking skills can be enhanced by reducing their level of anxiety. Hence, anxiety, fear, uneasiness and nervousness will slowly disappear and encourage the confidence of the learners when delivering a speech in a foreign language either inside or outside the classroom. Foreign language anxiety can be minimized through some practical ways. For instance, teachers need to be more friendly, use rewarding methods, and encourage their students during the learning process in the classrooms.

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