

Age as an Affective Factor in Influencing Public Speaking Anxiety of English Language Learners at Omar Al-Mukhtar University

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Abstract

The study is to show how age factor can influence public speaking anxiety among English Language Learners at Omar Al-Mukhtar University. To indicate the influence of age factor a questionnaire was distributed to the participants of the study. As well as correlation was also undertaken to the data collected to investigate the influence of age factor on public speaking anxiety. Results of the study showed that, there is a negative significant influence of age differences on public speaking anxiety of English Language Learners at Omar Al-Mukhtar University.

Keywords: Age, oral performance, English Language, speaking anxiety

1. Introduction

Public speaking Anxiety is a type of shyness characterized by fear about communicating with people. Public speaking anxiety in foreign language learning derives from the personal knowledge that one will almost certainly have difficulty in speaking to others (Cubukcu, 2007). According to McCroskey's (1978) definition, Speaking Anxiety is an individual's level of fear associated with either real or anticipated communication with other persons. Horwitz, Horwitz, Cope (1986) submit the construct of communication apprehension to their conceptualization of foreign language anxiety. They think interpersonal interactions are the major emphasis in the English class. Public Speaking Anxiety has been shown to have negative effects on learner achievement in interaction-oriented classrooms, such as the foreign language classroom Feigenbaum, (2007). Thus, communication can have a debilitating effect on language learners, and can detrimentally contribute to the speaking anxiety from which students suffer.

In a foreign language classroom, language learners' oral tasks include not only learning a second language but also performing the language. A language classroom is an example of a situation where perceived evaluation could be very high (Feigenbaum, 2007). In this type of setting, students feel that the teacher is judging them on every word they say, and teacher corrections may instigate this feeling of being judged Pica, (1987). Thus, the foreign language classroom may not only provoke speaking anxiety, but may also enhance communication apprehension.

Oral communication consists of two components: listening and speaking (Chan & Wu, 2004). Speaking is anxiety-provoking in foreign language. Young, (1986) find that most students are particularly anxious when they have to speak a foreign language in front of their class, Additionally Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986, p.125) give a general definition of anxiety to be "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system". Public speaking anxiety, it is a problem for language learners. Foreign language learners usually have difficulty communicating with each other's.

One factor to be considered in this study is the influence of age on public speaking anxiety. The choice of age as a factor is premised on the belief that older students of English language Department at Omar Al-Mukhtar University usually have lesser public speaking anxiety as compared to younger ones in the area of group discussion or oral presentation. On the other hand, it may be likely that younger ones perform better than the older ones in public speaking.

1.1 Problem Statement

The current study focuses on the public speaking anxiety among English language Learners at Omar Al-Mukhtar University. Some studies have also been conducted on the public speaking anxiety using the second language such as English among the students. For example Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) noted that students who in particular have problem in group discussion or oral presentation have the possibility of finding it more problematic to speak in class where foreign language like English is being used and where their performance are being noted. In what follows,

Horwitz et al., (1986) propounded the classroom international language anxiety that has been generally accepted in the subsequent studies on the issue of public speaking anxiety and foreign language such as English (Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert, 1999; Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley, 1999; Wang and Ding, 2001; Yan and Wang, 2001). Their findings have shown that there is existence of anxiety and that there is greater involvement of anxiety with speaking using the English language as a targeted language. Horwitz (1995) noted that using the targeted language in public speaking somewhat provoke anxiety for most of the students. Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley (1999) established that the use of foreign language in public speaking leads to anxiety among the students and this has positive relationship with age. However, in spite of the contribution of the previous studies, not much is being said about the students at foreign universities. In addition, it appears that not much attention have been given to the examination of the likely role age factor plays in affecting public speaking anxiety. Therefore, the current study takes this into consideration and contributes in this aspect.

2. Previous studies Related to Anxiety and Demographic factor of Age

Concerning age as a critical period hypothesis in which it has a great effects in learning a language be it first or second language. In the discussion of the the factors that cause public speaking anxiety previous studies consider age as one of the most influential factor that cause public speaking anxiety.

Ten years ago in the study conducted by Onwuegbuzie, (1999) who looked for the association between learner variables and language anxiety in their 210 participants whose age ranged from 18 to 71, it was found that there was a positive and statistically significant correlation between anxiety and age. In the multiple regression analysis, age contributed to 4% of the prediction of foreign language anxiety. That is to say, this would indicate that in this investigation, the older the student is, the higher his/her anxiety level was likely to be. In another study which was conducted on the anxiety level of 29 Science students by Azizah et. al. (2007), it was found that those whose age is more than 40 years old were more likely to experience low level of anxiety compared to those whose age ranged from less than 30 to 36-40 years old. Therefore, it was concluded in the study that age plays an important role in determining the anxiety level of students. Chan & Wu, (2004) pointed out since speaking in the target language seems to be the most threatening aspect of foreign language learning, the current emphasis on the development of communicative competence poses particularly great difficulties for the anxious student. To ensure the success of English education in primary schools, foreign language anxiety is a significant issue which cannot be ignored.

Xiuqin (2006) in his study on the responses of the learners' attitude toward oral English language that they had being learning it for two years, in that case defined age as the period of devoted learning. It is then explained that anxiety is still exists among these learners, thus prevent them from taking opportunities in their language practice. Huberty (2004) considered anxiety as a cognitive developmental phases of the learners, making sure its relation with age, in terms of the acquisition order. In discussing anxiety on human development, it is confirmed that developmental pattern is dissimilarity according to age differences as the age increases, with a periodic developmental significances. The infancy and preschool is said to be of 7-9 months, and the time when infants practice much level of anxiety, where as the second developmental milestone is within 12-18 months, then the toddlers do recognize what is known as separation anxiety. Then is the age of school, when anxiety is said to be determined, and the middle childhood and younger reasoning is said to be developed with the anxiety. Children mostly by the age of 8 become more anxious of some specific identifiable objects and events like animals, the dark and imaginary figures. The assertion undoubtedly relates age with the experience of anxiety, though not specifically speaking anxiety.

Blood et al. (2007) in the investigative study to discern who specifically stutter among the adolescents in the examination of the anxiety level reported that adolescents who stutter with an associated co-occurring disorders showed a higher level of anxiety than those adolescents whose stuttering has no co-occurring disorders, with a supportive result that anxiety and self-esteem were significantly correlated. This finding is in line with previous and current findings that show that stuttering is more prevalent among children compared to adolescents and with a stereotyped sight that their levels of anxiety correlate with the respective anxiety level, positing that age is a determining factor in the experience of anxiety. Ay (2010) investigated foreign language anxiety among young learners originally from Turkey with acute relationship with their personal language skill level. The findings showed that the foreign language anxiety that is experienced by the young students who are mostly adolescents is mostly deep due to their age significant, with a relation to their cognitive capability to overcome anxiety. Anyway, in spite of the contribution of the previous researches, there are not much studies being studied about English language learners at foreign universities. Furthermore, it is obviously that there is not much concentration in investigating of the probable factor of age in influencing public speaking anxiety. Then, this study takes it seriously in examining age as an effective factor that cause speaking anxiety.

3. Research Design

This research is going to use the survey design. According to Creswell (2009) survey design are procedures in quantitative research in which you administer a survey or questionnaire to a small group of people (called the sample) to identify trends in attitudes, opinion, behaviors, or characteristics of a large group of people (called the population). As the researcher investigates the amount of anxiety among EFL Learners and to find out if there is any relationship between Age as an important factor and public speaking anxiety among those students in English learning, and whether there is difference in level of public speaking anxiety according to their age. This design was used by the researcher because survey design collects quantitative, numbered data using a questionnaire and statistical analyses to describe

trends about responses to questions (Creswell, 2008). This design is also suitable for the researcher's questions in this study.

4. Age Distribution

This part discusses the results of frequency to know the age distribution, of the participants of the study. Questionnaires were distributed to 120 English language students (respondents) at Omar Al-Mukhtar University and only 108 respondents returned the answered questionnaire. Therefore, only 108 students were investigated using the questionnaire technique.

Table 4.1 Age Distribution

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid				
below 25 years	21	19.4	19.4	
25-34 years	66	61.1	80.6	
35-44 years	16	14.8		95.4
45-54 years	5	4.6	4.6	100.0
Total	108	100.0		

From the above table, most of the respondents, above average were from the age group 25-34 years and this amounted to 61.1% of the total population. About one fifth of the respondents were from the age group below 25 years and less than one fifth were from the age group 35-44 years. Few students who participated in the questionnaire were from the age group 45-54 years which represents 4.6% of the total population.

5. Correlation between Age and Public Speaking Anxiety

To examine the influence of age differences among the students on public speaking anxiety, this study addresses correlation between the dependent and independent variables. The table 5.1 below shows the results of Correlation between public speaking anxiety and age.

Table 5.1 Correlation Result between Age and Speaking Anxiety

Dependent Variable	Independent variable
Public Speaking Anxiety	Age
	Pearson Correlation
	-0.381***
	Sig. (2-tailed)
	0.000
	No of Respondents
	108

*** indicates that correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The result of the table above shows that there is negative impact of the correlation between age and public speaking anxiety, which suggests that the whole speaking anxiety go on the other way with age (Independent variable). The value of Pearson correlation is illustrated to be -0.38 implying that there is medium correlation between the two variables. Furthermore, the results indicate that $r = 0.38$, $n=108$, $p < 0.05$. Since, $p=0.000$ in the result is smaller than 0.05% it implies that age has significant influence on public speaking anxiety. In other word, there is negative correlation between the two variables. Students with lower ages are said to have more anxiety when speaking in public. For this purpose, the study hypothesis that age differences have significant effect on public speaking anxiety.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This study discusses the research question in which examine the influence of age in influencing the existence of public speaking anxiety among English Language Learners at Omar Al-Mukhtar University. With regard to the research question: "Does age differences among the students have influence on the level of public speaking anxiety?" the results of correlation suggest that age differences among the students who study in English department at Omar Al-Mukhtar university have significant influence on public speaking anxiety. This indicates that differences in ages have significant impact on speaking anxiety. Also, it identifies that students with lower ages face more anxiety when speaking in public. These current results support the previous results obtained by Horwitz (1995); and Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley (1999). These previous studies also found significant negative association between age and public speaking anxiety. In support of the result, about 19.94% of the student with age below 25 years and 49.07% of students with the age 25 to 34 years supported the statement that their thoughts become confused when giving a speech. The percentage of students below 34 years who indicated that they experience anxiety when speaking publicly is 68.52% while only 31.48% do not experience anxiety. One most important factor according to the evidence suggested by the following results is the differences in age. Lower ages were found to be greatly associated with higher anxiety in speaking as compare to the higher age. Additionally, Learners faced difficulty in oral speaking. Some learners have the ability in understanding the language but they find it difficult to speak so they had a high level of speaking anxiety as well as they are afraid of making mistakes. Finally, the findings of this research article indicated that Learners with poor skills face anxiety in speaking English. Over all, it can be pointed out that Age factor is the most important motivating factor causing public speaking anxiety among others.

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