Foreign Language Anxiety among Korean Students at Keimyung College University in Daegu, South Korea

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Abstract

This paper investigated the foreign language anxiety among students frequenting the Global Zone at Keimyung College University (KMCU) in Daegu, South Korea. Needed linguistic data were obtained from KMCU students (N=216; n=140) using Horwitz's (1986) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was later translated to the Korean language to hasten reading comprehension. The sample size was determined using Yamane's Formula. The subsequent analysis found no significant relationship between language anxiety and those collective variables on age, sex, and relative point/period where subject students started learning or speaking English. Horwitz et al. (2016) described three contributing factors of language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of negative evaluation. The descriptive method and Pearson Chi-Square are used to analyze the data. The data show the level of language anxiety experienced by KMCU students frequenting the Global Zone. In general, the overall anxiety level of the same subject-respondents is interpreted to be "moderate." These findings propose the need to integrate a new approach that engages non-native speakers in meaningful and stress-free classroom interactions that focus more on fluency than the accuracy of linguistic expressions in learning English as a Foreign Language.

Keywords: Language anxiety, communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, South Korea

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Introduction

Nature of the Problem

Learning a foreign language like English requires comprehensible input unconstrained by fear or anxiety. This has so far been Krashen's (1977) assertion in his input hypothesis that has since guided classroom environments for the past four decades. Despite earnest efforts by both native and non-native English teachers to establish a stress-free classroom, Hashemi (2011) asserts that language learners usually express anxiety, apprehension, and nervousness when learning a new language, a phenomenon this study simplifies as foreign language anxiety. This condition forms part of Krashen's affective filter that hinders comprehensible inputs from reaching the language acquisition device in the brain. Henceforth, it is not surprising that very few second language learners make substantial progress in language classrooms and that very few of them achieve native-like competence.

Current State of Knowledge

Foreign language anxiety tends to influence language learning and language performance mainly due to feelings of tension associated with speaking, listening and learning (Onwuegbuzie, Bailey, and Daley, 2000; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994; Elaldi, 2015). Tsaousides (2017) estimated that approximately 25 percent of people experience foreign language anxiety, especially when speaking in public. This number rings a bell considering numerous literatures illustrating that more or less 7% of Americans, though native speakers of English, fear speaking in public.

Being able to speak English in South Korea is considered an incredibly lucrative skill as it gets you hired to high paying jobs. English as they view it is a necessary language (Song, 2011). The general assumption is that speaking is the most anxiety-provoking skill associated with foreign language learning. Horwitz et al. (1986) identified communication apprehension to be conceptually relevant to foreign language anxiety. Among many other researchers, language anxiety (LA) is consistently considered as a debilitating factor which is associated with problems in language learning such as problems in listening comprehension, reduced word production, impaired vocabulary learning, lower grades in language courses, and

lower scores on standardized tests (Horwitz & Young in Kondo & Ling, 2004).Therefore, understanding the mechanism of anxiety in language learning has been of major concern to educators and researchers all over the globe (Akbari & Sadeghi, 2013; Aydin & Zengin, 2008; Lizuka, 2010; Kondo & Ling, 2004; MacIntyre & Gardner 1994; Mesri, 2012; Shabani, 2012). The focus of most of the anxiety research in the foreign language (FL) context has been associated with oral production (Kimura, 2008), while the shift has recently been occurred to other receptive skills like listening, which is one of the most effective skills for FL learners.

Meanwhile, many reasons have been cited as probable cause for such anxiety, but Sparks and Ganschow (as cited in Tran, 2012) viewed it as a consequence of poor language learning abilities. Argaman and Abu-Rabia (2002) supported this claim when they concluded a significant relationship between language anxiety and reading and writing skills. On the contrary, other researchers that include Horwitz et al. (1986), MacIntyre (1995), and Park and French (2013), explained that the relationship between language anxiety and different variables is not that simple and can be a cause or an effect of poor achievement.

The researcher observed that students who regularly visit Global Zone manifest apprehension and anxiety when they are asked to join in an English conversation. She observed that students who visit Global Zone at Keimyung College University usually have difficulty in expressing themselves in English, exhibit fear and have low self-esteem when being asked to talk in English. It is for this reason that the researcher conducts her study using Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to shed light on these phenomena known to have existed in the classroom since time immemorial. It was constructed based on self-reports from students, their own clinical experiences, and evidence culled from reviews of similar instruments. Its finalized version contained 33 items that employ 5-point Likert-type questions. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) aimed to gauge the students' level of language anxiety and has since been an instrument used in most research involving anxiety. They also identified three anxieties related to foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety to help language teachers and scholars understand the nature of foreign language anxiety. These three anxieties form an integral part of FLA, and together they conspire to inhibit learning as the learner attempts to learn and use a language.

Purpose Statement

This paper aimed to determine the level of foreign language anxiety of students from Keimyung College University (KMCU) frequenting the Global Zone during School Year 2017-2018.

Research Questions

1.   What is the level of language anxiety experienced by students frequenting KMCU Global Zone when taken as a whole or when analyzed in terms of:
      a.   communication apprehension,
      b.   test anxiety, and
      c.   fear of negative evaluation?

2.   Is there a significant relationship between language anxiety and those collective variables on age, sex and the relative point/period where subject students started to learn to speak English?

Hypothesis

In pursuit of the line of thinking advanced in the research objectives, this paper assumes the absence of any significant relationship between students' language anxiety and collective variable groupings on age, sex and relative period where subject students started to learn to speak English.

Methodology
Research Design

This study used the descriptive quantitative method to explore the participants' (English) foreign language anxiety levels. This design is formatted to gather information without altering or manipulating the current environment. It is also used to describe the characteristic of a population or phenomenon being studied. It describes associations or relationships between things in a natural situation (Fraenkel et al., 2011). The survey method was employed to examine Korean students' anxiety factors and levels who visit Global Zone.

Source of Linguistic Data

Participants to this study were 140 students randomly sampled, courtesy of Yamane's formula, from 216 students frequenting Global Zone at Keimyung College University for the Second Semester, SY 2017-2018. To recall, these are students who regularly visit Global Zone at Keimyung College University twice or thrice a month. A survey questionnaire (FLCAS) was then given to the respondents with supervision from the researcher and Korean staffs as translators.

Measures

A standardized research instrument used for this study was the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope, 1986). Permission was obtained from Dr. Elaine Horwitz to use the FLCAS questionnaire, which consists of 33 items in a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The questionnaires, originally written in English, were translated to Korean language for the students' easy comprehension while maintaining its validity. Korean translations were obtained from Google Translate and Papago, guided by Dörnyei's (2010) assertion that special attention should be given to the translation of the original scale to enhance its usefulness as a research tool. After that, translations were sent to a Korean staff of the Global Zone and two Korean students to examine any confusing words or phrases on the translated questionnaire. Subsequent changes were finally made on words phrases deemed difficult to understand.

Validity of the Data-Gathering Instrument

The 33-item data-gathering instrument, exactly the same Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) crafted by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope in 1986, enjoys the presumption of validity having been labeled as a standardized research instrument to collect data on foreign language classroom anxiety and have repeatedly been used by researchers of different nationalities around the globe. Prior permission had been sought from, and was subsequently approved by the above-mentioned authors who have reached such stature and prominence in the field of linguistic research.

Reliability of the Data-Gathering Instrument

The FLCAS questionnaire was pilot-tested to twenty (20) KMCU students seen frequenting the Global Zone a week before the data collection proper. It should be noted that these students were not part of the 140-sample size earlier identified. On purpose, they were commissioned to establish the reliability of the data-gathering instrument when used in Korean setting. Subsequent SPSS computations courtesy of Cronbach's Alpha proved its reliability with a positive correlation of .832, which is interpreted as "good" making the instrument reliable.

Procedures

Data-Gathering

After establishing the reliability of the data-gathering instrument, the researcher requested clearance to conduct her research to the Director of Global Zone. After she was approved, the researcher gave students verbally and printed English and Korean posters to conduct research a month later. She asked the students willing to join the survey to write their names and phone numbers on the information sheet she provided. After that, questionnaires were distributed to 140 student-respondents during October and November. To note, the respondents of this study only cover students who visit Global Zone frequently and do not constitute the whole population of the university. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires explained to the students what they should do, and gave them 30 to 45 minutes to answer all the questions. In many instances during the data-gathering, the help of Korean staff and student assistants proved valuable, especially at times where student-respondents cannot fully comprehend the questions.

Data Analysis

The data generated by the survey questionnaires were tallied, tabulated, and subjected to statistical analyses and interpretations consistent with its research objectives and hypothesis. To recall, this study aimed to find out foreign language anxiety level of students from KMCU visiting Global Zone.

Levels of Language Anxiety Experienced by KMCU Students. To determine the level of language anxiety experienced by students visiting KMCU Global Zone in learning the English language, the mean was used courtesy of the

Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21. The resulting mean scores were thereafter interpreted using interpretative range score.

Significant Relationship between Language Anxiety and those Collective Variables on Age, Sex, and Relative Point/Period of Starting to Learn English. To determine whether there is a significant relationship between language anxiety and those collective variables on age, sex and relative point/period of starting to learn English of students visiting KMCU Global Zone, SPSS 21's Pearson Chi Square was used.

Results and Discussion

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets the data, which were gathered to carry out the predetermined objectives of this research. To recall, this paper aimed to determine the level of foreign language anxiety of students from Keimyung College University (KMCU) frequenting the Global Zone. The resulting analyses follow the exact sequence in the research objectives in the introductory section of this paper.

Level of Anxiety Experienced by KMCU Students Visiting the Global Zone

Overall, the level of language anxiety experienced by KCMU students frequenting the Global Zone registered a mean score of 2.83 computed from the sub-variable groupings on communication apprehension (CA), test anxiety (TA), and fear of negative evaluation (FNE). The results show that the overall anxiety level is interpreted to be "moderate." Courtesy of SPSS 21, the level of language anxiety (LA) specified under communication apprehension (CA) experienced by student-participants recorded a mean score of 2.94 out of eleven (11) items in the questionnaire. This level of LA in this particular variable is interpreted to be "moderate." Tables 1-3 provide details of this findings with the questions on the first column and their mean scores on the second.

Table 1

Communication Apprehension

Questionnaire Items	Mean
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	3.20*
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	3.19
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	3.15
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	3.11
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	3.10
14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	2.98
32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	2.87
18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.	2.84
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	2.79
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	2.77
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	2.31**
Mean of Means	2.94

*The item with the highest mean
**The item with the lowest mean

The highest mean score was found in item 9 (M=3.20). Data analyzed showed that respondents started to feel anxious when asked to talk in class, especially when they were not prepared. It shows mixed emotions of nervousness and distress when being called to speak in front of the class without preparation. Lack of confidence and indecisiveness emanate from their inability to express their thoughts in their foreign language class, as shown in (items 1, 24, and 27). Be that as it may, there were students who like attending English classes and communicating with foreign professors, evidenced by items 14, 18, and 32. However, due to several overwhelming rules, especially Grammar rules, the students tend to get confused and perplexed when they use English. Items 4, 15, 29, and 30 provide evidence of the foregoing claim.

The following section tackles the level of language anxiety (LA) specified the next sub-variable grouping on test anxiety (TA). This variable registered a mean score of 2.84 out of fifteen (15) items in the questionnaire and was slightly lower than CA. Therefore, language Anxiety in this particular variable has been interpreted to be on the same level as "moderate." Table 2 provides details of these findings with the questions in the first column and their mean scores on the second.

Table 2
Test Anxiety

Questionnaire Items	Mean
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	3.24*
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	3.06
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	3.06
8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	3.04
11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	3.01
5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	2.99
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	2.94
22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	2.92
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class.	2.91
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	2.79
28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	2.77
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	2.74
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	2.69
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.	2.38
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	2.14**
Mean of Means	2.84

*The item with the highest mean
**The item with the lowest mean

Table 2 reveals that taking examinations, or being evaluated by teachers, was probably one of the most anxiety-provoking situations for a foreign language learner. The respondents were found to exhibit fear of failing the tests and were found conscious on the outcome of their grades. The mean score on item 3 was found to be extremely high (M=3.24), where respondents would feel palpitations out of fear when they were being called to talk or take an examination. It can be perceived that the respondents felt uneasy when they take a test or are given an oral examination in an English class (items 12, 10, and 21), resulting in failure and low self-esteem (items 16, 20, and 26). This situation often leads to students not taking the tests in English seriously as illustrated by items 6, 17, and 25. Preparation could have helped them diminish their fear of taking tests and prevented confusion or getting overwhelmed. Items 5, 8, 11, 22, and 28 support these findings.

This section finally brings into focus the final sub-section on LA under the category of fear of negative evaluation (FNE). This variable registered a mean score of 2.72 out of seven (7) items in the questionnaire and was found to be slightly lower than TA. Language Anxiety in this particular variable has been interpreted to be "moderate" or on the same level with the twin variables on CA and TA previously discussed. Table 3 that follows summarizes these findings more clearly.

Table 3

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Questionnaire Items	Mean
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	3.16*
2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	2.92
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	2.8
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.	2.85
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	2.76
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	2.39
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	2.11**
Mean of Means	2.72

*The item with the highest mean
**The item with the lowest mean

Item 23, having recorded the highest mean score of 3.16, provides evidence of student-respondents exhibiting apprehension on what others might think about them when they speak English. Making mistakes, having blunders, or talking with foreign professors made them extremely worried and nervous. It can be perceived that the respondents felt that others could speak better English than they do, resulting in apprehension and fear in trying to speak the language, as shown by items 7, 13, and 33. However, some students were not always afraid of corrections, although they exhibit some kind of fear or nervousness when they do not understand and do not know what to say in English. Items 2 and 19 support this claim.

Test of Significant Relationship between Language Anxiety and Collective Variables on Age, Sex and Relative Starting Point/Period of Learning English

This section now focuses on the relationship between language anxiety and the students' age, sex, and relative starting point in learning English. The sub-sections follow these findings in greater detail, starting from language anxiety (LA) and age, LA and sex, and LA and their relative point of learning/using the English language.

The ensuing analysis reveals the disparity between the levels of anxiety on respondents aged 22 and above and those aged 21 and below. This finding validates the usual premise that the older a foreign language learner is, or the more exposed the participants are in using/learning the English language, the more confident they become in interacting with their peers, juniors or superiors at the Global Zone. A somewhat opposite phenomenon was observed with those participants 21 years or younger who are trying to use or learn the lingua franca of the world, English. Table 4 illustrates the result of the test of correlation between language anxiety and age.

Table 4

Relationship Level between Language Anxiety and Age

Variables	Chi-square	Df	p-value	Interpretation
Age * Language Anxiety	3.550	4	0.470	No significant relationship

The result from Table 4 shows no significant relationship between language anxiety and age of the students evidenced by $\chi 2(4)$ -value = 3.550, with p-value = 0.470. Therefore, it can henceforth be concluded that language anxiety has no significant relationship with age; that is, all age groups from 20-21 and 22-and above equally have a proportionately uniform level of language anxiety.

This finding seemed to correspond to Latif's (2014) study. It was revealed that there is no evidence of a significant relationship between language anxiety level and age; therefore, he cannot conclude that language anxiety has any relation to age. Despite their differences in age, adult learners are more mature in building positive values towards language learning. This study is also similar to Majid et al.'s (2007) observation that adult learners are different from conventional learners in that their roles as adult/workers would enhance their shaping of more positive societal values, behavior, and thinking. In this situation, the respondents demonstrated positive motivation and self-efficacy towards learning English as a second language, enabling them to avoid feeling anxious during the learning process.

The succeeding section tackles the variable on sex which is still correlated with language anxiety. Table 5 that follows summarizes the result of statistical analysis between these twin variables. The findings reveal a whopping 74% or 103 of the 140 respondents who experienced a moderate level of language anxiety. It is worth noting that roughly 18% are male students while 56% are female students. This result shows that generally, students do not feel much apprehension or anxiety in learning the second language though they are still visibly anxious in some situations.

Table 5

Relationship Level between Language Anxiety and Sex

Variables	Chi-square	Df	p-value	Interpretation
Sex * Language Anxiety	2.394	2	0.302	No significant relationship

Table 5 above shows that female students have almost the same anxiety level as male students. It further shows the absence of any significant relationship in the level of language anxiety in terms of sex, as evidenced by $\chi 2(2)$ -value = 2.394, with p-value = 0.302.

Dewaele conducted such the study, and Al Saraj (2015), Dewaele, Petrides and Furnham (2008), Taghinezhad, Abdollahzadeh, Dastpak, Rezaei (2016) all concluded that there was no significant effect of sex on foreign language anxiety since the comparison of the mean difference between male and female was not statistically significant. Thus, the caution addressed to this issue may not merely be focused on females but also males. This study's result is similar to that of Na (2007) when he found out that there is no significant difference between males and females regarding foreign language anxiety. In his study, he stated that both sexes might respond similarly to a certain situation in their foreign language class.

The findings of the previous studies seem to contrast with the study by Mills, Pajares, & Herron (2006), who stated that there was a positive relationship between anxiety and male and female performance. According to Öztürk and Güzbüz (2012) findings, the results of their quantitative data show that female students demonstrated a high level of anxiety than the male students while speaking English in the classroom. This outcome supports several studies which reveal that speaking is a source of anxiety. For their part, Horwitz et al. (1986) found that students perceived speaking as the most threatening aspect of language learning. The findings of their study suggest that speaking is an anxiety-provoking factor in the learning process for the students, and female students experience this anxiety more than male students in a classroom setting.

The next section attempts to correlate LA with the respondents' relative start of using/learning the English language. To recall, the data-gathering instrument ask questions to determine when the respondents started speaking the English language. In this study, the relative start of learning the English language of the students was divided into three groups: Before elementary (since birth to kindergarten age); Elementary (elementary age); and Middle school to university level (middle school age to university level age and students who do not speak the English language at all).

Subsequent analysis reveals that 81% or 113 respondents who started learning or studying English in middle school until they were in university or college level have experienced moderate level of anxiety in learning the English language. For purposes of emphasis, the main aim of the questionnaire was to draw out the time when the students started to learn English. Usually, in their primary years, English class is taught to them to heighten their interest in the English language and its culture. In secondary education, which is widely considered a preparatory stage for entering the tertiary level, acquiring good grades is essential. These make students highly aware of test-taking; thus, they see to it that they get better grades to get enrolled in the university. While having a university or college education, students take English as a required subject and a certain level of English proficiency for graduation. University students see this stage as their final preparation for a career and are thus highly motivated.

Table 6 that follows made use of Chi-square to measure whether or not there exists a significant relationship between LA and the respondents' relative start of learning or using the English language.

Table 6

Relationship between Language Anxiety and Start of Learning English Language

Variables	Chi-square	Df	p-value	Interpretation
Start of Learning* Language Anxiety	2.595	4	0.628	No significant relationship

       The results show the absence of a significant relationship between LA and their relative start of learning English as evidenced by $\chi2(4) = 2.595$ with p-value = 0.628. Therefore, it is interpreted that there is no significant relationship between LA and the start of learning the English language. This result is similar to Tan and Xie's (2020) study, which also showed no significant difference between foreign language anxiety and the years of learning English of the 41 English major freshmen of foreign language departments of Nanchang Business College.

       Learning a foreign language effectively means using adequate learning strategies (Meschyan & Hernandez, 2002). The time spent studying formal English is an essential factor. However, no specific number of months or years spent learning the English language to increase proficiency. Although some articles indicate that many people can already function well after studying English for a year or two, it does not mean that the learner has already acquired proficiency (Ward cited from Magno, 2010). Even though a learner may seem fluent in a language socially, they may experience difficulty with the language academically (Lake & Pappamihiel, 2003).

       According to the study of Kim (2013), Koreans are very interested in education. Their literacy rate is 99 percent, the highest of any country at a similar level of economic development (Oh, 2012). However, the whole educational system from kindergarten to high school has been described as a preparation for college-ready students (Card, 2005; Seth, 2002). The sample size in this study only covers students who visit Global Zone frequently and do not constitute the entire population of the university. The study revealed that students who visit Global Zone have prior knowledge of the English language and show that students who have started learning or have been exposed to English are the least anxious as they speak the English language.

Conclusion

       When learning a new language like English, one is indeed bound to manifest nervousness, apprehension, or anxiety- a form of emotional problem that could highly affect the performance of English language learners. Second or foreign language learning is often a traumatic, or, to put it mildly, an awkward experience for non-native speakers of the English language. In pursuit of this viewpoint, this paper has thus far provided evidence that communication anxiety (CA) remains to be the strongest foreign language anxiety among KCMU students frequenting the Global Zone in South Korea. More than that, this study validates earlier findings by Voorhees (1994) in her research entitled Foreign Language and Gender that female students

have an almost identical level of anxiety compared with their male counterparts. What is noteworthy is that demographic information like age, sex and that relative starting point of learning or use of English do not relate at all with language anxiety. The promotion of small talk in classrooms is strongly encouraged as a starting point of language use so that, little by little, both male and female students gain the confidence to interact on a broader stage like that on the Global Zone.

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