

LANGUAGE ANXIETY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: CAUSAL FACTORS AND COPING STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

The deterioration of English proficiency among Malaysian graduates is well documented in the local literatures. Identified factors said to have contributed to this decline include instructors' pedagogical knowledge and skills, inappropriate assessments as well as student-related aspects like poor attitude, low esteem and high language anxiety. Since anxiety may hamper graduates' contribution to the country's development and their ability to be employed, this study was carried out to investigate the level of English language anxiety, the specific skills which students find most anxious, its causal factors, and strategies to cope and alleviate English language anxiety. A mixed-methods research design was employed whereby data was obtained via the use of self-developed questionnaire and in-depth interview. A total of 125 students participated in the quantitative data collection. The students approached as sample were purposively chosen among those who are majoring in non-English programs in a public university. Eight highly anxious students were later interviewed for the qualitative part of the study. The findings revealed that (1) majority of the university students had moderate level of self-perceived anxiety in an English language classroom; (2) writing skill is identified as the most anxiety-provoking skill; (3) instructor-students' interaction is considered the main factor contributing to anxiety; and (4) highly anxious students employed language learning strategies, relaxation and preparation as coping strategies. Several pedagogical suggestions were put forward to the English Language instructors so that they become more aware of language anxious students and that appropriate help could be extended to reduce anxiety in English language classroom.

Keywords: Language Anxiety, second language learners, foreign language classroom anxiety, anxiety coping strategies

1.0. Introduction

Poor English proficiency among university graduates has, for the last decade, caught the attention of Malaysian media, industry and the public. For a subject that is being taught and learnt at all educational levels in school as well as tertiary institutions, the substandard English attainment has contributed to not only inferior communication competency (Mohamed, Goh & Wan, 2004; Othman & Shah, 2013) leading to issues related to employability (Azam, Chin & Prakash, 2011; Roshid & Chowdhury, 2013; Koo, Pang & Mansur, 2009; Singh & Singh, 2008) but also general uneasiness of the language (Veerappan & Habsah, 2011).

Among the causes of English deterioration reported in both local and international literatures pointed to any one or a combination of the following: (1) teacher-related aspects such as poor attitude, inadequate pedagogical skills and knowledge, (2) technical aspects required in specific skills, (3) the teaching and learning processes involving the use of troublesome teaching methods (Ahmed, 2012; Hanumantharao, 2011) and shifts of medium of instruction (Darmi & Albion, 2013; Wong et al., 2011; Kabilan et al., 2010) and (4) inappropriate assessment and evaluation (Varalakshmi, 2013). Very often the issue is linked to either the teacher or the teaching process. However, having listed all possible causes of English deterioration originating from the teacher and the teaching and learning processes, researchers have also insinuated that the students themselves could have been the reason for poor English language performance. Several (Radzuan & Kaur, 2011; Rojo-Laurilla, 2007) even suggested English language competency and proficiency are largely determined by students' views and feelings relating to personal ability learning the language.

The discomfiting and complicating process of language learning which resulted in the deterioration of English proficiency among university students could have originated from language anxiety. Language anxiety refers to a situation where its sufferers experience uneasy, worrying, nervous and apprehensive feelings when learning or using, often a second or foreign, language. The level of anxiety experienced and displayed by individual student however vary according to the complexity as well as intensity of personal variables which include personal beliefs, attitude, motivation, and cognitive capacity, just to name a few. In the Malaysian context, several researchers have specifically examined the causes and/or effects of English Language anxiety related to the four language skills namely listening, speaking reading and writing. Mohamad and Ab Wahid (2008) found seven different causes of speaking anxiety: panic or shy, fear of audience, poor proficiency (i.e. grammar, pronunciation), fear of speaking with fluent English users, lack of self-confidence, rarely speak in English and afraid of perceptions of others. Meanwhile, Rajab et al. (2012) identified linguistic factor, cultural and the curricular content as possible contributing factors of reading anxiety. Mat Daud et al. (2005), on the other hand, found their student respondents suffered writing anxiety due to lack of writing skills. All in all, these researchers' findings pointed to the fact that if students believe English is difficult or that they

do not have the make up to master the language, or both, it will almost certainly result in mental and behavioural obstructions to learning. Henceforth, owing to its debilitating outcome, the researchers felt a study examining aspects of learners' affective aspect such as anxiety on English language outcome would be of paramount benefit.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The fact that Malaysian students generally have poor command of English language has been established and widely reported. This fact is readily discerned via Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) results with fewer obtaining excellent passing grades in English; soft-skills related researches indicating poor acquisition of communication skills in English among university graduates (Abdul Karim et al., 2012; Abdullah et al., 2012) as well as employers' reactions nationwide. Even the Minister of Education himself was baffled over continued poor standards of English in the country (Subramaniam, 2014). Other than instructor – related factors mentioned earlier, students' attitude, limited exposure and opportunity to use English in their daily conversation also posed as deterrent from acquiring sufficient competency. It is also reported in more recent research findings that language anxiety towards English is becoming a consistent phenomenon in second language acquisition classrooms (Darmi & Albion, 2014; Abdullah & Abdul Rahman, 2010).

It is said that students who experienced language anxiety continuously experience difficulties at different stages of language learning as they were unaware that they needed to seek help. This situation is worsened by their own erroneous belief that they did not excel in language learning due to personal knowledge deficiency albeit the effort they put in to learn English language. In reaction to what past researchers have examined on the issue of English language anxiety, this current study sought to measure the level of anxiety among university students in the Malaysian context using a newly self-developed questionnaire constructed primarily based on Young's (1991) and Oxford's (1999) theory of potential sources of language anxiety. Since language anxiety can interfere with the acquisition, retention and production of a language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994), the researchers believe better understanding of how it impacts on learning is crucial if students were to be helped to become better English language users.

1.2. Objectives of Study

Given the above issue, this study was carried out with the following objectives:

1. to investigate the level of language anxiety experienced by university students;
2. to determine which specific skill (listening, speaking, reading, writing) causes the greatest amount of anxiety for university students;
3. to find out possible factors that contribute to English language anxiety among the university students; and
4. to identify the coping strategies of the highly anxious university students.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Definitions of Language Anxiety

It has been reviewed by Horwitz et al. (1986) that foreign or second language anxiety concerns performance evaluation within an academic and social context, thus it is useful to draw parallels between it and three related performance anxieties, which are communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Although communicative apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation provide useful conceptual building blocks for a description of foreign or second language anxiety, Horwitz et al. (1986) proposed that foreign or second language anxiety is not simply the combination of these fears transferred to foreign or second language learning. They conceived foreign or second language anxiety as a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feeling and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Thus, in extending the explanation of self-perceptions, beliefs, feeling and behaviours further, Young (1991; as cited in Ohata, 2005) proposes an all-encompassing list of the potential sources of language anxiety through a review of the literature on language anxiety. Some of the sources are linked with the elements such as the student, the instructor and the instructional practice. The sources listed by Young are personal and interpersonal anxieties, students' beliefs about language learning, instructor's beliefs about language teaching, instructor-students' interactions, classroom procedures, and language testing. However, Ohata (2005) added that the sources listed by Young overlaps with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) three performance anxieties, namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and testing anxiety, but the categories listed by Young is still worth examining because the sources are addressing other critical issues that may underlie or affect the formation of students' language anxiety. On the other hand, Oxford (1999) also suggested the causes of language anxiety range from highly personal to procedural and lists the following causes of language anxiety: self-esteem, tolerance of ambiguity, risk-taking, competitiveness, social anxiety, test anxiety, identity and cultural shock, beliefs, classroom activities and methods, and instructor-students' interactions. Based on the two researchers' studies, a cross-comparison can be made to identify the similarities and the differences between the listed sources of anxiety.

Table 1: The comparison of sources of language anxiety listed by Young (1991) and Oxford (1999)

Young (1991)	Oxford (1999)
1. personal and interpersonal anxieties;	1. self-esteem,
2. students' beliefs about language learning;	2. tolerance of ambiguity,
3. instructor's beliefs about language teaching;	3. risk-taking, competitiveness,
4. instructor-students' interactions;	4. social anxiety, test anxiety,
5. classroom procedures; and	5. identity and cultural shock,
6. language testing.	6. beliefs,
	7. classroom activities and methods,
	8. instructor - students' interactions.

The link between the sources of language anxiety which contribute to students' language anxiety suggests that there are many potential sources coming from the student, the instructor and the instructional procedures which have significant impact to the second language learning. Thus, using the findings synthesized from the works of Young (1991) and Oxford (1999), this current study has derived five sources of language anxiety that will be further investigated, namely personal and interpersonal anxieties, students' beliefs about language learning, instructor-students' interactions, classroom procedures (i.e. activities and methods) and test anxiety while excluding instructor beliefs on language learning from the original list. In other words, this study will only be focusing on language anxiety from the students' perspective. Under the notions of personal and interpersonal anxieties, it can be further extended with the inclusion of minor components such as self-esteem, tolerance of ambiguity, risk taking, competitiveness, social anxiety and existential anxiety. For the purpose of this report, the sources mentioned were re-organized and re-categorized into two categories namely personal factors (those originating from the student) and interpersonal factors (referring to factors which resulted through student-environment/people/object interactions).

In sum, the current study examined factors of language anxiety experienced by language students in the Malaysian context looking from the paradigm of students' beliefs about language learning, classroom activities and methods, instructor-students' interaction, testing anxiety and personal and interpersonal anxieties which have been derived from the cross-comparison of Young's and Oxford's language anxiety sources lists. It can be said that both lists complement one another and become the framework for the analysis of language anxiety factors in this current study.

2.3. Language Anxiety and The Four Specific Language Skills

Language-related anxiety can affect a person's communicative ability in many ways, depending on the specific aspect(s) he experiences difficulties with. With English language, often people encounter fearful or anxiety-provoking situations when dealing with any of these four language skills.

In the first language skill which is listening, Christenberry (2001; as cited in Kuru Gonen, 2007) stated that listening is a problematic skill and consists of difficulties for teaching which is likely to cause anxiety. Riasati (2011) supported this from the revelation of his study. One of his interviewees mentioned that listening is the most anxiety provoking due to three reasons. The first reason is the speed in which the speakers speak. Secondly, different intonation patterns make language student have a difficult time to comprehend what the other interlocutor is saying. Lastly, unfamiliar words and expressions just worsened the situation stated in the first two reasons. Overall, most literature (i.e. Kim, 2000; Elkhafaifi, 2005) pointed to listening anxiety a result of not having listening strategies, poor classroom pedagogy and by-product of social interaction.

As for speaking skill, Hadziosmanovic (2012) suggested that speaking in the ESL is not exclusively the source of the anxiety, but that speaking in front of the class is. He indicated that speaking in English, speaking anxiety and classroom environment has a significant relationship altogether. The students perceived that their language anxiety stemming from an English speaking class is affected by challenges in linguistic such as lack of sufficient vocabulary, a poor command of grammar rules and pronunciation difficulties and cognitive which related closely to fear of failure namely failure in communication, failing in exams, making mistakes and failing in front of others (Ozturk & Gurbuz, 2014).

For a student who experienced reading anxiety, their speed of processing would decrease as they need more time to finish the reading task (Loghmani & Ghonsooly, 2012). Reviews of local researchers (Rajab et. al., 2012; Mohd. Zin & Rafik-Galea, 2010) found the level of anxiety related to reading English materials among Malaysian students is low despite the anxiety reported to have influenced reading performance significantly. This suggests that reading anxiety among Malaysian university students in learning English is not worrying and that there are still rooms for further enhancement of reading competency.

Based on the three past studies on language anxiety and writing skill conducted by Ucgun (2011), Rankin-Brown (2006) and Brouwer (2012), it was proven that writing anxiety have influenced students' language learning regardless of the different stages or ability (i.e. beginner or advanced language learner) and different dimensions that the researchers were trying to view writing anxiety with (i.e. causes, motivation). Hence, writing anxiety may also be an outcome of various factors that create difficulty in the process of learning and producing a writing piece in the target language which is English.

2.4. Strategies in Coping with Language Anxiety

In coping with language anxiety faced by university students, it is not only the students who should be held responsible but the instructors too, ought to provide guidance for the students on how to deal with language anxiety in the best possible way. Kondo and Ling (2004) posited a typology of strategies that students use to cope with the anxiety they experience in English language classrooms. Their findings suggested 70 basic tactics for coping with language anxiety that cohered into five strategy categories which are preparation (e.g. studying hard, trying to obtain good summaries of lecture notes), relaxation (e.g. taking a

deep breath, trying to calm down), positive thinking (e.g. imagining oneself giving a great performance, trying to enjoy the tension), peer seeking (e.g. looking for others who are having difficulty controlling their anxiety, asking other students if they understand the class) and resignation (e.g. giving up, sleeping in class). Nonetheless, often language instructors can help students to alleviate or address language anxiety by making them more aware of their personal traits as well as putting emphasis on other instructor-related dimensions such as the instructor’s personality, instructor-students’ interaction, classroom environment and instructional strategies (Bekleyen, 2003).

3. Methodology

This study employed the survey research design utilizing a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative data was collected using a self-developed questionnaire named Factors of Language Anxiety Questionnaire (FLAQ). The use of FLAQ also serves to provide the quantitative data in addressing the first three objectives of the study. After validating FLAQ items, the instrument was then piloted to establish its reliability and to determine anxiety levels. It was decided that the classification of anxiety levels is as follows:

Table 2: Classification of English Language anxiety level

Anxiety Level	FLAQ score
Low	40 – 93
Medium	94 – 146
High	147 – 200

Meanwhile, the qualitative data was obtained via email interview. The primary reason of employing this method of interviewing is that participants tend to be more open about personal matters, especially in admitting and discussing the reasons for their language weakness (James & Busher, 2006; Fox, 2009).

Data for the quantitative part of the study was obtained from 125 undergraduate students. They were purposively sampled from four faculties where English Language is not offered as a major in their program of study. Eight students with the highest anxiety scores from the questionnaire were later selected to be interviewed as a triangulation measure that would lend support the quantitative findings (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). Specifically, questions asked sought to unearth personal experiences of anxious students themselves and the strategies that they used to cope with their language anxiety.

4. Results

This section reports the findings according to the objectives of the study:

4.1. The Level Of Language Anxiety Experienced By Students

The findings revealed variations of English language anxiety level experienced by the university students. Table 3 depicts the distribution of students according to their levels of anxiety.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents according to their level of anxiety

Anxiety Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Low Anxiety	6	4.8	4.8	4.8
Medium Anxiety	108	86.4	86.4	91.2
High Anxiety	11	8.8	8.8	100.0
Total	125	100.0	100.0	

From the 125 respondents, only 11 were identified as high anxiety based on their responses to FLAQ while the majority were categorized as medium-anxious. Eight of the 11 highly anxious students were later interviewed to probe the extent of their anxiety, specifically how nervous they are in their English Language classrooms. The eight reported mixed responses with three feeling very nervous, three being occasionally anxious and the remaining two not quite apprehensive when attending their English language classes.

4.2. The Specific Skills Causing Greatest Amount Of Anxiety For University Students

In addition to examining the general anxiety level, the researchers were also interested to identify which of the four English language skills was most anxiety-provoking.

Table 4: Total mean of anxiety score according to language skills

English language skill	Total Mean	SD
Listening	3.0712	.51491
Speaking	3.0664	.52347

Reading	2.9632	.47917
Writing	3.0744	.45824

The research participants are in the view that writing skill contributes the greatest apprehension when learning English language. Hence, it can be indicated that the most anxiety provoking skill as perceived by students is writing skills. Detailed responses by items for each of the language skills are outlined in Tables 5 to 8, accordingly. The items are arranged in descending manner from the highest (most anxious) to the lowest (least anxious) scores for each of the skills.

Table 5: Means and Standard Deviations of Language Anxiety in Learning Listening Skills

	Items	Mean	SD
Qu1	I get upset when I am not sure whether I understand what I am hearing in English.	3.42	1.03
Qu13	I am worried that other students in class comprehend better what they listen to in English than I do.	3.22	.998
Qu17	I feel nervous when participating in an English listening activity with other students.	3.14	.922
Qu29	It bothers me to encounter words I cannot pronounce while listening to English.	3.12	.980
Qu33	It frightens me when I do not understand what the instructor is saying in English.	3.10	.957
Qu37	I often feel panic when answering listening comprehension test in English under time constraint.	3.05	.822
Qu5	I am satisfied with the level of listening comprehension in English that I have achieved so far.	2.99	.996
Qu21	I need to know so much about English history and culture in order to understand spoken English.	2.98	1.09
Qu25	I am afraid whenever I have a listening passage in English to listen to.	2.89	.896
Qu9	I usually find it difficult to understand English related materials that I listen to.	2.79	.836
	Total	3.07	.515

Table 6: Means and Standard Deviations of Language Anxiety in Learning Speaking Skills

	Items	Mean	SD
Qu34	I am worried about making mistakes when I use English to converse.	3.27	.928
Qu18	I feel nervous speaking in front of the entire class.	3.25	.877
Qu2	I get nervous when I have to speak up in my English language class.	3.23	1.02
Qu14	I am worried that other students in class speak better English than I do.	3.22	1.08
Qu10	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English language class.	3.20	1.04
Qu22	I needed to know so much about English history and culture in order to speak in English.	3.11	.863
Qu38	I often feel panic when I have to prepare and speak English under time constraint.	2.92	.858
Qu6	I feel confident when I speak in English.	2.89	.840
Qu26	Answering an instructor's question in English is embarrassing.	2.87	1.05
Qu30	I am afraid by the number of rules I have to learn to speak in English.	2.69	.987
	Total	3.07	.523

Table 7: Means and Standard Deviations of Language Anxiety in Learning Reading Skills

	Items	Mean	SD
Qu3	I get upset when I am not sure whether I understand what I am reading in English.	3.43	.970
Qu15	I am worried that other students in class understand better what they read in English than I do.	3.22	1.04
Qu35	I am worried about making mistakes when I read aloud in English.	3.10	.920
Qu39	I often feel panic when I answer reading comprehension test in English under time constraint.	3.06	.864
Qu31	I usually end up translating word by word when I am reading English.	2.99	.955
Qu23	I need to know much about English history and culture in order to read English.	2.90	1.04
Qu11	I often have difficulty comprehending English materials that I read.	2.88	.799
Qu19	I do not mind reading to myself, but I feel very uncomfortable when I have to read English aloud.	2.85	.959
Qu7	I am satisfied with the level of reading ability in English that I have achieved so far.	2.82	.892
Qu27	I am afraid whenever I see a whole page of English in front of me.	2.39	.870
	Total	2.96	.479

Table 8: Means and Standard Deviations of Language Anxiety in Learning Writing Skills

	Items	Mean	SD
Qu16	I am worried that my English compositions are a lot worse than others.	3.49	1.04

Qu20	I am afraid that the other students would think my English composition was terrible if they read it.	3.32	.930
Qu36	I get upset when I do not understand the instructor's correction of my writing in English.	3.25	1.01
Qu40	I often feel panic when I write English compositions under time constraint.	3.10	.837
Qu12	I usually seek every possible chance to write English compositions outside of class.	3.06	.864
Qu28	I am afraid if my English composition is being chosen as a sample for discussion in class.	2.96	1.07
Qu24	I need to know much about English history and culture in order to write in English.	2.96	1.03
Qu32	I am afraid by the number of rules I have to learn to write in English.	2.92	.799
Qu4	My mind often goes blank when I start working on an English composition.	2.85	.916
Qu8	While writing in English, I am not nervous at all.	2.85	.871
	Total	3.07	.458

4.3. Factors That Contribute To Language Anxiety from The Perspectives Of The University Students

From the literature, a number of contributing factors to anxiety in English language learning were identified. The factors were categorised into two main constructs, namely personal (originating internally or from within an individual) and interpersonal (the interaction between an individual with others/his environment) factors. Items representing each constructs were further divided into several sub-constructs. In addition to determine the impact of identified factors on anxiety, the researchers were also interested to find out if there were other causes of anxiety that were not ascertained before. The descriptions of sub-constructs and the mean of scores for each as reported in Table 9.

Table 9: Factors contributing to anxiety

Construct	Sub-constructs	Description	Mean	SD
Personal	Self-esteem	Personal reaction towards perceived self-concept relating to English language proficiency	3.23	.735
	Tolerance of ambiguity	Personal confidence and satisfaction with regards to English language use. A low mean score for tolerance of ambiguity suggests high language anxiety	2.89	.634
	Risk taking	Personal actions or activities in taking chances using English despite difficulties	2.98	.558
	Competitiveness	Personal assessment of how worried one is with regards to his engagement in various English language skills relative to other people. Competitive person tend to be more anxious and worried.	3.29	.904
	Student belief	Personal belief of what it takes to learn English and cross-referencing that with individual's learning ability	2.99	.692
Interpersonal	Test anxiety	English language test situations that can induce anxiety among the learners.	3.08	.745
	Social anxiety	Interpersonal factor referring to the individual's concern and feelings about how others perceive his/her English language competence	3.14	.669
	Existential Anxiety	Identification with a language group or target culture implies that the learner is an insider, a member of the 'club' of a certain language i.e. French, Spanish, German or Chinese speakers.	2.93	.992
	Classroom procedure	Various situations resulting from interpersonal reactions taking place in the classroom.	2.73	.721
	Instructor-student interaction	The nature of interpersonal interactions between student and teacher that contribute to anxiety	3.18	.742

It can be said that both personal and interpersonal factors do contribute to language anxiety among the research participants. The locus of two top most factors that incites anxiety appear to be internal in nature, namely individual assessment of how competent their English is in comparison to others and their reactions towards perceived ability or competency related to the English language. It is somewhat surprising however that none of the interview participants echoed competitiveness as the cause of their anxiety. A possible explanation is that they would not want to be seen as trying hard to measure up to others' standard. However, it was apparent from their verbal responses that lack of confidence does have significant impact on their English competency.

Meanwhile, the next two causal factors of anxiety were external in nature. It was clear that verbal and written interactions between instructor and students also create anxiety, particularly when students are in view that the instructors expect them to be proficient in English. This scenario becomes more critical if the instructor is seen as having certain judgements on students. Several interview participants claimed they were uncomfortable learning English due to the instructor's personality

such as being too serious, strict and rigid which hinders affable interactions and amicable environment. Cultural emphasis on having a positive outlook and saving face too could be reasons why the research participants scored high for social anxiety. They were anxious to use English in the classroom due to lack of application and opportunity to practice; hence preferring to remain silent instead of risking humiliation or embarrassment if they commit any language mistakes.

4.4. Suggested Strategies To Cope And Alleviate Language Anxiety

When asked how they cope with and try to overcome English language anxiety, the interview participants indicated they used both positive and negative coping strategies. However, the strategies used were more positive in nature focusing on self-help and seeking support from others. The list of coping strategies is as listed in Table 10.

Table 10: The Positive and Negative Ways of Language Anxiety Coping Strategies

No.	Theme	Response
Positive Coping Strategies		
1.	Self-help (Spiritually)	<i>Increase zikr (Memperbanyakkan berzikir)</i>
2.	Self-help (Gaining knowledge)	<i>Try to gain more knowledge in mastering English language (Cuba tambahkan ilmu dalam menguasai Bahasa Inggeris)</i>
3.	Language learning strategies (Dictionary use)	<i>I will try to find the meaning - for the words he do not know - in the dictionary and try to rearrange the words (Saya akan berusaha mencari maksud di dalam kamus dan cuba menyusun semula ayat)</i>
4.	Language learning strategies (Modelling)	<i>Sometimes I will try to remember back the English television programme that I have watched before and I try to repeat how those people in the television speak (Kadang-kadang saya akan ingat balik cerita-cerita Inggeris yang saya pernah tonton dan saya ulang semula cara bagaimana mereka di dalam TV bertutur)</i>
5.	Language learning strategies (Note taking)	<i>Write notes on what the lecturer said but also in English (Tulis notes apa yang pensyarah cakap tapi dalam bahasa inggeris jugak)</i>
6.	Language learning strategies (Word reference)	<i>Besides, I will try to remember every single word said by the lecturer so that would be easier for me to refer to the lecturer when problem arise with what I do not understand (Selain itu, saya cuba ingat setiap perkataan yang pensyarah sebut supaya senang saya nak refer pensyarah tu bila ada masalah dengan apa yang saya tak faham)</i>
7.	Relaxation	<i>Be positive and relax I try to relax Trying to sit calmly and control the anxious feeling (Cuba untuk duduk dengan lebih tenang dan mengawal perasaan gugup)</i>
8.	Preparation	<i>Make an earlier preparation both physically and mentally (Prepare awal dari segi fizikal dan mental) Sometimes I prepare in advance the question or answer in English, only then I will ask question (Kadang-kadang saya prepare soalan/jawapan dalam Inggeris dulu, baru saya akan tanya soalan). Always prepare short notes for presentation</i>
9.	External help (From instructor)	<i>Meet the lecturer (Jumpa lecturer) I reduce my nervous feeling by trying to focus in everything discussed by the lecturer (Saya mengurangkan perasaan nervous saya dengan cara fokus setiap apa yang pensyarah bincangkan)</i>
10.	External help (From peers)	<i>I will try to get closer to the students who are more skilful and good in English language (Saya akan cuba mendekati diri saya dengan pelajar yang lebih mahir dan pandai di dalam bahasa inggeris) Asking help from a friend to explain the learning topic (Meminta bantuan kawan untuk menerangkan topik pembelajaran)</i>
11.	Breathing	<i>I will take a breath for a while</i>
12.	Self-motivate	<i>I will try to motivate myself</i>
13.	Self-enjoyment	<i>Try to enjoy the learning without thinking too much of the anxiety</i>

		<i>(Cuba untuk enjoy dalam pembelajaran tanpa terlalu memikirkan perasaan gugup)</i>
Negative Coping Strategies		
1.	Absenteeism	<i>But I also have taken negative action such as absenteeism (Tetapi saya juga pernah mengambil tindakan negatif seperti ponteng)</i>
2.	Avoidance	<i>Try not to have eye contact with the lecturer</i>

In a much earlier study, Kondo and Ling (2004) found that their respondents cope with anxiety by engaging in activities that will help them prepare for English class. However, this study revealed that in addition to organizing self and making necessary readings or preparation before class, the participants used other language learning strategies which include maximising the use of dictionary, modelling, note taking and word referencing. It has been suggested that systematic preparation and putting into practice varying learning strategies can help students become less anxious before they enter their English classes (Trifoni & Shahini, 2011). Besides, instead of relying on peers help, the participants in this study included seeking the assistance from their English instructors. Although it is predicted that not many anxious students would be bold enough to practice this coping strategy, it is actually a good suggestion as students who seek direct help from their instructor may be seen as proactive and trying hard to really learn and improve themselves. As such, a more personal guidance and help session can be rendered accordingly.

Other than positive coping strategy, there were also participants who handled anxiety negatively by purposely not attending class and avoiding eye contact with the lecturer. These negative coping strategies nonetheless are not helpful in addressing anxiety and may result in undesirable learning outcomes.

5. Conclusion

Based on the four research objectives that the study sought to answer, it was found that:

- a) albeit the level of language anxiety is moderate, the anxiousness in language learning is largely influenced by the students' competitiveness in writing and their challenged self-esteem in reading and listening. Students' competitiveness is evident when they took to task 'competing' to produce quality, academically acceptable assignments;
- b) language anxiety experienced by the university is influenced greatly by their writing skills. The fact that the students by nature are very competitive, coupled with the high priority given to submission of well written English assignment has created an anxiety-inducing environment that does not quite help assist student learning of English language;
- c) instructor - students' interaction is the top most factor contributing to English language anxiety. Fear of not meeting the instructors' expectations as a result of having failed to understand feedbacks due to messy handwriting, doodling, and insufficient example, just to list a few, apparently contributed to much anxiety amongst the students; and
- d) students tend to choose more positive coping strategies when they experience anxiety in learning English. Among the strategies used include mental and physical preparation, study before asking the instructor questions, write short notes before oral presentation, engage in various relaxation and breathing techniques, seek others' help as well as practice positive thinking. However, there were also those who chose negative coping via being absent from class and avoiding anxious-provoking situation.

This study has brought to light a few pedagogical implications to enable language instructors facilitate students with English language anxiety. It is suggested that when teaching moderate to highly anxious students, English instructors ought to:

- create a low-to-moderate degree of competitiveness in the classroom especially when carrying out writing activities. Moreover, instructors can build up the students' self-esteem especially in listening and reading activities by offering various opportunities of receiving success in the classroom and avoiding activities that enhance early frustration (Hashemi & Abbasi, 2013).
- attend to students' self-esteem by allowing the anxious students to experience success, to provide feedback in non-threatening and humiliating manner, and to offer praises for improvements on all four skills when they are due (Shang, 2013); and
- develop positive instructor – students' interaction so that anxious students view instructors as being more tolerant towards their mistake. Specifically, when giving feedback to students, there is a need to ensure written feedbacks are legibly written with, perhaps relevant examples and to ask the students if they have understood what needed improvement or if they still require further clarifications.
- allow for more English speaking activities (i.e. oral academic presentation) because lack of opportunities and practice outside the language classroom to speak in English might be one of the reasons that this activity produces anxiety among students.

Overall, this study documents the university students as having the moderate level of anxiety when learning English language in the classroom setting while writing skill is the specific skill that causes greater anxiety for the students. Instructor–students' interaction was also found to be a possible anxiety-inducing factor resulting in students engaging in various coping mechanisms. This study had taken the lead in examining not only the general level of English language anxiety but also in identifying which specific skills contributes the most when learning the language. In addition, varying factors which may have caused anxiety when learning English in class were also identified. The findings of this study apply only to the question of anxiety among non-English major students. Via the pedagogical suggestions and implications put forward, it is hoped that

university students in Malaysia can be helped to gradually address their fear for the language, develop better proficiency while simultaneously improve their chance for better and deserving employment.

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