EFFECTS OF DEBILITATIVE AND FACILITATIVE ANXIETY ON SPEAKING IN SECOND LANGUAGE AMONG MALAYSIAN ESL LEARNERS
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ABSTRACT
Anxiety experienced in speaking English as second language (L2) can be both debilitating and facilitating which can influence students’ adaptation to the target environment and ultimately the achievement of their educational goals. This factor plays an important role to show the problems related to speaking English as L2 in a lifelong learning process. This study investigates how anxiety affects speaking in the L2 among Malaysian ESL learners’ in terms of the two different dimensions which are debilitative and facilitative. The study draws on a quantitative research design to analyse the anxiety types, which is mainly grounded by Krashen’s (1982) assumptions in the Affective Filter hypothesis. This study adapts the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), which was devised by Horwitz et al. (1986) as the data collection instrument in the research. The questionnaire consisted of 33 items scaled with a 4-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 100 ESL adult learners which consists of students from Executive Diploma Programme. The finding of this research shows that 70% of the students have negative attitudes towards speaking second language (L2) despite of having facilitative anxiety in speaking English as L2.

Keywords: ESL learners, adults, speaking anxiety, lifelong learning, effects, facilitative, debilitative

INTRODUCTION
Speaking is considered to be the most powerful weapon that stimulates the presence of anxiety in second language learning (Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999). According to Spielberger (1983, as cited in Horwitz 2001, p.113), anxiety has been outlined as “the patented feeling of stress, apprehension, goosey, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system”. In brief, anxiety therefore can occur in many contexts or in any situation of human life.
Alpert and Haber (1960) as cited in Ellis (1994) have clearly showed the differences between facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety by showing that anxiety can either be positive or negative. Looking on facilitating anxiety, this type of anxiety always motivates learners to do things more efficiently and it encourages learners to make an extra effort in overcoming feelings of anxiety. On the other hand, debilitating anxiety is said to the other way round. According to Simpson, Parker and Harrison (1995), debilitating anxiety refers to “extreme level of anxiety” which could result a poor and bad response or could even restrain it. Moreover, debilitating anxiety will definitely cause learners to prevent the learning process in order to suppress the feeling of anxiety.

Anxiety in speaking in a second language, especially when that language is English can have a debilitating effect and can influence students’ adaptation to the target environment and ultimately their educational goals. There is also agreement that anxiety is related to performance (Balachandran & Skully, 2004; Tobias & Everson, 1997), and that anxiety has been shown to have a debilitating effect on learning and achievement (Gaudy & Spielberger, 1971; Tobias, 1980).

Furthermore, one cannot deny that English is a universal language with regards to communication and it is broadly utilized as the second most important language in Malaysia. It is predicted that with the pattern of globalization, this country will confront firm competition from other outside countries especially in education. Therefore, Malaysian university students should be well equipped with a solid education foundation and in training to remain competitive; including the ability to communicate in English. As a second most important language in Malaysia, English is broadly used as a medium of instruction in different fields such as medical, engineering, legitimate and business. Thus, it is essential for Malaysians to be able to use English with the goal that they can utilize the language productively for educational purposes and later in the workplace.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

i. **Definition of facilitative and debilitative anxiety**

A review of the language anxiety literature highlights the distinction between facilitative and debilitative anxiety. The learning of any academic subject is enhanced by both positive and negative motivation, for example: a good performance in music, art or language learning, especially the overt social act of speaking another language, depends on enough anxiety ‘to arouse the neuromuscular system to optimal levels of performance, but not so much arousal
that the complex neuromuscular systems underlying those skills are disrupted’ (Scovel, as cited in in Horwitz & Young, 1991, p. 22).

Language anxiety is a form of debilitative anxiety which has a negative impact on the students’ performance, attitudes, emotional state and enjoyment of the language learning experience. Extremely anxious students are highly motivated to avoid involvement in the classroom activities which they fear the most. Horwitz and Young (1991, p. 35) state that ‘as long as foreign language learning takes place in a formal school setting where evaluation is inextricably tied to performance, language anxiety is likely to continue to flourish’.

Anxiety is identified as a distinct affective variable in second language research (Horwitz, 1986, et al., Young, 1990; MacIntyre, 1995; Horwitz, 2000; Dornyei, 2005; & Gardner, 2006). Anxiety is not usually identified as a solitary unit, but comprised of parts that have varying characteristics (Dornyei, 2005). Anxiety according to Dornyei (2005) is complex and is useful to examine in comparison with two categorical comparisons. Beneficial or facilitating anxiety versus inhibitory or debilitating anxiety is the first categorical comparison. Within the beneficial or facilitating framework, anxiety tends to not deter performance, but can facilitate it. For example, an athlete may be anxious before a championship game, but use the anxiety to concentrate further in performance. Hence, anxiety facilitated the athlete’s performance. Conversely, ‘worry’ under the cognitive domain can have debilitating effects on performance.

As an oral communication competence is given salience in language learning, numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between anxiety and oral communication competence especially among students. MacIntyre (1999) said that anxiety influences “both language learning and communication processes” (p. 24). Horwitz et al. (1991), conducted a research examining the relationship between anxiety and foreign language learning in a classroom situation. They labeled anxiety experienced during foreign language learning in the classroom as Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA). In addition, they stated FLCA as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p. 31). Their study is deemed very important since it initiated many other studies in language anxiety.

Horwitz (2010) proposed that foreign language anxiety is related to communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Communication apprehension
arises out of having a feeling of fear or anxiety when communicating with other people in different situations. Apprehension could eventually lead to frustration resulting in debilitating anxiety. Communication apprehension is not peculiar to individuals with a low level of language proficiency; it could happen to anyone. Extending from apprehension is test anxiety or test apprehension which is a common phenomenon that is experienced among individuals before taking a test. Individuals could be put in a state of mental and physical discomfort due to the worry of being evaluated in a test. This is a manifestation of debilitating anxiety which can affect test performance in a negative manner. On the other hand, positive anxiety could arise when students are able to overcome the negative anxiety and turn it into a motivating force to encourage them to perform better. Zeidner (1998) and Brown (2010) also mentioned that test anxiety could either be facilitative or debilitative.

ii. Studies on speaking anxiety

Kitano (2001) utilized a survey containing different scales to measure the class anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and self-perceived speaking ability of learners studying Japanese as a foreign language. Using multiple correlations and a regression analysis, Kitano ascertained the positive relationship between dispositional fear of negative evaluation and anxiety in the foreign language classroom. Also, she noted a stronger influence of the fear of negative evaluation on the anxiety of advanced-level students than on that of students of other competence levels. As to self-perceived ability in speaking the target language, it turned out to have a significant influence on the anxiety level of male students, but not on that of female students.

Both Liu (2010), and Kao and Craigie (2010) examined learner anxiety among undergraduates in the Taiwanese EFL context and reported an inverse relationship between language anxiety and performance. The participants in Liu’s study were freshmen from various disciplines, ability-grouped into four different levels of classes for required English courses according to their English proficiency test scores. It should be noted that even though students were learning English with peers of similar ability, certain levels of anxiety were still identified in the language classroom. Nonetheless, ANOVA results showed that the differences in anxiety across varying proficiency levels were non-significant. Liu suggested that the grouping practice may have some impact on lessening learner anxiety.
iii. Speaking anxiety among working adults in Malaysia

This study aims to investigate the phenomenon of speaking anxiety among adult Malaysians particularly those who have been in workforce during their lifelong learning undertaking. According to Aspin and Chapman (2001), one approach to conceptualising lifelong learning is the concern of promoting skills and competences necessary for developing general capabilities and specific performance in work situations. However, the number of studies done in this area particularly in Malaysia is surprisingly small which indicates it has not been explored yet. Nevertheless, Henshaw (1991) and Lang et.al (1999) found that many studies have been conducted in many countries to determine the technical and personal abilities required by engineers by today’s industry.

This includes to have solid communication and teamwork skills; the practical components for their profession. In addition, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development or OECD members maintain that their future citizens must be equipped with the skills of 'the knowledge economy' (OEC, 1992, as cited in Aspin& Chapman, 2001, p. 1). These include wide-ranging and thorough bases of knowledge content and cognitive competences: communication; numeracy and computer literacy; research ability and 'learning how to learn'; team-building and cooperation; inter-personal skills; judgement and discrimination, imagination and creativity.

Furthermore, many people have realized the importance of pursuing lifelong learning as part of their individual professional development as well as career expansion. They embark on additional diploma, second degree, professional certificate, short courses, master’s degree and doctorate of philosophy while working. One of their aims is to improve their soft skills including the ability to communicate and speak in public. However, it is good to acknowledge that it is important for “teacher educators to be aware of teachers’ conceptions of communication as a vehicle for developing learners’ understanding, and realize how they can assist students develop patterns that foster communication development” (Brendefur & Frykholm, 2000, as cited in Halizah Awang & Zawawi Daud, 2015, p. 481).
Research questions

Drawing from previous studies, this paper aims to investigate the speaking anxiety among working adults in Malaysia who are currently pursuing lifelong learning in tertiary level. The following research questions will guide this study:

1. Do adult learners believe that anxiety hinders speaking English as a second language?
2. Which type of anxiety is experienced by the speakers?
3. In what way does the anxiety affect their speaking skill?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the execution of this study. This study adopts a quantitative method for the above stated objectives. This study adopted Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). The questionnaire consisted of 33 items scaled with a 4-point Likert scale; strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree. This questionnaire eliminated “Nor agree or disagree” to avoid respondents from choosing an easy answer. A brief demographic information was derived as well on the questionnaire to identify participants’ gender, race, first language and years of speaking English.

Participants

Using purposive sampling, the participants were 100 students who are currently doing Executive Diploma programmes on weekends on a part-time basis at University of Malaya Centre for Continuing Education (UMCCed). The questionnaire was administered after the class starts. All the students have learnt English from 3 years up to more than 6 years.

Data Collection

Data of the study was collected via The Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). The rationale for adapting this questionnaire was utilized to evaluate the respondents’ nervousness and apprehension when using English as a second language receptively and productively in the classroom context. The scale of designed
for this purpose based on the construct of foreign language classroom anxiety which is a composites of communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

The FLCAS elicits the data on the respondents’ extent of agreement to their disagreement with the statements about their speaking anxiety and experiences in the classroom. It comprises 33 items scaled with a 4-point Likert scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ to ‘strongly agree’. The term ‘foreign language’ in the original scale was changed to ‘English’ to suit the present study. Respondents are required to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement by choosing the one of the response options from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”. The modified questionnaire has two parts, section one solicits demographic information of the respondents, section two (items 1-33) focuses on information on respondents’ anxiety towards speaking in English. In short, the questionnaire covers the fundamental aspects of communication apprehension evaluation espoused by Horwitz et al. (1986).

**Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection procedures were done in several stages. The first stage was the administration of the FLCAS questionnaires, which were administered to adult learners from Executive Diploma Programme during class time. This took approximately 10 to 15 minutes.

**Data Analysis**

In this section, the steps of the procedure for conducting this study are presented. The data collected in the present study was quantitative. The quantitative data of the questionnaires were analysed in terms of means, using Microsoft Excel and percentages.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effects of speaking anxiety has on ESL adult students’ decisions to speak English. This chapter reveals the findings of the study and followed by a discussion. Therefore, it analyses and discusses the results of this study based on the gathered data from the samples and instrument which have been explained in detail in the previous chapter. The research findings relate to the research questions that entirely guided this study. Data were obtained from FLCAS questionnaire.

Results found from students’ questionnaire survey

In the FLCAS questionnaire, participants had to tick the appropriate box from four options for each item. For analysis the responses were converted into mathematical figures as follows:

Strongly disagree (SA) = 1
Disagree (DS) = 2
Agree (A) = 3
Strongly agree (SA) = 4

The results found from participants’ questionnaire survey are presented below:

To answer research question 1, an analysis on the level of Malaysian ESL adult students’ anxiety towards speaking in English was done.
Table 1: Responses to Items in the FLCAS in Percentage (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Strongly agree (SA)</th>
<th>Agree (A)</th>
<th>Disagree (DS)</th>
<th>Strongly disagree (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I don’t worry about making mistakes in language class.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I tremble when I know that I’m going to be called on in language class.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I frighten me when I don’t understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. It wouldn’t bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than I am.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I don’t understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I get upset when I don’t understand what the teacher is correcting.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Even If I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I often feel like not going to my language class.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign language class.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. I can feel my heart pounding when I’m going to be called on in language class.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22. I don’t feel pressure to prepare very well for</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
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<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28. When I'm on my way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item 2</th>
<th>Item 5</th>
<th>Item 8</th>
<th>Item 11</th>
<th>Item 14</th>
<th>Item 18</th>
<th>Item 22</th>
<th>Item 28</th>
<th>Item 32</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Level of Facilitative Anxiety
To answer research questions 2 and 3, Figures 1 and 2 display the level of language anxiety in speaking among the ESL adult learners. The bar charts illustrate the highest and lowest percentage for each item given in the FLCAS questionnaire. Basically according to the items, the students are facing fear and anxiety in communicating with people. This type of anxiety in speaking a second language is derived from the learners’ personal knowledge that they will have difficulty understanding others and making themselves understood. The students faced problems like nervousness when questioned, they were embarrassed to volunteer answers, and felt that other students spoke better English. They were upset when they could not understand what the teacher corrected and often feared being laughed at by their peers. Generally they felt they were being judged and cast in poor light by teacher and peers.

These findings suggest that a majority of students experienced high feelings of anxiety when communicating in English with other people. In the real language use situation, it is normal for second language learners to feel some anxiety. As stated by Khairi and Nurul Lina (2010),
moderate feelings of anxiety in second language learning might help students to create the desire to learn, to motivate and to get the students realize that they have to work harder in order to acquire the target language.

On the other hand, if students experience low level of anxiety, they may be so relaxed that they do not really learn or acquire any new things and as a result, the process of language acquisition will not be successful. For students who experience high anxiety, they may perceive a second language learning situation as threatening to them and may respond to this threatening situation by showing poor learning performance.

The most significant finding of the research is that the students showed a high score in two of the traits of second language anxiety which are fear of communication apprehension and negative evaluation. This would lead to other psychological stresses, such as the fear of losing self-confidence or feeling inferior to others. It reflects the biggest dilemma faced by most second language learners in Malaysia as a whole.

The fact that students are more worried about failing the exam would probably halt the output process which is essential in the process of language acquisition. Rather than focusing on ways to polish and enhance their language, the students would dwell on unrealistic expectations in which they are to produce a flawless language. These kinds of negative traits would surely bring in how they behave and respond in the second language classroom that consequently debilitate the learning.

The results indicate that generally, the ESL adult learners in Malaysia still have positive attitudes towards speaking second language (L2). They realize the importance of English in daily basis and they have the desire to improvise their level of proficiency. Although they feel
that speaking English is difficult and stressful, they do not think it is a waste of time, and they even consider continuing to improve their English when they graduate. The findings further demonstrate that learner’s have a high level of motivation towards speaking L2. With regard to proficiency, the better learners have more positive attitudes and show greater initiatives towards speaking English than the weak students. Thus, despite the overall positive attitude towards speaking L2, it would appear that learners with both low and high levels of are more interested in improving their English.

The learners are also generally motivated to speak English in daily basis and for future career. However, it seems that their language anxiety did not affect their motivation level in speaking English as they assume that even a high level of language anxiety motivates them to learn from mistakes and speak even better.

**IMPLICATIONS**

Based on the findings, this study would like to propose to Ministry of Higher Education particularly all learning institutes to offer specific curriculum that can cater to working adults who experience speaking anxiety in order to improve their speaking skill. This can be done by offering additional course separated from the mainstream programme to suit their needs. The course must pay attention to the Practicality and relevance of communication and speaking skills in workforce as they require it for their career development.

Furthermore, in term of teaching methodology, as intellectual and emotional components are just as vital, it is significant for educators to consider these two variables when showing or drilling their students. This study wants to make instructors understand that some great students will not have the capacity to perform to their genuine standard because of full of feeling reasons, for this situation, speaking anxiety. What's more, it will give the instructors chance to see whether they truly comprehend their students and know about the troubles they
experience when speaking in English. Ideally, the data from the study will guide educators in dealing with their students and it will offer them some assistance with responding to their students' speaking anxiety suitably.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined speaking language anxiety among Malaysian working adults. From here, we can see that Malaysian students showed that they are not extremely affected by anxiety when they have to speak in English. This is quite expected as Malaysian learners are enculturized in the English speaking environment where speaking in English and taking oral English tests are quite the standard within their student experience. Therefore, from the data collected from the questionnaire, it’s clearly shown that the learners faced debilitative anxiety more compared to facilitative.
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