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The teacher as facilitator: Reducing anxiety in the EFL university classroom

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Anxious students are often concerned about the impressions that others form of them. When such students are confronted in a classroom with a learning situation that makes them uncomfortable, they may choose to withdraw from the activity. Some learners believe they cannot perform in English and consequently form negative expectations, which in turn lead to decreased effort and the avoidance of opportunities to enhance their communication skills. This study replicates Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1991) Foreign language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and results show that around half of the students in conversation classes at the focus university suffer from some level of language anxiety. This paper suggests that learners' level of motivation and effort can be raised when teachers use communicative strategies and adopt a language facilitating role by encouraging students to assess their performance in a positive light.

不安な生徒は他人からどう見られているかを気にしており、また授業での学習状況にいる時の不安感が生徒を授業中居心地悪くさせている。つまり「戦う意気」と「逃げる意気」の狭間にいるのである。 学習者の中には英語で上手く出来きないと思い込んでいる者がおり、その思い込みが消極的な希望しか持たないことになり、しいては努力しないで、自身のコミュニケーション技術を高めるせっかくの機会を避けることになるのである。 本研究は **Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1991)** の **Foreign language Classroom　Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)** を使用（再現）して測定し、その結果から大学での「英会話」授業の学生の半分近くが言語学習における不安感を弱めることに苦しんでいることがわかる。 本稿では、学生を励まして学生自身の積極性を評価することを示唆している。言語使用と言語習得の助けとなる学習方略とコミュニケーション方略を奨励することと同様に、教師が会話を促すサポート役に徹することによって、学習者の動機づけと努力の度合いが向上するのではないかとしている。

Introduction

Many of us have been in situations as language learners when we are asked a question and our minds mysteriously go blank. Or perhaps our heads follow a teacher around the class as we nervously await our turn to speak, barely listening to other students' output, our eyes trained on the teacher to see which "unfortunate victim" will be chosen to speak next. At other times we shun communicative opportunities altogether. While some students avoid talking because they are unprepared, uninterested, or unwilling to express themselves, most anxiety stems from feelings of alienation in class, from a lack of confidence, or because the students fear communication itself (Daly, 1991). Reflecting on my own, anxiety-ridden experiences of learning Japanese, I pondered that if my English conversation classes somehow induce anxiety and lead to a miserable experience, then I need to consider how to encourage my own students in their English study.

Task-based language teaching often utilizes incongruity and unpredictable learning activities to encourage communication (Ellis, 2003). Arguably, tasks that are not focused in a sequence of activities that ends with controlled practice may unwittingly encourage anxiety. As Aida (1994) notes, many language teachers are concerned about the possibility that anxiety may function as an affective filter preventing learners from achieving a high level of proficiency in the language. Learners need to have attitudes and use strategies that encourage lowered anxiety, higher motivation, and confidence in their ability to convey what they want to say. One of the challenges for teachers is to provide the kind of classroom atmosphere that promotes low-anxiety.

Classroom anxiety

Nespor (1987) writes that beliefs are "composed of episodically stored material derived from personal experience" (p. 320) which derive legitimacy from past episodes. These

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critical episodes then "color or frame the comprehension of events later in time" (ibid.). Thus, learners' experiences determine the value of similar, but new, tasks. In the classroom, students perform a "cognitive appraisal" (Dayhoff, 2000, p.15) which helps affect judgments. Students who experience anxiety in the classroom often base their fear on an inaccurate assessment of its causes. They imagine danger where it does not necessarily exist and do not have an effective plan of action to cope with their anxiety. Over time and in different learning situations people develop expectations concerning the likely outcomes of various behaviors within and across situations, but when they engage in communicative behaviors that seem to work, they develop positive expectations for those behaviors, and these can become a regular part of learners' communicative repertoire.

However, if experiences are negative, language anxiety begins to develop and if these negatively perceived experiences continue, foreign language anxiety may become a regular occurrence and the learner begins to routinely expect to be nervous and perform poorly. Anxiety can be associated with a variety of physiological and emotional states, embodied in feelings of tension even in situations where the immediate cause of such tension is not readily apparent. MacIntyre (1995) concludes that:

> Language learning is a cognitive activity that relies on encoding, storage, and retrieval processes, and anxiety can interfere with each of these by creating a divided attention scenario for anxious students. Anxious students are focused on both the task and their reactions to it (p. 96).

Anxiety is related to self-focused, negative and anxious cognition during interaction. Highly anxious students often have relatively negative self-concepts, underestimating the quality of their speaking ability when compared with others.

Anxiety and the threat to self-esteem

While some may argue that a dose of anxiety is necessary to create a language learning "charge", for many students nervousness distracts from attending to and remembering new language, and will thus affect the practice required for language to be assimilated. In describing language anxiety, MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) write:

> "The anxious student may be characterized as an individual who perceives the L2 as an uncomfortable experience, who withdraws from voluntary participation, who feels social pressures not to make mistakes and who is less willing to try uncertain or novel linguistic forms" (p. 112)

An unwillingness to make an effort can be seen as debilitating in communicative language classrooms, where making an attempt to use new language forms is a central tenet of second language acquisition. This unwillingness may spark what Dayhof (2000) calls the "anxiety feedback loop" (p.27), in which anxiety is triggered by concern over being scrutinized and evaluated by others in a performance situation. This can lead to an excessive fear of being humiliated or judged negatively in learning situations. Yet, I contend that students can make their learning more profitable and less painful by reflecting on their learning experiences and receiving necessary guidance.

The present study

The instruments

As a form of action research, I decided to replicate Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1991) 33-item Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to examine the degree of anxiety in my own university English classes. The three constructs (speaking anxiety, foreign language classroom anxiety, and classroom non-anxiety) have eleven

items each. In addition, I sought an example of an anxiety-provoking classroom learning experience through an open-ended question at the end of the survey.

The participants

A Japanese version of the questionnaire was given to 289 first-year students during English conversation classes in the second semester at a private university in Western Japan. In their first year, students at this university must enroll in either elementary or intermediate conversation classes, based on a self-appraisal of their English ability. All the Japanese students studied English as a school subject for six years at junior and senior high schools. The participants formed a convenience sample and responded on a 5-item Likert scale ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). In an attempt to gain a wider picture of student reactions, they were informed that there were no correct answers and were asked not to think too deeply before they responded. Of the 289 respondents, 190 (66%) were aged 18, and 73 (25%) were 19 years old. Two hundred and thirty-one (80%) were males, and 58 (20%) were females, which is roughly representative of the university's broader student population. One hundred and fourteen (39%) of the students are majoring in Commerce and 175 (61%) majored in Law and Economics. Two hundred and seventy-eight (278) or 96% are Japanese with the remainder made up of Chinese and Korean students.

Data analysis of the FLCAS

The responses to the 33 questions are displayed using frequencies and percentages and the overall findings had an acceptable Cronbach-Alpha reliability of .79. For the purpose of this analysis, the responses to "Strongly agree" (SA) and "Agree" (A) were combined to create an overall score of agreement with the question, and the sum of responses to "Disagree" (D) and "Strongly disagree" (SD) were similarly calculated to gain a measure of disagreement.

The results of the FLCAS

Speaking anxiety

Table 1, shows that students endorsed questionnaire items that suggest speech anxiety, with 59.1 % of respondents stating that they do not feel sure of themselves when they speak in English (Q. 1), 51.2% claiming that they start to panic if they are called upon to speak without having prepared in advance (Q.9), and 40.9% reporting that they get nervous when the teacher asks questions without allowing for preparation time

Table 1: Speaking Anxiety

1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I speak in English

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	12.1	47.8	24.6	13.8	1.7	3.55	0.935

3. I tremble when I know that I am going to be called on in English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	2.1	15.6	21.5	51.2	9.7	2.49	0.94

9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	12.8	38.4	23.9	22.5	2.4	3.36	1.043

13.It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	
Percent	8	36	34.3	20.1	1.7	3.28	0.933

20.I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	3.5	29.1	27	36	4.5	2.91	0.982

23.I always feel that the other students speak English better than me

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	11.1	31.8	34.6	19.7	2.8	3.28	0.995

24.I feel very self-conscious speaking English in front of other students

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	4.8	31.5	32.2	29.8	1.7	3.07	0.934

27.I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	1.7	18.3	34.3	42.9	2.8	2.73	0.851

30.I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak English

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	10.4	42.6	20.1	24.2	2.8	3.33	1.042

31.I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak English

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	3.1	13.1	38.1	40.5	5.2	2.68	0.879

33.I get nervous when the English teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	6.6	34.3	30.4	27.3	1.4	3.17	0.953

Forty-four percent report that they are embarrassed to volunteer to speak (Q.13), while 42.9% feel that other students speak better English than they do (Q.23). Thirty-six point three percent feel self-conscious speaking in front of their classmates (Q.24) and 53% feel overwhelmed by the number of rules that are believed to be necessary to speak English (Q.30). Thirty-two point six percent of students can feel their heart pounding when they sense they will be called upon in class (Q.20), but 60.9% of respondents do not feel so anxious that they tremble (Q.3). Forty-five point seven percent do not feel they get nervous or confused while speaking in English (Q.27), with the same percentage maintaining that other students will not laugh at them when speaking (Q.31). Obviously such findings must call into question teaching strategies that require learners to speak in front of the whole class, or tasks where they feel pressured to compare their performances against others.

Foreign language classroom anxiety

A perceived lack of competence can also lead students to display anxiety in the classroom. Fifty-two point six percent of students feel frightened when they do not understand what the teacher says in English (Q.4), 42.9% get upset when they don't understand what the teacher is correcting (Q.15), and 38.7% get nervous when they can't comprehend everything that the teacher says (Q.29). Sixty point three percent worry about the consequences of failing the English class (Q.10), while 36% say that they get so nervous that they forget things they know (Q.12).

Table 2: Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety

4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	6.2	46.4	23.9	21.1	2.4	3.33	0.957

7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at English than me

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	14.2	32.2	31.5	18.3	3.8	3.35	1.053

10. I worry about the consequences of failing my English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	23.2	38.1	17	18.7	3.1	3.6	1.127

12. In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	4.5	31.5	26.3	33.9	3.8	2.99	0.995

15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	7.3	35.6	29.8	24.9	2.4	3.2	0.977

16. Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	2.1	20.4	33.9	37	6.6	2.74	0.926

19. I am afraid that my English teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	1.7	16.6	31.8	45.3	4.5	2.66	0.868

21. The more I study for an English test, the more confused I get

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	3.5	11.8	28.4	49.8	6.6	2.56	0.908

25. English class moves so quickly I worry about being left behind

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	7.3	23.2	26.6	38.1	4.8	2.9	1.044

26. I feel more tense and nervous in my English class than in my other classes

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	6.9	20.8	33.9	35.3	3.1	2.93	0.98

29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the English teacher says

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	6.2	32.5	25.3	33.6	2.4	3.07	1.003

As in question 23 (above), 46.4% think that other students perform better than them (Q.7) while 30.5% feel that English classes move so fast that they worry about being

left behind. However, 43.6% of students do not feel anxious about English class if they are well prepared (Q.16), while only 27.7% feel more tense and nervous in English class than in other classes. To some degree then, anxiety must be understood in relation not only to English as an academic subject, but also in terms of the activities that take place in language learning environments.

Foreign language classroom non-anxiety

If we reverse the wording in some of the questions, we can see that 39.4% of students worry about making mistakes in English class (Q.2), and 37.7% say that they would be bothered if they had to take more English classes (Q.5). Sixty-eight point eight percent of respondents feel unconfident when speaking in English (Q.18), while 58.9% feel they would be nervous speaking English with native speakers of that language (Q.14), and 31.9% would feel uncomfortable around native speakers (Q.32). Thirty-nine point one percent feel pressure to prepare for English class (Q.22) while 33% often feel like not going to English class (Q.17). Again, findings show a lack of confidence. Fear of making mistakes may indicate that as anxious learners focus attention on perceived inadequacies, they are concerned about the potential for failure and the consequences of failure instead of concentrating on the task itself.

Table 3: Foreign Language Classroom Non-anxiety

2. I don't worry about making mistakes in English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	3.5	25.6	31.5	33.9	5.5	2.88	0.971

5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more English classes

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	4.2	21.5	36.7	27.7	10	2.82	1.1015

6. During the English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	5.2	33.2	32.5	24.9	4.2	3.1	0.973

8. I am usually at ease during tests in English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	3.1	20.4	22.8	42.6	11.1	2.62	1.028

11.I don't understand why some students get so upset over English classes

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	1.7	9	33.6	43.9	11.8	2.45	0.877

14.I would not be nervous speaking English with native speakers

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	2.4	9.7	29.1	46.4	12.5	2.43	0.915

17.I often feel like not going to English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	15	18	32.5	35.6	8	2.78	1.023

18.I feel confident when I speak in English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	1	5.2	24.9	52.9	15.9	2.22	0.813

22. I don't feel pressure to prepare well for English class

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	3.5	20.1	37.4	30.8	8.3	2.8	0.97

28. When I'm on my way to English class, I feel very sure and relaxed

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	0.3	8	40.8	43.3	7.6	2.5	0.764

32. I think I would feel comfortable around native speakers of English

	SA	A	N	D	SD	*M*	*SD*
Percent	3.5	20.4	44.3	25.3	6.6	2.89	0.921

Findings of the open-ended question

The survey also included an open-ended question asking respondents to recount a classroom learning experience that increased their level of anxiety. Many students viewed being asked to respond to teacher questions as threatening, particularly in situations when teachers "suddenly" asked them questions without adequate time to prepare a response. Students often blamed misunderstandings on their perceived limited ability level, which may lead to feelings of helplessness. Failing to remember previously learned vocabulary was also frequently cited, again heightening ability doubts. One respondent suggested that,

"when I thought I knew a word from last lesson and was called
upon to answer, I was dumbfounded, soon forgot, and couldn't
answer."

Similarly, another student reported he felt anxiety when asked a seemingly simple
question about something he managed in the past, but found that he was unable to reply.
Such statements appear to be linked with self-esteem and cause students to look inward
and to blame themselves for poor language retention. This may lead them to avoid
making greater effort in class in order to protect their sense of self-worth. Some also
noted that their level of anxiety rose when they thought other students were better or
more able them, as evidenced by such comments as; "everyone else seems to
understand, except me", "when I don't understand what the other students around me
are doing," or "when I don't understand, but other students manage to answer simply."
Students use classmates as points of comparison and their perceived failure is attributed
to the belief that they have less language proficiency than their peers.

Implications: The facilitating role of the teacher

The position advocated in this paper is that learners' potential is hampered by anxiety
and its associated reductions in self-esteem, risk taking and competitiveness. As
Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1991) note, educators should help anxious students cope
with existing anxiety-provoking situations and endeavor to make the learning context
less stressful. Creating a low-anxiety classroom atmosphere is clearly an important
prerequisite to language learning success. Language classrooms are "inherently face
threatening environments" (Dornyei, 2001, p.91) as learners are expected to
communicate using a "severely restricted language code" (p.91). Therefore, teachers
need to encourage students to recognize their language learning fears and situations that

provoke anxiety for them, especially as constant error correction serves as "a form of mild public humiliation" (Tsui, 1996, p. 146). However, teachers can reduce such embarrassment by using a modelling approach to correction, whereby students are not spotlighted during feedback. The teacher first acknowledges that the learner has conveyed a meaningful message, and then repeats the student's utterance using grammatically correct forms. This encourages the student to recognize discrepancies without a feeling of having been admonished. If teachers reward successful communication, they send the message to their students that there is more to language learning than just grammatical rules and forms.

Fifty three percent of students in the survey say they are overwhelmed by rules. By focusing on content rather than form and encouraging students to talk about familiar topics, students will invest more of themselves in the classroom environment. In the survey 59.1 % of respondents stated that they never feel sure of themselves when they speak, and 50% state that they panic. This may lead to non-cooperative behavior such as avoidance or withdrawal. Such students may also benefit from "cognitive retraining" (Oxford, 1999, p.67) in which the teacher asks learners to verbalize and reflect on subjective anxiety inducing situations so they can see that others often share the same apprehensions. If teachers help learners to recognize their fears and realize that anxiety episodes are transient, students can learn to interpret such situations in realistic ways, and thus may choose to approach, rather than avoid, situations that demand participation. Through reflection, learners can deduce the kinds of activities that seem to help them, and evaluate suitable tasks for their learning, while teachers can uncover their students' individual learning purposes, personal definitions of appropriate content, and beliefs about preferred ways of working. After establishing appropriate activity criteria, teachers can encourage learners to work together to design and develop new activities for themselves and for each other with a view to meeting students' individually identified learning needs.

When we engage in communicative behaviors that work, we develop positive expectations about those behaviors and they become a regular part of our communicative repertoire. Good study strategies have compensatory value; therefore, strategic and communicative competencies need to be encouraged so that students have access to a communication "first aid kit" that can be called into action when conversation breaks down. Teaching both learning and communicative strategies, which will help them to develop realistic expectations and achievable goals, can eventually raise learners' self-efficacy. Forty six percent of students in the present study think that their classmates perform better than them at English. Students who are concerned about others' impressions have a tendency to behave in ways that minimize the chances of unfavorable evaluation. Teachers should avoid saying "that's wrong" instead relying on a flexible questioning style which makes it clear that there is not only one "correct" answer. Another useful technique is to have students discuss answers with their peers before replying, which alleviates competitive stress. Considering that the classroom is a "public arena" (Long and Porter, 1985, p. 211), anxieties often arise when a teacher makes it a practice to call on random individuals in front of their peers. This can be particularly stressful when the students are aware that the lesson will not proceed until the teacher receives a satisfactory response.

In contrast, pair work provides a relatively stable environment in which to nurture skills without the absolute necessity for accuracy. Forty four percent of students report that they are embarrassed to volunteer to speak in class while 36.3% feel self-conscious speaking in front of their classmates. Students become even more nervous when faced with randomness and unpredictability, which can turn a seemingly innocuous question from the teacher into a nightmare experience. Such students benefit from pair work situations, where comparisons of capability are "operating at a more comfortable level" (Gardner and Lalonde (1990, p.219) because learners are compared with peers rather than the "expert" native-speaking teacher.

One way to increase confidence is by using co-operative rather than competitive goal structures. Collaborative tasks in which all parties provide certain information create positive interdependence between students. Through scaffolding, students use collective resources to "jointly manage components of a task to distinguish between what they have produced and what they perceive as an ideal situation" (Ellis, 2003, p.193). Similarly, "dictogloss tasks" (Ellis, 2003, p.193) whereby students note content words in a short text read by the teacher, encourage students to work together to decide what language forms to use to reconstruct texts from joint notes. Learners are more intrinsically motivated towards the task when they have to support each other.

Another way the teacher can build confidence is to act more as an advisor, or even a friend and "less like an authority figure making them perform" (Young, 1991, p.432). Instead of viewing herself as the expert whose task it is to transmit knowledge and leaving learners "silenced and powerless" (Auerbach, 2001, p.145), the teacher can adopt the role of facilitator, in order to empower learners to take charge of their learning. By encouraging L1 use, issues important to the students will emerge.

Discouraging the "banishment" (Allwright and Bailey, 1994, p.172) of the students' first language "accepts that the thinking, feeling, and artistic life of a person is very much rooted in their mother tongue" (Allwright and Bailey, 1994, p.172.). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1991) suggest that as students have mature thoughts and ideas but an immature L2 vocabulary with which to express them, the inability to express themselves or to comprehend another person leads to frustration and apprehension. Nearly 53% of students in the present study feel frightened when they do not understand what the teacher says in English. When their normal means of communication is suddenly eliminated, they feel unable to express their real personality and can demonstrate only a fraction of their intelligence. This inhibits learners from communicating and can deprive them of communicative practice opportunities. Students' mother tongue should be used for integration and setting the scene, and also at times of communicative exigency,

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which are unpredictable but often involve personal contact. Students may not recognize which aspects of their performance are being assessed in class, so informing the students in their own language that they will not be appraised on discrete language items during speech production will go a long way to alleviating anxiety and increasing confidence and motivation. Moreover, valuing learners' bilingualism has implications for the role of the teacher. An authoritarian attitude will be reduced as the teacher is no longer the traditional power holder and decision-maker. Instead, the students' language can be used as a negotiation tool and the teacher's role as a facilitator or enabler is brought to the fore.

Conclusion

When learners view the classroom as anxiety inducing, they often feel as if they are swimming among sharks and become less socially oriented, less assertive, and more withdrawn or self-conscious than in other situations. Anxiety is often a manifestation of feelings of incompetence. Where the trigger is concern over being scrutinized, judged and compared to others, the teacher can alleviate anxiety and foster a less confrontational atmosphere by encouraging pair work, group activities and scaffolding for mutual support and reassurance. Simply by removing the need for students to compare their performance with others in a competitive environment, teachers can reduce negativity, raise students' self-belief and assist them to alleviate the anxiety caused by expectations of failure.

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