BELIEFS ABOUT LANGUAGE LEARNING, ROLE OF GENDER AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN RELATION TO SECOND LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Tracy Anak William Tandang
General Studies Department
tracywilliamtandang@gmail.com
Politeknik Port Dickson

Marina Mohd Arif
Faculty of Education
marina363@salam.uitm.edu.my
Universiti Teknologi MARA, UiTM Puncak Alam Campus

ABSTRACT

The study has given a myriad of insights and deeper understanding on the issue of second language anxiety, especially in Malaysia. This study encompassed several aspects in second language learning. This study focused on the relationship between second language anxiety and beliefs about language learning. Besides that, the role of gender in second language anxiety has also been one of the main focuses in the study. On top of that, this study also emphasized on the effect of second language anxiety on the second language achievement. To achieve the purpose, a study was conducted quantitatively among 334 respondents from a local public institution, which is a polytechnic in Negeri Sembilan. The respondents of the study were from Commerce Department which is the largest department in the institution. The respondents were the students from the third semester in the second year. This study used the modified version of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). From the study, it is found that the second language anxiety of the students is moderately related to their beliefs about language learning. Besides, the second language achievement is negatively correlated with the second language anxiety, thus explains the low performance while experiencing high level of anxiety. This study also reveals that there is no significant difference found between male and female students in second language anxiety. It is anticipated for researchers to continue and expand the field of study in order to continue contributing to the body of knowledge on second language anxiety.

KEYWORDS*: Achievement, Beliefs, Gender influence, Second language anxiety*

INTRODUCTION

The study has given a myriad of insights and deeper understanding on the issue of second language anxiety, especially in Malaysia. The study is focused on the relationship between second language anxiety and beliefs about language learning, the role of gender in second language anxiety and the effect of second language anxiety on the second language achievement. Second language anxiety among students can be debilitating and leads to

problems in acquiring second language. Thus, it affects the second language achievement. Besides, factors such as beliefs about language learning and role of gender may play important role in determining the level of second language anxiety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Second language anxiety has several meanings and it derives from the term anxiety. Anxiety is an individual feeling of nervousness, apprehension, pressure, and worry related to the stimulation of the automatic nervous system (Talebinejad & Nekouei, 2013). Above and beyond, another definition of anxiety is the feeling of uneasiness, disappointment, uncertainty, nervousness, or worry (Toghraee & Shahrokhi, 2014). Besides, anxiety is also claimed as an emotional condition that has both positive and negative effects in which it may catalyse or obstruct an accomplishment such as learning foreign or second language (Toghraee & Shahrokhi, 2014). Second language anxiety indicates the feeling of tension and nervousness experienced by second language learners while using the English language.

Apart from second language anxiety, beliefs about language learning is also one of the main concerns of the study. In general, beliefs can be stated as the psychologically held understandings, premises, or proportions about the world that are felt to be true and sometimes it can be a strong filter against reality (Wong, 2010). Furthermore, according to Victori and Lockhart (1995), beliefs about language learning is general expectations that students hold about themselves as novice learners, about aspects influencing learning and about the features of language learning (Rieger, 2009).

Besides that, students from polytechnic are the interest of this study since there are only several studies conducted among polytechnic students that involve second language. For instance, a study was conducted among students from a polytechnic in Sarawak whichinvolves students from engineering and commerce department. Based on the findings, it is found that students experience problems while doing their oral presentation in English due to lack of practice as well as lack of preparation beforehand (Kho, M.G.W. & Leong, L.M., 2015). Besides that, the same study also found that the students believe that oral presentation is difficult and they are having negative thoughts on their marks. The students are also aware that they are having lack of proficiency in English. Besides that, the fear of having low marks caused low self confidence among the students (Kho, M.G.W. & Leong, L.M., 2015). From this study, it can be implied that the students are experiencing lack of readiness to learn as well as having negative beliefs about language learning.

Apart from that, a study among commerce students was conducted in Bahrain covering the issue of English language and accounting education. The findings from the study proves that the level of English proficiency among students affect their performance in accounting courses which are taught in English language (Almajed & Hamdan, 2015). More research among polytechnic students is also conducted as observed in Politeknik Hulu Terengganu. From the research it is found that the students are having problems introducing themselves and admitted that they are having difficulty to pronounce words in English (Mohamad, 2016).

On the other hand, research on second language anxiety and beliefs about language learning has also been a concern among researchers. There is a study on second language anxiety and beliefs about language learning conducted in Iran. The purpose of the study was to look at the connection between foreign language anxiety and belief towards foreign language learning among children who learn English as Foreign Language learners (Talebinejad &

Nekouei, 2013). It is discovered beliefs about language learning differed from each student depending on their cultural background and prior knowledges. Their exposure to the language plays important role in defining their beliefs about language learning. Conversely, the findings exhibited elementary school students in Iran have a low degree of foreign language anxiety. Furthermore, teachers and students held similar beliefs about language learning which is beliefs about language is directly related to second language anxiety. That implies that if the students are having positive beliefs, they tend to have less second language anxiety. Thus, students who believe that they can and able to master the language are having less anxiety as compared to those who have negative perceptions and beliefs.

In addition, study based on gender influence was also conducted in Malaysia, among students from a Malaysian university. The study is aimed to investigate the students' level of second language anxiety and also the differences across gender. The study used English as a Second Language Speaking Anxiety Scale (ELSAS) as the instrument which contains 32 items on second language anxiety. At the end of that study, it is found that the students are experiencing moderate level of second language anxiety. It is also discovered that the female students are experiencing higher level of second language anxiety as compared to male students (Siew & Wee, 2017). This denotes that there is a gender influence on second language anxiety. This also reveals that the female students are more worried on their second language abilities and skills. The female students cared more than the male student and that makes them having higher level of second language anxiety. Thus, a research looking at gender as one of the variables is necessary to know the differences of second language anxiety across genders.

Apart from that, a study conducted at University of Sagordha reveals that language anxiety and students' achievement are negatively interconnected to each other (Awan, Azher, Anwar, & Naz, 2010). Based on the review of Literature, the purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between second language anxiety and students' achievement. A total of 149 undergraduates who were still in their second and sixth semester were involved in this study. The students were from various departments. The study suggests that high achievers in second language usually are less anxious than low achievers. Learners with high anxiety usually will obtain lower results and therefore, it is making them more anxious to learn (Awan, Azher, Anwar, & Naz, 2010).

Definition of Terms

Some terms are constantly used in this study and definitions are as follow:

1.1   Second Language Anxiety

Second language anxiety can also be referred as the nervousness experienced when a state of affairs demands the use of a second language with which the person is not quite proficient (Cheng, 2001). In this study, second language anxiety refers to the feeling of tension and nervousness experienced by second language learners while using the English language.

1.2   Beliefs about Language Learning

According to Victori and Lockhart (1995), beliefs about language learning is the general anticipations that students hold about themselves as learners, as well as aspects encouraging learning and also the features of language learning (Rieger, 2009). For this study, beliefs about language learning refers to the assumptions as well as the perceptions towards learning English language among second language learners that may affect the whole process of language acquisition.

1.3 Second Language Achievement

Second language achievement can be implied as students' English performance which is also measured by the result of the previous examination. In this study, the students' performance is measured by their English result during Semester 1. The grades start from A until F.

Research Questions

Referring to the research objectives, the researcher identified five research questions related to the research objectives. The following are the research questions that may help to achieve the research objectives and purpose of the study:

1. Is there any relationship between beliefs about language learning and second language anxiety among the polytechnic students?
2. Is there any significant difference between gender and second language anxiety among the polytechnic students?
3. Is there any relationship between second language anxiety and second language achievement among the polytechnic students?

METHODS

As all research do have, this study also has its own research design in order to achieve and answer all the research questions involved. The study is conducted quantitatively by using a survey. The survey utilises the modified version of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) and Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory (BALLI). Altogether there are 71 questions divided into three sections namely Section A, Section B and Section C. 33 questions are from FLCAS while the other 33 questions are from BALLI. Another 5 questions are for demographic data and background of the respondents. On the other hand, for the participants of the survey, the researcher has chosen the students from a public institution in Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia. The number of respondents involved in the study is 334 students and they are from Commerce Department. Students from the Commerce Department are selected since the department is the largest department among the different departments in this particular institution. The students chosen for this survey has underwent an English subject in the previous semester where they have to sit for listening, writing, reading and speaking test. The result from this is used as an indicator of their English language achievement.
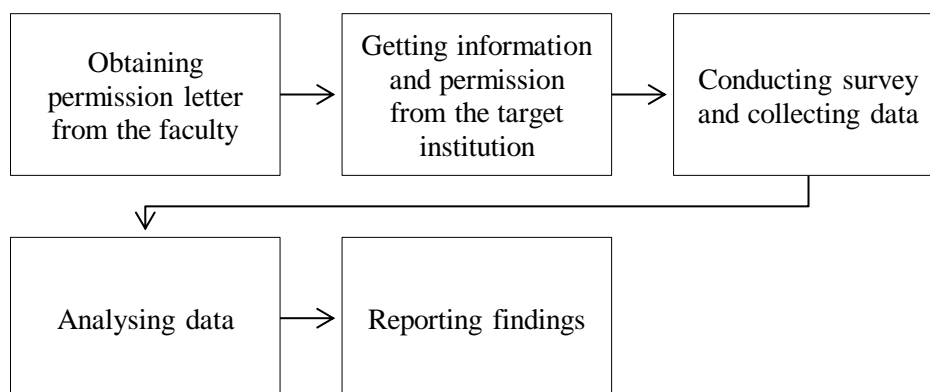
Data Collection

Fig. 1 Data Collection Process

Figure 1 shows the process of data collection for this study. First and foremost, a permission letter was requested from the faculty in order to carry on with the study. After that, the researcher obtained permission and information from the target institution where in this case the polytechnic. Next, the survey was conducted by distributing the questionnaire and getting it back within 3 days. After done collecting the data, the researcher continued analysing the data using IBM SPSS Statistics 20. Few tests were run in order to answer to the research questions of the study. After that, the findings from the study were reported.

Findings

After the data for the study has been collected, the researcher used IBM SPPS Statistic 20 in order to analyse the data and relate it with the research questions for this study. There are three research questions that need to be considered and thus these are the findings from the survey.

Research Question 1: Is there any relationship between beliefs about language learning and second language anxiety among the polytechnic students?

A correlation test was conducted to determine the relationship between beliefs about language learning and second language anxiety among the polytechnic students.

Table 1 Correlation test between Second Language Anxiety and Beliefs About Language Learning

Correlations		anxiety	beliefs
anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	.41**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	334	334
beliefs	Pearson Correlation	.41**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	
	N	334	334
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 1 shows a correlation test between second language anxiety and beliefs about language learning. The Pearson's correlation is r=.41 and p=.00. It implies that there is a moderate positive relationship between the two variables. Besides that, the p value is p=.00 and it is lower than 0.01 level which implies that the correlation is statistically significant.

Research Question 2: Is there any significant difference between gender and second language anxiety among the polytechnic students?

An independent samples t-test to know the significant difference between gender and second language anxiety is computed.

Table 2 Group Statistics According to Gender

	Group Statistics				
	Male and Female	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Anxiety	Male	99	92.27	16.41	1.65
	Female	235	93.00	15.34	1.00

Table 3 Independent Samples T-Test for Second Language Anxiety according to Gender

		Independent Samples Test							
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
									Lower	Upper
Anxiety	Equal variances assumed	.29	.59	-.39	332	.70	-.72	1.88	-4.41	2.97
	Equal variances not assumed			-.38	173.57	.71	-.72	1.93	-4.53	3.08

Table 2 shows the group statistics according to gender. 99 students are male while 235 students are female. The mean for both groups is almost the same with male students m=92.27 whereas female students m=93.00. On the other hand, Table 3 shows the independent samples t-test for second language anxiety according to gender. The probability value is sig. =.59 which is more than .05. Thus, the variances of these two groups are equal and therefore, the Equal variances assumed row is referred to. From this, it can be seen that p value is p=.70 and it is more than .05. Therefore, it means there is no significant difference in students' second language anxiety according to gender.

Research Question 3: Is there any relationship between second language anxiety and second language achievement among the polytechnic students?

Table 4 Correlations test between Second Language Anxiety and the Students' English Result

Correlations		Anxiety	English Result
Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	1	-.12*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.03
	N	334	334
English Result	Pearson Correlation	-.12*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.03	
	N	334	334
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).			

Table 4 shows correlation test between second language anxiety and the students' English result. From the correlation test, the Pearson's correlation is r=-.12 and p=.03. With the Pearson's correlation is at r=-.12 and it is a negative value, it is found that there is a weak negative relationship. Besides that, the p value is significant at 0.05 level and in this case, the p value is p=.03 and it is lower than 0.05. This indicates that the correlation is statistically significant at this level. Second language anxiety is negatively correlated with English's Result. The higher the anxiety is, the lower their English result will be, and vice versa.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is suggested that other researcher can continue to expand and elaborate the study conducted by adding few details and variables. One of the improvements that can be made is to conduct a research mainly focused on specific skills only. For instance, researcher may expand the study by conducting it specifically for speaking skills, writing skills, or listening skills. If research on this can be done, then it would be helpful since educators and teachers may get an insight on which skill is more prominent and prone to be the cause of second language anxiety. Apart from that, researchers may consider to conduct a longitudinal study. This means the study may include a pre-test and also post-test. This kind of study can help in monitoring and observing changes among the respondents. Besides that, this study has been done quantitatively, thus the future study can be conducted qualitatively. Researchers can monitor the respondents through interview sessions, observations or even a case study. Apart from that, another study can also be conducted on respondents with different mother tongue and backgrounds. This study has given an insight and more understanding on the second language anxiety among Malaysian students. From the study, it is found that the polytechnics students are having strong belief about language learning and moderate level of anxiety. In addition, it is also found that the second language anxiety is moderately related to beliefs about language learning. Apart from that, there is no significant difference across gender in second language anxiety.

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List of Acronyms/Abbreviations

Acronyms/Abbreviations	Description
FLCAS	Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale
BALLI	Beliefs About Language Learning Inventory
sumofanxiety	Students' anxiety on second language learning
sumofbeliefs	Students' beliefs about language learning
EnglishResult	Second language achievement based on their English result

Biodata of Writers

1. Tracy William Tandang

Tracy William Tandang is a lecturer at the General Studies Department, Politeknik Port Dickson. Her work focuses on Second Language Anxiety as well as Beliefs About Language Learning and their impacts on learners' performance.

2. Dr. Marina Mohd Arif

Dr. Marina Mohd Arif is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Education, UiTM. She is attached to the TESL Department at the faculty. Her research interests include Reading in the Second Language, Early Literacy and ELT Methodology.