



Language Learning Anxiety in Mandarin as Foreign Language Classroom

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Abstract: Majority of foreign language learners experience an average level of language learning anxiety. Learning Mandarin as a foreign language is relatively difficult for non-native Chinese learners, it is believed that anxiety is an important issue among non-native Chinese learners. Thus, this quantitative study aimed to identify language learning anxiety level in Mandarin as foreign language (MFL) classrooms. This study also explores the impact of gender differences among learners in MFL classrooms. 221 MFL learners from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sarawak branch were chosen as respondent in this study. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) was adopted to examine learners' level of language learning anxiety in MFL classrooms. The data were analyzed using SPSS 22. The findings revealed that learners are on a moderate level of anxiety. Independent sample t-test analysis of the findings in this study manifested that there were no significant differences in learners' level of anxiety in terms of gender. Nevertheless, it was found that female learners experienced higher level of anxiety as compared to male in the three major components. The findings from this study would be significant to both MFL educators and learners as it might help educators to have a better understanding of learners' level of anxiety and plan more effective teaching methods which could help learners to lessen their level of anxiety in MFL classroom.

Keywords: language learning anxiety; MFL classroom; anxiety level; gender

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, those who are not of Chinese descent are learning Mandarin as third language (L3) or foreign language (MFL). The initiative of Silk Road Economics Belt and the 21st- Century Maritime Silk Road contribute to the increasing number of Mandarin learners around the world (Ting & Jacqueline, 2018). Most of the universities in Malaysia neither public nor private offer Basic Mandarin language courses. However, the performance among non-native Mandarin learners in their Mandarin learning does not reach the desired outcomes (Ting, Ch'ng, & Norseha, 2020). Some researchers (Chen & Chang, 2004; Pappamihiel, 2002) claimed that foreign language anxiety (FLA) negatively impact on learners' performance. They have found that majority of learners experience an average level of anxiety in their foreign language learning. Thus, this present study aimed to determine anxiety level in MFL classroom among non-native Mandarin learners. Moreover, this study also aimed to examine is there any significant difference between MFL learners' level of language anxiety and gender.

2. Literature Review

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as “a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, belief, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process”. Horwitz et. al claimed that FLA is differ from other type of anxiety which FLA refer to a unique type of anxiety specific to foreign language learning. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994b) further explained that FLA occurred when learners feel tensed and apprehensive towards the second or foreign language context which included the elements of speaking, listening, and learning, or the worry and negative emotional reaction arousal when learning or using a second or foreign language.

Numerous researches on MFL learning anxiety have been carried out neither in the target language context nor non-target language context. Qian (1999) is the first researcher conducted study on MFL learning anxiety among foreign students from various countries (America, Korea, Japan etc.) in China. Findings in Qian’s study found that foreign students experience moderate level of anxiety. Qian further investigated others affective variables such as age, gender, learning motivation, learning duration and others in the study. The result revealed affective variables does not affect MFL learning anxiety among these foreign students. Shi (2005) further the study by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approach to investigate language learning anxiety among foreign students in China. Shi’s (2005) study demonstrated that foreign students experience certain level of anxiety in learning Mandarin. Gender, nationality and Mandarin language proficiency level was significantly affected their level of anxiety. Meanwhile, age, personality, duration of learning Mandarin does not show significant differences in their level of anxiety. To add, Li (2013) employed FLCAS as instrument to investigate MFL learning among Mandarin learners in Southeast Asia (SEA). The findings show that most of the MFL learners in Southeast Asia shows moderate level of anxiety. Learners’ demographic background such as learning experience, perception of Mandarin proficiency level also influenced MFL learning anxiety. In addition, research carried out by Hao (2014) also found that Turkmenistan preparatory students at an International Cultural Exchange School (ICES) which located in Central China Normal University are at the moderate level of MFL learning anxiety. The frequent factors of anxiety are learners’ learning environment, the characteristic of Mandarin language, self-assessment, translation on the teaching materials, amendment method employed by language instructor, learners’ level proficiency in English language, cultural differences and learning habits. The findings of study by Basith, Musyafak, Aris Ichwanto and Syhputra (2019) also showed that foreign students experienced a moderate level of anxiety and communication apprehension is dominant aspect. The study found that Mandarin learning duration affected learners’ level of anxiety, whereas learners’ level of anxiety does not affect by gender.

Peng (2012) and Xu (2014) has carried out the studies of language learning anxiety among Mandarin learners in Thailand. The findings in their study (Peng, 2012 & Xu, 2014) revealed that Mandarin learners experience high level of anxiety when they learn Mandarin. Nevertheless, the findings of Luo (2013) showed that the level of anxiety among Mandarin learners form two public universities in the U.S. was not high. Luo’s (2013) also found significant differences on learners’ level of anxiety in term of learners’ Mandarin language proficiency level. Findings from Liu’s (2020) study disclosed that majority of learner in Korea experience moderate and high-level anxiety. MFL learners’ anxiety provoking factors are fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety and communicate. Study conducted in Myanmar by Hu (2020) found that learners’ level of anxiety is at moderate level.

In Malaysia, Ting (2016) conducted a study among MFL learners in Sarawak while Zhang (2016) conducted the study among MFL learners in Peninsular Malaysia. Ting’s (2016) study revealed the learners are at moderate level of Mandarin language learning anxiety. Communication apprehension is the main factor that contributed to Mandarin learners’ language learning anxiety. The finding in the research of Zhang (2016) also indicated that the learners showed an average level of anxiety when they learn Mandarin. To compare the findings of Ting (2016) and Zhang (2016), it was found that learners from Peninsular Malaysia experience higher level of anxiety than learners from Sarawak.

Past research above found that numerous studies has been conducted on MFL learners in China (Qian, 1999; Shi, 2005; Li, 2013; Hao, 2014; Basith, Musyafak, Aris Ichwanto & Syhputra, 2019), United States (Luo, 2013), Thailand (Peng, 2012, Xu, 2018), Korea (Liu, 2020), and Myanmar (Hu, 2020). However, it was found that there are two previous studies conducted in Malaysia (Ting, 2016; Zhang, 2016). Therefore, it is deemed to conduct more research on MFL learning anxiety in order to fill in the gap and support educator to design more teaching methods to eliminate Mandarin learners’ language learning anxiety in MFL classroom.

3. Methodology

This study utilized quantitative research design in order to explore language learning anxiety among Mandarin learners in Mandarin foreign language (MFL) classrooms. It is partial findings which investigated the factors of Mandarin language anxiety among non-Chinese learners (Ting, 2016). This study adapted 33-item of a questionnaire developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) which named as Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The questionnaires utilize a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) to assess Mandarin learners’ language learning anxiety in MFL classroom. 221 Mandarin learners from Universiti Teknologi MARA, Sarawak branch were included in this study. Among these 221 Mandarin learners, 17.6 % were male and 82.4 % were female. They were between 19-26 years old. The data was presented in the form of descriptive statistics by using SPSS

version 22 in order to identify the language learning anxiety level among Mandarin learners in MFL classrooms. Independent samples of t-test were employed to examine the significant difference between MFL learners' language learning anxiety and gender. The mean score in this study was measured as shown in table 1. Based on the mean score interpretation table, MFL learners' language learning anxiety can be classified into three levels which are high anxiety level (3.67-5.00), moderate anxiety level (2.34-2.33) and low anxiety level (1.00-2.33).

Table 1: Interpretation of mean score

Level of anxiety	Mean
High	3.67-5.00
Moderate	2.34-3.66
Low	1.00-2.33

4. Findings & Discussions

4.1 Mandarin learners' language learning anxiety level based on three components

Overall mean score and standard deviation of Mandarin learners' language learning anxiety in MFL classrooms was presented in Table 2. Findings of this study revealed that Mandarin learners are at a moderate level of language anxiety in MFL classroom which manifested the overall mean score of 2.34 in table 2.

Table 2: Mean of Mandarin learners' level of language learning anxiety

Mean	Standard Deviation
2.34	0.610

Figure 1 demonstrated that among three major components of MFL language learning anxiety, communication apprehension scored highest (m=3.29), followed by fear of negative evaluation (m=3.26), and test anxiety (m=3.15). This finding revealed that majority of the Mandarin learners are at moderate level of anxiety on the three major components of MFL language learning anxiety which are communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety.

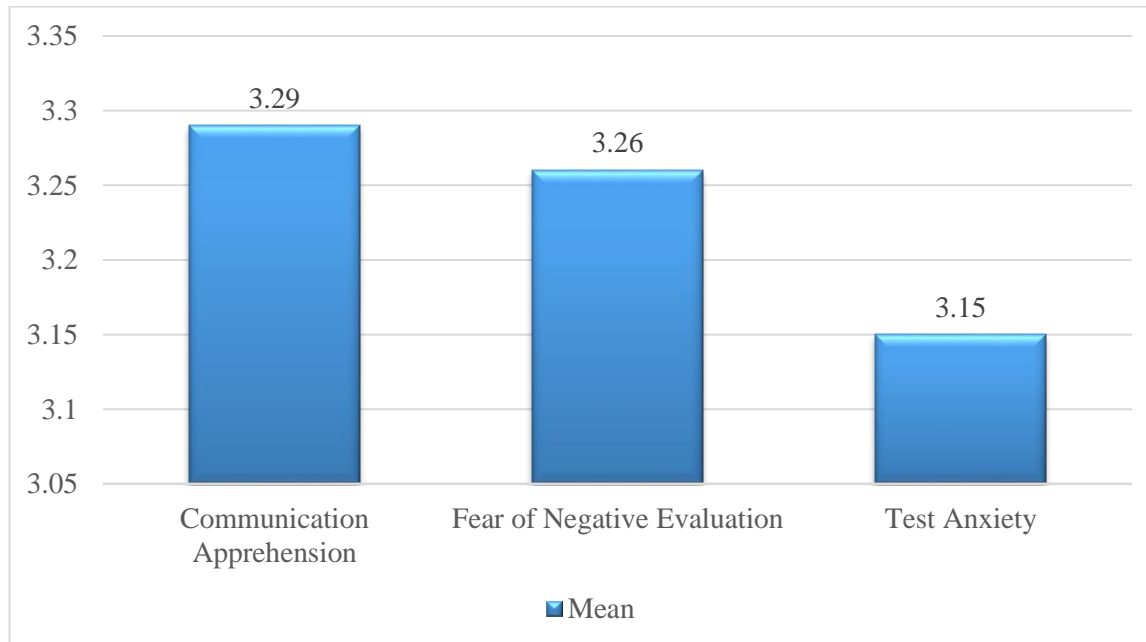


Figure 1: Three major components of MFL learning anxiety

4.2 Gender differences in the level of language learning anxiety

Referring Table 3, female learners were more anxious than male learners in MFL classroom in the three major components of language learning anxiety which included communication apprehension (Male= 3.25, F= 3.29), test anxiety (Male=3.14, Female= 3.15), and fear of negative evaluation (Male= 3.14, Female= 3.28). As presented in table 3, there was no significant difference in the three components of language learning anxiety between the male and female learners.

However, it was found that females scored higher mean compared to the male learners for the three major components of language learning anxiety in MFL classroom.

Table 3: T-test results for MFL learning anxiety and gender

Factors contribute towards MFL learning anxiety	Gender	Mean	SD	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		t-test for Equality of Means		
				F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Communication Apprehension	Male	3.25	0.452	.158	.691	-.494	219	.621
	Female	3.29	0.438					
Test Anxiety	Male	3.14	0.354	1.200	.274	-.247	219	.805
	Female	3.15	0.409					
Fear of Negative Evaluation	Male	3.14	0.497	.069	.793	-	219	.116
	Female	3.28	0.523					

*p<0.05

Table 4 shows an in-depth analysis on fear of negative evaluation. The findings disclosed that male and female learners exposed their anxious feeling when the Chinese teacher asks questions which they have not prepared in advance (t= -2.322, df= 219, p< 0.05) shows a significant difference. Moreover, more MFL female learners (M= 4.11, SD= 0.829) felt anxious when they were asked to answer the questions which they have not prepared as compared to MFL male learners (M=3.76, SD= 0.902). This indicates that female learners need more preparation before they answer the question in MFL classroom.

Table 4: T-test results for fear of negative evaluation and gender

Items of fear of negative evaluation	Gender	Mean	SD	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		t-test for Equality of Means		
				F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
I don't worry about making mistakes in Chinese class.	Male	4.17	0.854	.814	.368	.582	219	.561
	Female	4.07	1.027					
I think that other students are better at Chinese than I am.	Male	3.05	0.856	4.311	.039	-	219	.305
	Female	3.21	0.943					
It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my Chinese class.	Male	3.48	0.854	3.358	.068	.395	219	.693
	Female	3.41	1.025					
I am afraid that my Chinese teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	Male	3.71	0.793	1.064	.303	.426	219	.670
	Female	3.65	0.864					
I always feel that other students speak the Chinese better than I do.	Male	2.43	0.640	4.435	.036	-.608	219	.544
	Female	2.52	0.832					
I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak Chinese.	Male	2.66	1.008	.501	.480	-.371	219	.711
	Female	2.73	0.974					
I get nervous when the Chinese teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	Male	3.76	0.902	1.348	.247	-	219	.021
	Female	4.11	0.829					

*p<0.05

As presented in Table 5, upon a deeper analysis on components of test anxiety, there is a significant difference in male and female's willingness to join more Mandarin classes in future (t= -2.242, df= 219, p<0.05). Additionally, female learners (M=3.24, SD=0.812) are willing to take more Mandarin classes as compared to male learners (M=2.92, SD=0.774). This manifested that MFL female learners tend to learn more about Mandarin as compared to MFL male learners.

Table 5: T-test results for test anxiety and gender

Items of test anxiety	Gender	Mean	SD	Levene's Test for Equality of Variance		t-test for Equality of Means		
				F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)

				F	Sig	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in Chinese class.	Male	2.90	0.940	.119	.731	.043	219	.966
	Female	2.89	0.962					
It wouldn't bother me at all to take more Chinese class.	Male	2.92	0.774	1.980	.161	-2.242	219	.026
	Female	3.24	0.812					
During Chinese class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	Male	3.28	1.099	1.300	.255	-.799	219	.425
	Female	3.41	0.929					
I am usually at ease during tests in my Chinese class.	Male	2.61	0.935	.596	.441	1.125	219	.262
	Female	2.42	0.976					
I worry about the consequences of failing my Chinese class.	Male	2.82	0.823	.001	.970	.314	219	.754
	Female	2.77	0.826					
I don't understand why some people get so upset over Chinese class.	Male	3.02	0.810	4.272	.040	-1.201	219	.231
	Female	3.23	0.998					
If there is a test in Chinese class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	Male	3.25	0.594	10.31	.002	-.613	219	.540
	Female	3.34	0.876					
Even if I am well prepared for Chinese test, I feel anxious about it.	Male	3.71	0.723	.091	.764	-1.008	219	.315
	Female	3.85	0.794					
The more I study for Chinese test, the more confused I get.	Male	3.56	0.753	.000	.993	-1.758	219	.080
	Female	3.81	0.813					
I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for Chinese test.	Male	3.30	0.766	.133	.716	-.271	219	.787
	Female	3.34	0.811					
I am worried about getting left behind in Chinese class.	Male	3.07	0.739	.005	.941	-1.124	219	.262
	Female	3.20	0.648					
I feel more tense and nervous in Chinese class than in my other classes.	Male	3.10	0.940	.783	.377	-.435	219	.664
	Female	3.18	1.043					
I often feel like not going to Chinese class.	Male	2.53	0.755	.755	.386	-.221	219	.825
	Female	2.57	0.862					
I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in Chinese class.	Male	3.56	0.882	1.241	.266	-1.680	219	.094
	Female	3.80	0.808					
When I'm on my way to Chinese class, I feel very sure and relaxed.	Male	3.02	1.180	.180	.672	-.735	219	.463
	Female	3.17	1.101					

*p<0.05

4.3 Discussions

The results from the findings indicated that learners are in a moderate anxiety level in MFL classrooms. Moreover, results on three major components namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety also showed that the mean score of each component is in a moderate anxiety level. The findings of this study revealed that majority of the MFL learners experience a moderate anxiety level in MFL classroom which is consistent with findings of aforementioned studies done by Qian (1999), Shi (2005), Lan (2018), Basith et al (2019), Liu (2020) and Zhang (2016). Nonetheless, contradictory findings were found which included studies done by Peng (2012) and Xu (2014). Peng (2012) and Xu (2014) found that Mandarin learners encountered a high anxiety of language learning in MFL classroom. Although learners in MFL classrooms are at an average level of anxiety, this affective variable cannot be ignored as it could contribute to negative impacts on learners' performance. It could also influence learners' motivation to further their study in a foreign language.

Findings from this study demonstrated that language learning anxiety does not show significant impact of male and female learners in all three major components of language learning anxiety in MFL classroom, which are communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Nonetheless, finding of this present study was found that female learners' level of language learning anxiety is higher as compared to the male learners in three major

components of language learning anxiety. This finding is directly proportional to the findings in studies done by Peng (2012), Zhang (2016), Lan (2018), Basith et al (2019), and Liu (2020). This also vary from the finding yielded in Fu (2019) and Sa's (2013) study in which these studies found that significant difference between male and female learners in their language learning anxiety. Although Hu's (2020) studies also indicate that language learning anxiety does not show a statistically significant difference between males and females in MFL classrooms, Hu's (2020) study showed male learners exhibited a higher level of language learning anxiety than female learners in MFL classroom. According to Rosenfeld and Berko (1990), there was no significant effect in terms of gender as male and female learners have similarities in responding to certain situations in language class. It also implied that male and female learners have consciousness towards their performance in MFL classrooms, thus they show the same signs of language learning anxiety (Rafek, 2009).

Additionally, the findings of this study manifested, that for the component of "fear of negative evaluation", male and female learners show a significant difference in terms of feeling that "get nervous when Chinese teacher asks questions which they have not prepared in advance". It was found that female learners felt more anxious when they are not ready to answer the questions. These findings are in support of the findings from earlier studies by Shi (2007), which also found that majority of female students as compared to male students feared negative evaluation. In contrast, this finding is contrary to previous study by Hu (2020) which found that male students experienced higher fear of negative evaluation than male students in MFL classrooms. Previous research (Zhao & Whitchurch, 2011; Luo, 2013) revealed that learners at beginner level tend to be more anxious as compared to learners at advanced level. All respondents from this study are those enrolled in Introductory Mandarin (Level I), they need more preparation in order to alleviate their anxiety.

On another note, for components of "test anxiety", the findings also revealed that there is a significant difference between males and females in terms of enthusiasm to enroll Mandarin class. Based on the findings, more female learners demonstrated their eagerness for learning Mandarin compared to male learners. This finding is contrary to the findings of Hu (2020) which found significant differences between male and female in the components of "test anxiety". Moreover, Hu's (2020) findings indicated that more male was at the higher level of anxiety as compared to female. Nevertheless, there were no similar findings from earlier studies, therefore, it is suggested that more research needs to be conducted in order to affirm the findings.

5. Conclusion

In general, this study on language learning anxiety in MFL classroom revealed that learners experienced a moderate level of anxiety. Among the major components of language learning anxiety, "Communication Apprehension" shows the highest rank, followed by "Fear of Negative Evaluation" and "Test Anxiety". Independent sample T-test analysis indicated that the level of language learning anxiety did not reach statistical significance in terms of gender. Nevertheless, the findings from this study shows that generally female learners' level of anxiety are higher than the male learners in all the three major components of language learning anxiety. The implication of this study support educators to conduct more effective teaching methods in order to help learners to eliminate their feeling of language learning anxiety in MFL classroom. In accordance with that, an unconventional teaching and learning tool such as MOOC on Foundation Mandarin (Level II) can be introduced to learners with the aim to motivate yet spark learners' interest to learn Mandarin. Apart from that, it can be an alternative resource for learners to prepare themselves before they attend a Mandarin class. This alternative teaching and learning method help students to be more confidence in learning Mandarin and thus reducing learners' language learning anxiety in the long run.

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