

The Effect of Enjoyment and Anxiety towards Foreign Language Learning Experience among Lower Secondary School in a religious secondary school in Jeram district

Wirdawati Ahmad ⁽¹⁾, Akhmaliah Ab. Rahim ⁽²⁾

^{(1),(2)} Department of General Studies, Politeknik Tun Syed Nasir Syed Ismail, Hub Pendidikan Tinggi Pagoh, KM1 Jalan Panchor, Pagoh 84600, Johor, Malaysia

Corresponding author at: Politeknik Tun Syed Nasir Syed Ismail, Hub Pendidikan Tinggi Pagoh, KM1 Jalan Panchor, 84600 Pagoh, Johor

E-mail address: wirdawatiahmad@ptsn.edu.my

Abstract

There is a lot of evidence that secondary school students experience negative feelings when learning foreign languages. Students experience more anxiety when learning the language than enjoyment of interaction and engagement in foreign language learning. Therefore, this study investigates the relationship between Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) and Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA) in lower secondary students. A questionnaire adapted from Dewaela & MacIntyre (2014), Foreign Language Class Affective Variable, was administered to 20 male students of Sekolah Agama Mengengah Jeram in Selangor. The collected data was analysed using SPSS version 23. Two analyses were conducted: a descriptive analysis of happiness and anxiety and a correlation analysis of FLE and FLCA. The result of the descriptive analysis shows that there is more happiness than anxiety in foreign language classes. However, there were no significant correlations between FLE and FLCA ($r = -0.118, p > 0.05$).

Keywords: Foreign Language (FL), Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) , Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA)

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language (FL) can trigger positive and negative emotions in learners. Learners might feel anxious and embarrassed when speaking in the foreign language even though they expected it to be a language course and learners have to use the target language. Learners also tend to be reserved and shy when it comes to volunteering to answer questions while interacting with peers and teachers in the FL class. On the other hand, there are also learners who are happy and can laugh and feel that there is always a positive atmosphere during FL classes. For some, it is cool to know an FL and to be proud of their performance when they make mistakes in FL lessons.

Dörnyei and Ryan (2015) pointed out that scholars in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) have largely "shunned" them, even though emotions play a crucial role in our lives (p. 9). There are situations in which emotions play an important role in second language acquisition and learning, but only negative emotions appear in numerous SLA studies. This situation encourages some SLA researchers to contribute to a more constructive analysis of emotions in the field of SLA. Just as the interlanguage model in the 1970s replaced the tradition of error analysis and moved away from an exclusive emphasis on the deficits of

second language learners, the Positive Psychology method promotes a holistic view of the human being, which, in SLA terms, means moving away from a disproportionate emphasis on negative emotions (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety – FLCA) to include the positive emotions of L2 learners, such as Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE) (MacIntyre & Dewaela, 2016).

In the Malaysian educational context, the government shapes the nation by introducing languages into education. In primary and secondary education, there is a formal language subject for students to learn and acquire the language. From primary to secondary school, students learn English formally for almost 11 years. These language learning experiences lead to negative and positive emotions that are initially reflected in FLE and FLCA. This study will look at the foreign language learning of Islamic secondary school students who learn English and Arabic as compulsory subjects and foreign languages as independent subjects. According to Adnan (2017), all Islamic schools must adhere to the national curriculum for primary and secondary education and teach the subjects prescribed by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Students in Islamic schools are in the unique position of learning and using three languages: Malay or Bahasa Melayu as their L1, English as L2 and Arabic as L3.

This paper is initially intended to open the door to a new chapter in linguistics that seeks to investigate the effects of emotion on language learning by considering the learner variables that contribute to FLE and FLCA. The researcher is interested in studying male language learners in the classroom, but at a different age, as male students are usually the ones who develop the enjoyment of language learning or are burdened with language anxiety due to various factors.

2. Methodology

This is a descriptive study to determine the enjoyment of FL instruction and the relationship between FLE and FLCA in FL instruction. FLE and FLCA are the independent variables.

Twenty male students from an Islamic secondary school in Jeram, Selangor, were the participants in this survey. Both were 13 and 14 years old. The selected respondents were from lower secondary school and were free from any national examination. The respondents were formally studying two foreign language, namely Arabic and English. Arabic language is part of the curriculum and provides students with the opportunity to deepen their knowledge of all branches of Islamic theology, including the knowledge revealed by God (Allah) in the Holy Qur'an (Al-Qur'an). In this school context, the Arabic language is considered another important language to be learned alongside English, as students will use Arabic as one of the main requirements for their studies in Islamic countries. Students learn Arabic from Grade 1 to Grade 5 and it is one of the compulsory subjects for their examinations; PT3 (Penilaian Tingkatan 3) and SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia).

For this study, a set of questionnaires adapted from Dewaela & MacIntyre (2014), Affective Variables in the Foreign Language Class were used. The questionnaire consists of 25 questions divided into three components. The first part consists of five items asking for information about the student's background. This includes the language(s) the learners understand. The second part contains twelve (12) items that provide information about the learners' enjoyment of foreign language learning, and the last part contains eight (8) items

that inquire about the learners' anxiety about foreign language learning in the classroom. The questionnaire is designed on a 5-point Likert scale; 5= strongly agree, 4= agree, 3 = undecided, 2 = disagree, 1 = strongly disagree. The questionnaire was based on the intention of the study and the scale used after the students had been informed. Participants were asked to respond honestly to all questions. Instructions were provided for the administration and completion of the questionnaire.

As this was a descriptive sample, the data from the questionnaire was analysed quantitatively using version 23 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). In two analyses, a descriptive analysis of joy and anxiety and a correlation analysis of FLE and FLCA were performed.

3. Results and discussion

To discover enjoyment and anxiety in foreign language classroom experience.

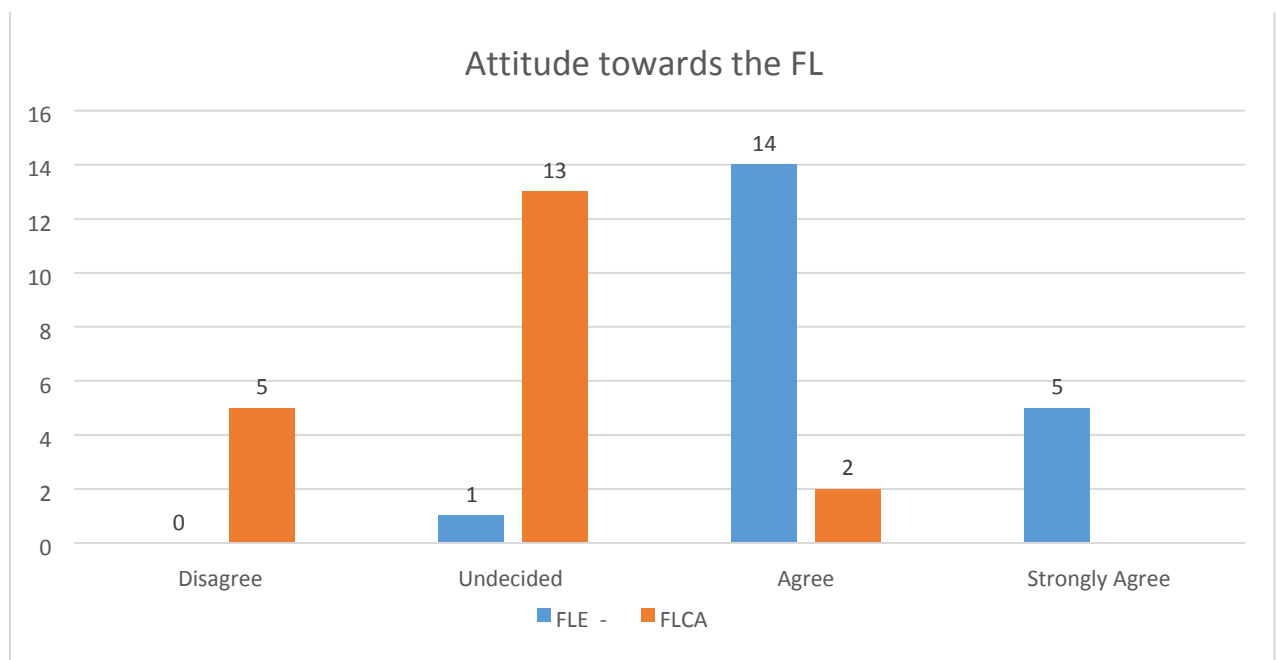


Figure 1. The effect of attitude towards the foreign language on FLE and FLCA

Figure 1 shows the frequency of attitude towards foreign language on FLE and FLCA. The attitude towards FL was found to have a significant effect on FLE with 14 students with 70% from sample. However, 13 students are at undecided stage towards the effect on FLCA which is 65% from the population.

The relationship between FLE and FLCA

		FLE	FLCA	
FLE 20	Pearson Correlation 1	-0.118	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.620
				N
	FLCA Pearson Correlation	-0.118	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.620		
	N	20	20	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2 tailed)

TABLE 1. Correlation between FLE and FLCA

The result of the descriptive analysis shows that the joy of learning a foreign language is greater than the fear. The students in this study learned English and Arabic in separate classrooms because they are of different ages. One may take great pleasure in the great teacher who always creates a good learning atmosphere, while the other may deal with a different teacher differently. The researcher is aware that the research design is not experimental and the cause of the FLE is not only on the teacher as the students' behavior is unpredictable. However, in this study, participants provided the name of a teacher who had become their idol. There were two questions about the teacher in the FL class, "My teacher is kind" and "My teacher is supportive" and for these questions 95% and 85% of the participants completely agreed. It is proved that the teacher in FL class plays a crucial role that can transform FL class into a good atmosphere. According to (Dornyei & Csizer, 1998; Gardner, 1985 in Dewaela 2017), the finding that the teacher and FLE have a positive attitude is quite expected. During lessons, a popular teacher can increase students' enthusiasm.

However, there were no significant correlations between FLE and FLCA ($r = -0.118$, $p > 0.05$). The result of Pearson correlation analysis showed a negative correlation and was not significant between FLE and FLCA. In other words, there are patterns of FLE and FLCA, but in a weak dimension. The dimension is two separate emotion dimensions but related to the same FL learning experience. This means that in this study the relationship between FLE and FLCA is weak, but occurs in the foreign language classroom. If a student has a high score (on a scale of 5) for FLE, they will have a low score (on a scale of 4) for FLCA. The variance is modest.

The correlation analysis for r_{q2} revealed a negative linear relationship between FLE and FLCA. The results show that the FLE values were significantly higher than the FLCA values. The difference between the levels of FLE and FLCA was relatively small for the beginner learners but increased for the advanced learners. In other words, since the students in this study are between 13 and 14 years old, the difference between achievement levels may be small. As learners get older and gain more FL learning experience, their FLCA might weaken and their enjoyment of learning might increase.

Kralova (2017) found a relationship between gender and FLA – male learners who perceived themselves as less skilled in a foreign language suffered more from FLA than female learners. Dewaele, MacIntyre, Boudreau, & Dewaele (2016) found that female learners had

more fun in their foreign language classes than male students. On the other hand, they had a higher FLA than their male classmates. In this study, it is not possible to make a comparison between genders, but the results show that male learners have more fun than anxiety in their foreign language classes and the FLCA is low as 65% of the students have an undecided scale. This shows that male students have their own motivation for FL, intrinsic and extrinsic. For the questions “Making mistakes is a great learning experience” and “I am proud of my accomplishments in class“, the frequency of the two items was 75% and 65%, respectively. These results show that the male students are responsible about learning foreign languages and are ambitious about foreign language learning. The researcher was able to get a positive feedback when the students were asked what their goal is in learning the foreign language, which is to be an Islamic preacher who can speak both English and Arabic.

According to this result, there is FLCA among students. Anxiety also plays a major role in facilitating or hindering language learning. By promoting anxiety, it motivates learners to face the new learning challenge and reduce anxiety. 65% “undecided” shows that there is a gap between students and large differences between students in learning a foreign language. They differ greatly in their pace, how they learn the new language and how they learn another language (Shaik, 2014). The students in this study were young learners who may be anxious about learning a language and may still have low language proficiency. Students’ performance can also affect their behavior, from negative to positive. Students' attitudes can change when they realize the benefit of learning a new language and the attitude towards that language.

FL class members feel demotivated and have low self-esteem. 65 of students felt: "I know that the other students understand FL better than I do." This indicates that the student does not feel comfortable in their own person. Anxious learners often seem to underestimate their existing language skills. Daley, Bailey & Onwugbuzie (1999) reported that very anxious learners have a negative perception of their abilities and self-worth. However, Deawela (2017) mentioned that students' anxiety in one of his study samples seemed to be related to their overall FL abilities and attitudes towards FL regardless of their immediate learning experience as FL teachers. This means that negative feelings towards FL teaching are often related to students' self-anxiety, which occurs not only during FL teaching, but in any learning situation where they perceive their self-esteem to be low.

Language proficiency and age have no significant effect on FLE and FLCA in this study, but they help teachers to support learners appropriately in language acquisition. By instilling a positive attitude towards learning English and Arabic in the early stages, students become successful language learners.

4. Conclusion

Enjoyment of FL instruction is high, but the link between FLE and FLCA is modest in this study. Students show a positive attitude towards foreign language teaching as is clear from the descriptive analysis. The classroom experience has a great impact when the teacher, classmates and the learners themselves create a good atmosphere.

The male students of Sekolah Agama Mengengah Jeram scored significantly higher in FLE than FLCA, although this study found a modest negative relationship between these scales.

FLE and FLCA are very low independent emotions. This situation indicates that students may score high or low on both dimensions depending on their FL learning experience.

In this context, it is true that the students in this study are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated language learners. They enhance their positive and negative emotions in the FL classroom, which leads them to be aware of the necessity of the foreign language to sustain themselves currently and for future endeavours. Their inner ability to succeed with the language is due to the fact that their academic channelling with the language is clear. FLE and FLCA encourage their FL attitudes to not only gain distinction in the exam, but to survive.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

W. Ahmad, A.A.Rahim: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Writing, fMethodology, Formal analysis.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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