English Language Anxiety Among Secondary School Students: Role Of Gender

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ABSTRACT

The present paper is an attempt to study the role of gender in listening anxiety, speaking anxiety, reading anxiety, writing anxiety and total English language anxiety. The sample comprised of 440 students out of which 168 were males and 272 were females. English Language Anxiety Scale developed by the investigator in 2015 was used to assess the anxiety level of students in English language. The scale included four dimensions of language i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. Results by t-test revealed that there is significant difference in the Listening Anxiety, Writing Anxiety, and total English Language Anxiety of the students on the basis of gender. In all these three aspects, males were found to be more anxious than females. On the other hand, no statistically significant difference was found among the students on the basis of gender in case of Speaking Anxiety and Reading Anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

“An understanding of and command over the English language is the most important determinant of access to higher education, employment possibilities and social opportunities. School-leavers who are not adequately trained in English as a language are always at a handicap in the world of higher education.” The statement quoted above from the report of National Knowledge Commission (2006) highlights the importance of English language which has great reach and influence. It is known as the lingua franca of the world for it has been a part of our education system for more than a century and is taught all over the world under many different circumstances and as first, second or foreign language. But it has been observed that people who do not have English as their first language i.e. mother tongue and they learn it as their second or
foreign language, face some level of anxiety learning it. Anxiety, in turn, affects their overall performance. There has been a sorry state of affairs regarding teaching and learning of English language in India but the news highlighting the alarming number of more than 80,000 students of class 10th across government schools who failed in English in the Punjab School Education Board examination held in March 2015 brought into light the pathetic condition of teaching and learning of the subject in Punjab (Ghai, 2015) So, getting to the root of the situation and making improvements in it is a big challenge for teachers, students, parents as well as the authorities. As anxiety long been a topic of discussion amongst researchers and there have been many researches which indicate a negative correlation between anxiety and academic performance especially in English language, it would be justified if studies are taken up in this regard in order to determine if it is true in case of secondary school studentsof government schools in Punjab. It has also been observed that English being a foreign language, students are usually apprehensive about using this language and this might be the case in any one or in all the four skills of language i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing. There is no doubt that to use any language efficiently, a person must have proficiency in all these four basic skills of a language.

Review of Related Literature

The relevant literature was reviewed and most of the results were found to be inconsistent with respect to each language skill in relation to gender. Gender was found to be significantly related to anxiety and girls were found to be more anxious than males when using the English language (Pappamihiel, 2002; Matsuda and Gobel, 2004; Abu-Rabia, 2004; Arnaiz and Guillen, 2012) whereas males in contrast to females experienced more language anxiety (Capan and Simsek, 2012). However, no difference was found in Language anxiety based on gender (Pappamihiel, 2001; Wu, 2011; Cabansag, 2013).No significant correlation was found between learners’ levels of foreign language listening anxiety and their gender ( Capana and Karacab, 2012) whereas it was revealed that female learners were more anxious than male learners in listening (Golchi,2012).

While speaking in English, it was found that the female students get more anxious than the male students (Ozturk and Gurbuz, 2013; Naghadeh et al., 2013).There was not a statistically significant effect of gender on the foreign language reading anxiety (Zhao, 2009;
Ghonsooly, 2012). Whereas no difference was found in reading anxiety based on gender (Wu, 2011; Capana and Karacab, 2012; Cabansag, 2013), females tended to be slightly more anxious than males in reading (Lien, 2011; Jafarigohar & Behrooznia, 2012).

Though there was no statistically significant correlation between writing anxiety levels of students and gender (Karakaya and Ulper, 2011), male students felt more anxious when writing in English than female students (Shang, 2013). In contrast to this, female students experienced more writing anxiety as compared to male students (Teksan, 2013).

Piechurska-Kuciel (2012) analyzed the relationship between communication apprehension and language anxiety from the perspective of gender. The results revealed that Polish communication apprehensive secondary grammar school males and females did not differ in their levels of language anxiety, although non-apprehensive males experienced significantly lower language anxiety than their female peers.

Nimat (2013) conducted a study to examine anxiety in undergraduate students with regard to the type of situations that provoke anxiety during their learning process and the relationship of anxiety with students’ achievement, motivation and autonomy. Results of the study suggested that their anxiety affected their four skills of language in which speaking anxiety was the highest above all. The main sources of anxiety were presenting before the class, making mistakes, losing face, inability to express, fear of failure, test anxiety, incomprehensible input, inability to comprehend, remembering target rules and grammar, poor pronunciation, lack of vocabulary and poor knowledge of English language.

The investigator found a gap for study related to English language anxiety among government secondary school students in India. That is why, the present study was undertaken in one Indian state-Punjab.

Objectives

(i) To study the role of gender in English Listening Anxiety among Secondary School Students
(ii) To study the role of gender in English Speaking Anxiety among Secondary School Students
(iii) To study the role of gender in English Reading Anxiety among Secondary School Students
(iv) To study the role of gender in English Writing Anxiety among Secondary School Students
(v) To study the role of gender in English Language Anxiety among Secondary School Students

METHOD

Sample

The present study was conducted on students of class IX studying in schools affiliated to Punjab School Education Board, Mohali. Out of 23 districts of Punjab, Patiala district was selected on the basis of convenient sampling. Students were approached conveniently and personally. They were explained the purpose and who were ready to give responses on the scale, only those were included in the sample. The sample comprised of 440 students out of which 168 were males and 272 were females.

Procedure

Data was collected only from the students who were willing to give their opinion. It ensured the trueresponses from the students. The students were approached individually and were given English Language Anxiety Scale developed by the investigator. They were given sufficient time to answer. The response sheetswere then collected. After collecting the required data from the students, scoring was done according to the marked ticks on the alternates. Five marks were assigned to Always, Four to Mostly, Three to Sometimes, Two to Rarely and One to Never. The total scores were calculated by summing up the scores of each item. The total score gave the level of anxiety in English among the students. Three levels (high, average and low) of anxiety were made on the basis of mean ± 1SD. The data was transferred to SPSS for data analysis in the light of the framed objective.

Tool
English Language Anxiety Scale developed by the investigator in 2015 was used. The tool consists of 48 items related to four skills of language learning- Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Five response categories i.e. always, mostly, sometimes, rarely and never were taken. The reliability of the scale was calculated by using Cronbach Alpha which came out to be .954. The content validity of the scale was ensured.

RESULTS

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELA</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>61.69</td>
<td>14.667</td>
<td>1.132</td>
<td>3.954</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>55.41</td>
<td>17.047</td>
<td>1.034</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>94.87</td>
<td>23.733</td>
<td>1.831</td>
<td>1.480</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>90.93</td>
<td>29.065</td>
<td>1.762</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>68.14</td>
<td>20.535</td>
<td>1.584</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>67.76</td>
<td>20.548</td>
<td>1.246</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WA</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>65.82</td>
<td>15.511</td>
<td>1.197</td>
<td>5.083</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>57.13</td>
<td>18.498</td>
<td>1.122</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>290.52</td>
<td>66.515</td>
<td>5.132</td>
<td>2.660</td>
<td>438</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>F</td>
<td>271.24</td>
<td>78.105</td>
<td>4.736</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 describes that the \( t \)-value for gender difference on English Listening Anxiety of secondary school students is 3.954 which is significant at .01 level with degree of freedom 438. It indicates that the mean scores of male and female students on Listening Anxiety differ significantly. In the light of this, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the English Listening Anxiety of the students on the basis of gender is rejected. Further, the mean score of males is higher than the mean score of females. It may be concluded that male students possessed higher level of English Listening Anxiety than female students.
The *t*-value (table 1) for gender difference on English Speaking Anxiety is 1.480 which is not significant. It indicates that the mean scores of male and female students on English Speaking Anxiety do not differ significantly. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the English Speaking Anxiety of students on the basis of gender is not rejected. It may be concluded that both male and female students possessed equal level of English Speaking Anxiety.

The *t*-value (table 1) for gender difference on English Reading Anxiety is .188 which is not significant. It indicates that the mean scores of male and female students on English Reading Anxiety do not differ significantly. Thus, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the English Reading Anxiety of students on the basis of gender is not rejected. It may be concluded that both male and female students possessed equal level of English Reading Anxiety.

The *t*-value (Table 1) for gender difference on English Writing Anxiety of secondary school students is 5.083 which is significant at .01 level with degree of freedom 438. It indicates that the mean scores of male and female students on Writing Anxiety differ significantly. In the light of this, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the Writing Anxiety of the students on the basis of gender is rejected. Further, the mean score of males is higher than the mean score of females. It may be concluded that male students possessed higher level of English Writing Anxiety than female students.

The *t*-value (Table 1) for gender difference on total English Language Anxiety, comprising of all the four skills-writing, reading, listening and speaking, of secondary school students is 2.660 which is significant at .01 level with degree of freedom 438. It indicates that mean scores of male and female students on English Language Anxiety differ significantly. In the light of this, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the English Language Anxiety of the students on the basis of gender is rejected. Further, the mean score of males is higher than mean score of females. It may be concluded that male students possessed higher level of English Language Anxiety than female students.

**Findings**

(i) Male students possessed higher level of English Listening Anxiety than female students.
(ii) Both male and female students possessed equal level of English Speaking Anxiety.

(iii) Both male and female students possessed equal level of English Reading Anxiety.

(iv) Male students possessed higher level of English Writing Anxiety than female students.

(v) Male students possessed higher level of Total English Language Anxiety than female students.

Discussion

The present study revealed that male students possessed higher level of English Listening Anxiety than females. Contrary to this, it was revealed that female learners were more anxious than male learners in listening (Golchi, 2012). However, no significant correlation was found between learners’ levels of foreign language listening anxiety and their gender (Capana and Karacab, 2012). The investigator found equal level of English Speaking Anxiety in both males and females but on the other hand, it was found that the female students get more anxious than the male students while speaking in English (Ozturk and Gurbuz, 2013; Naghadeh et al., 2013). In the present study, it was found that there was no statistically significant effect of gender on the English Reading Anxiety. The result is in line with the findings as revealed by Zhao (2009), Ghonsooly (2012). Whereas no difference was found in reading anxiety based on gender (Wu, 2011; Capana and Karacab, 2012; Cabansag, 2013), females tended to be slightly more anxious than males in reading (Lien, 2011; Jafarigohar & Behrooznia, 2012). The investigator found no significant difference in the English Writing Anxiety of the students on the basis of gender. The finding is supported by Karakaya and Ulper (2011). Whereas Shang (2013) found males to be more anxious than females while writing in English, Teksan (2013) revealed that female students feel more writing anxiety as compared to male students. In the study taken up by the investigator, males were found to be more anxious than females in their total English Language Anxiety as supported by Capan and Simsek (2012). This finding is contrary to the results that females were more anxious than males when using English language (Pappamihiel, 2002; Matsuda and Gobel, 2004; Abu-Rabia, 2004; Arnaiz and Guillen, 2012). No significant difference was found in language anxiety based on gender (Pappamihiel, 2001; Wu, 2011; Cabansag, 2013).
References


