

## Investigating the Effects of Communication Anxiety on Learner Academic Performance

### Study case: Bechar First Year LMD Students

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#### **Abstract**

The aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between foreign language classroom anxiety scores, and the learners' academic performance. First year LMD students from Bechar department of English were involved in the study whose analysis was performed by the use of the foreign language classroom anxiety scale, commonly known as FLCAS. Such a scale was developed by Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M.B. & Cope, J. (1986). It encompasses three subsets: communication apprehension, fear of feedback by peers and teachers, and fear of language tests. Thus, a directional hypothesis was formulated to test out the hypothesis and assess the correlation of the aforementioned variables by means of SPSS. The findings reveal the existence of some relationship between the aforementioned variables.

Key words: correlation, students' performance, assessment, anxiety,

#### **Résumé**

Cette étude a pour but d'étudier l'existence d'une éventuelle corrélation entre les niveaux d'anxiété chez les apprenants universitaires de première année et la performance académique de ces derniers. L'analyse de cette étude a été réalisée par l'utilisation de l'échelle, communément appelée 'FLCAS', développée par Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M.B. & Cope, J. (1986). Elle englobe trois sous-ensembles : l'appréhension de la communication, la peur de l'évaluation par les pairs et les enseignants, et la peur des tests linguistiques. Ainsi, une hypothèse directionnelle a été formulée pour voir s'il existe une corrélation entre les variables susmentionnées au moyen d' SPSS. Les résultats révèlent l'existence d'une corrélation entre les variables susnommées.

Mots clé : performance, évaluation, anxiété, negative feedback

#### **I. Introduction**

Assessing the learners' work is part and parcel of the teaching/ learning process. Assessment is an interactive activity in that it engages the teacher as a facilitator and the learner being not only the centre but also an active participant in such activity. To remedy the areas where the learner fails to perform satisfactorily, testing is all the more crucial. However, tests are at times, if not usually, ensued by poor scores due to a number of factors among which: the affective variables. Ignoring the latter in second language teaching is arguably a fact in our EFL classrooms owing to the teacher' failure to give them careful attention .

Anxiety is a psychological construct that causes the subject to feel uneasiness of mind. The individual gets a feeling described by worry and substantial manifestations of pressure in which condition they suspects approaching peril, calamity, or incident. They may encounter excruciating thorax torment, sickness, sweating, discombobulation, and heart palpitations (Attwell, 2006). This physical and psychological experience is resultant from the individual's defence mechanism which attempts to cope with the perceived threat (VandenBos, 2016). As aforementioned, according to Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M.B. & Cope, J. (1986) FLCAS encompasses three components which are: communication apprehension, fear of language tests, and fear of feedback by peers and teachers. However, such a claim is debatable, for MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) and Aida (1994) do not acknowledge the third component as being part and parcel of FLCAS.

#### **A. Communication apprehension**

Communication apprehension or (CA) is one of the psychological factors that may inhibit the learner to learn effectively, in that high CA constitutes a stumbling block to the teaching/ learning process, according to Powell, D. L., & Powell, R. G. (2016). The result is that the learner either refrains from taking part in communication to hide his/her anxiety, or indulges in it at the expense of qualitative participation (McCroskey and McCroskey, 2002). As a consequence of their high communication anxiety, the apprehensive learner puts in poor academic performance.

#### **B. Fear of language tests**

The teaching process entails tests to identify the areas where the learner does badly in order to remedy such areas. However, lots of variables negatively affect the learners' performance, among which the fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, though a small dose of anxiety is sometimes required to trigger the learner's "physiological levels of arousal," which ultimately reduce tension and enhance their performance (Boyle & Fisher, 2007,8). The findings of a survey that Williams and Andrade conducted in Japan in which 243 Japanese students participated revealed that students and the teachers alike were often the source of anxiety in conversation classes (2008). Test anxiety can be assuaged when the teacher's directions are clear, mistake-free, and not subject to diverse interpretations, which expertise can be acquired through the tester's knowledge of tests administration procedures. Fostering harmonious relations with the testee can also instil self-confidence which impacts their achievements positively (Boyle & Fisher, 2007).

### **C. Fear of feedback by peers and teachers**

Feedback is an evaluative tool whose end is to enable the learners to perform better as they become active participants in their own evaluation (Mentkowski, 2000). Yet it is important to make a distinction between positive and negative feedbacks, even though the latter is usually accompanied with some form of fear. What is essential to realize though, is that both types of feedback aim at improving the learners' level of performance so long as they meet with constructive criticism. So, what type of feedback learners favour? Those who opt for negative feedback modify their behaviour so to take part in their instruction as "they can learn to acknowledge negative emotions, constructively reframe their fear and criticism, create support systems and reward themselves for achievements along the way." (Strober & Jackman, 2003, 3). Others, on the other hand, disgust being castigated, for they associate rebuke with punishment they used to receive in their childhood, hence their fear.

## **II. Research Questions**

1. Is there any significant relationship between communication anxiety and learner performance? Statistically put, is the correlation between the independent and the dependent variable positive, or negative?. Or there is no correlation at all between the aforementioned variable as the null hypothesis may assert.
2. Is there a significant difference between males and females in terms of communication anxiety as to oral expression scores?

## **III. Method**

### **A. Respondents**

The questionnaire named FLCAS was given Tahri Mohamed University First year students of English at Tahri Mohamed University, Bechar, Algeria. Out of 112 students only 82 returned it (N=82). 60 females and 22 males. The choice of first year students was deliberate, for they are likely to suffer from some sort of anxiety, being novice at university.

#### GENDER

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
MALE	22	26,8	26,8	26,8
FEMALE	60	73,2	73,2	100,0
Total	82	100,0	100,0	

#### B. Instrumentation

FLCAS comprehends 33 items dispatched into three subsets: fear of feedback by peers and teachers, fear of language tests, and communication apprehension. Each of the aforementioned items is assessed through a five-points Likert scale ranging from 'strongly agree to strongly disagree.' As recommended by Howitz et al., items that are worded negatively were treated so that a high value indicates the same type of response on every item. The items which were negatively worded and which needed reverse scoring are the following: 2,5,8,11,14,18,22,28,32.

#### C. Data Analysis

To perform data analysis the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS v. 21) was used to assess the independent variable( communication apprehension) and the dependent variable (the students' scores in oral expression). Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the reliability and the correlation coefficients, the significance of the test , together with relationship between both aforementioned variables.

#### IV. Results and Discussion.

The answer to the research question relative to the relationship between the students' test scores and communication media is as follows:

For the correlation coefficient calculation, Pearson correlation was chosen as it is most commonly used by most researchers. The findings of the study reveal that there is a significant linear relationship between both variables, a low negative correlation as  $p$ . value is .013, whereas the correlation coefficient (  $r$  ) is -.273, for two-tailed test as shown in the following table:

**Correlations**

		Oral Expression	Communication apprehension
Oral Expression	Pearson Correlation	1	-.273*
	Sig. (2- tailed)		.013
	N	82	82
Communicati on apprehension	Pearson Correlation	-.273*	1
	Sig. (2- tailed)	.013	
	N	82	82

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

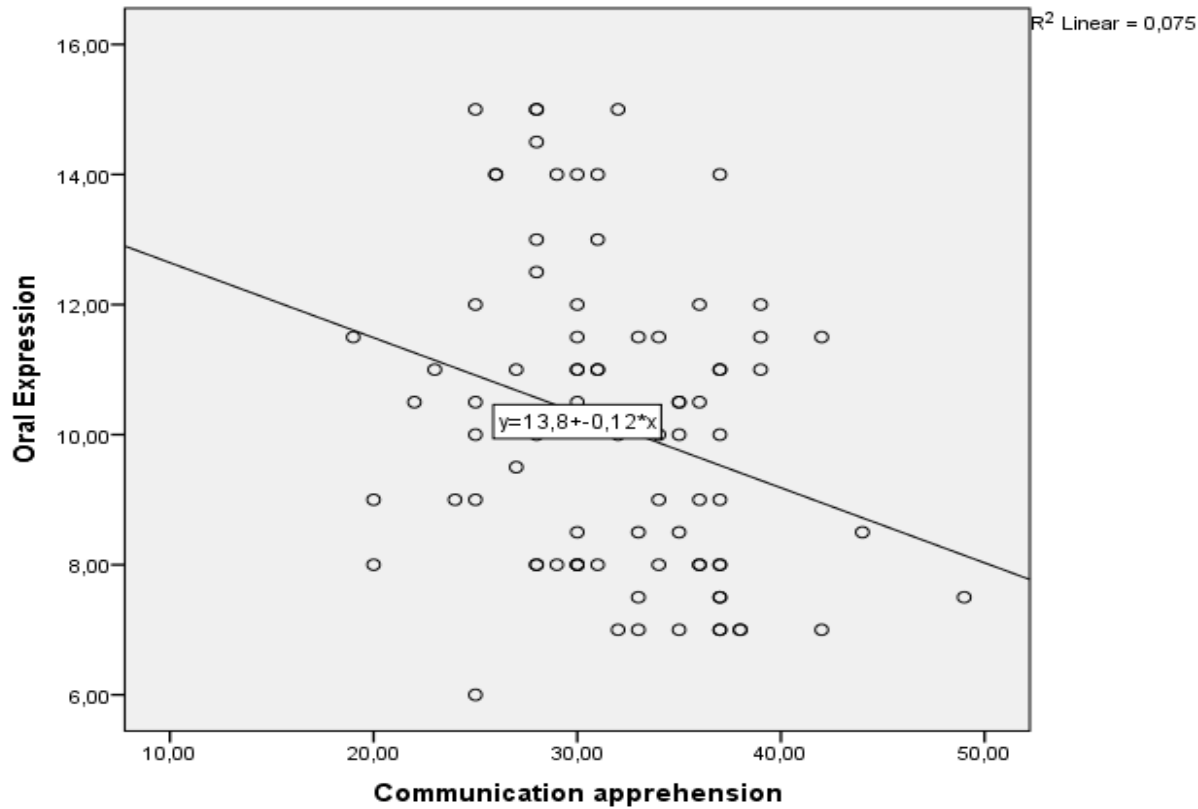
#### **APA format**

There is a significant relationship between communicative apprehension and oral comprehension test scores, ( $r_{80} = -.273, p = .013$ )

#### **Descriptive Statistics**

GENDER			R ange	Min imum	Max imum	Mean	Std. Deviation
FEMALE	Oral Expression	22	8,00	7,00	15,00	9,6591	2,51844
	Communication apprehension	22	29,00	20,00	49,00	31,4545	6,87111
	Valid N (listwise)	22					
		22					
MALE	Oral Expression	60	9,00	6,00	15,00	10,2833	2,32956
	Communication apprehension	60	25,00	19,00	44,00	32,0833	5,17914
	Valid N (listwise)	60					
		60					

As far variability is concerned, the table shows that there is a high variability for both males and females, and neither numbers are consistent in size as shown in the scatter plots.



As for internal consistency reliability of the test, Chronbach's  $\alpha$  (, 818) indicates that the test is reliable as shown below:

#### Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.818	.822	33

- Null hypo : there is no correlation bet comm. app and oral exp scores
- Alternative hypo : there is some correlation bet. comm .app and oral exp. scores

$A = .05$  ,  $p = .013$  correlation coeff. ( $r = -.273$ )

since  $p < \alpha$  the null hypothesis is rejected

Now because the correlation coeff. is negative , it means that there is a negative correlation.

### Conclusion

The present study aimed at considering the likelihood of any relationship between Tahri Mohamed university First Year LMD students' anxiety in oral expression and their academic achievement. The findings reveal a low negative correlation ( $r = -.273$ ) between students' level of anxiety and their score in oral expression, meaning that the relationship between both variables is not strong.

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