

Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) Working Title: What Causes Foreign Language Anxiety?

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Abstract

Learning a foreign language can be challenging to many students. Having to familiarize oneself with an entirely new language and culture is not an easy task to do. This causes anxiety among learners while attending foreign language lessons. Thus, this study is done to investigate the causes of the students' anxiety upon learning foreign language. 120 respondents from a public university in Malaysia composed of three different French class levels participated in answering this survey. Adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), the survey includes communication apprehension, test anxiety and negative evaluation as tools to measure student's anxiety scale. The survey revealed that the three tools mentioned above are certainly causing learners to be anxious during foreign language lessons. Findings from this quantitative research also projected students' anxiety scale through means score accordingly with negative evaluation coming as the highest total mean of 3.25. In the face of students' profound anxiety, educators' role is crucial in minimizing students' worry so that it will not affect students' study.

Keywords: Foreign Language Learning, Fear of Foreign Language Learning, Communication Apprehension, Test Anxiety, Negative Evaluation

Introduction

Background of Study

According to Moeller & Catalano (2015), foreign language is a language taught in class which the students are not accustomed with. Malaysians for instance are acclimated with Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Thus this makes languages such as French, Japanese, Arabic and Korean (Point et al., 2021) distant and foreign to Malaysian students.

Most universities in Malaysia offer foreign language courses as electives. UiTM is one of the universities which requires all students to take this course in order to graduate. Though Malaysian university students are familiar with foreign language learning as they attended compulsory English classes at school (Azman, 2009), foreign language anxiety is still very much present in higher education.

Foreign language anxiety arises upon learning a new language because this lesson demands learners to listen and speak during class. Both said tasks are highly related to anxiety as it piques human's nervous system (Hashemi, 2011). As a result, foreign language learning anxiety exists among students.

Statement of Problem

For many foreign language learners, speaking and communicating can be intimidating and can lead to a traumatic experience which is due to several variables. The study by Malik et al (2021), investigated the variables affecting English communication apprehension and anxiety in EFL learners and examined the barriers inducing it. This observation has identified three main categories of perceived limitations which are psychological, linguistic and socio-cultural hindrances. It is discovered that learners felt reluctant to communicate and remain passive in class since they had fear of being perceived negatively by their peers due to lack of self-efficacy, low esteem and confidence. In addition to that, the study proposed more comprehensible input and exposure to address communication apprehension in class and in public.

Similar findings have also been identified by (Melouah, 2013). In her study, she examined the sources inducing foreign language anxiety in learners and she suggested that among several affective factors, anxiety appears as a vital variable that repeatedly affects foreign language learners' oral production. The related scenario occurred all over again as learners prefer to remain silent during speaking tasks and their hesitation to play a part resulting in their low performance and achievement.

Following this, Asif (2017) in her study, explored the causes contributing to foreign language anxiety of learners and the major signs of anxiety from psycholinguistic and socio-cultural perspectives while learning and speaking. She discovered that both psycholinguistic and socio-cultural have strong influence on learners especially in communication apprehension. Some of the major reported signs are hesitation, verbal staggering and inconsistent speech. She added that the major findings are that learners suffer from apprehension specifically in speaking skills and anxiety affects the learners' proficiency in foreign language learning.

Importantly, Malik et al (2020) pointed out that foreign language learners' lack of confidence in speaking and communication is a serious threat at the tertiary level and educators' role is to recognize that the speaking process with errors and mistakes should be accepted to minimise the anxiety and fear faced by learners.

As there is lack of studies on foreign language anxiety in Malaysian context, and this issue needs more attention, therefore, taking this as a gap, this study aims to identify how

communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety influence fear of language learning.

Hence, this study is carried out to explore how these variables and hindrances affect French language learning as a foreign language. Accordingly, with these concerns in mind, this investigation is done to answer the following questions;

- How does communication apprehension influence fear of language learning?
- How does fear of negative evaluation influence fear of language learning?
- How does test anxiety influence fear of language learning?

Literature Review

Introduction

This section discusses the motives for learning foreign languages, challenges in foreign language learning, Past Studies and also the conceptual framework of the study.

Motives for Foreign Language Learning

Learning a novel language is a challenging task but what highlights the most regarding this learning is the motives of learning foreign language. Different people have their own reasons concerning why they opt for foreign language learning. By referring to Johnson (2017), nowadays there are more than one billion people learning foreign language. Among all the foreign language learners, they all share one common motive which is mainly about communication. Travelling to a country where communication is conducted predominantly in foreign language, captivates the intention and the curiosity in learning the language of the country. Plus, learning foreign language allows the individual to comprehend and also emerge in the culture of the foreign language: language equal to culture. This situation can be concretized in India, a highly populated country where the majority of people communicate in different languages and dialects. Johnson also remarked that one of the main factors of foreign language learning is for educational purposes. Students will learn foreign languages especially for those that will further their studies in foreign speaking countries.

Challenges in Foreign Language Learning

Learning a foreign language can be challenging to many students. Among some of the challenges are lack of motivation and the learning environment. Sometimes, students embark on the learning of a foreign language with no real motive. This can create problems in the learning process. According to Rahmat (2022), motivation in the learners keeps the spark of the learning mode going. Learners need to learn because they either need to learn the language later in their life-instrumental reasons. They also need to have value towards the need for the use of the language -valence. Next, the environment can be a great challenge for the learners. Both Rahmat, et.al (2021); Unal & Ilhan (2017) found the influence of the learning environment can facilitate or hinder foreign language learning. The environment can range from the way the language is assessed, to the language programmes, and also to the language teachers' qualifications. So, learners need to either overcome the challenges or learn to cope with the challenges to maximise their learning.

Failure to overcome the challenges can affect the learners in many ways. One way is that the learners began to fear the learning of the foreign language. Classroom interaction using the language is something they looked forward to. Their fear may begin by them avoiding interaction because of their communication apprehension. This fear then escalates into the

learners fearing negative evaluation by their peers. Learning is no longer fun. Learners end up having test anxiety and that actually kills the fun out of learning a foreign language.

Past Studies

Past Studies of Motives for Foreign Language Learning

There have been many past studies on motives for foreign language learning. The study by Karelina and Smirnova (2020) explored the motives of learning the English language for tertiary students in Russia. Two types of motives were considered in this research: internal and external. The participants were 80 first and fourth year students of the regional studies department of the faculty of foreign languages and Regional Studies of Lomonosov Moscow State University. The findings showed that when learning English, internal motives prevail. Among the internal motives were the ability to communicate effectively with students from other countries, ability to travel without language barriers, better career growth, better opportunity to work abroad and be a highly educated and cultured person.

Another study was done by Rahmat (2022) who investigated the motives behind learners learning English in a public university in Malaysia. This study used Vroom's (1964) Expectancy theory, which presents three components: expectancy, instrumentality and valence. The participants were 35 Malaysian public university students, learning English as a foreign language. The participants were given a survey that explored how learners' motivation is influenced by the three Expectancy theory components. Findings showed that learners learn English mainly for instrumental reasons. Their motives to learn English are driven by what they expect to use their language proficiency for.

Past Studies of Challenges in Foreign Language Learning

There have been many studies to show that learning a foreign language can be challenging to students. Solak (2015), a qualitative study to investigate the current challenges in English language learning and teaching in Turkey from high and low achievers' perspective. In this study, it was suggested that the English course should be realistic and designed as practice-based rather than theory-based. In addition, the materials such as course books, videos and internet websites should be chosen carefully according to the students' interest, level, and needs. Teaching and improving four language skills are supposed to be the focus of attention rather than grammar-centred language teaching.

Another study done by Mohammed (2018) showed that learners need a proper time and good management to overcome the difficulties of learning English as a foreign language in Iran. The results also revealed that teachers' role, learning methods and strategies are important to motivate learners to develop their linguistics and communicative competence.

Conceptual Framework

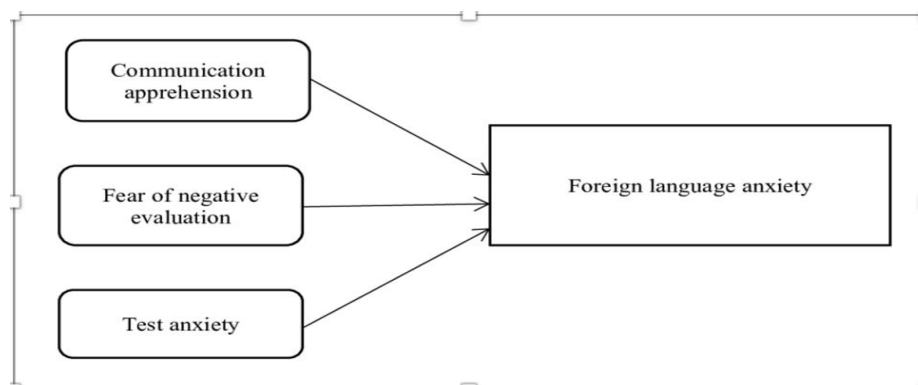


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Causes of Foreign Language Anxiety

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the study. This study is adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). The source of fear of language learning comes from three factors and they are (a) communication apprehension, (b) fear of negative evaluation and (c) test anxiety.

Communication Apprehension

Communication is a staple element in foreign language lessons. One cannot master a language by simply focusing on writing and theory. Even so, such significant component of the lesson has become a source of foreign language anxiety particularly known as communication apprehension. According to Kral'ova & Petrova (2017), communication apprehension relates to fear of speaking though not only limited to such action. Not being able to understand one speech or be understood by others also falls under the same anxiety category leading to learners getting nervous whenever they cannot catch phrases during lessons. Speaking in front of the class is challenging and stressful enough but doing so in a foreign language definitely accelerates students' existing anxiety.

Fear of Negative Evaluation

To comprehend the nature of foreign language anxiety, it is fundamental to observe some theories postulated by major researchers in the field. Based on the Affective Filter Hypothesis developed by Krashen (1985), a certain number of affective elements contributes to second language acquisition. From his observation, anxiety plays a major role in inducing the "affective filter" or "mental block" which results in the inability to perform well in class. On the other hand, Horwitz et al (1986) by using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), managed to distinguish a few sources of foreign language anxiety and one of the major factors is fear of negative evaluation (FNE). It is defined as apprehension about others' assessments, avoidance of evaluative circumstances and the anticipations that others would value one-self negatively. In some cases, learners keep thinking that others are better at foreign language than themselves in speaking for instance and they are afraid that others will laugh at them when they try to communicate in the foreign language. Due to this factor, they are too ashamed to volunteer answers and get anxious easily when the instructor asks them questions they have not prepared in advance.

Test Anxiety

The drive-oriented approach, developed by Cho (1991): trait-state anxiety theory, cognitive theory, cognitive and emotional is the term where the test anxiety can be elucidated. Normally these traits are often portray by high test-anxious students: 1) The test situation is

seen as difficult, challenging and threatening, 2) The individual sees himself as ineffective and inadequate in handling the task at hand, 3) The individual focuses on undesirable consequences of personal inadequacy, 4) Self-deprecatory preoccupations are strong and interfere or compete with task relevant cognitive activity and 5) The individual expects and anticipates failure and loss of regard by others. For future direction concerning test anxiety research, firstly, the test should emphasize on analyzing the nature and the etiological factors by conducting research about the relationship between parental or social attitude and test anxiety. Secondly, the outcome of test anxiety concerning memory, attention and cue utilization should be examined to clarify the relationship between test anxiety and performance.

Methodology

This quantitative study is done to investigate the causes of the students' anxiety upon learning foreign language. Participants were purposely chosen from a public university in Malaysia. The instrument (refer to table 1). used is a survey adapted from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). Apart from the demographic profile in Section A., there are 3 other sections. Section B has 9 items on flexibility, section C has 10 items on study-life balance and section D has 10 items on learning performance.

Table 1

Distribution of Items in Survey

| SECTION | FACTORS | NO OF ITEMS |
|---------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| B | Communication Apprehension | 11 |
| C | Fear of Negative Evaluation | 7 |
| D | Test Anxiety | 15 |
| | TOTAL NO OF ITEMS | 33 |

Table 2

Reliability Statistics

| Reliability Statistics | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .795 | 33 |

Data is collected via google form and analysed using SPSS version 26. With reference to table 2, the SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach analysis of .795 thus showing high internal reliability for the instrument. Data is presented in terms of percentage for the demographic profile and mean scores to answer the research questions.

Findings

Introduction

This section presents the findings by answering the research questions of the study. The presentation of findings begins with the report findings for the demographic profile in the form of percentages.

Findings for Demographic Profile

Findings For Gender

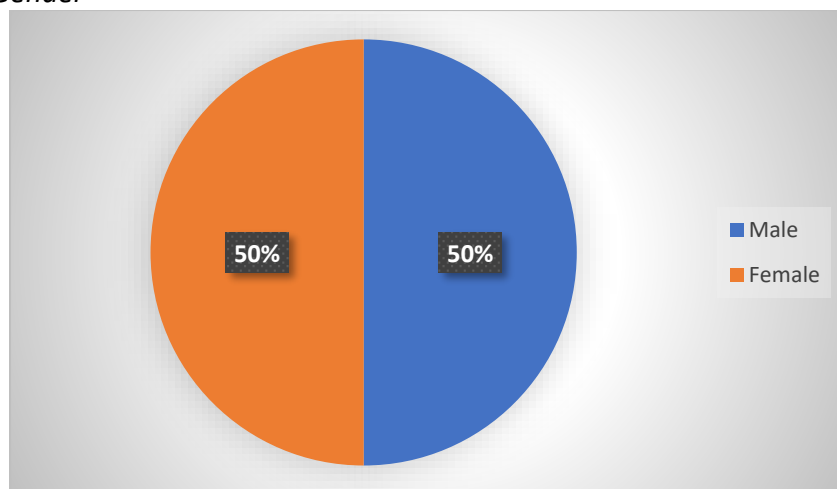


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

Figure 2 shows the percentage for Gender whereby male and female are equally at 50%.

Findings for Level

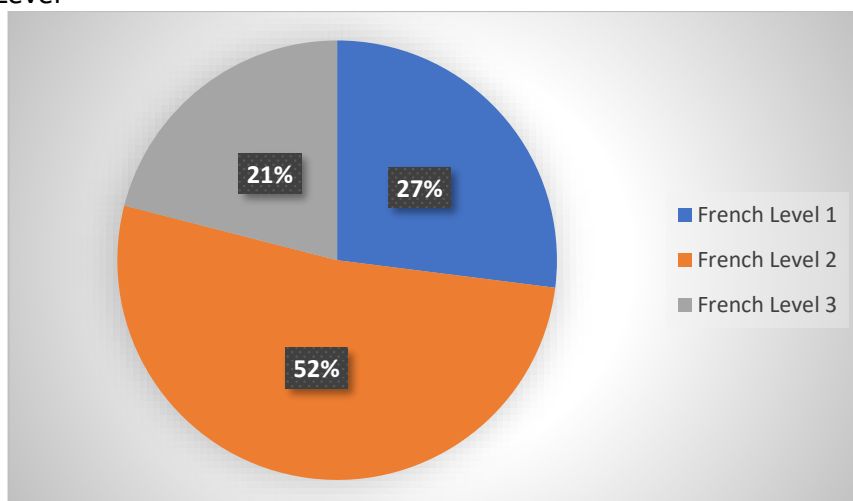


Figure 3- Percentage for Level

Figure 3 shows that French Level 2 is the highest at 52% followed by French Level 1 at 27% and French Level 3 at 21%.

Findings for Discipline

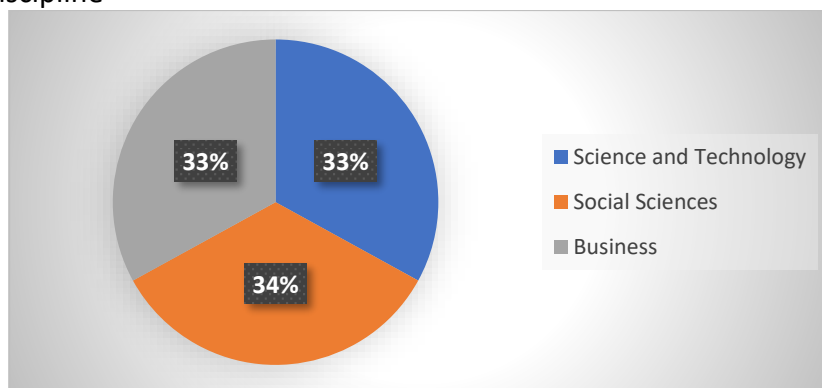


Figure 4- Percentage for Discipline

Figure 4 shows distribution by disciplines. 34% shows that respondents are from Social Sciences and 33% are from Science and Technology and Business.

Findings for Comprehension Apprehension

This section presents data to answer research question 1-How does communication apprehension influence fear of language learning?

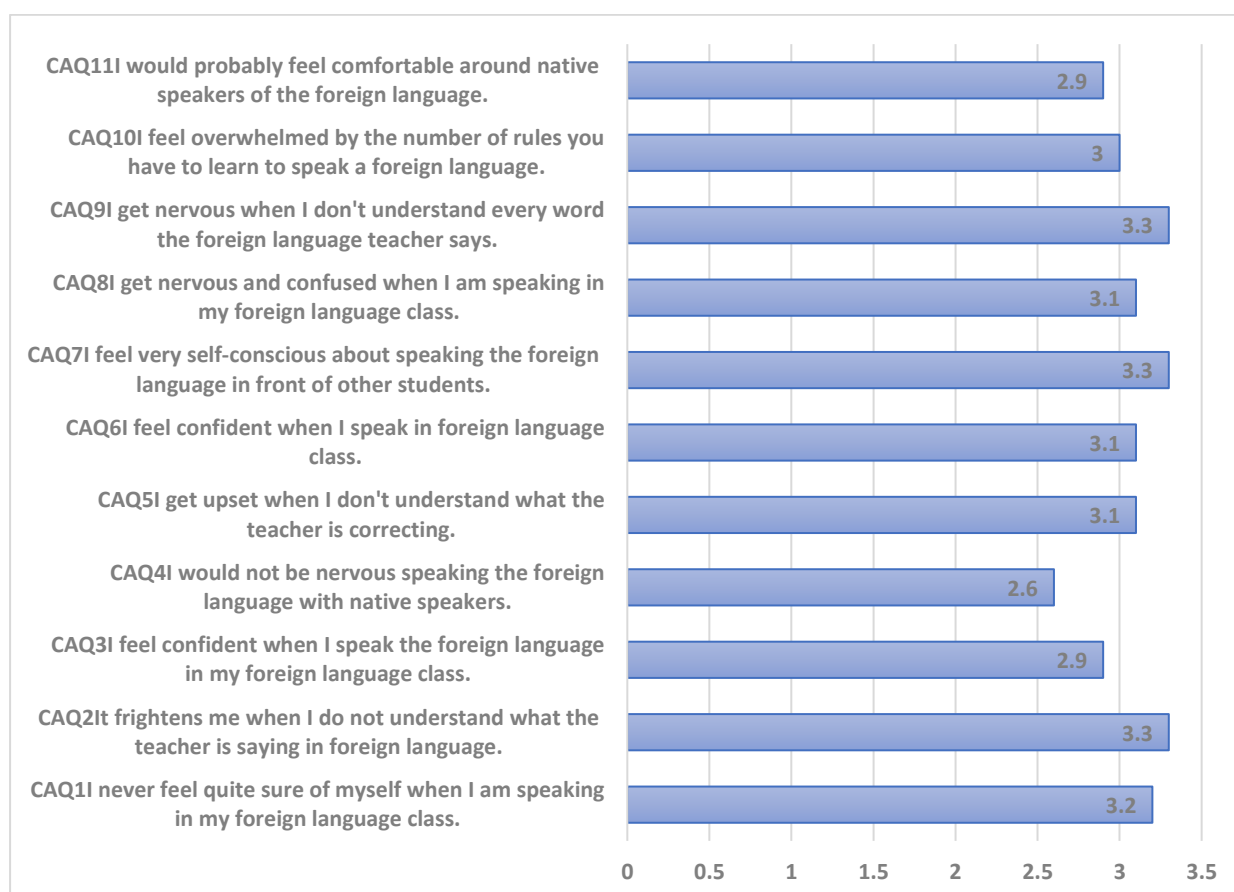


Figure 5- Mean for Comprehension Apprehension

Figure 5 shows the mean for Comprehension Apprehension. Three items had highest mean (3.3) “It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in foreign language” , “I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students” and “I get nervous when I don't understand every word the foreign language teacher says”.

This is followed by a mean of (3.2) “I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class”. The lowest mean is (2.6) “I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers”.

Findings for Fear of Negative Evaluation

This section presents data to answer research question 2: How does fear of negative evaluation influence fear of language learning?

Fear of Negative Evaluation

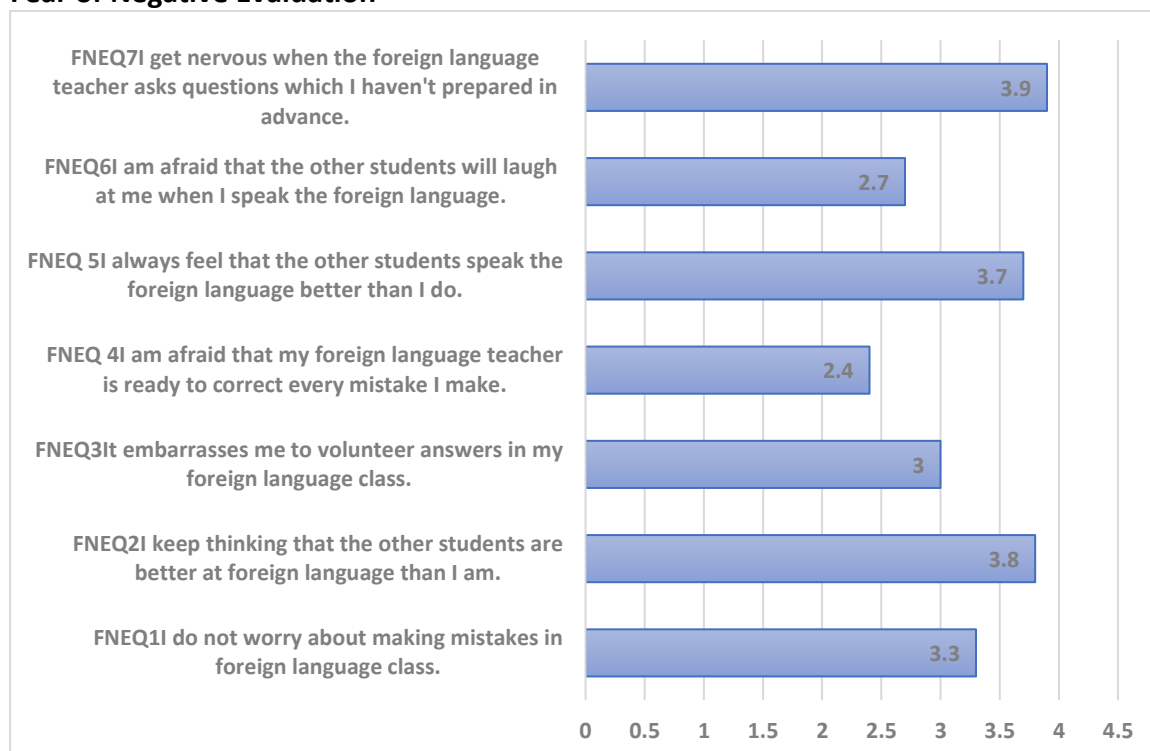


Figure 6- Mean for Fear of Negative Evaluation

Based on the findings about the fear of negative evaluation on how it influences fear in foreign language learning, the majority of students tend to get nervous when being asked by the teacher in particular when the question hasn't been prepared in advance (3.9). Most of the students have the concept that the other students are much better in foreign language (3.8) and have the impression that the others speak better in foreign language than their own selves (3.7). The findings portray an average mean concerning feeling worry in making mistakes (3.3) and feeling embarrassed to volunteer in giving answers in foreign language class (3.0). When it comes to feeling afraid that the others will laugh when speaking foreign language, the findings portray the mean of (2.7) which signify that students are not afraid in being laugh at by the entourage in class and it is the same for feeling afraid to be corrected by the teacher if making mistake in foreign language (2.4).

Findings for Test Anxiety

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How does test anxiety influence fear of language learning?

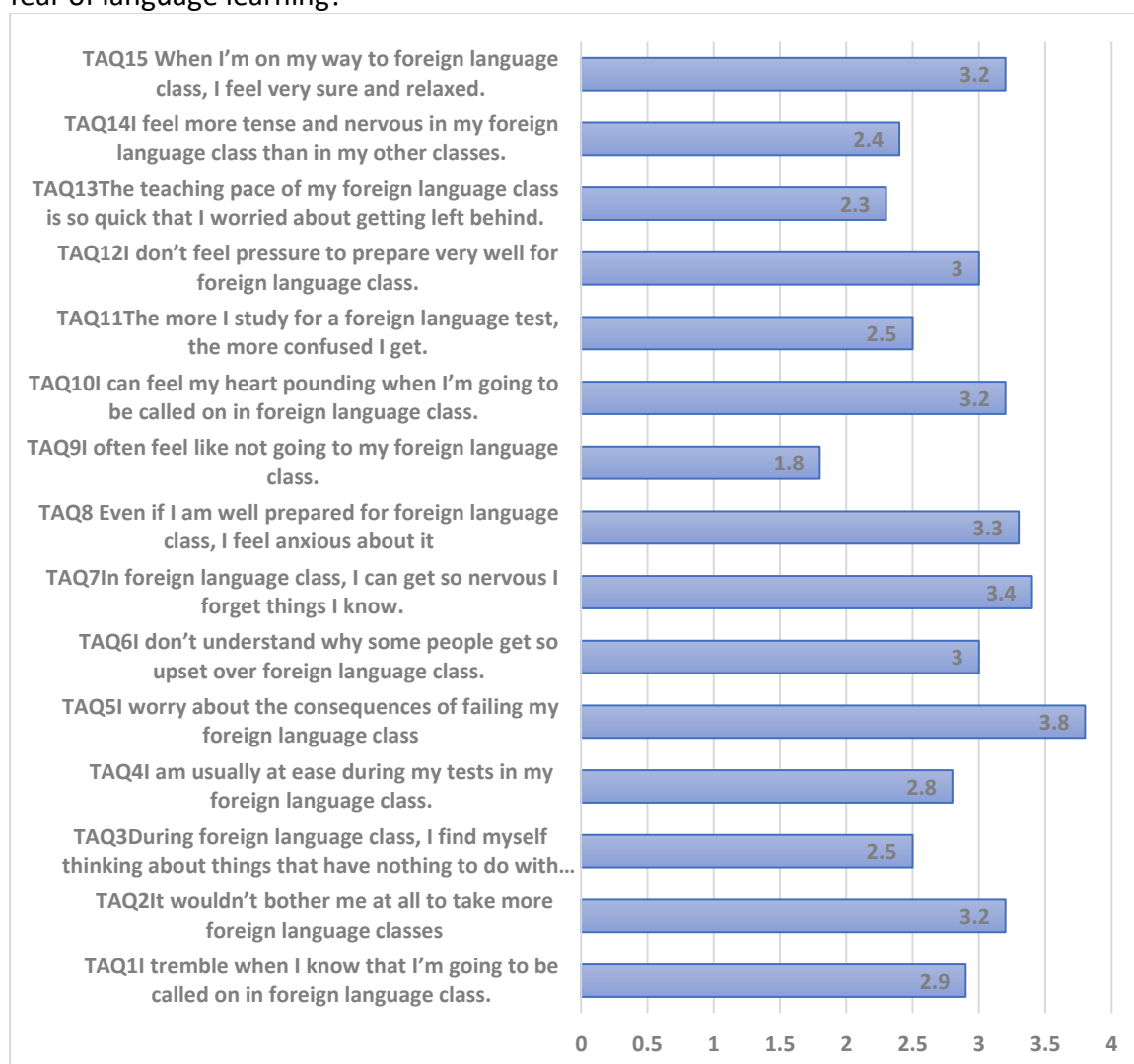


Figure 7- Mean for Test Anxiety

With reference to the findings related to test anxiety, the highest mean reveals that the majority of the respondents are worried about the consequences of failing their foreign language class (3.8). Besides that, a fair amount of respondents are so nervous that they forget things they know in foreign language class (3.4). This is followed by others who feel

anxious even if they are well prepared for class (3.3). The result also indicates that respondents can feel their hearts pounding when they are going to be called on in the language session (3.2). Nonetheless, the same mean of 3.2 outlines that they would not bother at all if they were to take more foreign language courses and they feel very sure and relaxed, when they are on their way to class. Plus, some of the respondents do not feel pressure to prepare very well for their course and they could not understand why some people get so upset over foreign language class (3.0). However, few respondents tremble when they know that they are going to be called on in class (2.9). Others usually feel at ease during the tests (2.8). The rest of them find themselves thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course during the class and feel that the more they study for the course, the more confused they get (2.5). When it comes to apprehension, respondents feel more tense and nervous in class compared to other classes (2.4), they get worried about getting left behind when the teaching pace of class is so fast (2.3) and unfortunately, some even often feel like not going to class due to stress (1.8).

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Table 3

Foreign language factor total mean

| | Foreign language factor total mean | |
|---|------------------------------------|------|
| 1 | Communication Apprehension | 3.07 |
| 2 | Fear of Negative Evaluation | 3.25 |
| 3 | Test Anxiety | 2.88 |

This study revealed that students are indeed feeling anxious while learning foreign language because of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety. Each item in the list mentioned influences fear of foreign language learning through different learning aspects and scale.

This study shows that fear of negative evaluation is the top reason of foreign language anxiety with a mean of 3.25 according to Table 3. This is in line with studies by Rahmat (2020); Boon (2021) in which both also found that fear of negative evaluation becoming the main anxious factor among learners.

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Anxiousness among students will always be lingering around upon learning any new lessons. Similar to foreign language learners, the feeling of nervousness is impossible to be wiped off entirely. Even so, such learning hindrance can be minimized. Educators play a vital part in easing the students' worries.

Providing a comfortable environment and encouraging lecture proved to be an excellent method in achieving ultimate classroom learning output (Inada 2022). Thus, it is safe to presume that this approach could also help reduce anxious levels in foreign language classrooms. Besides that, incorporating effective teaching methods such as cognitive and metacognitive approach during lessons can be done to maximise learning experience.

Future researchers could look into different reasons that cause anxiety toward foreign language learners particularly involving external factors (outside classroom). Furthermore, interviews can also be conducted in order to attain a more in depth understanding of students' learning concerns rather than constricting to survey analysis per se.

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