

Level of Students' Anxiety in Learning Arabic Subject

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the level of students' anxiety in communicating in Arabic, the level of students' anxiety about negative evaluation, and the level of students' general anxiety in learning Arabic. This study took the form of a survey study with a total of 181 students who took the Foundation Arabic II subject (Tac 151) at UiTM Johor Branch Segamat Campus randomly selected using the Krejcie & Morgan sample selection technique. The instrument used is a Likert Scale questionnaire adapted from the measurement scale presented by Horwitz (1983), FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale). The data were analyzed descriptively using the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) version 26. The study results showed the level of students' anxiety in communicating in Arabic, the level of students' anxiety about negative evaluations, and the level of students' general anxiety in learning Arabic, respectively, at a medium level. The study also found that students feel very worried when they do not understand what the lecturer is saying and feel very panicky if they must speak in Arabic without any preparation. The study also found that students are apprehensive when other students have a better command of Arabic and are more fluent in Arabic than themselves. The study's findings also show that students are apprehensive about the effects of failure in Arabic class. Although students' overall concerns do not show a high level, the teaching approach still needs to be improved so that students no longer have concerns about learning Arabic.

Keywords: Students' Anxiety, Communicating, Negative Evaluation, Learning Arabic

Introduction

Learning a foreign language, especially Arabic, is difficult for students who do not have a foundation in the language. Many students want to learn a foreign language so that it can be an added value to students when looking for a job in the future. Therefore, many universities and colleges offer foreign language subjects to their students, such as Arabic, Mandarin, French, Korean, etcetera. Arabic is one of the foreign languages in Malaysia that is in high demand from students and the general public to learn it. It is not surprising because Arabic is one of the languages close to Malaysian Muslims and a well-known language used in large countries such as Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and other Middle Eastern countries. In addition, some

learn Arabic for various purposes such as tourism, understanding the Quran, communication, and others. As Zulkiefley (2006) states, a foreign language also refers to a language learned for specific purposes by certain individuals or groups.

In learning a language, especially for someone who is not a native speaker, there will be challenges such as feeling worried, anxious, or afraid to learn the foreign language. Eysenck (1992) states that these feelings involve specific reactions that may occur suddenly and excessively, such as feeling depressed or stressed, tension, palpitations, trembling, and sweating. Naturally, such feelings are typical for every individual. However, if they happen excessively, they will interfere with student learning in terms of concentration, for example. They can cause students to fall behind and have a negative impact on student performance. It is feared that students will no longer enjoy learning and instead feel burdened and stressed to learn the foreign language.

The anxiety level in communicating in a foreign language is also influenced by the student's introverted and extraverted personalities. These introverted students are quiet, passive, and shy, while extraverted students are more confident to speak up in class (Nurul Shahida, 2017). In the Arabic class, the researcher as a lecturer found more students with introverted personalities than extroverted ones. Students with extraverted personalities are not a concern for lecturers because they can know their level of mastery of Arabic through their courage to speak, read in class, and give opinions. However, the concern is in introverted students who are quiet, afraid to make mistakes in speaking and reading Arabic, and shy to ask questions. This kind of attitude will cause difficulties for students to learn Arabic, which can affect their anxiety in learning it. Accordingly, this study was conducted to see the extent of students' anxiety in learning Arabic and describe suggestions to address students' anxiety to achieve a more effective teaching and learning process.

Literature Review

The Arabic subject is one of the third language elective courses offered to students at the diploma and bachelor's degree levels at UiTM. Students will take Foundation Arabic I and Foundation Arabic II courses at the diploma level for two semesters. Students will take Introductory Arabic I, Introductory Arabic II, and Introductory Arabic III courses for three semesters at the bachelor's degree level. Students who take this course come from various educational backgrounds and faculties at UiTM. Some students have studied Arabic before taking this elective course, and some have no foundation in Arabic.

Therefore, various activities are organized by the Arabic Language Club and Unit every semester to attract students' interest in learning Arabic, including Arabic Exhibitions and Documentaries, Arabic film screenings, competitions such as Arabic *nasyid*, quizzes, and others. However, the researcher saw that a few students were still afraid to speak Arabic, and it was difficult to master it. This is likely to be fear and worry that makes it difficult for students to master Arabic. This is because a person's failure to control feelings of anxiety can lead to a failure to master the language (Zarina, 2007).

There have been several previous studies related to the issue of students' anxiety in learning Arabic. Among them is Ghazali's (2010) study, which examines UiTM Shah Alam students' concerns about tests and motivation to learn Arabic as an elective subject. The study's

findings indicate that students' anxiety about tests is moderate and student motivation is at a high level. In addition, Pratiwi et al (2014) studied the factors of Arabic communication anxiety among UKM Islamic studies students who took Arabic as a compulsory subject. The study found that students' anxiety is due to a lack of courage, shyness, lack of confidence, and lack of interest. A study by Halim (2009) conducted on Bachelor of Arabic students at 5 IPTAs also found that internal factors of students such as shyness, lack of confidence, fear of being laughed at, and lack of enthusiasm become barriers for students to communicate well in Arabic.

In addition, Alghothani's (2010) study examines anxiety in an Arabic text reading skills course among students at a University in the United States. The study found a negative relationship between anxiety and students' ability to read Arabic texts. In addition, a study by Yusri and Rahimi (2009) examined the attitude of UiTM students towards learning Arabic. Findings found that students who do not have a primary Arabic language feel anxious and stressed when students who have basic Arabic language answer questions faster than them. They also have a negative perception of class travel that combines students who have a primary Arabic language with those who do not have a basic Arabic language.

In this study, the researcher wants to pay attention to the anxiety level of UiTM Johor Branch Segamat Campus students who take Arabic as an elective subject. The objective of this study is to see the level of anxiety in communicating, the level of students' anxiety about negative evaluation, and their general anxiety in learning Arabic subjects.

Objectives of The Study

- 1) Identify the level of students' anxiety about communicating in Arabic.
- 2) Identifying the level of students' anxiety about negative evaluation in learning Arabic subjects.
- 3) Identifying the level of students' general anxiety in learning Arabic subjects.

Research Methodology

This study's quantitative design uses the descriptive survey method to identify the level of anxiety in communicating in Arabic, the level of student anxiety about negative evaluation, and the general anxiety level of students learning Arabic subjects. This study uses a questionnaire instrument adapted from the measurement scale presented by Horwitz (1983), which is FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale). The questionnaire is divided into part A, which relates to the respondents' demographics. Part B relates to the level of anxiety in communicating in Arabic and consists of 12 items. Part C relates to the level of student anxiety about negative evaluation and consists of 8 items, and part D relates to the level of general anxiety of students in learning Arabic subjects and consists of 18 items. The population of this study is students taking the subject code Tac151 (Foundation Arabic II) at the UiTM Johor Branch Segamat Campus. The total number of students is 347 people. The author has randomly selected 181 students as a study sample to match the study population's size concerning Krejcie and Morgan's sample size determination.

The quantitative data of the questionnaire to answer the first, second, and third questions were analyzed descriptively by involving frequency, percentage, and mean using SPSS software version 26. The questionnaire was analyzed using a Likert Scale where 1=Strongly

disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not sure, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly agree. Then the mean score was interpreted by Ahmad (2002), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Interpretation of the Mean Score

Mean Score	Level
0.00 to 1.66	Low
1.67 to 3.33	Intermediate
3.34 to 5.00	High

The instrument's reliability data is shown in Table 2. The results of the SPSS analysis showed that the used instrument had a high level of internal reliability, with a Cronbach alpha of .801.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.801	33

Table 2

Reliability Statistics

Research Findings**Student Demographics**

Regarding gender, the findings show that 35% or 64 students are male, and 65% or 117 students are female. All study participants are students taking the Basic Arabic II subject at UiTM Johor Branch Segamat Campus.

Level of students' anxiety about communicating in Arabic

Based on table 3, the findings of this study found that the level of anxiety in communicating in Arabic is at a intermediate level. This is seen from the overall mean, which is 3.11. The findings show that the mean of eight is at a moderate level, and the mean of four is at a high level. Items at a moderate level are items 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, with mean scores of 3.21, 3.24, 3.09, 2.33, 2.84, 2.45, 2.64, and 3.11, respectively. The item with the lowest mean is item 6, which is 'I will not feel nervous about speaking Arabic with Arabs' with a mean score of 2.33, whereas the items that are at a high level are items 3, 4, 11, and 12 with mean scores of 3.49, 3.77, 3.44, and 3.65 respectively. The item with the highest mean is item 4, which is 'I will feel panic if I have to speak in Arabic without any preparation' with a mean score of 3.77.

The items that get a mean at this high-level show that students feel very nervous when they do not understand what the lecturer is saying in Arabic and when the lecturer asks questions in Arabic when the students are not ready. They will also feel very panicked if they must speak in Arabic without any preparation. Overall, students' anxiety about communicating in Arabic is moderate, with a mean score of 3.11.

Table 3

Level of students' anxiety about communicating in Arabic

Sub construct	Mean	Level
1. I am always feeling insecure when speaking Arabic in Arabic class	3.21	Intermediate
2. I feel nervous whenever I know that I will be called by the lecturer in Arabic class	3.24	Intermediate
3. I feel anxious when I do not understand what my lecturer says in Arabic	3.49	High
4. I tend to panic whenever I am forced to speak Arabic without any preparation	3.77	High
5. I am anxious to answer questions voluntarily in class	3.09	Intermediate
6. I will not be afraid to speak Arabic with native Arabic speakers	2.33	Intermediate
7. I feel confident speaking Arabic in class	2.84	Intermediate
8. I can feel my heart pounding whenever I am on my way to Arabic class	2.45	Intermediate
9. I feel timid whenever I speak Arabic	2.64	Intermediate
10. I feel anxious and confused whenever I speak Arabic	3.11	Intermediate
11. I will feel anxious when I cannot understand each word my lecturer speaks in Arabic	3.44	High
12. I become anxious when the lecturer asks questions that I am not prepared for in Arabic	3.65	High
Overall Mean	3.11	Intermediate

The level of students' concern about negative evaluations in learning Arabic subjects

Based on table 4, this study found that the level of students' anxiety about negative evaluation in learning Arabic subjects is moderate based on the overall mean, which is 3.28. Findings show that mean of five is at a moderate level, and the mean of three is at a high level. Items at a moderate level are items 1, 3, 5, 6, and 8, with mean scores of 3.28, 3.16, 2.69, 2.41, and 3.01, respectively. The item with the lowest mean is item 6, 'The more often I practice speaking Arabic, the more confused I become with a mean score of 2.41, whereas the items that are at a high level are items 2, 4, and 7 with mean scores of 4.12, 3.62, and 3.97 respectively. The item with the highest mean is item 2, which is 'I often feel that other students have a better command of Arabic than me' with a mean score of 4.12.

The items that get a mean at this high-level show that students feel too much that other students have a better command of Arabic and are more fluent than themselves. They also feel very disappointed when they do not understand the correction given by the lecturer. Overall, students' anxiety about negative evaluation in learning Arabic subjects is moderate, with a mean score of 3.28.

Table 4

The level of students' anxiety about negative evaluation in learning Arabic subjects

Sub-construct	Mean	Level
1. I am not worried about making mistakes in Arabic in class	3.28	Intermediate
2. I often feel that other students are better at mastering Arabic compared to me.	4.12	High
3. I often feel calm whenever I take Arabic tests	3.16	Intermediate
4. I feel disappointed whenever I do not understand the correction given by the lecturer	3.62	High
5. I feel nervous whenever the lecturer is always wanting to correct my mistakes	2.69	Intermediate
6. The more frequent I practice Arabic, the more I become confused	2.41	Intermediate
7. I always have the assumption that other students are more proficient in Arabic compared to me	3.97	High
8. I am afraid that other students will humiliate me when I speak Arabic	3.01	Intermediate
Overall mean	3.28	Intermediate

The level of students' general anxiety in learning Arabic subjects

Based on table 5, this study found that the level of students' general anxiety in learning Arabic subjects was moderate based on the overall mean of 3.01. Findings show that the mean of eight is at a medium level, and the mean of five is at a high level. Items at a medium level are items 2, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 12, and 13, with mean scores of 2.60, 3.08, 3.03, 1.97, 3.09, 2.55, 2.52, and 2.40, respectively. The item with the lowest mean is item 7, which is 'I always feel like I do not want to go to Arabic class with a mean score of 1.97, whereas the items that are at a high level are items 1, 3, 6, 8 and 11 with mean scores of 3.57, 3.90, 3.51, 3.55 and 3.36 respectively. The item with the highest mean is item 3, which is 'I am worried about the effects of failure in Arabic class with a mean score of 3.90.

The items that get a mean at this high-level show that the students are not afraid to take the next Arabic class. They also do not feel pressured to prepare well for the Arabic class. They also feel very confident and calm about going to Arabic class. However, they are apprehensive about the consequences of failure in Arabic class. They are also apprehensive even though they have prepared well for the Arabic class. Overall, students' anxiety about negative evaluation in learning Arabic subjects is moderate, with a mean score of 3.01.

Table 5

Level of students' general anxiety in learning Arabic subjects

Sub-construct	Mean	Level
1. I am not afraid to enroll into the next Arabic class	3.57	High
2. During in class, I often think about things that are not related to Arabic	2.60	Intermediate
3. I am worried about the effects of failing Arabic class	3.90	High
4. I do not understand why some students feel stressed due to Arabic class	3.08	Intermediate
5. In Arabic class, I feel nervous to the extent that I forget what I knew	3.03	Intermediate
6. Although I am well prepared for Arabic class, I still feel worried	3.51	High
7. I often feel like skipping Arabic class	1.97	Intermediate
8. I do not feel stressed out to make the best preparations for my Arabic class	3.55	High
9. Time flies in Arabic class which makes me worried that I could not catch up.	3.09	Intermediate
10. I feel more stressed and worried in Arabic class compared to my other classes	2.55	Intermediate
11. When I walk to Arabic class, I feel confident and calm	3.36	High
12. I feel overwhelmed with the amount of responsibility that I need to take to learn Arabic	2.52	Intermediate
13. I may be feeling comfortable speaking Arabic with native Arabic speakers	2.40	Intermediate
Overall mean	3.01	Intermediate

Discussion

The study found that the level of student anxiety in learning Arabic is moderate. This shows that students still have concerns about learning Arabic. Although students' concerns do not show a high level, initiatives still need to be done to improve the learning and teaching process so that students no longer have concerns about learning Arabic.

From the aspect of students' level of anxiety to communicate in Arabic, the overall level of students' anxiety was found to be at a moderate level. Findings show that students' anxiety is high when they do not understand what the lecturer is saying in Arabic and when the lecturer asks questions in Arabic when the students are not ready. This means that students cannot answer verbally the questions posed by the lecturer because they do not understand and are not ready when asked by the lecturer. McCroskey (1984) stated that students who experience this kind of anxiety avoid communication activities but even withdraw directly from these activities. Therefore, it is suggested that lecturers provide continuous communication training starting with the most straightforward level and give positive reinforcement to students such as praise and gifts if they can communicate well. Dubin (1977)

agrees that continuous motivation and language training is necessary to master a foreign language.

In addition, the findings show that students feel panicked if they must communicate in Arabic without any preparation. Therefore, the lecturer may be able to give them time for them to prepare in advance to find vocabulary and discuss with their friends before starting the Arabic conversation activity. Lecturers should often use simple or daily Arabic expressions that are commonly used, such as saying hello, congratulating, apologizing, etcetera, so that students can easily remember and use them in communication. Findings of the study Shazia et al. (2021) found that there is a significant relationship between language learning anxiety and the classroom environment. Therefore, lecturers are suggested not to give activities or language assignments that are too heavy and difficult in class because it can affect their level of communication anxiety.

From the aspect of students' anxiety towards negative evaluation, the overall level of students' anxiety was found to be at a moderate level. Findings show that students' anxiety is high when they feel that other students have a better command of Arabic and are more fluent in Arabic than themselves. Students with this kind of anxiety tend to expect others to evaluate them (Horwitz et al., 1986) negatively. Therefore, lecturers should motivate and encourage weak students and not compare the students' abilities with other students. The pace of teaching should also be moderate and not too fast so that all students can follow the learning process well.

From the aspect of students' general concern in learning Arabic, the whole is at a moderate level. The study results found that students are apprehensive about the effects of failure in Arabic class. According to (Skehan, 1989), low achievement in language learning causes student anxiety. It is not denied because students' confidence in language ability will decrease if their achievement is low. However, according to MacIntyre & Gardner (1989), anxiety is the cause of low achievement in students. Therefore, lecturers can advise students with this kind of anxiety to always work hard in their studies without thinking about failure first. In addition, students must focus entirely on class, complete all assignments, and prepare and revise to achieve good results in the Arabic exam.

Conclusion

Overall, students' concerns in learning Arabic are at a moderate level. Indeed, the teaching and learning process requires two-way communication to transfer knowledge more effectively. Apart from lecturers providing teaching input, students also need to be given space to communicate to practice their language use. This is because, of course, only in the classroom can the teaching staff ensure that students communicate in Arabic. Training or communication activities also do not need to be too tricky not to burden the students' emotions. According to Pratiwi & Suhaila (2015), activities carried out in small groups can make students more comfortable speaking Arabic and thus reduce their communication anxiety. In the teaching process, teachers can also insert jokes, give advice, be patient and be friendly to students. According to Young (1991), this approach makes students more comfortable and encourages students to speak in the target language. The level of students' anxiety in learning Arabic needs to be taken care of by all parties because it affects student achievement and students' confidence in mastering Arabic.

Pedagogical Implications

Through this study, Arabic educators will be able to recognise the traits of students who are anxious about learning Arabic and employ a variety of strategies to help them overcome their anxiety. This will allow students to concentrate better on learning Arabic and to feel less inferior to other students, which will help them learn Arabic more effectively. Future studies might concentrate on the perceptions of students regarding methods of instruction that can lessen students' anxiety while learning Arabic.

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