Investigating the relationship between learning anxieties and learning strategies used by EFL teachers and students

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ABSTRACT

This research has investigated the relationship between learning anxieties and learning strategies and has explored the effect of learning anxieties on learning strategies used by B.A EFL student of the Islamic Azad University of Ardabil branch. Overall, 103 students participated in this investigation, and two questionnaires were used for collecting data. To this end, Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) was utilized to measure the learning anxiety of students and to investigate the learning strategies and Survey of Reading Strategies (SORS). Readers having high anxiety (HAR), low anxiety (LAR), and moderate anxiety (MAR) were categorized based on FLRAS results. Momentum correlational-descriptive statistics, Pearson correlational coefficient, and Regression analysis were used for analyzing the data. The results of analyzing the data showed that r (0.022) <table (0.207), with a significance level of 0.842, was more than 0.05. There was it was shown that no primary relationships existed between reading anxiety and the overall use of learning strategies. Moreover, it proved that high anxiety didn't lead to less use of learning strategies. Due to the findings mentioned above, there was no need for regression analyses to investigate the effect of anxiety on the use of learning strategies. In addition, various suggestions have been presented for students and teachers of EFL, and future research of this study can be considered.

Keywords: Reading anxiety, Reading strategies, Learning, Islamic Azad University of Ardabil

Introduction

Learning reading is a fundamental skill for foreign language students and is the most important among the four primary learning skills [1-3]. Students` success while being educated in the university depends on their reading ability and the comprehension of English writing skills. Considering these two important issues, Anderson stated that learning a foreign language is the main skill for students. Learning is the most essential skill that is considered for having better development and gaining more improvement in the educational period. During learning, students can access several data related to the target culture and language [4]. This issue is completely right for university students since most of their time is spent for learning university texts. In Indonesia, the designers of measuring the language in the educational program emphasize on the learning major as a compulsory subject for students; thus, it is required that students be able to read various kinds of texts such as leaflets, sciences, social studies, and others [5-8].

According to the findings of UNESCO data in 2012, it has been reported that the interest in learning index reached 0.001 in Indonesia [9]. This means that among 1000 individuals, only one citizen was interested in learning the English language. The reason behind such disinterest in learning could be explained in this way Indonesian people prefer to obtain data through interviewing rather than written forms [10]. Moreover, the office of statistical studies showed in 2012 that more than 91% of Indonesian people aged over 10 years prefer to watch TV, and 17% of them prefer to learn more from various sources such as books, magazines, and journals [11]. Furthermore, the data obtained from an international evaluation program of students (an international study for economic cooperation and economic development organization that evaluated 15 years old students`

ability in mathematics, learning, science, and solving problems) proved that Indonesian students` educational skills (fst) were 61 among 65 companies that participated in PISA 2012. The results of the study carried out by Hamra and Syatraiana (2012) revealed that the low learning ability of Indonesian students was due to some problems resulting from various sources, such as weak interpretation of the text, not having a comprehensive vocabulary, using inappropriate learning strategy and having low grammar knowledge [6].

Foreign language learning-related publications suggest that individual differences, such as anxiety, are one the effective factors in learning, and most of the studies revealed that anxiety is one of the main factors that can impede the process of learning a second or foreign language [12-16].

Saito *et al*. (1999) stated foreign language learning anxiety for the first time; this was a kind of anxiety that learners experiences while reading a foreign language [12]. Students experiencing learning anxiety present some thoughts that reduce their working memory [17]. As a result, the reduced working memory can make students retry to using learning strategies and design on the background knowledge [18-20]. Anxious students lose their curiosity, which results in the reduction of capacities and comprehension abilities of cases such as rational thinking, quick observation, and response. Students learning strategies are other effective and participating basic factors that consider learning quality.

Learning strategies are important since they help students comprehend the text while learning, administer certain reading strategies, and cause students to use time effectively. In addition, it is an effective method for solving the learning problems of students while learning. Research investigations on the second language have proved the importance of learning strategies in increasing successful comprehensive learning. Since learning anxiety and learning strategies are two basic variables related to learning success, it is required that these two variables being investigated. Therefore, a recent study has investigated the relationship between learning anxiety and the use of learning strategies as well as the effect of learning anxiety on using learning strategies of B.A. EFL students of the Islamic Azad University of Ardabil.

Literature review

Foreign language learning anxiety

According to the conducted studies, the anxiety related to negative feelings such as fear, abstraction, not having self-confidence, and worriedness is endless. Most of the researchers have carried out studies to investigate the existence of anxiety in learning a foreign language. The results indicated that Foreign Language learning anxiety (FL) existed in reality, and it was different from foreign language total anxiety (FL) and changed with the target language. Foreign language reading anxiety (FLRA) learning results from the adversity, anxiety, or personal stress of learning a text in FL. Furthermore, foreign language learning anxiety seems to be related to the comprehension

difficulty level of various kinds of learning. In previous studies, Saita *et al*. (1999) have suggested that the two issues that lead to immense potential in simulating anxiety are [12]:

1. Writing system and diverse texts
2. Diverse cultural contents

In addition, they have stated that when the writing, alphabetical and cultural content systems are similar with students, less anxiety would exist in learning.

Using learning strategies

In recent years, various kinds of strategies and effects on language learning have attracted the attention of researchers. One of these strategies is learning strategies; Anderson stated that learning strategies are comprehensible and measurable steps from which readers can get help in learning, keeping, and retrieving new information. It is concluded that learning strategies are actions learners use to comprehend the text. Thus, learning strategies have been developed which were in line with this investigation. Learning groups were categorized into three wide groups, including:

1. Global learning strategies (GLOB) result from conceptual techniques (purposeful) with readers that monitor their readings, for example, reviewing the text in terms of its structure.
2. Problem-solving learning strategies (PROB) include local strategies focusing on solving the problem or repairing strategies when problems arise in comprehending textual information. For example, estimating the meaning of unknown words and reading tests for improving comprehension.
3. Supporting learning strategies are the main mechanisms for comprehending a text specific to the learners, such as using dictionaries, noting the points, and signing.

Materials and Methods

This study was research related to the descriptive design of terminologies, investigating the relationship between two or more variables. Individuals participating in this research included active students of the "English training program" of Ardabil Islamic Azad University. Sample sizes were selected through a simple random sampling method from among students in the fifth semester. The reason behind using fifth-semester students was that they had previously passed all learning courses. Therefore, their learning strategies were one sample. Moreover, another reason was the higher educational level of students having more homework or learning content levels. All samples included 103 students, while 88 students participated in the study, and 15 other students didn't cooperate while conducting the study. To collect data, the foreign language learning reading anxiety scale (FLRAS) designed by Saita *et al*. (1999) was used to evaluate the learning anxiety of students [12]. FLRAS includes 20 items on a five-point Likert scale (in the range of five points "strong agreement" to one point "not a strong agreement"). The scoring

of each item in the questionnaire depends on the positive or negative word formation.

The internal consistency of FLRAS was 0.86 (N-383). Then, the investigation of learning strategies (SORS) designed by Mokhtari and Shouri (2002) was used to explore the strategies used by students while e-learning the English language [21]. SORS includes 30 items in the five-point Likert scale of one point (I never or almost never do this) to five points (I usually or almost always do this). Internal consistency of SORS was 0.89 (N-147). In addition, descriptive statistics, the correlational momentum coefficient of Pearson, and regression analysis were used for analyzing statistical data. The correlational momentum coefficient of Pearson, as well as learning strategies, were utilized to find the relationship between students` learning anxiety. Regression analysis was also used to observe learning anxiety's effect on using learning strategies.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive statistics of students` learning anxiety

In **Table 1** ,The analysis of FLRAS descriptive statistics reported the maximum degree and minimum degree, respectively, equal to 85 and 33. The moderate degree was 57.26 for the participants, and the standard deviation was 9.304. The range of FLRAS in the recent study was 33 to 85. According to Kuru-Gonen's (2007) formula, 65 students had moderate anxiety, 14 had low anxiety, and 9 had high anxiety [22].

Table 1. The learning anxiety distribution of students

Categorization	Range of scales	Frequency	Percentage
Students having low anxiety	1-48	14	15.90%
Students having moderate anxiety	49-66	65	73.86%
Students having high anxiety	>67	9	10.22%
Total	-	88	100

Descriptive statistics of using learning strategies by students

In **Table 2**, The analysis of SORS descriptive statistics indicated that the maximum degree and minimum degree of using learning strategies were, respectively, 135 and 82. The range of SORS in this study was 82 to 135. The moderate SORS was 109.64, and the standard deviation was 12.562. For overall categorization, the results of SORS reported that 56 students were high users of strategies, 32 students were moderate users of strategies, and no users had weak strategy use. The distribution was as the following:

Table 2. The distribution of using learning strategies by students

Group	Moderate degrees range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	-	-	-
Moderate	2.7-3.4	32	36.36%
High	3.5-4.5	56	63.63%
Total	-	88	100

The relationship between learning anxiety and using learning strategies

In **Table 3**, the results of the correlation between FLRAS and SORS degrees show no relationships. This means no relationships exist between learning anxiety and learning strategies` use related to the B.A EFL student of Ardabil Azad University.

Table 3. The relationship between learning anxiety and the use of learning strategies

		Learning anxiety	Using learning strategies
Learning anxiety	Pearson correlation	1	0.022
	Sig (2-tailed)	-	0.842
	N	88	88
Using learning strategies	Pearson correlation	0.022	1
	Sig (2-tailed)	0.842	-
	N	88	88

The results of FLRAS showed that the amount of learning anxiety of B.A. EFL students of Ardabil Azad University were moderate. To support this finding, it could be stated that from the first semester, participants were encouraged to do their homework and learn the English language, or they were encouraged to search for English learning contents from printed texts or tests extracted from the internet (such as journals and online articles) in their learning majors. In addition, they were getting familiar with various kinds of homework presented by the teachers after almost 2.5 years of studying English at the university. Accordingly, it was impossible for them to feel high anxiety while facing various learning texts.

Furthermore, the study's findings showed that fifth-semester students of the "English training program" of Ardabil Azad University were aware of their learning strategies. Most participants were high users, meaning they almost always utilized learning strategies while learning university content. The acceptable explanation for supporting this finding was that they were educated and used various learning strategies presented by the significant learning teachers since they had enough time to explain to the students how and when they should effectively use learning strategies.

Based on the Momentum correlation results of Pearson, it was proved that the learning anxiety of students was not related to their use of learning strategies. The results indicated the correlation coefficient as 0.022 and the Sig (2-tailed) as 0.842 (P-842>0.05). This meant that no relationship existed between learning anxiety and the use of EFL B.A students of Ardabil Azad

University regarding learning strategies. The results showed that the high amount of learning anxiety of participants didn't guarantee the less use of learning strategies by participants. It may be assumed that anxiety is not the only factor effective in the use of learning strategies by students. As Zarei (2014) stated, the amount of motivation had a comprehensive effect on the student's use of strategies [23].

Furthermore, Li (2010) revealed that skill level is another factor leading to differences in both the kind and frequency of using learning strategies. Similarly, most of the studies confirmed that using learning strategies was related to gender [24]. Moreover, another inconsiderable factor is the uncontrolled situation in questionnaires that have not been completed.

Although much research has not been conducted on learning anxiety (FL) and the use of strategy to support the findings of this study. The results of the current investigation were in line with the studies of Loghmani and Ghnson (2012) [25]. A similar result of the current study existed due to the same level and amount. Moreover, Tarmizi (2014) also comprehended that no relationship existed between learning anxiety and the overall use of learning strategies [26]. A possible explanation was that participants` English skills might not differ sufficiently. On the other hand, this finding was not in line with the results of Tsai (2013) and Lien (2011), showing that there was a negative relationship between learning anxiety and learning strategy [27, 28]. In other words, higher learning anxieties were felt since the readers chose various or more learning strategies that were used in the learning process, which led to less learning anxiety. Although there were relations between variables of the study, this relationship was not that much powerful. It could be stated that the negative relationship obtained from this study resulted from the fact that different students had participated in this study having various levels. Therefore, it may be possible that actual differences exist in their learning abilities. Finally, this study showed no relations and effects existed between learning anxiety and the use of learning strategies by B.A. students of Ardabil Azad University.

Conclusion

The main finding of this research has been summarized as the following:

Firstly, no relationship existed between learning anxiety and using learning strategies by B.A. EFL students of Ardabil Azad University (r=0.022). The results showed that the null hypothesis (H_0) was accepted, and the research hypothesis was rejected; this meant that the high amount of learning anxiety in participants didn't guarantee less use of learning strategies by learners. Secondly, the use of learning strategies by students seemed not to be affected by learning anxiety since other factors existed that could have predominant effects.

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