

ANXIETY AND READING COMPREHENSION IN ENGLISH OF EDUCATION DEGREE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is the relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension in English of education degree college students. It was intended to compare the anxiety and reading comprehension in English of education degree college students from Mawlamyine Education Degree College, Yankin Education Degree College, and Thingankyun Education Degree College. This study also aimed to find out the gender differences and education level differences in anxiety and reading comprehension in English of education degree college students. The quantitative approach was used in this study. A total of 300 (150 males and 150 females) first-year and second-year student-teachers participated in this study. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) consists of 33 items, the Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) designed by Saito et al. (1999) consists of 20 items, and Reading Comprehension Test item designed by Cynthia Sherwood (n. d.) consists of 6 questions were used in the instruments (the item types were completion, short answer items, multiple-choice item, matching and essay type). Cronbach's alpha for the Inventory of (FLCAS) was 0.758. Cronbach's alpha for the Inventory of (FLRAS) was 0.751. In this study, no significant difference was found in language anxiety and reading anxiety by gender and education level. Anxiety and reading comprehension in English were significantly correlated at the 0.01 level. These results suggested that students with language anxiety tend to have reading anxiety. Decreasing students' anxiety and creating a low-anxiety classroom environment might help improve students' reading comprehension. Since reading anxiety seems to be a more stable construct as compared to language anxiety, coping with reading anxiety may require more time.

Keywords: Anxiety, Language anxiety, Reading anxiety

Introduction

At present day, education is a bridge that can use to go to greatness. No one can contribute to the world or earn money without education, one of the most important things in life. Everyone knows today is the knowledge age. Knowledge is power. Therefore, education is the fundamental need to raise our lives. There is no one in the world who does not need to face the challenges of globalization. In order to catch up with the trend of globalization, many countries have introduced the study of foreign language, especially the English language (EFL) speaking country, in which the study of English was introduced and has been taught for several decades in elementary and secondary as well as colleges and universities.

Anxiety is a part of human emotion which includes fear and uncertainty, uneasiness and frustration or tension (Brown, 2000). Vasa and Pine (2004) believe that the three basic interrelated aspects of anxiety are physiological, behavioral, and cognitive, but it is the cognitive aspect which has received the most attention in recent studies. Anxiety may be either facilitating; in a sense that it affects learning and positively or debilitating which hinders learning and. Facilitative anxiety stimulates the student to 'fight' the new learning task, and debilitating anxiety, on the other hand, motivates the student to adopt avoidance behavior (Eysenck, 1979).

Learning an additional language is both cognitively and emotionally demanding (Abu-

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Rabia, 2004). Anxiety, a complicated phenomenon, is a kind of emotion so the issue of anxiety in second language (L2) learning has concerned language educators and researchers for many years. A substantial amount of research has been conducted in this area and suggests that anxiety is an important factor in second language acquisition (Na, 2007). However, most of the research centers on the discussion of listening, speaking, and writing. Little attention has been paid to reading. Therefore, the present study attempts to fill the gap and explore the role of anxiety in (L2) reading.

Purposes of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension in English of education degree college students.

The specific objectives were

1. to observe the differences in reading anxiety and language anxiety by gender
2. to find out the differences in reading comprehension by gender
3. to examine the differences in reading anxiety and language anxiety between first-year students and second-year education degree college students
4. to explore the differences in reading comprehension between first-year students and second-year education degree college students
5. to study the differences in reading anxiety and language anxiety among education degree college students
6. to examine the differences in reading comprehension among education degree college students

Definitions of Key Terms

Anxiety. A part of human emotion which includes fear and uncertainty, uneasiness and frustration or tension (Brown, 2000).

Language Anxiety. A crucial affective factor in students' learning (Fallah, 2017).

Reading Anxiety. An anxiety that learners experience while they are reading in this new target language (Zhou, 2017)

Review of Related Literature

Foreign Language Anxiety

As foreign language anxiety concerns performance evaluation within an academic and social context, it is useful to draw parallels between it and three related performance anxieties; communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Due of its emphasis on interpersonal interactions, the construct of communication apprehension is quite relevant to the conceptualization of foreign language anxiety.

Communication apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people. Difficulty in speaking or in groups (oral communication anxiety) or in public (stage fright), or in listening to and learning a spoken message (receiver anxiety) are all manifestations of communications apprehension. Communication apprehension or some similar reaction obviously plays a large role in foreign language anxiety. People who typically have trouble speaking in groups are likely to experience even greater difficulty speaking in foreign language classes where they have little control of the communicative situation and their performance is constantly monitored.

Moreover, in addition to all the usual concerns about oral communication, the foreign language class requires the students to communicate via medium in which only limited facility is processed. The special communication apprehension permeating foreign language learning derives from the personal knowledge that one will almost certainly have difficulty understanding other and making oneself understood. Possibly because of this knowledge, many otherwise talkative people are silent in a foreign language class. And yet, the converse also seems to be true. Ordinarily self-conscious and inhibited speaker may find that communicating in a foreign language makes them feel as if someone else is speaking and they therefore feel less anxious. This phenomenon may be similar to shutters who are sometimes able to enunciate normally when singing or acting. Since performance evaluation is a going feature of most foreign language classes, test anxiety is also relevant to a discussion of foreign language anxiety.

Communication apprehension is a construct which is often linked to language anxiety. Young (1991) argued that communication apprehension is one of the performance anxieties which make up a theoretical model of language anxiety.

Communication apprehension refers to an individual's level of anxiety associated with their real or anticipated communication with another person or persons Yaung (1991). The high communication apprehension individual's feeling of anxiety about participating in oral communication outweighs his or her projection of gain from the situation.

Communication apprehension is a learned trait which is conditioned through reinforcement. If a child is rewarded in the home environment for silence and not rewarded or even punished when communicating, the probable result is a quiet child. We live, however, in an educational world where orally is viewed as a necessary, positive personal characteristic. Yaung (1991) found that teachers have a positive bias towards talkative children in their classrooms. Low communication apprehensive individuals are more verbally participative, select in high interaction performance followed by a negative evaluation which only serves to reinforce anxiety.

Method

This study sought to investigate the relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension in English of education degree college students. Quantitative research design and survey methods were used in this study.

Participants of the Study

By using random sampling technique, the sample for this study was chosen from education degree college students. A total of 300 education college students from Mawlamyine Education Degree College, Yankin Education Degree College and Thingankyun Education Degree College participated in this study (see Table 1).

Table 1 Number of Student Teachers from Selected Education Degree Colleges

Education College	First Year		Second Year		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
(EDC 1)	25	25	25	25	100
(EDC 2)	25	25	25	25	100
(EDC 3)	25	25	25	25	100
Total	75	75	75	75	300

Instruments

Following instruments were used to collect data in this study.

- (1) The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz et al. (1986).
- (2) The Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) designed by Siato et al, (1999).
- (3) Reading Comprehension Test, designed by Cynthia (n. d.).

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) designed by Horwitz et al. (1986) consisted of 33 items. Participants responded to a 4-points Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for (FLCAS) inventory was 0.758. The Foreign Language Reading Anxiety Scale (FLRAS) designed by Saito et al. (1999) consisted of 20 items. Participants responded to a 4-points Likert scale. Cronbach's alpha for (FLRAS) inventory was 0.751. Reading Comprehension Test designed by Cynthia Sherwood (n. d.) consisted of 6 questions. It has the item types of answer the question, multiple-choice question, complete the blank, matching and essay type.

Procedure

All the measures used in this study were adapted to the Myanmar language version. Then, expert review was conducted for face validity and content validity of the instruments by six experts in the field of educational psychology and educational test and measurement from Yangon University of Education. And also, expert review was conducted to Reading Comprehension Test for face validity and content validity by 3 experts from Yangon University of Education who have special knowledge in the field of Foreign Language (English).

A pilot study was conducted during the last week of December in 2018 with the sample of 50 first-year and second-year education degree college students from Mawlamyine Education Degree College. After receiving back, the questionnaires, the researcher improved and modified the weak points, misunderstanding of wording and phrases about some items that the participants seemed to be vague. By the use of these instruments, test administration was conducted on the first week of January, 2019 at Yankin Education Degree College, on the second week of January, 2019 at Mawlamyine Education Degree College students and at Thingankyun Education Degree College. After collecting the data, data entry was carried out by using statistics packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software version 25 and Microsoft Office Excel 2010. Then, data analysis and interpretation were conducted by the use of descriptive statistics, independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson product-moment correlation methods.

Data Analysis and Findings

By using the descriptive statistics, the data obtained from education degree college students' classroom anxiety, reading anxiety and reading comprehension were investigated.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for the Anxiety and Reading Comprehension in English of Education Degree College Students

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Language Anxiety	300	47	101	76.22	7.979
Reading Anxiety	300	28	62	45.37	5.253
Reading Comprehension	300	2	21	8.85	3.758

Descriptive analysis showed that the mean and standard deviation of total language anxiety, total reading anxiety and reading comprehension of the whole sample (see Table 2).

Mean Comparison of Education Degree College Students' Anxiety by Gender

To find out the differences in education degree colleges students of anxiety, descriptive statistics was applied. The mean and standard deviation of males and females were reported. In language anxiety, the mean score of males is 76.39, and the mean score of females is 76.05. In reading anxiety, the mean score of males is 45.64, and the mean score of females is 45.03, respectively. Therefore, the mean scores of males are slightly higher than those of females (see Table 3).

Table 3 Mean and Standard Deviation of Education Degree College Students' Anxiety by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Language Anxiety	Male	150	76.39	8.518
	Female	150	76.05	7.426
Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Anxiety	Male	150	45.64	5.332
	Female	150	45.03	5.173

Table 3 showed that there were slight differences in mean scores by gender in anxiety. To obtain more detailed information for gender differences, the independent sample *t*-test was applied to find out the significant differences in anxiety by gender (see Table 4).

Table 4 The Result of Independent Sample *t*-test for Anxiety by Gender

Anxiety	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean difference
Language Anxiety	0.368	298	0.713	0.340
Reading Anxiety	1.00	298	0.318	0.607

The result of the independent *t*-test showed that there were no significant differences between males and females in their level of language anxiety and reading anxiety in English (see Table 4).

It may be said that education college students may experience anxiety in English classes because foreign language class is dominated by anxiety-provoking situations and highly advanced English foreign language learners feel anxious while learning English. Both male and female are the same.

Mean Comparison of Education Degree College Students' Anxiety by Education Level

To find out the differences in education degree college students with anxiety, descriptive statistics was applied. The mean and standard deviation of first year and second year were reported. In language anxiety, the mean score of first year is 76.05 and the mean score of second year is 76.38. In reading anxiety, the mean score of first year is 44.79 and the mean score of second year is 45.88 respectively. Therefore, the mean scores of second year are slightly higher than the mean scores of first year which were reported in Table 5.

Table 5 Mean and Standard Deviation of Education Degree College Students' Anxiety by Education Level

Variables	Education Level	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Language Anxiety	First Year	150	76.05	8.386
	Second Year	150	76.38	7.576
Reading Anxiety	First Year	150	44.79	5.279
	Second Year	150	45.88	5.188

Table 5 showed that there were slightly differences in mean scores by education level in anxiety. To obtain more detailed information for education level differences, the independent sample *t*-test was applied to find out the significant differences in anxiety by education level (see Table 6).

Table 6 The Result of Independent Sample *t*-test for Anxiety by Education Level

Anxiety	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	Mean difference
Language anxiety	-0.354	298	0.724	-0.327
Reading anxiety	-1.798	298	0.73	-1.087

The result of the independent *t*-test showed that there were no significant differences between first-year and second-year of language anxiety and reading anxiety in English (see Table 6).

It may be said that the content of education degree college students learning about foreign language is not much different.

Mean Comparison of Education Degree College Students' Reading Comprehension by Gender

To find out the differences in education degree college students of reading comprehension in English, descriptive statistics was applied. The mean and standard deviation of male and female were reported. For reading comprehension mark, the mean score of males is 8.60 and the mean score of females is 9.10, respectively. Therefore, the mean scores of females are slightly higher than the mean scores of males (see Table 7).

Table 7 Mean and Standard Deviation of Education Degree College Students' Reading Comprehension by Gender

Variables	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Comprehension	Male	150	8.60	3.593
	Female	150	9.10	3.911

Table 7 showed that there were slightly different in mean scores by gender of reading comprehension performance in English. To obtain more detailed information about gender differences, the independent sample *t*-test was applied to find out the significant differences in reading comprehension by gender (see Table 8).

Table 8 The Result of Independent Sample *t*-test for Reading Comprehension by Gender

Variables	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference
Reading Comprehension	-1.153	298	0.250	-0.500

The result of the independent *t*-test showed that there were no significant differences between male and female of the reading comprehension mark in English (see Table 8).

Mean Comparison of Education College Students' Reading Comprehension by Education Level

To find out the differences in education degree college students of reading comprehension in English, descriptive statistics was applied. The mean and standard deviation of first year and second year were reported. For reading comprehension mark, the mean score of first year is 9.22 and the mean score of second year is 8.48, respectively. Therefore, the mean scores of first year are slightly higher than the mean scores of second year (see Table 9).

Table 9 Mean and Standard Deviation of Education Degree College Students' Reading Comprehension by Education Level

Variables	Education Level	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading Comprehension	First Year	150	9.22	4.093
	Second Year	150	8.48	3.363

Table 9 showed that there were slightly different in mean scores by education level of reading comprehension in English. To obtain more detailed information about differences in education level, the independent sample *t*-test was applied to find out the significant differences in reading comprehension by education level (see Table 10).

Table 10 Result of Independent Sample *t*-test of Reading Comprehension by Education Level

Variables	<i>t</i>	df	<i>p</i>	Mean Difference
Reading Comprehension	1.711	298	0.088	0.740

Based on the result of the independent *t*-test, it showed that there was no significant difference between first year and second year students' reading comprehension mark in English (see Table 10). The result on reading comprehension ($t = 1.711$, $p = 0.088$) was not significant although the mean scores were different.

It may be said that the students in the reading courses, have more accesses to the elements of reading such as grammar, sentence patterns and vocabulary in which their knowledge are the same by gender and education level.

Comparison of Anxiety and Reading Comprehension in English of Students Among Education Degree Colleges

The sample of 300 Education Degree College students were selected from three selected Education Degree Colleges. To examine Anxiety and Reading Comprehension in English differences exist among 3 Education Degree Colleges, analyses were conducted again and means were computed as follows.

Table 11 Mean Comparison of Anxiety and Reading Comprehension in English of Students Among Education Degree Colleges

Variables	Mean		
	EDC 1	EDC 2	EDC 3
Language Anxiety	76.20	76.65	75.80
Reading Anxiety	45.17	45.47	45.37
Reading Comprehension	9.79	8.89	7.78

According to Table 11, the mean score of students from EDC 2 were slightly high in language anxiety and reading anxiety. But the mean score of reading comprehension mark in EDC 1 was the lowest.

Next, to obtain more detailed information on the difference among education degree colleges, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted (see Table 12).

Table 12 ANOVA Results of Anxiety and Reading Comprehension in English of Students Among Education Degree Colleges

Variables	Education Degree Colleges	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Language Anxiety	Between Groups	2.333	0.084	0.919
	Within Groups	27.765		
Reading Anxiety	Between Groups	18.083	0.283	0.754
	Within Groups	63.976		
Reading Comprehension	Between Groups	102.270	7.560**	0.001
	Within Groups	13.528		

**mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

To obtain more detailed information of which colleges had significant differences, Post Hoc Comparison using Tukey HSD test was conducted (see Table 13).

Table 13 The Results of Tukey HSD Multiple Comparison for Anxiety and Reading Comprehension in English of among Education Degree Colleges

Variables	(I) EDC	(J) EDC	Mean Difference (I-J)	<i>p</i>
Language Anxiety	EDC 2	EDC 1	0.300	0.915
		EDC 3	0.100	0.990
Reading Anxiety	EDC 2	EDC 1	0.450	0.916
		EDC 3	0.850	0.733
Reading Comprehension	EDC 1	EDC 2	0.810	0.266
		EDC 3	2.010***	0.000

***The mean difference is significant at the 0.001 level.

Tukey results indicated that EDC students among education degree colleges were no significant difference in language anxiety and reading anxiety. However, Turkey results indicated that EDC students from EDC 1 were significantly difference from those of EDC 3 in reading comprehension mark.

EDC 1 and EDC 3 may be due to different locations and availability of learning materials can be different.

Relationship Between Anxiety and Reading Comprehension in English

To explore the relationship of college students' anxiety and reading comprehension test in English, Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were calculated. The results of bivariate correlations were displayed in Table 14.

Table 14 Inter-correlations for Anxiety and Reading Comprehension in English

Variables	Language Anxiety	Reading Anxiety	Reading Comprehension Mark
Language Anxiety	1	0.617**	0.008
Reading Anxiety		1	0.071
Reading Comprehension			1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

As expected, anxiety and reading comprehension performance in English were significantly correlated. In addition, the results of bivariate correlations showed that language anxiety and reading anxiety were significantly correlated.

If language anxiety is high, it may be because reading anxiety is also high.

Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between anxiety and reading comprehension in English of education degree college students. The results of the current study would help foreign language teachers in various ways. The result of the independent *t*-test revealed that there was no significant difference in language anxiety and reading anxiety across genders. This finding contradicts that of Elkhafaifi (2005) and Abu-Rabia (2004), whose studies uncovered significant differences in language anxiety based on gender and females being more anxious than males. Nevertheless, this finding accords with that of Matsuda and Gobel (2004), who found no significant differences in language anxiety between male and female students. And then, the similarity of the present study's findings supported that of Hui-Ju Wu (2011), who found no significant differences in language anxiety and reading anxiety between male and female students.

The finding accords with that of Elkhafaifi (2005), whose study showed that second-year students are lower language anxiety than first-year students since the second-year students spent more time learning in school experience. However, in the finding of Casado and Dereshiwsky (2001), whose study showed students' language anxiety increases slightly as they progress from the first year to the second year. The finding of Hui-Ju Wu (2011) also found no significant differences in language anxiety and reading anxiety between first-year and second-year. In the present study, showed no significant differences between first-year and second-year in language

anxiety and reading anxiety. The students in the reading courses have more access to the elements of reading, such as grammar, sentence patterns, and vocabulary and their reading anxiety would decrease with the increasing exposure to and familiarity with reading.

In this study, the result of the independent *t*-test showed that there were no significant differences between males and females of the reading comprehension mark in English. Moreover, based on the result of the independent *t*-test, it showed that there was no significant difference between first year and second year of the reading comprehension mark in English in the present study. However, Tukey results indicated that EDC students from EDC 1 were significantly different from those of EDC 3 in reading comprehension mark. In addition, the results of bivariate correlations showed that language anxiety and reading anxiety were significantly correlated in the present study.

Discussions

In addition, if reading anxiety is exactly as what the study identified, a more stable construct, students' reading anxiety may decrease slightly and not significantly changed during the short timeframe. Thus, examining a more extended period of language learning is suggested for future research to obtain a significant decrease of reading anxiety. Foreign language anxiety should be taken more seriously not only by instructors but also by students and possibly program developers. This may be achieved through workshops or presentations on foreign language anxiety and exploring different possible ways to alleviate anxiety in the classroom. Young (1999) believed that the only way to train students to become better language learners is accomplished by helping students deal with and overcome their feelings of anxiety.

To overcome the negative and debilitating effects of anxiety on all four skills, particularly reading comprehension, it should be of utmost importance and high priority to teachers or instructors to remove any unnecessary anxiety from language learning, and create a stress-free, safe and relaxing atmosphere in the class where students feel secure, interested, joyful and motivated to learn and internalize the learning materials so that they can meet the aims of teaching and learning. Therefore, teachers play a prominent role in alleviating and controlling anxiety in the classroom. They are likely to facilitate language learning through providing a supportive and friendly environment, applying non-threatening teaching methods and making use of interesting topics and themes which are relevant to the learner's lives and interests

In this study, though not significant, the finding still suggests that

- English teachers should cope with students' anxiety in order to enhance reading comprehension performance.
- English teachers should create a low-anxiety classroom environment in order for students to learn reading.
- While trying to help the students suffering from language anxiety and reading anxiety, the teachers should anticipate that reading anxiety does not easily decrease, and thus coping with it requires more time.
- English teachers should look closely at the affective state of the learners as this greatly influences their learning.
- English teachers should familiarize students with the exam format and the type of rating system.

- In the reading courses, the teachers should spend much time delivering lectures to explain the content and analyzing important sentence patterns and grammar.

Several limitations are recognized in this study. In the case of a study of anxiety and reading comprehension in English of education college students, longitudinal design is more desirable. For better results, the research should be carried out in all education colleges in Myanmar. The validity of two scales should be considered because some students might not be willing to express themselves frankly. The students are not familiar with the reading passage, and weak in vocabulary.

In this study, there was limited research, only three education colleges. Thus, more research can be done on other student-teachers from different education degree colleges and universities of education. Future investigation is warranted to determine whether language anxiety and reading anxiety are indeed uncorrelated with gender. Future research is suggested to investigate whether spending more time on language learning in school indeed leads to less language anxiety. It is noteworthy that there were no significant differences in students' reading anxiety measured at the first year and the second year.

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