

Investigating the Role of Anxiety on Online Learning among Iranian Intermediate and Upper-Intermediate EFL Learners

Abstract

This study investigates the role of anxiety on online learning among Iranian intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners. 80 students from different schools between the ages of 8 to 15 years and with an intermediate and upper-intermediate level of proficiency, and 40 teachers of different genders within the age group of 25 to 35 years participated in this study. All of the participants were Persian native speakers and joined the online classes three times a week. They were all informed about the causes and types of anxiety that students experienced in online classes through the questionnaire entries, which were both adopted from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLACS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and The Foreign Language Virtual Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLVCAS) developed by Kaiser and Chowdhury (2020) that the researcher used. A series of statistical analyses such as descriptive statistics and Correlation and ANOVA tests were run through SPSS Software (version 22) to analyze the obtained data. The study results showed that by considering the average level of learning anxiety through online education (2.84), this variable was less than the theoretical average of 3 and indicated that the level of learning anxiety through online education was low. Finally, the current research findings could benefit everyone involved in English as a foreign language teaching and learning process, including syllabus designers, foreign language teachers, and administrators.

Keywords: *EFL Learners, Anxiety, Online Learning, Intermediate Learners, Upper Intermediate Learners*

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Introduction

The growth rate of online education globally and in Iran was high until a year ago. This expansion rate was not expected to slow let alone stop soon (Bolliger & Halupa, 2012). Online education was considered a subset of distance education, also called distance learning. It was a type of education for students who may not always be physically present at a school (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2016). One of the most significant advantages was that students could review course materials repeatedly whenever they wanted and therefore had a high percentage of interaction and satisfaction. According to studies, online education was a significant advancement in teaching and learning because it allowed for the sharing of knowledge and skills while also offering opportunities for all kinds of learners in remote or vulnerable areas (Hill, 1997; Dhawan, 2020).

Learning a foreign language involves anxiety, which is defined as the fear of a foreign language that has been studied extensively. Fear of a foreign language, also known as xenoglossophobia, is a feeling of anxiety, nervousness, and phobia that occurs when learning or using a second or foreign language (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Dikmen, 2021). Emotions can occur in any second language context related to or related to productive skills in speaking and writing or receptive skills in reading and listening (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Hanifa, 2018). Studies have shown that fear of a foreign language has become a serious problem in language classrooms around the world, especially as it is closely related to the ability to speak a foreign or second language” (Horwitz et al., 1986; Hasan & Bao, 2020).

Learning a language online can make language anxiety difficult. One concern about online learning was "the fear of misuse of information technology that could affect classroom performance." (Saade et al., 2017, p. 48). According to this concept, fear does not mean a general concern about the use of information technology in this sense, but interaction with the content and processes that can lead to errors in reasoning, judgment and understanding that lead to poor results of elementary school students (Saade and et al., 2017; Howard et al., 2021).

We anticipate that by solving the problems related to anxiety in online learning in Iran, we would take a big step in the progress of online education even after the end of the pandemic and quarantine period because students would be keener and eager on participating in online classes even when the quarantine period was over,. Therefore, the present study investigated the role of anxiety on online learning among Iranian intermediate and upper-intermediate EFL learners.

2. Methodology

2.1. Design of the study

This research had a quantitative design due to the use of a questionnaire to collect the data of our study. On the other hand, the purpose of this study was not based on a cause-and-effect factor, therefore distinguishing the dependent and independent variables from each other was difficult (See Dörnyei, 2007)

2.2. Participants

In our study, 80 students from different institutes between the age group of 8 to 15 years and with an intermediate and upper-

intermediate level of proficiency had taken the test of placement and were categorized into different levels of proficiency. 40 teachers of different genders and within the age group of 25 to 35 years participated in this study. All of the participants were Persian native speakers and joined online classes three times a week. They were all informed about the causes and types of anxiety students experienced in online classes through two questionnaires.

2.3. Instrument

2.3.1. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLACS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986)

Classroom anxiety was measured using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLACS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), which is a 33-item survey of students' anxiety levels in foreign language classrooms. Respondents were asked to answer a question indicating how much they agreed or disagreed with a questionnaire item on a 5-point scale. Out of 33 items, fear of communication was 8, fear of negative evaluation 9 and test anxiety 5. 2.3.2. Foreign Language Virtual Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLVCAS) (2020) by Kaisar and Choudhury

Virtual foreign language classroom anxiety was measured using the Virtual Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLVCAS) developed by Kaisar and Choudhury (2020) and consists of 19 items that examine the level of virtual foreign language anxiety of students in a foreign language class. Respondents were asked to answer a question indicating how much they agreed or disagreed with a questionnaire item on a 5-point scale. 2.4. procedure

The data needed for the study were collected at a private language school in Tabriz, a city in northwestern Iran. There are general language courses at different levels. The students met three times a week. I studied 6 hours a week, 60 hours a semester. Other courses taught at this institution are TOEFL and IELTS preparation courses, chat courses and other languages such as French, German, Spanish and Italian. It should be noted that the students of this institute are male and female students of different ages and skill levels, which enables researchers to achieve their research goals. From 10 of these centers, 80 middle and high school students participated in a study to assess and evaluate their level of fear and anxiety about online language learning and to investigate how this type of anxiety affects them on the students. Overall performance

Table 1. Central indicators and dispersion of variables.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis	Minimum	Maximum
Language learning anxiety	3.69	.56	-.34	-.61	2.36	4.82
Online learning anxiety	2.83	.60	.23	-.77	1.58	4.21

The results of descriptive statistics in Table 1 showed that the mean values of language Learning anxiety and online learning anxiety were 3.69 and 2.83, respectively, with a standard

of overall learning outcomes. The students range in age from 8 to 15 and consist of 40 boys and 40 girls, although of different races, all of them are Iranian, their mother tongue is Persian, and they have studied English as a foreign language. at the language center. They are enrolled in language centers for a variety of internal and external reasons. However, they were more interested in learning English to do well in their academic programs at university. Two questionnaires were used for data collection. The courses were delivered entirely online, with no face-to-face interaction between students and teachers. At the end of the lesson, students were given quizzes. They clearly believed that answering the survey did not affect the grading process or class placement because there are no right or wrong answers and because they remained anonymous. The information they provide is strictly confidential and used only for statistical purposes, and the results of the statistical analysis are used only for academic and research purposes. Therefore, their main objective was to answer the questions honestly. All participating EFL students were given a Likert scale questionnaire (5 points). The questionnaire items were taken from the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLACS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) and the Virtual Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLVCAS) developed by Kaisar and Choudhury (2020).

2.5. Data Analysis

SPSS was used to evaluate the survey data from 80 participants. Our analysis included demographic data (gender and age group), the course location, the anxiety items, and gender differences in anxiety. A series of statistical analyses such as descriptive statistics and Correlation and ANOVA tests were run through SPSS Software (version 22) to analyze the obtained data.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic characteristics of the sample

Descriptive statistics indicators were used to examine the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Out of 80 students, 40 were female and 40 were male. The mean age of students was 11.73 (Std. Deviation= 2.21) with a minimum of 8 years and a maximum of 15 years.

3.2. Descriptive statistics

Central indicators and dispersion of research variables are presented in Table 1.

deviation of 0.56 and 0.60. It also showed that in language learning anxiety, the options "I agree with" and "strongly agree with" had been the most chosen. The options that had been

chosen in online learning are "I disagree with" and "strongly disagreed with". The values of skewness and elongation were in the range (-2 and 2) and showed that the distribution of variables was almost normal.

3.4. Analysis of research questions

Table 2. Independent t-test for a variable level of learning anxiety through online training.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 3					
			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Online Learning Anxiety	2.84	0.60	-2.36	79	.021	-.16	-.29	-.02

Table2 showed that the significance level (sig) value was equal to 0.021, which is less than 0.05. Considering the average level of learning anxiety through online education (2.84), it was clear that this variable was less than the theoretical average of

Table 3. Independent t-test for language class anxiety level variable.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 3					
			t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Language learning Anxiety	3.69	0.569	10.85	79	0.001	0.69	0.56	0.81

Table3 showed that the value of significance level (sig) was equal to 0.001, which was less than 0.05. Considering the average level of anxiety in language class (3.69), this variable was more than the theoretical average, which was three, and

Table 4. Pearson correlation coefficient between online learning anxiety and language learning anxiety.

		Online Learning Anxiety
Language learning Anxiety	Pearson Correlation	-.428**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	80

According to Table 4, the correlation coefficient of virtual learning anxiety and language learning anxiety was -0.482, which was significant at the level of 0.01 due to its significant level value, which was less than 0.01. Due to the negativity of this coefficient, these two variables were disproportionate and

Table 5. The determination coefficient (quadratic R) and camera-Watson statistics.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.428 ^a	.183	.173	.55316	1.599

a. Predictors: (Constant), language learning class anxiety

b. Dependent Variable: online class anxiety

3.4.1. Question 1: What is the level of learning anxiety through online education?

Due to the normality of the variables, a one-sample t-test was used. The software output is presented in Table 3.

3 and indicated that the level of learning anxiety through online education was low.

3.4.2. Question 2: What is the level of anxiety in students' language classrooms?

Due to the normality of the variables, a one-sample t-test was used. The software output is presented in Table 4.

indicated that anxiety in the language learning class was above average.

3.4.3. Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between online and language learning anxiety?

We performed the correlation test as follows (Table 4).

decreased with the presence of students in online learning while increasing anxiety in language learning.

3.4.4. Question 4: To what extent can foreign language anxiety predict online learning anxiety?

A regression test was used to examine the effect of foreign language class anxiety on online learning anxiety (Table 5).

According to Table 5, the coefficient of determination, which indicated the rate of change of the regression model in the total changes of the dependent variable, was equal to 0.183 for the model, which showed that 18.3% of the changes in online class

Table 6. Results of analysis of variance.

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	5.346	1	5.346	17.472	.000 ^b
Residual	23.867	78	.306		
Total	29.213	79			

a. Dependent Variable: online class anxiety

b. Predictors: (Constant), language learning class anxiety

According to the analysis of the variance of the model in Table 6 which was to measure the validity of the linear regression model with at least one independent variable, the significance

Table 7. Coefficient of the regression model of foreign language class anxiety.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	4.525	.408		11.091	.000
	Language Learning Anxiety	-.457	.109	-.428	-4.180	.000

a. Dependent Variable: online class anxiety

According to the significance levels presented in Table 7, the language class anxiety variable affected online class anxiety. The regression model of the effect of language class anxiety on online class anxiety was as follows:

$$Y = 4.525 - 0.457 * X1$$

In this model, language class anxiety with X1 was also shown as a dependent variable, i.e., online class anxiety with Y. According to the table in Model 1, the standardized regression slope coefficient of language class anxiety (X1) was -0.457, or in other words, with increasing one unit of language class anxiety, the online class anxiety variable decreased -0.457 units, which was statistically significant.

4. Discussions

The current study aims to study the role of fear in the inter-Iran knowledge of Iran, and ILN students are in online learning. In this regard, and some research respects the results of the research carried out, and some have not carried out the current learning results in this section. Studies also show lower levels of anxiety in online learning.

A study by Shahi (2016) found that the multimedia environment had a positive effect on Iranian EFL students' language learning. The results of the study believed that participants believe that they were the best way to learn English, they believed that they will help them improve the language. This was in line with our research results. A study by Atef-Wahid and Kashani (2011) investigated the relationship between English learning anxiety in English

anxiety were due to language class anxiety. In addition, the statistic of the Watson camera in this model was equal to 1.599 and more than 1.5, so the assumption of correlation between error sentences was confirmed.

level of this test was 0.001, which had the necessary validity. Table 7 shows the regression model's coefficient of foreign language class anxiety variation.

classrooms and overall English performance. Results showed that while some students felt very confident and comfortable, a third experienced moderate to high levels of anxiety while learning English in the classroom. The results showed that experiencing low levels of anxiety was highly effective for student performance.

A study by Moganibashi-Mansourieh (2020) aimed to assess the general level of anxiety of the Iranian population during the outbreak of COVID-19 in online learning. As with previous studies, the results of this study were consistent with previous studies and confirmed that lower levels of anxiety in online courses lead to higher levels of performance.

A study by Majid, Sharil, Luaran and Nadzri (2012) aimed to investigate the fear of online language learning among a selected group of adult students and determine the relationship between the domains of fear of online language learning. The results show that, in general, students are not afraid of learning foreign languages online. These results have helped online teachers or professors provide adult students with the support they need to achieve academic success through online learning. The study also found three significant positive relationships between fear and online learning and between attribution and confidence.

This study was conducted to investigate the anxiety factors of distance education students at Allama Iqbal Open University. Students are more scared when they consider learning at a distance. Because it was not possible to discuss or share

problems with distant covers and distances. Most students appeared in the reception and entered the country and communicated with bank costs, books, books, communication with teachers, communication with teachers, work levels, promise, evaluation, evaluation, education, education, communication with the local offices that I wish them accept. Education, education, level of education, learning, testing center, testing center and research program (AJMAL & AHMAD, 2019). This article aims to detail an elementary school teacher's perspective on online learning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Online learning was a system that supported teachers in the learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic, but it was not directly proportional to effectiveness, contradicting the findings of our study (Fauzi & Khusuma, 2020). Online learning is the latest change made by the education system in India after the current pandemic. Teacher and student comfort with online class design, structure, level of student-teacher interaction, quality and scope of course content, technical support, and overall online learning experience affected the overall teaching and learning experience. It determines the ultimate success or failure of online education. Therefore, a focussed awareness on usability and accessibility is needed to increase the adoption of online channels by students and teachers. As with previous studies, the results of this study were based on previous studies and increased at higher levels at higher levels of fear in online classes (Nambiar, 2020).

The results of the current study could provide pedagogical implications for teachers, materials developers, and curriculum designers. The results of this study will help teachers use similar programs to improve the quality of education. The conclusion also clearly indicates the use of the correct methods in the pedagogical context. Such acceptance can help teachers manage to increase interest in learning, teaching language and maintaining good information among EFL students. Furthermore, with the aid of these findings, students could gain the opportunity to participate in English classes successfully. In addition, these kinds of studies could play an important role in designing syllabuses and developing materials. Material developers and syllabus designers can improve the quality of materials and teaching materials by considering the above points.

5. Conclusion

The study results showed that by considering the average level of learning anxiety through online education (2.84), this variable was less than the theoretical average of 3 and indicated that the level of learning anxiety through online education was low, which was highly significant on the data. Finally, the current research findings benefited everyone involved in English as a foreign language teaching and learning process,

including syllabus designers, foreign language teachers, and administrators.

Acknowledgments

None.

Conflict of interest

None.

Financial support

None.

Ethics statement

None

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