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Cycle of Fear of Learning a Foreign Language: Does Gender Matter?

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Abstract

Foreign language learning as stipulated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint as one of the important facets towards developing a human capital. Upholding this aspiration, Malaysian students at the higher institutions are encouraged to take up a foreign language course throughout their study period. However, learning a foreign language can be a daunting and traumatic experience to many due to several reasons with gender role being one of the most prominent factors. Hence, this quantitative study is done to explore the comparison of fear of learning a foreign language across gender. The study involved 202 students from seven different foreign language courses namely German, Mandarin, Japanese, Arabic, Korean, Italian and French from Universiti Teknologi MARA, UiTM, Shah Alam. A survey adapted from Wenden and Rubin (1987) and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) was distributed through Google Form. The data shown that female students experienced greater fear of foreign language learning across all elements under this study namely communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety, as opposed to their male counterparts. Although male students showed equal level of self-consciousness when speaking, their anxiety seemed to be lower than the females. The study could be an invaluable source to inform foreign language teaching especially in creating a stress-free environment for learning.

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

Introduction

Background of Study

Foreign language learning in the tertiary education in Malaysia has been given its due gravitas and has been stipulated in the Malaysian Education Blueprint 2015-2025 for Higher Education as one of the important facets in developing human capital and preparing Malaysia to be a fully developed nation (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2015). Consequently, students in higher education institutions are encouraged to take up at least

one foreign language course throughout their study period. However, learning a foreign language can be a daunting and traumatic experience to learners (Zheng, 2008) and often strikes fear or anxiety throughout the process of learning (Rahmat, 2019).

Fear or anxiety in language learning has substantial impacts on learners and this has become the impetus for many research that looked into the said issue. Scovel (1978) associated the feeling of fear with anxiety, feeling tension, nervousness, apprehension, self-doubt, and disappointment. Hence, language anxiety or fear for language learning can be identified as “a distinctive complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Given the fact that language learners have distinct individual attributes such as age, gender, language knowledge, personality and behaviour, learners may experience different level of fear in language learning (Horwitz et al., 1986).

Statement of Problem

Learning a foreign language is known for its benefits and advantages. However, the learning process is not easy as there are challenges that learners need to face. The most known challenge of learning a foreign language is having the fear of learning foreign language. As learners are new to the language, they tend to develop fear or anxiety of learning the language. Language anxiety is one of the characteristics of learning an additional language (Razak et al., 2017). The anxiety in language learning is an issue that has been widely acknowledged and discussed as it gives substantial impact on language learners. As fear or anxiety unfailingly continues to be a part of learning disability that continues to detrimental feeling, the question about whether gender actually has become a factor that promotes it is also rising (Rafek et al., 2015). A study conducted by Razak et al (2017), investigated the gender differences in terms of anxiety among Yemeni EFL learners and also investigated the correlation between the level of anxiety and the academic achievement of the students. This study identified that the females experienced higher level of anxiety than the male students. The result also showed that there was no significant correlation between the level of anxiety and the academic achievement of the students. This observation identified a few important factors that affect the relationship between foreign language anxiety and gender. The factors mentioned were reading habits, the use of strategies of learning, motivation, the students' beliefs concerning learning, and the level of proficiency.

On the other hand, a study conducted by Awan et al (2010) exhibits a different result. In his study, the male students were more anxious than the female students and the difference was statistically significant. Male students were more inclined to hesitate and felt anxious in the language classroom. The female undergraduates were more confident and had greater ability to learn a new language and coped with the feelings of anxiety and nervousness. In the meantime, few studies showed that gender was an ineffective factor which might affect anxiety in learning a foreign language (Alsowat, 2016). Nahavandi and Mukundan (2013) studied the level of anxiety of the Iranian EFL students towards English as a foreign language and the findings showed that there was no significant relation found between language anxiety and gender. Looking at the previous studies and research, most of the results showed that gender influences the level of foreign language anxiety among learners. It was believed that females are more anxious than males, but this assumption is almost confusing since many studies proved that male students also experience anxiety more than female students, and few studies pointed out no differences in language anxiety due to gender (Alsowat,

2016). Many studies have been conducted on gender and fear of foreign language learning however, this issue is still debatable and controversial as past studies exhibit mixed results in regard to the difference between gender in terms of fear of foreign language learning.

Hence, this study is done to explore the comparison of fear of learning a foreign language across gender. This investigation is done to answer the following questions;

- RQ1 - How does communication apprehension differ across gender?
- RQ2 - How does fear of negative evaluation differ across gender?
- RQ3 - How does test anxiety differ across gender?

Literature Review

Introduction

This section discusses the motivating and demotivating factors for language learning and theories on fear of language learning. Furthermore, the review on the past studies done with relation to language learning across gender and the conceptual framework that governs the study will also be presented.

Motivating and Demotivating Factors for Language Learning

Motivation is an important factor in the learning process. Undoubtedly, it can be a driving force of the learning journey. To define, motivation is known for a positive behavior that encourages someone to achieve desired goals. Oxford dictionary defines motivation as “the feeling of wanting to do something, especially something that involves hard work and effort”. Next, Collins dictionary provides these synonyms for the word motivation; incentives, inspiration, motive. Memet (2020), in his study relevant to motivation in language learning and teaching described motivation as “the condition where a person is induced to act in a certain way, or where a certain subject or activity stimulates a person’s desire to participate”. Besides, another study on motivation in the learning process by Khudayberganov, Ruzmetova and Kurbonov (2020), presented that motivation in learning includes learners’ consciousness of the universal, educational, practical and developmental goals of educational activities and its relevance with their own individual goals that would build the motivation in them. In fact, the researchers pointed out that the power of motivation is determined by learners’ strong understanding on the objective of the learning activity.

Researchers continuously conduct studies on motivating factors of language learning. They often discuss the two concepts of motivation which are intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation exists within individuals depending on self-desires or interest with no influence from external factors. The opposite of intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation is influenced by external factor such as rewards or incentives. Hamidah et al (2017) highlighted one of the motivating factors which is ‘teacher influence’ in their study. The study emphasized that learners highly depend on teachers in supporting them to learn the language. This finding is similar with another study in which the researcher concluded that teachers should help learners to find motivation in language learning (Mitra, 2016). In this study, the researcher also discussed one of the intrinsic elements of motivation which is positive attitude. It was summarized that positive attitude towards L2 community, the enjoyment of learning and external pressures is essential to keep learners motivated throughout. Correspondingly, Hamidah et al (2017) mentioned that to determine one’s success in language learning,

personal attitude plays a significant role. The finding of the study showed though the learners had moderate attitude towards learning the language, overall, they were actually interested in learning the language.

However, some researchers focused on the demotivating or negative factors in language learning (Reyhaneh et al., 2012; Fatemah, 2017; Raneem, 2021). It is equally important to discuss the demotivating factors in order to evade undesired learning outcomes. Moreover, attention can be given to learners who face difficulties in language learning if these factors could be recognized. The study by Reyhaneh (2012) revealed that lack of perceived individual competence and lack of intrinsic motivation are the demotivating factors among language learners. Fatemah (2017) paid attention to language learning mindset and its role in the language learners' motivation and demotivation. One of the findings of the study was that the fixed mindset language learners were being more demotivated than the growth mindset language learners. Moving on to more recent research, Raneem and Zainab (2021) concluded that the most demotivating factors in language learning based on their study were subject related and teacher related factors.

While motivation is a driving force of a learning journey, demotivation is certainly a barrier. Hence, recognizing the factors that are motivating or demotivating in language learning is crucial to achieve the desired learning outcomes in learning in general. Motivating factors should be exposed among learners whereas the demotivating factors should not be ignored.

Theories on Fear of Language Learning

The feeling of fear can have a tremendous effect to language learners when they learn a language. To better understand the sources and effects of this psychological emotion on language learning, some theories on fear of language learning are discussed in this section which are Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's (1986) Theory of Foreign Language Anxiety, Young's (1991) six sources of Language Anxiety, and MacIntyre and Gardner's (1994) three-scales model.

The first theory associated to fear of language learning is by Krashen (1982). Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) is considered as an important theory in not just the field of second language acquisition but is also applicable in the learning of a foreign language. This theory stresses how motivation, self-confidence and anxiety or fear play a crucial role in the language learning process. The affective factors as mentioned above, indirectly impact the learning process by which they can act as a mental block that prevents input or information from reaching the language acquisition device of the human brain. In other words, this theory focuses on whether the three variables are related to the learner's success or failure of learning a second or foreign language.

Another theory related to fear of language learning, specifically on foreign language learning was developed by (Horwitz et al., 1986). Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope's (1986) theoretical model of fear in foreign language plays a vital role in research related to language and fear, with a large number of studies using it as the theoretical framework of their research. According to Horwitz et al (1986), fear in foreign language is related to performance evaluation in both the academic and social context. They have identified three variables or types of fear related to performance anxieties which are 1) communication apprehension; 2)

test anxiety; and 3) fear of negative evaluation. The first variable which is communication apprehension deals with the feeling of shyness due to fear (specifically an individual's level of fear) of having to communicate with other people. The second variable which is test anxiety is a type of performance anxiety as a result to the feeling of fear or afraid of failing. This variable centers around test-taking or academic evaluation setting. According to Horwitz et al (1986), learners who are test-anxious often feel that if their test performance is not perfect, they will consider themselves as a failure. The last type of performance anxiety is fear of negative evaluation. In this variable, it is all about how the individual is evaluated by others, not just during tests but also in social or evaluative context. Learners with fear in negative evaluation will try to avoid themselves from being evaluated by others. These students hold the perception that every time someone evaluates them, they will be evaluated negatively. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) thus introduced the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) as an instrument aiming to measure how these three variables are associated to fear in foreign language learning.

Aside from that, based on analysis of past literature, Young (1991) identified at least six main sources of fear of language learning which can be related to either the learner, the teacher/educator, or the instructional practice. Young (1991) unveiled that fear in language occurs from personal and interpersonal anxieties (which includes low self-esteem and competitiveness), learner beliefs about language learning (a key contributor to language anxiety), instructor beliefs about language teaching, the instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures (mainly on having to communicate in the target language in front of a group), and lastly, the language testing. Young (1991) also provided some strategies on how to reduce anxiety or fear when learning a language.

Other prominent figures under the field of fear of language learning or language anxiety are MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) who defined fear of foreign language as the feeling of tension and apprehension that are specifically related to the second or foreign language contexts. These contexts include learning language skills such as speaking, listening, and learning. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) had focused on identifying the types of language learning processes that might be affected as a result to fear of language learning. They themselves have developed a new anxiety measure that was structured from Tobias's (1986) three-stage model of learning. The focus of this new measure was to consider the role played by anxiety or fear at each of the three stages (input, processing, and output). The three scales developed by MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) are Input Anxiety, Processing Anxiety and Output Anxiety. The first scale which is Input Anxiety refers to the apprehension or the feeling of fear experienced by learners when they take in any information in the second or foreign language. The next one is Processing Anxiety which refers to the feeling of fear felt by learners when they learn or think in the second or foreign language while the last scale which is Output Anxiety is referred to as the apprehension experienced by learners when they speak or write in the second or foreign language. Each of these scales consisted of six-items with each having three positively worded items and three negatively worded items.

Past Studies

Past Studies on Motivating & Demotivating factors for Language Learning across Gender

In the domain of second and foreign language learning, motivation has been unequivocally perceived key towards successful language learning (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003) superseding an early believe that proposed cognitive abilities to be the core contributor of a successful language learning. It was argued that motivation is the driving factor of eagerness, enthusiasm and willingness to devote time and effort to learn a language. Additionally, motivation is also needed to sustain positive outlook and to persevere through the language learning process. Previous studies have shown various determinants to a learner's motivation with gender being one of the most prominent factors (Iwaniec, 2019).

For instance, Bećirović (2017) undertook a study to look into the relationship between gender, motivation and achievement in learning English as a foreign language in elementary and high school levels in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina Bosnia among 185 students aged ten, fourteen and eighteen. The study aimed to elicit gender influence on motivation and achievement in learning English as a foreign language. A set of questionnaires adopted from Schmidt and Watanabe (2001) was utilized to collect the data for the study. The results indicated significantly higher motivation among male students as opposed to the female students at four motivational components namely extrinsic motivation, personal goals, attitudes, and motivational strength. Additionally, the correlation between achievement and motivation is larger and more significant in the female group as compared to the male group across ages.

Another study that investigated the role of gender in motivation is a study by Iwaniec (2019) in Poland. The quantitative study was designed to examine gender differences among 599 Polish learners of English aging from fourteen to sixteen years old. The results indicated an extensive gender effect whereby females showed higher scores on three elements which are international orientation, ideal self and self-regulation. There was also a significant difference in the strength of links between self-regulation and instrumentality, self-efficacy beliefs as well as English self-concept. However, instrumentality, self-efficacy beliefs, English self-concept and intrinsic motivation showed no significant difference between genders.

Contrary to the aforementioned studies, Yih, Chin and Ling (2017) in their study among first year diploma students of UiTM Sarawak consisting of 56 male and 93 female students reported males to experience more anxiety in learning language as compared to females. However, there was no significance relationship between gender and anxiety shown in their data. Conversely, there was a significant relationship noted between gender and other anxiety factors such as negative evaluation and communication apprehension.

Studies above may offer validation on number of previous research that depicted the role of gender in motivation in foreign language learning.

Past Studies on Fear of Language Learning across Gender

Numerous studies have been conducted to investigate the fear of learning foreign language especially in terms of the (a) student's academic achievement and (b) test anxiety. There have been many past studies in relation to gender as well. A study done by Fatima et al (2020) investigated the impact of gender on foreign language anxiety among advanced learners of English in Pakistan. It aimed to investigate the impact of gender on foreign language anxiety and speaking proficiency of advanced level students. A total of 150 participants were involved

in this study. 90 of them were females and the remaining 60 students were male students. Mixed method was employed to meet the needs of the study. The data was collected through FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) which was translated to Urdu. The second instrument was an interview consisting of 10 questions. The results of the study indicated that female students exhibit a higher level of anxiety in comparison to male students. Based on the findings gathered from the interview, there were several factors related to their level of anxiety. It was important to note that pronunciation, lack of vocabulary and fluency were the major problems along with fear of speaking foreign language. As a result of the analysis of the responses to the FLCAS, it was found that oral tests, self-assessment of speaking abilities, self-comparison to others and fear of making mistakes were indicated as the common sources of anxiety. The other anxiety provoking situations were crowded classrooms, less practice and unprepared lesson. More additional sources of anxiety were identified during the interview and they were pronunciation, vocabulary, parents' education and teachers' manner.

In contrast, a quantitative study by Afianti and Afna (2020), showed that the fear or anxiety experienced by male students and female students was not significantly different. The aim of the study was to investigate English speaking anxiety experienced by students across gender. The study applied comparative design with 122 participants consisting of 25 male students and 97 female students. To collect the data, the researchers used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) which was translated into their mother tongue language. The results from the research showed that the level of anxiety experienced by the students in learning English as a foreign language is high. However, there was no significant difference between male and female students in feeling anxious or fear when using English as a foreign language. According to the study, the findings should be further investigated by considering other related factors such as culture and personality. Oztürk and Gürbüz (2013), conducted a quantitative study and examined the impact of gender on foreign language speaking anxiety and motivation. A number of 225 female and 158 male Turkish pre-intermediate students were involved in the study. The instruments used were the motivation and attitude questionnaire, EFL speaking anxiety scale and three interview questions. Two questionnaires were distributed to the students and 19 students were randomly selected for the interview. Based on the findings, the female students experienced a higher level of anxiety as compared to male students. The researchers highlighted that since female students experience higher level of anxiety when learning foreign language more than male students, specific strategies should be implemented so that the students can learn better.

Conceptual Framework

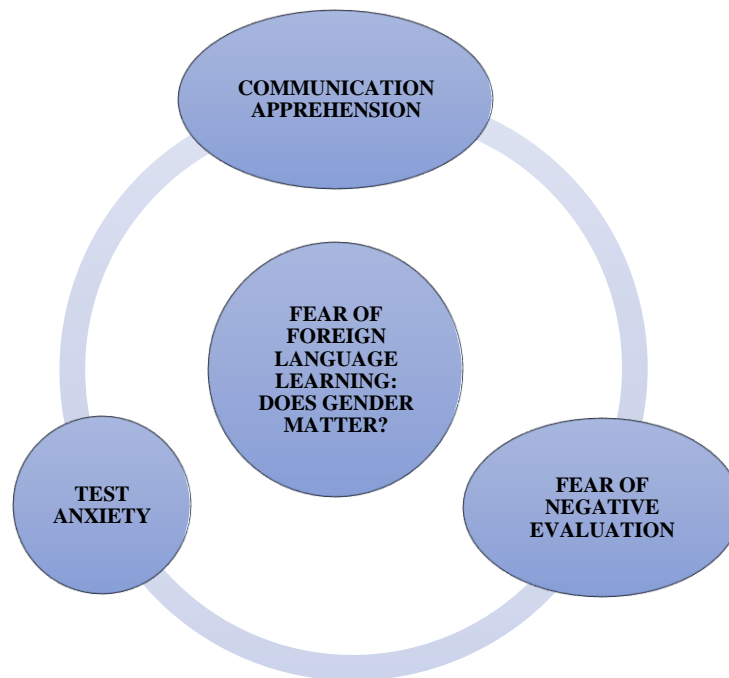


Figure 1- Conceptual Framework of the Study (adapted from Wenden & Rubin, 1987; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986)

Cycle of Fear of Learning a Foreign language across Gender

Figure 1 above presents the conceptual framework. This study is rooted from Wenden and Rubin (1987) and Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986). Foreign language learners who fear learning the language exhibit behaviours such as (a) fear of communication apprehension, (b) fear of negative evaluation, and (c) fear of test anxiety.

Communication Apprehension

The concept of communication apprehension was introduced by James C. McCroskey and Virginia P. Richmond in 1982. Communication apprehension is a type of shyness characterized by fear or anxiety communicating with people. It has been described as the fear or anxiety related to either actual or expected communication with another person or persons (McCroskey & Richmond, 1982). Communication apprehension (CA) has often been perceived as one of the most important psychological factors that enters versatile interactions with other effective, cognitive and contextual factors in the process of second/foreign language acquisition (Molnar & Crnjak, 2018). Specifically in this study, communication apprehension refers to the level of shyness, fear and anxiety in relation to gender. Some studies indicated that there was a significant relationship between communication and gender. Students feel difficulties and fear of communication especially at the oral level and that female students show greater apprehension of communication than male students ("Differences of Gender in Communication Apprehension of University Students," 2020c). Loureiro et al (2020) studied the differences of gender in oral and written communication apprehension of university students. The study was done as oral and written skills are important tools in the job market and the researchers observed difficulties in terms of communication apprehension, not only in regard to writing but also in oral communication experienced by graduates who enter the

labour market. The results of the study confirmed that the students experience difficulties mainly in terms of communication. Female students showed more significant levels of anxiety with regard to oral and written communication as compared to male students. This present study allows understanding the communication apprehension for different genders.

Fear of Negative Evaluation

Horwitz et al (1986) defines fear for negative evaluation as “apprehension about others’ evaluation, avoidance of evaluative situations and the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively.” To some extent, different from test anxiety, negative evaluation occurs not only during test taking but could occur in any social circumstances. Evaluation is not only from the teachers but also from the peers no matter real or imagined, can be subtle to learners (Horwitz et al., 1986). When negative evaluation is present, the feelings of uncertainty, overwhelmed, nervousness, confusion and mainly lack of confidence are experienced by learners. There are many possible reasons that can be connected to this experience. For instance, learners could become more self-conscious in a foreign language class when there are other learners around as well. They are conscious not to make any mistakes or sometimes just want to make sure they are understood when they speak in a different language. Besides, another reason could be when they fail to understand what the teacher is saying or when they do not understand the teacher’s feedback. Some learners might feel upset not only when they fail to comprehend but also when the teacher corrects their mistakes while they speak in foreign language.

Great attention has been paid to studies relevant to show the relationship between gender and anxiety in language learning (Nur Afiqah, 2015; Gerencheal, 2016; Mafuzah, Nur Hani & Jasmin, 2018). Gerencheal (2016) pointed out that females had higher anxiety level compared to males. Additionally, Mafuzah, Nur Hani and Jasmin (2018) reported that females had more fear to speak in class compared to males. However, the study also found that both, male and female had no fear of negative evaluation from their instructors. In fact, there were studies that showed there was no significant difference in the level of anxiety among male and female learners. For instance, one of the findings of gender and anxiety related study showed that both genders demonstrated similar level of anxiety in language classroom Mahfuzah (2009) as cited in (Afiqah, 2015). Thus, this study contributes to more understanding on subjects relevant to anxiety by both genders in language learning.

Test Anxiety

Test anxiety is the third and last component of fear of foreign language learning. Horwitz et al (1986) defines test anxiety as “a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure” (p. 127). This component can also be defined as “an apprehension over academic evaluation” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, p. 42). Specifically, learners who suffered from test anxiety tend to believe that if their performance in tests are flawed, they consider themselves as a failure. For them, they perceive perfect performance in tests as a success. Thus, learners are always extremely concerned or worried about their test performance and become anxious thinking they might not be able to perform well. Various possible reasons can be connected to test anxiety. Horwitz et al (1986) have listed down some possible reasons under test anxiety. For examples, students might develop the feeling of “worry” about the effect of failing in their foreign language class. Students might also tend to get so nervous which resulted to them forgetting what they have already known. Moreover,

students might “tremble” due to nervousness when they know that they will be called on by their teacher during language class. Another reason could be that students might feel worried of getting left behind in their studies. Also, they feel more “confused” the more they study for their language test.

Previous studies that focus on the relationship between test anxiety, foreign language learning and gender reported different findings. For instance, Santana and Eccius-Wellmann (2018) conducted a study on test anxiety between male and female students taking an English Language proficiency test, at a Mexican university. The results suggest that female students have significantly higher anxiety level than the male students and that the female students’ test scores showed a significantly lower score as compared to males. Another exemplary study was conducted by Celik (2019) who studied on the relationship between test anxiety and gender. 120 randomly selected English language preparatory students from Tishk International University Preparatory School, Iraq participated in this study. The study however revealed that there is no significant relationship between gender and test anxiety.

As previous researchers have indicated different findings pertaining to this topic, the current study focuses on identifying whether communication apprehension, negative evaluation and test anxiety constitute significant variables that affect the foreign language learning process on both genders of the respective group of students.

Methodology

This quantitative research is done to investigate the fear of foreign language learning. The instrument used is a survey adapted from (Wenden and Rubin, 1987; Horwitz et al., 1986). 202 respondents were purposively chosen to answer the survey. The survey has 4 main sections. With reference to Table 1, section A has items on the demographic profile. Section B has 11 items on Communication Apprehension. Section C has 7 items on Fear of Negative Evaluation and Section D has 15 items on Test Anxiety.

Table 1

Distribution of Items in the Survey

SECTION	VARIABLES	NO OF ITEMS
B	COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION	11
C	FEAR OF NEGATIVE EVALUATION	7
D	TEST ANXIETY	15
	Total Number of Items	33

Table 2 presents the reliability statistics for the instrument. SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach alpha of .847 thus showing a high internal reliability of the instrument used. Data is collected online via Google Form. Data is then analysed using SPSS version 26. Analysed data is presented in the form of percentages and mean scores to answer the 3 research questions.

Table 2
Reliability Statistics for the Instrument

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.847	33

Findings

Findings for Demographic Profile

The following section discusses the respondents' demographic profile which focuses on gender, semester and the related foreign language course taken by the participants.

Q1. Gender

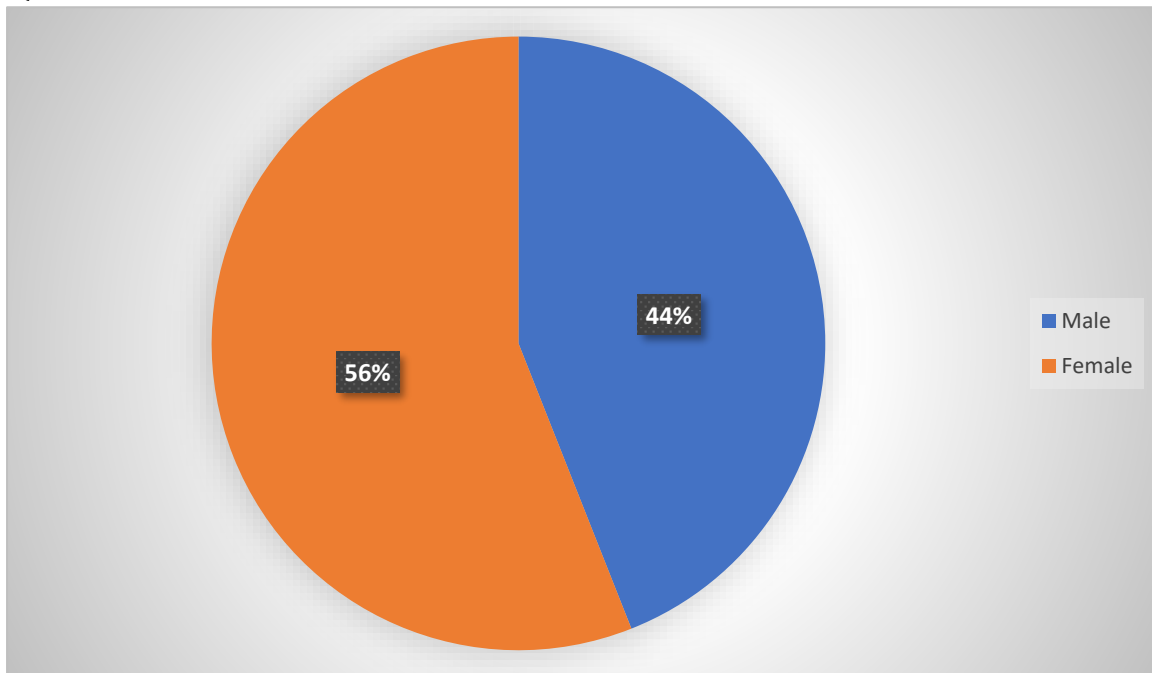


Figure 2- Percentage for Gender

There were 202 participants who took part in the study. They were all students of foreign language courses. Figure 2 shows 44% of the respondents were male students while 56% were female students.

Q2. Semester

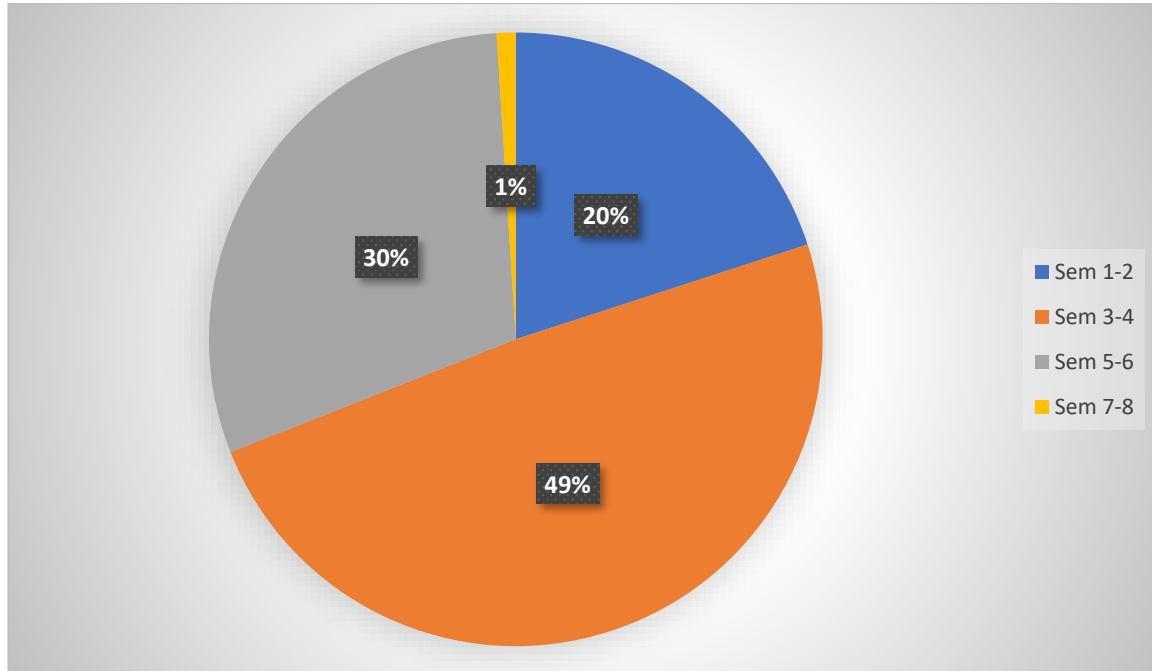


Figure 3- Percentage for Semester

Figure 3 demonstrates the 4 study semesters the respondents were in during their participation for the questionnaire. The most respondents (49%) were in Sem 3-4 while the least (1%) were in Sem 7-8. Respondents from Sem 1-2 and Sem 5-6 stated 20% and 30% respectively.

Q3. Language

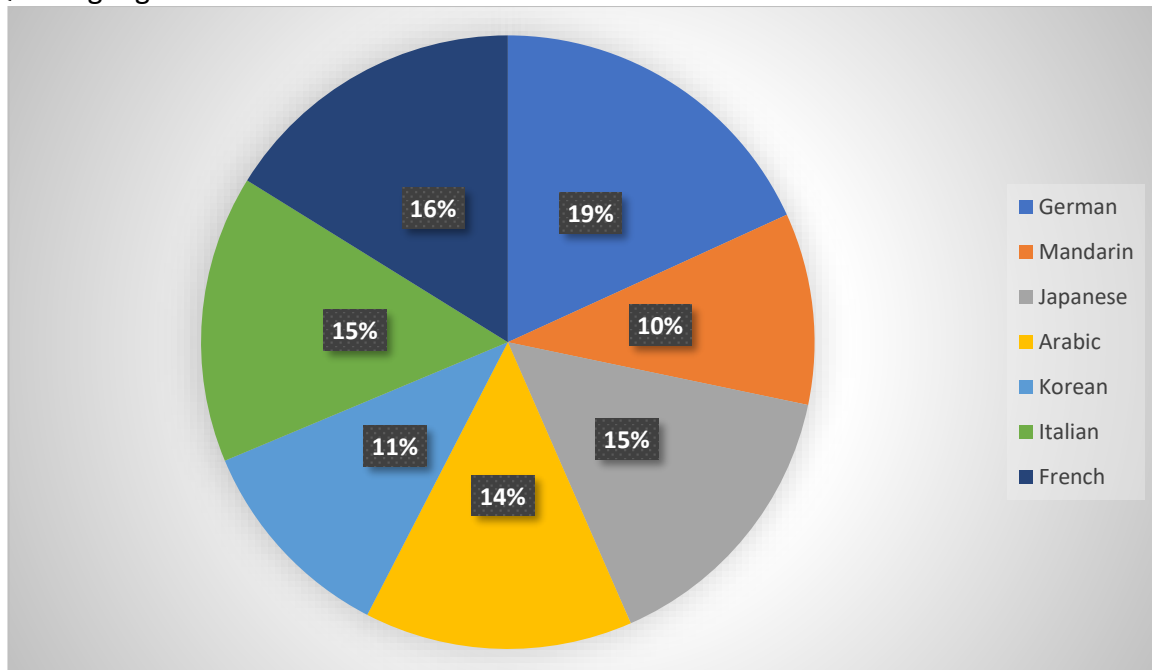


Figure 4- Percentage for Language

Figure 4 displays the 7 foreign languages taken by the respondents. There were 19% respondents for German language, 16% for French language and 15% for both Japanese and Italian languages. The remaining languages which are Arabic, Korean and Mandarin accounted for 14%, 11% and 10% respectively.

Findings for Communication Apprehension

Section 4.2 reports findings for research question 1: How does communication apprehension differ across gender? The result of the analysis is presented in the form of mean as shown in the following figure.

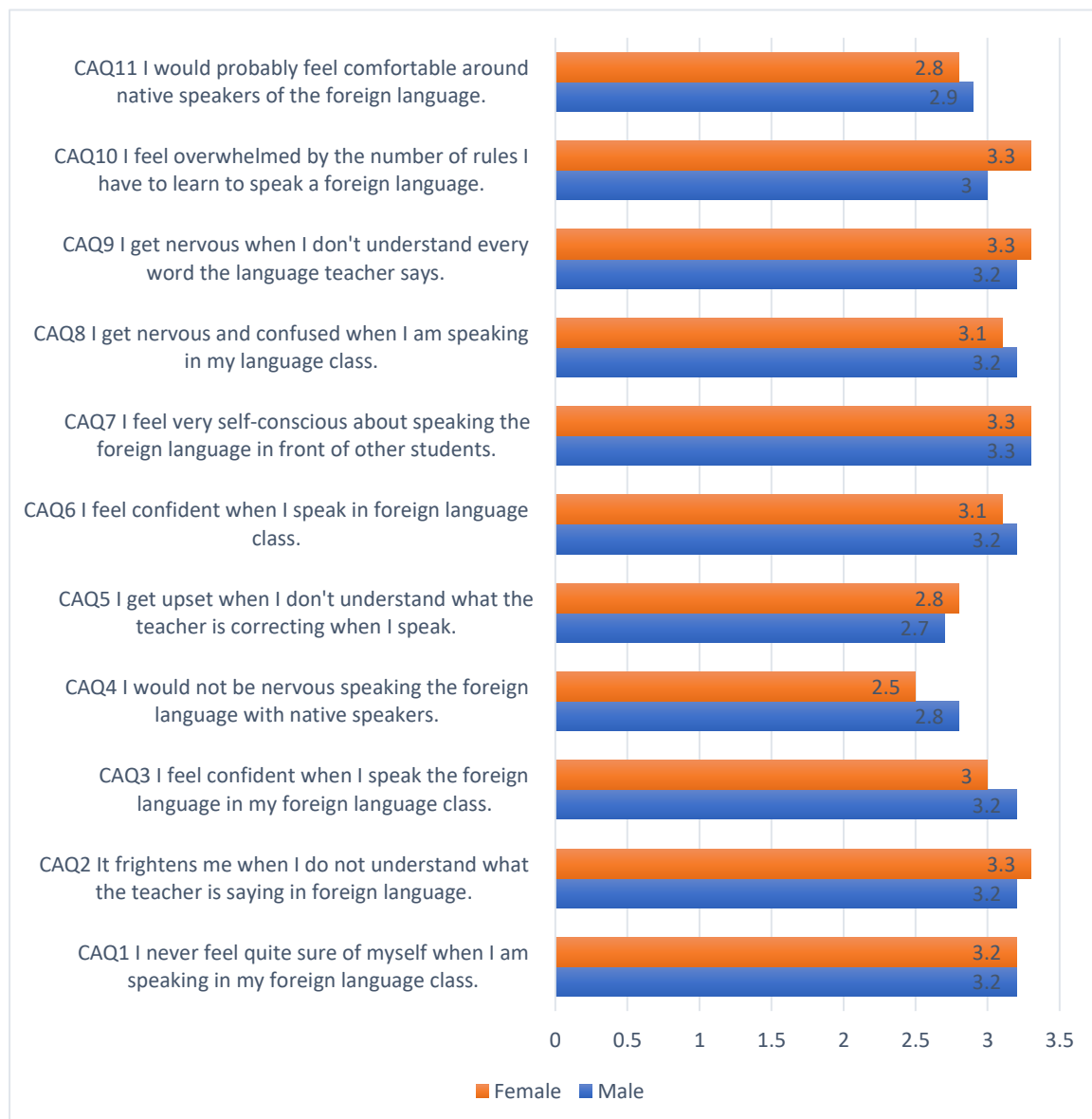


Figure 5 - Mean for Communication Apprehension

Figure 5 describes the mean score for the first variable which is communication apprehension, based on gender. The highest mean score was obtained by the statement “I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students” with both male and female students obtaining a mean score of (3.3). This is followed by two

statements which obtained similar scores which are “It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in foreign language” and “I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says” with male students obtaining a mean score of (3.2) and female students obtaining (3.3) respectively for each of the two items. Moreover, the next statement which obtained a mean score of (3.2) for both males and females is “I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.” On the other hand, the lowest mean score was obtained by the statement “I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers” with males obtaining a mean score of (2.8) and females obtaining a mean score of (2.5) while the second lowest statement was “I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting when I speak”. The male students obtained a mean score of (2.7) while the female students obtained a mean score of (2.8) for this statement.

Findings for Fear of Negative Evaluation

This section discusses the data to answer research question 2: How does fear of negative evaluation differ across gender? The following Figure 6 presents the result of the analysis in the form of mean.

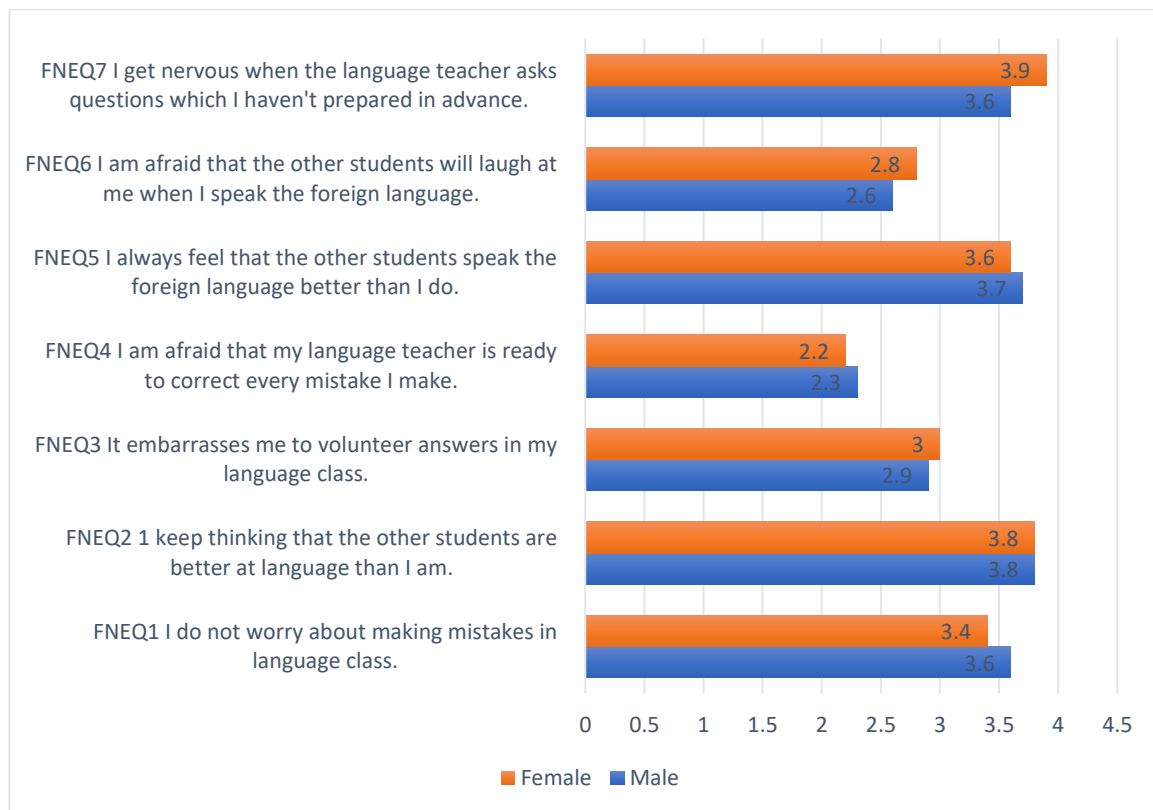


Figure 6- Mean for Fear of Negative Evaluation

Figure 6 illustrates the mean value for each of the items under the variable of fear of negative evaluation. As shown in the figure, the statement “I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am” rated the highest mean score as compared to other statements with both male and female students obtaining a mean score of (3.8). This is followed by the statement “I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance” with female students obtaining a higher score which is (3.9)

as compared to male students who obtained a score of (3.6) only. Interestingly however, the third highest mean score was obtained by the statement “I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do” by which male students showed a slightly higher score (3.7) as compared to female students (3.6). The next statement following the preceding item is “I do not worry about making mistakes in language class” with males obtaining a higher score (3.6) as compared to females with (3.4). The lowest mean score for the statement under fear of negative evaluation is “I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make” with males obtaining a slightly higher score (2.3) then females (2.2). Besides that, the second lowest mean score under this variable is “I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language” with male students obtaining (2.6) while female students obtaining a higher score which is (2.8) followed by the statement “It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class” with males obtaining a mean score of (2.9) and females (3.0).

Findings for Test Anxiety

This section presents data to answer research question 3: How does test anxiety differ across gender? Figure 7 illustrates the mean for each statement under variables of test anxiety.

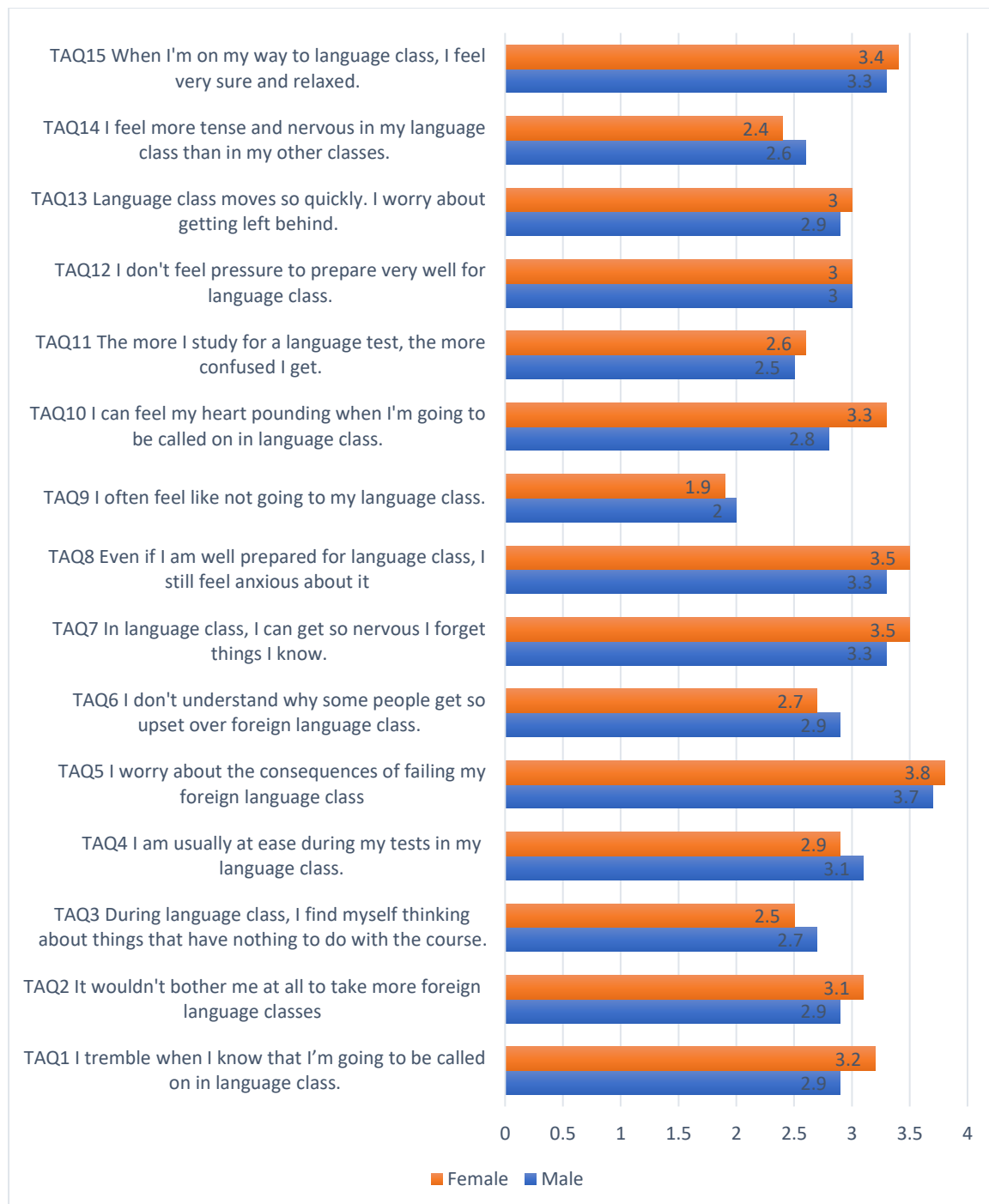


Figure 7 - Mean for Test Anxiety

Figure 7 illustrates the mean values for the items under test anxiety. As shown in the figure above, the lowest mean score obtained was for the statement “I often feel like not going to my language class”. Both male and female scored (2) and (1.9) respectively. The statement “I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class” is the highest in male and female with a mean score of (3.7) and (3.8). In addition, statements “In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know” and “Even if I am well prepared for language class, I still feel anxious about it” vividly exhibit that the level of anxiety in female is higher with a mean score of (3.5) for both statements while male with (3.3) which is lower than female.

According to the findings, both male and female experienced anxiety however, female students experienced a higher level of anxiety as compared to male students. This finding is parallel to a study by Gerencheal (2016) who investigated the possible differences of English language anxiety between female and male students. According to the study, females had higher level of anxiety in their English classes than their counterpart males. There was a significant negative relationship between their English achievement and their level of anxiety though the debilitating effect of anxiety were more serious in females than males.

Conclusion

Summary of Findings and Discussion

Table 3

Total Mean Scores for Fear of learning Foreign Language across gender

TYPE OF FEAR	Male	Female
Total Mean for Communication Apprehension	3.1	3.4
Total mean for Fear of Negative Evaluation	3.2	3.2
Total Mean for Test Anxiety	2.9	3

Numerous studies have shown the substantial role of gender in language anxiety and learners' motivation (Huang, 2004). Similarly, the analysis of the present study as expounded in the above section has proven to be in tandem with the previous research in many folds. Firstly, female students have appeared to be more apprehensive than the male students. The data revealed that although both female and male students showed equal level of self-consciousness when speaking, female students faced more communication apprehension as they experienced higher level of nervousness when speaking foreign language as opposed to the male students. This seemed to concur with Oztürk and Gürbüz's (2013) and Bećirović (2017) where both studies shown that female students usually appeared to be more anxious and nervous during the lesson in class. Despite being in tandem with the aforementioned studies, this finding also seemed to be contradictory to a number of research which discovered that male students were more anxious due to their perceived lack of competence in speaking in the target language (Awan, Azher, Anwar & Naz, 2010; Vein & Tsai, 2013).

Similarly, the study also revealed that female students have experienced higher level of fear of negative evaluation as compared to their male counterpart and this may be caused by the lack of preparedness prior to the language lesson. Conversely, Yih, Chin and Ling (2017) discovered something to the contrary where they found that males displayed higher level of fear of negative evaluation than their female counterparts. This is because males have to protect their ideal self of having pride and fear of losing it in front of their audiences. Additionally, male students also viewed themselves as being less competent than the females and this could cause fear in language learning (Elaldi, 2016). The data also showed that female students developed more fear of failing in their foreign language class as compared to the male students. Contrary to this, Yih, Chin and Ling (2017) revealed that males appeared to have higher level of fear of failing and this is due to the fact that females were more inclined for language learning (Horwitz, 2008).

Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research

Pedagogical Implications

Findings from this study lend support to Wenden and Rubin (1987); Horwitz et al (1986) which reaffirmed that learners' fear of foreign language learning is reflected through behavioural exhibits namely fear of communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and fear of test anxiety. Henceforth, foreign language teachers and instructors could benefit from the findings presented to tailor their teaching appropriate to students' needs. Firstly, teachers could create stress-free environment in the classroom for students to learn and prepare interesting and fun activities to lessen students' anxiety in communicating using the foreign language. Because the study has pointed out that students feel nervous while engaging in communication in foreign language classroom, fun activities were shown to have positive effect on students with anxiety in communicating in foreign language classroom (Thuong, Huyen & Thuaong, 2021).

Secondly, given that students' fear of negative evaluation may be caused by their lack of preparedness prior to any interaction in the classroom, teachers should provide ample time for students to prepare before performing any tasks, especially speaking related activities. Adequate practice, voluntary participation and group and pair activities should also be encouraged in a foreign language classroom as such practices have been shown to be effective in decreasing speaking anxiety among students (Al-Hnifat, Rashid & Al-Smadi, 2020).

Suggestions for Future Research

The current study has provided an invaluable insight into the fear of foreign language learning from gender's perspective. However, acknowledging the operational constraints of the study, two recommendations are presented in the following. Firstly, the constrain on time and cost only allowed for a reasonable size of respondents which focused on a group of UiTM students only. It is recommended that similar research to be conducted in different parts of the country, covering a bigger scale of participants. Secondly, given that the variables involved in the study have not been extensively studied (analysis only covered on comparison of means), it is recommended that future study investigates relationship between variables to elucidate the mean difference and investigate whether variables involved in the study interact with each other as previous studies (Yih et al., 2017; Rafek et al., 2014) have proven mean difference does not equate significant difference between variables.

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