

## ANXIETY IN LEARNING ENGLISH AT AL WAHDA ARAB ISKOLA SCHOOL IN BUDAPEST-HUNGARY

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### ABSTRACT

This study is going to examine the anxiety levels and their causes and try to offer solutions to overcome this problem for Arab school students who are learning English at Al Wahda Arab Iskola School in Budapest in Hungary. In order to answer the research questions, the researcher plans to conduct a quantitative research with the participation of about 40 students from different grades with the ages of 11 to 18 from Al Wahda Arab Iskola School. The researcher will examine through a questionnaire based on the foreign language classroom anxiety scale of Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, K. (1986) of 33 anxiety items.

The paper came up with the result that the students of Al Wahda Arab Iskola in Budapest exhibit anxiety in the classroom with female students having more levels of anxiety than their male counterparts and younger students more than older ones. This should give motive to the people in charge to study this phenomenon and try to find some solutions. Some new strategies need to be applied including the use of modern technology, group work, teachers praise and encouragement and changing the view of evaluating the students based on exams and focusing on the use of the language instead.

**KEYWORDS:** Learning English/ Anxiety in learning English/ Arab school in Hungary/ Anxiety levels/ Causes/ Suggested solutions

### INTRODUCTION

Since learning a second language has become an obligatory requirement at schools in most of the world's countries, it is normal that we see some problems arising because of this requirement. One of the most challenging problems to the students, teachers and schools is the second language learning anxiety. This research will examine anxiety levels in learning English for the students of Al Wahda Arab Iskola School in Budapest in Hungary. Some recommendations will be offered to help people in charge in this school to overcome anxiety levels to increase student's participation inside the classroom and enhance the English learning process in that school in general.

The researcher is going to study its levels in that school and compare the results with other research results and give recommendations based on those results. It will be a study of great importance for the school as it will be the first time that this topic will be addressed in that school. This might help

people in charge to develop strategies that help overcoming the phenomenon of anxiety in learning English in that school.

This research will answer the following questions concerning anxiety in learning English:

1. What are the anxiety levels and their causes for students of Al Wahda Arab Iskola?
2. Are there any gender, age or nationality differences concerning anxiety in that school?
3. What can be done to reduce the effect of anxiety for those students in that school?

The first part of this research will discuss the expression of anxiety and how it was viewed according to some scholars. Then the questionnaire items and the results of the questionnaire will be analyzed and compared with international standards mentioned in other works, and finally recommendations will be offered based on those results.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The researcher has read some resources about anxiety including Jafar Batiha, Noorizah Mohd Noor, Rosniah Mustaffa, (2014) who talked about the main factors of classroom anxiety which they attributed to the fear of failing the exam, the interaction between the teacher and the student, the lack of the appropriate vocabulary, the fear of negative evaluation and the high levels of expectations. Since I worked as a secondary school teacher for about nine years, I think that all these factors are the main and the most influential factors but they are not everything. For example, some students are anxious because of their parent's pressure on them to get a high grade and high marks, and when they can't achieve their own or even their parents' ambitions, they feel more anxious and they put more stress on themselves to be better. They put these factors after using the SPSS software to analyze the means of the items and then to decide the ones with the highest means to be considered the main causes of anxiety in the classroom. Ortega, (2009), said that the existence of anxiety can affect the students' academic achievement in the foreign language classes and will slow down the whole process of learning. Horwitz, et.al (1986) on the other hand attributed classroom anxiety in learning a foreign a language to three factors which are the fear of test, communication problem and fear of negative evaluation. From the researcher's own point of view, as a teacher who worked for about nine years in teaching English as a foreign language, anxiety takes place when the students are unwilling to communicate because they hate some teachers or hate the method of teaching used by those teachers. Some students are very anxious because from my experience they don't have the necessary vocabulary to make the sentence or convey the message so they avoid being laughed at or mocked by other students especially when the students are in the adolescence stage of the ages of 14-17. Jafar Batiha, Noorizah Mohd Noor, Rosniah Mustaffa (2014) stressed again on the high expectations as a main factor of classroom anxiety in learning any foreign language. They assert that when a student puts a level of performance and achievement for him\herself and achieves less than what they expected, this will greatly affect the student's way of judging him\herself negatively. That in turn will lead to high anxiety levels for such students.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

It will be a descriptive, qualitative study of anxiety levels in AWAI School where the causes will be studied and the possible solutions are expected to be offered. The researcher is going to examine anxiety levels at Al Wahda Arab Iskola in Budapest through a method of researching by using a questionnaire of 33 items based on the foreign language classroom anxiety scale of Horwitz, E. K.,

Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, K. (1986). The questionnaire will be conducted in Arabic as it is the students' mother tongue. Later the questionnaire results will be analyzed using the statistical package of social sciences SPSS and the main factors of classroom anxiety will be grouped together through calculating the mean of each item and compare it to the mean of other items.

### **3.1 THE PARTICIPANTS**

40 students participated in the questionnaire. They were chosen randomly from the 6th to the 12th grades.

The students of that school have been chosen to be the population of the study because the researcher has taught in that school for a month and he has had good contact with the school's headmaster. This will make the task easier for the researcher to get the necessary information from the school headmaster and even get the necessary cooperation from the students. Based on the results of the analysis, some academic solutions will be offered that will be suitable for the nature of those students based on their own data.

### **3.2 THE INSTRUMENT**

The questionnaire was conducted in the students' mother tongue of Arabic language. It starts with some items about general personal information like the age, gender and the nationality. Then the students are asked to express their agreement with the FLCAS 33 items using a five point likert scale that ranges from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

### **3.3 DATA COLLECTION**

With the help of the school's headmaster, the questionnaire was distributed in the form of convenience sampling to the students in the third period before noon and they were asked to fill it and hand it in to the school headmaster. After they finished, the papers were collected and given to the researcher.

### **4. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

It's not possible that this research will cover all causes and offer all best solutions for the problem of classroom anxiety in Hungary in general because this study will be exclusive to the school of Al Wahda Arab Iskola School in Budapest in Hungary which has students from different backgrounds who have different interests and learning styles from other students in other schools or academic institutions in Hungary or in the world. In addition, the results will be only based on the students' responses to the questionnaire's items. The results can't be generalized for all Arab schools in the European Union countries, for example, but they can be used as a start to open further research in other schools in the European Union.

### **5. EXPECTED OUTCOMES**

It's expected that this paper will come to the outcome that the students of Al Wahda Arab Iskola have some levels of anxiety in learning English as a foreign language that are attributed to many factors that will be discussed in the next section. It is also expected that the researcher will come up with some suggested solutions to overcome that problem in the English language classroom.

### **6. DISCUSSION AND EVALUATION**

The students who participated in the study are divided into two groups according to their age, gender and nationality as shown in figure number 1.

**Figure number (1). The participants' gender, age and nationality.**

**Frequency Table**

		age group			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	11-14 years	15	37.5	37.5	37.5
	15-18 years	25	62.5	62.5	100.0
Total		40	100.0	100.0	

		citizenship			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Hungarian	20	50.0	50.0	50.0
	non-Hungarian	20	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total		40	100.0	100.0	

		gender			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	MALE	15	37.5	37.5	37.5
	FEMALE	25	62.5	62.5	100.0
Total		40	100.0	100.0	

From this table we see that half of the students or participants (50%) were born in Hungary and the other half (50%) are staying there temporarily. We also see that about 38% of the participants were males (15 participants) whereas about 62% were female students (25 participants). Concerning the age of the participants, there are two age groups the first from the age of 11-14 with a percentage of 37.5% and the second is from 15-18 age groups with a percentage of 62.5%.

The 33 items of the questionnaire focused on three aspects of classroom anxiety which are communication, fear of negative social evaluation and the fear of exams or tests.

Three aspects of language anxiety are to be analyzed according to the FLCAS which are the communication apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation and fear of tests. Horwitz and Cope, (1986). See the appendix. Table (1): The participants' response for each item and table (2): The mean value of each item.

From table (2) of mean values we can see that the highest score items scored by the students were the following: During the English class I find myself thinking about other things with a mean value of 4.4 which is very high. This can be attributed to the lack of interest or to the classical and not attractive methods of teaching by the teacher. On the other hand, anxiety plays a key factor in such a situation. The next highest mean of items was when the students were asked about how nervous they get when they forget the answers in the English class. The mean was 4.1 which is again considered to be high which can be attributed to many factors like being afraid of the bad evaluation or assessment by the teacher.

On the other hand, the third highest mean value was when the students agreed with the sentence, I don't know why students get upset over English classes with a mean value of 3.9. This can be attributed to another group of the school students who are very confident about learning English and that they see themselves as progressive students.

Horwitz et. Al, (1986) divided the 33 items into three groups. The first group of reasons of anxiety can be attributed to communication apprehension represented by the items 1,4,9,14, 15, 18, 24, 27, 29, 30 and 32. The second group of items examines test anxiety which is represented by the items 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 28.

Whereas the third cause of anxiety was attributed to fear of negative evaluation with the items number 2,7,13,19,23,31 and 33 as the representing items of this factor.

**Figure (2): The mean value of each anxiety group.**

→ **Frequencies**

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↓ **Statistics** ↓ ↓

		test anxiety	communicati on apprehensio n	negative evaluation
N	Valid	40	40	40
	Missing	0	0	0
	Mean	3.1050	2.8205	2.8679

As we see from the figure 2 above which shows the main groups of causes of anxiety, the first group of test anxiety shows that it is the main cause of anxiety for the students of the AAI with an average mean value of 3.1. The second highest cause of anxiety is the student's fear of negative evaluation with an average mean of the items of 2.86 and the last cause was the fear of communication with an average mean of 2.82. Of course these means are very different between male and female students as will be explained in the following part. The teacher's way of testing the students' knowledge of English language or even the school's system of testing should be reconsidered to cope with the student's own needs and interests and in a way that also guarantees the students' progress in learning the English language.

### 6.1 ANXIETY AND GENDER

Figure (3) shows the gender differences concerning each group of anxiety causes and whether this difference is significant or not.

**Figure (3) Gender differences in mean values.**

Group Statistics

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
test anxiety	MALE	15	2.8978	.28381	.07328
	FEMALE	25	3.2293	.19349	.03870
communication apprehension	MALE	15	2.4121	.68105	.17585
	FEMALE	25	3.0655	.77829	.15566
negative evaluation	MALE	15	2.5238	.45390	.11720
	FEMALE	25	3.0743	.31709	.06342

Independent Samples Test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower		Upper
test anxiety	Equal variances assumed	2.168	.149	-4.396	38	.000	-.33156	.07542	-.48423	-.17888
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.001	21.903	.001	-.33156	.08287	-.50346	-.15965
communication apprehension	Equal variances assumed	2.389	.131	-2.689	38	.011	-.65333	.24297	-1.14520	-.16146
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.782	32.791	.009	-.65333	.23484	-1.13124	-.17543
negative evaluation	Equal variances assumed	1.976	.168	-4.514	38	.000	-.55048	.12194	-.79734	-.30362
	Equal variances not assumed			-4.131	22.285	.000	-.55048	.13325	-.82662	-.27433

As shown in the figure above, the average mean of test anxiety for male students is about 2.9 whereas for female students it is 3.2. We see through t-test that the difference between male and female students is of great significance as it is less than 5% as shown in the table. In fact it is 0% when the equal variances are assumed. Female students are more test anxious than their male counterparts. This might be attributed to the female's human nature of being more sensitive to criticism by their parents or their own teachers. This makes them anxious of having any exam. For communication apprehension, the same result of differences between male and female students was discovered with a male mean value of about 2.4 and a female mean value of more than 3. This again shows the girls anxiety towards participating in the classroom activities and communicating with the teacher or with their own colleagues. It is clear from this result that the teaching strategies are questionable and need to be more encouraging for the students, especially female ones.

Concerning fear of negative evaluation, female students in the same way showed higher levels of anxiety than boys with an average mean value of the group for females of 3 contrary to 2.5 for male students. The difference is of great significance as it is only 0% on T-test scale.

## 6.2 ANXIETY AND AGE.

The students who participated in the questionnaire were divided into two age groups. The first is the age group of 11-14 year old students and the second is 15-18 year old students. After analyzing the

data, it turned out that there is a different anxiety level exhibited by different age groups as it is shown in the following figure.

**Figure (4) Age differences in mean values.**

	age group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
test anxiety	11-14 years	15	3.2533	.22140	.05716
	15-18 years	25	3.0160	.27707	.05541
communication apprehension	11-14 years	15	3.2848	.86508	.22336
	15-18 years	25	2.5418	.62516	.12503
negative evaluation	11-14 years	15	3.0286	.49546	.12793
	15-18 years	25	2.7714	.41239	.08248

**Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
test anxiety	Equal variances assumed	.082	.777	2.817	38	.008	.23733	.08425
	Equal variances not assumed			2.981	34.766	.005	.23733	.07961
communication apprehension	Equal variances assumed	2.785	.103	3.147	38	.003	.74303	.23609
	Equal variances not assumed			2.903	22.840	.008	.74303	.25598
negative evaluation	Equal variances assumed	.584	.449	1.770	38	.085	.25714	.14527
	Equal variances not assumed			1.689	25.489	.103	.25714	.15221

It is clear from the table above that the older the students, the less the anxiety level is. For example, when we compare the mean value of the age groups concerning test anxiety, we find that the younger group means value is 3.2 and the older group mean is only 3 with a significance value of less than 1% which means a high difference. Similarly, when we compare the mean value of the two age groups concerning communication apprehension, we find that the younger group exhibited a higher degree of anxiety with 3.2 mean compared to only 2.5 for the older group with a high significance value of less than 1%. The third aspect of classroom anxiety –fear of negative evaluation- has less difference with a mean value of 3 compared to 2.7 for the older group with no significant difference -more than five percent- in fact it is 8%.

In every group of anxiety causes or aspects, age played an influential though varied effect on the level of anxiety for students of Al Wahda Arab Iskola School inside the classroom. This might be attributed to the experience gained in learning English by older students or because they have become familiar with their teachers not like the younger ones who meet new teachers in each educational stage at school.

### 6.3 ANXIETY AND NATIONALITY

When the citizenship or the nationality of the students was compared, it turned out that there is no or just a slight difference between the students who were born in Hungary and those who are in the country for a temporary period concerning the level of anxiety. Figure (5) will make it clearer.

**Figure (5): Comparing the mean values of different nationalities.**

Group Statistics						
	citizenship	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	
test anxiety	Hungarian	20	3.0400	.31745	.07098	
	non-Hungarian	20	3.1700	.22631	.05060	
communication apprehension	Hungarian	20	2.8773	.89912	.20105	
	non-Hungarian	20	2.7636	.70874	.15848	
negative evaluation	Hungarian	20	2.7929	.53145	.11884	
	non-Hungarian	20	2.9429	.36613	.08187	

  

Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
test anxiety	Equal variances assumed	1.289	.263	-1.491	38	.144	-.13000	.08717
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.491	34.348	.145	-.13000	.08717
communication apprehension	Equal variances assumed	9.578	.004	.444	38	.660	.11364	.25600
	Equal variances not assumed			.444	36.035	.660	.11364	.25600
negative evaluation	Equal variances assumed	7.906	.008	-1.039	38	.305	-.15000	.14431
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.039	33.720	.306	-.15000	.14431

The mean value of anxiety groups was as follows: 3 for Hungarian students versus 3.1 for non Hungarians concerning test anxiety. The difference in communication apprehension was even smaller of 2.87 for Hungarians and 2.76 for non Hungarians. A small mean difference is shown related to fear of negative evaluation with 2.7 for Hungarians and 2.9 for non Hungarian students in that school. This can be attributed to the fear of negative comments from the families of non-Hungarians where Arab children face more strict observation from their parents, whereas Hungarian Arab students are given more freedom in their life choices. In all of the three anxiety groups the significance level is not worth mentioning as it is above 5% in all groups of anxiety causes. This might prove that the problem is not in the student him or herself but actually it is a matter of school and teacher strategies that need to be amended to meet the needs of the Hungarian and non Hungarian students who study at the school.

Concerning taking more English classes, most of the male and female students are eager to take more classes. This means that even though they have some kind of anxiety, they still have the motivation to advance and progress in learning the English language. (Item number 5). Approximately all of the students (males and females) said that they think of other things in the FL class, (item 6). This might be attributed to boredom or lack of students involvement in the classroom activities but not due to lack of interest in learning English which can be proved by items (28, 5, 11). This means that some new teaching methods should be applied to get the students more involved in the learning process.

A lot should be done to overcome the problem of anxiety for students of Al Wahda Arab Iskola in Budapest. It is the responsibility of the teachers, parents, government and even the students themselves. Tsiplakides, Iakovos., Keramida, Areti.(2009) for example offered several solutions concerning the problem of classroom anxiety in general and the speaking anxiety in particular. They

think that the first solution should start from offering good classroom atmosphere for the students like rooms, teachers, learning materials, learning strategies...etc. They also suggested that focus should be on the communication process and the use of the language instead of focusing on evaluation itself. Correcting students' mistakes they suggested should be indirect, they suggest that it should be in a way that makes the student avoids embarrassment. They say that the students' effort should be praised regardless of how little it is, this gives the students a strong motive to participate again and not to be afraid of making mistakes.

## **CONCLUSION**

This paper examines anxiety levels in learning English at Al Wahda Arab Iskola in Budapest in Hungary, how different it is between male and female students, young and older students and Hungarian and non-Hungarian students. It also deals with what should be done to reduce the effect of that phenomenon on the students and the learning process in general. This study has come up with the result that there is a high level of anxiety in learning English in that school and that female students and young students exhibit more anxiety in learning that language than their male counterparts and their older ones. Future research can be conducted on other schools or even universities to examine the causes and offer the possible solutions to the problem of classroom anxiety in learning any foreign language not necessarily English.

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