

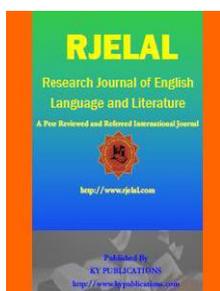


THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANXIETY PROVOKING FACTORS AND EFL LEARNERS' WILLINGNESS TO COMMUNICATE

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the relationship between anxiety provoking factors and English as a foreign language (EFL) learners' willingness to communicate in English language classes. 350 female high school students, grades two and three, in five different schools in Kerman, district 2 (15 to 17 years old) were the participants of this study. To homogenize the subjects of the study sample, the researcher employed Cambridge Placement Test to function as a test of homogenization, and based on the placement test, the intermediate students were considered as the sample of the study. The researcher employed two instruments to collect the required data (a WTC questionnaire, and an anxiety questionnaire). To analyze the collected data through the two questionnaires, the researcher used correlation. The results revealed that there is a negative relationship between anxiety provoking factors and EFL learners' tendency to communicate. The most important relationship was investigated and proved in terms of the fear of having grammatical mistakes, fear of not knowing enough vocabulary, teacher's feedback, and lack of self-perception.

Keywords: anxiety provoking factors, WTC, EFL learners

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that language acquisition is a complex process which involves several factors, and is highly influenced by learners' affective factors. Consequently, this study is intended to investigate the relationship between anxiety and WTC (willingness to communicate). Language learning is a process that involves affective factors. Second language researchers have long been aware that second language learning is often associated with affective factors, among which anxiety has been recognized as an important predictor of second language performance. Some researchers have suggested a possible relationship

between anxiety and willingness to communicate in English language classes.

As an affective variable, anxiety is assumed to influence second language acquisition. Much research (Horwitz , Horwitz & cope , 1986 ; Young , 1991) has been carried out to find the correlation between anxiety and achievement in learning a second language. Most studies (Horwitz , 1986 ; MacInvyre & Gardner , 1994) found that anxiety and achievement are negatively correlated and second language anxiety has a debilitating effect on the oral performance of speakers of English as a second language.

One of the variables which has been frequently foregrounded in literature as playing an influential

role in L2 learning is learners' L2 WTC. For learning to talk in the L2, learners need to be willing to communicate in the L2. Developing learners' L2 WTC should be the fundamental goal of language instruction. MacIntyre et al. (2001) defined L2 WTC as a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons. Considering WTC as a situational construct, researchers have examined how it is influenced by situational variables such as contextual variables and social support. A student-friendly and supportive environment should be created so that learners would be more willing to talk in class. In a stress-free supporting environment, learners can build a better rapport not only with each other but also with the teacher, which will in turn boost the learning process to a considerable extent.

Anxiety acts as a barrier in the process of second language acquisition. So this study probes the relationship between anxiety provoking factors and EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English language classes.

2. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This study follows Rogers' Humanistic Approach, and MacIntyre et al.'s Heuristic model of WTC in L2.

2.1 Roger's Humanistic Approach

Roger's humanism is not concerned with the actual process of cognitive learning since, he feels, if the context for learning is created properly, then, learners will learn everything they need to. The teacher as a facilitator must therefore provide the nurturing context for learning and not see his mission as one of rather programmatically feeding students, quantities of knowledge which they subsequently devour. So Personal emotions and aesthetic appreciations should be encouraged. This aspect of humanism tends to reject whatever hurts people and supports aesthetic enjoyment. In a humane language classroom, the learners' feelings are respected. It seeks to encourage teachers to consider the learners as whole persons where their feelings, intellect, protective reactions, interpersonal relationships, and desire to learn are considered with empathy and balance. A humanistic approach to learning will surely make learning an interesting process for the students, a viable

method to teachers and more plausible approach for the academicians. The affective aspects of language learning are as important as the cognitive aspects, and so the learner should be treated in some sense as a whole person. The answers to language learning problems are more likely to come from psychology than from linguistics. "Humanistic techniques engage the whole person, including the emotions and feelings (the affective realm) as well as linguistic knowledge and behavioral skills". Fully functioning persons live with all of their feelings and reactions and they can reach their full potential. Human beings are considered as whole person in humanistic approach: body (physical aspect), mind and brain (mental aspect), and emotions and feelings (affective aspect).

2.2 MacIntyre et al. WTC Heuristic Model

MacIntyre et al. (1998) conceptualized WTC in L2 in a theoretical model in which social and individual context, affective cognitive context, motivational propensities, situated antecedents, and behavioral intention are interrelated in influencing WTC in second language acquisition. Some researchers have argued that a fundamental goal of second language education should be the creation of WTC in the language learning process. It is also suggested that higher WTC among learners leads to increased opportunity for practice in L2 and authentic L2 usage (MacIntyre et al., 2003). In the communicative classroom, conscientious language teachers want motivated students who demonstrate a willingness to communicate in the L2. A lack of willingness inhibits effective interaction and language production. Recent technological advances have changed the classroom so that interaction has come to mean not only spoken interaction but electronic interaction as well. Focusing on the classroom context, MacIntyre et al. (2001) measured L2 WTC in the four skill areas of speaking, reading, writing, and listening both inside and outside the classroom. social context model does not deal with L2 usage, but describes the interrelations among interethnic contact, L2 confidence, L2 competence, and L2 identity, as Within the pyramid model of WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998), social situation refers not only to the physical location of interaction but also other elements of the interaction, including the

participants in the social exchange, A situation in which social acceptance is one of the most salient motives for adolescents. It seems that the students' ability to feel secure in the relationship with the

other person is a major concern and a key influence on WTC (MacIntyre et al., 1998).

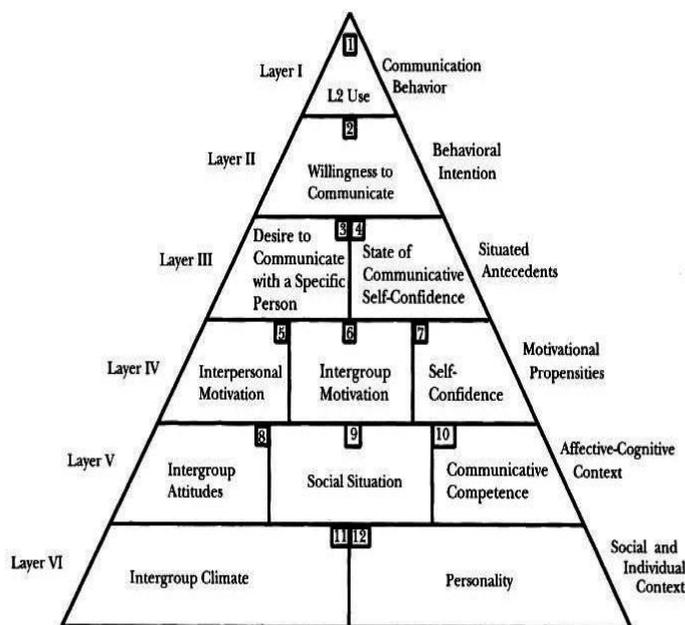


Figure 2.1 MacIntyre et al.'s heuristic model of WTC in L2 (1998)

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Individual Differences in Language Learning

Variability in human behavior is a factor which distinguishes social sciences from natural sciences. General theories in social sciences do not apply to all human beings even when all the environmental factors have been identical. Individual differences (IDs) among people play an important role beyond general theories which are advanced by social scientists. IDs are defined as "characteristics or traits in respect of which individuals may be shown to differ from each other" (Dörnyei, 2005, p.1). IDs seem to be nuisances which prevent formulation of general principles to account for human behavior in psychology (Dörnyei, 2005).

In order to account for the differences in learners' rate and degree of success in learning a second or foreign language, second language acquisition researchers have also come up with a series of ID variables.

3.2 Individual Differences and WTC

One of the ID variables which has recently been introduced in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research is willingness to communicate (WTC).

MacIntyre, Baker, Clement and Donovan (2003) defined WTC as "...the predisposition toward or away from communicating, given the choice" (p.538). Supposing that many factors influence a person's willingness to communicate, such as fear of speaking, lack of self-esteem and the issue of introversion and extroversion, the importance of evaluating the degree of the effect of WTC in success in SLA becomes clear.

In order to estimate the level of WTC in communicating in second language (L2), it is necessary to identify the people's reactions to speaking situations. When presented with an opportunity to use their L2, some people choose to speak up and others choose to remain silent. WTC represents the psychological preparedness to use the L2 when the opportunity arises (MacIntyre, 2007). It is assumed that the degree of WTC is a factor in learning a second language and the ability to communicate in that language. The higher WTC a speaker has the more likely he is to succeed in second language (L2) acquisition. High WTC is associated with increased frequency and amount of communication. The choice to speak or to remain

silent seems to be a factor in the success of a second language learner. When the opportunity to use the L2 arises, it is not unusual to be 'of two minds'; one mind wishes to approach the opportunity and the other wishes to withdraw from it (MacIntyre & MacKinnon, 2007). So if one can determine the contributing factors in the learners' choice of the first alternative: i.e. to approach the use of the L2, one has in fact created a successful learning situation. According to MacIntyre (2007), both individual factors (anxiety, motivation, attitudes, interpersonal attraction, etc.) and social contextual factors (ethno linguistic vitality, language contact, etc.) can enhance or reduce WTC. These factors interact at the moment a person chooses to speak in L2.

WTC model of communication as a new trend of the study of second language acquisition (SLA) has brought about a lot of controversy in the field (MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, Conrod, 2001; Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre, 1994; MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, & Donovan, 2002; Yashima, 2002). If one takes it for granted that WTC plays an important role in L2 acquisition, we have to go a step further and determine the factors that contribute to the enhancement of it. One of these factors is the learner's motivation. It has been recognized that students' motivation is directly (Hashimoto, 2002; MacIntyre, Baker, Clement, Donovan, 2002; Yashima, 2002; Baker, MacIntyre, 2000) or indirectly related to their WTC.

However, Dörnyei and Skehan (2003) viewed L2 WTC as an extension of the motivation construct. Therefore the relationship between the two concepts becomes an important issue to the extent that a path has been perceived between L2 WTC and motivation.

MacIntyre and Charos (1996) inferred a path leading from L2 WTC to motivation. The other way around was proposed by Yashima (2002). He hypothesized a direct path from motivation to L2 WTC, based on MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) WTC model.

The other important contributing factor to the enhancement of WTC is the learner's attitude. It has been suggested that, if a person has a positive attitude toward learning the second language, they may be more willing to use it in the future (MacIntyre

& Charos, 1996). Studies have illustrated a direct and/or indirect relationship between WTC and attitude. While Yashima (2002) indicated a direct relation between students' WTC and their attitude toward international community in the EFL (English as a Foreign language) context, in the ESL (English as a Second Language) context, Clement et al. (2003) showed an indirect relation through linguistic self-confidence between WTC and attitude toward the other language group.

Some studies have focused on the role of personality traits on the degree of WTC. MacIntyre et al. (1999) have illustrated that personality traits of introversion/extraversion and emotional stability are related to WTC through communication apprehension and perceived language competence. Similarly, MacIntyre and Charos (1996) have demonstrated that while personality traits of intellect, extraversion, emotional stability, and conscientiousness are related to WTC through perceived language competence, communication apprehension, and motivation, the personality trait of agreeableness is directly related to WTC.

However, McCroskey and Richmond (1990) treated WTC as a personality trait and defined it as variability in talking behavior. They argued that even though situational variables might affect one's willingness to communicate, individuals display similar WTC tendencies in various situations. Moreover, they identified introversion, self-esteem, communication competence, communication apprehension and cultural diversity as antecedents that lead to differences in WTC. Therefore, the study of the contributing factors in WTC leads to a sort of integrative motivation which includes all of the factors in a unified whole. MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) developed a comprehensive model of willingness to communicate in L2. They integrated linguistic, communicative and social psychological variables to explain one's WTC in her second language. WTC as "the probability of engaging in communication when free to choose to do so" (p. 546). However, MacIntyre et al. (1998) did not treat WTC in L2 as a personality trait but as a situational variable that has both transient and enduring influences. Moreover, they theorized that WTC influence not only speaking

mode but also listening, writing and reading modes. Consequently, the study of the role of WTC in L2 learning necessitates a close examination of it in the real language use environment. Hashimoto (2002) conducted a study with Japanese ESL students to investigate the effects of WTC and motivation on actual L2 use.

Another controversy is the investigation of the components which are more important in WTC in L2 learning. In their WTC in L2 model, MacIntyre, Clement, Dörnyei, and Noels (1998) proposed that personality has an influence on one's willingness to communicate in second/foreign language. Similarly, MacIntyre et al. (1998) maintained that certain personality types may predict one's reaction to a member of second/foreign language group. MacIntyre et al. (1998) hypothesized that authoritarian personality types would not be willing to communicate with a member of an ethnic group who is believed to be inferior. Similarly, they argue that an ethnocentric person, who believes that her ethnic group is superior to other ethnic groups, would not be willing to communicate in a foreign language. These factors help explain why some learners who achieve high levels of L2 linguistic competence remain reticent L2 speakers, as well as those with limited competence who speak incessantly. Theoretically, levels of anxiety and perceived competence coalesce to create a state of L2 self-confidence that, when combined with the desire to speak to a particular person result in WTC in a given situation (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Clement (1986) considers L2 self-confidence to be a motivational process, one that links WTC to a broad literature on motivation. Therefore, WTC is a composite ID variable that draws together a host of learner variables that have been well established as influences on second language acquisition and use, resulting in a construct in which psychological and linguistic factors are integrated in an organic manner (Dörnyei, 2005).

3.3 Anxiety and Language Learning

Khodadady and Khajavy (2013) investigated the relationship between language anxiety and motivation among Iranian EFL learners. Secondly, a foreign language achievement model based on language learning anxiety and motivation was

developed and tested by structural equation modeling. To achieve the purposes, foreign language classroom anxiety scale (FLCAS) and language learning orientation scale (LLOS) were administered to 264 participants. The results of the study showed that motivation and less self-determined types of external motivation are positively related to language anxiety. Also, intrinsic motivation and identified regulation were negatively related to language anxiety. The application of the structural equation modeling showed that both anxiety and motivation significantly predict the English achievement of the language learners within an Iranian context.

Shabani (2012) examined levels and sources of anxiety and their relationship with fear of negative evaluation among Iranian EFL learners. Data was gathered through administering two scales. Foreign language anxiety classroom scale (FLCAS) and fear of negative evaluation (FNE) scale were administered to a sample of 61 Iranian EFL learners. To analyze data, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were run. Descriptive analysis indicated that participants suffer from language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The result of independent sample t-test showed there was no significant difference between males and females in the levels of anxiety. The computation of means and standard deviations of statements in questionnaires revealed that the prime sources of language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation are fear of failing class and fear of leaving unfavorable impression on others, respectively. Furthermore, Pearson correlation analysis indicated there is a significant correlation between foreign language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

Hashemi (2011) used a qualitative semi-structured interview and focus-group discussion technique to investigate the factors behind language anxiety among the Iranian language learners both within the classroom and in the social context. The participants were 60 English language students majoring in English translation and literature who were chosen randomly among 300 other students. The findings suggested that language anxiety can originate from learner's own sense of self, their self-related cognitions, language learning difficulties,

differences in learners' and target language cultures, differences in social status of the speakers and interlocutors, and from the fear of losing self-identity. Ozturk and Gurbuz (2014) investigated the level determining factors of foreign language speaking anxiety and students' perceptions of them in a Turkish EFL context. Pre-intermediate students (N=383) of an English preparatory program at a state university participated in the study. The data regarding the level of EFL speaking anxiety were collected through a questionnaire, and then, randomly selected participants (N=19) were 26 interviewed to get in-depth data on speaking anxiety. The quantitative data was analyzed through descriptive statistics, and the qualitative data was analyzed via content analysis. Although the results of the quantitative data revealed that students experienced a low level of EFL speaking anxiety, the quantitative data demonstrated that most of the students perceive speaking skill as an anxiety provoking factor. It was also found that pronunciation, immediate questions, fear of making mistakes and negative evaluations are the major causes of EFL speaking anxiety.

4. Methodology

350 female high school students, grades two and three, in five different schools in Kerman, Iran (15 to 17 years old) were the participants of this study. In fact, the subjects were a combination of the second and third high school grades. To

homogenize the subjects of the study sample, the researcher employed Cambridge Placement Test to function as a test of homogenization, and based on the placement test, the intermediate students were considered as the sample of the study. The researcher employed two instruments to collect the required data. The first one was a WTC questionnaire designed based on the questionnaires of Yashim , 1999 and MacIntyre et al. ,2001. It was a 16 item questionnaire using five-point Likert style (1= completely agree, 2=agree, 3=no idea, 4=disagree, and 5=completely disagree). The second instrument was an anxiety questionnaire designed based on the questionnaires of Horwitz et al., 1986, and Xu, 2011. It consisted of 20 items. A 5-point Likert scale (1- completely agree, 2-agree, 3-no idea, 4-disagree and finally 5-completely disagree) was used to gather the data. The questionnaire was classified into four distinct components.

Table 4.1: Anxiety Questionnaire Components

No.	Categories	items
1	Lack of Self- perception	1-5
2	Anxiety of Teacher's Feedback	6-10
3	Fear of not Knowing enough Vocabulary	11-15
4	Fear of having Grammatical Mistakes	16-20

5. Results and Discussion

In this study, anxiety was considered as independent or predictor variable, and WTC was the dependent or criterion variable in this study.

Table 5.1: Descriptive Data of Subcategories

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Lack of Self- perception	350	5	25	15.21	4.00	-0.11	-0.34
Anxiety of Teacher's Feedback	350	5	25	15.93	4.34	-0.03	-0.50
Fear of not Knowing enough Vocabulary	350	5	25	15.33	4.01	-0.15	-0.17
Fear of having Grammatical Mistakes	350	5	25	16.33	4.04	-0.40	0.07

Based on the data in table 5.1, the means and standard deviations of four categories have been presented. According to the data, the mean score for lack of self-perception is estimated to be M=15.21 and it is M=15.53 for anxiety of teacher's feedback. On the other hand, the mean for fear of not knowing enough vocabulary is calculated to be

M=15.33 and this is M=16.33 for fear of having grammatical mistakes. The relevant standard deviations for these variables are 4, 4.34, 4.01, and 4.04 respectively.

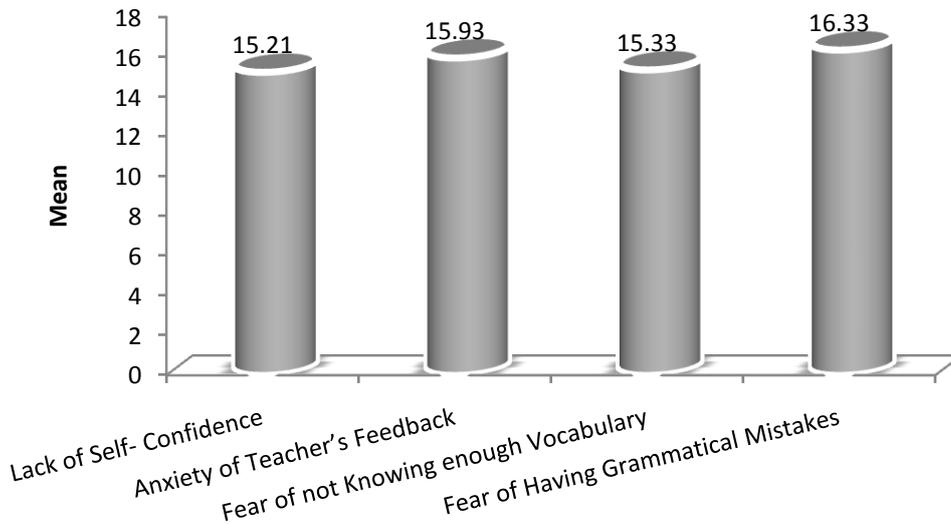


Figure 5.1 Bargraph on Subcategories

What is the relationship between high school EFL learners' lack of self-perception and their WTC?

To discuss this question, the information in table 5.2 can help. As it can be understood from the table, there is meaningful relationship between the two variables; lack of self perception and WTC, P value= 0.0005 < .05. Therefore with 99% of confidence it can be claimed that there is a negative

relationship between the learners' lack of self-perception and their WTC. It indicates that as the learners' lack of self perception increases, in the same way, their willingness to communicate decreases or vice versa. This can be supported by referring to figure 5.2 where the variance for anxiety makes up 32% of willingness to communicate.

Table 5.2: Correlation between Lack of Self-perception and WTC

Variables	Pearson Correlation	P-Value	N
Lack of Self- perception Willingness to Communicate	-0.566	0.0005	350

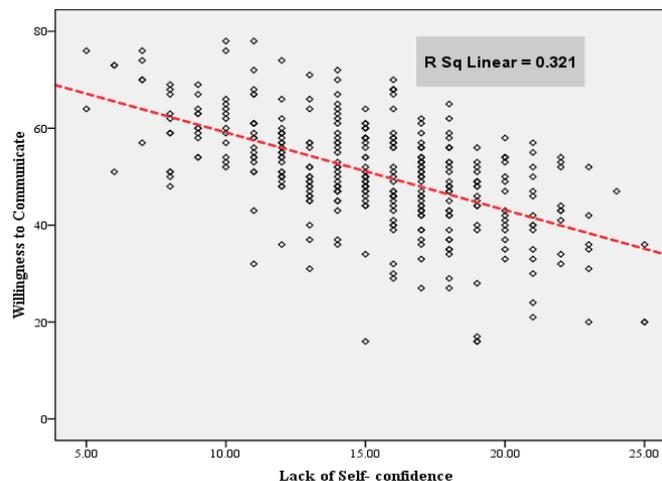


Figure 5.2 WTC and Lack of Self-perception

As the figure 5.2 displays, there is a meaningful relationship between lack of self-perception and the students' WTC.

What is the relationship between high school EFL learners' anxiety of teacher's feedback and their WTC?

There is a meaningful relationship between EFL learners' anxiety of teacher's feedback and WTC (table 5.3), P value= 0.0005 < .05. Therefore with 99% of confidence it can be claimed that there is a negative relationship between EFL learners' anxiety of teacher's feedback and their WTC. It indicates the idea that as EFL learners' anxiety of teacher's feedback increases, in the same way, their willingness to communicate decreases or vice versa. This idea can be supported by figure 5.3 where the variance for anxiety makes up 32% of willingness to communicate.

Table 5.3 Correlation between EFL Learners' Anxiety of Teacher's Feedback and WTC

Variables	Pearson Correlation	P-Value	N
Anxiety of Teacher's Feedback	-0.57	0.0005	350
Willingness to Communicate			

Figure 5.3 indicates that the variance of WTC can be applied to the EFL learners' anxiety of teacher's feedback. The scatted spots can show the correlation of the two variables.

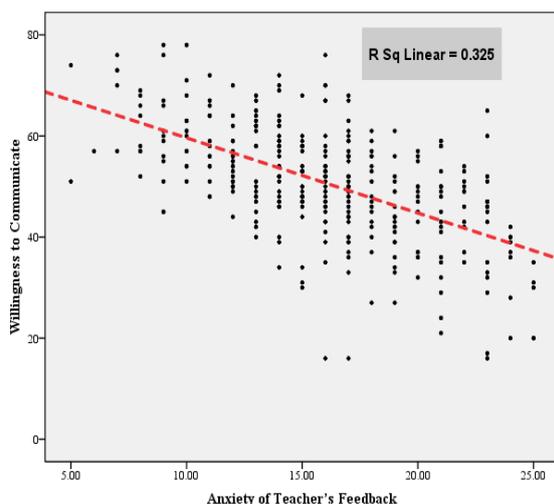


Figure 5.3 WTC and EFL Learners' Anxiety of Teacher's Feedback

What is the relationship between high school students' fear of not knowing enough vocabulary and their WTC?

To support the idea given above, the data in table 5.4 can help. As it can be understood from the table, there is a negative relationship between the two variables; not knowing enough vocabulary and WTC, P value= 0.0005 < .05. Therefore with 99% of confidence it can be claimed that there is a meaningful relationship between the two variables of not knowing enough vocabulary and their WTC. It indicates the idea that as the level of not knowing enough vocabulary increases, in the same way, their willingness to communicate decreases or vice versa. This idea can be supported by referring to figure 5.4 where the variance for anxiety makes up 31% of willingness to communicate.

Table 5.4: Correlation between Fear of not Knowing enough Vocabulary and WTC

Variables	Pearson Correlation	P-Value	N
Fear of not Knowing enough Vocabulary	-0.558	0.0005	350
Willingness to Communicate			

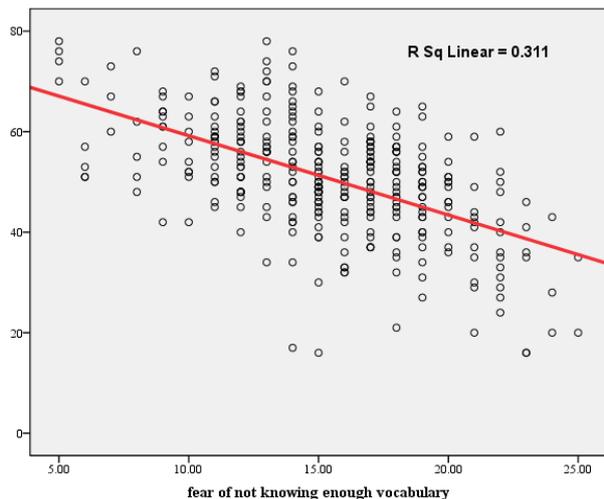


Figure 5.4 WTC and EFL Learners' Fear of not Knowing enough Vocabulary

What is the relationship between the high school learners' fear of having grammatical mistakes and their WTC?

To examine this question, Pearson correlation was run. Based on the data in table 5.5,

there is a negative relationship between the two variables; fear of having grammatical mistakes and WTC, P value= 0.0005 < .05. Therefore with 99% of confidence it can be claimed that there is a meaningful relationship between the two variables of fear of having grammatical mistakes by the learners and their WTC. It indicates the idea that

more fear of having grammatical mistakes the female learners have, the less they are willing to communicate or vice versa. This interpretation can be supported by referring to figure 5.5 where the variance for fear of having grammatical mistakes makes up 18% of willingness to communicate.

Table 5.5: Correlation between Fear of having Grammatical Mistakes and WTC

Variables	Pearson Correlation	P-Value	N
Fear of having Grammatical Mistakes Willingness to Communicate	-0.434	0.0005	350

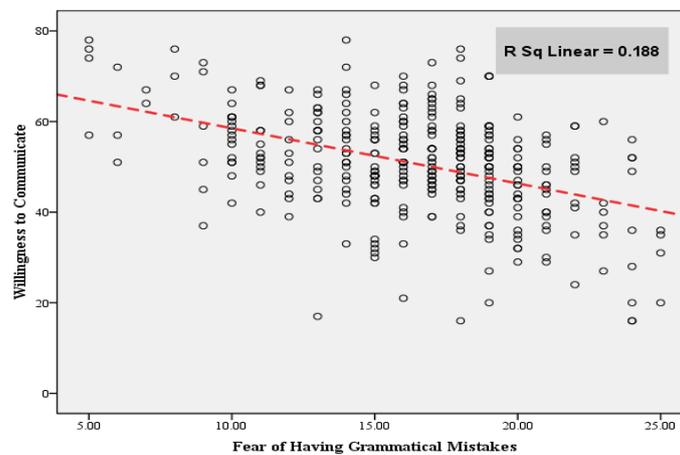


Figure 5.5 WTC and EFL Learners' Fear of having Grammatical Mistakes

What is the most effective anxiety provoking factor in making the students unwilling to communicate?

To examine the above question, Friedman test was run. The data in table 5.6 and figure 5.6 offers the detained information in this regard. As it can be seen, the test value is calculated to be 38.76: ($\chi^2=38.76$, $df=3$), and with 99% of confidence it can be claimed that there is a meaningful relationship between different variables of lack of self confidence, anxiety of teachers' feedback, fear of

not knowing enough vocabulary and finally fear of having grammatical mistakes; $p=0.0005$. The highest mean belongs to fear of having grammatical mistakes (mean=2.81) and the lowest one belongs to fear of not knowing enough vocabulary (mean=2.29). Therefore, it can be concluded the most anxiety evoking factor among the language learners of the study is first the fear of insufficient grammar knowledge and the one with the least effect is fear of not having enough vocabulary knowledge.

Table 5.6: Friedman Test of Variability

Factors	Mean Rank	Priority	Chi-square	N	df	P-Value
Lack of Self- perception	2.35	3 rd	38.76	350	3	0.0005
Anxiety of Teacher's Feedback	2.54	2 nd				
Fear of not Knowing enough Vocabulary	2.29	The last				
Fear of having Grammatical Mistakes	2.81	The first				

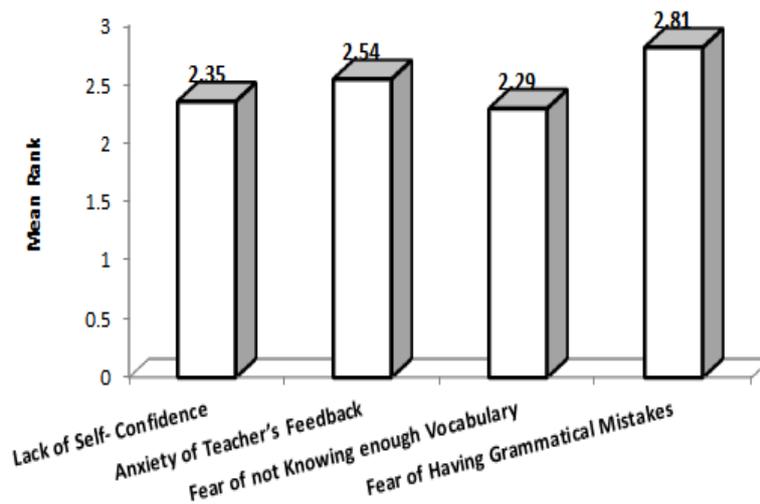


Figure 5.6 Rank Order of four Categories

6. Conclusion

The study was set out to explore the relationship between anxiety provoking factors and EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English language classes. The main findings were summarized in result part and this section synthesizes the findings to answer the study's research question:

1. What is the relationship between anxiety provoking factors and EFL learners' willingness to communicate in English language classes?

Evidence from this thesis shows that there is a meaningful negative relationship between anxiety provoking factors and EFL learners' WTC. Thus, of these four variables, lack of self perception, anxiety of teacher's feedback, fear of not knowing enough vocabulary and finally fear of having grammatical mistakes, the highest mean belongs to fear of having grammatical mistakes (mean=2.81) and the lowest belongs to fear of not knowing enough vocabulary (mean=2.29). Therefore, the most anxiety evoking factor among the language learners of the study is first the fear of insufficient grammar knowledge and the one with the least effect is fear of not having enough vocabulary knowledge. Horwitz et al. (1986) noted that students who are apprehensive about making mistakes in front of others seem to feel constantly tested and perceive every correction as a failure. Anxious participants tended to overestimate the number and seriousness of their errors, while low-anxious students took

them lightly (MacIntyre et al., 1998). Speaking anxiety creates a low self-confidence which makes students remain quiet in all situations, even if they have the capacity to express themselves and knowledge that is worth hearing.

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