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Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, and Enjoyment During Study Abroad: A Review of Selected Paper

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Abstrak

From as simple as speaking up to speaking in public, from finishing a test to studying abroad, anxiety is historically a negative variable affecting many language learners. This paper reviews one of the latest research articles purposively involving anxiety, second language acquisition, and studying abroad written by Dewey, D. P., Belnap, R. K., & Steffen, P. (2018), entitled "Anxiety: Stress, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, and Enjoyment During Study Abroad in Amman, Jordan." This study conducted in Jordan is a follow up to all the authors' project in 2016 with participants who are beneficiaries of a quarter of a century experimentation. This present paper did not adequately funneled its aims but excellently analyzed previous literature's and its own research design in a way that the average reader would understand, linking its findings with previous literature's findings to give vivid seminal and contemporary context so despite the inconsistent flow. Moreover, this article's content is valid (as all references are accurate) and well-argued. Not only is it highly recommended for its innovative anxiety-measure, but also because this research explored three gaps in anxiety and SLA studies: anxiety and L2 development in communicative environment (outside of classroom) abroad, degree of anxiety after receiving interventions to cope with anxiety, and anxiety levels in positive situation (enjoyable classroom). The research found despite levels of classroom enjoyment increasing, learners still show physiological signs of increased anxiety levels, more so if they have the tendency toward anxiety and low proficiency score prior to SA. Therefore this paper seen anxiety as a physiological conditions on "worry about an event" (p. 2), which makes this study believes that anxiety in language education context is an emotional state in which learners' feel negative about their knowledge and skill in their language performance.

Keynotes: Anxiety, foreign language classroom context, study abroad, a paper review.
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INTRODUCTION

As 2018 nears its end, three Brigham Young University (BYU) scholars published a 22-page anxiety research article titled "*Anxiety: Stress, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, and Enjoyment During Study Abroad in Amman, Jordan*" as a follow up to their 2016 Project Perseverance, which was meant to help students become self-regulating learners (Belnap *et al.*, 2016), in memory of a member of the project who played a key role in shaping the research. Japanese Language Acquisition and Linguistics Professor Dan P. Dewey, Arabic Language Acquisition and Linguistics Professor R. Kirk Belnap, and Psychology Professor and Clinical Training Director Patrick Steffen, aimed to investigate the variables and relationships of types of anxiety (i.e. overall anxiety level, classroom anxiety (CA), foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA)) with second language (L2) development and foreign language enjoyment (FLE) in foreign language classroom and daily activities outside of the classroom.

What is notable is the authors did not merely contribute into the study of the

most common problematic emotion in studying a foreign language let alone doing it abroad (Wu *et al*., 2015), but they closely examined numerous anxiety research and its latest methodology (referencing 97 studies ranging from 1953 to 2017), used four sets of methods to measure four different elements of which they brought forth an innovative new method that is significantly less invasive than the old one and explored un-investigated gap in the research of the most studied emotion in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (MacIntyre, 2017), contributing to a research field as old as two centuries ever since the conception of 'anxiety' by the existentialist philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1844). This article review also aims to contribute to the academic field especially in second language acquisition abroad because an article review discusses and analyzes the current understanding, significant gaps, prominent scholars and discoveries as well as speculates the future directions of research articles. This study sees article review as an academic work which functions to give an analysis meant to determine whether or not a research article is credible to be replicated.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Clear in reflecting the content the title may be, both the title and abstract are rather dry, and lack any drive or urgency of purpose. The title is fairly confusing with its seemingly redundant and ineffective employment of the word 'anxiety' at the beginning. While punctuation marks "suggest rather than define" (Mulvey, 2016), colon in titles is meant to emphasize and introduce a list, and a research article must be clear in its purpose instead of relying on the quick-wittedness of readers. Stress and FLCA are associations of anxiety, enjoyment is not.

Despite this, the title is well-synced with the abstract, which was written to be the perfect summary of the entirety of the article. The abstract captures the sum of information readers would have should they skim the article but doesn't address any sense of importance of anxiety as other studies' abstracts about anxiety do (Schotanus-Dijkstra *et al.*, 2019; Bakkane *et al.*, 2019; Chukhraev *et al.*, 2017; Watt *et al*., 1997). Going "beyond previous SA research by examining how anxiety develops and connects with language proficiency development over SA" doesn't count as its purpose because it's simply their overall method and how the article distinguishes itself from previous studies.

The keywords do not do a sufficient job in identifying the main area of focus (Yeong, 2014). Listing 'anxiety' and 'stress' as separate keywords when the authors use it interchangeably (p. 2) throughout the article is redundant, considering the keyword limit suggested by the Cambridge Core guideline is 3-5, which the authors went against since they listed 8. Foreign language classroom is clearly part of the main focus since its level of anxiety and enjoyment are part of the research question, yet it was not listed. Meanwhile, two of the listed keywords, 'Arabic' and 'Project Perseverance', are not focal points of the article, the former never being elaborated and the latter never even mentioned but only once as the title of the authors' previous published article (Belnap *et al*., 2016) (p. 18).

Considering the length of the article, it has low-frequency usage of the keywords that do describe the article's area of focus: 'oral proficiency' is used only 5 times, 'study abroad' 17 times, 'hair cortisol' 18 times, and 'enjoyment' 28 times. But this is found to be understandable because the article favored using the shortened versions of the full terms: 'oral proficiency' is mainly referred with 'OPI' which stands for 'oral proficiency

interview', 'enjoyment' is mostly referred with 'FLE' which stands for 'foreign language enjoyment', 'study abroad' is frequently shortened as 'SA', and the latter word of 'hair cortisol' is more preferred. Furthermore, the authors neither indented the line listing the keywords nor differentiated the font size of the line. Thus the keywords blend with the introduction of the article (p. 1).

The first 3 pages are taken by the introduction in which anxiety itself is never explicitly stated to be something interesting or of importance, merely that it has been frequently studied for many years, though the authors did a good job in identifying the term by viewing "stress as a response to stressors (demands exceeding current resources) and think of anxiety (worry over stressors) as an additional stressor" (p. 2) thus why they used anxiety and stress in uniform, but this also defeated the title's colon's function of listing stress as a subtopic of anxiety.

The authors' effort to connect the findings of many previous studies to narrow down on their own interpretation is commendable, but not so much with their unity and coherence. Mentioning "the focus of anxiety and SLA research has largely been FL in classroom learning" (p. 1) to explain that their research belongs to the type of study that involves L2 learners studying abroad, then going on to explain the synonymous use of 'anxiety' and 'stress', introducing the correlation "as anxiety levels increase levels of the hormone cortisol decrease" (p. 2) out of nowhere without explaining what cortisol is, then going back to explain the trend of most anxiety and SLA research's methodology to declare that their study will use a new method (p. 3), the article could have better narrative flow if the authors funneled the topics, from the general to the specific (Ball, 2012; Heppner & Heppner, 2004). The third paragraph is notably the worst, with all the sentences so out of order readers couldn't distinguish the thesis statement (p. 2).

Taking up 6 pages, the literature review is comprehensive in discussing previous studies methodology and results to conceptualize the authors' own approach and goals, but the categories are labeled somewhat inaccurately and not in theme. The first item it reviewed is 'anxiety and SLA' and both terms are undefined, only its relationship reviewed, not to mention SLA is never presented in its full term (p. 3-4). 'Foreign language enjoyment' is conceptualized, but the overall content in this second category is more of an examination of the relationship between FLE and FLCA, and technical error is found in the first sentence of this category (p. 4-6). 'Study abroad and anxiety' mainly focuses on how the article went beyond a 6-week study by Allen & Herron (2013) by extending their study to 14 weeks (p. 6-7) to determine anxiety and L2 proficiency development over three months abroad. 'Cortisol as a Physiological Measure of Overall Anxiety' is an excessive title since the authors noted "cortisol levels typically increase as the brain and body experience stress" (p. 8), but the review excellently reasoned out how the authors' new method can be a better alternative than the ones that have been used since 1986 (Vincent *et al.*, 1986). Measuring cortisol levels usually involve taking saliva, urine, or blood samples, but because this can be invasive for the long-term research the authors' planned, they proposed an innovative and less invasive anxiety-measuring procedure by using the hair as samples, 3-cm in length to represent the 3-month SA program (p. 8).

Impressively, the very broad and lacking in decent flow literature review managed to use both historical and contemporary findings with fair use of opposing views to put the research into context—that majority of anxiety and

SLA abroad research exclusively focused on classroom setting, leaving a gap that SLA abroad also happens as the students are immersed with the local life and language outside of the classroom. A second gap is explored; many scholars studied interventions to cope with anxiety levels, but none has studied "to what degree of anxiety experienced by the learners who received these interventions" (p. 10). A third gap is also revealed; studies on anxiety have been focusing on studying it in negative situations such as unemployment, physical health challenges, and pregnancies. This article can be the foil by studying anxiety in positive situations (i.e., enjoyable classroom).

Both location and participants of the study were chosen due to the authors' prior research in Jordan (Bown *et al.*, 2015), meaning the authors followed the trending longitudinal approach (using the same sample of people over time, and indeed these participants are beneficiaries of 25 years of experimentation) rather than the classic one time cross-sectional approach (using a fresh sample of people each time the study is carried out). To understand the relationship between anxiety variables with L2 proficiency, purposive sampling was used to acquire samples from a population of native English speakers enrolled in Arabic language SA program, by way of testing them prior to departure with Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) to get participants who scored Intermediate-Low and Advanced Low (in other words, average) so the impact of anxiety and anxiety interventions on L2 proficiency can be measured visibly (p. 10). The authors' previous research (Bown *et al*., 2015) found common sources of stress SA students experience include unwanted sexual attention (for females), overwhelm with program requirements, inadequacy by comparison, early and late frustration on conversational L2 fluency (p. 10), thus

the authors chose adolescents/young adults with a relatively even number of both genders (16 female, 20 male, ages 19-27).

The research design is where the article shines. Addressing the trending longitudinal approach rather than the classic one-time cross-sectional approaches with mixed method (p. 3), the authors measured four elements with their specific techniques at the beginning and end of 14 weeks of the SA program. First, since classroom is still a large part in the participants' lives, classroom anxiety level is determined using Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a 5-point scale of 33-item survey developed by Horwitz *et al.* (1986) who had re-conceptualized anxiety and SLA research first introduced by Scovel's (1978) by directing the study onto FL classroom (p. 4). Second, negative emotional reaction, FLCA (Mesri, 2012) is contrasted with a positive one that promotes resiliency, FLE, which is measured with 5-point scale of 21-item FLE Survey developed by Dewaele & MacIntyre (2014) to examine the correlation between FLCA and FLE in SA setting and following the recent trend of using positive psychology to deal with anxiety (MacIntyre & Mercer, 2014). Third, the participants' proficiency is measured pre-SA and post-SA using OPI which is a national professional test of the America Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL), done with the assistance of a trained rater.

Fourth, overall anxiety level in three months is measured with cortisol data gained from 50 strands of hair samples, specifically cut into 3-cm from the scalp because the approximate growth of hair is 1 cm per month, taken from each volunteer early on during SA as pre-cortisol data (baseline) and within 2 weeks prior to the end of the program as post-cortisol data (overall anxiety level representative). This original and

innovative approach to collect samples is discussed in high detail so reproducing it can be easy, and it must be praised for being ethical and significantly less-invasive yet still as reliable and valid as the old procedures. The authors even made sure the new anxiety-measure and another anxiety-measure used, FLCAS, "doesn't overlap and measured two different things" (p. 12) by employing Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient which measures the strength of the linear relationship between two variables (Lane *et al*., 2017).

The data generated is consistent with the data collected and were compared with two previous literature's findings: Cohen (1988) as a seminal (classic) reference and Plonsky & Oswald (2014) as the contemporary one. It was found L2 learners generally feel more anxious abroad, but FLCA levels will eventually decrease, and FLE increase. If the learners are the type who is prone to anxiety they were found to experience more overall anxiety abroad, but those who scored relatively high in the pre-departure OPI test would experience less overall anxiety (p. 13-14). All four research questions (p. 3) are answered and found to be in agreement with previous literature, but the authors' suddenly mentioned a fifth research question (p. 17) which was never discussed previously.

Flaws

A glaring problem in the article is how the research was never justified. It very drily discusses the relations or correlations of anxiety, FLCA, FLE, and L2 but never talked about the importance of determining those things. The authors stopped at discussing how anxiety has been found by other studies to be something negative, and never developed an argument of importance that reducing anxiety would improve L2 proficiency (Brantmeier, 2005; Matsuda & Gobel, 2004; MacIntyre *et al.,* 1997; Green &

Oxford, 1995; Oxford & Ehrman, 1992), or if anxiety itself is a negative factor in the process of language learning in general, considering some of the sources of anxiety such as sense of competition is a trait of the more advanced students (p. 16). Despite successfully addressing the relationship between anxiety and L2 proficiency, there's no sense of importance in lessening SA learners' anxiety in the context of SLA, but granted, it did well in summing up anxiety's importance in the context of learners' psyche when it drew upon their similarity with those of PTSD victims or university students who recently experienced "major life stressors such as the death of a family member or separation from a partner" (p. 15).

Another obvious hole in the article is the very sparse specification on Arabic; none of the discussions involving OPI or L2 proficiency mentioned that the language being tested on was actually Arabic so readers could easily mistake the authors were testing English language proficiency. Additionally, the authors' aims are varied and scattered, but the clear-cut purpose is thankfully delivered by the title, and the aims have either been answered as the authors answer the four research questions in the discussion or transformed into suggestions for future research

CONCLUSION

This experimental research article is trying to 'bite off more than it can chew' and ended up being a mess in funneling its aims and explanations. But one must praise how excellent it did in analyzing and presenting previous literature's and its own research design in a way that the average reader would understand, linking its findings with previous literature's findings to give vivid seminal and contemporary context so despite the inconsistent flow, this article's content is valid (as all references are accurate) and

well-argued. Its exploration in three gaps in anxiety and SLA studies—anxiety and L2 development in communicative environment (outside of classroom) abroad, degree of anxiety after receiving interventions to cope with anxiety, and anxiety levels in positive situation (enjoyable classroom)—and its innovative anxiety-measure makes this paper seems highly recommended to replicate in a similar context. Based on the findings revealed in the article, in simple this present paper seen anxiety is a physiological condition on "worry about an event" (p. 2), which makes this study believes that anxiety in language education context is an emotional state in which learners' feel negative about their knowledge and skill in their language performance.

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