



RESEARCH ARTICLE

LISTENING ANXIETY IN FOCUS: THE CASE OF THE FOREIGN UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS IN THE PHILIPPINES

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received 16th April, 2018
Received in revised form
28th May, 2018
Accepted 15th June, 2018
Published online 30th July, 2018

Key Words:

Listening Challenges, Coping Mechanisms,
foreign Students, Environmental Factors,
Teachers' Factors, Individual factors,
Anxiety Levels.

ABSTRACT

There is a good number of foreign students in many universities in the Philippines, but these students encountered listening dilemmas which hindered their learning. In this paper, the researcher randomly chose fifty (50) participants from 18 different nationalities to determine their listening anxiety levels, their causes, as well as the coping strategies they used in hurdling their listening difficulty. Using the measures of central tendency, the findings revealed that the foreign students' listening anxiety in general is high due to three (3) main factors: teachers' factors, environmental factors and, individual factors. As to their coping strategies, it came out that they used socio-affective strategies, meta-cognitive strategies, and cognitive strategies. Social and affective aspects, which involved asking for assistance and sharing of experiences, were dominantly employed by the students, followed the other two strategies. As conclusion, the participants' anxiety levels differ in impact towards their studies, and they used varied coping strategies that effectively addressed their listening anxiety. Consequently, the result could build a listening dilemma-free learning experience. Recommendations and suggestions for further studies to prepare and assist international students were included for their seamless learning experience wherever they may go.

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Citation: Gino G. Sumalinog. 2018. "Listening Anxiety in Focus: The Case of the Foreign University Students in the Philippines.", *International Journal of Current Research*, 10, (07), 71366-71371.

INTRODUCTION

Listening is the indispensable part of our daily lives. It demands a number of complicated and complex processes to be performed by learners. However, the skills of listening among learners is still undeveloped that resulted to anxiety (Gonen, 2009). Brandvick and McNight (2011) insisted that although students spent the greatest portion of their class time listening, many have still not fully developed the skill which resulted to listening anxiety. Capan (2013) reported that listening anxiety and other foreign language-skill anxieties are of the same patterns. The common ground among the forms of anxieties is associated to understanding the spoken words using the target language. It may be concluded that the inability to the learners to comprehend is a factor aggravating learners' anxiety level. At the same note, Golchi (2012) asserted that learners who have low anxiety perform better in the listening comprehension performance. As nervousness increases, the comprehension of the listening performance also decreases.

In contrast, Gilbert (2012) argued that nervousness tends to develop when students feel they are slipping behind others or when they feel that they are under too much pressure to perform well. Such nervousness has an especially negative effect on pronunciation. It is generally hard, for instance, for students to be courageous when called on to recite words or phrases alone. Several researches presented the factors why students suffered from listening anxiety. International students struggle from unfamiliarity with foreign accent (Franco et al. 2013; Khuo, 2011). Learners noted that accent makes communication impossible for it causes difficulty in understanding what is being said. If the lecturers can slow down a little with a moderate pace, words might be a little bit intelligible. It is the accent, not the language that has caused the problem. The accent that international students heard is different from where they lived and previously studied (Nayak and Sitalakshmi, 2010). More often, many people feel quite ashamed of their own accent, dialect or command of Standard English and this brings the feeling of inferiority over the English language (Fleming, and Stevens, 2015). In a separate study, students express that their second language made learning difficult because they are not comfortable speaking in class because of their English. Students also lack confidence in their English abilities which affects their participation in class and group discussions.

Unfamiliar vocabulary and their grammatical accuracy are also contributing factors (Anderson, Isensee, Martin, Godfrey and O'Brien, 2012). On the other hand, listening anxiety can also be boosted through the help of captioned videos. In the absence of real listening materials for students learning English as a Foreign Language, captions may be used to aid the listening materials and enhance the effectiveness of the listening materials (Gowhary, Pourhalashi, Jamalinesari and Azizifar, 2015). Group work and collaborative tasks could be employed to give students more opportunity to speak the language. The use of the appropriate strategies can also heighten the degree of self-efficacy in the part of the learners. Some use cognitive, meta-cognitive and social-affective capabilities (Graham, 2012).

In the Philippine school settings, listening is expected to have been developed through the use of listening activities pertaining to recordings, dubbed conversations, and videos with narrations and listening to songs in the native tongue as indicated in the curriculum. But as per observation, schools do not strictly practice the listening activities partly because of the classroom dilemma involving the lack of equipment and its availability, classroom size, and class size. The activities could have helped the learners attain proficiency in listening comprehension. Philippines, universities also accept international students where majority are non-native English speakers. Cebu in particular has universities with international students. So, the meeting of learners from different nationalities and different English varieties happens. In this case, the listening anxiety and listening comprehension problem are centered on the intelligibility of the speech heard (Jaber and Hussien, 2011). Listening problems then develop into a more complicated result affecting the students' listening comprehension and defeating the purpose of their coming to the Philippines (Krashen, 2013). This study is anchored mainly on Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis which claims that affective variables do not directly block the acquisition process but hinders learning from reaching the "language acquisition device", as termed by Chomsky which is part of the human brain accountable for language accession. The study investigated the causes of the listening anxiety of the students and their coping strategies that they use while they were learning inside the classroom in a university in the Philippines.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Site and Respondents: The study was conducted at Southwestern University PHINMA located in Cebu City, Philippines. The respondents of this study were the fifty (50) international students enrolled in the General Education subjects in Southwestern University PHINMA for the second semester of S.Y. 2016-2017.

Instruments and Procedure of Data Collection: The researcher gathered the participants in the speech laboratory and administer these instruments: a) Modified version of the Foreign Language Listening Anxiety Level Questionnaire originally developed by Kim (2000) cited in Tsai (2013). It is a 4-Likert point type scale; and b) Listening Anxiety Coping Strategy, a structured checklist questionnaire. It was formulated by Lee (1997) and altered by Ho (2006). Golchi (2012) further revised the instrument. It has 35 questions divided into three categories as tabled below. To ensure the

validity and security of the data, the researcher personally collected them.

Data Treatment: The study employed the quantitative research design. It specifically used the mean percentage of the data gathered data to come up with the ranking of the information from the instruments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Listening Anxiety Level of the Participants: Figure 1 showed the anxiety levels of the participants. Seventy percent (70%) or majority of them experienced high anxiety level. At this level, they were fully anxious for they aimed both getting good grades and complete comprehension of what was discussed. They intently listen to the point that they no longer move from their chairs. Understandably, this could be normal since English in the Philippines is only the second language and this happened during the first few months of their stay in the Philippines and in the university they were in. They had difficulty understanding the accent, the pace, the audibility of the voices of both the lecturer and their classmates, the translanguaging method used by the teachers, and etc. On the other hand, thirteen percent (13%) said that they their anxiety in only in the moderate level. At this level, the students only struggled on few reasons such as accent of the teachers and their classmates, including the translanguaging method the teachers employed in the classroom. For the nine percent (9%) of the participants, they said their anxiety level was low. This means, they only had problems with accent and translanguaging but only at some points. In the lighter side, eight percent (8%) of them said that they were not anxious and that everything was manageable.

Causes of Listening Anxiety: Looking at the table, it came out that the teachers' occasional use of the native language made the students highly anxious with fifty eight percent (58%) of the respondents who said so. A little bit more than half of the respondents agreed that code switching from English to the teachers' mother tongue or the language of the host university distracts the students causing them to feel nervous, thus, affecting the learning of the international students. This happened when teachers could not find the exact word to say. There was also forty eight percent (48%) of the respondents who said that they got nervous when they listen to oral instructions without seeing the teachers' facial expressions. In some instances, teachers did not accompany verbal commands with the corresponding non-verbal cues. Moreover, thirty eight percent 38% of the students experienced uneasiness triggered by the fear of being reprimanded when they fail to grasp the gist of the conversation. Al-Sawalha (2016) also agreed that the reason of listening anxiety among the respondents of his study was fear of negative evaluation by peers or lecturers in making mistakes in front of others. However, this fear of negative evaluation was inevitable. So, teachers should treat students' errors with great sensitivity since fear of negative evaluation was a major concern among students. However, the right time to react to the students' errors still arose as a huge challenge. A general concept guideline would be to accept errors as an inevitable part of the students' learning and react to or correct them in a positive way. Thirty-six percent (36%) of them disagreed to their teachers' use of idioms for it contributed to their anxiety. In addition, thirty-four percent (34%) of the respondents complained that some teachers have limited vocabulary and that they stutter when delivering the lesson which was

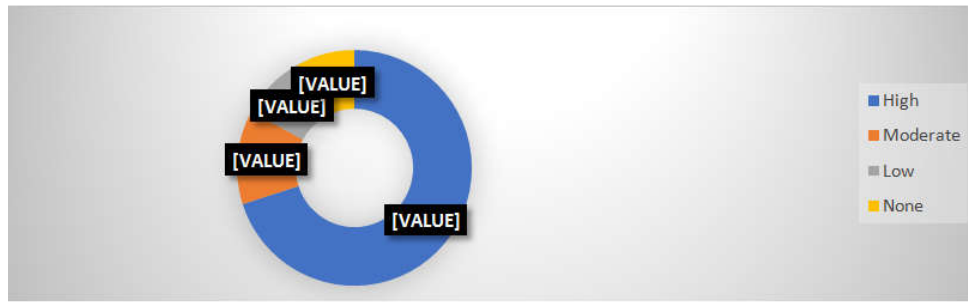


Fig 1. Listening Anxiety Level of the Participants

Table 1. Teachers' factors that cause listening anxiety to the foreign students

Causes of Anxiety	(f)	%
Professors' code switching from English to their native language	29	58%
Instructions without corresponding facial expressions and gestures	21	42%
Being reprimanded when not understood	19	38%
Professors' use of unfamiliar idioms	18	36%
Teachers' limited vocabulary	17	34%
Professors' frequent stuttering	16	32%
Professors speaking pace (speaking too fast)	15	30%
Softness of the professors' voices	15	30%
Non fluency of the professors in the use of English	14	28%
Teachers' accent	13	26%
Teachers' use of slang	13	26%

Table 2. Environmental factors that cause listening anxiety to the foreign students

Causes of Anxiety	(f)	%
Classmate' use of the native language in class interactions	34	68%
Classmates' use of their native language during collaborative tasks	33	66%
Classmates' code switching from their native language to English and vice versa	27	54%
Noisy environment	26	52%
Difficulty in communication due to limited vocabulary	26	52%
Occasional use of the English language; only when told by the teacher	22	44%
Use of slang	21	42%
Classmates only speak in English when talking to foreigners.	20	40%
stuttering	19	38%
Non-fluency in using English	18	36%
Speed rate (talking too fast)	15	30%
Classmates were uninterested to topics not related to the lesson	14	28%
Classmates' use of idioms	13	26%
Classmates' voices are too soft	12	24%

Table 3. Individual factors that cause listening anxiety to the foreign students

Causes of Anxiety	(f)	%
Having a different accent	23	46%
Uninterested to conversations not related to the lesson	16	32%
Fear of being laughed at	14	28%
Limited vocabulary	13	26%
Non fluency in the use of the English language	12	24%
Stuttering when speaking in English	10	20%

Table 4. Coping Strategies that foreign students use to cope with listening anxiety

Strategies	f	\bar{x}	%	Total	
Meta Cognitive Strategies	Pre-listening planning strategies	59	19.7	39.33	35%
	While-listening monitoring strategies	43	14	2	
	Post-listening evaluation strategies	73	18.3	36.5	
Cognitive Strategies	Formal Practicing Strategies	78	19.5	39	32%
	Translation Strategies	13	13	26	
	Bottom – up Strategies	41	10.3	20.5	
Socio- Affective Strategies	Top-down Strategies	183	16.7	33.27	43 %
	Social Strategies	39	19.5	39	
	Affective Strategies	69	23	46	

understandably fine since English is not the first language in the Philippines – the host university. Another thirty percent (30%) of them have problems with the teacher's speed rate. In addition, the use of slang has also resulted to nervousness. Consequently, respondents were expected to get anxious since it was their first time to be learning and listening to teachers who were new to them. These teachers were used to handling Filipino students or the learners of the host university. Noticeably, teachers adjust their teaching styles, but they adhere more to the learning styles of the majority of the population – the students of the host university. Undeniably, instructors and professors tried to balance just to make both foreign and non -foreign students actively involved in the learning process.

Serraj (2015) mentioned that environmental factors include classroom atmosphere that influences the learners' level of listening anxiety such as peers and class environment. Based on the table, the respondents have the same problem for both the teachers and their classmates which is the use of their native language – the Cebuano language with sixty-eight percent (68%). Understandably, Filipino students were able to speak in English, but they preferred to use Cebuano when talking to their classmates except to foreigners and when ordered by the teacher. Teachers might also encourage students to adhere to using English as the medium of instructions when communicating with their teachers and fellow students with high emphasis to their foreign classmates. This is to address the anxiety brought by the use of the native language as well as issues on code switching of their classmates from English to our Cebuano and vice versa with sixty-eight percent (68%) and their group mates during collaborative tasks with fifty-four percent (54%). Other cause of the anxiety was the noise from the surroundings identified by fifty-two percent (52%) of the respondents. As per respondents, some classrooms were not air-conditioned and noise from other classrooms got into their rooms. On the other hand, thirty percent (30%) of them found the speed rate of their classmates to be very fast because these students were used to different talking pace. This became a problem because the intelligibility of the utterance was sacrificed. By slowing down, international students got the chance to perceive and absorb the speech. The inclusion of idioms to everyday speech was another cause of anxiety since idioms were not universally understood. The least among the causes was the volume of the students whom the international students spoke with. Some were too soft and others were too loud when speaking brought about by their cultural differences. With differences in accent and English variety, getting the message of words, when not properly enunciated, resulted to a debilitating effect that the students experienced while learning. The speed the Filipinos were used to would not be a problem for other Filipinos because both were familiar to the language. Shown in Table 4 are the individual factors of the respondents. According to Serraj (2015) individual factors refer to the individuals' characteristics and situation including nerves and emotionality, inappropriate strategies and lack of practice. Though individual factors appear to be the least among the causes of anxiety, teachers should realize how much individual success in society depends on the ability to listen and speak well. Among the individual factors, the international students' accent was first in the list which gave them the tension due to the possibility that they might not be understood. This is according to forty six percent (46%) of the respondents. Out of fifty respondents, thirty-two percent (32%) of them got nervous when they felt uninterested in conversations which are

not part of the lesson because most of these are done in a very casual and would sometimes be included in quizzes and oral examinations. Sometimes, they felt that they were being talked about. There was also twenty eight percent (28%) of the respondents who said that their struggle also includes fear of being laughed at by their classmates whenever they say something not intelligible. Another twenty six percent (26%) of the respondents experienced anxiety due to limited vocabulary and inefficiency in expressing their thoughts. There are instances that students ran out of words tantamount to what they desire to say but this could be considered since English is not their first language. They only learned it in school. Lastly, foreign students received tensions about their fluency. They tend to over think whether they were understood or not. In many scenarios, learners resort to translating their thoughts from their native tongue to English.

Coping Strategies of the International Students: The debilitating effect brought by listening anxiety is inevitable. It exists even in a local scenario especially when students transferred to a new school, with new classmates and instructors in a totally new environment with surrounding people of the same nationality. Therefore, anxiety is expected from foreign students whose cultural background is a complete reciprocal of the place they once lived from any of the universities in the Philippines. However, the negative effects of listening anxiety could be lessen or even completely eradicated with the use of coping strategies that students learned from school and those that they themselves naturally discovered. It can be gleaned in Table 4, that the international students employed varied strategies in hurdling listening anxieties. Among the three categories, the socio-affective strategies have the highest total percentage followed by the meta-cognitive strategies and the cognitive strategies as the least among the three strategies. To support the result of the statistics, Tsai (2013) revealed that most of the learners preferred to use social-affective listening strategies compared to meta-cognitive strategies. This meant that among the three strategies, the respondents preferred the socio-affective strategies which implied that students proactively asked their teachers and classmates when they encounter difficulty along the way as they learn. They use social strategies that involved asking their teachers and classmates to clarify their comprehension. Moreover, their use of the affective strategies involved encouraging themselves not to feel anxious. Based on Table 5, 39% of them chose the social strategies while 46% of them preferred the affective strategies which were a bit higher when compared. These social strategies involved asking the teachers or classmates to repeat the message to assure understanding and try to care for the tone and intonation of the speaker's voice. This is true in a classroom scenario where students learned best and felt comfortable when working together. However, the international students adhered more to the affective strategies where they applied positive self-talk and tried to encourage themselves to be calm to avoid anxiety. They even discuss experiences or feelings after listening to their classmates or teachers. Next to socio-affective strategies, respondents also prefer using meta-cognitive strategies. In studies conducted by Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal and Tafaghodtari as cited in Rahimi and Abedi (2014), it is emphasized that attention to meta-cognitive awareness of listening comprehension aside from cognitive and affective factors is also important. This awareness is related to the way listeners think about listening process; plan, monitor and evaluate the listening task; and tackle the problems they face

during listening (Graham, 2008). However, learners who have different levels of anxiety vary in the use of meta-cognitive strategies. Learners whose anxiety level is low adhere more to meta-cognitive strategies compared to the highly anxious students. In some cases, these groups use both social-affective and cognitive strategies together at a time, but they use meta-cognitive strategies more. These learners have less apprehension and anxieties since meta-cognitive strategies focus on setting goals including monitoring of the portion learned and planning on how to decrease nervousness and anxiety to gain confidence (Golchi, 2012). On the other hand, the respondents least preferred the use of cognitive strategies which included the use of top-down as well as bottom-up listening processes, cognitive translation and cognitive formal practicing strategies. Based on the table, most of the respondents used pre-listening planning strategies with 39.33% over the other meta-cognitive strategies. These strategies included reminding themselves of the objectives of listening to their classmates and professors, concentrating on the listening task without paying attention to things that caused distraction and making a decision to just listen to important information in the conversation before listening. Secondly, the international students, 36.5% of them, employed the use of post listening evaluation strategies.

These strategies focused on self-checking what they have heard to correct errors, looking up online dictionary and google for meaning of words to check comprehension, reflecting on the struggle such as the speaking rate and accent and using a list to weigh the listening skill development. It was also helpful to use online dictionaries to check meaning of words in comprehending the message since many of the students nowadays are android phone users and are able to access mobile data. Lastly, the while-listening monitoring strategies got the least percentage of 28%. In these strategies, international students kept up with the speed of their classmates and professors, asked themselves how much they have understood and refocused when distracted. In coping with the speed rate of their classmates and professors, Lee as cited in Franco, Gao, Medved, and Yang (2013) mentioned that teachers or even classmates could help students with the international students listening difficulties by speaking with the normal pace. If teachers reduce the speed, the learners are given the opportunity to understand and to analyze the words heard. Occasionally, teachers may also repeat important ideas or write them for everyone to see so students can keep track of the lecture. Consequently, these dilemmas may develop and complicate any further if teachers and the school do not work to solve them. The table also presented the cognitive strategies that the respondents least used. Among these strategies, the formal practicing strategies were mostly employed which involved listening to songs or videos in youtube and facebook via mobile phones, laptops and tablets, jotting down notes some ideas and keywords and remembering key points during class interactions. Next in line were the top-down strategies with 33.27%. These strategies included listening to main ideas, predicting hypotheses on texts by titles, applying context clues, using information beyond the text, caring for the tone of the speaker, thinking in English, using mental pictures or imagine the situation to help themselves comprehend the conversation and relating new ideas to their one's own experiences gained from the world and from academic learning. Third, international students also resorted to cognitive translation which was translating what they have heard into their own languages which was very common to most foreign language

learners. Fourth, they used the bottom-up strategies which focused on using context clues to understand words particularly the prefixes and suffixes, repeating what was heard mentally, understanding utterances heard from starting at the words, phrases, clauses and the entire sentences and making a written or mental short story of what have been heard.

Conclusion

Listening anxieties have different causes and there are varied coping strategies to address such. Causes of anxieties, though common in a group, still differ in intensity and in the impact they give to the learners and that could be debilitating or beneficial. In the same manner, students vary in employing these strategies since preferences may be different from each other. What is deemed essential is both teachers and students to determine the root cause of fear and fill it with the precise coping strategies.

Acknowledgement

The author wishes to acknowledge the foreign students and teachers of Southwestern University who gave their time for the completion of this study.

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