

# Foreign Language Anxiety and Learner Beliefs in Second Language Learning: A Research Timeline

Illahi Bux Gopang  
Lasbela University, Pakistan

Faraz Ali Bughio  
IELL, University of Sindh, Pakistan

Shumaila Aijaz Memon  
IELL, University of Sindh, Pakistan

Jalal Faiz  
Faculty of Education, Lasbela University, Pakistan

**Abstract**—Research in second language learning has significantly demonstrated that foreign language anxiety and learner beliefs have been the main domain of inquiry in applied linguistics. Such interest has seen upsurge in studies on L2 anxiety and learner beliefs. This study tends to review language anxiety and learner beliefs in language learning. The review shows moderate and high levels of language anxiety in studies including negative correlation between anxiety and achievement. In addition, it also reveals that learner beliefs have played a role in increasing language anxiety. Moreover, research studies on FLA (foreign language anxiety) and LB (learner beliefs) describe a whole scenario of the exiting literature. The study also critiques some pedagogical strategies suggested in research and how far these are applicable in decreasing language anxiety and avoiding incorrect beliefs about language learning. Further, the research review suggests that different approaches are used to quantify language anxiety and to describe beliefs in language learning. Since, the prime purpose of the study is to review the approaches and their validity and reliability in describing language anxiety and beliefs. The study synthesizes foreign language anxiety and learner beliefs studies and offers some recommendations in order to complement and supplement the existing literature.

**Index Terms**—foreign language anxiety, learner beliefs, research approaches

## I. INTRODUCTION

This review of related literature on foreign language anxiety and learner beliefs describes the concerned phenomena investigated empirically in different contexts. This review also covers some historical perspective of anxiety and learner beliefs research. This study is significant from theoretical perspectives. First, the study supplements and complements the existing literature on foreign language anxiety and learners beliefs in second language learning. Thus, a great deal of research is still required to describe these two problems related with language learning. Second, the study not only describes the concerned issues but also provides in depth understanding, insight and recommendations for researchers and teachers who teach at university level in Pakistan in particular. The research review provides pedagogical benefits to teachers and policy makers who design curriculum at higher education level. Last but not least, this study identifies gaps and creates a platform for further research and broadens a scope of foreign language anxiety and learner beliefs about language learning in Pakistan. This study undergoes a systematic review of literature on foreign language anxiety and learner beliefs about language learning.

Since, research has significantly demonstrated that foreign language anxiety is an important affect factor in second language acquisition (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Aida 1994; Woodrow, 2006). Affect refers to “emotions, feelings, beliefs, moods and attitudes which greatly influence our behavior (Morgan, 2009, p. 145). The question is which feelings and beliefs affect language learning? However, research is still silent on specifying feelings and emotions which influence the level of anxiety. Students’ feelings of nervousness, stress, anxiety and beliefs of accuracy and fluency about language learning have taken a great place in the domain of second language research. These however, may affect the process of learning second language. Scovel (2000) is of the view that researchers have failed to understand affect in research because they have mostly focused quantitative paradigm to examine affect. So this idea of Scovel entails that affect needs to be explored not only quantitatively but also qualitatively in second language learning and teaching research. Such focus on affect in research can make it effective and affective. Moreover, it can also bring some pedagogical benefits in teaching and learning practices at higher educational institutes. According to Horwitz (1989) it is actually a serious mistake to discuss foreign language anxiety and avoid considering emotional reactions of students to language learning. This idea was carried out and confirmed in the study of Tallon (2006) which

suggested learners' emotional representations of uncomfortable experiences are very significant in language learning. This confirmation may refer L2 anxiety to be a matter of great inquiry for researchers. Moreover, research has described some sources which trigger language anxiety among learners at all levels. Among the sources, learners' beliefs may have contributed a lot in the context of arousal of anxiety in classroom. For example, Horwitz (1988) also pointed out 'students who believe that language learning consists of translation, or vocabulary memorization, or grammar translation are not likely to adopt the types of holistic strategies associated with successful language learners' (p. 292). However, these beliefs of language learning may also contribute as the basis of anxiety among students. Therefore, in depth understanding of the problems of foreign language anxiety (FLA) and learners' beliefs can supplement the existing literature and help teachers improve teaching and learning practices at university levels.

## II. FOREIGN / SECOND LANGUAGE ANXIETY RESEARCH

In foreign language anxiety research, Chastain (1975) conducted a study which resulted showing no significant correlation. Later, two concepts of language anxiety; facilitating and debilitating were determined in study of Kleinmann, (1977). This study was conducted on Spanish and Arab students who happened to avoid structures in English language. However, a very interesting research was carried out by Scovel (1978) who identified some previous studies which lacked consistency and indicated inconsistent results. What he did was a development of instrument which measured L2 anxiety. It may be basically a step towards the consistent measuring instruments for anxiety research.

Moreover, diary study in language anxiety was initiated by Bailey (1983). This attempt was made to investigate language learners who tend to compare themselves with others negatively and become victim of lower self-esteem. It was a classroom based research which developed gradually and indicated learners' psychological barriers in L2 learning. In a study of affective factors, Gardner (1985) is considered to be authority because he took initiatives and introduced Attitude Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) in order to measure affective factors such as motivation, attitude and anxiety. He excelled in that field and developed instrument which is valid and reliable. Later, a big change came out in the research of Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope (1986) who introduced foreign language classroom anxiety scale. The scale proved to be highly valid and reliable in anxiety research. This was based on 33 items ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Thus, the scale consisted of three main components communication anxiety, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. Now onwards, the question of inconsistent results in anxiety research was resolved with development of appropriate instrument.

Furthermore, Young (1990) surveyed on 200 university and high school Spanish students. In her research, it was revealed that students were found more interested in group activities and less anxious in learning. Teachers' involvement in classroom as a facilitator was positively reported to be lower anxiety provoking. Simultaneously, Young carried out another research in 1991. In this study, she classified the factors which mainly cause language anxiety among learners. Such factors were (1) personal and interpersonal (2) learner beliefs about language learning (3) instructor's belief about language teaching (4) instructor- learner interaction (5) classroom procedures and language testing. This study was unique and distinctive because it introduced main factors which caused foreign language anxiety.

A study of Horwitz et al, (1986) on foreign language anxiety which was replicated by Aida (1994) in the Non-Western context. The FLCAS was utilized to measure anxiety among students. She identified four factors; speech anxiety and fear of negative evaluation fear of failing, comfortableness in speaking with native Japanese, and negative attitudes towards the class (Aida, 1994). In the same vein, Gardner and MacIntyre, (1994) reported three stages of anxiety known as input, processing and output. They declared that students' poor performance is related with these stages. Moreover, their research also indicated strong relationship at processing and output stages.

Up till now, we have discussed language anxiety from students' perspectives. The way they experienced language anxiety in L2 learning. In contrast, Horwitz (1996) suggested in her study that non-native teachers may suffer from anxiety with negative consequences in classroom. In terms of teaching methodology, Horwitz also pointed out that teachers select approaches which may not enhance communication rather increase students' anxiety. To examine anxiety among non- native teachers, Teacher Foreign Language Anxiety (TFLAS) scale was developed. Horwitz (1996) suggests that anxiety should be investigated from non-native teachers' perspectives. In this context, Gregersen, and Horwitz, (2002) documented pre English teachers who were reported anxious and non-anxious. In collecting data, a video tape recorder was used to interview teachers. The results indicated anxious teachers avoided making mistakes while no anxious teachers went talking without thinking of mistakes they make in classroom. Another model to examine foreign language anxiety known as WTC was developed by MacIntyre et al., (1998). This was introduced as an alternative for FLA. This scale shows influence of anxiety when L2 is produced. Later, Onwuegbuzie, (1999) determined some of the characteristics associated with level of anxiety at university level. Among these, low expectations, negative perception and the self were mainly reported in the study.

A study conducted by Spitali (2000) at American high school, suggests significant negative relationship between FLCAS scores and attitudes towards people from different cultures. With continued idea of anxiety, Horwitz, (2000) reviewed literature and suggested that it is essential to understand anxiety in learning. By understanding anxiety, teachers need to understand and listen to students' problems associated with learning. Students having exposed to overseas are found less anxious in leaning (Matsuda & Gobel, 2004). This research was conducted on students at

university level in Japan. Horwitz (2010) describes a research article written by MacIntyre (2007) on FLA and WTC as suggesting situation and trait states. Similarly, Liu and Jackson (2008) suggested foreign language anxiety and willingness to communicate as supplementary approaches to delve deep in students' emotional reactions to language learning and language use. They reported significant correlation between Chinese students WTC and FLA.

### III. RESEARCH ON LEARNER BELIEFS

In study of Young (1991), some factors were revealed which contribute in language anxiety. Among these, instructor beliefs about language learning, learner beliefs about language learning are focus of the study. Through these factors, the study of Young shows that learner beliefs play a significant role in second language learning. The idea of Young was extended in the research studies of Wen and Clement (2003) and Peng (2007). These studies support the study of Young that learners' beliefs have an important role to play in language learning. However, some beliefs which have been extensively reported are accuracy and fluency in second language learning. These need to be maintained otherwise learning may be negatively affected. For example, in research of Gynan, (1989) and Horwitz, (1984), it is confirmed that learners are not without beliefs. Further, Gynan (1989) researched on beliefs reported that learners were stuck with idea that pronunciation is the most important factor to learn second language. Research in second language confirms that learners develop these beliefs about language learning. It is noticed learners' beliefs are very important in learning second language. Above cited studies show that beliefs have been investigated to determine learners problems associated with language learning. Only research on learner beliefs may not suffice because one sided picture is shown. In contrast, there is a need to research teachers' beliefs. And such research was initiated by Pajares (1992) who documented complexity in teachers' beliefs in second language learning. Some cause of such complexity were also identified in the study. Among these, poor conceptualization and difference in perception of beliefs and their structures.

A very interesting study was conducted by Peacock (2001). This was a longitudinal research on learner beliefs. The prime aim of study was to examine changes in beliefs about language learning. Data were collected from 146 trainee ESL students who were enrolled at the City University of Hong Kong. The study concluded with no significant changes in beliefs. However, some differences were noticed in key areas; learning second language means to remember a lot of words and master rules of grammar including those who communicate in more than one language are considered to be very talented. Peacock (2001) suggested that learning vocabulary was overemphasized by the respondents of the study. Continued with idea of beliefs, a study of Ohata (2005) indicated that teachers' perceptions should be recoded because these play an important role in students' anxiety. This way, researchers can come to understand the way teachers relate students' foreign level in classroom. Further, Atlan (2006) conducted a research on learner beliefs and administered questionnaire to collect data from 248 respondents who were enrolled in different disciplines at different universities. The results of study indicated a range of beliefs with various degrees of validity. The study also confirmed that learners have a set of fixed beliefs about second language learning. Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory, (BALLI) was re-examined to report its reliability and validity in research. This attempt was made by Nikitina and Furuoka (2006) at university Malaysia Sabah. The results of research indicated that BALLI is very suitable research instrument to measure learners' beliefs in any sociolinguistics settings (Nikitina & Furuoka, 2006). FLA and LB research confirms some dominant factors provoking anxiety among learners; learners beliefs on FL learning (Ohata, 2005); instructors' beliefs on FL teaching (Tanveer, 2007); classroom procedure (Williams & Andrade, 20008); self- esteem (Wang, 2009); societal interference, lack of confidence, and lack of preparation (Wei, 2012, 2013, 2014). More importantly, second language research has mostly focused on learners' proficiency levels and it has ignored the issues such demotivation and anxiety in accordance to classroom teachings (Pappamihiel, 2002). In addition, a lack of research has extensively been observed on learners' beliefs about language learning in developing countries in particular Pakistan. It is identified that research has been exclusively conducted on foreign language anxiety and learners beliefs in developed countries like USA, UK, China and Japan. Moreover, not many studies have correlated language anxiety and beliefs in research.

### IV. QUALITATIVE V/S QUANTITATIVE APPROACHES

A great deal of research on foreign language anxiety and learner beliefs has been conducted using quantitative approach (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994; Woodrow, 2006; Horwitz 2010). In quantitative approach, questionnaire has been proved a reliable instrument in gathering data. Quantitative instruments (e.g... FLCAS, BALLI, TFLAS, ESA, AMTB). Researchers and linguistics discussed and initiated an idea that only quantitative approach didn't suffice research on FLA and LB. There is still much to explore. However, the qualitative approach is followed in order to show in depth understanding of investigated phenomena. Researchers have used quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate foreign language anxiety and learner beliefs in second language learning. After these two approaches, the third wave of approach is mixed methods research. For example, Johnson and Onwugbuzie (2004) interpret it as "the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study"(p. 17). Recently, this approach is used in research to examine learning issues from more than one aspect. Simply, the prime purpose is to provide clear picture of research problems.

### V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Foreign language anxiety and teacher beliefs may be explored among the non-native at university education. This type of research needs to be operationalized in Pakistan in particular. For example, why students continue and discontinue their studies. Reasons for such issues may be properly addressed in research. It may be systematically explored in research. Moreover, a longitudinal study is required to address anxiety and beliefs in learning. This may help researchers to identify any change among their learners. A literature review recommends a number of things. For example, first, teachers need to create atmosphere of learning which keeps learners comfortable and easy. Second, this can be implemented if we follow Horwitz idea of understanding students learning problems. Teachers play an important role to decrease level of anxiety and clarify incorrect beliefs in learning (MacIntyre, 2007). In this process, L2 anxiety and learner beliefs may not affect learning in classroom.

## VI. CONCLUSION

A review of related literature on language anxiety and learner beliefs entails that L2 anxiety and learner beliefs are challenging issues in second language learning; however, researchers and practitioners should address these systematically and offer thorough understanding. A cited review suggests serious efforts are required explore extensive picture. A systematic research is still needed to confirm previous studies on foreign language anxiety and learner beliefs. This theoretical perspective suggests research timeline conducted so far. It is also noticed that studies have provided consistent results in L2 anxiety and learner beliefs. Horwitz, Gardner and MacIntyre developed appropriate instruments in research timeline. In other words, this review shows consistency in research studies on L2 anxiety and learner beliefs.

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**Illahi Bux Gopang** is working as a lecturer at department of English language and literature, Lasbela University, Pakistan. He did his master in English literature in 2006, from university of Sindh. He did his MPhil in applied linguistics in 2016 from university of Sindh. His area of research interests are foreign language anxiety, L2 motivation, Learner beliefs and learner autonomy. He has presented his research in national and international conferences. Gopang is certified master trainer from Higher Education Commission Pakistan.

**Faraz Ali Bughio** was born in Larkana, Sindh, Pakistan on January 09, 1979. He has done MA in English Literature from University of Sindh Jamshoro, Pakistan in 2001, MA in International English Language Teaching from University of Sussex, United Kingdom in 2008, and PhD from University of Sussex, United Kingdom in 2013. His thesis title for PhD is "Improving English language teaching in large classes at university level in Pakistan."

He has been associated with teaching English language and literature at graduate and post graduate level since 2002. At present he is working as an Associate Professor at the Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro, Pakistan. His recent publications Apart from working on publications in the field of English language teaching, Critical Pedagogies and Critical Discourse Analysis, he has been supervising and teaching M Phil and PhD Research scholars in the field of English language teaching and Literature.

Dr Bughio is Higher Education Commission Pakistan's approved supervisor.

**Shumaila Aijaz Memon** was born on 29<sup>th</sup> of March 1985 in Sindh, Pakistan. She is a PhD in Linguistics from Centre for Research in English Language Learning and Assessment, University of Bedfordshire, UK in 2015. Her major field of study is in reading attitudes in second language. She works at Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh and as a visiting faculty member at Mehran University of Engineering and Technology. She teaches graduate and post graduate level courses and supervises Mphil and PhD candidates at both places.

Dr Memon is a representative of the Linguistic Society of Pakistan and also serves as editor of a research Journal ARIEL. She contributes as reviewer for many local journal of Pakistan.

**Jalal Faiz** teaches at the Faculty of Education, Lasbela University of Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences, Uthal, Balochistan. He did his MA/MS – from University of East Anglia, Norwich, United Kingdom (UK) in 2011 and PhD – from University of Westminster, London, United Kingdom in 2015. He has presented papers in various national and international conferences in United Kingdom, Turkey, France and Slovenia. His research area is Governance, International Development, Peace Education, Educational Policies and Issues, Textbooks, and Curriculum in Pakistan.