THE IMPACT OF ANXIETY ON LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND/FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

According to examinations records, the failure rate in compulsory English of the first year undergraduates in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of a state university in Sri Lanka is considered high. Of the many factors related to this phenomenon, anxiety related to second language learning is considered to be a major cause. The objectives of the research were to study the degree/level of anxiety of the students learning English as a second language, to examine the relationship between the students' overall language anxiety and their language achievement as measured by the End Semester Examination marks and to investigate the relationship between the three components of the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale: communication anxiety, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation and language achievement While the end semester course grade was taken as a measure of language proficiency, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale that was developed by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope in 1986 was administered to 50 students to measure the language anxiety experienced by the students. Interviews and observations were also used to gather further data. The findings revealed that language anxiety was present among the sample of students, that it had a negative impact on their language achievement. Moreover, the correlation between Communication Anxieties and End Semester Marks (-.286) indicated that the relationship between the two variables was negative and that the relationship between Fear of Negative Evaluation and the End Semester Marks was also negative (-.364). However, the relationship between Test Anxiety and exam marks was positive which could be attributed to many environmental factors. The recommendations were given under promoting the teaching of the target language at school level, teacher training, use of modern techniques in the language classroom and enhancing support given to students.

Keywords: language anxiety, performance, communication, fear of negative evaluation