The Role of Self- Confidence Effectiveness for English Language Learners

(Key words: Self-Confidence, anxiety, proficiency, Language Performance, Language Learning)

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Abstract

Self-confidence is an important factor in the learning of any second language. Psychological and social (Traditions and culture) phenomenon are very important and should be considered in studying self-confidence. Forty two students (16 females and 26 males) in the English department, College of Arts, University of Kufa, have been subjected to a self-confidence questionnaire. Answers of questionnaire’s statements reflect the level of self-confidence (A, B, C, and D). A and B represent lack of self-confidence while C and D represent good self-confidence. Data of self-confidence questionnaire has been analyzed by many statistical methods (ANOVA, Histograms, and Estimated Marginal Means). ANOVA test shows significant differences among statements and in two kinds of answers. Histograms show that most of students have good self-confidence and their problems are with speaking to others especially their professors and classmates and also being afraid and embarrassed of doing mistakes. Estimated Marginal Means curves show that males have high self-confidence than females, and females show high lack of self-confidence in speaking English to their professors and classmates. Females show high worrying and fearing from speaking English in public, while they show great careful to their grade and they are competitive. These problems of females students are related to traditional concepts of society. Special teaching methods must be used to encourage and urge students in English language to speak English and to make them acquire complete learning in English language and overcome the psychological and social obstacles.

1. Introduction

Language learning is a complicated process (Young, 1991). It is affected by cognitive and affective factors which constitute the main source of individual differences in foreign language learning (Tallon, 2009:65). According to Brown (2009:47) and Skehan (1994:49), the affective domain is the emotional side of human behavior and it involves a variety of personality aspects such as emotion, attitude, motivation, personality, anxiety and self-confidence. Among all of these, self-confidence is one of
the most influential variables which affect the process of learning. It is one of the central drives in human beings and can exercise a determining influence on a person’s life, for good or bad.

Most of dictionaries define self-confidence as a feeling of trust in their own ability, and judgment. Clément (6992: 62) phrased this factor as “I can do it” or self-esteem principle, i.e., a learner believes in his/her own ability to accomplish the task. “The eventual success that learners attain in a task is at least partially a factor of their belief that they indeed are fully capable of accomplishing the task”. (Dörnyei, 6065: 62) stated that the concept of self-confidence is closely related to self-esteem, both of them share a common emphasis on the individual’s perception of his/her abilities as a person. Linguistic self-confidence is related to the output they produce. Second language (L2) self-confidence has been shown to be a significant indicator to language proficiency. Xu (6066: 624) considers self-confidence as a socially-constructed concept.

The importance of the L2 self-confidence construct and its relevance to learners both outside and inside the language classroom is self-evident. Confident learners are more likely to participate meaningfully in class activities (Edwads and Roger, 6064).

The aim of this study is to show the effect of self-confidence on English language learning by using questionnaire and some statistical methods.

The test of Questionnaire is answered by selected students in the English Department, College of Arts, University of Kufa.

7. Literature Review

Anstey (6992: 68) explained that many researchers used the terms self-confidence, self-worth, self-evaluation, self-satisfaction, and self-appraisal interchangeably. Basically, it is a psychological and social phenomenon in which an individual can evaluate him/herself according to
some values which may appear in different emotional situations, and which become developmentally stable, but are still open to be changed depending on personal circumstances.

Matsuda and Gobel (6005) stated the important role of “self-confidence” in identifying components of foreign language anxiety. Matsuda and Gobel (6005) found a strong link between “Low Self confidence in Speaking English” and “Reading Confidence/Enjoyment”. Horwitz et al. (6992) claimed that there were three components of foreign language anxiety: test anxiety, communication apprehension, and fear of negative evaluation. Therefore, language anxiety manifested itself when students avoided conveying complex messages in the foreign language, i.e., when they displayed a lack of confidence. Thus, if debilitative anxiety affects students’ performance or achievement, teachers should be able to identify what it is and help learners cope with or overcome their anxiety and lack self-confidence. (Matsuda and Gobel, 6005).

Self-confidence is considered to be another significant factor, which influences the learners' language performance. The students who lack of confidence are usually found to be extremely fearful and timid, moving away from expressing their opinions and even unable to utter a complete meaningful sentence in class. Therefore, self-confidence is very important for many reasons. The first reason is that self-confidence will encourage a person to try a new learning. One would be willing to take some risks in order to be successful. Another reason is that a confident person rarely gives up. With these abilities, a confident student can succeed in language learning.

Self-confidence is also the most essential factor that determines learners’ willingness to participate in oral activities in the classrooms (Yashima et al., 6005). In other words, we can say that where there is self-confidence, there will be good communication, while lack of self-confidence is thought to be the most strong and dangerous barrier for effective communication. A number of studies have been carried out on the effects of self-confidence on learners’ readiness to participate in classroom communicative activities (Clément, 6992; Gregersen and Horwitz, 6005; Molberg, 6005). These studies revealed that self-confident learners usually take risks at speaking in the second language even if they do commit mistakes. They engage in different oral activities in any topic and number of
students in class. They learn from their mistakes, work hard and by this way, they enhance their language proficiency. While low confident learners usually feel uncomfortable when using oral language because they are concerned about their performance could be criticized or disapproved, so they tend to perform less successfully.

Furthermore, the studies of self-confidence have meaningful implications for language teachers and professors. What should be carefully considered is how to help students to build and strengthen their confidence when they learn the second language. Successful language learning only takes place in an environment where learners learn with confidence and joy, where learners can use the second language at ease. Therefore, teachers should spare no efforts to create conditions that can be conducive to students' self-confidence. According to Krashen (1985) p.62 “The students who feel at ease in the classroom and like the teacher may seek out more intakes by volunteering ... and may not be more accepting of the teacher as a source of input”.

Self-confidence is a personal factor that pays a supportive role in the achievement of foreign language learning. Some studies claim that without self-confidence, no language learning activities will be carried out successfully (Al-Hebaish, 6066). It may facilitate or debilitate academic achievement. Foreign language learners who possess general self-confidence perform well and most likely believe themselves to be capable learners. When there is low self-confidence, on the contrary, "learners suffer from uncertainty, insecurity, fear and social distance" (Rubio, 6009).

The relationship between general self-confidence and academic achievement has been documented in literature. It is a controversial relationship and different studies showed conflicting results. A significant number of studies, as cited in Al-Hebaish (2011), reported the positive correlation relationship of self-confidence with grades in language courses. Likewise, as high self-confidence may develop the learners’ desire to communicate and help enhance and improve language proficiency; it may generate good performance. The correlation between self-confidence and academic achievement is an interactional one. As levels of self-confidence increase, academic achievement will increase as well. As learners suffer from low self-confidence, academic achievement decreases.
Now two terms have interrelated, Self-confidence and Anxiety. Anxiety is another particular affective factor. It is one of the most prominent and pervasive emotions. Language anxiety “ranks high among factors influencing language learning, regardless of whether the setting is informal (learning language on the streets) or formal (in the classroom)” (Jane, ⑧-⑩). Students with anxiety attending the class will feel afraid and nervous to cooperate with teachers and then they cannot concentrate on the learning topic points and waste their energy or they just want to flee the learning task.

Ellis (⑩-⑫) divided anxiety into three kinds: state anxiety, trait anxiety, and situation-specific anxiety. The study of situational anxiety has received considerable attention in Language Acquisition (SLA) research. It consists of the anxiety which is aroused by a specific type of events or situation such as examinations, public speaking, or class participation. “Language anxiety”, a type of situation-specific anxiety associated with attempts to learn an L2 and communicate in it. Second language learners’ anxiety is due to their competitive natures. They tend to become anxious when they compare themselves with their classmates in the class and found themselves less proficient. The anxiety will decrease when they perceive themselves becoming more proficient, and therefore better able to compete. Researchers also found that teachers' questions and feedbacks to students' answers are also threatening (Ni, ⑩-⑪).

To most instructors, developing learners' oral communication skills is the most challenging task in language teaching. Although practicing different communicative activities is the best way to help learners speak the language fluently; competence in the L2 may not be enough. (Dörnyei, ⑩-⑫) pointed out that learners not only need to be able to communicate but also be willing to communicate. MacIntyre et al. (⑫-⑬), as cited in Brown (⑬-⑭: ⑯) defined willingness to communicate as “the intention to initiate communication, given a choice”.

⑱. Methodology

A. Research Design

A survey (self-confidence questionnaire) has been applied on sample of students. See questionnaire in (Appendix ）。
The nature of questionnaire is about the feeling and worrying of student in using and studying English Language not only among her/his colleagues but with their professor as well.

The answers of questionnaire are typical answers (a. Agree, b. Strongly Agree, c. Disagree, and d. Strongly Disagree). Each answer represents a level of self-confidence; A & B represent low self-confidence and self-doubt (anxiety) respectively, while C & D represent self-confidence and more self-confidence respectively.

B. Participants

The participants of research are undergraduate students in the English Department, College of Arts, University of Kufa (evening study). A number of 56 students in the fourth year (senior students) has been participated in the research study. They are (62) Females and (62) Males. The percentage of male and female of all senior students in the department has been considered. The range of their ages is between 66 to more than 20 years old, 66 females are between 66 to 65 years old. Most of them have a good English level.

C. Data Analysis

The data collected from the questionnaire is converted to numbers and percentage in a master table (see Table:1).

The data is divided according to gender and then converted to the percentage for each gender.

Statistical analysis has been applied on data to find the significance of differences. Analysis of variance, two-way ANOVA test has been used to investigate the differences in two groups (Answers, and Gender), and then each statement has been analyzed by using statistical histogram and Estimated Marginal Means.
Table 1: Scores acquired from students’ questionnaire. (F=Female, and M= Male)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q. No.</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>A (%)</th>
<th>B (%)</th>
<th>C (%)</th>
<th>D (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results and Discussion

Analysis of variance, two-way ANOVA has been applied to test the differences or variance in answers within two ways (Gender and questionnaire No.). ANOVA results show significant differences (less than .0004) in two kinds of answers (A and C) within gender. It means that there are significant differences between female and male in these two answers, which represent two kind of significant level (A: less self-confidence, and C: strong self-confidence), while in the answers (B and D) the test shows no significant differences (see Table 6).

Among questionnaire’s statements as a group, the test show significant differences across all kinds of answers (Table 6).

Table 7: ANOVA test results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>Type III Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>389.057</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>389.057</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>.047</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>22.148</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22.148</td>
<td>1.723</td>
<td>.180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>8.781</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8.781</td>
<td>0.148</td>
<td>.927</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>D</td>
<td>509.244</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>509.244</td>
<td>19.300</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q-statements</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>7893.350</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>727.791</td>
<td>8.052</td>
<td>.001</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>368.381</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36.838</td>
<td>3.821</td>
<td>.017</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>3495.049</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>399.549</td>
<td>0.127</td>
<td>.902</td>
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<tr>
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<td>D</td>
<td>349.089</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31.730</td>
<td>7.793</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Twelve histograms (for each statement) have been made to study the differences in the attitude and response of female and male toward each statement (Fig. 1).
- **Statement No.1**: most of student choice answers (C and D) with clear majority for answer (C). It means that most of students have good self-confidence when the professor talks to them in English. 10% of females feel scare and 7% feel strongly scare, while 3% of males feel scare.

- **Statement No.2**: most of students have no problem when their classmates talk with them in English, just 7% females feel scare and 7% feel strongly scare.

- **Statement No.3**: significant percentage (10% of females and 3% of males) of students feel scare when they talk to their professor in English and females is higher than male in this answer. 7% of males feel strongly scared.

- **Statement No.4**: Most of students have no problem when they talk in English to their classmates, just 7% of females feel scare when they do that.

- **Statement No.5**: 22% of males and 52% of females worry if their classmates speak English better than them. Males are interested in speaking good English language.

- **Statement No.6**: 40% of females worry if their classmate will get higher grade than them while 3% of males worry about their grade. It means females have more worry about their credit than male.

- **Statement No.7**: Both females and males students with close percentage (26%) are worried when their professor corrects their mistakes with 66% of female are strongly worried.

- **Statement No.8**: Students not worry about people of classmate may laugh if they speak English. 7% of female worry about that and 7% are strongly worried.
Statement No. 11: less than in Q. 3 for male are worried (75%) when classmates correct their mistakes in English, while same percentage of female in Q. 4 (31%) are worried, but less percentage (2%) strongly worried, and majority of students have no problem in this point.

Statement No. 11: Most of students feel no scare in English class than in other class, only 21% of male are strongly scared.

Statement No. 11: half female’s students forget English when their professor asks them a question and 45% are strongly forgotten, with compare with 13% of male students.
Fig. 1: Percentage histograms of questionnaire’s answers for each Statement. (Blue: Male, Red: Female)
For more clear idea about the general attitude of female and male, Estimated Marginal Means diagrams have been made but for each answer for all statements (Fig. 6). Estimated Marginal Means diagrams show the followings:

- **Answer (A):** This answer reflects less self-confidence and anxiety. Females in this answer is higher than males in \(^6\)-statement (\(^6\), \(^9\), \(^5\), \(^6\), \(^2\), and \(^1\)). The central point of all these statements is related with speaking in English whither to their classmate of their professor of people. Both females and males are close in percentage in statement No. \(^6\) and \(^9\) and no one picks statement No. \(^1\). Males higher than females only in statement No. \(^9\).

- **Answer (B):** It reflects strongly less self-confidence. Females is higher than males with significant gaps in five statements (\(^6\), \(^9\), \(^5\), \(^6\), and \(^1\)) which are related to speaking of English and correcting mistakes, while males is higher in two statements with slight percentage (\(^6\)\(^5\)) for each one.

- **Answer (C):** This answer is an indication for self-confidence. Both curves for female and male are nearly close to each other with slight differences, e.g. in statement (\(^6\) and \(^9\)).

- **Answer (D):** It indicates to strong self-confidence. Males are higher than females in most of statements (\(^6\)-statement). It is a good indication that males have good self-confidence than females.

\(^5\). Conclusions

Generally, High percentage of students shows good self-confidence in \(^9\) statements. Statements (\(^6\), \(^9\), \(^5\), and \(^1\)) show the highest self-confidence for all students.

ANOVA test show significant differences between the answers of females and males, and among the statements as another group. Statement \(^6\&\(^9\) when their professor and classmates talk to them in English, statement No. \(^6\) when they talk to their classmates and statement No. \(^1\) they don’t feel scare in the English class.
Fig. 7: Estimated Marginal Means diagrams.
In statements No.: (♀, ♂, ♀, and ∀), students have problems in those points. They are scared and worried about the followings issues: (speaking English to my professor, if my classmates speak better English than I do, classmates will get a higher grade than I will and making a mistake if I speak English). Also significant number of students have problems in the followings statements (♂, ♀, ♂, and ∀) which are related to the followings problems (people or my classmates will laugh at me if I speak English, when the professor corrects my English mistakes, my classmates correct my English mistakes, and forgetting English when the professor asks me a question).

The major problems from statements and answers (Estimated Marginal Means) can be categorized as the followings:

♀ - **Problems related to the Students:** They have lack of self-confidence in speaking in English to their professor, making mistakes in speaking, and getting less grade than their classmates. Especially females show more lack of self-confidence in that point, and it is due to the social situation of female in Iraq (particularly in south of Iraq) and also the culture make female feel shy and retreated when she speaks to the make professor of classmate. Female shows more worrying about her grades than male. This reflects that female more competitive than male.

♂ - **Problems related to the others:** Students have problem with self-confidence when others (professor of classmates) correct their mistakes, classmates speak better English than them, people or classmates will laugh at them if they speak English and they forget English when the professor asks me a question. It also these problems because of the social traditions and the culture toward who speak foreign language especially for females.

♂ - **Problems related to the Gender:** Estimated Marginal Means graphs show that males have more self-confidence than female in the answers of self-confidence (C and D), just in two statements (♂ and ∀) females are more confident than male. In the answers of less self-confidence (A and B), the curves of female and male are relatively close and
females slightly high than male. This means that males have more self-confidence than females in answers (A and B). Females answers show low self-confidence than males and. In some answers there is lack of self-confidence. Females’ lack of confidence (Linguistic insecurity) comes from social traditions and culture, which create psychological and social barriers (shyness and hesitation) in speaking directly with strangers even with their professor or classmates. Absolutely such a problem will affect their English learning. It must be considered in order to guarantee good English learning and to make female’s students acquire good learning and overcome the social and psychological obstacles. Using new teaching techniques which will help and encourage students, with concentrating on female’s students, to speak English and how they learn from their mistakes by them.

7. Suggestions

The following recommendations and suggested topics could be investigated in further research:

1- More research on self-confidence can be carried out to include all stages in the Department of English to monitor the changings in self-confidence in different stages.

2- A study can be drawn for female’s students only to study and specify their problems in self-confidence in speaking English languages. This will lead to design an appropriate method of teaching English.

3- Further research can be undertaken to measure self-confidence in both speaking and writing for students using questionnaire to make comparison in self-confidence in speaking and writing according to their credits in their classes.

4- Further work can be applied to measure self-confidence in class so as to study the interaction and participation of the activities in the classes with students’ different topics between professor and students from one side and between students (Male and Female) from the other side.
References


Appendix (1)

1. I feel Scare when my professor talks to me in English.
2. I feel scare when my classmates talk to me in English.
3. I feel scare when I speak English to my professor.
4. I feel scare when I speak English to my classmate.
5. I worry if my classmates speak better English than I do.
6. I worry that my classmates will get a higher grade than I will.
7. I worry that I’ll make a mistake if I speak English.
8. I worry that people or my classmates will laugh at me if I speak English.
9. I worry when the professor corrects my English mistakes.
10. I worry when my classmates correct my English mistakes.
11. I feel more scared in English class than in other class.
12. I forget English when the professor asks me a question.
دور تأثير الثقة بالنفس لمتعلمين اللغة الإنجليزية

(الكلمات الرئيسية: الثقة بالنفس, الفلق, البراعة, اداء اللغة, تعلم اللغة)

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المستخلص

تعتبر اللغة بالنفس عاملاً مهماً في تعلم أي لغة ثانية. إن الحالة النفسية والاجتماعية (التقاليد والثقافة) مهمة جداً وينبغي النظر إليها في دراسة اللغة بالنفس. لقد خضع لاستبيان اللغة بالنفس أثناً واربعون طالباً (22 من الالات و16 من الذكور) في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية كلية الآداب. جامعة الكويت. عكست بيانات الاستبيان مستوى اللغة بالنفس (A, B, C, D). A, B تمثل انعدام اللغة بالنفس بينما C, D تمثل حالة جيدة للغة بالنفس. تم تحليل استبيان اللغة بالنفس بعدد من الأساليب الإحصائية (انوفا, المدرج الإحصائي, وسائل التقدير الحاسمية). أظهرت النتائج أن نوعاً فريق ذا دالة إحصائية في البيانات وفي نوعين من الإجابات. أما المدرج الإحصائي فقد بين أن معظم الطلاب لديهم ثقة جيدة بالنفس وان مشاكليهم في التحدث مع الآخرين وخاصة الأساتذة والزملاء وأيضاً الخوف والخجل من القيام بالأخطاء. أظهرت منحنيات وسائل التقييم الحاسمية أن الذكور لهم ثقة عالية بالنفس من الأئثاء وأيضاً أظهرت أن الأئثاء لهم درجة عالية من اندماج اللغة بالنفس في التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية إلى استبانهم وزملائهم. أظهرت النتائج أن للإناث خوف وقلق عال في التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية علانية، ولهم درجة عالية من الحذر والتناقل فيما بينهم. إن هذه المشاكل بين الطلاب سببها التقاليد والمجتمع. يجب استخدام طرق خاصة للتدريب لتشجيع وثبات اللغة الإنجليزية على التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية وجعلهم يكتسبون التعلم الكامل باللغة الإنجليزية والتغلب على العقبات النفسية والاجتماعية.