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A Qualitative Inquiry into EFL Anxiety: Through the Voices of Class Constituents

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This article explored 9 EFL learners' emotional reactions they experienced in order to locate sources of EFL apprehension in university-based classroom settings. As part of further establishing construct validity of the measure (the FLPAS) Kim (2002) developed, lengthy interviews were adopted with focus on sources of discomfort with a variety of forms of language learning tasks. Findings showed that the interviewees confirmed most of the statements in the measuring tool, thereby increasing the trustworthiness of the measure. Specifically, the following themes or categories emanated from the analysis of interview data: (a) anxiety about performance in EFL classrooms; (b) EFL anxiety or discomfort about difficulties with cultural understanding; and (c) EFL anxiety induced by instructor and instruction.

I. INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, the topic of foreign language (FL)/second language (L2) anxiety has captured many language professionals' attention. Research on this topic has been carried out and contributed to the theoretical clarification of the FL/L2 anxiety construct to some extent, leading to the identification of a variety of sources of language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Scovel, 1978, Young, 1986). Given that a substantial body of research has developed in the field and has made important advances in terms of research into the role of language anxiety in learners' performance and into the methods for its treatment, those advances have

particularly made it possible for practitioners to be equipped with tools necessary for the treatment interventions or anxiety reduction programs. This has eventually contributed to helping learners with difficulty in the process of language learning.

Numerous empirical studies have proliferated that investigate the effects of language anxiety on FL/L2 learners' performance. Some of those research studies resulted in contradictory research findings in exploring the effects of the construct on a learner performance (e. g., Aida, 1994; Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1988). As the problem with correlational research on language anxiety or affective variables was raised in MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), based on the research in MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) and Young (1986), such empirical studies are often criticized in terms of the difficulties with defining, manipulating, and quantifying variables based on correlational research on language anxiety.¹⁾ On the other hand, a small number of research studies have been conducted by using qualitative research methods in order to identify sources of anxiety in the language classrooms (Bailey, 1983; Cheng, 1998; Cohen & Norst, 1989; Proulx, 1991).

Up to date, language anxiety research has been marked by some limitations ranging from unclear conceptualizations of the construct to the current measuring tools (Kim, 1998; Kim, 2002). On an empirical ground, Kim (2002) developed a measure of Foreign Language Performance Anxiety Scale (FLPAS; see Appendix) in response to an emerging call for the reconceptualization of the construct as well as for the development of its measure. His research showed that the FLPAS is a highly reliable and valid measure of the FL anxiety construct. As another way to evidence construct validity of the measure, this study purported to further establish construct validity or augment the trustworthiness of the instrument. That is, a qualitative interview approach was adopted not only to provide evidence for the validity, but to further understanding of EFL learners' anxiety proneness in a university-based classroom setting.

As far as FL/L2 anxiety is concerned, language researchers' inquiry into the construct has so far focused on locating sources of anxiety on a discrete skill level, not on a comprehensive level. Particularly, given that no attempt has been made that investigates EFL anxiety coupled with instruction and culture, the present study also centered around ferreting out the sources of EFL anxiety associated with

1) See Bailey (1983), Bailey and Ochsner (1982), and Cohen and Norst (1989) for discussion of the difficulties with correlational studies on anxiety and affective variables. For a detailed discussion of the nature of correlational research and some of the problems associated with it, see Fraenkel and Wallen (1996) as well.

instruction and culture learning on the parts of learners. In this vein, the present study with equal attention given to EFL anxiety research at a comprehensive level will be viewed as a contribution to the literature, thus paving the way for a more thorough picture of the construct that influences EFL learner performance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the literature review of the ten diary studies on this topic, Bailey (1983) attributed the cause of language anxiety to competitiveness as an individual learner's personality trait. Competitive learners may have so great a concern about peers' performance that they keep comparing other students' performance with theirs to a very self-deprecating extent (Bailey, 1983; Donley, 1999). Bailey further sorted out the following characteristics regarding competitiveness that contributes to language anxiety from the analysis of her own diary: (a) obvious self-comparison with peers and personal expectations; (b) hostile responses toward other learners based on comparisons; (c) a desire to exceed peers; (d) concern with tests and achievements with reference to other learner performances; (e) a psychology for the teachers' approval; (f) a temporary or permanent withdrawal from the language learning setting; and (g) a learner's anxiety experience in the language learning class.

Cohen and Norst (1989) conducted a qualitative analysis of the diaries written by adult professionals in a Master's program in Australia. Their study did not focus on anxiety per se, but covered a wide range of affective aspects of language learning. With respect to anxiety, the researchers noted that contrary to their expectation, the participants' diaries displayed intense anxiety and fear coupled with FL learning. Public humiliation and instructor's disapproval were listed as sources of speaking anxiety in FL classes.

Young (1991) located potential sources of anxiety in language learning, based on her review of the literature on language anxiety. Young suggested that language anxiety comes from at least six sources as follows: (a) anxieties at personal and interpersonal levels; (b) student beliefs concerning language learning; (c) teacher beliefs about language instruction; (d) interactions between language student and teacher; (e) language tests; and (f) procedures with reference to the instructional setting.

From the interviews with university FL learners, Price (1991) cataloged sources of anxiety in the language classroom. They were: (a) speaking a target language before other students; (b) making mistakes in pronunciation; (c) frustration over the inability to communicate in an effective way; and (d) the difficulty coupled with FL language classes themselves compared to other content courses. By interviewing 24 Taiwanese college EFL learners, Cheng (1998) recently sorted out the sources of language anxiety. He reported that language anxiety emanates from lack of self-confidence, a clash between self-expectation and reality due to perfectionism, learners' fear of losing a good image, and a psychology of competition and deficiency compared with other learners.

III. METHOD

All interviews were conducted to approach the topic of EFL anxiety through the voices of the participants themselves, as well as to gather qualitative data in support of the construct validity of the measure developed, the FLPAS (Kim, 2002). The interviews were to probe (a) an individual student's perception of EFL anxiety induced by classroom language learning and (b) aspects of anxiety-provoking classroom practices perceived by individual students. Additionally, the current researcher's focus was on capturing instructional and cultural factors which are assumed to influence EFL students' anxiety by interviewing EFL learners and their teachers. Observations of EFL classrooms were also made as part of ensuring interview data triangulation.²⁾ This technique of triangulation is to increase credibility of explanations and interpretations made in qualitative research.

1. Participants

Nine university EFL learners were recruited to be interviewed for the current study. They were among those who had already participated in the scales

2) According to Mathison (1988), triangulation is not a technique to solve data collection and analysis problems, but a technique to provide better evidence for meaningful propositions about the social world. Three forms of triangulation are data triangulation, investigator triangulation, and methodological triangulation. For detailed account of triangulation, see also Creswell (1998), Reitzug (1994), and Schwandt (2001).

administration (See Kim, 2002). The participants were chosen among those who turned out to be highest-, average-, and lowest-anxious EFL learners on the basis of the administration of the FLPAS. All participants volunteered to be interviewed. Six interviewees were freshmen, two, sophomores, and one, junior. Of the student interviewees, 3 were male and 6 were female. Three participants represented each anxiety level. The researcher interviewed four instructors (3 female and 1 male) as well. They all held Master's degrees. They had studied in the States, except for one female instructor. They had been teaching English more than 5 years. Instructor participants ranged from late 20s to mid 30s of age.

2. Procedure

During weeks 3-5 of the first semester of 2000, all interviews were conducted after the researcher made arrangements with the individual interviewees. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes. Except when follow-up interviews were needed, EFL learners were basically interviewed once. These interviews were semi-structured, given that this format allowed the researcher to conduct interviews "guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time" (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). All interviews were conducted in the Korean language. At the outset of each interview, a few minutes were spent establishing rapport between interviewee and interviewer. The respective interviews were audio-taped with the permission of each interviewee. During the interview, the researcher jotted down what needed to be clarified or explored further. Following each interview, the researcher composed an in-process memo, based on notes taken during the interview and listening to the interview tape. When interviews were completed, audio-taped interview data were transcribed in Korean.

In addition to the interviews with EFL learners and their four instructors, observations of three different EFL classes taught by one instructor were made with his permission during Week 4, whereas observations of the other three EFL instructors' classes were not made, since they declined to be observed. During the observations, the researcher took notes of what was going on in each class, with focus on some aspects of affective reactions that came from classroom interactions among class constituents. After each observation, an in-process memo was written based on notes from the observation. Such classroom observations were intended to triangulate the data from interviews.

3. Data Analysis

As individual interview transcripts were available, the individual interviewee received the transcript, the researcher's finding, and tentative interpretations of the interview data to verify the interview data. This was intended for member checking which is regarded as "the most critical technique for establishing credibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Thus, member checking concerned taking data, interpretations, and findings back to the interviewee to see if he or she finds them plausible (Merriam, 1998).

The first interview transcript and the researcher's in-process memo, based on findings and tentative interpretations of the interview, were examined to extract subcategories of data which capture information pertinent to the facets of classroom EFL learning contributing to anxiety. These subcategories constructed later were compared with those subcategories extracted from the other two interviews with the EFL learners from each anxiety level and in-process memos. Comparisons of the subcategories with one another were used to lay out the structure of the researcher's findings from the interviews. Such a structure was later compared with in-process memos from class observations in order to derive abstractions or categories of the data. These data reflected the patterns or themes of the current study with reference to interviewees' perceptions of EFL anxiety and factors coupled with instruction and culture in classroom language learning situations.

The researcher consulted with a colleague as a peer debriefer who had experience conducting qualitative research. Consultation with the debriefer served to provide an external check of the qualitative research process of the current study. His engagements with the researcher were frequent during the process of subcategorizations from interview transcripts and in-process memos relating to each interview and subsequent comparisons of those subcategories. All this later extended to categories in association with EFL students' perceptions on language anxiety and cultural and instructional factors. Thus, consultation with the peer debriefer, notes from class observations, in-process memos from the observations and interviews were all used to establish the trustworthiness of the findings and interpretations made in this current qualitative inquiry into EFL anxiety in classroom settings.

IV. RESULTS

The results of this study were strongly supportive of the construct validity or trustworthiness of the measure developed. Just as the quantitative data supported statements of the FLPAS (Kim 2002), where university EFL learners agreed or strongly agreed with items about EFL anxiety on 28 of the 30 items, qualitative interview data paralleled these findings as well. Along with the comparisons of subcategories emerged from observation notes and in-process memos, examining the respective interview data generated three major categories associated with EFL anxiety of university students. They are: (a) anxiety about performing language learning tasks in EFL classrooms; (b) EFL anxiety or discomfort about difficulties with cultural understanding; and (c) EFL anxiety induced by instructor and instruction. The ensuing reports focus on the specifics of what emerged from those categories.

1. EFL anxiety regarding language learning task performances

1) Producing performance anxiety

Three interviewees who turned out to be EFL learners with high anxiety on the FLPAS score voiced their anxiety about speaking, especially when they had to use only English in their English conversation classes. Their EFL anxiety seemed to arise from concerns about an issue of face-threatening due to improper command of spoken English. They seemed to be preoccupied with the thoughts of losing the faces in public. Even if they wanted to speak up in front of the whole class, they tended to be conscious of such a face-threatening act. This seemed to be particularly true when they are not sure whether their spoken English is correct or appropriate in terms of grammar and content at hand. In addition, they were too intent on the idea of speaking English in perfect manners. Thus, a mixture of perfectionism and face-threatening seemed to be a major barrier to speaking performance in English even at a beginner level. The same was true for those interviewees who turned out to be less anxious EFL learners in the FLPAS administration. The comment below illustrates the point.

I know I can think and speak in my native language the way any adult does.
But in English, it's a totally different matter. . . . still incapable of using them

to speak English properly and free of errors. This always makes me feel nervous and frustrated, when I have to speak English . . . It's really impossible for me to use my English full of errors. . . I don't want to lose my face in their presence.

Student interviewees almost unanimously made similar comments that when speaking alone in the presence of the instructor and classmates, they got so anxious and stressful. One female interviewee responded:

When I am asked by the instructor to speak in English about a certain topic and at the same time my classmates are watching me, I become too anxious to speak. That's the most stressful moment I can ever imagine in English class. . . . I am too conscious of the way others may think of me when they are to hear me speaking English or I just do not have enough courage to speak up in class. Anyway, it's really hard for me to get rid of anxious feelings about speaking English. I turn into a shrinking violet in my English conversation class over and over again.

Similarly to speaking alone in class, EFL learners expressed their anxious feelings, when they had to participate in a whole class discussion of English conversation class and when they were supposed to ask the instructor questions in English. Three of the student interviewees told that they did not feel comfortable with practicing speaking English even in a small group.

I know I was in English conversation class and I was expected to become an active participant whether I speak in a whole class practice or group practice. Well, I think I am so dubious about my ability to speak English. I rather not take risks to speak whatever it is in my class. Of course, I feel so frustrated at myself, because of that. If I think I could do better than was expected of me in my English class, I doubt that I would remain silent under a lot of pressure. . . .

. . . Students as a whole seemed to respond well to the instructors direction. . . . students were engaged in a group work in order to practice the unit among themselves, while the instructors moving around. Classroom was filled with a lot of noises. When the instructor was near one of the groups, two students who were speaking in English suddenly stopped. . . . (From a class observation note).

2) Literacy Anxiety

Unfamiliarity with the texts EFL learners read makes it difficult for them to understand what they read, leading to anxiety coupled with poor comprehension of the contents. Also many unfamiliar terms encountered in their reading classes seemed to contribute to their feeling anxious. Apart from a full understanding of the text, students often found that they could not have a minimal understanding of the text. They sometimes depended on context for a minimal understanding of their reading by trying to guess the meanings of unknown words. They stated that most of the time contextual help did not seem to work and that they felt at a loss. They had wished the instructor not to ask them any questions on that reading:

Whenever in reading class, I found myself so helpless. However hard I tried to understand the meanings of many unknown words to me by using contexts, that didn't work at all. Ten to one, I couldn't rely on context . . . Just because of those words, I have had a great trouble understanding what the text is about. I was at a loss for the rest of reading class. I had wished my instructor would have not given me any question to answer.

Among the lists EFL learners made of reading-related apprehension, they seemed to feel stressful over reading abstract texts which they said were written about contents unfamiliar to themselves. Abstract texts with contents unfamiliar to them have been a major reason for Korean EFL learners to get anxious and nervous when in reading classes. According to the interviewees, the texts they had to read were so literary, scientific, or sometimes philosophical in contents that they could not get the gist of what they read. Even after repeated readings of the texts, they usually had a hard time understanding what the texts were about. The following is representative of the statements in this regard:

. . . contents which I don't know about and the texts were so difficult to understand. Almost everything I had to read in my English reading class was written by famous authors in the fields of literature, philosophy, and science. They wrote so abstract. I can't tell what they were going to say by reading the texts once. In fact, its so hard for me to do that even after I read the texts over and over again. I got lost in them. I don't know why the textbook should include such texts with plenty of big words. I just got more confused and anxious whenever I had to read those kinds.

Given that answering reading comprehension questions is an important classroom learning activity in EFL learning, the task also turned out to be most anxiety-provoking for the current interviewees. Their anxiety seemed to come from their being not appropriately equipped with the ability to answer reading comprehension questions after reading given texts. In addition to those anxious feelings associated with the texts and vocabularies used, the task of grasping the meaning of the texts put tremendous pressures on the learners, when followed by a series of questions and answers. For EFL learners, it seemed that understanding reading materials is one thing and answering the questions based on that reading is another. In particular, the learners felt stressful over answering the comprehension questions by reading the texts within a given time in class:

A certain text . . . was so stressful to me. Such a stressful feeling kept going until the instructor ends asking questions. I don't think I have been ready to deal with that kind of reading. Though I read the text, sometimes I had no clear idea of the content. I got angry with myself. . . . to answer questions immediately after I read within a limited time, the level of my stress and anxiety suddenly goes up. . .

Apart from reading-related anxiety, EFL learners interviewed revealed that they had anxious feelings associated with writing in EFL. Current EFL learners have had very few experiences composing in English through high school. While in high school, their writing experiences had been confined to translating Korean sentences into English counterparts. They had never been given chances to write in English about assigned topics or free choices. Getting accustomed to this kind of translation writing practice at secondary school has never been a help for learners to write independently in English. One of the interviewees told:

The only writing experience in my high school days had been to make a few English sentences as part of exercises at the end of each unit of the textbook. . . . In college, English composition has been a total new experience with a mixture of feeling "don't-know-what-to-write-about" and so uneasy. . . . My instructor was an American who put me under a lot of pressure. The pressure was simply due to the fact that I was not used to what a real composition is about. . . . Writing in English is not familiar territory to me.

Along with the previous translation-centered writing in high school, difficulties

coupled with choosing words and expressions they consider most appropriate seemed to make EFL learners feel unsure of and uncomfortable with college-level writing. Their ability to articulate ideas and thoughts in English writing seemed to be in part affected by inappropriate choices of English lexicon and idiomatic expressions which lead to learners' helplessness, as represented below:

Simply, all I had in English composition was to render into English. That did not do much good to my writing in English, when I took a composition class. In college, the opportunities to compose in English are available, but I can't have any good command of all the idiomatic expressions and all the words. . . . To me, all the trouble with English writing seems to start with improper selections of words and idioms. . . . I don't think I can move along the DEF's without any successful retrieval of such ABC's of writing from memory in the first place.

Besides the unfamiliarity with English composition while in high school, current university EFL learners seemed to experience writing apprehension, due to a lack of confidence in meeting their writing instructors' expectations. In other words, English composition accompanied emotional reactions signaled by worries over the learners' unclear ideas how to compose to the extent that the instructor would find their writing to be satisfactory. In addition to uncertainty of one's ability to compose in English properly, another contributor to one's worry about writing in English turned out to be related to a writing class activity. The interviewees voiced their worries about suspicion on their capability to comment on peers' writing performance, as illustrated in the representative statement below:

To make the matter worse, I felt so helpless and worried in my English composition class. Those feelings have to do with me not being able to write in English well enough to keep up with my teacher's expectation. I don't think it's possible for me to do the way my teacher expects to see me write about. . . . To make the matter worst, I get so worrisome when I sometimes have to read others' writings and help them write better by commenting on theirs in the class. Knowing that I am not confident in and sure of my writing itself, how can I dare to comment on someone's writing in English at this level? . . .

In-class English composition turned out to be a great burden to the EFL learners

interviewed. Particularly, they felt pressured over the in-class composition task which was subject to the instructor's grading, though they knew that it was not counted towards final course grade. Time factor came into play in arousing EFL learners' performance anxiety about classroom English composition as well. One of the interviewees narrates:

. . . so nervous about having to write on the spot, following my instructor's direction. Such assignments were not uncommon in my composition class. The instructor I had last semester would get us to write in English on many occasions. She collected every piece of our writings for correction and grading. Fortunately, she said that those writings of ours in the class were assigned just for practice's purpose, but not for part of an individual's final grade. . . . However, the very nature of writing I had to do within some amounts of time in class was that much stressful. I never recall I'd been relieved under those assignments . . . ashamed and embarrassed about showing my writing to her.

3) Listening anxiety

In interviews with 9 EFL learners with different FLPAS scores, it was found that 8 respondents had the anxious feelings in common when they were to be spoken to by a fast speaker of English. Exposure to such speakers that needs subsequent responses to them was looked upon as among the most difficult challenges EFL learners face in language learning processes. They unanimously mentioned that they would not feel that much anxiety about listening to a native speaker, if they did not have a fast speaker around them. They seemed to be so preoccupied with catching every word spoken to them that they easily got frustrated and upset with their listening comprehension. As a consequence, this seemed to have kept them from responding to a native speaker of English in appropriate manners:

. . . no comfortable feelings at all, when spoken to by any native speakers, specifically by those who speak English very fast. I know I can understand a few words or sentences at the beginning, but most of the time, I have no idea of what I heard in the end. I don't think I can speak to him, as long as I don't clearly understand him. . . . With only a few words I think I understood, how can I respond to him? . . . my face was getting blushed like a carrot, instead.

In situations in which EFL learners were around native speakers, the learners tended to feel anxious about exposure to native speakers' voices with less clear acoustic features. Listening to such voices as well as different accents and tones proved to be another source of the current interviewees' stress and anxiety. In such cases, they expressed that their listening comprehensibility drops so dramatically, especially in the face of speakers who scarcely open the mouth while speaking. A lack of sonority characteristics of such native speakers' voices seemed to play a crucial role in students' getting anxious, when they had been given opportunities to listen to them:

. . . feel so anxious when I listen to a native speaker of English. The more I listen to any one native speaker's voice and get used to it, the more difficult it seems to me to listen to others. Some speak like murmuring. Others speak so different accents without making clear sounds. Whenever I try to catch what they say, all I could hear is only a lot of noises which make little sense to me. Those natives' voices are too cacophonous to comprehend. I find them only to be too stressful to hear.

4) Evaluative apprehension

The current respondents expressed the concern that they have always been exposed to the English teacher's judgement or rating, either explicit or implicit. That is to say, whether they were learning English in the classroom or they were to be given English tests by the instructor caused them to get nervous about their performance in English. Though a learner is expected to feel a lesser degree of anxiety about performing classroom language learning tasks than about taking English tests, the very presence of the teacher while they have been learning English in the class turned out to be an enormous stressor:

I know how I have usually performed in the class would not be reflected in my final grade . . . the thought that I have been under my teacher's observation all the time during English class gets me to feel so uncomfortable and nervous. . . . Being conscious of the teacher's presence or his comment on my English later, I cannot but feel tense and look hesitant. The point is that I find it so hard to collect myself before I do something in class.

2. EFL anxiety due to difficulties with cultural understanding

Culture learning is often regarded as part of language learning. Though the current learners had very few opportunities to experience the foreign culture before, they seemed to feel much less sensitive to culture learning in their English class. Generally, learning a culture very different from their own in the class did not induce any severe anxiety at all. The majority of the current interviewees turned out to be not sensitive to anxiety arising from culture learning in their English learning processes. Insensitivity to culture learning appears due to the fact that they have had few opportunities to mingle with native speakers of English or to learn about the target culture in English classes. interviewed students reached an agreement in terms of lack of learning cultural aspects of EFL. Any serious attempt to discuss or explain the target culture was missing in their classrooms. One of the student interviewees took an extreme position on learning culture in his English class. He seemed to be satisfied with just learning English discrete from culture learning in the classroom. Given his current level of English proficiency, he did not perceive culture learning as an important part of English learning. To him, culture learning appeared to be a luxury he can dispense with.

Though I know that to learn something like culture is good, I just don't have any room for such a thing in my English learning . . . and I am not good at English, all I can think of right now is to have my English proficiency improved to an extent I can express myself in English. . . . Cultural aspects of English learning is just a peripheral thing to me. I see I have to pay attention to other more important aspects of English which I consider primary, neither second nor tertiary. I know what's at stake. When I think I would've met the primary things, I might switch to the next ones.

However, student interviewees who had come into firsthand contact with American culture took rather a different stance on their anxiety and discomfort caused by cultural understanding and differences. Without any prior knowledge or full understanding of American culture, what they experienced in the American classrooms and on the street turned out to be a great shock to them. They found themselves so unnatural and uncomfortable in situations where they were going to say and behave the way people there would do. In their contact with native speakers of English, they stated that they had felt still more anxious about whether

their behavior might offend the native speakers. On the other hand, their anxiety and discomfort seemed to be in part linked to a conflict between cultures of Americans and theirs.

On the street, an American boy around 15 asked me what time it was. The problem was not what he asked, but the way he talked to me. "Hey, you got the time?" How could you address someone who was older than you and a stranger by "Hey"? . . . I was so offended by him. Though I know that he is not representative of American boys and culture . . . educated in my culture in which such things can't be granted, I can't stop thinking that he was so lippy. Was that incident typical of American culture or was he just symbolic of American liberalism? No answer yet . . . I would like to think of that incident as an opportunity for me to learn more about American culture . . . though I may have a difficulty with adjusting myself to the "Hey" of American culture in a similar situation, I suppose.

3. Instructor induced EFL anxiety

Regardless of their anxiety levels measured by the FLPAS, all of the student interviewers revealed their anxious feelings that were induced by their instructors while in the classroom. Instruction or instructor factors associated with emotions seemed to assume a major role in boosting students' interest in and letting them build their confidence in English. One of the interviewees commented on his previous reading class and the way the instructor had monotonously run his class. The interviewee portrayed the instructor as one that "read, translated English into Korean, and explained grammar . . . would do so for good." Because of the way his instructor had structured his English class, he mentioned that English reading class had always filled him with a sense of boredom and that he never got motivated during the class.

He [instructor] always read, translated English into Korean, and explained grammar. . . . Whenever I was in his reading class, I never felt that he taught English interestingly. Instead I felt bored all the time.

EFL learners tended to feel much less comfortable toward a class in which their instructor underscores perfect accuracy rather than meaningful communication. According to them, some of the instructors that EFL learners had had made it a

rule to correct every error they had made before the whole class. Having such instructors in their English classes, especially in composition and conversation classes, turned out to be most anxiety-provoking and stressful as told by the interviewees.

. . . I felt so embarrassed and miffed by her way of correcting my mistakes when my classmates were watching. I wish I could've hidden behind someone's back.

Meanwhile, one of the interviewees with the low FLPAS scores indicated that his instructor has always been trying to make students feel comfortable in the class by introducing a variety of activities, giving assignments with many options available, and engaging them in small group works. More significantly, he added that how his instructor taught English composition and conversation classes was effective for his building confidence in the course. The instructor was said to provide feedback with minimal markings on his writings, if any and never to try to correct his writing in front of other students:

. . . English composition and conversation taught by the same instructor last semester, the instructor was never stingy in his praising us. He prepared a lot before class and tried to make us feel less anxious in the classroom. He gave us various topics and assignments for us to choose, together with some guidelines. . . funny and interesting. I don't remember any one attempt he made in terms of error corrections before the whole class. He was very brief to comment on our writings by pointing out some common mistakes . . . I didn't have to get nervous or antsy about his comments on my work.

More specifically, the analysis of the extended interviews provided an opportunity to determine the degree to which the interviewees provide support for the trustworthiness of the FLPAS developed (Kim, 2002). Overall, the interviews turned out to support most of the FLPAS statements in terms of the percentages of the current EFL learners' responses. Interviewees' responses pointed to the strongest support for speaking alone in front of the class (for instance, Item 1: 89%). Responses seemed to indicate that current interviewees felt very anxious and conscious about the way others might think of them, and they were not courageous enough to speak up in class, due to low self-confidence (Item 26). Participating in

a whole class discussion and asking questions of teachers also proved to be anxiety-provoking (Items 16 & 30). Being uncertain of one's ability to speak English, learners seemed to refrain themselves from taking risks when they were supposed to be active participants in classroom language learning. Exclusive use of spoken English while class was in session caused a third of the interviewees to feel apprehensive and uncomfortable (Item 9). Those who expressed pressure over the use of only English in class were pretty much preoccupied with the thoughts of face saving and must-have-perfect command of spoken English once they would have to speak in class, which in actuality was out of their control and put them into helplessness (Item 23). This apparently seemed to be associated with low or absence of self-confidence on the parts of the learners as well and serve as a barrier to speaking-related performance. Irrespective of the FLPAS scores, all the interviewees unanimously supported the anxiety arising from their exposure to unfamiliar speaking tasks (Item 2).

In regard to writing anxiety, the interviews showed that current participants felt apprehensive coming from lack of writing practice in English, primarily due to translation-centered writing in earlier stages of English learning. More than 50% of the respondents strongly voiced anxious feelings over their failure to come up with appropriate words and expressions when they had to write in English (Item 22). Being unable to retrieve suitable words and idiomatic expressions was a contributor to writing anxiety which caused them to feel unsure of their ability to compose in an appropriate way. The perception that learners could not keep up with instructors' expectation on their writings deterred themselves from feeling comfortable, as stated by six interviewees (Item 24). Additionally, the interviews lent support to worry about providing useful comments on peers' writing (Item 6). Respondents' worries reflected uneasy feelings or discomfort coupled with uncertainty of their ability to help others write better as part of process writing practice, when they were not even sure of their own writing in English. Tight time limitations on writing activities were also a strong indicator that caused the student writers to feel much too anxious and stressful in EFL classes (Item 13). Learners stated that they were very nervous and anxious about the thought of being exposed to instructor's constant and informal assessment in writing class, even though they knew that each of the assignments did not necessarily constitute part of the final grade (Item 17).

As was expected, most anxious feelings came from the task of answering reading comprehension questions in a class (Item 4), especially when a time limit was set

for their answers (Item 10). Six interviewees expressed that they were stressful over reading abstract texts dealing with literature, philosophy, and science (Item 11). The same number of interviewees responded that they were not comfortable with reading texts unfamiliar to them (Item 14). Unfamiliarity with such texts led some of the interviewees to poor comprehension of the contents they had to deal with in reading class. In reading texts, students are often expected to depend on context for grasping some unknown words or for a minimal understanding of the texts. When the contextual help did not work well and learners felt that they could not guess the meanings of unknown words, they reported that their anxious feelings never tapered off throughout the reading class (Item 28). Along with helplessness and feeling at a loss arising from the idea of getting no contextual help, interviewed students expressed the enormity of anxiety and frustrations over their encounters of many unfamiliar vocabularies in reading classes (Item 19).

V. DISCUSSION

Given the objective of the present study, the following three categories that contribute to learners' anxious feelings about EFL learning have emerged from lengthy interview data: EFL anxiety about performing language learning tasks; EFL anxiety about difficulties with cultural understanding; and EFL anxiety ascribed to instruction and instructor. Additionally, extended interviews hinted at more concrete sources of FL anxiety relative to classroom language learning. Those sources are low self-confidence or lack of self-confidence as a consequence of being dubious about one's ability, worry about losing face in public, and perfectionism. Such sources transpired from the extended interviews were consistent with those in earlier studies (Cheng, 1998; Norst & Cohen, 1989). The sources were found to be mostly associated with barriers to oral production. Additionally, tight time limitations on reading and writing activities, being spoken to by a fast speaker, and maladjustment to or difficulties with different acoustic features were contributing to learners' anxious feelings in a university-based EFL classroom.

As for items regarding listening anxiety, current interviewees almost unanimously supported in their statements that they felt tense about listening to a fast speaker of English, feeling preoccupied with catching every word spoken to but discouraged by not being able to do so. Taking a listening comprehension test in

a classroom turned out to be another source of anxiety. As a preamble to appropriate oral response later, in particular, seven respondents attributed their anxiety about listening to a native speaker of English to difficulties coupled with various accents, namely, to what is called "acoustic inadequacies, lack of clarity and proper enunciation" (Arnold, 2000, p. 779) (Item 25). Before Arnold, Dunkel (1986) underscored the weight of listening comprehension in achieving communicative competence: "putting the horse (listening comprehension) before the cart (oral production). . . . the key to achieving proficiency in speaking is developing proficiency in listening comprehension" (p. 100). A good oral proficiency in English presupposes a good aural proficiency. Prioritizing proficiency in listening before proficiency in speaking is also in concordance with many researchers' emphasis on listening as rudimentary for the language learning process to occur (Dunkel, 1991; Rost, 1990; Vogely, 1999).

However, EFL learner's anxious feelings over some of the tasks or topics might be interpreted as being linked to what could be seen as poor teaching practices (i.e., students' engagement in tasks with insufficient or no vocabulary preparation beforehand and excessive emphasis on correcting oral mistakes in front of peers; reading comprehension of complex literary passages with no prior vocabulary preparation; setting tight time limitations on writing and reading activities). Prior to students' engagement in specific learning tasks, an instructor's modeling combined with appropriate strategies would be a most effective way to alleviate anxiety on the parts of those apprehensives (Nyikos & Oxford, 1993). In this way, the tasks to be covered could be seen as less unfamiliar to them, leading to assuagement of anxiety over the unfamiliarity with the tasks to some extent and to the promotion of active involvement in the tasks. The modeling is thus underlined, because very few EFL learners are likely to be free from intense stress proneness or anxiety disposition arising from learning activities or performance tasks which are seemingly unfamiliar to them.

Findings of the present study enabled the researcher to see the construct of EFL anxiety in a more comprehensive way, but not in a separate way. That is, interviews with the current participants helped to sort out diverse sources of their anxious feelings over encounters of a wide range of classroom language learning situations. This study was undertaken to provide additional, preliminary support for the trustworthiness of the measure constructed, using qualitative interview data. However, it appears too premature to generalize the findings of the present study, since the research employed data drawn only from a very limited number of Korean

EFL learners. Given the issue of generalizability, additional qualitative inquiries into the construct of EFL anxiety are definitely in order and recommended as follow-up studies.

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Appendix: Foreign Language Performance Anxiety Scale (FLPAS)

- CHOICES: (A) STRONGLY AGREE
(B) AGREE
(C) UNDECIDED
(D) DISAGREE
(E) STRONGLY DISAGREE

1. I feel anxious when I speak English alone before the whole class.
2. Even if I am going to speak on an unfamiliar topic in my English class, I am not nervous about it.
3. I feel anxious about writing in English, when it is graded.
4. I find it stressful to answer reading comprehension questions in English class.
5. I find myself anxious about speaking in English while in group work.
6. I worry about if I can provide useful comments on my classmates writing in English.
7. I do not feel anxious about doing group presentations with other classmates in English class.
8. Taking exams in English class causes me to feel anxious.
9. I have anxious feelings, when I have to use only English in order to speak in class.
10. I feel pressure when I have to read within a limited time in English class.

11. I feel anxious in my English class when I read texts written in an abstract way.
12. I feel nervous when I am engaged in a role play in my English class.
13. I feel pressure about writing in English class whenever time limit is set.
14. When I read unfamiliar texts to me in English class, I am likely to feel uncomfortable.
15. Taking a listening comprehension test makes me nervous in my English class.
16. I feel tense about asking the teacher a question in English in front of the class.
17. The thought of being judged by my English teacher makes me feel anxious in the class.
18. I find it anxiety-provoking to volunteer for an answer in front of the whole class.
19. I am anxious about reading in my English class, when I see many unfamiliar words.
20. I do not feel nervous about reading in English class, even if I cannot exactly understand the contents of reading materials.
21. Oral exams in English give me much pressure.
22. Finding right words and expressions gives me anxious feelings in my English writing class.
23. I have no confidence in speaking in English because I cannot use correct grammar.
24. I get anxious when I have to write because I dont know what my English teacher expects to see in my writing.
25. I do not feel comfortable with listening to different accents in English.
26. Having my speaking judged by my English classmates makes me feel anxious.
27. I feel nervous when I cannot understand teacher comments on my English writing.
28. I cannot understand a word from context, I become anxious about reading in my English class.
29. I feel tense when I listen to a fast speaker of English.
30. I get nervous participating in whole class discussions in my English class.

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