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SPEAKING UNEASE: INVESTIGATING LANGUAGE ANXIETY AMONG JORDANIAN POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS AT YARMOUK UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the phenomenon of language anxiety among postgraduate students at Yarmouk University in Jordan. Language anxiety, a significant psychological factor influencing language learning, is examined through a mixed-methods approach, combining surveys, interviews, and classroom observations. The research investigates the levels of language anxiety experienced by students, its sources, and its impact on language proficiency and academic performance. The findings offer valuable insights into understanding and addressing language anxiety among postgraduate students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

KEYWORDS

Language anxiety, Foreign language learning, Postgraduate students, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Yarmouk University, Anxiety sources.

INTRODUCTION

Language anxiety is a pervasive psychological factor that profoundly influences language learning and proficiency. For postgraduate students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, such as Yarmouk

University in Jordan, language anxiety can have a significant impact on their academic journey. This study, titled "Speaking Unease: Investigating Language Anxiety Among Jordanian Postgraduate

Students at Yarmouk University," delves into the complex phenomenon of language anxiety, aiming to shed light on its prevalence, sources, and consequences in this specific context.

The Significance of Language Anxiety:

Language anxiety refers to the uneasiness, fear, or nervousness experienced by individuals when attempting to speak or communicate in a non-native language. It is a multifaceted phenomenon that can manifest in various forms, including fear of making mistakes, apprehension about being judged, or anxiety related to language assessments. Language anxiety can significantly hinder language acquisition, impair oral proficiency, and adversely affect overall academic performance.

The Context of Yarmouk University:

Yarmouk University, as one of Jordan's leading institutions of higher education, attracts a diverse body of postgraduate students from various linguistic backgrounds. English is often the medium of instruction for many programs, making language proficiency a crucial aspect of academic success. Understanding the dynamics of language anxiety within this context is essential for educators, administrators, and students alike.

Research Objectives:

This research study has several key objectives:

Assessing Language Anxiety Levels: Through surveys and interviews, the study aims to gauge the levels of language anxiety experienced by postgraduate students at Yarmouk University.

Identifying Anxiety Sources: It seeks to identify the sources and triggers of language anxiety among students, exploring both internal and external factors.

Analyzing Impact on Proficiency: The study examines how language anxiety influences language proficiency and academic performance, particularly in speaking skills.

Exploring Coping Strategies: In addition to identifying challenges, the study investigates the strategies that students employ to cope with or mitigate language anxiety.

The Research Methodology:

To achieve these objectives, the research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys, qualitative interviews, and classroom observations. This multifaceted methodology allows for a comprehensive exploration of the complex phenomenon of language anxiety among postgraduate students.

Significance of the Study:

Understanding the extent and nature of language anxiety among postgraduate students at Yarmouk University is essential for several reasons. It can inform the development of targeted interventions and support mechanisms to alleviate anxiety, enhance language learning experiences, and improve academic outcomes. Moreover, the study's findings may have broader implications for EFL contexts in higher education settings worldwide.

In the pages that follow, we delve into the multifaceted world of language anxiety, examining its prevalence, sources, and consequences among

postgraduate students at Yarmouk University. Through this exploration, we aim to contribute to the body of knowledge on language anxiety and provide actionable insights for educators, students, and institutions committed to promoting effective language learning in EFL contexts.

METHOD

The research methodology for investigating language anxiety among Jordanian postgraduate students at Yarmouk University employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. This mixed-methods design allows for a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon, offering both statistical insights and in-depth qualitative perspectives. The methodology comprises the following key components:

Survey Questionnaire:

Participants: A purposive sample of postgraduate students at Yarmouk University is selected.

Survey Instrument: A structured questionnaire is developed, incorporating standardized language anxiety scales, such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), and additional items related to anxiety sources, coping strategies, and demographic information.

Data Collection: The survey is administered electronically to participants to assess their levels of language anxiety and gather quantitative data.

Interviews:

Participants: A subset of survey participants is invited to participate in semi-structured interviews.

Purposeful sampling ensures a diverse range of interviewees based on survey responses.

Interview Protocol: A semi-structured interview guide is developed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and narratives regarding language anxiety, its sources, impact, and coping strategies.

Data Collection: In-depth interviews are conducted, recorded, and transcribed to gather qualitative insights.

Classroom Observations:

Participants: Classroom observations are conducted with the consent of participating students and instructors.

Observation Protocol: A structured observation checklist is developed to assess language anxiety manifestations during classroom interactions, including verbal and non-verbal cues.

Data Collection: Observations are made during select classes to document instances of language anxiety.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative Analysis: Survey data is analyzed using statistical software (e.g., SPSS). Descriptive statistics, correlations, and inferential tests are employed to assess the levels of language anxiety and explore relationships between variables.

Qualitative Analysis: Interview transcripts are subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to language anxiety, its sources, and coping strategies.

Triangulation:

Data Integration: Quantitative and qualitative data are compared and integrated to provide a holistic understanding of language anxiety among postgraduate students.

Ethical Considerations:

Informed Consent: Participants are provided with informed consent forms, explaining the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality measures.

Anonymity and Confidentiality: Measures are taken to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants' responses and identities.

Ethical Approval: Ethical clearance is obtained from the relevant university ethics committee.

Findings Interpretation:

Results Synthesis: The combined findings from surveys, interviews, and classroom observations are synthesized to draw comprehensive conclusions about language anxiety among postgraduate students at Yarmouk University.

By employing this mixed-methods approach, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of language anxiety, its sources, and its impact in the specific context of Jordanian postgraduate students at Yarmouk University, ultimately contributing to strategies for alleviating language anxiety and enhancing language learning experiences.

RESULTS

The investigation into language anxiety among Jordanian postgraduate students at Yarmouk University yielded multifaceted results:

High Levels of Language Anxiety:

The survey results indicated that a significant proportion of postgraduate students experience moderate to high levels of language anxiety in their English language courses. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) scores indicated that anxiety related to speaking and participating in English classes was particularly prominent.

Sources of Language Anxiety:

Qualitative interviews revealed that the primary sources of language anxiety included fear of making mistakes in front of peers and instructors, concerns about pronunciation and grammar, apprehension about negative evaluation, and self-consciousness during oral communication.

Impact on Academic Performance:

Classroom observations corroborated the impact of language anxiety on academic performance. Students exhibiting visible signs of anxiety, such as hesitancy, avoidance of speaking, and nervous body language, often struggled to actively participate in class discussions and oral assessments.

Coping Strategies:

Qualitative data indicated that students employ various coping strategies to manage language anxiety. These strategies included preparation and practice, seeking support from instructors and peers, positive self-talk, and exposure to English language environments outside the classroom.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study shed light on the complex interplay of language anxiety, academic performance, and coping strategies among Jordanian postgraduate students at Yarmouk University. The discussion centers on several key points:

Prevalence of Language Anxiety:

The high levels of language anxiety observed in this study highlight the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to help students overcome anxiety-related challenges in English language courses.

Impact on Academic Performance:

The study underscores the adverse impact of language anxiety on students' academic performance, particularly in oral communication. This finding emphasizes the urgency of addressing language anxiety to enhance learning outcomes.

Sources of Anxiety:

Understanding the sources of language anxiety provides insights for educators and administrators to create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. Efforts to reduce anxiety related to fear of evaluation and mistakes can be particularly beneficial.

Coping Strategies:

Recognizing the coping strategies employed by students can inform the development of interventions that promote effective anxiety management. Encouraging positive self-talk, peer support, and creating opportunities for practice and exposure to English can be valuable strategies.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study, "Speaking Unease: Investigating Language Anxiety Among Jordanian Postgraduate Students at Yarmouk University," illuminates the prevalence, sources, and consequences of language anxiety in an EFL context. The findings emphasize the urgency of addressing language anxiety to promote enhanced language proficiency and academic performance among postgraduate students.

The study advocates for the implementation of interventions, including anxiety reduction programs, peer support networks, and classroom strategies that create a more supportive and inclusive learning environment. By addressing language anxiety, Yarmouk University and similar institutions can empower students to navigate language unease more effectively, fostering improved language learning experiences and outcomes.

Overall, this research contributes to the understanding of language anxiety in higher education and underscores its significance in EFL contexts. It offers a foundation for further research and the development of evidence-based strategies to alleviate language anxiety, ultimately enhancing the language learning journey for postgraduate students.

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