

The Relationship between Shyness and Young Language Learners' Language Achievement

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Abstract

The study sought to investigate the interplay between shyness and young language learners' (YLL) language achievement (LA). To undertake this study, 40 intermediate YLL comprising 20 males and 20 females took part in the study. They were homogenized in terms of language proficiency via the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and a shyness questionnaire (SQ). First, the participants were asked to take the OPT. Next, they were required to fill out the SQ. The findings showed that non-shy YLLs performed better on the placement test than the shy YLLs. More precisely, there was a negative relationship between shyness and English LA. The findings also attested that there was no significant relationship between the gender (i.e., shy and non-shy YLL) and their LA. The findings may have both theoretical and pedagogical implications. From a theoretical underpinning, foreign LA can lead to a better understanding of the complex nature of the construct of shyness. From a pedagogical aspect, language teachers may employ different strategies to tackle YLLs' shyness with the hope to promote LA.

Keywords: Affective factors, Cognitive factors, Language achievement, Shyness, Young language learner.

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1. Introduction

One of the many challenges issue facing contemporary society is the increasing incidence of behavioral, mental, and educational problems. Although the attention paid to externalizing issues has not gained much attention, shyness is a serious issue that interferes with educational processes and social interactions. Shyness can affect the lives of children in many different ways and these consequences can last a lifetime (Fordham & Stevenson-Hinde, 1999). Shy children may be at risk of struggling in school during their early years from depression, fear and anxiety, and emotional adjustment issues may also be faced in adolescence (Hirshfeld et al., 1992; Schmidt, 1999; Rubin, 2001). Furthermore, shy kids have been shown to be less effective in using language in social situations.

The importance of studying the shyness of children and YLL should not be underestimated, as it is essential at this stage to provide children with a healthy atmosphere in order to avoid future social problems and to help them develop in their education. To achieve what they deserve they should be able to express themselves. Gardner and Macintyre (1993) stated that second language refers to any language that is studied apart from the first language of a nation. A variety of factors influence the success of someone learning a foreign language. They divided these factors in to two groups:

- Affective factors,
- Cognitive factors.

Affective factors include learner's attitude to the learning process that has also been identified as being critically important to second-language acquisition, Anxiety in language-learning situations has been almost unanimously shown to be detrimental to successful learning. A related factor, personality, has also received attention. Social attitudes such as gender roles and community views toward language learning have also proven critical. Language learning can be severely hampered by cultural attitudes. Affective factors particularly include language attitude, motivation, language anxiety, willingness to communicate, and shyness.

The learner has a lot of information on his brain as if it were the hard disk of our computer, there were some mental factors or characteristics of an individual that make him more successful than others. These three

characteristics seem most effective and important in success of learning a second language. These factors are:

- Intelligence,
- Language Aptitude, and
- Language Learning Strategies.

Such a complex process necessarily has many causes and elements which contribute to it. Internal factors that influence second language learning are those that are derived from the learner's own experience. Some pupils learn a new language faster and easier than others. All those who have learned a second language themselves, or taught those who use their second language in school, know this simple fact. Such language learners are obviously successful because of their pure determination, hard work and persistence, but there are other important factors affecting performance that are generally beyond the learner's influence (Izard & Hyson, 1986).

The affective component in shyness reflects the psychophysiological reactions experienced by shy people, such as anxiety, muscle tension, increased heart rate and upset stomach and they expressed that is shyness actually is a symptom of some underlying psychological problem such as inferiority, self-consciousness, perfectionism, lack of self-confidence, low self-esteem or a fear of rejection (Briggs, Cheek & Jones, 1986; Leary, 1986).

2. Review of Literature

Shyness is one of the personality factors which has been widely researched and discussed in the literature (Chu, 2008). Regarding language learning, Crozier (1997) stated that less shy children outperformed more shy ones in formal fluency and expressive tasks. Also, there was found to be a significant difference between shy and non-shy learners with regard to failing records (Amini, 1999). It was concluded that shy groups failed more than non-shy ones. Moreover, Sephrband (2000) documented a better performance by non-shy learners compared with the shy ones. Nevertheless, research conducted by Allvar (2003) and Pazooki and Rastegar (2009) indicated the negative effect of shyness used by students and on the language proficiency, respectively.

Due to the previous studies mentioned above, to find the relation between shyness and LA, it is documented that shyness is significantly and negatively

associated with LA. They stated that Shyness can have a negative effect on learning” Crucial skills for success in school include the ability to participate actively in the classroom and to get along with others. Shy children are less confident in these areas than their peers, and this can have a negative effect on their learning and school performance (Chishti, Amin &Yousaf, 2018; Namaghi, Safaee & Sobhanifar, 2015).

According to Coplan and Armer (2005), the most common characteristic of shyness is the difficulty of verbal communication and speech inhibition, which can be detected in early years. Shy kids have also been shown to have poorer verbal and receptive language abilities in some studies. A large body of research has emerged showing shyness is a highly prevalent condition in children and adults. Various studies indicate that almost half of all people believe they are shy. Asendorpf and Meier (1993) found shy kids spend less conversational time than their sociable peers do. Evans (2001) who not only spoke fewer words than their talkative peers in shy school children, but also observed qualitative variations in their expressions. Shy students introduced fewer subjects, spoke fewer words and made shorter pronouncements about each subject, spoke more often about objections.

Payne (2006) stressed that cultural experience is essential for understanding individuals who identify themselves as shy. Therefore, each culture is not the same and they have their own concept of normality. Various cultures have different strategies and it is important that this is taken into account when working with people from a specific cultural community.

Trow (2004) conducted that we should recognize academic success in terms of knowledge obtained or comprehension produced by test Trademarks granted by school teacher Schoolboy. Not only does achievement require class success, in which baby schooling occurs, but extracurricular sports Indicate even infant literacy. According to some research in India, highly shy students vulnerable to neuroticism tendencies and results in negative consequences, for example low achievement at academia. Participation in schools is typically less by the shy kids feel nervous when they are trying to participate (D’Souza, Urs& James, 2000).

Cheek and Briggs (1990) presented that the nervous signs of shyness include global mental anxiety with more common physiological problems, such as stomach upset, heart racing, sweating and/or blushing. These reactions reflect shyness-factors of somatic anxiety. Schalling (1975) suggested that the cognitive component of shyness involves extreme public self-awareness, self-deprecating thoughts and worries about other people's negative assessment. The distinction between somatic and cognitive elements of shyness is based on the difference between somatic fear and psychic fear, a distinction that continues to receive empirical support (Heiser et al., 2009). Additionally, the distinction between somatic components of shyness and advanced cognition is important for understanding the development in shyness in young children (Greenberg & Marvin, 1982; Izard & Hyson, 1986).

There are some shyness theories which distinguish between different kinds of shyness of children. Buss's theory (1984) made a distinction between early appearing nervous timidity and late appearing self-conscious shyness. Lewis (1995) differentiated between shyness that occurs in the first year and is entirely avoidant and negative, and two types of humiliation, self-exposure and self-assessment. The theoretical view of Asendorpf (1989a) is that childhood shyness is the result of the interaction during development of at least three distinct phases of shyness: temperamental shyness, social evaluative shyness and in sociability. Finally, Rubin (2001) distinguished between two groups of children removed from society. The first is withdrawal due to shyness and the other form is a retired child who is not inherently shy but tends to play alone (Rubin et al., 2009).

Pye (1989) studied such school children and labelled them as invisible children. In case studies he found that these pupils try to cope with their difficulties in the classroom and adjust to the demands of school and to the attitudes of teachers by inhabiting what he calls "No-man's-land", i.e., they adopt a self-protective strategy and maintain a defensive strategy of passive withdrawal. They do nothing or do the least amount of work to avoid attracting the attention of the teacher; they never answer the teacher's questions or volunteer their participation in any activities.

Crozier (1997) argued that these strategies to overcome shyness, although seemingly effective, separate pupils from participation in valuable school activities and prevent them from developing coping strategies that would add to their self-confidence. Shy children are likely to be less evident in their classroom due to their quietness and inability to initiate either verbal or non-verbal involvement in structured or unstructured environments, interaction, questioning, elaborating thoughts, and finding support. Shy children are likely to be less evident in their classroom because of their quietness and inability to initiate both verbal and non-verbal participation in structured or unstructured situations, interaction, questioning, elaborating ideas and asking for support. Students who are reserved and withdrawn are likely to have few friends, have trouble establishing and maintaining peer relationships, have poor relationships with school teachers, and are vulnerable to depression and social isolation.

Crozier (1997) also pointed out that if a child seems withdrawn this does not necessarily indicate particular social interaction difficulties. The child may have simply become disengaged and generally lack interest in school, which has led to the child's dislike of engaging in school activities. And, maybe a child is anxious and concerned about home issues or about maltreatment or bullying at school.

Jones and Gerig (1994) interviewed a group of 'silent' children who had been routinely observed and classified as such in their class. The children identified themselves as reserved and lacking in self-confidence and preferred not to be the focus of attention of other pupils. While pupils who are quiet, shy and withdrawn agree that their quietness or shyness may be socially restrictive, they may have different, often contradictory, attitudes to speaking at school. Worry about speaking in front or with others can make shy pupils feel inadequate, especially when compared to their less shy peers, which can also prevent them from taking an active role in their learning. That can lead to academic disability. Zimbardo (1977) stated the following characteristics of pupils and students, based on his observations of pupils in their classes and university students in their colleges:

- They are reluctant to initiate conversation, activities, add new ideas, volunteer or ask questions.

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- They are reluctant to structure situations that are ambiguous.
 - Unstructured permissive situations, such as dance, create special problems for the shy that are not apparent when the guidelines for appropriate behavior are spelled out, as in class.
 - Shy students talk less than non-shy students during most interactions with classmates. They allow more silent periods to develop and interrupt less than non-shy students.
 - Shy students use fewer hand gestures during interviews than non-shy students.
 - Shy children spend more time sitting in their seats, wandering less around, and talking to fewer other children. They obey orders and are rarely troublesome.
 - Rarely are shy children chosen for special duties, such as teacher's errand monitor.

Zimbardo (1977) concluded that shy pupils are distant from their teachers by not engaging teachers on personal issues, by not asking or even encouraging teachers to give them support or guidance, and by providing little to no input on the efforts that teachers are making on their behalf.

This research had the aim of investigating the relationship between shyness and language achievement of Iranian YLL. Consequently, the following study issues were dealt with:

RQ1. Is there any important connection between the shyness of YLL and their English language achievement?

RQ2. Is there any significant difference between shy males and females in their language achievement?

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

For the purpose of this study, both young male and female students from two language institutes located in the urban area of Babol, Mazandaran were participants of the present research. There were 40 (i.e., 20 male and 20 female) BA students who were from three majors including psychology, sociology and management. Their age ranged from 19 to 23. They were all

passing their early education at Babol University. The students were at intermediate level as far as their language proficiency was concerned. They were learning *New Interchange* three at a private language institute. Accordingly, a convenience sampling procedure was adopted to select the target group. To screen the homogeneity of YLLs, a Nelson Test was administered. Before sampling, the population members were divided into homogeneous subgroups based on the test outcome.

3.2. Instruments

There were two main instruments used in this study.

1) Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was primarily used in order to measure and determine the participants' level of English language proficiency. Since the OPT test has often been used by Iranian ELT researchers as a language proficiency test, and therefore the reliability and validity of this test were good enough to serve the purpose of this study. This test consisted of 60 items in the form of multiple choice questions, and students were supposed to choose the correct answer from among the alternative. In this study, this test served as an index to show LA of the YLL.

2) The Shyness Questionnaire

Pilkonis's (1977) SQ was utilized for the purpose of this study. This questionnaire comprised 44 items in the original questionnaire and after piloting in the context of Iran, the number of the test decreased to 40 items in this context. The questionnaire was on a four-point Likert scale and the students had to choose one of them. The reliability of the questionnaire was checked by Cronbach Alpha and enjoyed a reliability of 0.78. This questionnaire showed that the higher score one student received, the less shy that student were in their performance in the school.

3.3. Procedure

To comply with the objectives, the following steps were taken: Two language institutes in Babol were randomly selected to screen the subject. A number of 98 YLLs at the intermediate level expressed their willingness to take part in the

study. The OPT test was administered to ensure the homogeneity of the participants. The test was administered among the population in 4 classes (i.e., two male classes and two female classes). Those who scored between one standard deviation above and below the mean were randomly selected. Accordingly, 40 students (i.e., 20 male and 20 female students) were selected as the sample of the study. Next, the SQ was distributed among the YLLs. The SQ was preceded by a brief explanation of the purpose and nature of the study. All were ensured the confidentiality of the data. Attempt was made to clarify how their answer could change the outcome of the study. They were requested to answer honestly. The time-limit for the questionnaire was 45 minutes. Two weeks later, the OPT was administered among the YLLs with the aim to evaluate their ELA level. Next, the researcher collected the data and analyzed them to discover the relationship between shyness and LA.

3.4. Data Analysis

This study was classified as the correlational research. It is non-experimental study in which the objective is to measure two variables and assesses the statistical relationship (i.e., the correlation) between them with little or no effort to control extraneous variables. In this study, shyness and the gender were independent variables and the LA of the YLL was the dependent variable. The collected data was analyzed by statistical analysis through the SPSS software (version 21). This study aimed to investigate the relationship between shyness and LA scores of Iranian YLL, and to determine the difference between male and female YLLs' shyness in terms of their LA. Therefore, descriptive statistics, means, standard deviation, and Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient were used to analyze the data and to find the correlation among the variables.

4. Findings

4.1. Analysis of First Research Question

First of all to analyze the data, the test of normality was used to ensure the normality of the data. Table 1 shows the normality test and confirms the normality of the data as the p-value is greater than 0.05.

Table 1: Test of Normality for Shyness and English Language Achievement

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Shyness	.11	40	.20 [*]	.98	40	.88
ELA	.08	40	.20 [*]	.98	40	.69

To answer the first research question of this study and to investigate the possible relationship between shyness and English LA of Iranian YLLs, Pearson correlation analysis was run. Table 4.2 indicates the descriptive statistics of shyness and English LA. The mean scores of the shyness and English LA are 25.17 and 33.55, respectively.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Shyness and English Language Achievement

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Shyness	25.17	2.83	40
ELA	33.55	9.20	40

Table 3 indicates the Pearson correlation between the two sets of scores from the participants (shyness and English LA). The p-value revealed that there was a negative and significant correlation ($r=-076$, $p\text{-value}=0.00$) between the two groups, as the $p\text{-value}=0.00$ is less than the required 0.05. In this regard, it can be stated that there is a negative relationship between the shyness and English LA scores of the learners which means that high scores in one variable is associated with low scores on other one. Therefore, the first null hypothesis of the study is rejected, leading to the conclusion that there is a negative and large correlation between shyness and ELA. It seems that the less shyness they have, the more achievement they will have on English language.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation between Shyness and English Language Achievement

		Shyness	ELA
Shyness	Pearson Correlation	1	-.76 ^{**}
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.00
	N	40	40
ELA	Pearson Correlation	-.76 ^{**}	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	
	N	40	40

4.2. Analysis of Second Research Question

To probe the second hypothesis of the study and to see whether the obtained data is normal or not, Shapiro-Wilk test of normality was utilized. Table 4.4 shows the result of the normality test and it reveals that the data of both male and female learners are normal as the p-value is greater than 0.05.

Table 4: Test of Normality for Male and Female Scores on ELA

	Gender	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
LAS	Male	.09	20	.20 [*]	.97	20	.92
	Female	.14	20	.20 [*]	.96	20	.57

In order to see whether there is any statistical difference between shy male and shy female learners in terms of their ELA scores or not, an independent sample t-test was used. The results of descriptive statistics are presented in Table 4.5. The mean scores of shy male and shy female learners were 33.90 and 33.20, respectively. To investigate whether the mean difference is statistically significant or not, an independent sample t-test was run.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics of Male and Female Scores on ELA

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
	Female	20	33.20	9.27	2.07

Table 6 represents the results obtained from independent sample t-test of shy male and shy female learners' scores. As p-value (0.81) is larger than the required 0.05 (p-value >.05), it can be stated that the mean difference between the two groups is not significant. It means that despite the difference in the descriptive statistics, the inferential statistics revealed that the mean difference is not meaningful. In this regard, the second null hypothesis of this study stating there was no significant difference between shy male and shy female learners in terms of their ELA scores is not rejected.

Table 6: Independent Samples T-Test on Shy Male and Female Learners' Scores on ELA

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
										Lower	Upper
LAS	Equal variances assumed	.022	.88	.23	38	.81	.70	2.94	-5.26	6.66	
	Equal variances not assumed			.23	37.99	.81	.70	2.94	-5.262	6.66	

5. Conclusion

The major focus of this study was to explore and detect the relationship between shyness and YLLs' ELA. As it has been discovered, there is a negative relationship between the learners' shyness and ELA scores that means high scores on one variable are correlated with low scores on the other. It can be inferred, therefore, that there is a negative and strong relationship between shyness and ELA. The less shyness they have, the more confidence they would have on English.

This result is in line with Alavinia and Salmasi (2012) and Chishti, Amin, and Yousaf (2018) studies in which they found that the shyness of the learners was negatively associated with the ELA scores. It seems that shyness can affect their attempts to learn English in the sense of the EFL which can ultimately hinder their learning, thereby leading them to perform poorly on their English exams. The second result was that the shyness of the male and female students in their ELA was not substantially different.

It means that the inferential statistics, given the discrepancy in the descriptive statistics, show that the mean difference is not important. In terms of their ELA ratings, there is no substantial difference between shy male and shy female YLLs. This result is completely incompatible with previous study by Alavinia and Salmasi (2012) in which they stated that the gender of the learners was not important in the mean language learning gap and shyness.

Some may fairly argue that there is a lack of substantial gender gaps in the standardized teaching methods and resources, the formal history of language learning, and the respondents' age and language level (Saunders, 2012). The participants in this study represented a very homogeneous group of students with regard to their individual characteristics and those of their sense of learning. The findings of the present study, together with the findings of Saunders (2012) who believed that in the sense of the EFL, in which the EFL is a topic of education, identity issues are not prevalent, any potential gender differences are waters down. Similarly, Chu (2008) found a moderately positive correlation between ELA and shyness. He also found a negative relationship between shyness and willingness to communicate in both first and second language.

Unlike studies by Saunders and Chester (2008) who reported sexual differences in shyness in adolescence, and Zimbardo (1977) who found adolescent females to be slightly shier than adolescent boys, the findings of this study showed a non-significant relationship between shyness and gender. The result of the study is not in line with the studies of Kleinmann (1977) and Krashen (1985) who found a negative relationship between shyness and ELA.

The present study made a rigorous and vigorous attempt to investigate how significantly shyness could have parts in ELA and also it is investigated that how gender effect on the relation of shyness and achievement of language.

The negative relationship between shyness and ELA in the current study is the assumption that over shy students feel despised, emotionally irritated, scared of others judgments, anxious, and hesitant in social situations. For instance, oral examination that requires speaking in front of class prevents the student from focused revision are examples of situations in which shyness negatively influences achievement. This interpretation is consistent with some recent research (Hughes, 2008; Crozier &Badawood, 2009; Grozier & Hostettler, 2003; Crystal, Parott, Okazaki, & Watanabe, 2001) who found that over shyness is a negative predictor of achievement.

Also, this result is consistent with the results of Abdul Qadir and Kamel (2005) and Harthy (2003) and differed with Slamah, Sulayman, and Ibrahim's (2011) study who reached to the absence of differences in statistical

significance between the behavior of shyness and academic achievement. The results showed that non-shy YLLs performed better on the placement test than the shy ones. Their scores clearly showed the superiority of non-shy YLL to the shy learners. As a result, we can say there is a negative relationship between the shyness and ELA scores of the learners. The second finding was that there was no significant difference in the scores of male and female shy YLL s and also there was no significant difference in the scores of male and female non-shy YLL s. Therefore, we can say there is no significant relationship between the gender of shy and non-shy YLL s and their ELA.

According to the results of present study, three pedagogical implications were provided. This study can help teachers find out what encourages or impedes their students from practicing English. Using the information of students' personality trait like shyness an instructor can gauge the participation of the class activities that he or she may want to implement and make modification of the curriculum accordingly. If there were more shy students who were reluctant to speak up and practice in the class, pair work or individual activities can take up a larger portion of the curriculum, to help create a low-risk learning environment, and to help students who prefer to process mentally before production.

Secondly, most of the time there are shy students in the language classroom. So, the teachers should be cautious to not underestimate shy students. Teachers can identify shy student and help them express their ideas by utilizing techniques such as role-play, repetition, and less oral tasks that are less stressful for shy person. Identify shy student and help them not underestimate them. Underestimation does not help them be stronger instead it makes them weaker and weaker by losing their self-esteem

In this study, the work encountered many unforeseen circumstances and potentialities. It seems that many factors interact and create new situations leading to new questions. These questions are suggested as more study topics under the following: The age of children in this sample was restricted to between the ages of 14 and 15 More work is required to study the impact of shyness on the development of the language at different ages of learners.

This study used only quantitative method of research; this work has potential to be carried out using qualitative methods of research. Therefore, research design may be rendered in future study to use both the methods of quality and quantity analysis (mixed method).

Several research may be performed to explore the impact of shyness on the verbal actions of the learners in different settings such as schools, playgrounds and home environments.

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