The Mediating Effect of English Language Anxiety on the Relationship between Classroom Learning Environment and Coping Strategies

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the mediating effect of English language anxiety on the relationship between classroom learning environment and coping strategies among first-year college students of UM Digos College. In order to do so, this study employed the quantitative research design using the descriptive and correlational method via mediation analysis. Using proportionate stratified random sampling, primary data were gathered through the use of online survey questionnaires addressed to 271 respondents who are first-year students with GE 2 subject. In addressing the hypotheses of the study, correlation analysis using Pearson product-moment correlation and mediation analysis using Sobel z test was used. The level of classroom learning environment, coping strategies, and English language anxiety were similarly high among college students. Results also revealed classroom learning environment has significantly predicted coping strategy. However, classroom learning environment did not significantly predict English language anxiety. Further analysis through Sobel z test confirmed that the mediating effect of English language anxiety on the relationship between classroom learning environment and coping strategies is insignificant.

Keywords: Classroom learning environment; English language anxiety; Coping strategies; Mediation; Regression; Philippiness

INTRODUCTION

English language is regarded as the international language that serves as an avenue for non-native speakers to adapt the language for worldwide access or professional growth [1,2]. The Philippines is one of the many countries that use English language as a powerful tool for international elevation. A lot of studies were already conducted on English language learning; findings revealed that most students who adapt English as a second language experience language anxiety. Coping styles for language anxiety help the learners lessen and eliminate anxiety. However, most of the learners seldom thought about how to reduce anxiety [3-5]. When students fail to use coping strategies, anxiety increases which leads to reluctance in communication, feelings of incompetence negative effects on academic performance and continuity of enrolment.

A person develops behaviors or actions to solve problems as he grows; therefore, a college student should have developed the ability to generate strategies to deal with problems such as foreign language learning anxiety [6]. To attain both physical and mental health a person needs to use coping strategies to alleviate and adapt the environmental pressure. Anxiety increases when there is an environmental threat increase. This means a free-anxiety classroom learning environment may decrease students' affective filters, such as language anxiety. However, suppose the learner's anxiety continues to elevate [7]. In that case, it increases the chance of perceiving the second language acquisition situation as threatening because they cannot see themselves as being able to overcome the perceived threats from their fears. This may lead them to find ways to deal with these feelings of inadequacy and helplessness by using coping strategies. Moreover, the teacher, one of the key players in the classroom learning environment, should act as a facilitator by developing a harmonious relationship with the learners and stimulating students' motivation and interest in language learning by assisting students to cope their anxiety while learning the language.

Numerous studies show classroom learning environment as a strong predictor of coping strategies [8]. However, language learners' perceived level of language anxiety might also foreshadow their coping strategies. In the Philippines, taking a language course can be a stressful and intimidating experience for some students

[9-12]. Thus, the investigation of language anxiety is essential to these students, especially non-English majors who usually have few chances to use the target language in their daily life. Hence, the researcher opted to conduct this research to explore the mediating effect of English language anxiety on the relationship between classroom learning environment and coping strategies of college students [8].

METHODOLOGY

This study used the non-experimental quantitative research design using the correlational technique. The non-experimental quantitative design was used to determine the relationship between variables and to figure out which of the variables are connected, while the correlational technique describes the statistical association between two or more variables. The study was conducted at UM Digos College involving N=271 first-year college students who were currently enrolled in Purposive Communication subject (GE 2) [5]. They were chosen as respondents because they were able to comprehend the contents of the survey questionnaire.

The researchers adopted existing scales in making the three-part survey instrument. The first part is the classroom learning environment instrument which was adapted, a new learning environmental instrument named What Is Happening in this Class? (WIHIC), which incorporates scales that have been used and proven to be significant predictors of the classroom learning environment. The second is the coping strategies scale to assess college students' use of coping strategies. The third scale was the English language anxiety which was taken from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to determine language learners' anxieties.

Contingent with UMERC approval number UMERC-2021-157, the researcher sent letters of permission to conduct the study, signed by the adviser and favorably endorsed by the Dean of the Professional Schools, to the approving office of UM Digos College. Using a stratified random sampling, a pre-filled link was sent electronically via email and other online channels to the respondents. During the conduct of the survey, respondents were asked to read and answer the questions honestly and religiously. Moreover, the online survey was conducted for three days commencing February 5 until Feb 7 of 2021 [11].

For a more comprehensive interpretation and analysis of the data, the following statistical tools were utilized. The mean was used to characterize the classroom learning environment (IV), coping strategies (DV), and English language anxiety (MV). The Pearson was used to determine the significance of the relationship between classroom learning environment (IV), coping strategies (DV), and English language anxiety (MV). While the Medgraph using the Sobel z-test was used to determine the mediating effect of English language anxiety on the relationship between classroom learning environment (IV) and coping strategies (DV).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Shown in Table 1 are the results of the descriptive statistics on assessing the quality of classroom learning environment as perceived by college students, which has an overall mean of 3.72 (SD=.535), described as high. The moderate level is indicative of high levels surmised of its indicators, task orientation (=4.08,

SD=0.626), equity (=3.89, SD=0.729), cooperation (=3.77, SD=0.757), cohesiveness (=3.67, SD=0.794), involvement (=3.58, SD=0.702), teacher support (=3.57, SD=0.782), and investigation (=3.45, SD=0.723). Taken as a whole, it is inferred that college students perceived their classroom learning environment to value task orientation. This further implies that the high level of task orientation vis-à-vis other indicators could mean that situations pertaining to fostering task orientation is more pronounced among college students.

The overall level of classroom learning environment is high, which indicates that college students experience a free-anxiety social learning atmosphere most of the time while they are learning the language [13]. A closer look at the results shows a very immediate difference in ratings among the seven indicators, which indicates that all participants perceived their virtual learning environment positively in all dimensions [14,15]. However, task orientation garnered the highest score among the seven indicators, which means that the learning activities or tasks given to college students are relevant to the subject, they understand the lessons, and they are willing to perform different language learning activities assigned to them. On the other hand, college students were also found to be highly satisfied with the remaining six indicators [16,17].

These results are incomparable with the pronouncement of that all students have been helpful to each other (student cohesiveness); there has been a positive interaction between teachers and students (teacher support); all students have an interest in the classroom discussions related to the lesson and have tried to join them (involvement); a majority of students have attended to the lessons actively and have tried to answer the teacher's questions (investigation); there has been a good cooperation among students and they have enjoyed pair/group work in the classroom (cooperation); and most of the students agree that the teacher has given the amount of help to each student (equity).

On the other hand, Table 2 shows the results of the descriptive statistics in measuring the level of English language anxiety among college students. The overall mean of English language anxiety

Table 1: Quality of classroom learning environment as perceived by college students.

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
cohesiveness	3.67	0.794	high
teacher support	3.57	0.782	high
investigation	3.45	0.723	high
involvement	3.58	0.702	high
task orientation	4.08	0.626	high
cooperation	3.77	0.757	high
equity	3.89	0.729	high
Overall	3.72	0.535	high

Table 2: Level of English language anxiety among college students.

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Communication apprehension	3.39	0.728	moderate
Fear of negative evaluation	3.64	0.889	high
Test anxiety	3.33	0.83	moderate
Overall	3.43	0.72	high

is 3.42 (SD=0.720), assessed to be high. The high level could be attributed to predominantly moderate ratings given by college students on communication apprehension (x=3.39, SD=0.728) and (x=3.33, SD=0.830) with fear of negative evaluation (x=3.64, SD=0.889), being the highest and the only measure assessed high. In general, it is surmised that the high level indicates that the condition associated with language anxiety among college students is observed oftentimes. Furthermore, the high level of fear of negative evaluation means that this dimension is more pronounced compared to two other indicators of English language anxiety.

The overall level of English language anxiety as perceived by college students is high, which means that the indicated factors of this variable were observed most of the time. Among the three indicators, fear of negative evaluation garnered the highest score, which indicates that most college students experience anxiety if they are being evaluated by both their peers and their teachers as to their performance in using the target language.

Shown in Table 3 were the results of the descriptive statistics on assessing the extent of coping strategies among college students, which has an overall mean of 3.89 (SD=0.447), described as high. The high level is also reflective of low level to high levels of its indicators, resignation (x=2.37, SD=0.920) is low, positive thinking (x=4.16, SD=0.544), preparation (x=4.08, SD=0.526), relaxation (x=3.84, SD=0.628) and peer seeking (x=3.80, SD=0.705). It can be seen that college students used coping strategies frequently to alleviate their English language anxiety. The high level of coping strategies in the four indicators indicates that college students use coping strategies most of the time. In addition, the low level of coping strategies implies that college students seldom use coping strategies.

Displayed in Table 4 are the results of the relationship between the independent (classroom learning environment), dependent (coping strategies), and mediator (English language anxiety) variables. Bivariate correlation analysis using Pearson product-moment correlation was employed to determine the relationship between the variables mentioned.

The first zero-ordered correlation analysis between classroom learning environment and coping strategies revealed a computed r-value of 0.657 with a probability value of p<0.000, which is significant at the 0.05 level. This indicates that there exists a positive and strong association between the two variables [18-21]. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between classroom learning environment and coping strategies is rejected.

In the same manner, the second bivariate correlation analysis involving classroom learning environment and English language anxiety yielded an r-value of -0.010 with a probability value of p<0.868, which is not significant at 0.05 level. This indicates that there exists a negative and a fragile association between the two variables and that the existence of a possible relationship is nil. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship is not rejected, and that classroom learning environment and English language anxiety may be independent and non-associated variables of their own.

The third correlational analysis between English language anxiety and coping strategies yielded an r-value of 0.258 with a probability value of p=0.000, which is significant at a 0.05 level. This indicates

Table 3: The extent of coping strategies among college students.

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
preparation	4.08	0.526	high
relaxation	3.84	0.628	high
positive thinking	4.16	0.544	high
peer seeking	3.8	0.705	high
resignation	2.37	0.92	low
Overall	3.89	0.447	high

Table 4: Correlation analysis of the variables.

Pair	Variables	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Decision on Ho
IV and DV	Classroom learning environment and coping strategies	0.657	0	Reject
IV and MV	Classroom learning environment and English language anxiety	-0.01	0.868	Do not reject
MV and DV	English language anxiety and coping strategies	0.258	0	Reject

Table 5: Regression results of the variables in the four criteria of the presence of mediating effect.

Step	Path	Beta (Unstandardized)	Standard Error	Beta (Standardized)
Step 1	c	0.548	0.038	0.657
Step 2	a	-0.014	0.082	-0.01
Step 3	b	0.164	0.027	0.265
Step 4	c	0.55	0.036	0.66

a positive and weak association between the two variables. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship between English language anxiety and coping strategies is rejected [22].

The current study found a strong and positive association between the perception of college students on their classroom learning environment and their use of coping strategies to alleviate language anxiety. This result is analogous to the findings of classroom learning environment factors, to some degree, could be the reflections of students' coping styles in that coping styles affect students' perceptions of the learning environment or that the students can contribute to the shaping of the learning environment through their coping styles. On the other hand, the second bivariate correlation analysis involving classroom learning environment and English language anxiety shows a negative and fragile association between the two variables [23]. This finding contrasted the assumption of the study that these two variables have a strong correlation. Furthermore, these is, to a certain extent, contradictory to the results a friendly and supportive learning environment helps alleviate or lowers learners' anxiety.

Lastly, the correlational analysis between English language anxiety and coping strategies reveals a positive and weak correlation between these two variables [3]. Using coping strategies helps college student's deal with their anxiety. He believed that anxious people are likely to adopt conditions such a strategy is perceived to be most effective in reducing their anxiety.

Moreover, the data were analyzed with the linear regression method

as input to the medgraph. Mediation analysis is the mediating effect of a third variable in the relationship between two variables. Four steps must be met for a third variable to act as a mediator. In Table 5, these were categorized as Steps 1 to 4. In Step 1, the classroom learning environment as the Independent Variable (IV) significantly predicts coping strategies, which in this study's Dependent Variable (DV). In step 2, the classroom learning environment (IV) did not significantly predict English language anxiety, the Mediator (M). In step 3, English language anxiety significantly predicts coping strategies of college students.

The classroom learning environment was positively correlated with coping strategies, indicating that an increase in the classroom learning environment leads to increased use of coping strategies. Moreover, the classroom learning environment was found to have a negative correlation with English language anxiety, implying that an increase in the classroom learning environment leads to a decrease in English language anxiety. This means that these two variables are not associated. On the other hand, English language anxiety and coping strategies were also found to have a positive correlation with coping strategies, implying that an increase in English language anxiety results in increased use of coping strategies. However, it did not translate into direct effect, meaning that English language anxiety did not mediate the relationship between the classroom learning environment and coping strategies. Simply put, the classroom learning environment and coping strategy do not run through English language anxiety which is the mediating variable; therefore, mediation is not established [24].

The results of the main problem of this study, as mentioned in the preceding paragraph, do not support the theoretical framework. Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that a free-anxiety classroom learning environment may decrease students' affective filters, such as English language anxiety. And if the learner's anxiety continues to elevate, it increases the chance to perceive the second language acquisition situation as threatening because they cannot see themselves as being able to overcome the perceived threats from their fears. This may lead them to find ways to deal with these feelings of inadequacy and helplessness by using coping strategies.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed a high level of classroom learning environment, a high level of English language anxiety, and a similarly high level of coping strategies among college students of UM Digos College. The relationship between classroom learning environment and coping strategies indicates a significant and positive linear relationship between the two variables, while the link between classroom learning environment and English language anxiety shows a very weak negative correlation. On the other hand, the correlational analysis between English language anxiety and coping strategies reveals a weak positive correlation. Furthermore, results indicated that English language anxiety does not significantly mediate the relationship between the classroom learning environment and coping strategies.

Mediating effect in this study is not evident; therefore, the effective size measures were not computed. Hence, the results do not support the Affective Filter Theory in which this study was anchored.

From the results of the study, the following recommendations are suggested. First, UM Digos College administration may adopt

the findings of this study in providing quality education to their students. English language teachers, in particular, as key facilitators in the classroom learning environment, may maintain or strengthen their positive practices, particularly those aspects which are found to be highly satisfactory, and improve those aspects which are less pronounced such as investigation and teaching support. It is suggested that the Human Resource Management Development of the University of Mindanao may provide English language teachers with professional development courses to train them and make them aware of the complex issues related to learner anxiety and prepare them for good strategies to help reduce students' language anxiety.

It is also suggested that the dean or program heads may constantly monitor the teaching performance of their faculty members, especially those who handle English subjects. It is also important to evaluate the teacher's behavior while teaching the language. If the teacher is over-anxious or frustrated, the learners will definitely take some effect from the teacher's behavior. The teaching methods and practices inside the classroom should also be investigated to arrive at the highly-rated sources of anxiety. There may be crucial variables that contribute to English language anxiety other than the indicators used in this study, such as teachers' manners, evaluation procedures, and the physical learning environment. So, these variables should be addressed deeply for a better understanding of anxiety.

Additionally, even though the use of coping strategies among college students is highly prevalent, the findings of this research may be used to address the problems in the use of coping strategies to alleviate students' English anxiety in the global context. Examining an effective coping strategy to best alleviate a specific factor of language anxiety offers a good opportunity to increase students' English language learning process. Containing the factors that influence the students' active use of coping strategies may drastically improve students' motivation to learn the English language despite experiencing anxiety.

Lastly, since anxiety levels and anxiety-provoking variables may vary from context to context, more research is called for with different groups of learners in various situations to understand the issue better and promote effective language learning. Since the present study has been conducted among tertiary students, it is encouraged to conduct the survey among high school and primary students as there may be differences in anxiety levels to age and academic levels. Future researchers may also replicate the study in other geographic or educational institutions that offer language teaching in their curriculum by using different methodologies and instruments, which may provide different results. Other aspects may also be explored in determining factors relating to a classroom learning environment and the factors affecting English language anxiety. A qualitative analysis of the findings of this study was also recommended to corroborate the findings.

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