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Investigating the EFL Anxiety Effect in Web-Assisted Iranian Teaching Setting

Mohammad R. Sadeghi

Malek Ashtar University, Iran

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Corresponding Author:

Mohammad R. Sadeghi
universed2@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This study compares the impact of web-assisted teaching settings and traditional teaching settings on students' foreign language classroom anxiety. Two classes of students (N=50 for each class) from an English course in a higher vocational college in Iran were involved in the study. One class was taught in web-assisted contexts; the other in traditional contexts. A number of studies revealed that foreign language classroom anxiety scale was used as an instrument to measure students' anxiety level in different teaching contexts. Statistical analysis showed that after the treatment, students' foreign language classroom anxiety has decreased significantly in web-assisted teaching contexts, but remained stable in traditional teaching contexts. In addition, unlike students in traditional teaching contexts, students in web-assisted ones did not exhibit a negative relationship between their English proficiency and their foreign language classroom anxiety. Instead, students with lower level of English proficiency displayed the lowest level of anxiety while students with intermediate level yielded the highest level of anxiety. According to the post-treatment survey, this study suggests the major reasons for such phenomenon may lie in students' inability to adapt to new environment and lack of learning strategies for autonomous learning.

Keywords: Iranian Web-assisted Teaching, English Proficiency, Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, Higher Vocational College Students.

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign language anxiety is a key affective variable in foreign language learning. Brown maintained that "The construct of anxiety plays an important affective role in second language acquisition" (Brown, 1994; 2002); Oxford (1999) held the same opinion and considered anxiety as a vital factor which influences language learning. A good number of empirical studies have been carried out to investigate the relation between foreign language classroom anxiety and learners' performance. Most of them indicated that such relation tend to be negative (Horwitz *et al.*, 1986; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991; Phillips, 1992). Therefore, how

to reduce learners' anxiety, as well as the negative impact of anxiety, in foreign language classroom has become a focus for researchers and language teachers.

With the development of network technology, there is an increasing trend for web-assisted teaching in Iran's English classrooms. It is true that web-assisted teaching has obvious advantages over traditional teaching methods, such as greater access to learning materials, a more dynamic interaction between teachers and students, and more flexible learning hours. Yet, these advantages are no guarantee of a significant reduction of classroom anxiety. As a matter fact, the correlation between web-assisted teaching and foreign language classroom anxiety is still an issue under discussion. Some studies showed that web-assisted teaching helps reduce learners' anxiety (Xin, 2004; Shao *et al.*, 2008); while some indicated that it promotes learners' anxiety (Lewis and Atzert, 2000; Aydin, 2011; Xiong, 2012). This study compares web-assisted teaching and traditional teaching for English learning in a higher vocational college in Iran, aiming to investigate the impact of different teaching contexts on students' foreign language anxiety.

THEORETICAL FRAMWORK

Foreign Language Anxiety

Scovel defined anxiety as "a state of apprehension, a vague fear..." (1978). Anxiety can be experienced at various levels. Trait anxiety, which is a more permanent predisposition to be anxious, is experienced at the deepest level; while at a momentary level, state anxiety is experienced in relation to some particular event or act (Brown, 1994; 2002). Foreign language anxiety belongs to state anxiety. It is "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (MacIntyre and Gardner, 1994).

Traditionally speaking, there are three types of foreign language anxiety: communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation (Horwitz and Cope, 1986). As for the impact of foreign language anxiety on language learners, it can also be classified as facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety (Scovel, 1978). Generally speaking, facilitating anxiety may have positive impact on learners of foreign language (Bailey, 1983; Andres, 2003); while debilitating anxiety may exert negative impact on learners in terms of classroom performance, language achievement, self-esteem and language performance (Saito and Samimy, 1996; Aida, 1994; Gardner et al, 1993; Anderson et al., 1994). Several empirical studies have indicated that foreign language anxiety is closely related with learners' ethnic background, motivation, language performance, etc. Woodrow studied the relation between ethnic background and anxiety, and confirmed that English second language learners' ethnic and educational backgrounds have the potential to impact their anxiety level in second-language learning (Lin, 2012); Gardner, Day, and MacIntyre investigated the impact of motivation on learners' anxiety, and indicated that students with integrative motivation possessed less anxiety than those without integrative motivation (Lin, 2012); besides, Tse carried out empirical studies on the correlation between anxiety and adult learners' learning achievement, and found that their relationship tend to be negative (Lin, 2012). Researchers in Iran, however, lay more emphasis on the relationship between anxiety and the development of undergraduate students' English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Chen (1997; 2004), Feng (2004), Shi (2006), and Zhou (2010) all found that foreign language anxiety produces negative impact on the development of undergraduate students' English language skills.

Web-assisted Teaching and Anxiety

With the advent of information age, the impact of web-assisted teaching on foreign language anxiety has become another research focus. Most studies on this aspect showed that web-assisted teaching helps relieve learners' anxiety (Xin, 2004; Shao *et al.*, 2008; Sui, 2012;

Zeng, 2012); but several studies indicated that web-assisted teaching may have negative influence on undergraduate students' anxiety. Lewis and Atzert argued that CALL classroom makes learners more frustrated and will lead to debilitating anxiety (Xiong, 2012); Xin (2004) and Sui (2012) held that although the impact of web-assisted teaching is positive, factors such as learners' computer skills and English proficiency, autonomous learning strategies, technical problem, and lack of speech communication under web context will increase undergraduate students' anxiety.

The Current Study

From the above literature, it seems that studies on foreign language anxiety can be improved from the following 3 respects: 1. The influence of other learner factors, such as age, gender or English proficiency, on learners' anxiety under web-assisted contexts needs further discussion; 2. Empirical classroom-based contrastive research can be carried out to measure learners' anxiety level in different teaching contexts; 3. More attention can be paid to higher vocational college students, who belong to a large and unique student group in Iran, and who experience difficulties in improving English. In view of these observations, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of web-assisted teaching context on students' anxiety level. An empirical classroom-based contrastive method and quantitative and qualitative research methods will be adopted in this study, aiming to answer the following research questions:

1. Does web-assisted classroom lead to greater decrease in the anxiety level of higher vocational college students than traditional classroom?
2. Does students' English proficiency have a significant impact on their anxiety level in web-assisted teaching contexts?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study, conducted for the duration of a semester (fifteen weeks), followed a pretest-posttest design, and employed an empirical classroom-based contrastive approach with data collected from the pretest and the posttest. In this type of research design, two classes of students from a higher vocational college were involved in this study. One class attended web-assisted English class; and the other attended traditional English class. Quantitative and qualitative data collecting methods were adopted for contrastive analysis. Quantitative method includes two measurements of participants' anxiety level before and after the teaching test, the data of which was then analyzed and contrasted through independent sample T test, ANOVA, and repeated measures. Qualitative methods include classroom observations and semi-structure interviews with students randomly sampled from the two classes after the teaching treatment.

Teaching Methodology

Students in treatment group attended web-assisted class. Under such teaching model, every week, students first attended 2 hours of class in web classroom (classroom with computers and access to the Internet), where they could log in the online learning center and finished the online listening, speaking, reading and writing tasks assigned by the teacher, who patrolled the classroom and provided help and guidance when needed. After finishing the teacher's tasks, students could carry out autonomous learning on whatever English learning materials they were interested in. Then, later in the week, students attended another 2 hours of class in traditional classroom, where the teacher organized various types of activities, including group discussion, role-play, giving presentation, etc., to check students' learning progress and effects; and gave instructions on difficult language points and grammatical structures.

Students in control group attend traditional class. Under such teaching model, the weekly 4-hour English lessons were carried out in traditional classroom, where teacher combines a

variety of traditional teaching methodologies including grammar-translation method, audio-lingual method, communicative approach, etc. Table 1 gives detailed description of the two different teaching models involved in this study:

Table 1: The Two Teaching Models Involved in This Study

Teaching Model	Num. of Ss.	Duration	Teaching Hours	Teaching Method	Teaching Materials
Web-assisted Class	50	15 weeks	4 hours each week	Online autonomous learning plus classroom instruction and activities	Textbook plus online learning materials
Traditional Class	50	15 weeks	4 hours each week	Classroom instruction and activities	textbook

Participants

100 freshmen from a higher vocational college in Iran agreed to participate in the teaching treatment. They were divided into 2 groups, each with 50 students. They are of similar age, and share similar educational background (all of them were from secondary middle schools and had at least 9 years of English learning experience). To define their English proficiency, researchers further divided them into 3 levels according to their performance in their College Entrance Examination English subject test (a 150-point test) – higher level (above 90, 15 students for each group), intermediate level (between 70 to 89, 20 students for each group) and lower level (below 70, 15 students for each group). There was no significant difference between the two groups of students in terms of their English test performance ($t=.084$, $p=.933 > .05$); as for the 3 levels of students in the each group, no significant differences were found in terms of their English test performance (higher level: $t=-1.236$, $p=.227 > .05$, intermediate level: $t=1.203$, $p=.236 > .05$; lower level: $t=.559$, $p=.581 > .05$). Pre-test measurement of anxiety level showed that there were no significant differences between each group of students ($t=-.555$, $p=.580 > .05$), and students with different level of English proficiency (higher level: $t=-1.179$, $p=.248 > .05$, intermediate level: $t=-1.467$, $p=.151 > .05$; lower level: $t=-1.386$, $p=.177 > .05$).

Instrument

The instrument used in this study is the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz and Cope (1986). The FLCAS is a 5-point Likert-type questionnaire with 33 items. The reason for utilizing this scale is that it “has evidence of reliability and validity scores” (Lin, 2012: 65). To suit the needs of this study, the researcher revised some items in the FLCAS so that when a participant gets a higher score, he/she experiences higher anxiety level. The researcher also classified the items in the FLCAS into 4 subscales according to Zeng’s (2012) classification: communication apprehension (item 1,3,4,9,13,14,18, 20, 29, 32, 33), test anxiety (item 8,10,16,21,25,28,30), fear of negative evaluation (item 2, 7, 15,19,23,24,27,31), and fear of English class (item 5,6,11,12,17,22,26). Reliability test of this revised FLCAS scale for the current study yielded an alpha coefficient of .900, which indicated that this scale is reliable.

Data Collecting

Two measurements, pre-test measurement and post-test measurement, were carried out for the two groups of students and the 13th version of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. The statistical analysis of independent t test, ANOVA and repeated measures were used to analyze the data obtained from the two groups of students. Results of the analysis showed that the internal reliability of the two measurements of the treatment group yielded an alpha coefficient of .925 and .904 respectively; and that of

the control group yielded an alpha coefficient of .934 and .921 respectively, which means that the results of the 2 measurements are reliable.

Post-treatment Interview

A post-treatment interview was conducted to gain insights into students' preferred teaching models, and their opinions on the major sources which lead to their classroom anxiety. Five students from each level of the two classes (30 in total) were randomly selected for a semi-structure interview. Some of the students' responses gathered from the post-treatment interview are discussed later where relevant.

RESULTS

Between-Groups Contrastive Analysis

According to the results displayed in Table 2, in the descriptive statistics, the FLCAS of treatment group decreased at all levels after the treatment (CA: pre-test 3.46, post-test 3.29; TA: pre-test 3.17, post-test 3.01; FONE: pre-test 3.08, post-test 2.87; FOEC: pre-test 3.07, post-test 2.70; CFLCA: pre-test 3.22, post-test 3.01); while control group experienced increases of anxiety in the subscales of fear of negative evaluation (pre-test 3.15, post-test 3.30), fear of English class (pre-test 3.06, post-test 3.28); and their composite foreign language classroom anxiety remained quite stable (pre-test 3.30, post-test 3.33). Besides, Independent sample T test on the FLCAS of both groups showed that after the teaching treatment, there were statistically significant differences in the composite foreign language classroom anxiety level ($t=-2.862$, $p=.005<.01$); and significant differences also appeared in the two subscales of FONE($t=-3.160$, $p=.002<.01$) and FOEC ($t=-5.060$, $p=.000<.01$).

These results indicated that students' foreign language classroom anxiety may be relieved in web-assisted teaching, which exerted great impact on the two subscales of fear of negative evaluation and fear of English class.

Table 2: Independent Sample T-test on the FLCAS and Its Subscales of both Groups

Variables	Treatment Group (N=50)		Control Group (N=50)		t	p	
	M	SD	M	SD			
Pre-test	CA	3.46	0.68	3.52	0.83	-.430	.668
	TA	3.17	0.73	3.35	0.74	-1.243	.217
	FONE	3.08	0.81	3.15	0.77	-.413	.681
	FOEC	3.07	0.72	3.06	0.69	.081	.935
	CFLCA	3.22	0.66	3.30	0.67	-.555	.580
Post-test	CA	3.29	0.64	3.40	0.66	-.894	.373
	TA	3.01	0.63	3.29	0.65	-1.839	.069
	FONE	2.87	0.70	3.30	0.67	-3.160	.002**
	FOEC	2.70	0.57	3.28	0.59	-5.060	.000**
	CFLCA	3.01	0.53	3.33	0.58	-2.862	.005**

Note: CA=communication apprehension, TA=test anxiety, FONE=fear of negative evaluation, FOEC= fear of English Class, CFLCA=composite foreign language classroom anxiety; **p < .01

To investigate the role played by teaching methods and students' English proficiency in the above results, 2×3 between-subjects Effects Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to examine the post-test measurement of FLCAS of both groups. There were 2 independent variables: teaching method and English proficiency; 3 levels: higher, intermediate and lower; and the post-test measurement of FLCAS were the dependent variable. Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics for univariate ANOVA. There were significant differences between the 3 levels of students in both groups, which were caused by English proficiency ($F=3.146$, $p=.048<.05$) and teaching methods ($F=8.183$, $p=.005<.01$) respectively. However, judging from the statistics of Partial Eta Squared, teaching methods (.080) accounted for a larger portion of the variance of dependent variables than English proficiencies (.063). Besides, the interplay of teaching methods and English proficiency exerted no significant impact on the

FLCAS of the two groups of students ($F=2.301$, $p.106>.05$), which showed that there were no significant differences between students with similar English proficiency under different teaching context.

From the above analysis, it is now safe to draw a conclusion that, compared with traditional classroom, web-assisted classroom performs better in easing students' foreign language classroom anxiety.

Table 3: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects on the 3 Levels of Students from Both Groups (Dependent Variable: Post-test Measurement of FLCAS of Both Groups)

Source	Type III sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Model	5.485 ^a	5	1.097	3.791	.004**	0.168
Intercept	973.532	1	973.532	3364.313	.000**	0.973
EP	1.821	2	0.910	3.146	.048*	0.063
TM	2.368	1	2.368	8.183	.005**	0.080
EP*TM	1.332	2	0.666	2.301	0.106	0.047
Error	27.201	94	0.289			
Total	1035.080	100				
Corrected Total	32.686	99				

Note: EP = English Proficiency; TM = Teaching Methods * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Within-Groups Contrastive Analysis

To further investigate the impact of English proficiency on students' FLCAS in web-assisted teaching contexts, One-way ANOVA was used to examine the post-test measurement of the FLCAS of the 3 levels of students from both groups. The results (Table 4) revealed that no significant differences were discernable among the 3 levels of students in the treatment group ($F=2.358$, $p=.106>.05$); while differences among the 3 levels of students in the control group are significant ($F=3.400$, $p=.042<.05$). According to the results of Post-hoc tests (Table 5), in the treatment group, only students with intermediate level showed significant differences from students with lower level ($p=.037<.05$); while in the control group, students with higher level showed significant differences from students with intermediate level and lower level ($p=.019<.05$; $p=.043<.05$). From table 5, we can also notice that the correlation between English proficiency and FLCAS for control group students was negative; while we find no evidence of such tendency for students in the treatment group.

Table 4: One-way ANOVA on the 3 Levels of Students from Both Groups

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Treatment Group	Between Groups	1.267	2	0.634	2.358	0.106
	Within Groups	12.627	47	0.269		
	Total	13.894	49			
Control Group	Between Groups	2.056	2	1.028	3.400	0.042*
	Within Groups	14.209	47	0.302		
	Total	16.264	49			

Note: * $p < .05$

Repeated Measures was also adopted to test all the data collected from the research. There were 2 levels of between-subjects factors: pre-test of FLCAS and post-test of FLCAS; and 3 levels of within-subjects variables: higher, intermediate, and lower. The results were displayed in table 6: there were no significant differences in terms of FLCAS among the 3 levels of students in the treatment group before and after the teaching treatment ($F=2.049$, $p=.140>.05$); however, the differences of that of control group were significant ($F=12.793$,

p=.000<.01). Besides, post-hoc test (table 7) showed that no significant differences were found among the 3 level of students in the treatment group; and there were significant differences both between higher level and intermediate level (p=.000<.01), as well as higher level and lower level (p=.000<.01). From the above analysis, it is obvious that in traditional classroom, students' anxiety level are negatively related with their English proficiency; while in web-assisted classroom, such negative relation does not exist. Other factors may interfere in affecting students' foreign language classroom anxiety.

Table 5: Post-hoc Tests

	Level (I)	Level (J)	Mean		Std. Error (I-J)	SD	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
			Pre	Post				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Treatment Group	Higher	Intermediate	3.34	3.19	-0.21	0.18	.239	-0.57	0.15
		Lower	3.24	2.81	0.17	0.19	.374	-0.21	0.55
	Intermediate	Higher	3.05	2.98	0.21	0.18	.239	-0.15	0.57
		Lower	3.24	2.81	0.38*	0.18	.037*	.02	0.74
	Lower	Higher	3.05	2.98	-0.17	0.19	.374	-0.55	0.21
		Intermediate	3.34	3.19	-0.38*	0.18	.037*	-0.74	-0.02
Control Group	Higher	Intermediate	3.56	3.48	-0.46*	0.19	0.019*	-0.84	-0.08
		Lower	3.53	3.44	-0.42*	0.20	0.043*	-0.82	-0.01
	Intermediate	Higher	2.71	3.02	0.46*	0.19	0.019*	0.08	0.84
		Lower	3.53	3.44	0.04	0.19	0.833	-0.34	0.42
	Lower	Higher	2.71	3.02	0.42*	0.20	0.043*	0.01	0.82
		Intermediate	3.56	3.48	-0.04	0.19	0.833	-0.41	0.34

Note: *p < .05

Table 6: Repeated Measures on the 2 Measurements of FLCAS of Both Groups
Transformed Variable: Average

	Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Treatment Group	Intercept	472.071	1	472.071	2704.088	0.000**
	Level	0.715	2	0.358	2.049	0.140
	Error	8.205	47	0.175		
Control Group	Intercept	531.441	1	531.441	3150.556	0.000**
	Level	4.316	2	2.158	12.793	0.000**
	Error	7.928	47	0.169		

Note: **p < .01

Table 7: Post-hoc Tests (Measure: MEASURE_1)

	Level (I)	Level (J)	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Lower Bound
Treatment Group	Higher	Intermediate	-0.25	0.14	0.086	-0.54	0.04
		Lower	-0.01	0.15	0.932	-0.32	0.29
	Intermediate	Higher	0.25	0.14	0.086	-0.04	0.54
		Lower	0.24	0.14	0.103	0.05	0.52
	Lower	Higher	0.01	0.15	0.932	-0.29	0.32
		Intermediate	-0.24	0.14	0.103	-0.52	0.05
Control Group	Higher	Intermediate	-0.65*	0.14	0.000**	-0.94	-0.37
		Lower	-0.62*	0.15	0.000**	-0.92	-0.32
	Intermediate	Higher	0.65*	0.14	0.000**	0.37	0.94
		Lower	0.03	0.14	0.830	-0.25	0.31
	Lower	Higher	0.62*	0.15	0.000**	0.32	0.92
		Intermediate	-0.03	0.14	0.830	-0.31	0.25

Note: **p < .01

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that compared with traditional classroom, web-assisted classroom led to a significant reduction in students' foreign language classroom anxiety. However, in a web-assisted classroom, English proficiency neither positively nor negatively correlated with students' foreign language classroom anxiety. The following section will discuss the two research questions.

Research Question 1: Does a Web-assisted Classroom Lead to Greater Decrease in the Anxiety Level of Higher Vocational College Students than Traditional Classroom?

Evidently, web-assisted classroom helps decrease higher vocational college students' anxiety level. This finding is similar to the findings of Xin (2004), Sui (2012) and Zeng (2012), who conducted similar researches on undergraduate students. Three reasons account for this finding:

Theoretically speaking, the idea of web-assisted teaching conforms to the learning theory of constructivism, which views learning as an active and social process, underlying a dynamic interaction between task, instructor and learners, as well as an active collaboration among learners (Fang *et al.*, 2003). Web-assisted teaching helps decrease students' anxiety level in that it allows students to arrange their own learning and enables students to interact and collaborate with each other and with teachers conveniently to solve certain learning task, hence accelerating their learning motivation and interest.

Secondly, the relaxing learning environment of web-assisted classroom helps reduce students' anxiety level. Gardner *et al.*, (2012) found that anxiety is closely related with learning environment. A favorable learning environment will understandably ease learners' anxiety. Web-assisted teaching creates such a favorable environment, which is different from traditional teaching where teachers' questions and requirements often frustrate students with insufficient language skills. The results of this research showed that web-assisted learning environment helps decrease students' anxiety level. Among all the scores of the four subscales of FLCAS of treatment group, the average score of foreign language classroom anxiety was the lowest (2.70), which indicated that students felt fairly comfortable with the web-assisted learning environment; and 80% of the treatment group interviewees said that their anxiety was relieved in a web-assisted classroom. Some of their responses are quoted as follows: "*the current English classroom is more relaxing than before*"; "*I am not afraid of attending English class now*"; "*I felt less stress than before*"; "*I think it's quite relaxing to learn English online*".

Thirdly, the absence of verbal communication in web-assisted classroom helps relieve students' anxiety level. Wang (2003) pointed out that the biggest psychological barrier to Chinese students learning English may lie in speech anxiety, i.e, the fear of speaking English in class and the fear of answering teachers' question in English. However, in web-assisted contexts, such barrier can be removed. The reason is threefold:

1. Web-assisted teaching is student-oriented, and students can take full charge of their own learning without worrying about teachers' questions.

2. Face to face communication is not necessary in web-assisted classroom because students can communicate with other students and teachers through online communication tools.

3. Students' fear of negative evaluation decreases. From the results of this research, we found that treatment groups' average score on the subscale of fear of negative evaluation is on a low level (2.87); besides, most interviewees from the treatment group (86.67%) said that in a web-assisted classroom, they felt less tense because they were not worry about being laughed at by others for their poor English or being asked to answer teachers' questions.

Research Question 2: Does Students' English Proficiency Have a Significant Impact on their Anxiety Level in Web-Assisted Contexts?

Regarding the second research question, the results of this study showed that students' English proficiency has an impact on their anxiety level in the control group. As the descriptive statistics suggests (table 5), the correlation between English proficiency and anxiety levels appears negative. In other words, the higher the students' English proficiency, the lower their anxiety level. This finding is similar to that of MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), who found that learning process is negatively correlated with foreign language classroom anxiety. However, such correlation did not exist in treatment group. In the descriptive statistics (table 5), students with lower English proficiency yielded the lowest score (2.81) in the post-test measurement; while students with intermediate English proficiency yielded the highest score (3.19). This finding is different from that of Zeng's (2012), which indicated that in web-assisted contexts, there is a negative correlation between students' language performance and their foreign language classroom anxiety. To further investigate the reasons for such finding, this study interviewed 15 students (5 from each level respectively). With a close study of their responses, we suggested two reasons for the above results:

In the first place, the lack of autonomous learning ability of students with higher and intermediate level, rather than English proficiency, resulted in their high level of foreign language classroom anxiety in web-assisted contexts. When asked the possible causes of their anxiety, 8 students (3 from higher level, 5 from intermediate level) share the following responses: *"I feel worried because most of the time, I don't know how to deal with those online learning materials. It seems that I learn nothing from it"*; *"I feel unsure because there is no teacher's instruction and I don't know what to take down in class"*.

Such responses can be interpreted as an inadequacy in adapting to a web-assisted contexts and employing strategies for autonomous learning among students with higher and intermediate levels. As a result, they became doubtful and uncertain about their English learning, which led to their high level of foreign language classroom anxiety. However, researchers also noticed that the anxiety of students with higher and intermediate level was facilitating. From our classroom observation, most of them finished teacher's assignments as required and were quite active in online learning discussions. Some of them often asked teacher for help when they encountered difficulties. Besides, from their responses to the interview, researchers found that most of them did not lose their interests in learning English; rather, they said they found themselves work harder than before.

Secondly, incapability of managing study and insufficient self-esteem were the major causes of the low anxiety level of students with lower level of English proficiency. For some students from this group, web-assisted classroom is more a good chance to entertain themselves than to practice managing their own study. From our classroom observation of this group of students, classroom misconduct, such as playing games, watching online movies and chatting online were often spotted. Besides, some students from this group took a negative view and remained indifferent to their English learning no matter in web-assisted contexts or in traditional contexts and they never felt ashamed of their mediocre English performance. As a result, they found it more relaxing in web-assisted contexts than in traditional contexts. Their responses to the interview verify this. When asked the major sources of their anxiety in web-assisted classroom, 4 out of 5 said that without teachers' constant instructions and questions, they felt more relaxed in a web-assisted classroom. In fact, the low anxiety level among this group of students hinders, rather than facilitates, their English learning.

Implications for Teachers

1. Web-assisted teaching is in line with the development of modern education. It can effectively improve the current cramming method of teaching, which often frustrates students in many ways; for instance, it helps lower students' foreign language classroom anxiety level, and increase students' learning interests. On the other hand, teachers

should also notice that web-assisted teaching is not a panacea for all current problems of English teaching in Iran. Just as Zeng once put it: “Modern technology usually leads to emotional deficiency in language classroom, ... the humanistic nature of language learning should not be neglected” (2012). Therefore, web-assisted teaching should be tailored to meet different classroom situations and students’ individual needs, and be synthesized with traditional methods, so as to achieve a better teaching effect.

2. As mentioned above, the major sources for students’ increased anxiety level in a web-assisted context can be located in students’ inability to adapt well/successfully to the new learning environment. Therefore, teachers should lay emphasis on helping student to acclimate to the web-assisted leaning context. Three measures can be taken to tackle this problem. First, classroom communication and personal instruction should be highlighted so that students can understand what they are going to do in a web-assisted classroom. Second, the design of the online learning center can be improved so that it becomes more student-friendly. Third, online learning tasks should be diversified so as to cater for students’ different needs.
3. Another major source for the rising of students’ anxiety level lies in students’ ineffective autonomous learning strategies. For this issue, regular lectures on autonomous learning strategies are necessary, but a better way, just as Wen puts it, is the model of “trying-sharing-performing-monitoring”, where teacher first identify both students’ successful and unsuccessful strategies, help expand their repertoire of learning strategies, provide them with opportunities to practice, and then encourage them to monitor and evaluate their strategy use (2012).
4. Special attention should be paid to students with lower level of English proficiency. Teacher should try every measure possible to curb their debilitating anxiety, while helping them to maintain a certain level of facilitating anxiety. Effective measures may include monitoring their study progress through technical means and designing learning materials which suit their English proficiency.

Implications for Students

1. Students should update their conception of English learning and try to adapt to new learning methods. In fact, most students in Iran are accustomed to traditional teaching and learning methods due to the test-oriented educational system; however, online learning, mobile learning, and MOOC are increasingly changing our traditional classroom. In such an information age, students should adapt themselves to the new educational development so as to get better opportunities of improving themselves.
2. Students should also overcome their psychological barriers to their effective communications with teachers. Shyness is a major problem for most English learners in Iran. Most of them are rather reluctant to talk with their teachers about their learning problems. In a web-assisted classroom, a good communication with teachers may help them relieve their anxiety and promote their learning effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study sought to determine whether a web-assisted teaching context affects students’ foreign language classroom anxiety. Further research could consider the correlation between web-assisted teaching contexts and other learning factors such as learning motivation and learning strategies. In addition, the relationship between FLCA and learning motivation, or between FLCA and learning strategies can also be explored.

This study supports previous research findings that web-assisted teaching helps decrease students’ foreign language classroom anxiety (Sui, 2012; Zeng *et al.*, 2012). To be specific, students’ anxiety level decreases significantly in the subscales of fear of negative evaluation and fear of English class. This result indicates that web-assisted teaching can be adopted as an

effective alternative to traditional English classroom.

On the other hand, this study finds that English proficiency produces little influence on students' foreign language classroom anxiety in a web-assisted teaching context. Rather, students' inability to adapt to new learning environment and their lack of autonomous learning strategies are the major causes for their rising of anxiety. This suggests that teachers should pay more attention to students' learning needs, helping them to improve their adaptability to new learning environments and develop better learning strategies; while students should become more responsive to new learning technology and more active in communication with teachers concerning their learning problems.

It should be noted that the sample size (n=100) of this study was quite limited, and the teaching treatment only lasted for 15 weeks. A larger sample size and longer treatment duration may produce more convincing results. In addition, the current method of classifying students' English proficiency only by their performance in College Entrance Exam may have its limitations. A more comprehensive method will help identify students' English proficiency more precisely.

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