The Relationship Between Iraqi EFL Learners' Stress Coping Strategies, Self-Efficacy, and Language Learning[1]

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ABSTRACT

The investigation of the connection that exists between the manner in which students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) deal with stress and their judgments of their own degree of self-efficacy was the objective of this thesis. In addition, the current research investigated the statistical link between the aforementioned two aspects and the level of language learning shown by the students. The participants in the research were drawn from a convenience sample consisting of one hundred and fifty Iraqi students who were studying English as a foreign language. Students attending these schools were enrolled in a wide range of academic programmes offered by Iraq's many educational establishments. Their ages ranged anywhere from 18 to 27, with the average being 27. They were in the process of earning an English degree at the time. The questionnaires Learners' Self- Efficacy Survey, which was designed and validated by Gahungu (2009), and Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS), which was designed and standardized by Endler and Parker, were given to the participants who were chosen to take part in the study, and they were asked to respond to both of the questionnaires. The first survey consisted of forty questions based on a *Likert scale* with five points, and the second scale consisted of forty-eight questions, with sixteen questions designed to measure task-oriented coping, sixteen questions designed to measure avoidance coping, and the final sixteen questions designed to measure emotion-oriented coping respectively. The same Likert scale was used in each of the questionnaires.

Keywords: *language achievement; self-efficacy; stress coping strategies*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

There are some studies in which the role of stress particularly in academic settings was investigated. For instance, Misra and Mckean (2000) performed a study in which they examined the probable link between academic stress, apprehension, time management and university students' satisfaction. The obtained results of their study indicated that in order to avoid apprehension in the academic context, students try to do some leisure activities. Misra and Mckean (2000) also examined the role of gender in this regard. Their findings displayed that female guys take advantages of leisure activities than males.it means that male students can cope their apprehension more than females. While female students showed to be more successful in their time management than males. In this light it can be viewed that leisure activities were used as coping strategies to deal with academic stress. Fram and Bovillian (2001) also believed that when students face with a complex situation, they will extend their thinking capabilities and use specific strategies to handle such conditions. Thus, in order to cope with such apprehension in the academic setting, students should be aware of developing their copying strategies. Regarding the concept of self-efficacy, Bandura (2001), suggested a social cognitive theory that focuses on the role that a self-referent phenomenon can play in individual's personality. Based on this proposed sociocognitive perspective, intentionality, forethought, self-

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reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness are regarded as the foundational characteristics of individuals. Bandura (2001) explains intention as "representation of a future course of action to be performed" (p. 6). The exhibition of potential plans, however, needs more than an intentional state. What is necessary is the practice of foresight by which people are interested and their activities are formed in prediction of future happenings. Positive application of objectives and plans, requires not only the intended skill to make choices and action procedures, but also the skill to encourage and manage the application of anticipated activities. According to Bandura (1986), this metacognitive ability is understood via self-regulatory procedures that associate thinking to activities and contains self-monitoring, performance self-guidance through individual values, and helpful self-reactions. The latest distinguishing main characteristic of Bandura's theory pivots on peoples' ability of reproducing themselves, their thinking, and activities. According to Bandura (1997), perceived self-efficacy, which is "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3), is the most important and omnipresent device for individual activity. He also declared how people act can often be improved foreseen by the opinions they have about their own abilities than by what they are truly able of achieving.
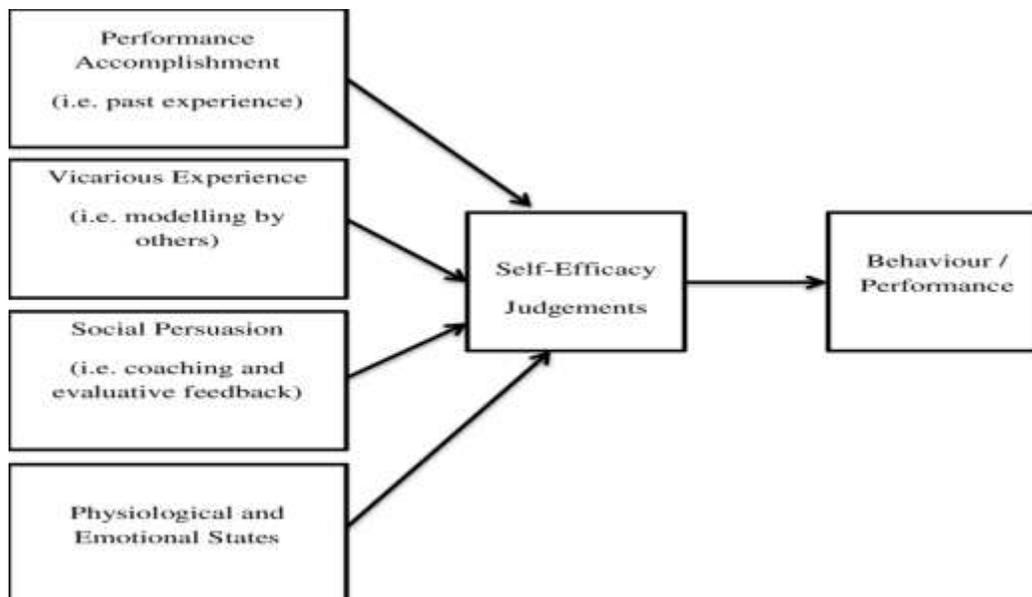

Figure 1.1: Self-efficacy theory adopted from Bandura (1986)

Statement of the Problem

In the context of education, it is very important to pay attention to the meaning of students' apprehension and its side effects. According to Vlassises, et al. (1994) when anxiety is observed in students' work, its negative impacts can also be seen. Therefore, as Sloboda (1990) claimed, stress definitely affects individuals' performance when they do their academic tasks. Many researches in the world have confirmed the debilitative effects of stress on pupils' actions (e.g. Akbari, 2015; Atrian, et al., 2016; Fram & Bolivian, 2001). There are many studies which considered the role of stress copying strategies in academic settings. But to the researcher' best knowledge, there is not any study, specifically, in Iraqi context, which deal with the links between these constructs (stress coping strategies, self-efficacy, and language learning) in a single frame. Thus, it is rational for this research to examine the association between students' dealing with apprehension copying strategies and their level of self-efficacy. Furthermore, in order to find the effect of using such strategies on students' achievement, it is also logical to consider this relationship with their language learning.

Significance of the Study

Research has shown that stress is one of the important issues that can cause a variety of problems for learners, in general, and language learners, in particular. Several scholars have worked on this construct and examined its effect on other variables or they investigated its relationship with other language and learner related variables. Since, anxiety is regarded as a factor that many Iraqi learners face in their language classes, and due to lack of research in Iraqi context on this issue, it is vital to investigate the stress copying strategies and its relation with Iraqi EFL learners' self-efficacy and their language achievement. This investigation is strongly useful, since it can help both language teachers and students to manage their teaching as well as learning in way that they can diminish the stress level in the classroom contexts. Doing so, teachers can make use of such strategies in their classes and students can learn to use them in order to handle the apprehension they may face while learning a foreign language.

Purpose of the Study

Regarding the gaps existed in finding the association between the variables of this study in Iraqi educational context, the present study aims at examining the probable statistical relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' stress copying strategies and their self-efficacy. Additionally, the current research will investigate the statistical relationship between these two variables and students' language learning as well.

Research Questions

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' stress copying strategies and their self-efficacy?

    1.1 Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' task-oriented copying strategies and their self-efficacy?

    1.2 Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' avoidance-oriented copying strategies and their self-efficacy?

    1.3 Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' emotion-oriented copying strategies and their self-efficacy?

2. Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' stress copying strategies and their language learning?
3. Is there any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' self-efficacy and their language learning?

Research Hypotheses

H01. There is not any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' stress copying strategies and their self-efficacy.

H01.1 There is not any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' task-oriented copying strategies and their self-efficacy?

H01.2 There is not any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' avoidance-oriented copying strategies and their self-efficacy?

H01.3 There is not any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' emotion-oriented copying strategies and their self-efficacy?

H02. There is not any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' stress copying strategies and their language learning.

H03. There is not any significant relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' self-efficacy and their language learning.

(De)Limitations of the Study

Like other scientific studies, this research also has some limitations. First, participants of the study will be chosen by using convenience sampling procedure due to feasibility consideration. Second, the effect of gender on the relationship between the constructs under study will not be considered due to some limitations. Moreover, only questionnaires will be used for data collection due to time limitation. Furthermore, the participants are only from Iraqi universities. Therefore, this study can be replicated using participants from schools and institutes.

Definitions of the Key Terms

Stress Copying Strategies

Stress coping strategies is "a problem-solving method. It is expending conscious effort to resolve personal and interpersonal problems, and seeking to master, minimize or tolerate the stress or conflict" (Weiten & Lloyd, 2008; p. 126).

Task-oriented Coping

Task-oriented coping shows the answers focused at problem resolve or mentally changing the worrying condition (Endler & Parker, 1990).

Emotion-oriented Coping

Emotion-oriented coping shows the reactions to oneself not the problem. In order to handle a stressful condition, a person uses this copying strategy when being emotionally anxious (Endler & Parker, 1990).

Avoidance-oriented Coping

This kind of copying strategy shows the reactions planned to avoid facing anxious conditions. By itself, it is divided into two parts including distraction and social diversion (Endler & Parker, 1990)**.**

Language learning

According to Oxford (2003) language learning is regarded as a route of obtaining knowledge of language that does not have instant social and communicative meaning in the society.

Self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy is the "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3).

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Stress coping strategies

Many studies have investigated the relationship between students' stress coping strategies and anxiety (e.g., Akbari & Sadeghi, 2013; Kondo & Ling, 2004; Lizuka, 2010; Yousofi & Ashtarian, 2015). Yousofi and Ashtarian (2015), for example, conducted a study in the context of Iran to see whether high school students' anxiety is related to their coping strategies. For this aim, sixty female learners were asked to answer an open-ended questionnaire in which three questions were composed. Since, the design of the study was qualitative in nature, no statistical analysis was performed by the researchers.

The results of the study revealed that language students experience different forms of anxiety, such as test anxiety (felt during exam times), communication apprehension (felt while one is interacting with somebody else and is frightened of unpredictable situations), evaluative anxiety (felt when the person thinks his/her performance is judged negatively

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by the teacher or peers), and class anxiety (felt when the person is in the classroom and many factors may lead to apprehension). Besides, it was found that when students feel anxious, they use a variety of strategies to cope with their feeling, such as relaxation, compensation, resignation, and preparation (to name a few) (Yousofi & Ashtarian, 2015).

Similarly, Kondo and Ling (2004) did a study in Japan to explore what strategies students employ when they are stressed. It was found that learners try to do different things. For instance, they may choose preparation as a technique to avoid anxiety. In other words, they try to study before the class or teacher lecture. If they want to have presentation, they will practice a lot, and put themselves in situations which push them towards studying and preparing (Kondo & Ling, 2004).

As the second strategy, peer seeking, some students look for their classmates' opinions about ways to hinder stress, or when they do not understand the material from their teachers, they would ask their peers whether they did not grasp as well, and if so they become relaxed. Some learners use relaxation, such as taking deep breathes and resting well before the class. Resignation is a form of negative strategy by which learners accept the situation but do nothing for it; they may for example sleep in the class or give up trying (Kondo & Ling, 2004). Lizuka's (2010) study in Japan is similar to these findings. In his study, learners used positive coping strategies, such as asking peers to help them and using L1 in order to compensate for difficulties in learning the second language. A number of studies also considered stress coping strategies with regard to gender (e.g., Mesri, 2012; Shabani, 2012).

Hirsch et al. (2016) conducted a study to explore the most important students' stress coping strategies, and based on the results they introduced their categorization, as illustrated in Figure 2.1.
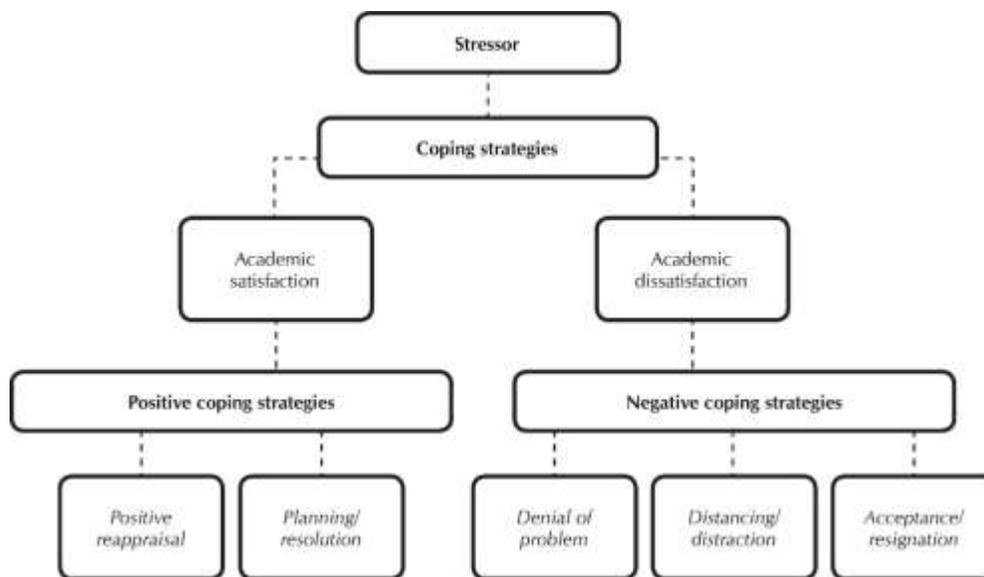

Figure 2.1. Academic factors contributing to the use of coping strategies

As can be seen, positive coping strategies are related to academic satisfaction (positive reappraisal and planning), and negative coping strategies are related to academic dissatisfaction (denial, distancing, and acceptance).

Self-efficacy

Literature on self-efficacy is evident of its significant role in learners' motivation, self-regulation, and achievement (e.g., Honicke & Broadbent, 2016; Ritchie, 2016; Schunk & Pajares, 2010; Zumbrunn et al., 2019). Self-efficacy in also influential in controlling students' stress (Bandura et al., 2003; Freire et al., 2019; Lanin et al., 2019; Schönfeld et al., 2019; Sahin & Çetin, 2017). Bavaqar (2019), for instance, carried out a quantitative study in an Iranian context and among twenty university students too see if there is any significant relationship between learner self-efficacy and their oral performance. the results proved that students who have higher levels of self-efficacy have better performance in speaking ability compared to those with lower levels of self-efficacy. In other words, there is a positive association between the variables (Bavaqar, 2019; Dodds, 2011).

Fahim and Mouziraji (2013) aimed at finding the nexus between self-efficacy and critical thinking, and asked 50 university learners to complete the two questionnaires. The results of this quantitative analysis revealed that the both constructs are highly relevant implying that the more students have self-efficacy, the more critical their thinking is. Other studies with the same purpose also came to similar results (e.g., Dehghani, et al. 2011; Phan, 2009; Sariolghalam & Noruzi, 2010).

Heidari, Izadi, and Ahmadian (2012) wanted to see the association between student self-efficacy and the use of vocabulary learning strategies. The results revealed that self-efficacious students use more strategies to learn than less efficacious learners. This is in line with other research (e.g., Ehrman & Oxford, 1990; Green & Oxford, 1995; Li & Wang, 2010; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Siew & Wong, 2005; Yang, 1999).

METHODOLOGY

Participants and Settings

For the purpose of this research, 150 Iraqi EFL learners will be selected based on convenience sampling. The students are from different universities of Iraq. Their age ranges from 18 to 27. They are studying in English major. The selected participants will be asked to answer two questionnaires. Also, in order to measure their language learning, the participants' GPA will be taken into account.

Instrumentation

Learners' Self-Efficacy Questionnaire

In order to measure Iraqi EFL learners' self-efficacy, Learners' Self- Efficacy Survey designed and validated by Gahungu (2009) will be used. The questionnaire contains 40 items on a 5-point Likert scale and the answers rang from never to always (Gahungu, 2009). The reliability and validity of the scale were confirmed throughout some studies (e.g. Hashemi & Ghanizadeh, 2011).

Copying Strategies Questionnaire

In order to consider the Iraqi EFL learners' stress copying strategies, the related questionnaire, Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS), designed and standardized by Endler and Parker (1990) will be utilized. This scale includes 48 items in which 16 items measures task-oriented copying, another 16 items measure avoidance copying, and then 16 items gauge the emotion-oriented coping. Avoidance copying, by itself, contains two sub-factors i.e. distraction and social diversion.

The CISS focuses on three major dimensions of coping in response to a stressful situation: Task-oriented, Emotion-oriented, and Avoidance-oriented coping. Task-oriented coping refers to responses directed at either problem resolution or cognitively reframing the meaning of the stressful situation. Emotion-oriented coping refers to responses directed toward oneself rather than the problem at hand. An individual using this coping style may respond to a difficult situation by becoming emotionally distressed or engaging in fantasy activities. Avoidance-oriented coping refers to responses designed to avoid dealing with the stressful situation. Such attempts to deal with stress may take the form of either distracting oneself with other situations (e.g., shopping) or through interacting with other persons, forms of Avoidance-oriented coping that the authors conceptualized as a Task-oriented avoidance and Person-oriented avoidance, respectively (Endler & Parker, 1990, 1999).

Data Analysis

To analyze the collected data, the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) 23 will be used. To gauge the statistical relationship between Iraqi EFL learners' copying strategies, self-efficacy, and language learning, the Pearson Moment Correlation Coefficient will be run.

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