CHAPTER 3- THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Theoretical Framework

The theory of foreign language anxiety was first proposed and introduced by Horwitz et al. (1986).

> *Our findings suggest that significant foreign language anxiety is experienced by many students in response to at least some aspects of foreign language learning. A majority of the statements reflective of foreign language anxiety (nineteen of thirty-three items) were supported by a third or more of the students surveyed, and seven statements were supported by over half the students. Although at this point we can only speculate as to how many people experience severe reactions to foreign language learning, these results (considered in light of the number of students who expressed a need for a student language-support group) imply that anxious students are common in foreign language classrooms (at least in beginning classes at the university level).* (Horwitz et al., 1986: 125).

Advances in foreign language anxiety theory and instruments emerged in the mid-1980s (MacIntyre &Gardner, 1991).

2. Data Collection

A quantitative method is adopted in the process of data collection and data analysis. There are three reasons for collecting and using such kind of data. The first reason is that it is easy to access. The researcher didn't face any obstacles to administer the reading and the writing tests nor the questionnaire with the help of Dhofar University Research Board (URB) and some of the teachers at the Foundation Program. The second reason is that it is inexpensive since the researcher didn't have to travel or spend a lot of money to collect the data. The place where the study was conducted is the same place where the researcher

works. The third justification is that the time spent to collect these data was only two hours; in other words, it did not take up much time.

3. The Instrument

Three tools are used to collect the data,

- Questionnaire to measure language anxiety (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale FLCAS questionnaire)
- Reading test
- Writing test

This collection of the data took place on an ordinary class day and lasted two hours during a regular English class, by the permission of the University of Dhofar Research Board (URB) and the English Teaching Program Coordinator at the Foundation Program (FP). First, every student was given a questionnaire to measure language anxiety. The questionnaire is an inventory devised by Horwitz, and Cope in 1986 and it is called Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This questionnaire has been tested and it was found reliable and valid. The FLCAS questionnaire consists of 33 questions.

Based on the answers in the anxiety measure questionnaire, every student was given a numeric grade for anxiety level. The students were then be classified into two anxiety groups: high and low.

There was no time pressure on the students, for nothing can be gained by hurrying. Students who completed their questionnaires quickly were not allowed to leave the classroom, instead they were given English assignment papers from their teachers; this eliminates any motivation to complete the questionnaires quickly.

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After the students returned their completed questionnaires, another test was handed out to them to measure their achievement in comprehending an unfamiliar text in an English reading, and their achievement in an English writing task. They were not limited in time at this stage either.

4. Descriptions of the Writing Test

The writing test consists of three parts. In Part one, students were given a set of single words and phrases just like information points which belong in a single context, e.g. a particular person, place, event, etc. The student's task was to write a paragraph including all the given information points. Marks for this question were awarded according to a general score by using a five–level rating scale. Total marks for this part is 6 marks.

Part Two of the writing test contained situational instructions for the writing of a reply letter. The student's task was to write a text of at least 75 words. Marks for this part were awarded according to an overall score by using a five-level rating scale. Total marks for this is 10.

Writing Test Part Three was free writing. Students were given a title and they were asked to write a text of at least 100 words. The same scale that has been adopted in marking Part Two is also used in this part and the total mark is 10.

5. Descriptions of the Reading Test

The reading test consists of three parts. Part One contained six short excerpts from six different texts. These materials were accompanied by nine short excerpts, six of which followed on from the excerpts in the first column plus three distractors. The student's task

was to match excerpts that belong together. Each item was awarded one mark i.e. the total for this part was 6.

Part Two of the reading test was six short texts of varying types. For each text there was one statement with a single-word gap. The student's task was to fill each gap with one word or a number. Each item was awarded one mark. The total marks for this part was also 6.

Reading Test Part Three contained one longer narrative or informative text with eight multiple-choice gap-fill items, each item with three options. The student's task here was to indicate the correct option: A, B or C. Each item was awarded one mark thus adding up to a total of 8 marks for this part of the reading test.

6. The Validity and Reliability of the Reading and Writing Tests

Because the reading and writing tests used in this research are national tests in the Sultanate of Oman, a letter was sent to the Ministry of Education requesting some information about the validity and reliability of the two tests. Soon an answer was received in Arabic saying that:

The National test is prepared on specific descriptions and objectives (the descriptions are available). Then, an independent expert committee, consisting of academic and technical members, assesses and evaluates the test before it is applied nation wide. The members of the committee are specialized in the subject area, highly experienced and from different backgrounds. Once the final model test is approved, it can be applied and administered all over the country at the same time. The committee first has to display a sample that is similar in its formats and descriptions to the original national test version, but

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different in its contents. This sample test is applied in the middle of the academic year. The purpose is to discover the deficiencies if any, re-assess the test and solve the problems that may occur.

Reliability of the test is measured statistically by calculating the amount of internal consistency of the test. The test scored high internal consistency coefficients on Cronbach's Alpha (r = 0.87). Cronbach's Alpha (equation) ranges from 0 to 1.00, with values close to 1.00 indicating high consistency.

7. The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)

The FLCAS is a 33-item self-report instrument originally developed from "student self-reports, clinical experiences, and a review of related instruments" (Horwitz, 1986: 37). It uses 5-point Likert-type scales with choices ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." This instrument was designed to measure the level of anxiety foreign language learners experienced in the language classroom.

The internal consistency of the FLCAS using Cronbach's alpha was .93 with a sample of 108 students (Horwitz. 1986). Test-retest reliability over a period of eight weeks was ($r = 0.83$) and ($p < .01$) with a sample of 78 subjects. The Chinese version of the FLCAS from two previous studies on Taiwanese students reported similar results: Wu (1994), and Cheng (1994) obtained Cronbach's alphas of .95, and .95, respectively.

It is also important to be mentioned that the FLCAS inventory was translated to the students' mother tongue along with the original items on the same page. Two professional translators were used in the process of translation in order to insure a high translation quality from the original version for the obvious reason that poor translation may affect the students' responses to different items of the questionnaire (see the appendix ….). The

purpose of the translation in this stage was to help the students to make a good understanding of the questions which definitely results in accurate responses.

8. The Procedure

First, the reading and writing tests papers as well as the questionnaire were given serial numbers on the first page from 1 to 50. Then every student was given the paper that holds the same number in the writing test, the same number in the reading test and the same number in the questionnaire. Names were not dealt with for the purpose of anonymity and the exam hall was comfortable enough so the students were seated in a way that prevented cheating. The researcher and the English program coordinator together with another English language teacher were in the exam hall functioning as invigilators. The students were told that the purpose of the test was only to collect data for a research and the information that they were going to provide would not be used for further purposes. Also they were told that participation in this research is not compulsory and for free.

At the first stage, the writing test papers were handed over to the students and they were given enough time to complete the writing test. The time for the writing test was determined according to the exam time determined by the Ministry of Education from which the test was taken. When the time of the writing test was over, the writing test papers were collected and the reading test papers were handed over to the students at the same time to make sure that every student was given the paper that had the same serial number. Finally, the questionnaire papers were handed over with the same procedures. It took the participants around fifteen minutes to complete the questionnaire and turn it in. Nobody was allowed to leave the examination hall till the time of the two tests and the questionnaires ended (two hours).

9. Writing achievements were scored on the following scales

(i) **Vocabulary:** the number of "difficult" words that the student uses. "Difficult" words are those appearing in the reading text and they were not familiar to the student before the reading. Such words appear in the short glossary. Unusual words not in everyday use and not taken from the text or the glossary were also considered "difficult" words. The vocabulary grading is from 0 to 10.

(ii) **Writing fluency:** To what extent do the student's written texts create a sense of fluency? Fluency grading is from 0 to 10.

(iii) **Grammatical mistakes:** use of tenses, inflection of verbs according to persons and tenses, etc. Again, the grading is from 0 to 10, based on the number of errors made.

(v) **General interest in the text written by the student**. That means originality, organization, ability to interest the reader, and ability to create a readable written text. Grading is from 0 to 10.

The average of the four scores becomes the 'writing task grade'.

10. Data Analysis

The subjects had the chance of being selected based on two types of tests, namely the National Secondary School Certificate, and the Dhofar University placement test. Accordingly, they might be considered to be normally distributed in terms of the overall general proficiency of English as a foreign language.

Since the samples are normally distributed, the researcher could conduct a parametric test namely Pearson's r correlation to determine whether or not the variables are

significantly related. The data analysis procedure and details will be further explained in the next chapter together with the necessary illustrative tables and figures.