

ANXIETY FACTOR IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract: One of the key factors of shift in language teaching is the emphasis on the improving communication skills and various methods and approaches have emerged that stress on the development of oral communication. Speaking is one of the most significant skills that have to be developed and it is the most complicated skill to acquire as there are lot of factors involved in the process of communication. One such factor that affects speaking is anxiety, especially in L2 environment where there is less scope for communication in the target language. Recent research on speaking anxiety and its role in language learning proves the debilitating effect that anxiety has on the language learning process. Speaking anxiety as a predominant factor that affects performance in classroom settings is emphasized in this study. The relationship between Speaking English, Speaking anxiety and L2 classroom environment and the affective variables involved in speaking anxiety are the highlights and significance of this study. The purpose of this study is to substantiate the fact that anxiety is the predominant factor that results in low level performance. The process of identification gives an explanation as to how these factors influence students' ability to learn and perform in an instructional environment since L2 classrooms are sometimes framed upon formation of groups with various dynamics that may have a greater effect or impact on learners speaking anxiety. This research is carried out at tertiary level engineering students from various disciplines. The methodology used in this study is qualitative method, consisted of individual learners' open-ended views through semi-structured questionnaires.

Keywords: Speaking Anxiety, L2 Classroom, Teaching.

INTRODUCTION

English language acquired new dimensions and crept itself into diverse methods that are implemented in all levels of educational system. At this juncture, ELT has reached a stage where acquisition of language skills is gaining prominence. Level of acquisition is measured in terms of development of Communication skills more particularly, speaking. It is considered as fundamental skill that is tested at the college level. The lacuna arises at this stage because less importance was assigned to improve speaking skills at school level. Since the learners will not have any accuracy and fluency at this stage, they lose confidence and interest to use the language. Many factors affect the process of learning and teaching the language. The key factor is linked to instructed language teaching scenario and with this as the focus, this study is undertaken to identify reasons for poor performance, learners strategy to decrease anxiety and expectations during speaking sessions.

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SPEAKING ANXIETY

Anxiety can be defined as a kind of fear and uneasy emotional state of a person. To begin with, Freud described anxiety as ‘something felt’, an unpleasant affective state or condition (Freud, 1924). cited in Spielberger, 1966). “Anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system”. (Horwitz et. al., 1986, p.125)

Second language anxiety has a debilitating effect on the learners of English as a second language, since it is perceived as a specific stressful and anxiety-evoking experience and more so during oral communication. While anxiety is generally a response to perceptions of a present or future threat (Barlow, 1988; Behnke and Beatty, 1981), it is possible that some speakers experience the greatest degree of anxiety before and during the speech. Ultimately, a better understanding of the impact of speakers’ anxiety could enable speakers to engage in more effective and appropriate communication in front of others. This could also be considered as one of the primary goals of communication education.

In educational research, Trait anxiety is relatively stable personality trait. A learner who is trait anxious is likely to feel anxious in a variety of situations. State anxiety is a temporary condition experienced or felt at a particular moment or point of time. The third type of anxiety is situation specific anxiety and it reflects a trait that recurs in specific situations (Spielberger, Anton and Bedell 1976). However, research into language learning anxiety has classified it as situation specific (MacIntyre and Gardener 1991b; Horwitz 2001). That is a trait which recurs in language learning situations, especially in classrooms.

As an individual learner plans and prepares for an upcoming speaking activity or oral presentation in front of others, negative thoughts about the activity or session may intensify feelings of anticipatory anxiety associated with the speaking task assigned. This psychological phenomenon pose as a Challenge to teachers and instructors involved in speaking activity where the ultimate goal is to educate and train the learners as competent communicators.

OBJECTIVE

This study was carried out with the following objectives:

- (a) To find out whether it is lack of awareness of importance of English or the level of anxiety involved during communicative activities is the reason for poor performance.
- (b) To understand the strategies that learners adopt normally to decrease anxiety.
- (c) To know the learners’ expectations in terms of learning environment during speaking sessions.

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The Participants for this study included thirty undergraduate B.Tech students of various discipline who had undergone English Proficiency Test and shortlisted for basic level English Course.

Procedure

This study elicited qualitative data from the English language learners of B.Tech basic level English Course. Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire, consisting of five questions related to the objectives of the study, to find out the following: (a) Awareness of the importance of English. (b) Reasons for learning English. (c) Preferred method of teaching and views of students on ideal language classroom environment (d) Learners feedback on speaking sessions (e) Strategies that the learners' adopt to boost their confidence and decrease their anxiety level.

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study offer support for conceptualization of second language anxiety and the questionnaire was found to be relevant and valid. A significant relationship was found between second language learning, speaking anxiety and the learners' performance. The major stress or impact factor identified by the learners' was speaking in front of others and the difficulties they face during oral presentations.

One of the purposes of this study was to explore the learners' perspective in terms of English language learning and speaking. The awareness about the importance of English is substantially evident from the data.

AWARENESS AND IMPORTANCE

The learners' are well aware of the fact that English language is 'Universal', 'Global', 'Prestigious', 'Common', 'International' and base for all subjects. The learners' are of the opinion that English speaking gives confidence, sense of belonging, improves personality, helps to explore and excel, connects and unifies people across the world, for gaining prominence and recognition; it is difficult to survive without English and to be confident, etc.,

Furthermore, the learners also stated that English is essential for effective communication and impressive interaction as it is prerequisite for internship, recruitment and higher studies in other countries. Good communication skills in English provide a platform to speak or express oneself better while making presentations and attending interviews. Communicating with friends confidently understanding others views easily and determining the attitude of a person will be incomplete without English.

The learners expressed various reasons for learning English language. The students' said, 'like the language', 'easy to communicate', 'widely spoken', 'wide-spread', 'to converse with a stranger or unknown person'.

The learners' consider it as a stylish, universal and language for survival when they travel to foreign countries. Apart from boosting one's self confidence, English language helps to overcome the language barrier, to impress others and gain good language proficiency to tackle competitive world. It also adds more 'style to person's background, profile' and paves way to communicate and express views effectively. For many, Speaking in English is a dream and English speakers are considered as talented and gifted personalities.

Some of them have also come out with the following reasons for learning English: most of the relevant books are written in English; it helps to achieve set goals; learn it for love for the language; no matter whether it is correct or not – just speak and enjoy; good to learn a language other than one's mother tongue.

As a matter of fact, a few of them have also mentioned that they find it difficult to learn the main subject or to learn good things without knowing English language. The learners do consider it as a university core subject and it is mandatory to learn. Most of them learn as 'it is essential' and 'just wish to speak frequently and fluently'. For a few of them 'it is a dream' as it helps to get their dream job and their success of professional glow and personal growth is totally depended on knowledge of English language. It is truly interesting to observe that for some of the learners' 'it is fun' and 'easy than the other languages' and also 'a better medium to communicate with others' and 'helpful while using technology'.

In addition to the above mentioned, the following views such as 'Love for the language', 'want to be famous for English', For higher studies, brighter future, research publication, develop English knowledge and improve speech delivery, helpful in various situations like Bank transactions, etc., to understand the words used in core subject books, to learn or educate ourselves, develop communication and writing skills, gain knowledge, helps for one's career and during world tour.

The learners' have mentioned that they all experience some anxiety when speaking in English and also suggested interactive sessions as solution for their anxiety which they experience during speaking sessions. Anxiety experienced while speaking in English can influence the learners' adaptation to the target language and ultimately their educational goals. The relationship between anxiety and oral performance (speaking) is an identified factor.

LEARNERS' DIFFICULTIES

The difficulties faced by learners vary according to their exposure. There are many physical and psychological factors involved in the process of L2 speaking.

Learning and Acquisition

According to the learners' point of view, anxiety is caused due to number of valid reasons. Very strong disturbances affect the process of communication, such as 'stage fear' 'lack of confidence, memory, concentration and 'practice', 'lack of command over language', 'poor and improper communication', and inadequate interaction. Some learners' are even finding it difficult to get correct word according to their thought process.

Not getting the right word, urge to use unknown words in mother tongue, 'lack of preparation' and 'lack of memory' leads to lose the confidence and also increases the level of anxiety. "No previous experience of speaking in front of the class, 'fear of facing classmates', 'task completion', 'forming correct sentences', 'distraction due to classmates', 'fear of what to talk next', 'fear of correct tone and pronunciation', 'forgetting the points in the middle of the speech', 'forgetting what actually was planned to speak or present', 'Unable to think of some unique words on the spot', 'nervousness and hesitation', 'shyness', no proper knowledge of right words for different situation', 'fear of failure', 'fear of mispronunciation', 'distraction caused due to eye contact, 'shivering', 'tension', 'blankness', 'fear of others making fun'.

It is quite common that many learners or speakers don't get the relevant or apt points at the right time. Moreover, for many, speaking in front of others itself is a matter of "great fear". 'Fear of fumbling', And the question 'In case I forget something, will it be possible to manage?' also lurks in their minds. Anxiety is also evident in other physical gestures like trembling of hands and legs.

Strategy to Reduce Anxiety Level

It is evident from the data that the learners' know more about their weakness than their strength. They possess better drive and attitude to learn English language and also adopt certain strategies to reduce the anxiety level during speaking sessions like: speak in such a way to make others comfortable, to be aware of one's anxiety problem, and to work hard to overcome based on the reason for their anxiety. As per the teacher's general instructions and guidance, strategies like speech practice in front of the mirror to correct facial expressions, helped the learners' to overcome stage fear, made everyone speak, focus on experiencing than the consequences. The learners' confidently expressed that 'Organising English language games', 'improving reading skills', 'visiting different places' and 'interacting with new people', 'getting guidance from friends' and 'recollecting the good memories' and 'sharing it in front of the class' and participating in more number of motivating tasks would certainly decrease the level of anxiety. They also stated that 'interactive sessions and short presentations', 'if others can, then, why

not me – attitude’, ‘interact with people from other states’, ‘speaking in English make me confident’, ‘being friendly with teachers and classmates’, ‘freedom to speak and express own views’, ‘learn with calm mind’ are all the suggested and successful process of reducing anxiety and to build up confidence among language learners.

Reference, Perspectives and Expectations

The learners’ expect the teachers’ ‘to make sessions fun and interesting through interactive sessions’. In connection with L2 learning and acquisition, ‘timely feedback’, ‘personal interaction with the learners’, ‘correction in privacy’, ‘importance of speaking’ and ‘listening activity’, ‘comfort level’, ‘frequent opportunities’, ‘being friendly’, ‘the role of teacher as a problem’ – ‘solver are all great matter of their expectations’.

One of the main suggestions stated by the learner is that they ‘don’t like to be corrected or scolded in public’. The language teachers ‘should be able to create a very friendly atmosphere’, then ‘detect errors and offer guidance’. The teachers’ great responsibility is to make the learners read a lot to increase their vocabulary and reading speed.

Learners’ feedback on speaking sessions is truly encouraging and gives better scope for teachers’ improvement. Though has the talent to speak, shyness is the barrier for not using the language. According to them, the sessions are amazing, relaxing and refreshing, happy and helps to explore. The opportunity given to overcome stage fear makes the learner ‘feel good’. They do ‘feel like a professionals and confident’ as teachers would correct and help. As a result, they do activities with great interest and dedication.

CONCLUSIONS

This study found that all the learners’ are well aware of the importance of Learning English and interested and enthusiastic about learning and improving their language. Thus, the learners’ awareness is not the issue, as the current educational and job scenario demands it to a great extent. The need of the hour is to create a suitable language learning environment and make language learning an enjoyable process through interactive sessions. However, the data reveals the fact that the learners’ are much involved in looking for opportunities to improve and prove their speaking skills. It is mainly now the teachers’ responsibility to open up the gateway towards learning and speaking in English as a fun-process through relatively designed activities for the learners’ based on their requirement, and learning style. Of course, the learners’ should also tune their minds to receive, acquire and learn with high level of determination and willingness.

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