

ANXIETY IN ENGLISH CLASS: A BIG IMPEDIMENT FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the various reasons because of which, many Indian students suffer from anxiety, while speaking in English in a classroom. It further explores, why they get anxious while speaking in English and how they handle anxiety. It also tries to find practical solutions to overcome this problem. This paper further highlights the role of a teacher in getting rid of classroom anxiety. Data collection involves group interviews of thirty students. They were divided into six groups. Each group comprised of five students. Data was analyzed through discourse analysis. It was found that most of the students get anxious while speaking in English in a classroom. The paper concludes by saying that there should be a friendly environment for students which motivates them to speak in English without getting anxious.

KEYWORDS: Classroom Anxiety, Speaking English, Handling Strategies

INTRODUCTION

In spite English being one of the two official languages of India, not many Indians use English as their first language. The reason being they are not comfortable talking in English. Although the reality is that everyone wants to be proficient in English. Especially for students, learning English is very important but for most of the Indian students learning English is a daunting task. There is fear of speaking in English (known as language anxiety) among most of the students. This fear hampers their learning process and makes it very difficult for them to learn the language. The current study investigates different reasons which make Indian students anxious while speaking in English in a classroom. It also analyses how they handle anxiety. This paper also attempts to find practical solutions to overcome this problem by highlighting the role of a teacher in getting rid of classroom anxiety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking in English class can be considered the biggest concern of anxious second language learner. Horwitz asserts that “one-third of all foreign language learners experience some level of language anxiety. Therefore, foreign language anxiety has been a topic of much interest and research in recent years” (117). Various authors have defined anxiety in their own way. Spielberger believes that “Anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system” (6). Some people feel anxious while performing in Mathematics or science. Similarly, some can find learning a foreign language in a classroom quite stressful.

According to MacIntyre and Gardner, foreign language anxiety is “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning” (285). According to Horwitz, foreign language anxiety is “a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to

classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process.”

Horwitz et al. classified foreign language anxiety into three components as:

1. Communication apprehension, 2. Fear of negative evaluation 3. Test anxiety. Communication apprehension arises from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas. It is a “type of shyness characterized by fear of or anxiety about communicating with people.” Fear of negative evaluation arises from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others. Test-anxiety refers to a “type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure” (127).

Young also ascertains “six possible correlated sources of language anxiety, which may be attributed to the foreign language classroom environment: personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner beliefs toward language learning, teacher beliefs about language instruction, an interaction between instructor and learners, classroom procedures, and language exams” (430).

As mentioned by Hurwitz, “a review of the literature found only one instrument specifically designed to measure foreign language anxiety. Gardner, Clement and Smythe developed five items to measure French class anxiety as a part of their test battery, on attitudes and motivation (126)”. Thus there is a lack of discussions concerning anxiety and second language achievement. This study attempts to highlight classroom of anxiety of students while English language learning.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Site and Participants

The present study was conducted on a group of students in class XII (Non- Medical) from a Kendriya Vidyalaya in Punjab. The exact name of school, as well as the participants, is not mentioned. The reason for doing so was that the researcher wanted the students to participate in the discussion without any fear. By knowing that whatever they are going to say will be anonymous can make them more comfortable while expressing their views. This will help the researcher in getting clear idea about how students feel while talking in English in a classroom. Furthermore, a formal setting might have proven to be an obstacle in getting more frank and accurate reasons for classroom anxiety. Hence, an informal kind of setup was established so that students do not get anxious while talking. This research is case study of a single class comprising of thirty students. Out of those thirty, seventeen were female and thirteen were male. The participants belong to different family backgrounds and English was a second language for all the students.

Data Collection

Data collection for current study included semi structured interviews of focus groups. As explained by Morgan, “Focus groups are used for generating information on collective views, and the meanings that lie behind those views. They are also useful in generating an understanding of participants' experiences and beliefs (46)”. Thirty students were divided into six groups. Each group comprised of five students. The data received through group interviews is analyzed through discourse analysis. The students were asked about their anxiety levels while speaking in English in a classroom and how do they handle anxiety. The researcher discussed in detail regarding classroom anxiety with the students. All the interview questions are attached in the appendix.

Data Analysis

Discourse analysis was used as an approach to analyze the data received during group interviews. As mentioned in literature review Horowitz had classified that three variables; communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety cause second and foreign language anxiety. This classification was used as a guide for analyzing the data.

RESULTS

Why do Students feel Anxious while Speaking in English in Class?

After talking to students the researcher realized that most of the students avoid talking in English in the classroom. Following are the reasons for their anxiety while speaking in English in class:

Not confident of speaking correct English: The most common concern as a cause of anxiety mentioned by the students in a classroom is their poor command over English language. Most of the students are not at all confident regarding their knowledge of English language. They find it really difficult to find appropriate words while framing sentences in English. They are also worried about committing grammatical errors while speaking in English. Their basics of English are not clear so they are not confident speaking in it. This makes them quite anxious when they have to speak in English language.

Feel shy: Another major reason for anxiety as mentioned by students is shyness. The students mentioned that they feel shy to face the class. It requires lots of courage to stand up, look into the eyes of students and then speak. Most of the students are reticent in behavior so they do not feel like participating in classroom activities.

Worried about negative evaluation: The next point mentioned by the students was, regarding the cause of anxiety in a classroom. The students are constantly scared of being negatively evaluated by their teachers as well as the fellow students. They get nervous thinking about the humiliation they will have to face by the teachers if something goes wrong. They are scared of being ridiculed by the teacher for committing silly mistakes. The students further mentioned that they are also apprehensive about the opinion of their fellow students and they do not want to be negatively evaluated by them.

Peer Pressure: Another thing which makes the students anxious while speaking in English in the classroom is pressure from their friends. Some of the students mentioned that they can speak English quite well but even then they refrain themselves from talking in English in a classroom. The reason they mentioned was peer pressure. According to them if they speak fluently in the classroom their friends (who are not that good in English) will not like that and they might stop talking to them. So just to be in good books of their friends they do not like to talk in English in classroom.

How Do Students Handle Anxiety?

The researcher talked to the students and asked them what they do to overcome anxiety. The majority of students said that the best thing to do was not to speak at all. According to them when the teacher asks them something they do not look at her eyes. Avoiding eye contact is the most effective strategy students use to escape speaking in English in class. Their idea of coping with anxiety is not to participate in any activity. They believe remaining silent is the best thing as it works. The researcher tried to make them realize that it was not a right strategy to cope with anxiety as they are avoiding talking in class. This will affect their learning as well as performance. In fact, it will be a big hindrance in their learning process. In this manner they will not be able to learn English language ever. So, the researcher further asked them how they can get rid of anxiety. Most of the students believed their English teacher can play an important role in getting rid of anxiety in English class.

Teacher's Role in Reducing Anxiety in Students

A teacher can play a significant role in reducing anxiety in the classroom. It is the duty of a teacher to make students comfortable in classroom. The role become even bigger for an English language teacher as English is a second language for most of the students. So, the teacher needs to be patient while teaching them. The teacher should keep following points in mind while teaching in a classroom:

Create a supportive environment: The teacher should always be compassionate towards students. She should always be encouraging and motivating. A supporting and friendly environment will make students comfortable and thus less anxious.

Make learning fun: Learning should always be fun. The students can never learn under stress. So the teacher must come out with some innovative ideas to make language learning very interesting. This will reduce anxiety among students and they will come forward to participate in various activities.

Never point out a single student: The teacher should address the whole class instead of asking a specific student. She should wait for students to volunteer for their response. Pointing out a student can make him anxious. The teacher should let students take some time to prepare their answer and even then if nobody is volunteering to answer teacher should encourage them to get up and speak.

Always be enthusiastic: The teacher should always teach whole heartedly. The enthusiasm of teacher will reflect in students' response. Students will be motivated to speak in English without getting anxious.

Appreciate student's response: Teacher should always encourage students to speak and when a student takes the initiative to speak it is the responsibility of a teacher to appreciate that. Appreciating will make them less anxious and they will be motivated to participate in classroom activities.

Should not interrupt student while speaking: Teacher should not correct a student, while he is speaking. She should hear patiently and when the student finishes she should give her opinion in a very friendly manner.

CONCLUSIONS

The study shows that most of the students feel anxious while talking in English as English is not their first language. They do not have very good command over English language. Most of the students suffer from anxiety, because of communication apprehension as well as fear of negative evaluation. The majority of the students handle anxiety by remaining silent, avoiding eye contact and not participating in any discussion. It was also analyzed that a teacher can help a lot in reducing the anxiety levels of students. The anxiety of students depends a lot upon the behavior of a teacher in a classroom. The need of the hour is to create a friendly environment for students which motivate them to speak English without getting anxious.

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APPENDICES

Interview Questions

- Do you feel anxious when speaking English in class? How much difficult is it for you?
- How often do you speak in English in class?
- Do you participate in class room activities?
- Do you look at your friends while speaking in class? What do you feel about the class audience?
- How is the atmosphere of the class when you are speaking?
- Do you get anxious thinking that the other students in class will laugh at you when you speak English?
- Do you feel anxious if someone talks to you in English?
- What do you think are the reasons of your possible anxiety and how can you overcome it?
- How do you feel when you are not able to find suitable word to express yourself?
- Are you satisfied with your teacher's effort to make you feel less anxious?
- How do you think that your teacher can help you in overcoming anxiety while speaking in English in class?

