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THE STUDY OF THE IMPACT OF SHADOWING EXERCISE IN REDUCING SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG COLLEGE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to develop a pedagogy aiming at reducing speaking anxiety among undergraduate students. Speaking anxiety is the most recurrent challenge among Undergraduate students who in their Business Communication Course invest their energies in an endeavour to overcome this anxiety before they transit from academic to professional life. The purpose of this study is to study the impact of using 'shadowing' exercise in order to reduce speaking anxiety levels among Commerce undergraduate students. Based on the results of the oral performance and levels of anxiety on the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS), this study found that there was a marked decrease in speaking anxiety levels. 'Shadowing' a Ted talk was used as an intervention tool. As the study proved to offer promise with the desired results, the researcher recommends this fairly novel approach of the use of shadowing a Ted talk as one technique that could be incorporated into the pedagogy in a public speaking class.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, Shadowing, Oral performance

INTRODUCTION

The importance of public speaking cannot be underlined enough for business professionals, whose success and career path depends largely on their ability to communicate orally with their partners, superiors or underlings. Consequently, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers pay more attention to practicing the language – an approach known as 'Communicative Language Teaching' (CLT). Throughout their experience as EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers, they have found that speaking is one of the most desirable skills that English learners want to develop but feel insecure and nervous about practicing it precisely because they assume that their weaknesses would be highly

exposed. "Anxiety is one of the most negative psychological hinders for many EFL Learners" (Maouche, 2010, p. 8). Anxiety is defined as a state of uneasiness and apprehension of fear caused by the anticipation of something threatening. The American Psychological Association (APA) defines anxiety as "an emotion characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts and physical changes like increased blood pressure"

According to Kirkwood and Melton (2002), anxiety disorders are among the most common mental disorders encountered by public speakers. People who feel anxiety while speaking in public generally tend to avoid situations where they have to perform, but when they encounter such

situations, they suffer intense distress and anxiety. According to Kant (2000), people in general negatively assess and appraise those who demonstrate their fears towards public speaking and fail to make a strong impression through confident gestures. These problems can act as hurdles in achieving ones goals that could be both personal and professional; hence speakers need to develop strong public speaking skills to enable them to become more confident.

Public speaking is not an inborn skill and like all skills it must be learnt through practice and training. Educators therefore have recognised that this is a vital skill and students have to be trained and thus business schools/Graduate Programs have communication courses across the curriculum at the core of their educational policy. Students need to know how to organise their oral discourse, while exerting persuasion, being able to make others share their vision. The mere presentation of facts, figures or pieces of information is never sufficient to be persuasive, so EFL teachers have to teach students, besides how to select and organize information, how to use para-verbal and nonverbal communication. But Public speaking is also a situation where a student becomes the focus of attention and has to address an audience. This mostly leads to the sympathetic nervous system of his/her body getting activated thus leading to experience emotions like fear and anxiety and the behaviour that goes with it like sweating, stammering, nausea etc. It is clear that anxiety is a crucial point to consider in learning a foreign language especially due to its emotional, physical, and psychological impediments on learning and practicing the language. Anxious learners therefore would be less willing to practice. Most of them try to avoid situations where they have to perform or speak in public, but when unavoidable, such situations are endured by distress. According to Luca (2001), "Many people who converse easily in all kinds of everyday situations become frightened at the idea of standing up before a group to make a speech"(p.9). MacIntyre (1995) found that there exists a cyclical relation between anxiety, competence, and performance. His findings reflected that anxiety affects the cognitive domain

and as a result of that performance is harmfully affected causing "negative self-evaluation and more self-depreciating cognition which further impairs performance" (p. 92). By this process, anxious learners would experience the same every time they practice. The task of the EFL teachers therefore is to support students in realising that they are not the only ones who may be going through these emotions and in fact, almost every student who has a speaking assignment feels the same and that the anxiety is a psycho-physiological state which is normally experience. In this scenario though, the EFL teachers have to device pedagogy that will assist in coping with this speaking anxiety.

Professionals are expected to regularly keep on improving their communication skills. Verderber, Sellnow and Verderber (2011) state, "Public speaking, a sustained formal presentation by a speaker to an audience, is simply one form of human communication. So learning to be an effective public speaker will help one to be more effective in other communication settings as well" (p.2). A change in confidence, speaking style, intonation pattern and the rest can result in a positive change in professionalism and personality. According to health care professionals like Tacheva (2013) are of the view that, "The verbal register, intonation, articulation, pronunciation, tone, rhythm, dialect define the character of the communicative impact as positive or negative depending on whether they facilitate or hinder the achievement of communicative purposes"(p. 605).

Teachers can help to overcome this problem by supporting learners' practice in small groups of peers. To address and overcome speaking anxiety various methods are being explored in a classroom situation. One such tool experimented on was the use of 'shadowing'.

Shadowing exercise is a language learning technique developed by the American Professor

Alexander Arguelles, which means learners attempt to repeat--to "shadow" -- what they hear as quickly and accurately as they hear it. In this paper the researcher has gone a step further to not only repeat what they hear but also imitate the gestures, posture and other aspects of body language. For this

a Ted talk was chosen as it could be closest to shadowing the speech and body language of the speaker. It is assumed that in the process of shadowing a Ted speaker, a student will model their presentations accordingly which will give them the confidence to believe that they are learning public speaking in the right direction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since early 1980s, shadowing has been applied to the English teaching in China and has acquired a great of achievements. Ye Guigang (1983) pointed out that the shadowing exercise requires learners speak while listening. and they should strive to keep up with the speed of the recording, almost making the sounds at the same time. Learners must be highly focused and agilely make corresponding responses through imitating pronunciation loudly, which contains both the information input and output processes [2]. In practice, the speed of shadowing is 2 seconds slower that of broadcasting while ensuring that the speed and content of shadowing are consistent. According to Lambert(1991), shadowing exercise technically is a rhythmic acoustic tracking task that requires the practicer to make instant sounds to the sound stimulus signal [3]. Hamada (2016:a) who conducted research with the title "An Effective Way to Improve Listening Skills through Shadowing" found in his study that learners' listening comprehension skills improved more when combining different difficulties of learning materials alternately. An improved listening ability was also found in research by Tamai, in Yonezawa & Ware (2008: 1256) showed that shadowing produced positive effects over a three-month period, especially for middle and lower-level students. Higher level students showed less improvement, probably because of their familiarity with the language (p. 44-45). A study on the effect on shadowing on reading skills was undertaken by Nakanishi & Ueda (2011:12) who conducted research with the title "Extensive Reading and the Effect of Shadowing". Their second research question asked whether or not shadowing could enhance the effects of extensive reading. When compared with the ER class, the ER-and-shadowing class showed more gains on post-test scores, indicating that shadowing seemed to

enhance the effects of extensive reading. In his study of Shadowing Exercise on Improving Oral English Ability for Non-English Major College Students Wang (2017), the post-experiment questionnaire survey of 20 subjects in the experimental group showed that after the experiment 18 (90%) students thought the shadowing exercise was interesting. 19 (95%) students said their oral English fluency had been greatly improved. 20 (100%) students all thought their oral English ability had been enhanced. 17 (85%) students believed the shadowing improved their confidence and interest in speaking. And 17 (85%) students said they would continue to use the shadowing exercise to practice oral English in the future. From all above, the shadowing exercise exerted a positive effect on improving oral English ability. With the above studies showing promise with the use of 'Shadowing' in language skill development the researcher decided to study if this technique could also be effective in reducing speaking anxiety while delivering formal presentations.

METHODOLOGY

The experiment of shadowing exercise in anxiety of speaking among college students while delivering presentations. In order to find out effective and efficient methods to reduce students' anxiety levels while speaking, through the empirical research, this paper studied the shadowing exercise's influence on improving confidence and reducing speaking anxiety while delivering presentations.

HYPOTHESIS

'Shadowing' exercise can significantly reduce speaking anxiety among college students when delivering presentations.

SUBJECTS

The participant students were 34 students who belonged to the researcher's tutorial batches. All of them were above average Undergraduate Commerce students studying at the First year of a Commerce college in Mumbai. The IQ was based on the scores of the previous year. The researcher administered the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale

(PSCAS) developed by Yaikhong & Usaha (2012) for these 34 students.

EXPERIMENTAL TOOLS

PSCAS comprised 17 items, (Figure 1.1) each of which was answered on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5 “Strongly Agree” to 1

“Strongly Disagree.” Thus, the total multiplied scores of a PSCAS were 85 and then subtracted by 17; scores higher than 68 were categorized as high anxiety, between 68-51 as medium anxiety, and lower than 51 as low anxiety. To reveal levels of anxiety requiring the determination of the mean, Liu and Jackson (2008) suggested adjusting the values assigned to different alternatives from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree.” Namely, the items expressing positive attitudes had the values assigned to their alternatives reversed, so that the response “Strongly Disagree” received a score of 5 instead of 1 and vice versa. As such, Items # 4, 8, 10, 12, of a PSCAS had the values reversed. In terms of anxiety levels based on mean, it revealed that mean scores which fall within the interval of 3-4 were categorized as medium anxiety level, below 3 as low anxiety level, and above 4 as high anxiety level, respectively.

The pre-training and post-training PSCAS. The purpose of pre- training PSCAS survey was to collect subjects’ general information of anxiety levels, confidence level, fear of speaking, tension and stress of speaking while delivering presentations and the understanding of shadowing exercise. The subjects were 16 participants. The post-class questionnaires were mainly used to know the training effect of shadowing exercise, including interest in shadowing exercise, pronunciation, gestures, posture, eye contact, changes in oral English

fluency, its influence on improving oral English and whether they would use

shadowing exercise in future preparation of delivering presentations. The questionnaire adopted the LIKERT 5 scale form.

The teaching materials. The ‘shadowing’ involved a TED talk which the students modelled as their delivery of presentations. Each student modelled a different TED talk. The shadowing time stayed at 1-2 minutes initially, and gradually increased to 5 minutes. The classroom teaching was for 12 weeks in total, 1 period (1 hour) each week for the group.

Figure 1.1:

Item No	Statements adopted with minor adaptation in wordings	Opinion				
		(5) Strongly Agree	(4) Agree	(3) Undecided	(2) Disagree	(1) Strongly Disagree
1	I never feel quite sure of myself while I am speaking English.					
2	I start to panic when I have to speak English without a preparation in advance.					
3	In a speaking class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.					
4	I feel confident while I am speaking English.					
5	I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English.					
6	I am afraid that other students will laugh at me while I am speaking English.					
7	I get nervous when the English teacher asks me to speak English which I have prepared in advance.					
8	I have no fear of speaking English.					
9	I can feel my heart pounding when I am going to be called on.					
10	I feel relaxed while I am speaking English.					
11	It embarrasses me to volunteer to go out first to speak English					
12	I face the prospect of speaking English with confidence.					
13	Certain parts of my body feel very tense and rigid while I am speaking English.					
14	I feel anxious while I am waiting to speak English.					
15	I dislike using my voice and body expressively while I am speaking English.					
16	I have trouble to coordinate my movements while I am speaking English.					
17	Even if I am very well prepared, I feel anxious about speaking English.					

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Figure 1.2

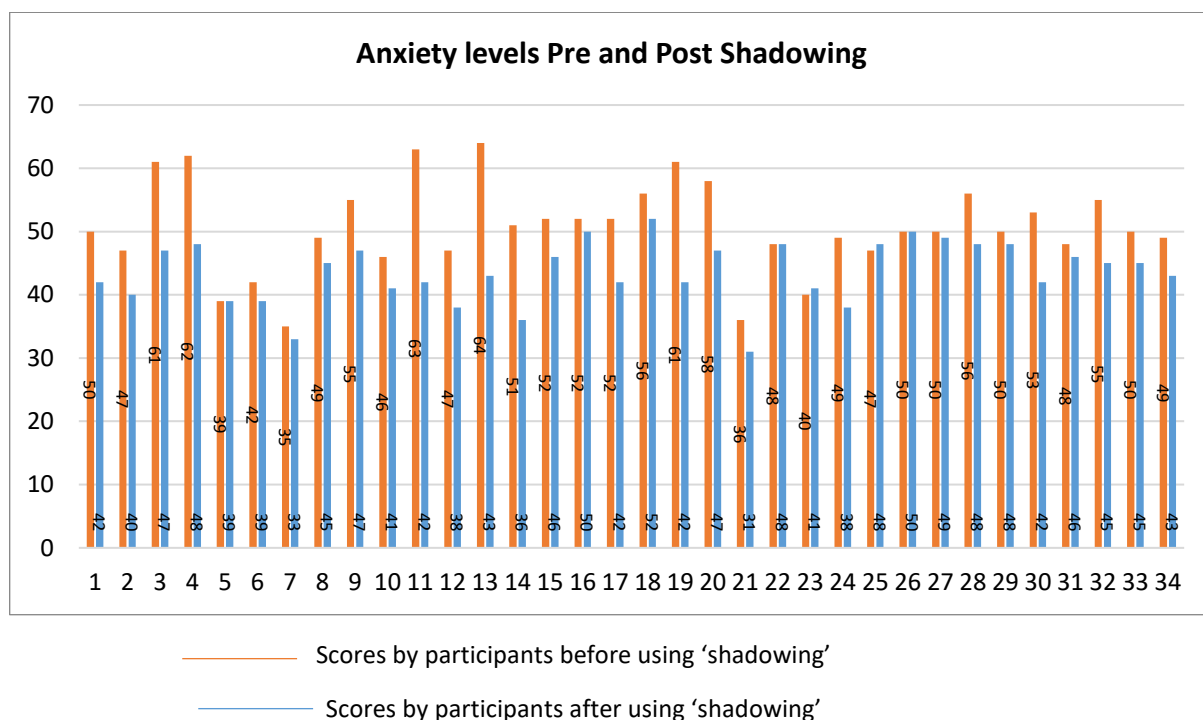


Figure 1.2 reflects the scores of the anxiety levels of students. Scores in orange denote the levels of anxiety before using shadowing technique. While no students' scores were in the range of higher than 68 which denotes a high level of anxiety, Student nos. 3,4,9,11,13 to 20,28, 30,32, totalling 15 in all scored anxiety levels 68-51 which was medium anxiety. Student nos. 1,2,5,6,7,8,10,12,21 to 27,29,31,33 and 34 totalling 19 in all scored levels lower than 51 which was low anxiety.

Scores in blue denote the levels of anxiety after using 'shadowing' technique. It was found that except for Student no.18, the anxiety levels scored by all the other students of the 'pre - shadow' test from the anxiety levels 68-51 range i.e. Student nos. 3,4,9,11,13 to 17,19,20,28, 30 and 32, totalling 15 showed a decrease from 'medium level' to 'low level'.

CONCLUSION

The study implicates that 'Shadowing' a Ted talk contributed in improving confidence and reducing speaking anxiety among learners while delivering presentations. Since this technique used Ted talk as the intervention tool, the learning was

not restricted to speaking alone. Shadowing of body language, posture, gestures and eye contact was modelled upon which further increased confidence and reduced anxiety. The researcher feels that this technique could be incorporated in any pedagogy aimed at reducing speaking anxiety in students.

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