



A Theoretical Review of English Communication Anxiety in the Context of EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

English communication anxiety has been widely accepted as one of the key affective factors that affect learners' speaking performance in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms. Students may know the language well enough but sometimes they will be scared, ashamed and discouraged to use it properly. The study is concerned with a theoretical explorative literature review on the concept of English Communication anxiety, its main causes, effects on speaking performance as well as teaching pedagogical strategies to achieve minimization of it. Foreign language communication anxiety consists of three components; communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). The review points out learner-related, teacher-related and classroom-related sources of anxiety and emphasizes the negative effect on learners' fluency, participation and willingness to communicate. The paper also highlights the importance of supportive learning through teaching practices, collaborative work among peers, formative assessment, and integration of technology to develop a low-anxiety learning environment. Through synthesising insights from the existing literature, the study highlights that communication anxiety must be mitigated in order to improve speaking proficiency and foster learners' confidence in EFL contexts. The paper also provides pedagogical implications for teachers and curriculum designers, and suggests directions for future empirical studies focusing on anxiety-reduction strategies in the language class.

Keywords: Communication anxiety in English; English as a Foreign language (EFL); Foreign language anxiety; Willingness to communicate; Affective factors.

1.Introduction

In academic, professional and world contexts, being able to speak fluently in English has grown into an important need (Dornyei,2005). However, In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class, many students felt great distress and nervousness when speaking in English. This phenomenon, known as English communication anxiety or foreign language anxiety in general, has been identified as one of the significant affective factors that may impact language learning success (MacIntyre,1999). Although learners might know the English language quite well, their fear of committing mistakes, being assessed badly (Gregersen & Horwitz 2002) or even of speaking in front of other people often stops them from being actively involved in oral communication.

The influence of affective variables on learners' success in the process of learning a language have also been consistently demonstrated (Dornyei, 2005) by research conducted in the field of second language acquisition. Of these variables, foreign language anxiety has been widely studied due to its debilitating impact (Horwitz, 2001) on speaking performance, classroom involvement and language acquisition success. In many EFL contexts, especially where English is learnt primarily in formal classroom settings, opportunities for authentic communication are few and limited (Young, 1991). Learners' speaking activities are often seen as a vehicle for evaluation and correction only. These conditions bring about a tension-laden educational environment where students are discouraged from free communication and expression.

This is because English communication anxiety affects the learners' willingness to

communicate (MacIntyre, 1999). Students with high anxiety tend to avoid speaking tasks (Liu & Jackson, 2008), are silent during interaction in the classroom and show low levels of participation. This not only reflects their speaking abilities but also hinders their confidence and motivation for using the language in practical contexts. Hence, a new pedagogical strategy that can foster a low anxiety learning environment (Young, 1991) will be required as to understand the nature, sources and effects of English communication anxiety.

Therefore, this paper aims at a theoretical examination of English communication anxiety in EFL classes. It investigates foreign language anxiety and its specific components, describes the main factors behind communication anxiety, analyses its effect on speaking performance and introduces didactic methods that would alleviate those difficulties and foster effective oral communication. The paper synthesises themes from previous literature to offer a holistic overview of English communication apprehension and its impact on English language instruction.

2.Concept of Foreign Language Anxiety

Foreign language anxiety is usually a context-specific psychological barrier that arises from the students inherently with the demand of the use of second language in communication process. While general anxiety has a broad range of topics and situations within its context, second/foreign language anxiety is directly related to the learning and use of a second or foreign language. This is especially apparent in speaking contexts where learners must produce language spontaneously in front of teachers and peers. Such anxiety has generally been accepted

as an important affective variable affecting language performance and success.

The systematic investigation of foreign language anxiety received a significant reinforcement from Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) who proposed the concept of "Foreign Language Anxiety" as its unique construct, devising the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) to measure students' levels of anxiety. Foreign language anxiety (Horwitz et al.) is understood as a system of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours associated with foreign language learning classroom due to the unique demand of the language-learning process. It is commonly conceptualized as comprising of three interrelated components: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986). Communication apprehension is a fear of new communication situations in which learners feel unable to express themselves through the target language; fear of negative evaluation is concern about being judged by teachers or peers; and test anxiety refers to fear of failing in assessment. These elements are especially pertinent within speaking tasks, as learners are required to process the language in real time and receive instant feedback.

For instance, anxiety affects cognitive processing at the input level, the processing stage of production as well as output stages (MacIntyre & Gardner 1994). At the input stage, worried learners struggle at attending to and processing what they hear in the language; at output preparation stage, anxiety cripples their ability to structure linguistically relevant knowledge; and finally, on output itself, it brings stalling and avoidance of communication. Hence, otherwise competent learners may be found speaking poorly when they are anxious rather than incompetent.

A very important aspect of foreign language anxiety is its connection with learners' self-confidence and their perceived

communicative competence. It has been found that among learners who feel their language ability is lacking are more likely to be speaking anxious. This perception tends to create a snowball effect in which anxiety diminishes participation, limited participation limits practise and lack of practice further reduces confidence. As a result, anxiety has not only adverse effects no real-time performance but also becomes a hindrance to long-term language development.

Foreign language anxiety in EFL classrooms is, to a large extent, heightened by contextual variables such as teacher-centred instruction, emphasis on grammatical accuracy, immediate error correction both overt and covert and limited opportunities for meaningful communication. In such formal classroom setting, where learners are expected to speak for the audience (teachers and other students), speaking is often perceived as the most anxiety-provoking skill. Thus, gaining insight into the multidimensional nature of foreign language anxiety enables educators to develop pedagogical practices that cater to learners' emotional as well as linguistic needs.

In short, anxiety towards a foreign language is an important affective factor that affects learners' speaking behaviour, participation and performance in EFL classrooms. This is not simply a learner problem – it is a pedagogical response that must be at the forefront of teacher and curriculum designer focus. An understanding of its constituents and the mechanisms underpinning it lays the basis for locating its sources, and finding ways to mitigate its adverse effects on oral communication.

3.Causes of English Communication Anxiety

In the EFL context, anxiety for communicating in English develops from various aspects including learner-related factors, teacher-related factors and classroom related ones. Such factors affect learners' emotional reactions toward speaking tasks and

determine their motivation to engage in oral tasks. The knowledge of these sources found in the existing literature is crucial to provide the pedagogical interventions that decrease anxiety and promote a more positive learning context.

3.1 Learner-Related Factors

Perceived lack of linguistic competence in learners is one of the main causes of anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner 1994) through communication. The fear of speaking English often begins with the explanation that people feel that their vocabulary, pronunciation or grammatical knowledge is not enough. This feeling of incompetence reduces their self-esteem, leading them to be more prone to avoid participating orally. The learners, in most instances, compare themselves with relatively better-performing peers, which exacerbate feelings of inferiority and anxiety.

Additional learner-related factor is low self-efficacy. Students who believe in their capability to speak English never get nervousness and hesitate while speaking. Such learners obsess over their mistakes and expect the worst, which compromises the fluency and clarity of their expression. Moreover, individual personality including shyness, introversion and fear of public speaking also lead to higher level of communication apprehension.

A lack of exposure to English outside the classroom also contributes significantly to an increase in anxiety. Therefore, in such circumstances many EFL learners have no opportunity of using the language outside class. So, the classroom becomes the only place for oral practice, which means that any exercise in speaking soon becomes worrying tasks in performance. Here learners do not have any real experience of exchange, and lack the spontaneous interaction resulting from it and they were very reluctant to make mistakes.

3.2 Teacher-Related Factors

In language teaching, teachers play a crucial role in establishing the emotional

atmosphere. Nevertheless, some teaching habits serve unwittingly to raise students' anxiety. For instance, excessive use of error correction based on a student's knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, where students are interrupted frequently to go over mistakes which could hold them back from expressing their ideas freely. Having such learners corrected right in front of their classmates leads them to feel embarrassed. Therefore, subsequently, they are unwilling to participate again in speaking activities.

Overall teacher behaviour and attitudes also influence language learners' level of anxiety. For instance, an authoritative teaching style, lack of laudatory feedback when the students have done well and no chance to discuss among themselves can lead to rather ruthless classroom settings with everyone out for themselves. Conversely, students are more comfortable and self-assured when teachers offer supports such as general encouragement or plenty of rehearsal time as well as opportunities for students to learn from one another.

Another important consideration is how assessment occurs. When speaking activities in class are primarily used for examination instead of practice, it is more likely that learners will associate them with grades and performance pressure. Such perception will increase their anxiety regarding test and thus reduce their willingness to communicate

3.3 Classroom-Related Factors

The environment of a classroom itself can be anxiety-generating. Speaking in front of a bunch of peers has become as a threatening because, if learners are afraid of negative evaluation or criticized. Constant juxtaposition with fellow students in classrooms creates competitive atmosphere, thereby contributing to increase Communication Apprehension.

Anxiety levels are also influenced by the type of task and classroom organisation. In some kinds of activities that require immediate

responses without enough time for preparation can bring stress to those learners who require extra time to organise their thoughts. Likewise, teacher-centred classroom interactions which give only a few students the chance to speak, restrict practice and put pressure on those called upon to speak.

Communicative and collaborative learning environments which are typically absent in EFL classes, will play a pivotal role in easing anxiety among learners (Young, 1990). If speaking activities are not integrated into the usual classroom practice then it only serves for grading purposes, then learners will never gain confidence enough to negotiate language with other speakers.

In a nutshell, the findings suggest that may include learner characteristics, teacher practices and possible classroom situation which will minimize the occurrence of English communication anxiety. These dimension influence and mediate learners' attitudes towards speaking tasks and their engagement in oral communication. The first step is to understanding the sources of these anxieties that can help the teacher to develop methods which will produce a low-anxiety and comfortable EFL classroom.

4.The Effect of Anxiety on Speaking Performance

This study deals with the very important and widespread negative communication effects brought about by foreign language learners' anxiety over speaking English in class. Since English communication apprehension is quite critical and even paralyzing, it greatly influences the speaking performance of the learners in EFL classrooms. Even though the majority of learners have a decent body of knowledge as far as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation are concerned, that knowledge is often limited in its use due to anxiety. It effects not only the number of students' participation in speaking tasks but also the quality of their spoken output.

One of the clearest signs of anxiety is hesitance or panic, and learners become less fluency. Nervous students hesitate often, speak slowly with many pauses and use shorter and less complicated sentences. Due to afraid of making a slip tongue, to come up with the right vocabulary then students make communication failure and to cope with this anxiety leads to a disorganised speech. This resulting in cognitive interference that constraints in processing language and difficult to put their ideas clearly.

Another impact of communication anxiety is avoidance. High-anxiety learners will certainly avoid any situation where they have to speak in English. For instance, when attempting pair work or cooperative learning opportunities, they may simply not speak at all or fail to volunteer the answers themselves or revert back to their mother tongue as a way of avoiding conversation unless the teachers specifically asked about avoidance. In the end, some will not attend oral classes and speaking activities are omitted entirely. Avoidance of such situations creates less opportunities to practice, which in turn restricts their speaking fluency development.

The learners' willingness to communicate is negatively influenced by anxiety. Even if the speaking task is set and learners are totally ready for it, their fear of negative evaluation hinders them to become actively involved. They often worry about mistakes with pronunciation, grammatical accuracy and the reactions of peers and teachers. It causes a forced and unnatural way of communication and robs spontaneity. This can cause learners to be less competent than what their actual level is.

Also, communication anxiety negatively affects the self-confidence and motivation of learners. Over time, continual feelings of nervousness and failure in speaking events can result in a decrease in learners' confidence in their own ability to speak English. This affects their involvement in classroom

activities and makes them lose interest gradually in language learning. Over the years, these learners may grow to panic in speaking English and consider it a stressor rather than an enjoyable experience.

Anxiety is also playing crucial part in assessment environments. When speaking exams is there, frightened students tend to forget what they had already learned. That is very normal because the stress of oral tests erodes their memory. In the same way, countless mistakes in grammar and pronunciation plagued them during what should have been intensive practice on network-based lip-synch skill learning platform. Consequently, their performance on these tests does not accurately reflect real language ability. All anxiety creates a gap between competence and performance where the true potential of students goes unrealized.

Anxiety has an effect classroom interaction pattern as well. In most EFL classes, only a few confident students dominate talking activities and passive learners remain mute. Such one-sided participation weakens the potential for communicative language teaching and also makes lesser overall quality in classroom discourse.

Finally, self-perceptions of fear about speaking English has far-reaching effects on speaking performance such as low levels of fluency, avoidance of participation, and consequently reduced self-confidence which can lead to poor-assessed test situations. In fact, this hampers immediate oral output while simultaneously restricting long-term language development. This negative impact highlights the importance of pedagogical methods which help students to enjoy speaking in a low-anxiety and nurturing environment.

5. Some Strategies in Reducing English Communication Anxiety.

The ideal consequences as per above findings entail the need for personalization of English classroom pedagogies to eliminate,

compensate against or alleviate the dangers of an anxiety in an EFL circumstances. As anxiety is a complex construct, any effective intervention should comprise the aspects related to supportive teacher behaviour as well as relevant classroom practices and learner autonomy. This enhances not only learners' speaking performance, but also their psychological component of confidence and willingness to communicate

5.1 Teacher's Role in Creating Supportive Environment

The teacher is the most important element of setting a positive emotional tone in the classroom. Students are far more comfortable and able to speak English with a gentle, supportive, non-threatening teaching style. Thus, the teacher should not overly emphasize grammatical correctness but allow students to express what they want. Delayed error correction works wonders in relieving anxiety too because it enables to sentence without interruptions and embarrassment.

Giving positive and constructive feedback is also one way to decrease the anxiety of learners. When learners' effort and growth is acknowledged as opposed to their errors or mistakes, teachers can foster a sense of accomplishment and confidence in students. In addition, allowing enough practice time before performing speaking tasks helps learners to be better organised and reduces anxiety during the process of spontaneous performance.

Pair work and group work can be effective ways to reduce communication apprehension. Speaking in small groups provides a less intimidating environment than speaking to the entire class and can increase the participation rates. Collaboration scenario encourage peer support which relieves stress of teacher-centred communication.

5.2 Strategies for Anxiety Management in Learners

There are also various strategies that learners themselves can adopt to manage communication anxiety. Preparation and practising before speaking tasks allow learners to gain confidence and build fluency. Reading it aloud, recording their own speech, and talking to peers can familiarize them with the language that they require and they become less nervous.

Another one is cultivating positive self-perception. For students, making mistakes is an integral part of the learning process itself and it should not be viewed as failures. Prevent them from on-the-job training and set realistic goals which they can track their own progress. This will give a sense control over speaking tasks but also regain their self-confidence.

Peer learning is equally important in alleviating anxiety. When learners practice speaking with supportive peers, they feel less judged, and are motivated to speak up. Such interaction establishes a cooperative learning environment that facilitates active communication.

6. Techniques to Encourage Low Anxiety Speaking Classroom

Communicative and task-based activities can lower this communication hesitation. Role plays and discussions Problem solving tasks and information gap activities Language games (which can also be given a strong meaning-over-form focus that fosters spontaneous.) They are fun ways for students to practice their English in practical, real life situations and develop confidence and fluency!

Technology assisted language teaching which could also provide low-anxiety learning environment. Use tools for recording audio and video, language learning applications that help construct vocabulary materials in writing or typing then read live to practice speaking privately without nerves settling during the process & state will be able repeat at their own

pace. These kinds of tools which, taking some air pressure originating from the need to feel forced small having become evaluated quarter-hour after use and also letting everyone self-track their progress.

Another key strategy is the utilization of learner centred pedagogy for teaching. Learners take ownership of their learning and are more likely to learn when they are actively engaged in choosing topics, engaging in activities, and processing their learning. This lessens pressure to perform and encourages a more relaxed approach to speak.

In essence, traditional teaching style mainly focused on evaluation of leads to anxiety. Thus. There needs of establishing a friendly and communicative learning atmosphere for students would promote their confidence towards communicating in English. By incorporating positive teacher behaviour, group work, training learners to speak in English and using communicative and technology-based activities can creates a secure classroom where students feel confident and motivated to interact in the target language. Such setting enhances oral proficiency, but encourages the language learning experience in long run.

7. Pedagogical Implications

The problem of communicating in English affects the performance of speaking, which was discussed in this section shows that an alternative teaching approach should be made in EFL classrooms to improve. Because anxiety is closely tied to learners' classroom experiences, teaching methods, and evaluation procedures, it needs to be addressed as a pedagogical matter instead of seeing it only as an individual learner problem. Below are some implications most relevant to the English language teaching profession: teachers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators.

One of the greatest implications is to provide a learning-centred classroom that can

minimize anxiety for learners. Teachers need to provide speech activities that promote real-life communication so, students can express what they think mostly uninterrupted. Encouragement, patience and positive reinforcement encourages student's participation and feeling valued of learning. When the learners feel that the classroom is a safe place to take chances and learn then they are more likely to speak up.

Secondly, another implication is the use of collaborative learning strategies Pair work, group discussions and interaction with peers ease the pressure that can be associated with speaking in front of a whole class and offer more opportunities to practice. Such activities also help students develop their inter and intrapersonal skills, both of which are necessary for successful use of language in real-life. Collaborative tasks are more suitable to multilingual EFL settings, as it encourages and develops mutual learning and joint accountability for interaction.

Additionally, the outcomes additionally uncover that a technique centered way to vital advanced minding assessment. Rather than one-off oral tests, this could include various forms outlining gradual student progression and effort in accomplishing tasks for teachers. Here, in this modus operandi self-assessment and peer-assimilation manner of practice learners can look at your finest job vital method that when serves test wont allow them to see. This is how assessment snaps into significance rather than an extra pressure on learning.

The Pedagogical Importance of Integrating Technology in Speaking Instructions This way, students will be less anxious and it would be a practical solution; giving him/her digital tools to practice speaking alone and receive feedback on his voice or comments. They offer practice opportunities in the classroom and support self-regulated learning spaces based on technology.

Consequently, this implies that the affective dimension of language learning should find its place in teacher training programmes. Training teachers to identify early signs of anxiety in children, implement appropriate strategies in the classroom and give emotional supports as required learners Teachers need knowledge on affective variables that serve as a barrier for learning so they can adjust their teaching.

And, of course again, curriculum designers need to systematically include speaking opportunities within their courses. Thus, a more property curriculum should mix convenient linguistic and affective learning dimensions have to be fashion in order that there may be extra inclusive and green atmosphere for language acquisition.

Therefore, the use of communicative, supportive and learner-centred pedagogies solve English communication anxiety. This EFL classrooms can support speaking proficiency and learners' confidence through collaborative learning, formative assessment, technology integration, and affect-sensitive teaching approach.

8.Conclusion

Anxiety regarding communication in English is still one of the most challenging affective obstacles to the improvement of speaking ability inside EFL classrooms. Although many learners already possess the underlying linguistic knowledge necessary to speak English, their way of speaking is often deteriorated by fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence and insufficient opportunities for real oral interaction. This paper has presented a theoretical overview of the concept of foreign language anxiety, its main sources and effects on speaking performance with relevant pedagogical strategies that may alleviate undesirable consequences.

English Communication anxiety is a multidimensional entity arising from the

interaction of learner-related, teacher-related and classroom-related factors. This not only limits learners' fluency and involvement but also leaves a groove between their aptitude and real output. The students who have higher level of anxiety avoid speaking task, do not answer back in a classroom interaction and create negative tendency for learning language. Thus, anxiety reduction strategies are required to enhance speaking performance and language achievement.

The authors also mention that this 'destressing communication' burden does not fall solely on advertising learners. It has everything to do with methods of instruction, the atmosphere and assessment in classrooms. Teacher-centred instruction must be replaced by evaluation-oriented methods that includes learner centered and contents clearly stated for communicative purpose, in order to have a suitable learning environment. Lastly, participatory activities to do with students patience when seeking feedback on incorrect answers that can feed into corrective-feedback signalling individual or group success responding positively in kind from peers along positive re-enforcement and formative assessment outcomes lead up for speaking results through tech achievements.

This pedagogical exhortation to English language teachers towards mindful perspectives and emotionally attuned practices are intrinsically contingent upon sensitive thoughtfulness regarding the affective needs of learners. Similarly, teacher-education programmes should promote sensitivity towards affective variables to allow teachers arrive at classroom anxiety-reducing techniques. Likewise, curriculum designers have to perceive speaking as a continuum of development rather than an isolated performance judging statement.

In conclusion, an English learner ought to speak well if the motivation is persistent for students and teachers fulfil a conducive

atmosphere of EFL classroom. A learner's speaking performance improves in a classroom that is cooperative and expressive because it motivates, gives confidence and sustains the desire for long time. This paper indicates a pathway for future research: i.e., to subject methods of anxiety reduction, the most facilitative contexts in which real-world practice might occur and even new technology such as artificial intelligence (AI) may facilitate low-anxiety environments, to rigorous empirical evaluation. It will also encourage quite better and sufficient practices such as in English teaching.

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