



## TACKLING COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION THROUGH DRAMA TECHNIQUES

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### ABSTRACT

This paper tries to share some of the findings of an empirical research conducted for the doctoral degree. The study focused primarily to study the reasons for poor oral communication skills of learners in English. It was observed that many of the target learners had English language fear. Though, there are many reasons for poor oral communication skills in English, this study confines to study English language fear of target group of learners. The study studies relationship between language fear of learners, and its relation with language learning and language performance in the classroom. The reasons for fear of language would be lacking of strategic practice to initiate communicative activities in the classroom. In order to shed the language fear, a set of drama techniques were proposed to overcome language fear. The use of drama techniques ensured coordination and cooperation among the students, and reduced language fear and enhanced oral communication skills of target learner.

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This study began investigating reasons for poor participation of learners in oral communication activities among Undergraduate College students affiliated to Osmania University in Hyderabad, Telangana. Many learners in the class have a kind of fear to speak with others or communicate in English language orally. Even though, some of them are linguistically competent, they still afraid of communicating in English with their fellow students as well as with their teachers, and others in the classroom and out of the classroom situations. The reason is that the students worry more about their use of English language.

Communication apprehension (CA) is “a part of anxiety related to oral communication. It is an individual’s level of fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons.” (McCroskey, 1982: 78). Communication apprehension arises usually in all

the major area of communication situations like group discussion, participating in classroom meetings, inter-personal conversations, classroom presentations, etc. It affects oracy of the learner. It is often identified with a variety of labels such as social anxiety, reticence, shyness, unwillingness to communicate, avoidance, social-communicative anxiety etc. (Daly & McCroskey 1984). CA is a kind fear that may prevent students from performing at their potential in oral communicative situations. In other words, the highly apprehensive individual will avoid communicative situations or react in some anxious manner if forced into it, because they foresee primarily negative consequences from such engagements. So, apprehensive students avoid all the communication situation as a means of safeguarding themselves.

Cambridge advanced learners’ dictionary defines apprehension as a worry about the future

consequences, or a fear that something unpleasant is going to happen. In the same way, communication apprehension can be defined as a worry about communication situations. It is a worry or a fear that something unpleasant is going to happen if one participates in communication. According to International Encyclopaedia (2010) communication apprehension refers to one's anxious feeling about communication.

Communication apprehension has a debilitating effect on language learning. Language fear acts as affective filter hypothesis. According to Krashen (1984), it is one obstacle that manifests itself during language acquisition and acts as an affective filter or "screen" which is influenced by emotional variables that can prevent learning. According to Krashen (1984) the affective filter can be prompted by many different variables including anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, stress, etc.

James & John (2005) also feel that language fear is the most influential affective factor in language learning. Anxiety can reduce both learning capacity and performance by requisitioning cognitive processing resources and preventing memory from operating properly. (James & John 2005:39) Sanjay Kumar & Pushp Lata in their book on communications skills (2011) by OUP mention the problem of stage fright of Indian students. "Most of us are scared of a situation in which we have to stand up in front of our audience and say something. This fear is so widespread that as many as 70 percent of the university students regard it as a very big challenge and seek to avoid the task of making a presentation as long as they can." They also "mention that most of our fears are baseless and can be overcome with some guidance and training."

(Sanjay & Latha 2011: 277)

In addition to the above evidence an article on communicative skills of the Telugu students mentions like this, "Many students accomplish their schooling in their mother tongue i.e. Telugu. Though they have attained heaps of marks in core subjects, they remain very poor at English speaking skills. The students have an unknown fear and fever over English all these years."

<http://www.eltlinkup.org/mboard/msg/18.html>

The students who have language fear or communication apprehension hesitate to participate in communicative situation in the classroom or out of the classroom. They are very cautious about their errors or mistakes and often worried about the flaws in their language. Therefore, they often try to avoid communication situation and become passive learners in the classroom. In spite of fear, learners are very much interested to learn English and they know the importance of English in their studies and in their future careers.

As long as the learners have high level of language fear the scope of learning tends to be low. This might be one of the language hindering factors among the target group of learners. So, in order to improve their English language learning and performance, certainly there is a need to reduce their language fear. Therefore, drama techniques are hypothesized as suitable strategies to overcome the language fear among the target students.

The pedagogical benefits of drama are:

- Drama is rich source of spoken language which is directly useful for speaking in real life. In my opinion there is huge difference between spoken language and written language.
- It is believed that drama provides a medium through which learners can engage in purposeful communication. And it also provides a rich context for students to make use of the language. Drama is worth using in language classroom because it can create more authentic experiences.
- Alen Maley & Alen Duff (2005) make use of drama as one of the tools to motivate students to learn as theatre of drama is fun and exciting as no one can predict what exactly will happen during different activities. Drama allows students to learn actively rather than passively so that students do not get bored.
- Evans (1984) also suggests that drama provides opportunities for students to practice different language features, encourage language use, motivate students and cater to the needs of students with

diverse abilities. It also builds up students' confidence and helps to focus attention. Students have greater involvement when drama is used in the classroom.

- Process drama allows learners to experience first-hand interaction with the world and create a context to let them "play" so they will be actively involved.
- Dougill (1987) also agrees that drama can build up stronger cohesion between students, and promote creative and critical thinking.
- Drama allows students to have greater linguistic development. Holden (1981) believes that drama activities help students to achieve the goal of communication more easily as they can communicate not only through vocal features but also gestures, facial expressions and movements.
- Evans (1984) agrees that drama contributes a lot to language learning as it enables students to use their voice, gesture and movement to achieve communication. Instead of just having grammar practices, students can use a wide range of texts for acting out and this can increase their awareness of appropriateness and register in English.
- Dornyei (2001) believes that cooperative learning can enhance learners to develop positive attitudes towards learning as well as promote their self-esteem and self-confidence as it is related to various motivational practices, such as the development of learner autonomy.
- According to Gill Thompson and Huw Evans (2005), Drama is invaluable as a means for developing language skills, encouraging social interaction and group participation and teaching learners how to listen and respond appropriately. It is a multi-sensory tool, which combines listening, speaking, thinking, exploration and use of the immediate environment and the development of physical control. (Gill Thompson and Huw Evans 2005:4)

Therefore, drama techniques are considered to use to overcome language fear, and for oral communication, for language, for context, for involvement and for confidence of the students.

The main objectives of the study are: i) Reducing language fear and ii) Developing oral communication skills using drama techniques. Based on the objectives two research questions were framed to investigate the matter. The research questions are: 1) Do target learners have oral communication apprehension? And 2) Do drama techniques help to overcome oral Communication Apprehension?

The methodology of this study used quasi-experimental research design. Where, it used both qualitative research tools and quantitative research tools. The study uses the classroom observations, students' Personal report of communication apprehension (PRCA) questionnaire and students' proficiency tests which come under the quantitative tools to measure language anxiety. Whereas, the students' and teacher' informal oral interviews and classroom observations come under the qualitative tools. This research included measuring communication apprehension of the target learners and experimentation of drama material selected based on the needs of the target learners. It also considers the causal impact of the material and techniques used to develop oral communication skills of the target learners.

The population of the study is tertiary students of Osmania University who are studying B.A., B.Sc., B.Com. etc. in the affiliated colleges in and around Hyderabad in the academic year 2012-13. The sample for the pilot study and main study colleges under Osmania University were used to collect data. From the data it was evident that many of the target learners were having debilitating language fear. In order to reduce the language fear and enhance communication skills drama techniques were used. Brown (2007) defines technique as, "any of a wide variety of exercises, activities, or tasks used in the language classroom for realizing lesson objectives." (Brown 2007: 17) Whereas, Holden (1982) defines drama techniques as "imaginary situations in that the students are allowed to be themselves or another person." In the

conceptual framework of drama the following techniques are used: Mimes, Role Plays, Guided Improvisation, Reading Scripts a Loud, Tableau, Simulation, Drama Games, Hot Seating, Play Production, etc.

The sample for the main study consisted 76 students from both MBGC (36) and BZC (40) thirty-six students from each class of third semester students of under graduation course from Nizam College from the academic year 2012. Before the intervention classes and after the intervention classes a pre-test and a post-test were conducted to see whether there was any significant difference between the pre-test and post-test. The research tools used for this purpose were PRCA Scale and Proficiency tests.

As part of direct observation and assessment of the learners' participation in oral communication, the researcher visited altogether thirteen degree colleges and collected data from 16 classrooms from the target population.

Findings: Data on participation of learners

Based on the participation of the learners in each of the sixteen classes was divided into three categories: Active participants, partial participants and non-participants.

Overall finding: Data from sixteen classes from ten colleges shows that the existence of non-participants in oral communicative activities in the class which represent approximately 37.41% of the population of the study.

Teachers' Oral Interviews on students' participation and language fear findings:

According to teachers, the active participation of the learners in the classroom was very less. Only a few students 6 (approximately 20 percent) participated actively; another 14 students i.e. 46 percent of students participated moderately but 10 students

i.e. 34 percent of students were very passive in the classroom. These students listened actively to the teachers but they did not participate actively in any of language activities.

Non-participant Students' interviews findings: Data was collected from 64 students who were not participating in the classroom oral communicative activities showed that they had language fear. Participatory observations, teachers' interviews and students' interviews data reveal that the existence of language fear among the target group of students, which in turn inhibits the participation of the learners in classroom activities.

Measuring language fear using PRCA inventory: Results of 270 students' PRCA

Findings: From the data it is evident that most of the students of representative sample from undergraduate students having debilitating language fear. The percent of such student in the class was very high. Only a few students were free from communication apprehension i.e. 19.2 percent. Rest of the students exhibited some level of communication apprehension. Many of the subjects exhibited highest level of communication apprehension in public speaking and the lowest in inter personal conversation

Research Question two:

In order to answer the second research question, "Do the Drama techniques help to overcome oral Communication Apprehension?" This study conducted pre-test and post-test to both experimental and control groups before and after the intervention classes. The intervention classes were offered to the learners using drama techniques for a semester. The no of classes successfully completed were 32. Results of Pre-test and post test scores of Experimental group and Control group.

Table Showing results of pre-test and post test scores

	Experimental Group(36 students)				Control Group(40 students)			
	Mean	St.dev	High	Low	Mean	St.dev.	High	Low
Pretest	74.92	16.85	108	41	74.57	14.80	102	44
Posttest	48.30	9.68	63	26	71.40	13.63	98	43
	t=16.69				t=7.47			

From the above table, the results of pre-test of the control group before intervention classes, mean (40)

m =74.57 and after the intervention the mean, m (40) =71.40; the difference of means in the pre-test

and posttest of control group is 3.17. It means 2.6 percent of reduction of communication apprehension among control group. The standard deviation in pre-test of control group is 14.80 whereas, after posttest standard deviation is 13.63. Among the control group, the highest level of communication apprehension in the pre-test was 102 in pretest and in the posttest, highest communication apprehension was 98. The lowest communication apprehension among the control group was 44 and in posttest it was 43. Finally, the results of the t-test of the control group showed that  $t(40) = 7.47$ .

Whereas, Experimental group scores before and after the intervention classes showed the following results: The pretest mean of the experimental group,  $m(36) = 74.92$  and posttest mean of experimental group is 48.30. The mean difference between the pre-test and posttest of experimental group is 25.24. It means 21.03 percent of reduction of communication apprehension among the experimental group of students. The actual gain of intervention classes can be had from the differences of gain between experimental and Control group i.e.  $21.03 - 2.6 = 18.43$ . Further analysis of standard deviation, highest and lowest scores of the students also reveal the impact of intervention classes. Standard deviation of experimental group in pre-test was 16.85 and in posttest it was 9.68. The highest communication apprehension in pretest was 108 and the posttest was 63. The lowest communication apprehension in the experimental group pretest was 41 and the post was 26. The gradual reduction of scores reveal that there is a significant impact of intervention classes. The same is found even in T-test i.e.  $t(36) = 16.69$  which is very significant.

The overall achievement:

The achievement gained: in GD is 4.99 i.e. 16.63 percent; MT is 6.22 i.e. 20.73 percent; IC is 6.14 i.e. 20.46 percent and PS is 6.45 i.e. 21.5 percent. The total gain is 19.83.

### Conclusion

As the study began probing reason for poor oral communication skills, it found that there were a considerable number of non-participants in oral communication activities. The same was revealed from the direct observation of the classrooms. The

data from sixteen classes from ten colleges showed the existence of non-participants in oral communicative activities in the class. These non-participants were approximately 37.41% of the population of the study. In fact the active participants were 20.55%. the rest of them were either non-participants or partial participants. The same kind results were found in the teachers interviews on participation of the students in the oral communication activities. According to teachers the active participation of the learners in the classroom was very less i.e. 20% of student actively participated; another 46% of students moderately participated but 34% percent of students were very passive in the classroom.

Data from participatory observations, teachers' interviews and students' interviews revealed the existence of language fear among the target group of students, which in turn inhibited the participation of the learners in classroom activities especially group discussion, meeting, conversations and giving speeches. As a result of it, considerable number of non-participants existed in English classrooms. The further research was focused on measuring the exact level of communication apprehension using PRCA inventory. Data from the 270 students on communication apprehension showed the following results: 52 students exhibited low CA i.e. 19.25 percent. These students were free from debilitating anxiety. But the rest of the students exhibited moderate CA and high CA. The number of students who exhibited high CA were 65 i.e. 24.07 percent. The number of students who exhibited above low CA and below high CA were 153 students i.e. 56.66 percent

In conclusion, from this study it was evident that most of the target learners had language fear which resulted in weakening their language learning and communication skills. In this study around 40 percent of the target learners exhibited debilitating language fear. Due to language fear many of these learners hesitated to participate in communication situations.

Direct participatory observation of the students reveal that many of the target learners were not participating in oral communication

activities. Most of the time they were limited with reading and writing skill.

Though many of learners knew grammar and linguistic aspects, and as there is no through practice in communication situations, many students fail to communicate in day to day communication activities.

From students' interviews and teachers' interviews, it was found that most of the learners in the class were not participating in the class actively because they had lot of language fear.

Drama techniques effectively enhanced 20 percent of their learning in oral communication especially, in GD, Meeting, Conversations, classroom meetings and public speaking.

Drama techniques enhanced students' confidence level, risk taking level, and taught how to interact in social situations.

Through drama and drama techniques learners participated actively and showed a remarkable improvement.

It was also found that drama techniques helped the learner to develop oral communication skills along with both verbal and non-verbal skills in context with confidence.

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