

Anxiety in Second language students

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Analysis: Anxiety in Learning a Second Language

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Introduction

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The teaching and learning of foreign languages involve the application of four fundamental elements including reading, writing, listening and speaking. Although these four skills are perceived as necessary in the learning process, speaking skills tend to be the most challenging part of the process. In social situations, students learning second languages are faced with anxiety which is caused by several factors including the fear of negative evaluation from their audience. As a result, anxiety has become the issue of concern for most students and teachers in foreign language teaching institutions. Therefore, this article is set to analyze and provide effective solutions to the anxiety faced by students learning foreign languages (Karatas et al., 2016).

Firstly, anxiety in learning a foreign language can be referred to as an unpleasant emotional condition that is often portrayed by apprehension and the feeling of tension. Anxiety is currently the most challenging factor in learning institutions that teach foreign languages. The three components contributing to anxiety in learning second languages include communication apprehension which comes as a result of shyness to speak in front of an audience, the ³ fear of negative evaluation by others as well as the fear of failure. The combination of the three components results in high levels of anxiety that deter students from practicing the skills they learn in classrooms.

Further, teachers become inspired by the good performance of their students since they perceive it as an achievement in their career. Therefore, it is the goal of every foreign language teacher to produce students who can fluently communicate in the foreign language they teach them. However, even though teachers play their role in teaching their students, anxiety becomes a major challenge for the process. Even after several years of studying foreign languages, many

students are unable to grasp the communication skills involved in these languages. This fact, therefore, is an indication that the time spends in the classroom ³ plays a limited role in determining the success of the second language students (Çağatay, 2015).

Foreign language classrooms are characterized by oral discussions by the students to emphasize the theoretical skills learned in the textbooks. In this regard, students are expected to hold group discussions which are carried out using the foreign languages they are studying. However, these practices become the primary causes of anxiety among many students since they perceive them as demanding tasks. Anxiety in social situations affects students in all institutions including native speakers. Therefore, the idea of speaking in a language that the students are not familiar with becomes a major problem in these institutions.

The research carried out by the Procedia Social, and Behavioural Sciences shows that students become anxious due to the fear of making pronunciation mistakes. However, speaking in front of peers appears to be the primary catalyst of anxiety in many institutions. It is a normal situation for students to evaluate others based on their performance during presentations in classrooms. This aspect, however, affects the target students and impacts their future success in learning the second language. Among the primary elements influencing the success of foreign language learners is the issue of gender. Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences found out that gender played a vital role in learning foreign languages. Female students according to the research are the most affected in practicing foreign languages in a classroom setting. Self-comparison with other students tends to be the central factor affecting the performance of non-native speakers during the practice of speaking skills in classrooms. It is in the interest of every student to view themselves as successful considering the hard work they put on during their

studies. Therefore, when students make a self-assessment and find out that they are not doing well, this affects the way they proceed with their studies in the future days (Çağatay, 2015).

Many students who opt to study foreign languages as their second language are motivated by the availability of jobs in the native countries. Therefore, this does not necessarily mean that they enjoy conversing in the foreign language they have targeted. Most students during the research admitted that they disliked the English language; an aspect that seems to impact their learning process negatively. Anxiety can be classified into three categories including situational anxiety, trait anxiety as well as state anxiety. Many students are mostly affected by the situational anxiety which usually occurs when addressing an audience primarily in a classroom setting. However, this type of anxiety is somewhat temporary since specific situations trigger it. Trait anxiety aligns with the personality of the student. This type of anxiety becomes permanent and is a major challenge for foreign language learners. Further, state anxiety among student is characterized by a temporary response to certain stimuli. Similar to situational anxiety, this type of anxiety is temporary and can improve with time if the student becomes familiar with the situation.

The main characteristics portrayed by anxious foreign learners include ² sweating, palpitations, trembling, apprehension, worry, fear, threat, difficult concentration, forgetfulness, freezing, going blank and avoidance behavior which hinders them from expressing their ideas in social situations. However, these factors indicate a lack of confidence which occurs as a result of bad grammar making students develop the fear of addressing an audience. There is a close relationship between anxiety and lack of confidence. For instance, many students fail to communicate fluently despite being familiar with the theoretical skills taught in classrooms. The

application of class work in social settings is the main problem that teachers and learners of foreign languages face (Çağatay, 2015).

Further anxiety stimulates the division of attention causing failure in communication of the foreign languages. In broader terms, many students ² divide their attention between self-related cognition and task-related cognition making their overall performance inefficient. With this knowledge, it is therefore evident that anxiety leads to divided attention which drives away their concentration from the task at hand. The fear of being judged by the people around is ⁶ one of the most common factors in many foreign language institutions. Consequently, this situation is the main obstacle for students who interact with native speakers. Native speakers can communicate fluently in their language making foreign learners feel intimidated by the situation.

Every student taking second language courses does so to promote self-development. Therefore, proper measures to prevent anxiety among the students are an issue that needs to be addressed with urgency. The teaching procedures followed during the classroom work ought to be adjusted to enable international students to benefit from second language learning. Solving this problem entails understanding the root causes of the problem. Students who study second languages have been brought up in an environment where they have not been familiar with the foreign language. Therefore, the lack of enough practice is one of the main elements that cause anxiety when it comes to social interactions (Çağatay, 2015).

Teachers can approach this problem with ease by granting students more time to practice their communication skills. From the research conducted in the Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences students stated that lack of practice was the major challenge they experienced in their academics. As a result, this makes them lack experience in conversing in the foreign languages making them develop anxiety when faced with the challenge of addressing a crowd. Also, the

idea of engaging students in forced classroom conversations can produce negative results since this makes them uncomfortable. Therefore, the practice of foreign language calls for more practice in social interactions outside classrooms. Many students only practice their skills in classrooms and proceed with their native language after classes. This impacts the way the textbook content sticks since practicing is the main objective of learning. Without practice, the material obtained in classrooms tends to fade away because the knowledge is no longer applied in real life. This rectification, therefore, lies on the side of the students since teachers cannot get involved in interactions of the students outside the classroom. However, teachers have a role to play since they are required to encourage students to practice a foreign language in their homes (Suleimenova, 2013).

The most effective way of ensuring that foreign language learners grasp the teachings provided in classrooms is balancing their interactions ⁴ with non-native speakers as well as native speakers. The non-native speakers will make the social interactions comfortable hence eliminating anxiety. However, sometimes anxiety can challenge a person to do better in the next communication if addressed adequately. Therefore, conversing with native speakers gives an overall point of view of the practical language used by the natives. This can assist students in developing a mastery of the foreign language that they are studying. Because non-native speakers also make pronunciation mistakes as well, students will get the impression that the challenges they are experiencing usually are encouraging them to work on their flaws.

Unguided interactions may, however, result in uncorrected mistakes. Therefore, the presence of a teacher in social interactions can be beneficial in shaping the skills of the students. This aspect makes classroom discussions mandatory for teachers who aspire to produce successful students in their institutions. Also, the supervision of an instructor enables them to

spot the challenges that affect the performance of specific students in the classroom. With this knowledge, teachers can come up with the appropriate measures to help the student improve on their skills hence guarantee better outcomes in the future. In the research, students admitted that they develop the fear of failing exams making them dislike the subject or rather the language that they are studying.

The idea of including exams in the academic curriculum is to evaluate the performance of students and determine whether they have mastered the theoretical skills learned in classrooms. However, exams should be more than just obtaining high grades since passing does not guarantee a student's success in social situations. Designing methods alternative techniques for establishing whether students have mastered the subject can be a great step in addressing the issue of failure that is often caused by anxiety. Theoretical tests only test the knowledge obtained in textbooks and do not involve speaking making the students perform poorly when it comes to social interactions (Suleimenova, 2013).

Practicing the foreign language makes it familiar among the students hence easing the anxiety in a social situation. However, as far as practice is concerned, patience is the most crucial aspect to put into consideration during this task. The learning process is gradual, and therefore teachers should not give up their pursuit ⁵ to help the students master the second language. It is a known fact that practice makes perfect. Also, language is something that people adopt by practicing it for many years. For instance, Chinese who were brought up in Western countries like the United States can speak fluent English better than Americans who grew in Asian nations. Therefore, these facts prove that fact that language can be adopted and that practicing is the best option that teachers need to emulate in their teaching practice.

Conclusion

In summary, anxiety is more of a psychological problem since many students who fail to perform well in their academics do so due to the constraints of their negative thoughts. Therefore, teachers can address this issue by attacking their negative thoughts and encouraging them to overcome these challenges by thinking positively. Because anxiety is closely connected with oral practice, eliminating anxiety can boost the outcomes of international students. Also, the lack of preparation for classroom presentations is another major problem faced by second language learners. What most teachers do not understand is that randomly subjecting students in public speaking without giving them enough time to incorporate their speech can trigger anxiety hence failing. This lowers their self-esteem making them resent the idea of practicing further. Many students who give up on their foreign language education do so due to lack of motivation (Koçak, 2010).

Teaching international students should be carried out on a personal basis. With this regard, teachers ought to assist students who show reluctance in mastering the skills in classrooms since every student learns at a different pace. Filling student's minds with textbook theory produce minimal results as compared to outside classroom practice of the foreign language. Therefore, to ensure that this problem is adequately addressed, both students and teachers have a major role to play.

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