



Sudan University of Science and Technology

College of Languages

Experiencing Speech Anxiety at Tertiary Level

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Abstract

It is generally observed that Students at tertiary level need to use English for their academic purposes. Most of the books are in English and some of the subjects are taught in English. Moreover, the use of English language as the medium of instruction in class requires students to be proficient in English. Despite having learned English for 7 years in schools, students still have difficulty to use the language effectively. Most of the students have problems in speaking foreign languages especially in the English class. It can be more stressful when they are expected to speak in English before the fluency is achieved.

Key words: tertiary academic purposes medium of instruction stressful

Background

It goes without saying that English Language is the language of international communication; it is widely used in Sudan as a foreign language. It is anticipated that the trend of globalization has generally affected language learning tremendously and a

consequently Sudan will face more stiff competition from other foreign countries. Thus, Sudanese students should be well equipped with a social education foundation and in training to remain competitive, including the ability to communicate in English. As the second most important language in Sudan, English is extensively used in educational system from the primary up to tertiary level. It is also widely used in various professions such as the medical, engineering, legal and business. Therefore, it is very critical for Sudanese students to be proficient in English, so that they can use the language efficiently for academic purposes and later in professional settings.

Students who are proficient in English shall have better chances to be employed by multinational companies after they graduate. It is because the employers do not simply look at their excellent academic results, but also their proficiency in English language. Companies nowadays do not only select the best graduates who can deliver technical skills but also those that possess soft skills. These soft skills include the ability to communicate in English efficiently. In fact, even job interviews are now conducted in English. Thus, confidence in speaking is very important for graduates because it can prove that they are the suitable candidates applying for the job.

Anxious students are often concerned about the impressions that others form of them. When such students are confronted in a classroom with a learning situation that makes them uncomfortable, they may choose to withdraw from the activity. Some learners believe they cannot perform in English and consequently form negative expectations, which lead to decreased effort and the avoidance of opportunities to enhance their communication skills. This study replicates Horwitz and Cope's (1991, p. 70) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). This study suggests that learners' level

of motivation and encouraging students to assess their performance in a positive light can raise effort when teachers use communicative strategies and adopt a language-facilitating role.

Statement of the Problem

The question of speaking anxiety is partly cultural and partly academic or pedagogical. Sudanese students are generally shy and a bit hesitant to make attempts that call for standing up and speaking before even their peers. A student who believes that one must never say anything in English until it can be said correctly will probably avoid speaking most of the time. Indeed, some learners prefer to keep quiet during English lessons because they are reluctant to speak in English. Anxious learners tend to think about negative evaluations from other people and the situation becomes worse if they can't control their anxiety. In order to overcome this problem, teachers should make Learners' context less stressful for the students and use suitable teachings methods that can help learners to minimize their speaking anxiety in English classroom.

The Concept of Anxiety

Everyone feels anxious at some time or another. Fear and worries are common in children, teenagers and even for adults.

This is a normal part of development. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), MacIntyre and Gardner (1991), Tang (2005) anxiety is the subjective sense of suspense, apprehension, nervousness, and worry related to appeal of the autonomic nervous system.

Mesri (2012: 148) stated that there are three types of perspectives from which research studies on anxiety are conducted. They are trait anxiety, state anxiety, and situation specific anxiety. According to Scovel (1978), trait anxiety is an aspect of personality trait that is more

permanent disposition to be anxious. It could be concluded that trait anxiety is a part of one's character and such students have a general predisposition

to become anxious in various situations. Spielberger (1983) stated that state anxiety is thoughtfulness experienced at a particular moment or situation. It means that state anxiety is a nervous feeling at any situation that happens only particular moment.

Finally, Ellis (1994) stated that situational anxiety is related to apprehension felt at specific situation and event. Unlike trait and state perspective, situation-specific perspective requires the respondents to ascribe their anxiety to particular sources.

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), there are three components of foreign language anxiety namely communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation.

Communication apprehension refers to worry about oral communication (Horwitz et al., 1986). The basic cause of communication apprehension is some personality traits such as shyness, quietness or reticence. Test anxiety is an apprehension towards academic evaluation. Horwitz et al., (1986) stated that test anxiety refers to learners' negative expectations about their performance in an upcoming test. Fear of negative evaluation is observed when foreign language learners feel incapable of making the proper social impression and it is apprehension towards evaluations by others and avoidance of evaluative situations.

Horwitz et al., (1991) stated fear of negative evaluation refers to individuals' worries about what others think about them and believe that those thoughts are usually negative. Speaking Anxiety in a Psychological Context Samuelsson (2011) cites the cognitive-behaviorist approach which views speaking anxiety as the most common form of social anxieties. He defines speaking anxiety as difficulty to speak in group. These difficulties are very in the cases of prepared speeches, oral presentations, answering questions or simple presentation.

Samuelsson (2011) also claims that speaking anxiety is a specific social phobia that 15-20 % of human population suffers, and it could be a hindrance in studies and life in general. This opinion informs the reader that speaking anxiety is becoming human suffers and as a hindrance for reaping the students' success in speaking test.

2.2 Anxiety Definitions and Instruments

Anxiety is one of the most well documented psychological phenomena. The definition of anxiety ranges from an amalgam of overt behavioral characteristics that can be studied scientifically to introspective feelings that are epistemologically inaccessible. Broadly speaking, anxiety is the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the automatic nervous system (Spielberger, 1983). Traditionally, the nature of anxiety has been differentiated into trait anxiety, situational anxiety, and state anxiety. Though no clear delineation between these three categories can be claimed, the differences can roughly be identified on a continuum from stability to transience, with trait anxiety related to a generally stable predisposition to be nervous in a wide range of situations on one end, and a moment-to-moment experience of transient emotional state on the other. Situational anxiety falls in the middle of the continuum, representing the probability of becoming anxious in a particular type of situation.

To recognize language anxiety in a broader context of research on anxiety, MacIntyre (1998) observed that language anxiety is a form of situation-specific anxiety, and research on language anxiety should employ measures of anxiety experienced in particular second\foreign language contexts conceived of language anxiety as "the worry and negative emotional reaction aroused when learning or using a second language". Similarly,

Horwitz and Cope (1991, p. 125) conceptualized foreign language anxiety as a "distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process".

The recent history of studies on anxiety in the language learning area is remarkably influenced by two seminal papers. First, Scovel (1978, pp.28-129-142) identified that early perspectives of anxiety generated very inconsistent results concerning the relationship between anxiety and second language achievement. Scovel attributed the conflicting and mixed results to different anxiety measures and different conceptualizations of anxiety. He claimed that ambiguous experimental results can be resolved if the distinction between facilitating and debilitating anxiety is drawn. Facilitating anxiety occurs when the difficulty level of the task triggers the proper amount of anxiety. However, although a certain level of anxiety may be beneficial, too much anxiety can lead to a debilitating effect, which may lead to avoidance of work or inefficient work performance.

Horwitz and Cope's (1986, p. 70) paper is also influential. The authors clearly articulated the concept of foreign language anxiety. Placing language anxiety in the framework of related concepts of anxiety, the authors recognized that language anxiety is a situation-specific anxiety construct, largely independent of the other types of anxiety. One major contribution of their paper is, it offers a Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. This self-report instrument, eliciting responses of anxiety specific to foreign language classroom settings, triggered an avalanche of similar studies. The results of these studies demonstrated that language

anxiety exerts a debilitating role in the second/foreign language classroom in different contexts.

The complexity of anxiety is also reflected in the means of its measurement. There are three major ways of measuring anxiety in research, including behavioral observation or rating; physiological assessment such as heart rates or blood pressure tests; and participants' self-reports, in which internal feelings and reactions are measured (Daly, J. A. 1991; pp. 3-13). Participants' self-reports are utilized most often in examining the anxiety phenomenon in educational studies. Summarizing the above discussions, it is recognized that language anxiety, a type of situational specific psychological phenomenon bearing its own characteristics from language learning contexts, is a relatively distinctive form of anxiety. Language anxiety is also intricately intertwined with other individual differences such as personality traits, emotion, and motivation.

2.3 Factors contributing to FL anxiety

The components of foreign language anxiety have been identified (Horwitz, et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989) to narrow down this concept into researchable issues: (1) communication apprehension or anxiety. (2) Fear of negative evaluation. (3) Test anxiety. The consolidation of these factors thus leads to the creation of anxiety in language learners.

Communication apprehension generally refers to a type of anxiety experienced in interpersonal communicative settings (McCroskey, 1987) which is obviously relevant to second/foreign language learning contexts. More particularly, in the language classroom where the

learners have little control of the communicative situation, and their performance is constantly monitored by both their teacher and peers (Horwitz, et al., 1986), communication apprehension seems to be augmented in relation to the learners' negative self-perceptions caused by the inability to understand others and make themselves understood (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989). The particular manifestation of communication apprehension in the classroom includes oral communication anxiety, such as difficulty in speaking in matched-gender/mixed-gender dyads and groups as well as the anxiety related to stage fright. In fact, communication apprehension is generally a type of shyness characterized by fear of anxiety about communicating with people in any given situations.

Concerning the fear of negative evaluation, as Young (1991) argues, "students are more concerned about how (i.e., when, what, where, or how often) their mistakes are corrected rather than whether error correction should be administered in class" (p. 429). In this sense, it seems that teachers' beliefs about language teaching may act as some obstacles for L2 learners and thus create language anxiety in them because the assumptions of the teachers as to their role in the language classroom may not always correspond to the individual needs or expectations that L2 learners would consider for their teachers.

Test anxiety refers to a type of performance anxiety stemming from a fear of failure. Test anxiety is likewise believed to be one of the most important aspects of negative motivation. It can be defined as "unpleasant feeling or emotional state that has physiological and behavioral concomitants and that is experienced in formal testing or other evaluative situations" (Dusek

1980, p. 88). Test-anxious students often put unrealistic demands on themselves and feel that anything less than a perfect test performance is a failure. Students who are test-anxious in a foreign language class probably experience considerable difficulty since tests and quizzes are frequent and even the brightest and most prepared students often make errors (Horwitz, et al., 1986).

Anxiety in Relation to Other Affective Factors

Research has shown that affective variables do not operate independently of one another; instead, the causal relationships among them are complicated and warrant further investigation (Gardner, Tremblay and Masgoret, 1997; pp.81-344-362). It is always intriguing, yet difficult, to determine how these affective variables are interrelated and how they impact on one another. For example, personality traits, such as introversion and extraversion, are associated with anxiety arousal (Macintyre and Charos, 1996). The underlying assumption is that introverts are more likely to be anxious than extraverts (Brown, Robson, and Rosenkjar, 2001). Introverts usually prefer individual work more than group work, so they may easily become anxious if they are put in more communication-oriented classroom settings. Extraverts, on the contrary, may feel uncomfortable if they are asked to work on their own all the time.

Gregersen and Horwitz (2002; pp. 562-570) found that some students' language anxiety may stem from their perfectionist tendencies. They concluded that anxious students share many similar manifestations with perfectionists and these similarities have the potential for making language learning unpleasant. Evidences of this conclusion include the fact that anxious learners were not easily satisfied with their accomplishments and had a higher level of concern over the errors they made than non-anxious learners who tended to celebrate small victories accomplished.

Moreover, learners' stylistic preferences may possibly be in conflict with those of their teacher's, therefore, result in anxious feelings among certain students, Oxford (1999; pp. 260-278) elaborated from her case studies on how classroom style conflicts can exacerbate anxiety in the language classroom. She contended that style conflicts can take different forms: examples can include personality conflicts (e.g., introvert vs. extravert), and teaching and learning style conflicts (e.g.; global and intuitive-random learning style vs. analytic and concrete-sequential teaching style).

The concept of language anxiety is also closely associated with attitudes and motivation. For example, the instrument used in Gardner's socio-educational model (the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery) includes a classroom anxiety scale that measures students' embarrassment or anxiety level within the paradigm of attitudes and motivation. Choi (1988) found a significant relationship between foreign language anxiety and emotional intelligence skills

Methodology

This part will provide a full description of the study adopted methodology. It describes the population of the study, the samples and the tools used for the data collection as well as the procedures that followed and how validity and reliability were applied for the study.

The Study Population and Sample

The population of this study is EFL teachers and learners from three Universities (Sudan University of Science and Technology, Al-Neelain University and Khartoum University). In the academic year 2019/2020. The sample of the study consists of 150 learners. It also includes 50 English language teachers who are teaching at Sudan University of Science and Technology (College of Languages), Al-Neelain University (Faculty of Arts) and Khartoum University (Faculty of Arts).

Tools of the study

Research methodologies vary according to the purpose and the nature of the problems under the study; generally, they could be quantitative research or

qualitative ones. Also, method of educational research are divided into historical method, the descriptive method and excremental method. The researcher adopts the descriptive methodology which is carried out by means of case study where a questionnaire, interviews and audio recording messages constitute the method of the data collection.

Questionnaire Analysis

Table (1)

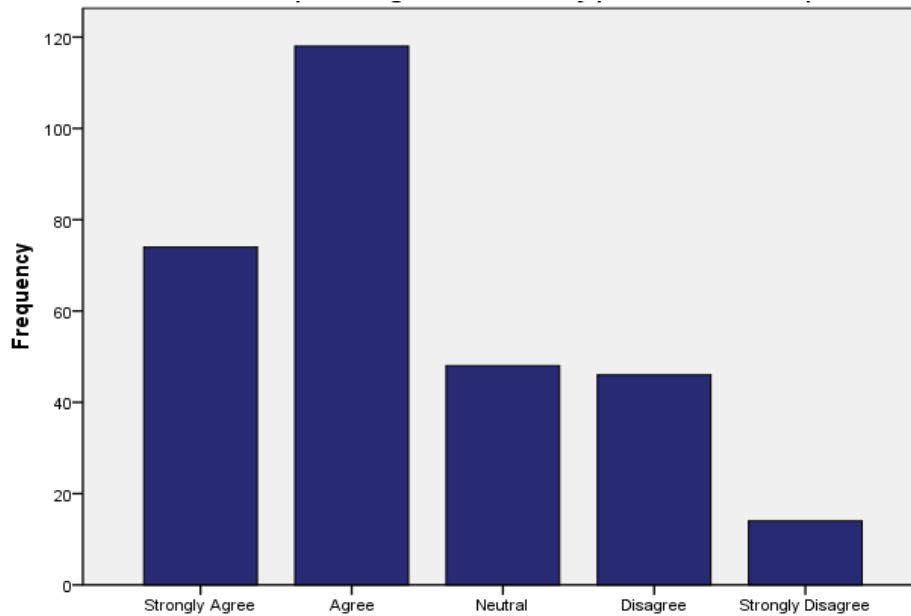
Level	Frequency	Percent
First	264	88.0
Second	13	4.3
Third	8	2.7
missing	15	5.0
Total	300	100.0

The table (1) the results show that 88% of the respondents are in the first level, 4.3% of them are in the second level, 2.7% are in the third level, while 5% are missing data.

Table (2) feel anxious when I speak English because my pronunciation is poor.

Item	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	74	24.7
Agree	118	39.3
Neutral	48	16.0
Disagree	46	15.3
Strongly Disagree	14	4.7
Total	300	100.0

Figure (1.1) feel anxious when I speak English because my pronunciation is poor.



The above table and diagram show that 39.3% of the total participation are agree to “I feel anxious when I speak English because my pronunciation is poor”, and 24.7% are strongly agree to this statement. 16% are neutral. While 15.3% are disagree, 4.7% are strongly disagree. This means 64% are agree to this statement.

Summary and Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to gain insight into teachers and students’ beliefs about speaking anxiety. It also aimed of investigating how to minimize speaking anxiety in the classroom. The study finally had the purpose of improving speaking skills in the classroom.

The hypotheses underpinning this research are ELT teachers and students at tertiary level. It was hypothesized that "making errors, ignoring motivation and encouragement effect on student's speaking, and the lack of oral practice led to speaking anxiety. In chapter two, literature review provided support for these hypotheses. The current discussion focuses on the significant patterns which have emerged in teachers' and student' beliefs about speaking anxiety.

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