



FACULTY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

MASTER THESIS:

“The factors that cause anxiety in learning English speaking skills among high school students” (Case study: High School “Kadri Kusari” in Gjakova)”

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Abstract

It has been generally recognized that many high school students faces difficulties in learning and speaking English language. Anxiety is one of them. The tendency of the this research is to investigate the factors that cause anxiety in learning English speaking skills among students of the high school “Kadri Kusari” in Gjakove, and to develop strategies for reducing the effect of language anxiety. The researcher carried out the study by conducting Google form questionnaires’ with 92 students and interviews with four English teachers from the respective school. Also open discussions on the topic of the research are carried out by the five teachers with their students during English classes.

The findings from questionnaires’ and interviews showed that the students felt anxious of making mistakes and about teachers correcting their mistakes in the classes; they felt nervousness about failing the exams; some of the identified factors of anxiety were associated with learner’s own sense of ‘self ’ and language classroom environment, self-perceptions, strict and formal classroom environment, presentation in the classroom, fear of making mistakes and apprehension about others’ evaluation, as well as their primary school education in particular English language teaching and learning.

The study derived several recommendations and the most important is that a low- anxiety and supportive learning environment should be created inside the classrooms.

Keywords: English Language, Anxiety, Identified factors

5.1. Conclusions

In the last years it is noticed an increase of interest in English language study to the phenomenon of anxiety. The problems of students' language anxiety remain one of the greatest obstacles teachers have to overcome in teaching and learning English language. As shown by the results of this research, English language speaking anxiety does exist among the high school students who participated in this research. And it revealed that students have negative experiences with speaking activities during English language classes. All the measurement instruments used to investigate the problem of speaking anxiety were significantly helpful.

It is certain that English speaking competence is a compound skill that needs continuous development, and this development can occur when students reflect on the process of speaking and practice verbally without the threat of evaluation. It can be stated that the results of the research showed a real state of anxiety during English speaking of students in the respective school, how teachers treat their students, and how much do they do to make students feel comfortable while they learn and speak English as well as how much they make efforts to be an example of spontaneously speaking English. By focusing on the process of speaking the English language, students/participants of the survey attained a useful device to raise their English speaking ability. The results of the questionnaires show that speaking is foundational in learning the English language.

Language anxiety may not need particular treatment but it does demand the careful attitude of the language teachers in order to understand and to effectively identify this phenomenon in the student's English language speaking skills. It is also important to apply the new interactive methodology of student-centered learning, where they conduct combined activities involving teachers and students rather than the traditional method of teacher-centered learning, where they constantly repeat the learning tasks like machines.

The research conducted through student's questionnaires and teacher's interviews was an effort to realize the factual nature of the phenomenon from different perspectives.

All research participants/students agreed that they feel anxious and nervous while speaking English in front of others. Every factor or situation that increases the chances of exposing the student's deficiencies and language imperfections in front of others is expected to cause language anxiety for students while speaking English. This situation might be group work or class

presentations that would challenge a student's communicative abilities.

The research findings presented that the feelings of anxiety become more threatening when the language teacher's method of correcting mistakes of the students is inflexible and humiliating for the students.

The research concludes that the important causes of anxiety in learning English speaking skills among the students of the high school "Kadri Kusari" are: the firm, uncomfortable and embarrassing attitude of the teachers towards students, mostly when they make mistakes; classroom environment where the students view the classroom as a place where their mistakes are noticed and their shortcomings are pointed out; speaking the English language in front of the whole class or in public, even in their native language; lack of confidence and therefore motivation in their ability to learn English; fear of making mistakes and fear of losing face for not being perfect and, conditioning in childhood to believe that English is an extremely difficult language to learn. All these negative factors can influence their effort to learn English and may consequently impede their learning, and therefore cause them to do poorly on their speaking English.

Nevertheless, for the effective improvement of language anxiety, the comparison of the results obtained in this research with those of the past research suggests that there does not seem to be any specific "treatment" for language speaking anxiety. The methods and strategies suggested in this research, as well as recommended by other researchers, could "certainly work as prescription for anxiety but it might as easily be advice on 'what good teachers' should routinely do" (Oxford, 1999: cited in Jones, 2004: 37). All such advice is excellent but because it is applicable to students who do not show signs of anxiety the advice cannot be other than general (2004: 37).

This research can provide perceptions into how the teachers can develop appropriate interventions to decrease language anxiety among English language learners. Furthermore, by understanding the causes and effects of language anxiety and their relationship to language achievement, strategies and interventions for the enhancement of the self-confidence of the students and the lowering of their language anxiety can prove beneficial to all participants, students and teachers. It is extremely important that English teachers not only recognize that anxiety can be a major cause of students not being successful in speaking English, but also assist them to overcome the consequences of anxiety as well.

The results of this research should be of guidance to both teachers and students of English

languages, to help promote attainment of the English language, and more explicitly, to address one of the issues that is prevalent with English language learners, that is anxiety and particularly, speaking anxiety in English language learning.

Recommendations suggested by this study are that teachers strive to create a low stress, friendly and supportive learning environment; foster a proactive role on the part of the students themselves to create an atmosphere of group cohesion and support; be sensitive to students' fears and insecurities and help them to confront those fears; use gentle or non-threatening methods of error correction and offer words of encouragement; make cautious use of purposeful group work or collaborative activities; use relevant and interesting topics for class discussions and exercises; speak more slowly or consider using English to clarify key points or give specific directions; attend to the learning styles or preferences of the students; and hear and appreciate the opinions of students for valuable perceptions, ideas and recommendations.

In conclusion, teachers are the ones who should try to make reforms and improvement based on suggested effective methods and strategies in reducing anxiety, allowing students to build more self-confidence and to be more motivated on learning English language speaking skills.

5.2. Recommendations

Seeing that language anxiety can exercise disadvantageous influence on English speaking skills, it is important that English teachers not only recognize the anxiety as a major cause of students' lack of success in communication but also support them to overcome their feelings of nervousness and discomfort. Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations can be made.

- The English language teachers should recognize the existence of the feeling of anxiety in learning and particularly speaking the English language and then should take initiatives for its effective reduction. They should identify individuals with signs of stress and anxiety and should apply appropriate strategies to help them respond to these feelings.
- The teachers must behave in a friendly manner, being helpful and cooperative, making

students feel comfortable when speaking in the class, ensuring students' active participation in the classroom environment. This can also reduce, although not eliminate the anxiety between students and teachers to a considerable extent.

- The English language teachers should study the feelings that cause the fear and anxiety among the students. It is essential to think positively, to realize that everyone can make mistakes learning a language and that making errors is a crucial part of the English language learning process. Convey to the students that perfection is an impossible goal and that it is not a necessity for success.
- Discussion in the class about the feelings of anxiety should be initiated by the teachers and the teachers should also try to reduce the sense of competition among the students. They should affirm participation in class and clearly express that speaking in class will positively influence their mark, even if they make mistakes.
- The teachers should provide students with a maximum of speaking time in a non-threatening environment. This is done by adding small-group activities, role plays, and pair-work into their lessons.
- The teachers should encourage students to have the confidence to make mistakes in order to obtain communication skills and their response towards a student's errors should be tactful and pedagogical.
- The teachers should advise students that they should not worry about what other students may think if he/she makes a mistake in the message that they are trying to communicate. Instead, students should focus on producing a message and make communication successful. The teachers should always affirm a student's effort to communicate, even if it is full of mistakes.
- If students conveyed lack of practice with speaking skills in their previous language learning experiences, respectively primary school education, the teachers should adopt a

communicative approach to provide students with more chances to practice their speaking skills.

- To lower inhibition it can be good to use group work so that the inhibited student does not have to face the whole class when speaking. It is more likely that useful verbal practice will take place in this situation than in a full class.
- It is important to base an activity on easy language so that the students can speak fluently and feel secure. A good way to make this work is to review vocabulary before starting.
- The students should dare, be willing and able to participate in conversations about familiar topics without preparation and exchange information about personal opinions and experiences.
- The English language teachers should undergo training courses on language anxiety in order to make them aware of this complex issue and, henceforth, adopt and implement proper methods and strategies to cope with the phenomena, namely English speaking skill anxiety.
- Finally, central and local education authorities must provide schools with environmental-classroom equipment in terms of English language cabinets, Audio-Visual aids, projectors.

Recommendations from this research are that every language teacher can offer different ways of reducing language anxiety speaking skills based upon his/her personal observation during the teaching process. Thus, during this process, the role of language teachers is considered highly crucial and their particular beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards language learning and the teaching process have the potential of both causing and reducing language anxiety among the students.