Impact of Intervention to Reduce Stage Fear and to Enhance the Speaking Skills of Prospective Teachers

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ABSTRACT

In the communicative model of language teaching, instructors help their students to develop their speaking skills by providing authentic practice that prepares students for real-life communication situations. Effective instructors teach students speaking strategies - using minimal responses, recognizing scripts, and using language to talk about language - which they can use to help themselves expand their knowledge of the language and their confidence in using it. Learners have stage fear and they refuse to speak in front of others. Speech therapists describe speaking anxiety as something that has a great impact on one's self-confidence since it often makes one experience failure when not being able to speak out and show what one knows. Speaking anxiety creates a low self-confidence which makes students remain quiet in all situations, even if they have subject knowledge and the capacity to express themselves. The present paper discusses the intervention that can be given to reduce speaking anxiety and to develop the speaking ability of prospective teachers.

Introduction

Many language learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language. These learners define fluency as the ability to converse with others, much more than the ability to read, write, or comprehend oral language. They regard speaking as the most important skill they can acquire and they assess their progress in terms of their accomplishments in spoken communication.

Language learners need to recognize that speaking involves three areas of knowledge:

1. Mechanics (pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary)

2. Functions (transaction and interaction)

3. Social and cultural rules and norms (turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pauses between speakers, relative roles of participants)

In the communicative model of language teaching, instructors help their students to develop this body of knowledge by providing authentic practice that prepares students for real-life communication situations. Effective instructors teach students speaking strategies - using minimal responses, recognizing scripts, and using language to talk about language - which they can use to help themselves expand their knowledge of the language and their confidence in using it.

Speaking Anxiety

When looking up the word anxiety it is described as "an abnormal and overwhelming sense of apprehension and fear often marked by physiological signs (as sweating, tension, and increased pulse), by doubt concerning the reality and nature of the threat, and by self-doubt about one's capacity to cope with it." (Merriam Webster dictionary)

Speech therapists describe speaking anxiety as something that has a great impact on one's self-confidence since it often makes one experience failure when not being able to speak out and show what one knows. Irregular heartbeat, perspiration, stumbling and an inability to act are a few symptoms that block ones capacity to act and speak. This explains that this issue often turns into a vicious circle because one bad experience from speaking often becomes a reminder when the next opportunity arises. If a student with speaking anxiety experience failure he or she will rather remain quiet than take the risk of failing again. This

situation drags them into silence that becomes more and more difficult to break since it contributes to a role as "the quiet one" in class. Speaking anxiety creates a low self-confidence which makes students remain quiet in all situations, even if they have the capacity to express themselves and knowledge that is worth hearing.

Big Six Sources of Speech Anxiety

• Fear of Failure

• Fear of Disapproval

• Fear of Unknown

• Fear of the Spotlight

• Fear of the Audience

• Fear of Breaking the Rules

Speaking anxiety affects second language learning since it impedes students in improving their oral skills which is crucial when learning a new language. It automatically affects students' grades since the syllabi demand oral proficiency and activities in classrooms that require oral communication. It is important to understand that inhibition is a major obstacle to second language acquisition since it makes students not to practice their oral proficiency. Since the hardest part for speaking anxious students is breaking the silence as it is the crucial part for teachers to create comfortable learning situations.

Research Problem

There is no doubt that the majority of second / foreign language learners experience

different degrees of anxiety when they are asked to express themselves in front of the class or other people. This is true even when their language abilities are quite good. Foreign language anxiety which is a well-known affective factor, is "a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, and behaviours related to classroom learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning arising process" (Horwitz & Cope, 1986). Anxiety in itself is not a bad thing since a certain amount of anxiety can motivate a learner to learn and acquire a language. However, language teachers and researchers have noticed that there is a high level of anxiety which negatively affects many language learners' behaviour and their educational outcomes. The main concern of teachers is helping students to pass the general exam. As a result, college students lack competency in speaking, and many have difficulties with pronunciation. This makes them unwilling to communicate in the target language.

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the means to do away with the stage fear that makes speaking English more stressful and thereby affecting their speaking ability. This study will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. Does stage fear influence learners' speaking ability?

2. Is there any possibility to reduce stage fear which will lead to effective speaking?

Experimental Design

In this present study the investigator has used pretest – posttest control group design. In this design the control group and experimental group are formed and their equivalence are established through randomization. Of the various Colleges of Education in Thoothukudi district, the present study was confined to Annammal College of Education for Women, Thoothukudi. Forty four prospective teachers of the college were taken as the sample for the present study. The investigator prepared an intervention for prospective teachers to help them to overcome their stage fear and to improve their speaking ability. The intervention strategy consists of 5 training modules involving various activities. Three hours of training was given on each day.

Outline of the Intervention

Day 1 - Ways to improve communication skills and oral fluency

Day 2 - Reason out (Here think aloud strategy is used, the students are allowed to think upon their own weakness and finds out the root cause. It is also a form of self assessment and improvisation.)

Day 3 - i) Pick the card (Each student is asked to pick one card. They must think over the situation and come out with an explanation which serves as a solution for the problem) ii) Complete the proverb (10 proverbs were splited and the strips of paper were shuffled. Each student chooses a strip of paper and comes to the front of the class and reads the half of the proverb she has. Then eventually they find out their pair

having the other half. Having the complete proverb now they are asked to come out with a story relevant to the proverb).

Day 4 - Crazy Story telling & Sentence race

Day 5 - Common Expressions in English & Stress and Intonation

Data Analysis

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference between control and experimental group prospective teachers in their pre-test scores on speaking ability based on the following dimensions:

- Interaction
- Pronunciation
- Fluency & Coherence
- Vocabulary
- Grammar

TABLE 1
Test of significant difference between control and experimental group prospective teachers in their pre test scores on speaking ability based on dimensions

Group	Dimension	No. of Students	Mean	SD	Calculated t-value	Table t-value	Remark
Control	Interaction	22	2.09	0.52	1	2.08	NS
	Pronunciation		2.18	0.66	0.18		NS
	Fluency & Coherence		2.09	0.52	0.56		NS
	Vocabulary		2.05	0.37	0		NS
	Grammar		2.23	0.52	0		NS
Experimental	Interaction	22	1.91	0.61	1		NS
	Pronunciation		2.09	0.52	0.18		NS
	Fluency & Coherence		2.18	10.58	0.56		NS
	Vocabulary		2.05	0.65	0		NS
	Grammar		2.23	0.42	0		NS

It is inferred from the above table that the calculated t-values 1, 0.18, 0.56, 0 and 0 for all the dimensions are less than the table value (2.08) at 5% level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. It shows that there is no significant difference between control and experimental group prospective teachers in their pre-test scores on speaking ability based on the following dimensions:

- Interaction
- Pronunciation
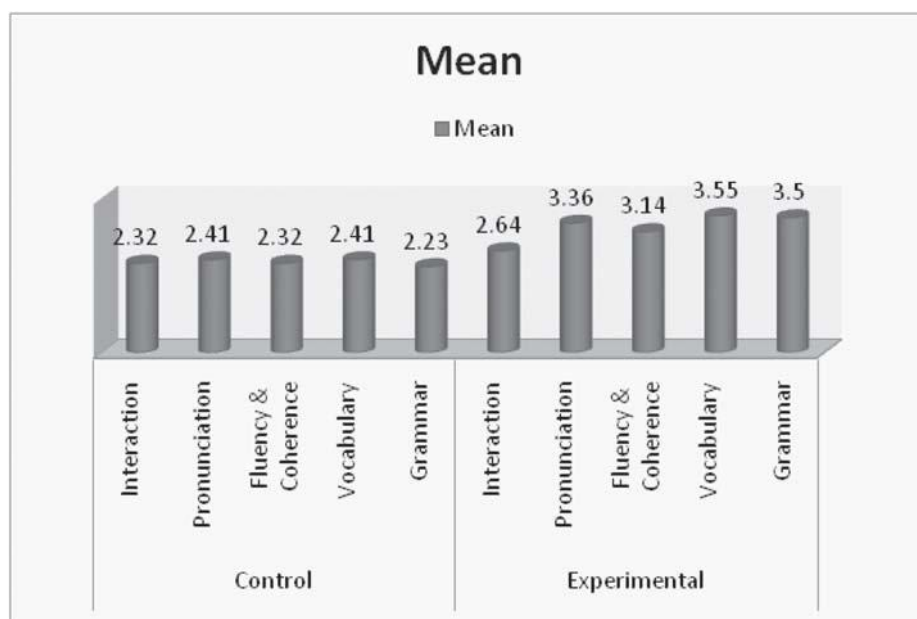- Fluency & Coherence
- Vocabulary
- Grammar

Null Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between control and experimental group prospective teachers in their post test scores on speaking ability based on the following dimensions:

- Interaction
- Pronunciation
- Fluency & Coherence
- Vocabulary
- Grammar

TABLE 2
Test of significant difference between control and experimental group prospective teachers in their post test scores on speaking ability based on the dimensions

Group	Dimension	No. of Students	Mean	SD	Calculated t-value	Table t-value	Remark
Control	Interaction	22	2.32	0.47	1.91	2.08	NS
	Pronunciation		2.41	0.59	4.28		S
	Fluency & Coherence		2.32	0.71	3.64		S
	Vocabulary		2.41	0.50	4.92		S
	Grammar		2.23	0.42	7.21		S
Experimental	Interaction	22	2.64	0.58	1.91		S
	Pronunciation		3.36	0.84	4.28		S
	Fluency & Coherence		3.14	0.77	3.64		S
	Vocabulary		3.55	0.85	4.92		S
	Grammar		3.5	0.67	7.21		S

It is inferred from the above table that the calculated t-value (1.91) is less than the table value (2.08) at 5% level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is accepted. It shows that there is no significant difference between control and experimental group prospective teachers in their post test scores on speaking ability based on the dimension interaction. It is inferred from the above table that the calculated t-values 1.91, 4.28, 3.64, 4.92 and 7.21 for other dimensions are more than the table value (2.08) at 5% level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. It shows that there is significant difference between control and experimental group prospective teachers in their post test scores on speaking ability based on the following dimensions:

• Pronunciation

• Fluency & Coherence

• Vocabulary

• Grammar

Findings

Based on the analysis, it is found that there is no significant difference between control and experimental group prospective teachers in their *pre test* scores on stage fear. It revealed that the students' performance was equal in pre-test irrespective of whether they belong to control or experimental group. This shows that the two groups of present study are equal in stage fear.

Based on the analysis, it is found that there is significant difference between control and experimental group prospective teachers in their *post-test* scores on stage fear. The mean score of the experimental group in their post test (91.64) is less than the mean scores of the control group in their post test

(110.32). This shows that to eradicate the stage fear just listening in the class will not help. Also, students get bored easily when taught through lecture method. The experimental group students when exposed to various activities show less stage fear. This may be the reason behind the significant difference found in their post test scores on stage fear.

The objective of this research study was to investigate the impact of intervention strategies in improving the speaking ability and reducing the stage fear of prospective teachers. The analysis demonstrates that there is significant increase in the speaking ability and decrease in stage fear of prospective teachers of the experimental group when compared to control group. It is found that following are the main sources of fear hindering students speaking ability:

- Limited vocabulary

- Inaccurate grammar

- Lack of fluency

- Imperfect pronunciation

- Lack of active listening

- Fear of speaking in public

- Fear of expressing certain views

- Diminishing confidence

- Dominance of hesitation

- Lack of group skills

- Fear of making mistakes

- Lack of exposure and practicing platforms

Discussion

The intervention strategies were designed in such a manner that it took care of all the above mentioned barriers. Thus it helped the students of experimental group to overcome these barriers and speak well. The results indicate that when students are exposed to well-designed intervention strategies their performance can improve. It should include a variety of activities that enable the students even the shy learners to come out of their comfort zone. All speaking activities can be made interesting only by making the students involve in it. Thereby through these activities they gain firsthand experience of using the language. Also unknowingly they start to use the language without fear. By making students involve in such activities constantly make them feel comfortable with the language.

Teachers should realize that language learning, and particularly oral production, is a potentially stressful situation for some students. Teachers are to assume the role of researcher in their own classrooms. Apart from academic achievement, language teachers have a great role in promoting the students' second language speaking skills. It is important to nurture the child's speaking ability right from the early stage. Hence, the language teachers must take this in consideration and must provide their students a platform to converse in the target language and must ensure regular exposure to speaking in the language.

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