



Tracking and Tackling Second Language Verbal Anxiety in Hindi EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

A quotidian problem for non-native learners of a second language is its learning or using anxiety. In India, where English is considered as an 'elite' language, where English speakers are considered as supreme due to historical background (India) of white supremacy with context to British rule. Thus, it is crucial to make learners understand about the significance of self-confidence to learn a language, and to make them accept that English is a mere language, which will help them to get relief from the stress of learning the language to the level of perfection. It is important for the second language teachers to understand and treat students with equity as per the requirements in their learning. The fear of failure, being misunderstood, what others will think i.e. fellow learners' evaluation and fear of making grammar mistakes are the most common reasons why people are afraid to speak English. The planning of effective instructions and strategies for a classroom packed with individualized demands that the educator/teacher is supposed to cope up with. A responsibility to ensure about what works better for each individual learner and even more essentially, what works better for the group of learners in the classroom is a tougher task today. This research paper studies the potency of using the activities and strategies which are to be implemented in the classroom set up as well as outside the classroom set up to augment the speaking skills of the set of seven students of grade 9. This paper focuses on the plight of language's verbal usage of Hindi EFL class w.r.t. anxiety in its learners.

Keywords: EFL- English as a Foreign Language

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role in today's world whether it's socio-political or economical, without a doubt, English is a primary necessity for globalization. Using English to communicate in an oral/verbal sense is difficult for non-native speakers. English not only connects us to the world, but the language earns a status to one. It is essential to anyone who is presenting themselves on a global level. Learning English as a second language is a mind-grinding task for students in the EFL classrooms. The age of high school is such that peer pressure leads individuals to behave perfect and fear of imperfections often trigger their mental health. Not just peer evaluation but behavior carried by language teachers while evaluating the students affect them a lot as it exposes their incapacibilities in front of their fellow mates. Language Learning Anxiety is indeed a very strong factor that directly affects the communicative performance of the students. The students were very apprehensive about expressing themselves clearly in English because they don't get exposure to this language much and they are not sure if they speak English correctly (Yusuf Mehdi, Shravan Kumar: 2019)

Today, the classroom is permitted to be a diverse place where students from manifold backgrounds and abilities sit with an objective of developing knowledge and skills that will assist them in growing as lifelong learners while preparing them for the next level in their academic lives. The classroom set up where this research study was to take place approved these conditions. Although the set of seven students were intelligent and brilliant as they were brought into the school only after refinement through the process of entrance examinations in grade 9, they lacked in speaking skills. No doubt, a poor environment for language speaking with lack of practice of using language in daily lives fails the efficiency in this, but instructional strategies can be adopted within the school to cope up with this problem of lacking skill. The purpose for doing so was to improve the effectiveness of instruction as determined by subjective student growth observed during a series of instructional units. Most of these students avoided initiating class activities. They often avoid eye contact, hide their faces or give excuses like having a lower voice or not being ready. There was no learning disability in these students and scored more than average in each subject in recent examinations.

ANXIETY

Anxiety is a feeling of discomfort in the body, a troubled feeling in the mind. A subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system (MacIntyre & Gardner). There are various factors that cause language anxiety, the most common of which include learners' excessive self-consciousness and self-awareness concerning their oral reproduction and performance and their peculiar, and quite often misplaced and mistaken, views and beliefs regarding different approaches (Badia Muntazer Hakim).

LANGUAGE ANXIETY

Language Anxiety can be defined as a feeling of fear and stress to learn and specially to present the second language in EFL classroom. The major causes may include negative evaluation by classmates, humiliation by teachers. Making mistakes feels like catastrophe to most people. For some, it can leave a long term effect like inevitable anxiety or even a nervous breakdown. Fear of being judged, negatively evaluated, humiliated and audience eyes (stage fear) often lead a person to feel demotivated. Sometimes, people take failure as the end which reduces their self-confidence and self-esteem. Language Anxiety is also a component of the same. Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) defined foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex set of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process".

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language anxiety is something that is experienced by all the learners of the new language (Yusuf Mehdi, Shraavan Kumar: 2019). Many researchers have studied the ongoing pre-eminent topic of Second Language Anxiety (SLA). According to Campbell and Ortiz, all the Second language learners and the foreign Language learners experience anxiety to a mild to moderate extent. The anxiety, as indicated by Horwitz, is mostly related to the poor performance in the foreign language, especially in speaking skills.

According to Horwitz, in Horwitz and Cope (1986) foreign language education is a complex process, which involves learners' self-perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors particular to environments of foreign language learning. Some learners who are extravagant in verbal communication in their native language may get themselves in trouble doing the same thing in the second language. Besides, New Webster Dictionary (1994: 932) states that speaking is an act to express ideas, feelings, and thoughts orally. It is also called oral communication. According to Syakur (1987: 5), speaking is a complex skill because at least it is concerned with components of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary and fluency. Speaking is an act that is done naturally by people in their life. It is a productive skill of language.

The root of the problem is enough practice in speaking (Shinta Yunanda: 2011). Anxiety is one form of emotional problem that could highly affect the academic performance of EFL Learner (Jamilah Mohammed Sadiq: 2017). Classroom anxiety is a recurrent phenomenon for language learners (Hakim, B. M. :2019).

OBJECTIVES

1. To determine about the possible reasons for verbal language anxiety from students.
2. To work on rectification of language anxiety of a group of students.
3. To inspect whether the measures which were applied proven to be useful.
4. To estimate the success of action research.

METHODOLOGY

To know more about the density of the problems related to this issue, research is focused on collecting data through oral communication in English like anecdotes performance, speech opportunities, class readings, dialogue conversations, tracking requests for help, presentations. Making the rubrics when noticing their body language and expressions to know if students are comfortable in speaking the second language and if not, then how much trouble they are facing was a regular task.

Reflecting more on the students, this study scrutinizes a group of bright, hard working and ambitious students with no learning or other disabilities, but fails to express themselves in oral communication in foreign language; feel hesitation, get fumbled and jammed in words. Despite being students of a government school, these students failed people's belief of having a poor performance in English. Their pronunciation skills, writing skills, feedback on listening and understanding the language makes them brilliant, different from others and also help them in academics a lot as they are capable of creating their own answers with their own vocabulary.

Their speech anxiety ranges from a slight feeling of nervousness to sometimes a fear which evolves in their hearts. Some of the symptoms which were noticed by me during collection of data were- shaking of hands, sweating on forehead, dry lips, tiredness, lost in words and zoning out, shivering of fingers, drying up of lips etc.

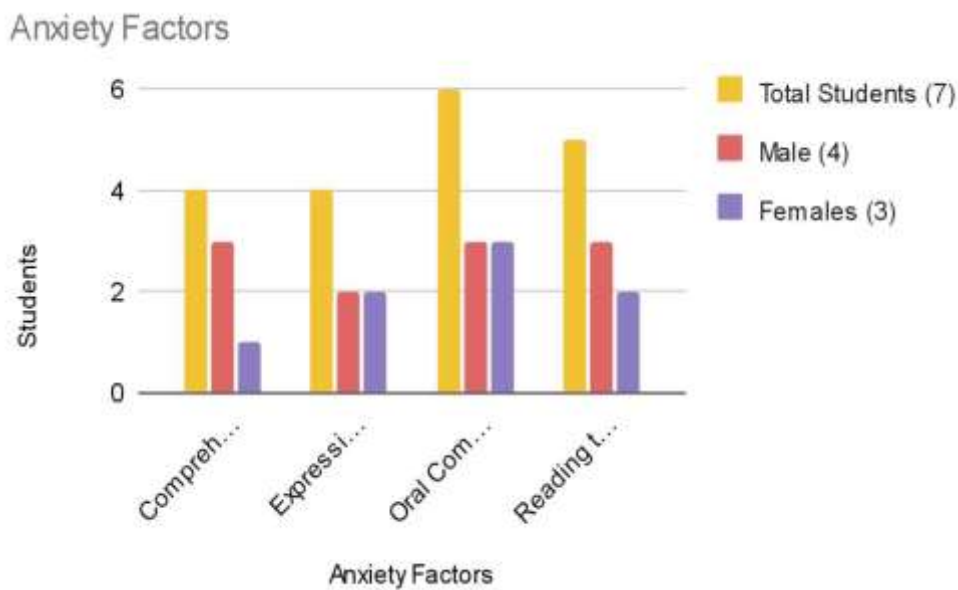
DATA COLLECTION

Anxiety factors chosen in order to deliberately focus on verbal anxiety for foreign language were: Comprehension obstacles, expressionlessness or undefined/unmatched expressions as per the context, usage of English as a medium to communicate verbally and stress of reading turn/denial to read. The data for the same is represented in *Table 1*.

Table 1

Anxiety Factors	Total Students (7)	Male (4)	Females (3)
Comprehension	4:7	3:4	1:3
Expressions	4:7	2:4	2:3
Oral Communication	6:7	3:4	3:3
Reading turn	5:7	3:4	2:3

Graph 1



Commenting on *table 1*, 57% of the students have trouble comprehending using English as the medium in which the majority is of male as compared to that of females. The freedom of expression was not confirming the comfort level of students. Most of 85% of the students were having trouble with oral communication while using English as language to communicate. Students often showed stress on their faces when it was their reading turn or it was about to come. Few of them also denied that they do not have potential to read because of their throat health, low pitch, unwellness, etc. The males showed more Anxiety than girls.

Self reflection about this obstacle of language usage was way too necessary to know what these students themselves think of this problem. Two of the students were able to identify and understand their symptoms of language anxiety while the other four took it as something usual or disregarded it as a problem. They often told me that in their previous schools there were a lack of opportunities to communicate in English and that is why they didn't form a habit of it and feel uncomfortable using it.

When the students were interviewed about what they think of English as a language to be used as Verbal communication in a classroom discussion, they provided a heterogeneity in answers. The answers are presented in *Table 2*. Reflecting on their statements, one can conclude that lack of environment and opportunities to use English as a medium of verbal communication scare them as the fellow learners, who got such a learning environment will be evaluating them negatively and teachers who may humiliate them. Most researchers have found that fear of imperfections, negative evaluation, humiliation, grammar mistakes, wrong pronunciations, and unorganized sentences may affect students' mental health which leads to lack of confidence, fear and stress to learn or of not understanding.

Table 2

Students	Self Reflection Statements
Student A	I don't feel I can speak better English than my friends.
Student B	I'm afraid that others will make fun of me if I pronounce an easy word wrongly.

Student C	I don't want to use English because it limits my views.
Student D	I often use hmm, aan, aaaa, mmmh sounds when I am stuck in between the sentences.
Student E	I feel speaking English will make me stop from speaking anything, it feels like a punishment.
Student F	I can openly express my feelings in Hindi only. I've never used English to communicate.
Student G	I can write in English but reading the same in front of everyone makes me scared.

PLAN OF ACTION

These students were given a regular dose of various activities which helped them to practice their speaking skills in the language which was carried out for 40 days. Activities and strategies to improve oral communication in the second language used are as follows, these activities were in accordance with the principles of learning like principle of practice and drill, principle of habit formation, principle of motivation etc.

- i. Model talks on stage to overcome fear of using language.
- ii. Using English to communicate in class to make a habit of language.
- iii. Asking students for a summary of lessons for language practice.
- iv. Anecdote for using language to express thoughts.
- v. Debate for using language to compare and comment.
- vi. Role play to use expressions while using language.
- vii. Skits to use expressions as well as to communicate in language.
- viii. Story completion to use creativity while using language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

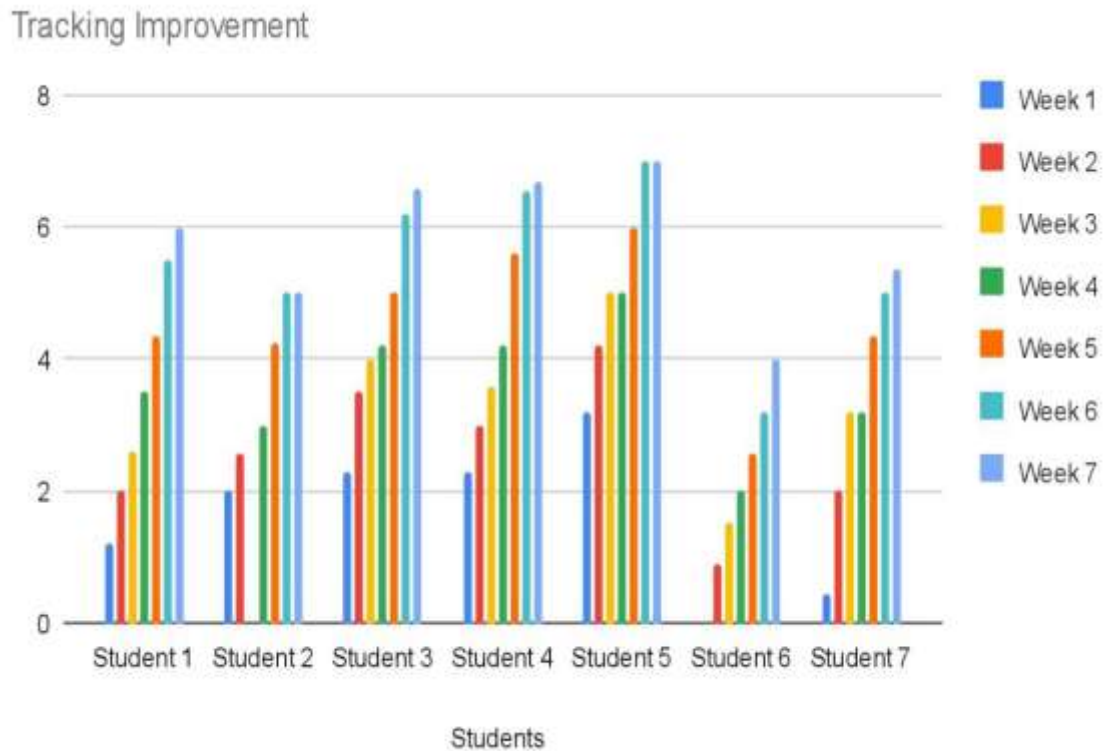
To test whether the language speaking practice helped students to overcome speaking anxiety of foreign language, students were under an eye simultaneously and emphasizing self initiation, habit/usage of language for daily communication, confidence and ease of using the language. Their factors of anxiety improvised day by day and by noting an assumed number for each of them, the results are presented in *Table 3*.

Table 3

	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6	Week 7
Student 1	1.2	2	2.6	3.5	4.36	5.5	6
Student 2	2	2.58	on leave	3	4.25	5	5
Student 3	2.3	3.5	4	4.2	5	6.2	6.58
Student 4	2.3	3	3.59	4.2	5.6	6.55	6.69
Student 5	3.2	4.2	5	5	6	7	7
Student 6	0	0.89	1.52	2	2.56	3.2	4
Student 7	0.45	2	3.2	3.2	4.33	5	5.36

Based on *Table 3*, the bar graph was maintained to observe the growth of students per week.

Graph 2



Analyzing the *Graph 1*, students have shown a reasonable growth in enhancing their verbal skills and gaining confidence of hold over the language which ultimately helped them in reducing language anxiety. There were weeks when students were neutral and did not improve at much ratio but most of them were able to revamp.

To explore final results, students were asked to perform a stage play in English. They had two days to prepare. It was a group activity so that not only speaking of language but also the oral communication with each other can be observed with emphasis on emotional representation in English and body language which will help in measuring achievement levels. The students were intentionally put in one group altogether.

By observing and noting all the points related to body language of students while they performed, their facial expressions and fluency, one could directly judge the level of confidence they had as there was a decline in hesitation, their hands were shaking less comparatively, no sweat, no fumbled behavior. The confidence was visible in their eyes.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Most students in Hindi EFL need help and support from language teachers with special care in speaking of language. As the speaking of language is most important for any individual as compared to other language skills. The main aim of EFL is to make students confident and fluent in using the language.

Teachers must plan methods to tackle anxiety of students and then plan instructions to teach second language learners in Hindi EFL classrooms. The teachers have to be compassionate and committed towards the juvenile learners, her/his behavior will impact their learning for a long period of time. With a regular practice and habit with proper planned strategies, teachers may help students to overcome their fear of using the language.

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APPENDIX

Employing *Rubrics* to track improvement in students is much better than taking separate tests. Formative assessments and evaluation are fitter in tracing the breakthrough in students over the period of research.

Refer to *Rubric 1*.

Rubric 1

Rubrics/ Grades	A (Excellent)	B (Very good- Good)	C (Average)	D (Not satisfied)
English Communication	Used English as a language to communicate whole/most of the day.	Used it in classroom settings when asked to, with fluency.	Some obstacles were there but they tried to communicate some of the time, mistakes in sentences.	Used English rarely to communicate.
Model/Peer talk present	Conversed with peers effectively with a clear message.	Communicated well with some obstacles.	Was not very fluent but tried well.	Wasn't able to tell clear message and used wrong rules
Anecdote	Was able to express thoughts with freedom.	Felt some barriers but coped with it own.	Got fumbled with words and thoughts.	Was zoned out and fumbled a lot.
Debate	Was able to take proper control on perceptions and present critical views.	Compared and Contrasted the topic with their own knowledge and perceptions.	Tried to present views in favor/against the motion but stuck in words.	Was not able to present views openly, felt difficult in framing thoughts in words.
Role Play and Skits	Showed good interpersonal and interpersonal communication, showed expressions and presented dialogues in a good way	Connected with peers and had good expressions on a satisfactory level.	Barriers in dialogue presentation but completed it successfully, need improvement.	Lack of freedom of expression and speech, need to improve.
Story Telling/Completion	Was able to use creative thoughts.	Was able to complete/tell the story successfully.	Tried very well and used creativity on average.	Tried but it wasn't satisfactory.

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