

The Alleviation of the Language Anxiety of English as Second Language (ESL) Learners through Communicative Language Teaching

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Abstract: Language anxiety is identified by many scholars as a significant aspect that inhibits the language acquisition of English as Second Language (ESL) learners. Student-centered approaches are widely practiced in ESL context as they are acknowledged and accepted as highly effective in foreign language acquisition. In Sri Lanka, most of the institutes implement teacher-centered approaches in ESL classrooms due to various practical issues such as insufficient resources and consumption of longer time. Thus, this research is an attempt to trace whether the communicative language teaching, which is one of the most popular student-centered approaches, can be utilized in order to alleviate the English language anxiety of the respective learners. The nature of the research demanded a mixed approach in order to validate the implications. Thus, the sample included 40 students who follow Diploma in English at E-SOFT, which is a renowned private institute. The study utilized an abbreviated form of Foreign Language Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz and Cope in order to calculate the language anxiety encountered by the ESL learners. The quantitative data were accumulated by conducting interviews with academics and students. The research findings bear testimony that students feel less anxious in classrooms that practice communicative language teaching while they had an unfavorable attitude towards teacher-centered classrooms. The results also manifested that communicative language teaching method is an effective strategy that could be utilized in order to alleviate the English language anxiety of the ESL learners that will eventually have a significant impact on their language achievements.

Keywords: Language Anxiety, ESL Learners, Communicative Language Teaching, Language achievement, Student - Centered approach.

I. INTRODUCTION

English, which is considered as a lingua franca, today has become vital for individuals to be connected with the world. Even though the government has taken many measures in order to enhance the language skills of the ESL learners, still the students lag behind their language competencies, notably in communication skills. This could mainly be because of foreign language classroom anxiety which is described as “a distinct complex construct of self – perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (Horwitz, 1993) that has a significant impact on learners’ achievements. Many studies

reveal that the learning setting is a major source of LA. In Sri Lanka teacher – centered approach which is in question, is most commonly used in ESL classrooms due to various practical issues. In contrast, Communicative Language Teaching is widely practiced and considered to be a successful and an innovative method in enhancing the communicative competence of the learners. Thus, this research was conducted with the objective to find out whether there is a relationship between language anxiety and teaching approaches utilized in ESL classrooms and further it projects on how communicative language teaching could be implemented to enhance the language skills of the students.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Huang (1990) suggests that the learners become hopelessly dysfunctional when comes to oral communication in a teacher – centered model as it encourages them to be more passive and the focus lies not on the function of the language but on its form. Young (1990) indicates the importance of creating an atmosphere of low anxiety that is favorable for the ESL learners. These suggestions include various aspects related to instructor behaviour and classroom procedures. “To decrease anxieties associated with classroom procedures, instructors can do more pair work, play more games and tailor their activities to the affective needs of the learner. Koch and Terrell, Price, Young (50) and Omaggio (52) suggest that LA is alleviated when students work in small groups, do pair work, and experience personalized language instruction. Group work not only addresses the affective concerns of the students, it also increases the amount of student talk and comprehensible input”

III. METHODOLOGY

The research utilized a mixed approach while focusing more on quantitative approach. 40 students, 22 female and 18 male, who follow the Diploma in English at the renowned institute E-SOFT, selected with the use of convenience sampling, participated in the study. An abbreviated form of the Foreign Language Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was administered to the sample group in order to measure the language anxiety encountered by them. This comprised of 30 questions, 2 related to the personal details and 28 items associated to the foreign language classroom anxiety which

were under a series five-point Likert scale. The 28 questions were under the two categories Communicative apprehension (1- 12) and Fear of negative evaluation (13 – 28). Further, the mean values were interpreted as low (1.0-2.4), moderate (2.5-3.4) and high (3.5-5.0) following Oxford and Burry-Stock (1995) scales. The 40 students were divided into two groups of 20. Each group of 20 students were taught the same lesson (Present Progressive Tense) utilizing two different teaching approaches, teacher – centered and the communicative language teaching approach whereas the language anxiety encountered by the students in each group was analyzed with the aid of SPSS statistical software, which is a reliable analytical tool to arrive at the conclusion. Qualitative data were accumulated mainly by interviews conducted with academics and ESL learners to obtain a distinctive insight in relation to the rationale.

IV. RESULTS

Table 1: Communication Apprehension

Question	Teacher – Centered Approach	Communicative Language Teaching
Q1	3.4 Moderate	2.3 Low
Q2	3.3 Moderate	2.8 Moderate
Q3	3.2 Moderate	2.4 Low
Q4	3.5 High	2.8 Moderate
Q5	3.3 Moderate	2.4 Low
Q6	3.1 Moderate	2.4 Low
Q7	3.2 Moderate	2.7 Moderate
Q8	3.2 Moderate	2.8 Moderate
Q9	3.3 Moderate	2.4 Low
Q10	3.4 Moderate	2.5 Moderate
Q11	3.4 Moderate	2.5 Moderate
Q12	3.6 High	2.6 Moderate

Source: Sample data, 2020

Table 2: Fear of Negative Evaluation

Question	Teacher – Centered Approach	Communicative Language Teaching
Q13	3.2 Moderate	2.5 Moderate
Q14	3.05 Moderate	2.7 Moderate
Q15	3.1 Moderate	2.4 Low
Q16	3.4 Moderate	2.4 Low
Q17	3.5 High	2.5 Moderate
Q18	3.4 Moderate	2.4 Low
Q19	3.6 High	2.2 Low
Q20	3.4 Moderate	2.4 Low
Q21	3.1 Moderate	2.3 Low
Q22	3.5 High	2.4 Moderate
Q23	3.5 High	2.5 Moderate
Q24	3.2 Moderate	2.4 Low
Q25	3.3 Moderate	2.5 Moderate
Q26	3.4 Moderate	2.8 Moderate
Q27	3.3 Moderate	2.8 Moderate
Q28	3.4 Moderate	2.3 Low

Source: Sample data, 2020

V. DISCUSSION

Communication apprehension describes the fear encountered by the learners when communicating in the target language while fear of negative evaluation is defined as the fear regarding the assessment of the others, circumventing such evaluative situations and the presumption that the peers would assess oneself in a negative manner. Both these anxiety types inhibit the production of the target language that will eventually result in the low language proficiency. The two tables are a clear manifestation of the fact that there is a connection between the English LA of the ESL learners and the teaching approach utilized in a classroom. In both sections lowest mean values for all the questions are reported from the students who were taught using communicative language teaching while the highest mean values are discovered from the students in the teacher – centered classroom. Academics and students were also in the view that communicative language helps students to produce language productively and reduce the fear encountered that help them in enhancing their language skills.

VI. CONCLUSION

The results exhibit that a change in the teaching approach could accommodate in alleviating the English LA of the ESL learners, which in the due course helps in the growth of their language competency. Further, it is apparent that from the two teaching approaches teacher – centered and communicative language teaching, most appropriate teaching approach in creating a favorable learning atmosphere for the ESL learners which assists in reducing their fear towards the English language is the communicative language teaching. Thus, the government should take steps to educate and provide quality practice for the English language teachers, which will enable implementing this particular approach in ESL classrooms. This will help to create individuals competent in English who are capable to meet the dire needs of the fast moving world.

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