

The Unheard Voices of Students: Affective Filter in Focus

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Abstract: Despite the breakthroughs of teaching and learning that stimulate student interactions, there are still many who dislike participation in the class. Hence, this study explores the struggles of students with high affective filter; how students with high affective filter cope their inability to perform well in the class, and what expectations students have from teachers to lessen their affective filter. Qualitative phenomenological study was used to extract unshared sentiments of shy students. Six senior high school students were invited for a Focus Group Discussion. The findings revealed that shy students are struggling to cope daily communicative demands from class activities; they are often victims of mislabeling; and they wish to receive more constructive remarks from teachers to boost affect for learning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Emotion and cognition are often tagged as factors in learning a language. Many times, I have observed scenarios where students find difficulty in sharing ideas in the class not due to lack of knowledge but due to certain level of shyness which inhibits them to perform better in oral communication. This knowledge has been shared, not only in the context of this study, but as well as abroad. Lin's (2008) research on affective filter hypothesis among Taiwanese university students found that affective competence affected the students in knowledge acquisition. The study used natural approach of teaching such as the incorporation of games, English songs and movies. This methodology further informs teachers that facilitating emotional health can be done in a most typical manner (Berho & Defferding, 2005).

A research was also undertaken by Marcial (2016) in the University of the Philippines Los Baños. The study showed that even students at the university had already reported anxiety at a lower rate and that the students' level of anxiety had a strong connection to their self-perceived use of English in both formal and informal conversation.

Findlay & Coplan (2009) concluded that the family environment and situation is assumed to play a significant role in the development of shyness among the children. If children experience high levels of family stress during a young age, they are more likely to experience shyness during the middle childhood years and beyond. Parents who experience high long-standing arguments with their children may increase the chance of developing shyness in their children. Children may also develop a more dependent relationship with parents as well as a strong passive stance with other peers and new people (Feng, Shaw, & Moilanen

2011). This captures the use of English language outside the classroom and at home.

Since shy children are at an elevated risk of higher levels of anxiety, they also have an increased risk of depression; they report feeling sad more frequently than non-shy children (Eggum et al., 2012). Increase levels of anxiety contribute to lower results of performances at school. In addition, nervous students as well as other extremely insecure students have poorer scores than other students.

Social functioning is also decreased which leads to poorer relationships and more stressful school experience (Wood, 2006). Shy children may have academic struggles as well. They experience an increase levels of stress from being with peers and teachers. Their cognitive abilities are taxed (Hughes & Coplan, 2010). This results to a reduction in their cognitive resources which should have been used for learning and paying attention. Hence, lower grades, lower standardized test scores and higher levels of unfinished work of students can be attributed to the increase level of stress.

An important method for helping shy students from a teacher's standpoint is to develop positive teacher-child relationship (Arbeau, Coplan & Weeks, 2010; Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004). Other than the traditional role of teaching academic skills, the teachers are responsible for controlling children's activity level. Intimate teacher and child relationships are negatively associated with school avoidance and positively related to prosocial behavior. The teachers reported that timid children are more inclined to develop intimate, close relationships with one or two friends. Positive relationships between teachers and students promote children's long-term social and academic improvement and are especially helpful for the adjustment of shy students in school (Coplan & Rudasill, 2016).

Hence, the current researcher was inspired to delve into looking the struggles of students with high affective filter; how students with high affective filter cope their inability to perform well in the class, and what expectations students have from teachers to lessen their high affective filter. This study was viewed using Krashen's (1982) affective filter hypothesis. Several main factors in the success of learners in Second Language Acquisition should be related to the emotional state of the student as stressed by Krashen (1982). The achievement of learners in learning the English language in English as a second language classroom relies heavily on the learner's

enthusiasm and involvement in the lesson plus the faith and trust they have in their teacher.

II. METHOD

The study is a qualitative design adopting a phenomenological approach to conduct research. The researcher requested six (6) senior high school students who were observed to be shy in an Oral Communication class. These participants were enrolled in the first semester of Grade 11 in Senior High School Program of Davao City National High School, AY 2018-2019. They were subjected for a Focus Group Discussion. The number of participants for Focus Group Discussion is enough as Krueger, & Casey (2010) suggest that a good focus group must limit the size to six to eight people. An informed consent was secured from the participants before the researcher gathered the data. The participants then were asked of open-ended questions. Transcribing the recorded interview followed. The transcribed data was carefully read and reread to establish codes. Later, significant statements were grouped together to form themes and categorized them accordingly.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section attempts to discuss in full the themes emerged from Focus Group Discussion. The themes were discussed under three dimensions or categories: struggles of students with high affective filter; coping ability of students with high affective filter to perform well in the class, and student's expectations from teachers to lesson affective filter.

Struggles of Students with High Affective Filter

Fear of Rejection: Students who are shy feel embarrassed and believe that they are excluded and may deliberately discourage social contact within the school.

Student A shared that “kanang mahadlok ko unsa ang ginaisip sa tao. Dili ko ganahan ma judge ko...” (*I am afraid of what other people think about me. I do not like being judged*). Student B also shared the same sentiment: “kanang mahinumduman nako akoang past na basig ma bully na pod ko” (*like I am reminded of my past that I might be bullied again*).

Volbrecht & Goldsmith (2010) claimed that being evaluated and having fears of being negatively reviewed and rejected could result to avoiding social situations or withdrawal. Shy people have likewise a preference to be out from peers. They will neglect the relationships they have with peers and this could lead to rejection from those peers (Rubin & Caplan, 2010).

Communication Apprehension

Students who are anxious in engaging communicative situations may be brought by poor self-concept. They seldom talk and when they talk, they do refrain from follow up questions from the teacher. Student C confessed that “every time pag naay reporting kay murag makulbaan ka, murag dili ka maka report ug tarong kay shy ka...” (*every time there is*

reporting you feel nervous, you cannot perform well because you are shy.) Shy students often find it challenging to start a discussion or exchange thoughts in the classroom. It does not mean that they are mentally disabled, they are just victims of uncontrollable flow of emotions.

Student E argued that: “dili man me mga bolok sir, maulaw lang jud me mag share kay we feel being judged”. (*We are not dull; we are just shy to share ideas because we feel we are being judged.*) Student F shared the same sentiment: “dili nalang me mag apil apil sir kung mag estorya na ang uban kay dili me ganahan ug daghan mag storya. Sila nalang importante nakasabot man me” (*We don't like joining and sharing our ideas when others start to talk. We don't like crisscross conversations. I leave the talk to them, anyway we understand [the lesson]*).

Du (2009) has shown that a person's level of fear to speak is significantly significant, typically correlated with their forward thinking. This is the usual barrier of second language learners to acquire the English language successfully. Sometimes, the learners are enthusiastic to engage in a discussion but the thought of saying something haunted them or impeded them. Shyness occurs. Shyness ranges from one person to another and from one circumstance to another. Contact-conscious individuals might not appear apprehensive if they are not interested with a certain form of conversation.

Coping Skills of Students with High Affective Filter to Perform Well in the Class

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an individual's belief in his or her innate ability to achieve goals. In order to cope shyness to perform in the class, shy students believe and oblige themselves to talk. They encourage and motivate themselves to share in midst of discomfort to socialize. Student D shared that: “akoa nalang gina motivate akoang sarili na dili ko maulaw kanang ginaisip nako na kaya lage nako ni” (*I motivate myself not to be shy. I put in mind that I can [communicate]*). Further, student C shared the same thought: “wala man me laing choice gud kung dili maningkamot nalang jud kay mabagsak man jud. Usahay magkurog pero laban nalang” (*We have no choice but to strive our best, lest we fail. Sometimes we are shaking [to speak in front] but [we put in mind] just go on.*)

Caprara and Steca (2005) opined that people are self-regulating agents whose development takes place in transactions within a network of socio-structural and psychosocial influences, where individuals are both producers and products of social systems. The self-efficacy or the belief of individuals have in their capacity to do and regulate circumstances affecting their lives is one of the mechanisms that facilitate the function of a social wellbeing. The belief that one holds that he or she can do something and produce an effect is the core that guides and motivates people to do an extra effort to reach the goals (Berho & Defferding, 2005).

Self-efficacy beliefs directly contribute to decisions, actions, and experiences, as people reflect upon their capacities when deciding whether to undertake challenging activities or to persist in pursuing difficult tasks. The more confident people are, the more resilient they are in the face of reversal and hardship.

Class Preparation. One of the themes that emerges to cope shyness is to prepare in advance possible class presentation. In a way, shy students can prepare their scripts when asked to explain a concept. Student F opined that: “mahadlok man gud ko ma judge so naga prepare jud ko ahead of time. Usahay mag memorize ug definition para dili kaayo ulaw” (*since I am afraid to be judged, I prepare in advance. Sometime, I have to memorize definitions so I would not be humiliated [if called without an answer]*). The lack of adequate time preparation may be a reason why students are scared and fearful of a presentation in the class. Holmes (1997) confirmed that students worry that their responses might also be deficient; thus, lacking confidence.

Cobb-Dozier, & Cobb-Dozier (2015) also argued that many students' fear comes from the context of being unprepared. Leading up to a speech in front of the class, the learners may be wondering if they practiced enough and if they can remember everything they are expected to talk about. These thoughts may be running through the speakers' minds and may hamper innate skills to communicate. Hence, preparing in advance in class may help trick these kinds of thoughts.

Students Expectations from Teachers to Lessen Affective Filter

Encouragement. Shy students need much encouragement to perform beyond their limits and expectation. They need motivation and constant reminder why they should speak up. A very strict teacher in the class cannot challenge them instead intimidates them not to say anything. Student A shared that: “kanang kailangan namo ug encouragement kay mahadlok man me sa amuang mga teachers” (*we need encouragement [from their teachers] because we are afraid of our teachers*). Most scholars and educators would agree with Du (2009) that enthusiasm is the main factor in language acquisition, if not the most significant one. Without which, even gifted individuals cannot accomplish long-term goals, whatever the curricula and whoever the teacher.

Fair Treatment. Students who are experiencing shyness desire for equal treatment. They wish to be respected and understood. Student F confessed that: “unta dili sila mag judge dayon sa amua kay kabalo man me kaya lang maulaw lang jud me” (*[We] wish they will not judge us easily because we know [something about the lesson] it is just that we are shy*). Student D shared the same sentiment: “mas nindot jud na maconsider amuang emotion kay dili lalim sa amuang part kay dili man namo ni gituyo gud. Unta pagsabot jud” (*It would be nice if our emotion is considered because it is not easy in our part because we don't choose to be like this. We wish them to understand us*). William & Burden (2000)

argued Maslow's theory that a student will lack learning motivation if his basic needs are not met.

For instance, a learner with unhappy childhood usually is driven with a strong desire for a secure environment because his needs for love and interpersonal closeness are not met. Students who are not performing well in their study and are often criticized by their parents at home or teachers in class will be diffident and hold low self-confidence and self-esteem. Thus, teachers need to create a positive atmosphere in which students feel that they belong, and in which they can develop respect from each other.

IV. IMPLICATION FOR EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

Teachers, sometimes, are swift to conclude that shy students are not as successful as their confident counterparts, and do not have the basic academic knowledge and skills they need. Teachers sometimes believe the reason they cannot provide input to classroom instructions is due to lack of acquiring the prerequisite academic skills.

However, these students do not participate because of their inner challenges with shyness, not because of a lack of awareness and/or skill. Krashen's affective filter hypothesis is of great practical effects for learning a second language. Teachers should look for effective teaching strategies which can cultivate students' active learning.

The neglect of the role of healthy emotional development of students in their learning has an adverse impact on the method of teaching and learning. Only those teachers who devoted much attention to the role of the students' affect in L2 teaching can learning be guaranteed and value of L2 teaching be revealed. The students are not mere receivers of knowledge. Teachers must understand and acknowledge this reality.

The emotional growth of students is also important to learning. Teachers also need to help students build a positive impact, and it is really critical and urgent. Teachers may boost the students' desire to learn by satisfying their fundamental needs, generating attention or promoting self-efficacy and reducing their anxiety through collaboration. Students and teachers can find satisfaction in the teaching and learning process when students have interest in learning class lessons. In fact, students who have more positive self-esteem and image are more likely to become successful and engaged in pursuits of academic excellence.

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