

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF
EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY
AND COUNSELLING
(IJEPC)www.ijepec.comA CASE STUDY ON CHALLENGES OF STUDENTS'
WILLINGNESS TO ORALLY RESPOND IN ENGLISH DURING
CLASS SESSIONS IN SABAHBernadette Tobi¹, Mohammad Aqmal Hafidz Musa^{2*}, Nor Dawirah Rahman³, Sabariah Abd Rahim⁴¹ Centre for the Promotion of Knowledge and Language Learning, Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Malaysia
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Abstract:

Students' willingness to respond in class is an important factor to ensure language usage and language acquisition. Literature reviews reveal that learners' levels of anxiety and self-confidence are predictors of students' willingness to communicate in class. However, there has been a lack of studies conducted in the local context regarding anxiety as a predictor of willingness to respond in English. This study looked into students' anxiety levels while communicating in English during Occupational Purpose class and the reasons for not being willing to respond in the online class orally. The class consisted of students from Malaysia and China studying in a local Malaysian university. During class, the instructor had to call out names to get students to answer questions asked. Classes were entirely conducted online and the assessments cover both written and oral aspects. Horwitz's Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was adapted and Baharuddin's three levels of anxiety mean measurement was used in this study. The FLCAS scale included 33 items of a five-point Likert scale which in this study was reversed with 1 "Strongly disagree" to 5 "Strongly agree" to measure the level of anxiety. The data obtained were analysed using descriptive analysis to include percentages and mean. The finding indicates that level of anxiety is not a predictor of WTC.

Keywords:

English Language Anxiety; Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCAS); Communication Apprehension; WTC And Online Class; Factors Affecting WTC

Introduction

Speaking in class can be a daunting task for any second language learner. Numerous studies and research have mentioned that second language learners are reluctant to willingly speak in class. To effectively attain the objectives of language learning, students need to use the target language and communicate in class. Despite studies and research conducted to find ways to improve students' willingness to converse in the target language, inevitably, students are still unwilling to respond in the target language. In physical and online classes alike, language classes teachers are still facing the problem of students' willingness to communicate in the target language during class. (Suryanto and Zahra, 2021; Güneş and Sarıgöz, 2021; Kashinathan and Aziz (2021).

Getting students to speak and express their opinions in a second language voluntarily can be distressing. Lan et al. (2021) study on English L2 learners found that grit and psychological shyness as important factors in students' willingness to communicate. Shyness is an indicator of learners' fear and anxiety (Rubin et al., 2009) that impedes willingness to communicate in class.

The nascent studies on students' willingness to communicate in Malaysia are encouraging (Kho-Yar et al., 2018). This paper aims to find the main reason or reasons why students in this local context do not willingly communicate during class sessions as there are limited WTC studies conducted in online classes in Sabah. This case study seeks to ascertain reasons and other elements which impede the willingness to communicate for students studying at a public university in Sabah.

Literature Review

Literature reviews reveal that researchers in Malaysia pointed out several factors that inhibit students' willingness to communicate in English during class sessions.

Abdullah and Abdul Rahman (2010) found that tertiary learners experienced a moderate level of anxiety when communicating with classmates with the same level of language proficiency; however, their level of apprehension rose when learners were expected to speak formally to a group of other people when asked to speak spontaneously and were overwhelmed with the English language rules needed to be proficient.

Students would be least participative in class because of the fear of being negatively evaluated by peers than because of their lack of interest in the target language. (Ansari, 2015). Ansari (2015) also mentioned that instructors should be wary of negative responses to students.

Mei and Masoumeh (2017) mentioned several factors that restrain students from willingly conversing in English. The first factor was diffidence; students fear being the centre of attention, being ridiculed and being criticised, these, unfortunately, impede their oral communication. The second factor was impercipience or lack of knowledge of what to say

leaving them stumped in any conversation. The third factor was linked to the loquaciousness of certain students who tend to monopolise the class conversation, casting the less proficient students to clam up either to say very little or never at all.

Kho-Yar et al. (2018) revealed that higher language proficiency connoted students' willingness to communicate in class. Hence, indicated that students with a better command of the language were more inclined to willingly speak in class. Paneerselvam and Mohamad (2019) mentioned that literature reviews reveal students' lack of grit, self-assurance, apprehension, shyness, and limited knowledge of vocabulary as the main reasons for students being ineloquent. Della et al. (2020) found that students with a better command of English determine their willingness to communicate thus less speaking anxiety.

In the digital context, Abu Bakar, et al. (2021) mentioned that online class sessions reduce students' chances to speak in the absence of physical presence. The unavailability of physical interaction with other students wavered their motivation to initiate conversation in English with other students and instructors.

It was also found that teachers taking post-graduate studies were also found to be unwilling to speak in class although they have the confidence to speak in the target language. Badrasawi, et al. (2020) concluded that although the educators did not have high anxiety in speaking English, however, the fear of receiving negative comments and making errors induced speaking apprehension hence the suggestion that instructors' elucidations should be kept positive when responding to students' blunders or inaccuracies. This is congruent with what Aleksandrzak (2011) mentioned that advanced learners, too, were not convinced to use the target language beyond their academic settings.

Methodology

The case study used a quantitative research methodology. Descriptive analysis is indicated in mean scores and percentages.

Sampling

This case study was carried out on thirty students from the English for Occupational Purposes class. The course was a 14-week class during the COVID-19 pandemic where teaching was remotely conducted on digital platforms and students were geographically scattered. Only 23 students filled out the Google Form shared in the class Telegram group chat. Classes were fully conducted online through the Google Meet platform. The students were all Malaysians except for two international students from China. The course required students to collaborate in groups of five to perform interviews, meetings, and oral presentations. The group which had international group members was asked for responses on reasons that interfered with their group communication. The students attained Band 2 and Band 3 in their MUET.

Instrumentation

The Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) developed by Horwitz et al. (1986) was used in the study. The FLCAS scale included 33 items of a five-point Likert scale which in this study was reversed with 1 "Strongly disagree" to 5 "Strongly agree". This was as suggested by Liu and Jackson (2008) when the mean was used to measure the level of anxiety. The FLCAS looked into three speaking anxiety dimensions. The dimensions are Communication Apprehension, Test Apprehension, and Fear of Negative Evaluation. The

anxiety levels were based on the mean, where Baharuddin's (2009) three levels of anxiety scores categorised as high anxiety level – HLA at a mean of 3.67-5.00, moderate language anxiety – MLA at 2.34-3.66 and a mean score of 1.00-2.33 indicated low language anxiety (LLA) were applied. Table 1. shows the mean level of English language anxiety.

Two open-ended questions were added to the questionnaire to gauge students' opinions on reasons for not being willing to communicate in class.

Table 1: Baharuddin (2009): Students' Mean Level of English Language Anxiety

High Anxiety Level (HAL)	Moderate Language Anxiety (MLA)	Low Language Anxiety (LLA)
3.67 - 5	2.34 – 3.66	1.00-2.33

Findings

The data collected from the questionnaire were analysed and presented in the form of descriptive statistics using mean and percentages.

Table 2: Students' Level of English Language Anxiety

Communication Apprehension	Test Anxiety	Fear of Negative Evaluation
2.7	2	2.3

As shown in Table 2, the result indicated that students experience communication apprehension, at the mean of 2.7 (MLA). Communication apprehension is defined as feeling unsure, panicked, nervous, upset, self-conscious, confused, and overwhelmed. Hence, students tend to defer from voluntarily speaking in class.

The fear of negative feedback came second at 2.3 (MLA) where students were deterred from speaking voluntarily because they assumed that others are better than them. Test anxiety ranked the lowest at mean 2 (LLA), which indicated that students were less nervous and anxious and did not tend to forget what they knew when they were well prepared. Selected questions in the questionnaire to further analyse the anxiety levels.

Table 3: Students' Level of English Language Anxiety on Selected Questions in FLCAS Questionnaire in Percentages and Mean

Question No.	Item	Strongly Disagree – Disagree n = 23	Neither Agree nor Disagree n = 23	Agree – Strongly Agree n = 23	Mean
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my online English language class.	5 (5.7%)	11 (47.8%)	7 (30.4%)	3.2
3	I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in English class.	2 (8.6%)	11 (47.8%)	10 (42.8%)	3.4
4	It frightens me when I do not understand what the	5 (21.7%)	7 (30.4%)	11 (47.8%)	3.3

	teacher is saying in English.				
6	During English class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	13 (56.5%)	5 (21.7%)	5 (21.7%)	2.5
9	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English class.	0 (0%)	6 (26.1%)	17 (73.9%)	4.2
8	I am usually at ease during my English assessments - Interviews and Meeting	1 (4.3%)	13 (56.5%)	9 (39.1%)	3.5
12	In English class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	5 (21.7%)	6 (26.1%)	12 (52.2%)	3.5
13	It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my English class.	9 (39.1%)	8 (34.8%)	6 (26.1%)	2.7
16	Even if I am well prepared for English class, I feel anxious about it.	4 (17.4%)	5 (21.7%)	14 (60.9%)	3.6
17	I often feel like not going to my English class.	16 (69.5%)	4 (17.4%)	3 (13%)	2
19	I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make.	13 (56.5%)	5 (21.7%)	5 (21.7%)	2.3
20	I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English class.	3 (13%)	6 (26.1%)	14 (60.8%)	3.6
Question No.	Item	Strongly Disagree – Disagree n = 23	Neither Agree nor Disagree n = 23	Agree – Strongly Agree n =23	Mean
23	I always feel that the other students speak English better than I do.	2 (8.6%)	2 (8.6%)	19 (82.6%)	4.1
24	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students during our online group work	2 (8.6%)	7 (30.4%)	14 (60.9%)	3.6

The researchers elaborated on selected questions in the FLCAS questionnaire to focus on the answers given by students. For question 1, with a mean of 3.2, students indicated that their anxiety level was moderate with a majority saying they neither agree nor disagree with the statement and not feeling sure of themselves when speaking in their online English class. Relatively, they were afraid to be called on in their English with 42.8% Agree – Strongly Agree saying they trembled when being called on in class. Most agreed that not comprehending the teacher in class was frightening with 47.8% Agree – Strongly Agree with the statement. It was a consolation to know that 56.5% paid attention in class when they Strongly Disagree – Disagree with the statement they found themselves thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course during English class.

Students showed a high level of anxiety at a mean of 4.2 (73.9%) Agree-Strongly Agree, they dreaded impromptu speaking. However, students score a mean of 3.5 MLA, where they were somewhat composed during English interviews and meeting assessments. Perhaps it was attributed to the two-week preparation time given to students before the evaluations were conducted. They were also at an MLA mean of 3.5 of forgetting things they knew when they got nervous.

Students were also at a mean of 2.7 MLA when volunteering to answer in their English class with only 26.1% Strongly Agree-Agree that they felt embarrassed to voluntarily answer in class. This result indicates that a majority were not afraid to voluntarily answer questions in class. However, in reality, during online English class sessions, the researcher had to call on students to answer questions. This could be attributed to the next statement where 60.9% strongly agree-agree that even when they were well prepared for English class, they felt anxious about it.

A majority of 69.5% agreed that attending English class was at an LLA mean of 2, suggesting that anxiety did not deter them from attending English class and implying that they enjoy attending classes. Students also had an MLA mean of 2.3 with teachers correcting their mistakes where 56.5% mentioned that they were not afraid of being corrected by the teacher. Nevertheless, an MLA mean of 3.6 with 60.8% Strongly Agree-Agree that their heart pounded when they knew they were going to be called on in class. This infers being anxious to be called on yet at the same time being willing to be corrected in class.

The impression that others were more proficient resulted in a HAL mean of 4.1 with 82.6% of Agree-Strongly Agree students deduced that their peers were more proficient than them. It can be construed to be the main reason students were unwilling to communicate. This is followed by an MLA mean of 3.6 where 14 out of 23 students asserted being self-conscious about using English in front of other students during group discussions.

The researchers added an open-ended question in the questionnaire to see if students felt better typing in the chat box or speak on their microphones, 20 out of 23 (87%) students indicated typing in the online class chat box was more appealing than switching on their microphones to speak.

In the selected interview, when asked what was the main challenge of communicating with their international classmates, students both local and international, stated that the accent and pronunciation as the main reasons that deter communication. The group of mixed nationalities

was slow in finishing their tasks. The local students informed the instructor that their international peers did not cooperate and were reluctant to do video call discussions on the assigned tasks. The instructor had to step in and gave more time, flexibility, and encouragement to the group members to finish their oral communication tasks. Below are the comments made by both Malaysian and China students on why they were hesitant to communicate with their group members.

Table 4. Malaysian and China Students Reasons On Why They Were Hesitant To Communicate With Their Peers

They have different accent
Different accent
The English that they used mix with their own local language. It's kind of hard to understand their pronunciation clearly.
...because sometimes I don't really understand their pronunciation
No because maybe half of (the conversation) they do not understand
sometimes i dont get what they are saying because i feel confused of their pronunciation. It doesn't mean that they don't know how to speak in english it just the pronunciation that i don't get it.
I don't think it's easy because I don't understand Malay, but I can try to listen. I don't understand some words.

Discussion

The findings indicated that students were at a moderate anxiety level where only 26.1% strongly agreed that they were embarrassed to volunteer to speak in class, this should prompt more voluntary responses from the students. However, in actual fact, students were reluctant to voluntarily switch on their microphones and speak in class. It is disconcerted to find that they were not embarrassed to speak but still refuse to voluntarily respond. This was observed the whole 14 weeks of the course when very few students would voluntarily speak in class. The instructor would then call out names randomly to induce responses. A possible deterrent to voluntarily communicating in class was English proficiency level where 82.6% of the participants conjectured that their peers were better than them. Another possible deterrent could be the lack of peers' interaction due to online class. In a study on Malaysian students' behaviour, Jahedi and Lilliat (2020) found that students' relationship with their peers affect their willingness to response in class; good relationships among students promote WTC in class.

It was also noted that students did have the answers to questions asked but did not voluntarily respond. They would rather type their answers in the chat box during online sessions. For other course inquiries, they would favour personally messaging the instructor for clarifications or inquiries. This concurred with the 87% of students who would prefer to text the instructor instead of voicing their questions in class. Further research is needed to determine the reasons for students' unwillingness to voluntarily communicate in class although the instructor noticed

that they were proficient in using English. It is also advisable for instructors to be prudent and wary when grouping or placing students of different nationalities. They may require more attention.

In drawing inferences from these findings, it is hoped that further studies could be conducted to ascertain the reasons for students' willingness to communicate in the local context. It is hoped that this paper elucidated the frustrations of instructors with students' unwillingness to respond and is used as a guide for instructors to provide curated learning. As mentioned by Leong and Ahmadi 2016, it is the educators' responsibility to ensure students are immersed in their learning.

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