Research Paper   Open Access

SPEAK UP OR SHUT UP: A CASE STUDY ON LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH AMONG PUBLIC SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT: The Philippines, a predominantly English-speaking nation among non-native speakers due to English being integrated into the educational system, faces challenges where Filipinos encounter difficulties expressing themselves in English classroom settings. This study aimed to explore ways in which language teachers can support students in overcoming anxiety and fear related to expressing themselves in English during daily conversations. Through a qualitative research using the case study phenomenological approach, this study was conducted with five SHS learners from Dr. Panfilo Castro National High School. The responses, when analyzed, coded, and themed, revealed psychological aspects, social dynamism, and language acquisition as key factors influencing language anxiety. Addressing these factors can help educators improve English language instruction effectiveness and aid learners in developing robust speaking skills.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is one of the countries in Asia known to be the largest English-speaking nation when published by a British council a few years ago. The country uses the English language as an international language for communication and because the majority of the population of the country has a degree of fluency. However, not all people from other countries know that English learners from the Philippines are also facing difficulties in speaking the language despite English is considered as the second language to Filipinos.

In the country, English is constitutionally named as Philippine's official languages, and it continues to be an integral part of culture and local life, it is therefore necessary to keep learners have the confidence if not total fluency in expressing themselves in English, be it in the classroom or outside settings. Thus, development of student's speaking English is necessary.

The present research is a descriptive case study analysis of five HUMMS students at Dr. Panfilo National High School who have been struggling to speak or express themselves in English for years whether it is in the academic or conversational setting. Due to this problem, most of them use their mother tongue to express their ideas even in an English class. Despite the encouragement of the teacher, they still have this feeling of anxiety to use the English language in formal and informal communication (conversational English).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. English as a Second Language

In the article written by Dela Cruz (2022), English is classified as a secondary language (Kirkpatrick & Deterding, 2011), primarily used for official partaking in administration, business, law, media, education and even in entertainment. It is also recognized as one of the two languages of the country, the other of which is Filipino. English was considered the second language since Philippines corresponds to the Outer Circle classification of Kachru's Circles of English Model (Schneider, 2011). Most countries in the Outer Circle like Philippines, were former American colonies that through time, institutionalized their use of the English language. Patronizing Americanized concepts and preferences is widely accepted that is why English language can't be left out of the discourse on the national language, language planning, and language policies in the Philippine context. It impacts not only education but also extends greatly into the conversation on nationalism, ethnolinguistic identity, and, at the socioeconomic level, our incessant focus on and pursuit for globalization.

2. Communication Apprehension

Communication apprehension has been identified as a major factor which prevents an individual's willingness to communicate his/her ability to develop effective communication skills (Amiri & Puteh,2018). This research conducted by the aforementioned authors focused on the communication apprehension of doctoral students from seven Malaysian universities. Findings revealed that four significant factors emerged from the rich data and were categorized into; linguistic issues, deficiency in knowledge of research during presentations, students' negative perceptions towards the presentation panels and other factors. These only shows that despite being highly educated, students, still experience communication apprehension specially during their presentation where panel of evaluators openly questions them and evaluate them. Moreover, student's perceptions on the complexity of English language, lack of vocabulary list and examiner's pronunciation and accent were also the issues of concerns of the doctoral student's that inhibits them to communicate confidently.

3. Fear of Negative Evaluation

Fear of negative evaluation is defined is "apprehension about others' evaluations, avoidance of evaluative situations, and. the expectations that others would evaluate oneself negatively" (Watson & Friend 1969: 449).

Tzoannopoulou (n.d.), investigated the sources provoking language anxiety and fear of negative evaluation in a group of Greek university students. In her study, language performance was taken into consideration, analyzed and included in the data for statistical treatment. Based on the findings of the study, the main stressors of fear of negative evaluation include communication apprehension felt toward teachers, peers and native speakers, fear of tests and of speaking in class and also teachers' questions and corrections. The study also used the FLCAS or Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Test to find out the level of anxiety experienced by the students in the English classroom. Results also revealed that the learners with higher levels of FL anxiety also tended to experience higher levels of fear of negative evaluation. Moreover, the sources of fear of negative evaluation include negative judgments by others, disapproval by others, making mistakes, and leaving unfavorable impressions on others.

4. Anxiety of English Classes

When nervousness or fear occurs in a language-learning context, it is termed language anxiety. Psychologists used the term "anxiety reaction" to separate people who are usually fearful in general circumstances from those who become nervous only in language-specific situations (Horwitz et al., 1986). Hakim (2019), studied the anxiety among English learners in Saudi Arabia. Using a qualitative, semi-structure interview and the focus group discussion technique, the researcher aimed to investigate the factors that contribute to the language anxiety experienced by Arab language learners. It focused on learners both within the classroom setting and without like in the social context and recommended a number of approaches to manage and overcome to manage this problem.

Based on the findings of the study, English learners have extreme language anxiety and confirmed its negative effect on the process of learning particularly in peaking the second language. And in order to become a successful foreign language speaker, students need to overcome this problem. Moreover, language anxiety is closely associated with how learners perceive the language learning process, their self-consciousness about the language and how they should be acting in any communicative setting, and also the linguistic complications they have to deal with in their interactions in English.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study is qualitative research in nature using the case study phenomenological approach to identify the major challenges or difficulties of the students in using the English language, particularly in conversational English. A case study is a qualitative design in which the researcher explores an in-depth program, event, activity, or process on one or more individuals. The case (s) are bound by time activity, and the researcher collects detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period (journals.sagepub.com,2020).

Research Instrument

To find out the challenges faced by HUMMS students in Grade Eleven, the researcher used an interview method with five struggling students based on the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) survey using the semi-structured interview. are the most commonly used qualitative data gathering techniques and are used with grounded theory, focus groups, and case studies (deakin.libguides.com, 2024).

Interviews are purposive conversations between the researcher and the interviewee, either alone or as part of a group. It can be face-to-face, via telecommunications (Skype, Facetime, or phone), or via email

(internet or email interview). The length of an interview varies. They may be anywhere from thirty minutes to several hours in length, depending on the research approach. There are three types of interviews generally used in qualitative research; structured, semi-structured, and unstructured. In this study, the researcher used semi-structured interviews which require the interviewer to have a list of questions and topics pre-prepared, which can be asked in different ways with different interviewee/s. Semi-structured interviews increase the flexibility and responsiveness of the interview while keeping the interview on track, increasing the reliability and credibility of the data. The semi-structured interview is one of the most common interview techniques (deakin.libguides.com, 2024).

The semi-structured interview included the following:

1. What are the main English classroom anxiety problems of the students that stop them from expressing themselves in English, especially during conversation and/or classroom discussion?

2. How high or low does the English anxiety of the respondents inhibit them from using English as their medium in conversation?

3. How English language teachers can help the students to develop confidence in using English as their conversational medium?

Procedures

Before the conduct of the study, the researcher selected first the participants who would be the respondents of the study using a purposive sampling. This selection process was based on the FLCAS test where the students were identified as struggling participants due to language anxiety which is difficult for them to communicate in the English language. After the selection process, it was followed by the construction of the semi-structured questionnaire used during the one-on-one interview. The majority of the questions are open-ended questions and exploratory in nature to get the best responses from the participants.

The interview method was done like a conversational or casual talk to the student to avoid pressure, nervousness and anxiety. The researcher made them relaxed by starting with casual questions related to the study. During the interview, follow-up question was also raised to complete the process of identifying the difficulties of the participants in using English to express themselves. This is to avoid biases and prejudices.

All the responses of the five participants were clustered and thematized accordingly. This is to analyze and find out the common difficulties of the students in conversational English. Moreover, to determine what possible suggestions, activities that will make the students participate in the English conversation with confidence and spontaneity.

Coding and Theme Development

Coding is a method used to categorize and index the data. Initially, researchers might use open coding, assigning codes to data chunks that represent different concepts or themes as they emerge. This evolves into axial and selective coding, where connections between codes are made, and broader categories or themes are developed. In terms of theme development, from the codes, researchers develop themes that capture recurring patterns or important insights about the data. This thematic framework helps in understanding the deeper narratives and processes at play within the case.

After the interview process done by the researcher, it was transcribed coded and themed. Four key themes emerged from the responses of the participants namely; 1) "It's all in the mind" (Psychological Aspect); 2) "Everything Around" (Social Dynamism); 3) "Where It All Began" (Language Acquisition); and 4) If and Only If (Language Barriers in Education). All these themes were based on the specific responses of the five participants who found to have high level of English anxiety in an ESL class.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is one tool on which qualitative researchers use to ensure accuracy in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, after the coding of themes and interpretation of data, validation and reliability process were undertaken through collaboration of other two language teachers to ensure the confirmability of the same observation they have with the respondents. Through the interview process which the researcher administered with two language teachers, same observation and manifestations of language anxiety among learners were driven and attested.

Collaboration with other language teachers is essential for confirmability and credibility. As the researcher worked closely with two other language teachers to review the data, codes, and themes, they were able to provide valuable insights and confirm the accuracy of the findings based on their own experiences and expertise.

Through collaborative discussions, this study was able to build a consensus on the interpretation of the data. This collaborative approach can help the researcher validate the findings and ensure that they are not the result of individual biases.

IV.   RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Following Table Presents The Themed Responses Of The Participants Based On The Interview Conducted. This Describes The Responses Of Each Participant And Reveals The Reasons Behind The Challenges And/Or Difficulties Faced By The Students In Academic And Conversational English.

Table 1. Main Themes of Language Anxiety in Conversational English Among Public SHS Learners

Key Themes	Code	Description	Common Responses
It's All in the Mind (Psychological Aspect)	• **Nervousness and Fear.** *These are prevalent psychological responses among learners when faced with the prospect of speaking English.* ● **Negative Self-Perception.** *Many learners harbor a negative self-perception regarding their English-speaking abilities. This perception is often rooted in past experiences of failure or ridicule, leading to a persistent belief that they are inadequate English speakers.* ● **Self-doubt.** *This is closely linked to negative self-perception but focuses more on the internal questioning of one's capabilities.*	This refers to the mental and emotional factors that influence language learning and communication. It includes aspects such as ***anxiety, self-confidence, motivation, and emotional responses*** to language learning situations. Understanding the psychological aspect is crucial for addressing learners' emotional needs and creating a supportive learning environment.	Participant No. 1 (Question 4): *"I'm just really nervous when the teacher has expectations of me…"* - Participant No. 3 (Question 4): *"I'm not sure if it's a sign of anxiety, but during those times, my hands would shake…"* - Participant No. 5 (Question 4): *"First of all, it's about self-confidence, which I lack."* - Participant No. 5 (Follow-up Question B): *"7, because there are times when nervousness takes over, and I can't deliver what I want to say properly."* - Participant No. 2 (Question 2): *"I feel sad, sir, when I can't answer, and my thoughts are like, what's going to happen here, will I still improve in English?"* - Participant No. 5 (Question 2): *"It feels like I can't handle it, it's difficult, really difficult because I'm not used to speaking English or delivering lengthy English directly…"*
Everything Around (Social Dynamism)	● **Social Pressure.** *The expectation to perform well in front of peers, teachers, and sometimes even parents creates a high-stress environment.* ● **Social Influences.** *The influence of peers and teachers plays a critical role in shaping language anxiety.*	This aspect pertains to the social interactions and dynamics that shape language learning experiences. It encompasses ***peer interactions, cultural influences, group dynamics, and social contexts*** in which language learning takes place. Recognizing the importance of social interaction in language acquisition helps	- Participant No. 5 (Question 6): *"Inside the classroom, when you really, when you're listening, even if you're struggling, even if you really don't understand, you can ask your seatmate..."* -Participant No. 3 (Question No. 2) *"Well, you know, for example, I'm a Bicolana with a bit of a Bisaya accent. I have some words that I tend to stress*

	Positive reinforcement from peers and supportive teachers can alleviate anxiety, whereas negative comments and a competitive classroom environment can intensify it. ● **Cultural Factors.** *The societal attitudes towards English and the value placed on proficiency, also impact language anxiety. Additionally, cultural norms regarding speaking out and making mistakes in public can either mitigate or exacerbate anxiety.*	educators design collaborative activities and foster a sense of community in the language classroom.	*incorrectly, like emphasizing the soft 'e' over the hard 'i', or the soft 'o' over the hard 'u'."* - Participant No. 4 (Question 6): *"Well, you know, keep trying because someday you'll realize your mistakes when speaking English..."* - Participant No. 3 (Question 6): *"Here at school, we need to improve our conversation skills with others, using English or even not totally in English, just so you can keep up with others..."* - Participant No. 2 (Question 6): *"So, I can learn faster and deliver speeches like them. It's like I can develop what they're doing."*
Where It All Began (Language Acquisition)	● **Language Exposure.** *The level and quality of exposure to English significantly affect learners' anxiety levels. Those with more exposure to English through media, conversation, and reading often feel more comfortable and less anxious.* ● **Diversed Mother-Tongue.** *The differences in phonetics, grammar, and syntax can make the acquisition process more daunting and increase anxiety during English conversations.*	Language acquisition refers to the process through which individuals acquire a new language. It involves ***understanding how learners acquire linguistic knowledge, develop language skills, and internalize language rules and structures.*** Studying language acquisition helps educators identify effective teaching methods and design language learning materials that facilitate the learning process.	- Participant No. 2 (Question 1): *"Sir, sometimes when, let's say, we're always speaking English, in English class, I get nervous when we're discussing and I don't understand."* - Participant No. 3 (Question 1): *"Well, in English class, it's more about memorization. I struggle with memorizing English words because I have difficulty with their pronunciation."* - Participant No. 4 (Question 1): *"In English, sir, you can't really rely on me because I'm really weak in English, especially when Ma'am Amy has to answer something orally, she's just impromptu."* - Participant No. 5 (Question 1): *"When it comes to English, I'm not really that good at it. I can't speak English*

			directly because even though I think about what I'm going to say, I can't say it because I'm overwhelmed by nervousness, fear, and trembling."
			- Participant No. 2 (Follow-up Question A): *"Well, sir, it's kind of okay, still struggling, especially with activities."*
			- Participant No. 3 (Follow-up Question A): *"It's like feeling nervous and sweating profusely, like a wet chick on the side of the road."*
			- Participant No. 4 (Follow-up Question A): *"Right now, it's okay because there are people guiding me, helping me, and teaching me to improve in English."*
			- Participant No. 5 (Follow-up Question A): *"Sometimes I know the answer, but I still can't respond."*
			- Participant No. 1 (Question 5): *"None, I just think that I'm good, I can probably do it."*
			- Participant No. 2 (Question 5): *"Sir, I ask for help from my friends, like, 'Hey, boost my confidence,' or 'What's the English term for this?'"*
			- Participant No. 3 (Question 5): *"When I know there will be an oral recitation, beforehand, I pray, read through possible questions, prepare answers..."*
			- Participant No. 5 (Question 5): *"Sometimes I read stories on my cellphone, AU (alternative universe) stories, sometimes on Wattpad..."*
If and Only If (Language Barriers in Education)	● **Fear of Grammatical Errors.** *Learners often feel that any grammatical mistake will lead*	This aspect focuses on the challenges and obstacles that learners face in acquiring a new language within an educational context. It	- Participant No. 1 (Question 2): *"Well, when it's impromptu, I don't want to think that the ones good at English would think, 'Oh, I*

to embarrassment or negative judgment, which inhibits their willingness to speak. This fear is often reinforced by a focus on accuracy over fluency in language instruction.

- **Impromptu Challenges.** *The lack of preparation time can heighten learners' fear and self-doubt, leading to a freeze response or avoidance behavior. These situations often leave lasting impressions, reinforcing the cycle of anxiety and fear associated with speaking English.*

includes barriers such as **limited access to language resources, language anxiety, cultural differences, and linguistic diversity in the classroom.** Addressing language barriers requires implementing inclusive teaching strategies, providing language support services, and promoting cultural understanding among students.

thought they were good, turns out they're not.'"
- Participant No. 2 (Question 2):
"That's when my words get chopped up because of nervousness, my hands get cold, they become restless, fidgeting with my clothes because my hands are sweaty from nervousness."
- Participant No. 4 (Question 2):
"It seems like you struggle a lot with English, especially during impromptu situations and oral recitations."
- Participant No. 1 (Question 3):
"In English, it's just, well, nothing much, maybe just at home when I joke with my sibling."
- Participant No. 2 (Question 3):
"In games, sir, like Monopoly. Mobile games, sir. Also, when I talk to foreigners."
- Participant No. 3 (Question 3):
"Well, I write poems."

Language anxiety among Filipino students when speaking English can be attributed to several factors, rooted in educational settings, cultural dynamics, and individual psychological aspects. Based on the results of the interview, and responses of the participants, the following themes arose. These are; It's all in the mind" or psychological aspect; "Everything around" or social dynamism; and "Where it all began "or language acquisition.

A. It's all in the Mind (Psychological Aspect)

This refers to the mental and emotional factors that influence language learning and communication. It includes anxiety, self-confidence, motivation and emotional responses to language learning situations. This can be seen on the responses of the participants

They experience nervousness when asked to speak English, often manifesting as cold, shaking hands, and other indescribable sensations. This only means that anxiety attacks them when asked to speak English. Hakim (2019), confirmed in his study that language anxiety has negative effect on the process of learning English and/or speaking the second language. Moreover, language anxiety is closely associated with how learners perceive the language learning process, their self-consciousness about the language and how they should be acting in any communicative setting, and also the linguistic complications they have to deal with in their interactions in English.

B. Everything Around (Social Dynamism)

This aspect pertains to the social interactions and dynamics that shape the language learning experiences. It encompasses peer interactions, cultural influences, group dynamics and social contexts in which language learning takes place. Recognizing the importance of social interaction in language acquisition help educators design collaborative activities and foster sense of community in the language classroom.

In this aspect, it could be seen from the responses of the participants that they can seek the help of peers or classmates specially when they struggle to come up with an idea to be expressed in the target language. Moreover, cultural influences have become also the problem of the participants since not all of them are from the Tagalog region whose accent and ways of pronouncing the words is quite similar to that of native speaker. It could also be seen that the only place that they are motivated to speak English is during English class which sometimes they failed to do so due to anxiety and other factors that hinder them to express themselves in English.

C. Where it all Began (Language Acquisition)

Language acquisition refers to the process through which individuals acquire a new language. It involves understanding how learners acquire linguistic knowledge, develop language skills, and internalize language rules and structure. Studying language acquisition helps educators identify effective teaching methods and design language learning materials that facilitate the learning process. Based on the results of the responses of the participants, what causes language anxiety reveals that nervousness, fear of negative feedback or evaluation, lack of confidence and communication apprehension which can be found in the FLCAS theoretical framework where this study was anchored.

Thus, language anxiety can significantly affect English language acquisition among ESL (English as a Second Language) students due to several reasons. Rafek (2013), explained that around the world, language learning comes with difficulties and disabilities due to some traumatic experience, feeling stressed, anxious and worries specially in communication. It is very evident that language acquisition is often influenced by apprehension, fear of negative feedback or evaluation, as well as lack of self-confidence. With a few responses on the methods of teaching.

D. If and Only If (Language Barriers in Education)

This aspect focuses on challenges and obstacles that learners face in acquiring a new language within educational context. It includes barriers such as limited access to language resources, language anxiety, cultural differences, and linguistic diversity in the classroom. Addressing language barriers requires implementing inclusive teaching strategies, providing language support services, and promoting cultural understanding among students. It could be seen from the responses of the participants, majority's challenges fall under nervousness or language anxiety, limited access to language resources. This indicates that the primary issues of the students in speaking English is language anxiety. Hakim (2019), emphasized that extreme language anxiety has negative effect on the process of learning the second language. Language anxiety is closely associated with how learners perceive the language learning process and most of them have these negative thoughts about it, thus, it affects their cognitive and emotional aspects of speaking the English language.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results presented, the participants of this case study found to have higher language anxiety which lead them to struggle in using the English language whether in conversational English or in the classroom setting. Though other factors were mentioned and presented such as less exposure to the language, and low self-confidence, still anxiety in the use of the target language comes first.

This only means that teachers may consider identifying all the anxieties felt by the students and all the negative experiences in the English class so they can think of the possible engaging activities that will let the student speak without any hesitations or fear of being evaluated. This may include, bull sessions where students are given time to speak in the class of any topics without correcting their grammar or pronunciation, just for speaking alone. It could be also in a form of pairs where information could be given by the partner to other partner, picture describing, narrating picture and other engaging activities where they are given only the chance to speak without correcting right away purely just for speaking exposure (Hariye Kayi, 2022). In this way, students may develop the confidence to speak and later on correct the expressions where they will accept it with positive attitudes. These activities were also mentioned by the students during interviews that they lack exposure in English speaking that made them struggle in the use of the language, thus these activities are hereby suggested.

In conclusion, by understanding and addressing language anxiety, educators can significantly improve the effectiveness of English language instruction and help learners develop robust speaking skills. For English teachers and future researchers, these recommendations may be given considerations to develop the students speaking ability/skills using the English language.

1. Encourage a positive classroom climate where mistakes are viewed as natural steps in the learning process. Teachers can foster this by regularly acknowledging that errors are expected and helpful for learning.
2. Start with low-stakes speaking activities in a controlled environment, gradually increasing the complexity and public nature of tasks as students build confidence. Use pair work and small groups

before moving to whole-class activities to help students feel more comfortable speaking up.

3. Provide skill-building exercises through regular practice session and pronunciation. Being confident in how words sound can reduce anxiety about speaking them aloud.

4. Conduct similar study that will develop the speaking skills of the students using the English language and find other factors that contribute to language anxiety of the students

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