

Strategies to Overcome Speaking Anxiety among Saudi EFL Learners

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Abstract

This action research aims to explore the dominant causes of speaking anxiety among Saudi EFL learners, and to suggest effective strategies that can both help conquer learners' fear of communication and boost their confidence level. Saudi students suffer from a substantial level of communication apprehension. The findings of this study will be to the benefit of Saudi EFL learners as they can enhance learners' oral communication skills which are impacted negatively by learners' speaking anxiety. A total of 38 non-English majors, 5 EFL teachers from King Khalid University and 5 EFL schoolteachers participated in this study. Survey questionnaires, discussions and semi-structured interviews were the main research tools for collecting data. The results indicate that learners' communication apprehension stems from: insufficient exposure to English; poor vocabulary; test anxiety and concern over negative evaluation; a lack of awareness of recent trends of EFL teaching; and the absence of well equipped, modern EFL classrooms with less density. The major remedial measures include developing speaking competence by enhancing learners' oral proficiency, employing modern EFL teaching strategies by enthusiastic teachers; establishing well equipped modern EFL classrooms with lower classroom density, and introducing English from the beginning of primary school level and moderating evaluation policy.

Keywords: Saudi EFL learners, speaking anxiety, teaching strategies, task based learning.

Introduction

When the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is heading to prove itself to be an exemplary leading nation in all aspects, the greater demand creating potential, competent graduates possessing excellent communication skills cannot be denied. It has become a pressing need to chalk out effective mechanisms which qualify the Saudi EFL learners to communicate fluently without reluctance. Unfortunately, up to the present time, English is still considered as a second language and has minimal use in everyday life. In defiance of initiating diverse measures by the Ministry of Education to advance the practice of teaching and learning English, the Saudi EFL learners

still lack the moderate level of language proficiency. In the classroom, maximum students suffer from communication anxiety. Inadequacy of each required language skills prevents the learners from communicating in written and oral form (Al-Khasawneh, 2010). Thus, they are more inclined to refrain themselves from classroom discussions. They remain reluctant to participate even in basic classroom conversations and demonstrate extreme anxiousness when they are asked to communicate in foreign language. Gregersen et al. 2014 suggests, “Language learning is an emotionally and psychologically dynamic process that is influenced by a myriad of ever-changing variables and emotional “vibes” that produce moment-by-moment fluctuations in learners' adaptation.” Zheng & Cheng, 2018 identify foreign language classroom anxiety as a type of anxiety that's typically aroused by a particular sort of scenario.

In fact, anxiety is one of the major barriers of second language communicative competence and researchers have made various studies in removing this disastrous impact on language learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012; Huang, 2012; Hewitt & Stefenson, 2011; Riasati, 2011; Horwitz, 2001; Young, 1999; Oxford, 1999; Aida, 1994; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986). For a long time, EFL/ESL teaching in Saudi Arabia largely concentrated on traditional methods which include grammar translation, audio-lingual and the like and the progress cannot be termed praiseworthy. The contemporary communicative method claims to be more effectual and can help the learners to shrug off their “Speaking Anxiety” if properly and skillfully utilized.

The study of Kocak (2010) explored that inadequate vocabulary, poor understanding of grammar and sentence structure, limited opportunity of practicing and communicating in front of others and fear of failure in particular resulted in creating anxiety among the learners. Zheng (2008) states, “Language learning experience could become a traumatic experience and may deeply disturb one’s self-esteem or self-confidence as a learner”. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), label speaking as the most affected skill of language anxiety. According to Mak (2011), foreign language learners experience fear, due to the fear of negative evaluation.

Furthermore, some researchers claim that the role of EFL/ESL teachers at times become the cause of learners speaking anxiety. The study of Williams and Andrade (2008) revealed that, teachers were responsible for the anxiety provoking situation. The study of Hamad (2013) in context of public speaking, criticized inappropriate curriculum design and lack of initiatives of the instructor as anxiety provoking factors. However, the prevalent influence of mother tongue plays a negative role on English performance in Saudi Arabia. The students are introduced to English in the final year of primary school level and they are provided with limited opportunity to practice English both inside and outside classrooms (Al-Nofaie, 2010). “A considerable percentage of class time is run in Arabic. Such a practice minimizes the time of exposure to English and thus the learning outcomes will not be adequately accomplished” (Fareh, 2010, p.

3602). The occasion to practice English is rare for the learners. Resultantly, the learners fail to construct correct sentences, suffers from mispronunciation, spelling errors and thus fail to communicate “comfortably and efficiently either when dealing with ‘academic topics’ or common everyday topics” (Mukattash, 1983, P.169).

Literature Review

What is Foreign Language Anxiety?

The study of Gardner & MacIntyre 1993 associates Language anxiety with the nervousness arising in the learners when they are required to communicate or accomplish any task using second language. MacIntyre 1999 labels it as “negative emotional reaction” while learning second language. It affects an individual’s level of achievement in foreign language learning (Dordinejad and Ahmadabad, 2014). The study of Huberty, 2009 reveals a negative correlation between a learner’s performance and his/her level of anxiety. Although anxiety has remained a crucial barrier to foreign language learning, it is necessary for the learners to overcome it (Wu, 2010).

Experimental Researches on the Causes of Language Anxiety

Researchers have conducted several studies on Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety (FLSA) based on foreign language anxiety conceptualized by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986). Horwitz et al. (1986) explained foreign language anxiety as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process”. Littlewood (2004) highlights the barriers of classroom participation as “tiredness, shyness, fear of being wrong, insufficient interest or knowledge in the subject and insufficient time to formulate their ideas”. The study of Debreli and Demirkan (2016) suggests that, the problems of pronunciations, immediate questions asked by teachers and the failure of understanding questions result in expanding the level of anxiety.

Ohata (2005) and Ay (2010) state the effect of “unpreparedness” on students’ speaking anxiety. According to Choi (2016), the teachers’ behavior and attitude plays a vital role to decrease the anxiety of the students. Therefore, it is a pressing need that L2 learners are provided with friendly environment to get rid of the feeling of awkwardness and agitation. EFL teachers should consider it as a religious duty to encourage the learners to communicate in second language by creating favorable atmosphere. Harmer (2007) supports that, students’ motivation is "far more likely to remain healthy if they are doing things they enjoy doing" (p. 102). Brown (2007) suggests generating congenial classroom surroundings that can persuade the learners to learn with enthusiasm. Current studies on language teaching strategies emphasize on designing and preparing several possibilities for the learners to engage in speaking (Ellis,2008). The nervousness of EFL learners’ stems from “learners’ unrealistic or erroneous beliefs about language learning” (Zhang & Zhong, 2012).

The study of Nahavandi & Mukundan (2013), to identify the level of Iranian EFL learners' anxiety on second language acquisition, identifies "communication anxiety" as the prime element of agitation among the English language majors. Hashemi and Abbasi (2013) emphasize on friendly and informal classroom environment and suggest "formal language classroom setting is a major source of stress and anxiety because of its demand to be more correct and clearer in using the target language". During test, learners fail to answer properly due to anxiety (Conway, 2007). Self-consciousness negatively impacts the learners as they fear of losing their face in front of classmates (Jones, 2004).

Studies on Language Anxiety in the Saudi EFL Context

Researches on language anxiety in the Saudi EFL context are negligible. Alsowat (2016) investigates the causes influencing the anxiety among Saudi EFL learners at Taif University. A revised version of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), Inventory of Foreign Language Anxiety Factor (IFLAF) and two questionnaires are distributed to 373 EFL learners. The results include panic of the consequences of failure, forgetting familiar things, feeling of discomfort during language tests.

The study of Alhamadi (2014) at Tibah University explores anxiety as a supreme component influencing language learning negatively. She suggests that educational system in Saudi Arabia for teaching second languages should be revised.

The research of Al-Saraj (2014) on FLA perspectives on ten female EFL learners of Saudi Arabia reveal that the nervousness of the learners is triggered by the teacher, poor teacher-learner relationship, ineffective teaching method, fear of negative evaluation, competitiveness, and the communicative approach.

The investigation of Alrabai (2015) to discover the root causes of communication apprehension, explore that "the anxiety associated with learning English as a foreign language in the Saudi context is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. "The Saudi EFL learners fail to continue their conversation due to insufficient vocabulary and their level of fluency declines (Rabab'ah, 2003). In addition, the teachers of the institutions embrace a bilingual method in order to meet the learners' queries. Al-Nofaie (2010) states that "the use of Arabic was an unavoidable phenomenon" (P.77) in the classroom. Students' reluctant and limited participation in classroom prevents them from practicing the target language.

In fact, minimal research has been conducted on Foreign Language Anxiety in the Saudi EFL context. Therefore, the current study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant factors of Saudi EFL learners' speaking anxiety?

2. What are the possible solutions to conquer the learners' fear of communication?

Methodology

Research Design

The researcher has employed a descriptive research to find out the answer to the defined questions. Descriptive research is described as a research method, which explains the actual situation as precisely as possible (Atmowardoyo, 2018)

Participants

The participants were 38 EFL learners, enrolled in Intensive English Program, 5 EFL teachers of King Khalid University, and 5 EFL schoolteachers. The learners were from different disciplines and all of them had received formal English education since they were in fifth grade. The average age of the learners was 18.7. On average the EFL teachers' experience on EFL teaching in Saudi Arabia was 9.2 years.

Task and Procedure

The course continued for fifteen weeks and the researcher observed the learners in three phases. During the first phase, on introductory week, each of the learners was asked to introduce themselves in front of the whole class using five sentences in English. They were informed that their responses would be graded. The task was designed to observe the learners' proficiency in speaking. On average, all the learners demonstrated extreme signs of anxiousness with exceptions of three or four. Subsequently, the learners were provided with FLCAS questionnaire to detect the "English Speaking Anxiety" existing among them.

The second phase involved two different tasks. For the first task, the instructor provided the learners with materials to imitate. The materials were three to five minutes video clips on situational English conversations. The learners were divided into groups and assigned with specific roles for performing the selected task. The instructor guided the students to imitate and rehearse.

For the second task, the learners were asked to make a four minutes oral presentation on "My favorite social media platform". First the learners talked about the topic for four minutes, later they recapitulated the same for three minutes and finally spoke for two minutes on the same topic.

On the third phase, both tasks performed on the second phase were repeated. After the tasks were completed, the instructor provided feedback along with obtained scores on the group performances of the students. Subsequently, students were provided with the second questionnaire.

Questionnaire for EFL teachers, was distributed among 5 EFL university teachers and 5 schoolteachers containing both close and open ended questions including a box for suggestion.

Instrument

Initially, the data required for this study is collected using (FLCAS) - Foreign language classroom anxiety scale. The purpose of this scale is to identify the level of anxiety of the learners inside the classroom. Various studies have applied this scale and it is considered as authentic. (Aida, 1994; Elkhaphiefi, 2005; Horwitz et al., 1986; Kitano, 2001; Moghaddam, 2015; Price, 1991; Sus, 2002; Şener, 2015; Wang, 2010; Zhao, 2007). The scale uses a five point Likert scale which includes: Strongly Agree - 5, Agree-4, neither Agree nor Disagree-3, Disagree-4 and Strongly Disagree-1. There are 33 items in this scale and among them 9 items (2, 5, 8, 11, 14, 18, 22, 28, and 32) are negatively worded; therefore, the points are reversed in these items. Higher score shows higher level of anxiety and lower score indicates lower anxiety. The anxiety score ranges from 33 to 165. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) of the data about the 33 items is 0.982, which shows a very high credibility.

After the completion of all the required tasks, the participants are provided with the second questionnaire, including two open-ended questions regarding their most-liked and least-liked part(s) of the tasks and their suggestions for further improvement concerning task design and implementation. The questionnaire is included suggestion box.

EFL teachers answered both close and open ended questions, including suggestions on removing "Speaking Anxiety". All the questionnaires are filled out anonymously.

Data Analysis

The questionnaires were distributed among the participants after the completion of the tasks. Questionnaires were verbally translated into Arabic for the better understanding of the students. The FLCAS questionnaire's data was entered in Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 24.0 to obtain mean and standard deviation for each item. To review the participants' responses of open-ended questions frequency counts were applied. Semi-structured interviews, discussions also worked as tools for collecting data. The FLCAS questionnaire implemented to evaluate the level of participants' anxiety was influenced by Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986).

Results and Findings

According to Horwitz et al. (1986), the internal consistency of FLCAS is 0.93 based on Cronbach's coefficient alpha. Initially, reliability coefficients were computed, which showed an internal consistency of 0.981 for sample of this study. The questionnaires were distributed among 38 students. All the questionnaires were returned. Many of the participants shared their

views verbally. The numbers in Table 1 specify the number of the students who have chosen each answer from “strongly agree” to strongly disagree” in questionnaire A. The mean FLCAS score of the participants of this study is 4.01 which reveal that the learners are fairly anxious. According to Horwitz (2008), “students with average around 3 should be considered slightly anxious, while students with average below 3 are probably not very anxious. Students, who average 4 and above, are probably fairly anxious”.

Table1. FLCAS items with numbers of students selecting each alternative.

Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking in my foreign language class.	17	13	2	2	4	3.97	1.305
*2. I don't worry about making mistakes in language class.	4	2	1	11	20	4.08	1.323
3. I tremble when I know that I'm going to be called on in language class.	11	8	4	6	9	3.16	1.586
4. It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language.	16	15	2	1	4	4	1.252
*5. It wouldn't bother me at all to take more foreign language classes.	0	0	1	1	36	4.92	0.359
6. During language class, I find myself thinking about things that have nothing to do with the course.	11	13	4	3	7	3.47	1.466
7. I keep thinking that the other students are better at languages than	19	7	6	2	4	3.87	1.359

I am.							
*8. I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.	5	2	1	6	24	4.11	1.448
9. I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.	33	2	0	1	2	4.66	1.021
10. I worry about the consequences of failing my foreign language class.	16	17	0	1	4	4.05	1.229
*11. I don't understand why some people get so upset over foreign language classes.	4	2	1	6	25	4.21	1.359
12. In language class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know.	24	8	1	3	2	4.29	1.183
13. It embarrasses me to volunteer answers in my language class.	23	10	0	3	2	4.29	1.16
*14. I would not be nervous speaking the foreign language with native speakers.	2	4	0	15	17	4.08	1.171
15. I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting.	28	5	0	2	3	4.39	1.242
16. Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.	33	5	0	0	0	4.87	0.343
17. I often feel like not going to my language class.	9	15	2	4	8	3.34	1.494
*18. I feel confident when I speak in foreign	5	1	1	7	24	4.16	1.405

language class.							
19. I am afraid that my language teacher is ready to correct every mistake I make	9	15	9	1	4	3.63	1.195
20. I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in language class	9	9	10	3	7	3.26	1.408
21. The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get.	8	9	4	4	13	2.87	1.614
*22. I don't feel pressure to prepare very well for language class.	7	5	4	5	17	3.53	1.606
23. I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do.	10	12	8	6	2	3.55	1.245
24. I feel very self-conscious about speaking the foreign language in front of other students.	28	4	0	2	4	4.32	1.358
25. Language class moves so quickly I worry about getting left behind.	28	5	1	1	3	4.42	1.2
26. I feel more tense and nervous in my language class than in my other classes.	25	4	1	3	5	4.08	1.496
27. I get nervous and confused when I am speaking in my language class.	24	6	2	2	4	4.16	1.366
*28. When I'm on my	5	1	6	8	18	3.87	1.398

way to language class, I feel very sure and relaxed.							
29. I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says.	20	7	6	1	4	4	1.336
30. I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language.	16	18	0	1	3	4.13	1.119
31. I am afraid that the other students will laugh at me when I speak the foreign language.	30	3	1	2	2	4.5	1.133
*32. I would probably feel comfortable around native speakers of the foreign language.	2	1	7	5	23	4.21	1.166
33. I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance.	16	14	2	3	3	3.97	1.241

Note: Reversed scored items are indicated by an asterisk ().*

The two open-ended questions of second questionnaire, asked the participants about their most-liked and least-liked part(s) of the tasks. The qualitative data provided rich accounts of the learners' viewpoints.

In the first open ended question, 89.47% of the students (N=34) suggested that, the informal classroom environment helped them to learn without stress. 81.57% of the students (N=31) supported friendly teacher-student relationship. 89.47% (N=34) learners regarded imitating as an important tool to remove their level of anxiety. Thirty four students (89.47%) favored rehearsing to gain confidence. 86.84% of the learners also held positive opinions on task repetition. Thirty three participants (86.84%), considered role play as their favorite part of the tasks. 73.68% of the learners (N=28), advocated that, oral presentation by creating real life situation supported them to build their confidence. 63.15% (N=24) learners expressed that

speaking without the concern of making grammatical errors supported them to develop fluency. Twenty students (52.63%) enjoyed collaborating with peers as it helped them to learn while having fun.

In the second open-ended question, 94.73% of the students (N=36) suggested that overcrowded classrooms are demotivating while learning and they fail to get teacher's proper attention on them. 76.31% (N=29) of the learners hoped to have properly equipped EFL classrooms in order to create real life situation while learning. Thirty one students (81.57%) explained that, failure to understand the suggestion of the instructor make them tensed. Twenty eight students (73.68%) explained that they suffered because of lacking in vocabulary while performing the required tasks. 65.78% of the students (N=25) hoped that the instructor should let them choose the topic by themselves for their tasks. They felt that their given topic was difficult as compared to others. 81.57% (N=31) suggested that the group members should be selected by the instructor. 84.21% of the participants (N= 32) felt that some members of their groups were reluctant to perform their assigned tasks. As a result of their careless manner, the performance of their groups deteriorated. Thirty five students (92.10%) blamed technical problems as one of the major hindrances to complete their tasks.

Table 2: Students' comments on their Most-liked part(s) of the task:

While preparing for our speaking-tasks, I enjoyed:	
Informal classroom environment (34)	<i>"I loved the friendly and informal atmosphere of our EFL class. I did not feel that I came to learn; Instead I felt, I came to have fun"</i>
Friendly teacher-student relationship (31)	<i>"Our teacher was not authoritative. She acted as our friend. She was not pointing out each of my mistakes. So, I was not afraid of making grammatical errors. I did not hesitate to ask even the silliest questions."</i>
Imitating (34)	<i>"I loved and enjoyed imitating. I think, I could speak better if I had started imitating the native speakers from the beginning when I started to learn English. It helped me to shrug off my fear."</i>
Rehearsing (34)	<i>"Rehearsing helped me to gain confidence. I liked rehearsing with my friends and teacher. It was full of fun. I didn't feel I was learning something."</i>
Repetition (33)	<i>"I liked repetition of tasks because it helped me to identify and solve my problems. It reduced my level of anxiety."</i>
Role play (33)	<i>"My favorite part of the tasks was role play. I with my friends thoroughly enjoyed this activity. While performing, I did not feel afraid even for a second. We laughed at our mistakes together and tried to fix. None of us felt ashamed. Even though I knew that I was</i>

	<i>going to be graded, I was not nervous.”</i>
Presentation by creating real life situation (28)	<i>“Creating real life situation while performing my task increased my interest and level of confidence to speak.</i>
Speaking without the concern of making grammatical errors (24)	<i>“As I was imitating, I was not concerned with grammar rules. Later, I was able to use the imitated sentence patters for more complex conversations.”</i>
Collaboration with peers (20)	<i>“It was wonderful to work with peers. We learnt from each other. We laughed together at our mistakes. We learnt while having fun.”</i>

Note: The numbers in parentheses reveal number of participants stated the issue

Table 3: Students’ comments on their Least-liked part(s) of the task:

While preparing for our speaking-tasks, I didn’t enjoy:	
Overcrowded classroom (36)	<i>“Our classroom was crowded with students. I feel my teacher could have allotted more time for me if there were fewer number of students.”</i>
Poorly equipped EFL classroom (29)	<i>“I think we need more materials in EFL classrooms in order to create a real life situation. It can help us to learn more about foreign language. We along with our teacher wasted a large amount of time collecting necessary materials to create real-life situation.”</i>
Failure to understand the suggestion of my teacher (31)	<i>“I sometimes fail to understand what my teacher is correcting and start feeling stressed.”</i>
Lacking in vocabulary (28)	<i>“Because of lacking in vocabulary, I fail to get my meaning across to my teacher.”</i>
Tight schedule (33)	<i>“We were always rushing to meet the deadlines of each task. We were working in groups. We might have done better if sufficient time was given to us.”</i>
Topic selection (25)	<i>“The selected topic for my group was not easy. I felt that the other groups had easier topics for role play.”</i>
Selection of group members (31)	<i>“I think that the group members should be selected by the teacher.”</i>
Reluctant attitude of group members (32)	<i>“Some of the members in my group were very reluctant to complete their assigned tasks. As a result, the performance of our group was not satisfactory.”</i>
Technical problems (35)	<i>“Limited connectivity of internet was wasting much of our allotted time.”</i>

Note: The numbers in parentheses reveal number of participants stated the issue.

Questionnaire for the EFL teachers was designed to obtain teachers' perspectives and suggestions on issues that are related with the learners L2 speaking anxiety. The percentages in Table 4, specify percentages of the instructors who have chosen each answer from "strongly agree" to "disagree". The first statement was about the introduction of English from the beginning of primary level. Among the teachers, 50% strongly agreed, 30 % agreed, 0% disagreed. In the second statement, 70% teachers strongly agreed on employing modern and effective teaching strategies; 30% agreed and none disagreed. The third statement was about creating real life situations in classroom to strengthen self –confidence and self-esteem of the learners. Among the instructors, 60% strongly agreed, 30% agreed 10% disagreed. The fourth statement suggested to build strong teacher –student relationship in order to tackle speaking anxiety of the learners. All the participants strongly agreed. The fifth statement demanded the establishment of well-equipped EFL classrooms with less density. 70% of the teachers strongly agreed, 30% agreed and none denied. The sixth statement asked for prohibiting students from using Arabic in English language classes. 50% of the participants strongly agreed, 30% agreed while 20% disagreed. The seventh statement demanded that assessment method should focus on evaluation instead of examination. Among the participants, 30% strongly agreed, 40% agreed while 30% disagreed. The last statement suggested providing maximum exposure to English from family, institution and society. 70% teachers strongly agreed, 30% agreed and none disagreed.

One of our colleagues from King Khalid University emphasized, *“English should be the only medium of communication and instruction between instructor and learner”*. Another colleague suggested, *“Use encouraging words and persuade them to speak by saying that making mistakes are usual and those can be fixed.”* Another colleague included, *“Instead of pointing out each mistake, we can repeat the same phrase or sentence correctly without mentioning. Moreover, a harmonious rapport with the learners can be developed to make them feel comfortable.”* Colleague from Khamis International School emphasized, *“Create real-life situation for the better understanding of the learners.”* Another colleague added, *“Design and develop effective group activities to help the learners fight their fear.”* One more colleague suggested, *“Select suitable and interesting topics for the learners in the context of Saudi Arabia and focus on their strengths instead of weaknesses.”*

Table 4: Percentage summary of EFL Teachers' Responses.

Statements	<i>Strongly Agree</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>
1. English should be introduced from the beginning of Primary school level	50%	30%	20%
2. Employing modern and effective teaching strategies	70%	30%	0%

3. Creating real life situation in classrooms to strengthen self-confidence and self-esteem	60%	30%	10%
4. Building sound teacher-student relationship	10%	0%	0%
5. Establishing well-equipped modern EFL classrooms with less density	70%	30%	0%
6. Prohibiting students from using Arabic in English language Classes	50%	30%	20%
7. Assessment method should focus on Evaluation instead of Examination	30%	40%	30%
8. Providing maximum exposure to English from family, institution and society	70%	30%	0%

Discussions and Recommendations

Developing Speaking Competence by Enhancing Learners' Oral Proficiency

Willis' Three-phase Task-based Learning Model

Teachers can take advantage of various task based language teaching models. The method of PPP (Present Practice Produce) has been appreciated initially and later was criticized due to its limitations. Willis (1996) model of TBL (Task Based Learning) can bring greater advantage and prove to be effective in removing speaking anxiety with Saudi EFL learners with basic language proficiency. Through adopting and adapting Willis's (1996) three phase model, the teacher can present any material of target language to the learners. The material can be any short situational conversation, dialogue or soundtrack. The learners imitate and practice the given item in collaboration. After rehearsing, they finally perform in front of the class. Different phases of the task reduce their anxiety and at the end, performance boosts their confidence. Such practice helps the learners to decrease stress. Concern of being, "wrong, stupid, or incomprehensible" (Brown, 2001, p. 269) damages the learners' potential. Recently, repetition has derived a large amount of recognition and several studies have acknowledged its role in different types of learning (Bygate et al. 2013; Horst 2013). In fact, repetition, imitation and rehearsing can help L2 learners engage in practical communication in everyday life (Berthier & Lambon Ralph, 2014).

Maurice's 4/3/2 Technique

Wang (as cited in Maurice, 1983) suggested that, Maurice's (1983) 4/3/2 technique can gently improve the students speaking fluency. In this very technique initially, a learner talks about a familiar topic for 4 minutes; then he/she restates the topic for 3 minutes and lastly speaks for 2 minutes on the same topic. Because of performing three times with the same topic the student becomes more familiar and therefore shows confidence with increased fluency. Zhou

(2006) supports the technique and argues that it has shown remarkable improvement on Chinese EFL learners speaking. “Research on this activity shows that the learners’ speed of speaking increased during the talks (as measured by the number of words per minute), the hesitations they make decrease (as measured by hesitations per 100 words), and surprisingly their grammatical errors in the repeated parts of the talk decrease and they tend to use several, more complex grammatical constructions in the last of the three talks than they did in the first talk.” (Nation, 1989, p. 381)

Task Repetition

Task repetition is “the repetition of the same or slightly altered tasks whether whole tasks, or parts of a task” (Bygate & Samuda, 2005, p. 43). It is actually a kind of planning (Ellis, 2005). The advantage of executing the task before performing it for the second time aids the learners to enhance complexity (lexical sophistication) and fluency. Task repetition privileges complexity and fluency of L2 oral production (Ahmadian and Tavakoli 2011; Bygate 1996; Gass et al. 1999). The idea of repetition boosts the confidence of L2 learners and thus encourages them to communicate in the target language (Yousef, Jamil & Razak 2013).

Employing Modern and Effective EFL Teaching Strategies to Reinforce Confidence

L2 language learners struggle to converse in English due to lack of self-confidence. The learners’ first and foremost goal should be gaining confidence when they need to communicate (Sabri & Qin, 2014). “Communication apprehension” causes the learners to lose confidence. The fear of oral communication termed as “Communication apprehension” occurs when a learner gets afraid to communicate in the target language with another person (Amogne & Yigzaw, 2013). Therefore, it is the teachers’ prime responsibility to implement effective strategies to boost confidence of the learners.

Introducing Drama to Reduce Anxiety

Drama improves the body language through practice and motivates to perform in group activities. Drama creates a communicative tension-free platform which can ensure optimal learning. (Miccoli, 2003; Gorjian et al., 2010). In the study of Atas (2014), a higher percentage of students reported that, introducing drama in their speaking class helped them to reduce tension and thereby improved confidence. Atas (2014) states:

... drama positively affected students’ anxiety, fear, nervousness, and embarrassment towards speaking in the FL. Most of the students benefited from drama exercises in ways such as speaking in FL when unprepared; feeling confident while speaking English; overcoming the feel of being worse at speaking English than other students; and the fear of being laughed at while speaking an FL.

Conducting Workshops and Training Sessions for Teachers to Ensure Positive, Effective and Enthusiastic Teaching

Brown (2007), suggests that teachers' factors may hamper learners' enthusiasm to participate in language learning. Negative comments of teachers can cause a great deal of anxiety among learners. Mahmoodzadeh (2012) includes that teacher's lack of teaching experience can increase the level of speaking anxiety of the learners.

Alrabai (2015) includes:

EFL policymakers in the Saudi context should involve English teachers in pre-service and in-service training programs on general psychology, including language anxiety. Such programs might be beneficial in enhancing teachers' level of FLA awareness and thus enable them to address the learners' feelings of stress and anxiety in their classes.

Building Sound Student-Teacher Relationship

A teacher can manage to create favorable atmosphere for learners to feel relaxed, by building a strong bond with them. Teachers should consider learners' sentiments, passions and curiosities to develop their self-esteem. (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017) say, "They should build a friendly relationship with their students".

Establishing Well-Equipped Modern EFL Classrooms with Less Density

Ashraf (2018) argues, "A crowded EFL classroom is de-motivating for both teacher and learner." Saudi EFL learners from different departments "are huddled in a classroom like cattle" Ashraf (2018). Authorities of the institutions need to consider the matter seriously and initiate necessary steps. Even the most effective teaching strategies fail to achieve goal, when most of the class time is wasted in managing the learners to settle. Moreover, to create real life situations, an EFL classroom requires necessary materials to engage the learners in several activities. The classroom needs to be spacious facilitated with multimedia, OHP, internet and other study related materials.

Introducing English from the Beginning of Primary School Level

There has been a lot of controversy among researchers regarding age in relation to second language acquisition. However, many studies support, "The younger, the better", probably because the young learners perform better than the older ones in terms of second language acquisition including various language skills like morph syntax (Birdsong & Molis 2001, DeKeyser 2000, Johnson & Newport 1989, Patkowski 1980) and pronunciation. (Flege 1991, Flege & MacKay 2004). (Jamali, 1991) supports that, exposing L2 equally with L1, can bring preferable attainment. Therefore, introducing English from the beginning of primary school level is a vital need for the learners.

Moderating Evaluation Policy

More preference should be given on evaluating a learner from different perspectives. Various alternatives should be available to evaluate a learner's speaking skill. Speaking is one of the major skills of language learning and it should not be ignored in school level. Unfortunately, in Saudi Arabia, English is still considered a subject which is required to pass only. Systematic and effective evaluation system should be utilized to identify the learners' true attainment in all language skills.

Prohibiting Students to Use Arabic in English Language Classes

Arabic or controlled use of Arabic should be prohibited. The learners have limited exposure to English. Therefore, allowing the students to communicate in Arabic minimizes their chances to overcome second language practice which results in developing anxiety.

Conclusion

The significance of learning English still requires further attention in Saudi Arabia. The institutions should pay due importance in teaching and learning English. It should not be considered a subject required to pass only. Learners need support to fight their fear of speaking in English. United efforts should be extended from all the institutions including the primary institution titled "Family". Instructors need to tackle the learners' anxiety with much delicacy and intelligence. New, effective, interesting and appropriate activities should be designed to assist the learners of 21st century.

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