FUN LEARNING ACTIVITIES: THE ANTIDOTES OF ANXIETY IN PUBLIC SPEAKING CLASSROOM

Evelyn Yeap Ewe Lin[†]

Department of Languages and Communication, College of Foundation and General Studies,Putrajaya Campus, Unversiti Tenaga Nasional, KM7, Jalan IKRAM-UNITEN, Kajang, Selangor.

Noor Hafiza Nor Azmi

Department of Languages and Communication, College of Foundation and General Studies,Putrajaya Campus, Unversiti Tenaga Nasional, KM7, Jalan IKRAM-UNITEN, Kajang, Selangor.

Ili Farhana Ab Razak

Department of Languages and Communication, College of Foundation and General Studies,Putrajaya Campus, Unversiti Tenaga Nasional, KM7, Jalan IKRAM-UNITEN, Kajang, Selangor.

Nurhanis Sahiddan

Department of Languages and Communication, College of Foundation and General Studies,Putrajaya Campus, Unversiti Tenaga Nasional, KM7, Jalan IKRAM-UNITEN, Kajang, Selangor.

Chong Seng Tong

Department of Languages and Communication, College of Foundation and General Studies,Putrajaya Campus, Unversiti Tenaga Nasional, KM7, Jalan IKRAM-UNITEN, Kajang, Selangor.

Mohd Ariff Ahmad Tarmizi

Department of Social Sciences, College of Foundation and General Studies,Putrajaya Campus, Unversiti Tenaga Nasional, KM7, Jalan IKRAM-UNITEN, Kajang, Selangor.

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to find out if a series of fun learning activities conducted in a public speaking classroom is effective to lower anxiety level among students. In accordance with this, the current study was conducted employing a one-group pre-test and post-test experimental design. These tests were carried out using questionnaires to determine students' level of public speaking anxiety. It is found that there is a significant difference in the students' level of public speaking anxiety after encountering the treatment based on fun learning activities designed. Some recommendations and ideas with regard to the fun activities used to teach public speaking skills are discussed.

© 2014 AESS Publications. All Rights Reserved.

Keywords: Fun learning activities, Public speaking classroom, Public speaking anxiety, Experimental design, Public speaking skills, Lower anxiety level.

1. INTRODUCTION

Anxiety has always been a hindrance in students' learning experience, especially in higher education or tertiary level of education. Communication anxiety in language classrooms poses a potential for further studies as well as attempts to overcome such conditions. This is highly relevant in the context of Malaysian higher education language or communication classrooms when the students have to present and speak in public. As a continuing study of (Yeap *et al.*, 2012), this study will focus on the results of the pre-test and post-test experimental designs for analyzing the effectiveness of fun learning activities in a public speaking classroom. Treatment in the form of fun learning activities will be conducted to gather results on its effectiveness in reducing students' public speaking anxiety. The significance of this study is due to the majority of public and private universities in Malaysia having compulsory and elective courses in public speaking as well as communication skills. This is due to the high demands of the job market, requiring applicants and former university students to communicate well and display good presentation skills.

Interest in public speaking itself should be built at university level. This is due to future challenges in the working world. According to Latisha and Surina (2010), one of the most important criteria required by employers is good communicating skills and the ability to carry out a good presentation in English. To supplement this, a series of fun learning activities could be implemented as to improve students' concentration as well as interest in the course. This series of activities is also to complement the textbook for a public speaking course in Universiti Tenaga Malaysia (UNITEN) or ENGF103 (English for Academic Purposes). The targeted course is a requirement for all Foundation students of UNITEN to prepare them for presentations and public speaking through three assessments, impromptu speech, informative speech and persuasive speech. This experimental study will analyze the results from the pre-test and post-test conducted to the target groups to look at the effectiveness of the series of fun learning activities in reducing students' anxiety levels in a public speaking classroom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Public Speaking Anxiety

According to Zohar *et al.* (2010), studies on anxiety is the research on how anxiety affects and interrupts activities n the cognitive and information processing. Zohar *et al.* (2010). Important areas interrupted by anxiety are the central executive and the phonological loop in the information processing system of the brain (Zohar *et al.*, 2010). The effects are speed-over-accuracy bias in activities with rapid decision-making, selective attention bias as well as a lower capacity in the working-memory, all induced by public speaking anxiety (Zohar *et al.*, 2010). In this case, anxiety causes a stress on the functional and structural consequences, thus affecting the verbal nature which is a large part in the cognitive processes (Zohar *et al.*, 2010). By reduced memory capacity and an attention bias, task performance, in this case public speaking will be disrupted in terms of its verbal encoding of information input as well as the syntactic elaboration of information output (Zohar *et al.*, 2010).

2.2. Activities Facilitate Teaching and Learning

This study draws from the idea by Sarjit (2005) where she says teachers should be aware of students' level of enthusiasm to carry out their teaching. Different types of aids and activities are important in ensuring a better understanding of content of the teaching. This study also utilizes part of the experiential learning model by Kolb (1984) which stated that students learn from a cycle of four processes, which he insisted that they must be present for learning to occur most completely. The cycle involves learner's involvements in the learning itself. From the involvement in the activities designed, the learner tends to reflect on the experiences from many points of view to seek for understanding (reflective observation). From all the reflections the learner made, logical conclusions (abstract conceptualization) will be drawn to help him relate the activities and theories learnt which will finally lead to the decisions and actions (active experimentation) that establishes new experiences (concrete experiences).

Concrete Experience

Active Experimentation

Reflective Observation

Abstract Conceptualization

:
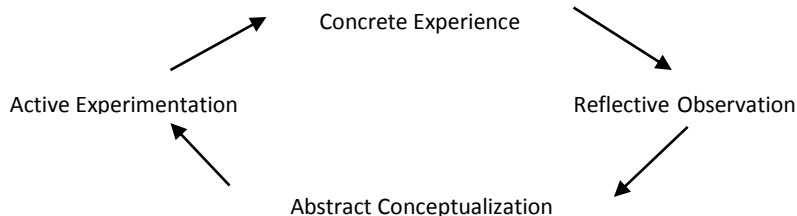
For example, when students are involved in activities conducted in the class related to the subject they are learning at that particular time, they will start to reflect on the activities done as how it relates to the subject taught theoretically by adding many viewpoints from other knowledge. After that, students will draw a conclusion from what they have done with the activities by adding in the theory learnt. Then, it will guide them to make decision that will then be added to their new concrete experience in mind.

Therefore, studies have been conducted in accordance to anxiety in public speaking classrooms with numerous activities initiated to aid each part of students' learning processes. This study will focus on the anxiety in impromptu speeches and oral presentations in front of an audience. This has been studied and was mentioned by Blöte et al. (2009) where such public speaking situations have been studied in correlation to social phobia or social anxiety.

2.3. Studies on Students, Anxieties

Based on various studies conducted on anxiety, this study seeks to examine how fun learning activities would assist in lowering the levels of anxiety among students in a public speaking class.

A study by Wang and Liao (2012) for example, examines the presence of anxiety among university students in taiwan when taking the General English Proficiency test (GEPT) and whether there are any differences in GEPT anxiety levels among students according to gender and/or personality. This particular study found that students who are more introverted feel a greater anxiety than students who are more extroverted (Wang and Liao, 2012).

A study by Winters et al. (2007) on the other hand, seeks to explicate predecessors of research findings on physiological and psychological components of public speaking anxiety and gaining a

better view of public speaking anxiety. The findings provide the framework for a more detailed area of study on public speaking anxiety and contribute in expanding its understanding (Winters *et al.*, 2007).

This study will seek to expand those areas touched by previous studies as such mentioned while focusing on the effectiveness of fun learning activities in lowering levels of anxiety among students in a public speaking classroom. The current study uses the experimental research design in order to obtain results in the effectiveness of the designed fun learning activities in reducing stress levels in the target groups.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design

The current study was conducted employing a one-group pre-test and post-test experimental design. It was conducted to explore students' public speaking anxiety before and after receiving treatment through a series of activities. This study was done to find out if the activities help in reducing their level of anxiety to speak in public.

3.2. Treatment

There are 7 activities conducted to supplement most of the core topics in the book. They are:

3.2.1. Expressive Introduction

For ice breaking activity, they were taught to use dissimilar expressions of emotions in the first class. The expressions of emotions were written down on pieces of small papers which will be drawn from the box by students and they have to use the written expression to introduce themselves in front of the class.

3.2.2. Ten Creative Ways to Use an Object

Before impromptu speeches presentation, students were instructed to do this activity in class for them to apply their creative and imaginative thinking on their own. Students will have to figure out what to do with the weird object that they already draw from a bag. Hilarity might be prompted out as they may not familiar what the object is.

3.2.3. Charade

This is a familiar and recognized activities that applied by many teachers before they start their lesson.

3.2.4. Sound Story

The effective use of voice during presentation will be conceded by this activity which is invented by Mdm Juriah Rashid from Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM).

3.2.5. Chocolate VS Ice-cream

Students were asked to promote their own freshly produced ice-cream or chocolate with advertisements and posters in this activity as a preparation in practicing before delivering

persuasive speech. This activity will played by two big groups of students.

3.2.6. Lord Moulton's Heir and Property

Students will be rolled as the lawyers and judges as they were placed in an environment of court and the judge will define and decide who should get the property. This activity also can be applied as a practice before persuasive speech delivery.

3.2.7. Blindly Arrange in Order

Students were asked to make themselves in position from the shortest to the tallest as this activity was carried out as an additional activity in lecture class on how to work in a group from the textbook.

3.3. Sample

The sample for this study was one class of foundation students in UNITEN. The total number of samples for pre-test and post-test in this study consists of 13 students who registered for ENGF103 English for Academic Purpose subject. The total of 15 students were chosen at first, however, only 13 of them were willing to be involved in this study. The class consisted of a mixture of male and female students in a multicultural classroom environment.

3.4. Instrument

The questionnaire consists of 2 sections. Section A is students demographic data, Section B will gauge students' responses on their level of anxiety with the use of Likert Scale from "1 as strongly disagree" and "5 as strongly agree". The overall reliability of the questionnaire is $\alpha = .79$.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table-1. Students' Level of Anxiety: Pre-test

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRPSA	13	119.00	152.00	135.0769	10.18546
Valid N (listwise)	13				

In order to measure the level of anxiety, a PRPSA scale established by McCroskey (1970) is adopted in this study. According to McCroskey (1970), low anxiety refers to score less than 98. Meanwhile, moderate anxiety score is between 98 to 131. As for high anxiety, the score is is more than 131. Based on Table 1.0, the respondents show high level of anxiety to speak in public before receiving any treatment (M= 135.1, SD=10.2).

Table-2. Students' Level of Anxiety: Post-test

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PRPSA	13	71.00	133.00	101.5385	15.47910
Valid N (listwise)	13				

Meanwhile, based on Table 2.0, the results of the post-test show that the respondents show moderate anxiety (M=101.5, SD=15.5). It is significantly lower and almost bordering with low anxiety score (M= < 98). Therefore, it can be best stated that the treatment has helped to decrease their level of anxiety in speaking in public.

Table-3. Result of T-test comparing the mean of PRPSA Pre and Post Test.

One-Sample Test

Test Value = 0						
			Sig.		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	t	df	(2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Pretest	47.816	12	.000	135.07692	128.9219	141.2319
Postest	23.651	12	.000	101.53846	92.1845	110.8924

Before the treatment, students PRPSA was significantly higher, $t_{(13)} = 47.816$, p < .000. Meanwhile, after the treatment, the post-test data shows students' PRPSA to be significantly lower, $t_{(13)} = 23.651$, p < .000. According to Table 3.0 above, it can be concluded that the use of a series of activities are able to reduce higher levels of public speaking anxiety to moderately low. This means that with the help of the series of fun learning activities, students become less anxious to speak in public. Hence, it is important to introduce this series of activities to other academicians.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

To conclude, since only one group of students was involved in this study, further research should be conducted as the results shown that most students enjoyed the activities while learning through the whole semester. Furthermore, activities like this will also create a strong bond among the students which will then reduce their anxiety level in public speaking. However, this has involved only 13 students, which also served as a first time one group experimental studies on this series of activities, further improvement on how to conduct the activities to create maximum learning impact on the learners need to be explored. It is also important to use a complete module for the upcoming study as to maximize the knowledge to be shared to all academicians around the world in this series of activities.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

REFERENCES

Blote, A.W., M.J. Kint, A.C. Miers and P.M. Westenberg, 2009. The relation between public speaking anxiety and social anxiety: A review. Journal of Anxiety Disorders, 23(3): 305-313.

Kolb, D.A., 1984. Experiential learning: Experience as a source of learning and development. New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Latisha, A.S. and N. Surina, 2010. Employability awareness among Malaysian undergraduates. International Journal of Business and Management, 5(8): 119-123.

McCroskey, J.C., 1970. Measures of communication-bound anxiety. Speech Monographs, 37: 269-277.

Sarjit, K., 2005. Suggestion for teaching public speaking and evaluating speeches. The Internet TESL Journal, 11(7): 1-9.

Wang, Y.H. and H.C. Liao, 2012. Anxiety of university students in Taiwan about the general english proficiency test. Social Behavior and Personality, 40(1): 63-74.

Winters, J.J., N.R. Horvath, M. Moss, K. Yarhouse, C.R. Sawyer and R.R. Behnke, 2007. Affect intensity of student speakers as a predictor of anticipatory public speaking anxiety. Texas Speech Communication Journal, 31(1): 44-48.

Yeap, E.E.L., H. Hawanum, A.M. Mohd and A.A.T. Mohd, 2012. Excellent students' voice: English public speaking activities are fun. Paper Presented at MICELT, Kinta Riverfront Hotel and Suite, Ipoh, Perak.

Zohar, D., Y. Livne and J. Fine, 2010. The effect of anxiety on linguistic parameters of public speech: A verbal impairment model. Anxiety, stress and coping. An International Journal, 16(3): 293-306.