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Exploring Speaking English Anxiety among KUST Students: Causes and Interventions

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ABSTRACT

Speaking English anxiety is a pervasive issue affecting academic performance and self-esteem among university students in Pakistan. This qualitative study investigates the causes and interventions of speaking anxiety among students at Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST), Pakistan. The research aims to identify the psychological and physical factors hindering effective communication in English and suggest strategies for students and teachers to overcome speaking anxiety. The study reveals that students experience anxiety due to fear of mistakes, peer evaluation, lack of confidence, and inadequate practice opportunities. Language proficiency, cultural differences, and teacher-student interaction emerge as significant factors contributing to speaking anxiety. The findings highlight the need for educators to create a supportive learning environment, fostering improved oral communication skills among English language learners. Recommendations for educators include providing regular speaking opportunities, peer-to-peer conversations, constructive feedback, and relaxation techniques to mitigate anxiety. The study's outcomes inform teaching practices, emphasizing the importance of addressing speaking anxiety to enhance students' academic performance and self-esteem.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, English language learners, KUST students, teacher-led strategies, relaxation techniques, language proficiency, cultural differences, teacher-student interaction.

Introduction

Pakistan did not have English as its native language but it became the official language of Pakistan at its formation. English is Lingua franca—it is the requirement of the hour. English has become the minimum requirement of every Student to have a good future in a real world. Lack of oral English for students in Pakistani universities: The paradox in Pakistani universities is that although the medium of instructions is largely English translation most of the students feel challenged in terms of being able to communicate

verbally in English language. Standard student skills in English reading & writing are pertinent to our education system & examinations also assess these skills excluding English speaking skill. It is not tested in exams and as such no strategies or techniques are used to enhance it. Most of the students are equally good in both writing and comprehending English but when it comes to speaking, many become sluggish and many develop nervousness. This research is also going to outline other reasons why this result in this English language anxiety in students as well as the strategies that may be used to address this English Speaking Anxiety.

Statement

In Pakistani education system, speaking skill is least focused and this absence leads to fear and the aspects of speaking anxiety in those learners who are learners. They cannot join the conversation discussions taking place in English language.

1. To discover the psychological and physical ailments which hinder the learners' effective communication in English.
2. Thus it is also important to suggest useful strategies for the students themselves and the language teachers working with students –to overcome English language speaking fear.

English is not the native language of Pakistan but it was declared as the official language of Pakistan, after it came into being. English is Lingua franca—it's the need of time. English has become the basic necessity of every Student who want a successful career in practical life. In Pakistani universities, despite the fact that majority of the subjects are taught in English but most of the students find it hard to orally communicate in English language. Our education system focuses on student English reading and writing skills and examinations also evaluates and tests these skills while English speaking skill is ignored. Neither it is assessed through exams nor are any strategies or techniques applied to improve it. Consequently, majority of the students can write very well in English and can understand as well but when it comes to speaking in English, they hesitate and get nervous. This research is going to point out other reason as well that causes this English language anxiety in students and the techniques that could be employed to overcome this English Speaking Anxiety.

In Pakistan, education system emphasizes more on reading and writing skills while speaking skill is not paid attention to and this lack of attention leads to lack of confidence and the elements of speaking anxiety in learners. As a result, these students are unable to take part in conversations taking place in English language.

Objectives

It has been envisaged that majority of the learners are challenged psychologically and physically for them to be able to communicate in English. Psychological factors do drive the process equally for example language anxiety does come in. Some of students tend to avoid speaking in English because they may fear that other people might laugh at them or correct their mistakes. This could be as a result of past negative learning experiences or low self-efficacy. Also, learners may have poor self-esteem, or become frustrated in the lack of positive results and thus are unable to engage in the conversations.

In an effort to assist the students deal with speaking anxiety the following strategies may be adopted. However, they are useful for students, for example, in moments when learners practice English conversationally in the company of friends or when using language exchange applications. They should also pay attention to the kind of language that they use on themselves, encouraging oneself by knowing and telling that learning involves making errors. One can control anxiety and minimize nervousness during the conversation by practice of mindfulness before the start of the dialogue, for example, deep inhale – deep exhale

Main objectives of the study are to:

1. Investigate the psychological and physical challenges faced by learners in communicating in English.
2. Identify the factors contributing to English language anxiety.
3. Explore strategies to overcome speaking anxiety

Research Questions

1. What are the key barriers that hinder students' ability to communicate confidently and proficiently in English?
2. What are the significant factors contributing to English language anxiety, and what effective interventions can be implemented to support students in overcoming these challenges?

Significance

This study will have helpful knowledge for language teachers by informing them of the subtler challenges that learners face in speaking English. Among the concern which students are likely to experience include but not limited to; accent, smoothness, correctness, and self-esteem while using the language. With these barriers one gets a better understanding of the many challenges that students go through depending on cultural differences, lack of practice or nervousness when speaking a new language.

With this kind of information, the teachers will be more knowledgeable when it comes to applying the right kind of approach to tackling of these challenges. It might include altering their instructional practices: speakers, including additional activities involving speaking; or providing individual feedback to pupil improvement on their performance. By these effective actions, it would be possible to make good climate and atmosphere for learning and it would be easier for the teachers and students to reduce the barriers easily and master the English speaking ability freely. In conclusion, this research will help to improve the practical application of language teaching strategies as well as the beneficial results contemplated by the learners.

Literature Review

Language learner from time to time exhibit concern regarding efficiency of recalling of the new vocabulary, understanding of the instructor and regarding their fear of speaking in front of others in a target language (Hidayati, 2018). Majority of people will feel some form of nervousness when speaking in front of an audience; research has it that many people fear speaking in front of an audience than anything else. With this in mind, it is understood that speech anxiety could be as mild as getting what

many people simply call 'Nerves' to something very near to becoming a panic. Sweating, shaking, excessive salivation, stomach butterflies, visual spot showing dizziness, palpitations and high pitch voice are among some of the earliest signals of speech anxiety (Gopang, 2016).

When asked to speak in English, the students mentioned become nervous because they were afraid of making mistakes, were shy and unfamiliar with the language and possessed no words to say, or ideas (Anandar, 2015 and Sayuri, 2016). Speaking performance of students with higher level of anxiety desires uneasiness attitude towards speaking and they feel awkward in English (Sutarsayab, 2017).

Foreign language anxiety can best be defined as the kind of anxiety that hinders the acquisition of skills involved in the use of oral interaction; the fear of communication, test anxiety as well as the fear of being judged negatively by teachers and fellow students (Horwitz, and Cope, 1986).

In the Von (2003) study, the perception of the students was determined on foreign language. In order to check the validity, the researchers employed interviews. From the above interviews, one was certain that when the mode of speech was spoken, the learners never had any clue on the activities in the lessons. There were learner negative encounters in the classroom, fear of being negatively labelled and nonetheless.

Teaching practices and some of the participants were presented as the cause of the Language anxiety. From a study made concerning classroom speaking, several factors were mentioned by Ripple (1964). He identified 6 main causes of anxiety and learners' features and their reaction, features of the teacher and his reaction, behavior setting and physical setting.

These are the following... All these are noted to elicit concern that leads to anxiety amongst the learners when speaking in the classroom in English. Finally, the conclusion was made by Tanveer (2007) who considered classroom surroundings to be learner-friendly, organisation of the kind of activities like drama or play, or role play and avoiding superficial pronunciation, and non-heterogeneous classes reduced anxiety in learners.

A study (Prices, 1991) indicates that of teachers the students should be familiar while the size of the class should be small The use of positive reinforcement in language teaching should be done early in life Inhibition of a successful environment for language learning by the friendly role of the teacher.

Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature.

Research Population

The population of this study comprises students of KUST, specifically students of the English Department.

Data Collection Tools

The data for this study is collected with the help of interviews, where students from different batches of the English Department will be asked a set of questions, designed by the author of this paper. These interviews will focus on establishing the psychological or physical disabilities students face when communicating in English.

Participant Selection Criteria

Participants will include:

1. Students from the English Department
2. Students from other departments (to provide diverse perspectives)
3. Students with varying levels of English proficiency

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is used to identify patterns and themes in the interview data

Findings

The study revealed that:

1. Students experience anxiety due to fear of mistakes and peer evaluation.
2. Lack of confidence and self-esteem hinder oral communication.
3. Inadequate practice opportunities contribute to speaking anxiety.

Conclusion

From the literature review and findings, it is clear that learners with low self-esteem, high anxiety, and low motivation struggle with speaking skills. Teachers should create friendly conditions, know students' preferences, build confidence, and select effective strategies for speaking activities.

Recommendations

1. Teachers should provide regular speaking opportunities in class.
2. Encourage peer-to-peer conversations to build confidence.
3. Offer constructive feedback, avoiding immediate correction.
4. Incorporate relaxation techniques to reduce anxiety.

Limitations

1. Small sample size
2. Limited to KUST students
3. Further research needed to generalize findings

Implications

This study highlights the need for educators to address speaking anxiety in English language learners. By implementing recommended strategies, teachers can create a supportive environment, fostering improved oral communication skills.

Suggestions for Future Research

1. Investigate the effectiveness of relaxation techniques in reducing speaking anxiety.
2. Explore the impact of technology integration on speaking skills.
3. Conduct comparative studies across different institutions.

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