

## Factors that Influence Anxiety in Learning English Speaking Skills among PTSS Students

*Siti Nurfirdaus Binti Mohd Nasir, Nur Hartini Binti Harun*

<sup>1</sup>Department of General Studies, Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, Malaysia Email: sitinasir10@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup>Department of General Studies, Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, Malaysia Email: nurhartiniharun@yahoo.com

**Abstract:** This study intended to identify factors that influence anxiety in learning English speaking skills among PTSS students. The study focused on the factors in learning English as a second language and was conducted in order to answer 24 items related to the topic. 30 students were given a set of questionnaire to determine the students' tendency towards the target factors. The descriptive analysis showed the highest percentage was where the students started to panic when they have to speak without preparation in language class (78%). However, it was a surprise when the least number of students answered they felt more nervous in their English language class than in other subject classes (28%). Finally, there are several actions to be taken by the researchers mentioned in this research to overcome language anxiety among DHK1 students.

**Key words:** language anxiety, speaking skills, English as a second language, speaking anxiety

### 1.0 Reflection of the Study

The first polytechnic education was established and implemented in 1969. The education Industrial Master Plan (1985-1995) has strengthened the role of polytechnics in the country's workforce in order to meet the demands of semi-professional level. Education and training in the polytechnics in the form of industry-led programs are developed in collaboration with the industrial development. The main objective of the establishment is to support the Higher Education Ministry in performing the responsibilities of the workforce at generating a semi-professional and middle executive. To strengthen the role of polytechnics in the field of education and training, Department of Polytechnic Education has launched the transformation polytechnic for the empowerment of education in these institutions in assisting the country's vision to be the advance country by year 2020.

One of the changes in polytechnics is the revamped of the English language syllabus from ESP to Communicative English. This is because inability to use English has even been said to be the reason of the high level of unemployment among polytechnics graduates. According to Shariff [1], employability skills of fresh graduates have constantly received considerable attention in the local media. Lack of English language proficiency has often been cited as one of the major factors contributing to graduate unemployment. Jawhar

[2] also added that in the private sector, graduates are becoming unemployable as a result of lack of proficiency in the English language.

However, teaching English language is a big challenge in this country. Students are still unable to acquire or even comprehend the language even after eleven years of learning the language at the primary and secondary levels. Ong et.al [3] states that, studies have shown that the effects of poor academic achievement during the early school years are often carried over to the adolescent years. One of the reasons is because most of them do not have the confidence to communicate in English language. This nervousness or anxiety frequently seems to become particularly aggravated when students are required to speak in class. Language anxiety can interfere the input, processing, retrieval, and the output level. If anxiety impairs cognitive function, students who are anxious may learn less and also may not be able to demonstrate what they have learned [4]. Thus, they may experience even more failure, which in turn increase their anxiety in learning English. Furthermore, Crookall and Oxford [5] reported that serious language anxiety may cause other related problems with self-esteem, self-confidence, and risk-taking ability, and ultimately hampers proficiency in the second language.

**Corresponding Author:** Siti Nurfirdaus Mohd Nasir, Department of General Studies, Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin, Malaysia Email: sitinasir10@gmail.com

Therefore, with this notion, the researcher would like to identify language anxiety among DHK1 students and factors that contribute to this problem.

**2.0 Focus of the Study**

The aims of this study are to identify language anxiety among DHK1 students and factors that contribute to this problem.

**3.0 Objectives of the Study**

*3.1 General Objectives*

The general objectives of this study are to identify language anxiety among DHK1 students and factors that contribute to this problem.

*3.2 Specific Objectives*

3.2.1. To identify language anxiety among DHK1 students.

3.2.2. To determine the factors that contributes to language anxiety among DHK1 students.

**4.0 Subject**

The respondents in this study are 30 Diploma in Hotel and Catering Semester 1 (DHK1) students at Politeknik Tuanku Syed Sirajuddin. There are 10 males and 20 females.

**5.0 Research Methodology**

*5.1 Questionnaire*

In this study, the researchers utilized a quantitative approach to collect the desired data. A questionnaire consists of 12 statements were distributed to 30 respondents of DHK1 (Diploma in Hotel and Catering) students in order to identify the language anxiety among them in learning English. The data collected were analysed.

*5.2 Research Instrument*

In this quantitative approach, the researchers adapted and developed the questionnaire from FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale) [6] to measure the respondents' anxiety in English speaking classroom. This questionnaire is broadly used by researchers in various contexts to identify and measure student's anxiety in speaking.

*5.3 Sample*

The researchers selected only semester 1 students mainly because they feel more anxious when speaking English in classroom due to unfamiliar environment and the transition from school to tertiary education compared to the seniors who have more experience and more familiar with the environment and the system.

**6.0 Data Analysis**

*6.1 Data Analysis*

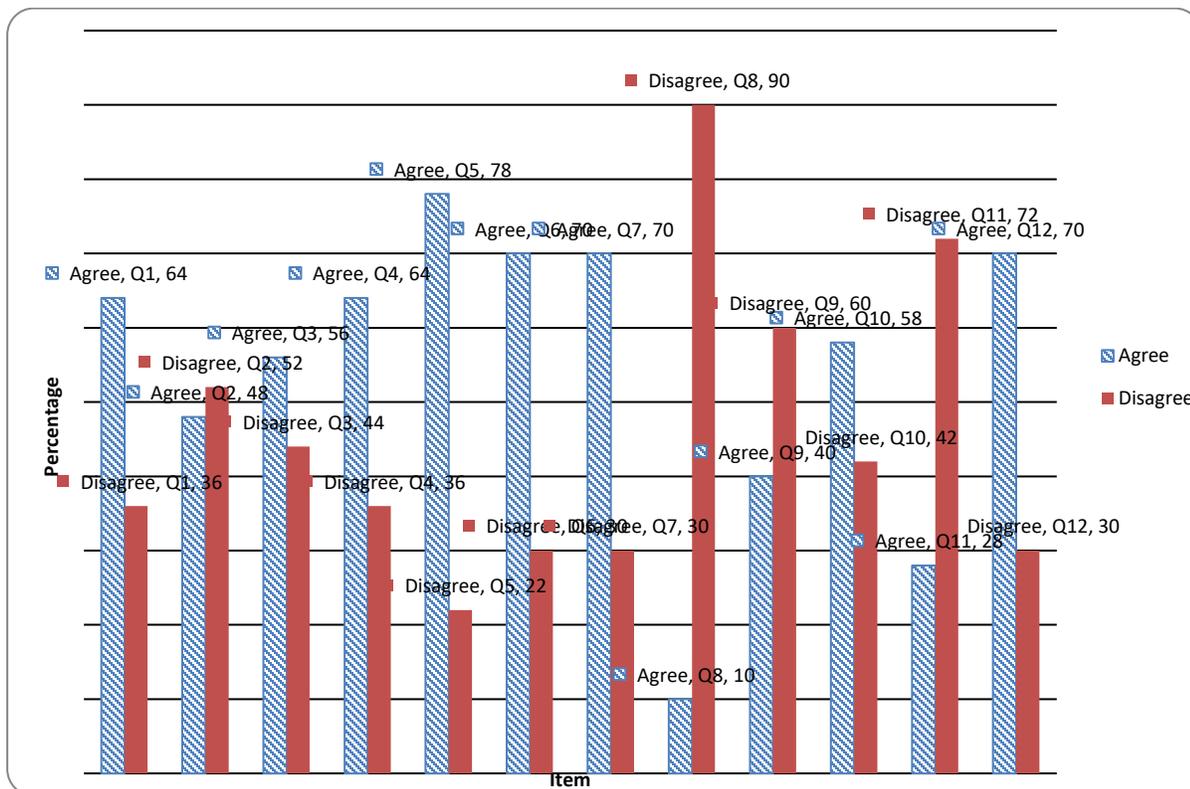


Figure 6.1.1a: Language Anxiety

| INDICATOR |  |            |          |
|-----------|--|------------|----------|
| NO.       | ITEM   | PERCENTAGE |          |
|           |  | AGREE      | DISAGREE |
| Q1.       | I never feel sure of myself when I am speaking English in my class.                          | 65         | 35       |
| Q2.       | I do not worry about making mistakes in language class.                                      | 48         | 52       |
| Q3.       | It frightens me when I do not understand what the teacher is saying in the English language. | 56         | 44       |
| Q4.       | I am usually at ease during tests in my language class.                                      | 64         | 36       |
| Q5.       | I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class.                 | 78         | 22       |
| Q6.       | In language class, I can get nervous I forget things I know.                                 | 70         | 30       |
| Q7.       | Even if I am well prepared for language class, I feel anxious about it.                      | 70         | 30       |
| Q8.       | I often feel like not going to my language class.  | 10         | 90       |
| Q9.       | I feel confident when I speak in English class.  | 40         | 60       |
| Q10.      | I feel very self-conscious about speaking the English language in front of other students.   | 58         | 42       |
| Q11.      | I feel more nervous in my English language class than in my other classes.                   | 28         | 72       |
| Q12.      | I get nervous when I am speaking in my English class.  | 70         | 30       |

6.1.1a Table 1: Language Anxiety among DHK students

Based on Table 1, there are 12 questions for part A, where 12 items agree with the percentage of (Q1=64, Q2=48, Q3=56, Q4=64, Q5=78, Q6=70, Q7=70, Q8=10, Q9=40, Q10=58, Q11=28, Q12=70) and 12 items disagree with the percentage of (Q1=36, Q2=52, Q3=44, Q4=36, Q5=22, Q6=30, Q7=30, Q8=90, Q9=60, Q10=42, Q11=72, Q12=30). The result has shown that about 78% of DHK students in semester 1 start to panic when they have to speak without preparation in language class this finding was congruent with Young [7] who reports the spontaneous activities in front of the class are anxiety provoking activities. However, only 5% of the students feel like not going to English class due to certain reasons which is actually positive feedbacks to the teachers. Surprisingly, the result for Q11 shows that the respondents do not feel more nervous in English class compared to other classes (72%).

Based on the questionnaires that have been collected, the paramount reason of language anxiety among students is unpreparedness as 78% percent of the respondents answered *Yes* for Q5 (I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class) which is the highest percentage because many students tend to get panic if suddenly they had to speak in front of the crowd. This is responsible for student's anxiety which hinders the student's performance. As a second language learners, they are focusing on memorizing grammar, sentence structure and vocabulary, but they have difficulty in practicing it in everyday interaction [8]. Students find how beneficial and vital it is to be prepared to reduce anxiety in English class. They demonstrate a high level of anxiety because they are not yet fluent in the target language. Sadeghi et al., [9] reported two factors causing speaking anxiety are

limited vocabulary and poor language proficiency . Students who have poor language proficiency often feel anxious when they have to speak using the target language.

### 7.0 Actions to be taken

Based on the analysis above, the researchers have taken several actions in order to overcome language anxiety among DHK1 students.

- 7.1 Maximized the usage of English Talent Platform in order to expose the students to present in public so that, it can enhance self-confidence and reduce language anxiety.
- 7.2 Organized the friendly match between classes in order to improve students' communicative skills and increase their motivation in learning English (e.g.; elocution, role play, debate etc.).
- 7.3 Provided intensive English class focusing on students' communication skills. This class was especially designed for low proficiency students.

The planned actions will be conducted in 5 weeks and the observation will be done in 2 weeks.

### Step 1:

The planned action 7.1 conducted by the lecturer during the English lesson for 2 weeks. The class lecturer took the students to the English Talent Platform (ETP) and students did the presentations either in group or individual. ETP is a mini stage in the cafeteria area and fully equipped with PA system. The objective of having ETP is to familiarize students with public presentation to increase students' confidence. The students are allowed to perform any presentation in English for

example choral speaking, role play, reading a poem and etc. By performing at ETP, students are able to express themselves freely and creatively without any pressure of grading by the lecturer. Simultaneously, this would reduce students' anxiety in using English in public.

### Step 2:

The planned action 7.2 was conducted within 1 week. The lecturer organized one friendly match (e.g.; debate, elocution etc.) and the students competed with other classes from different programs. The purposes of having the friendly match are to improve students' communication skills and increase their motivation level in learning English. The competition were divided into three rounds which are preliminary round, semifinal round and final round. The winner of the competition received a special prize sponsored by English unit. The students seemed to enjoy the activities as they reported positive feedback after the competition and feel more confident to practice the language.

### Step 3:

The planned action 7.3 was conducted within 2 weeks. The lecturer provided an intensive English class focusing on students' communicative skills. The classes were carried out for 3 days per week and 2 hours per session. Only 20 students were selected per class to ensure the effectiveness of this class. The objective of organizing the intensive class is to help low proficiency students to improve their English language and eventually this will reduce their anxiety level in using English. Students were selected based on the result of their quiz 1. Those who get low marks were chosen to attend this class for improvement. The class was focusing on communication skills, grammar and listening skills (for examples; social conversation skills, oral presentation skills, simple tenses and selective listening skills).

## 8.0 Conclusion

This study, conducted through individual, was an attempt to apprehend the true nature of language anxiety. The results of this study clearly indicate that the most anxiety provoking skill in learning English is speaking skill. Almost all research subjects acknowledged that they feel anxious and nervous while speaking English in front of others. Some of them even expressed that they feel 'stupid' when they cannot speak English well and others maintained that they try to skip or escape the situations, which demand speaking in front of others, either in the classroom or outside of the classroom. What seems to distinguish speaking is the public nature of the skill; this poses a threat to peoples' self-concept, self-identity, and ego, which they have formed in their first language as reasonable and intelligent individuals [6]. Thus, every factor or situation that creates possibilities or enhances the chances of

exposing their deficiencies and language imperfections in front of others is likely to cause language anxiety for ESL/EFL learners. This situation could be either classroom interaction in the form of open class forum, group participation or class presentation, or giving a short talk in any public event is likely to challenge learners' communication skills. What makes a language classroom a highly anxiety-evoking place is its evaluative nature: evaluation by the teachers, peers, and by a learners' own 'self', accompanied by high expectations and beliefs about L2 learning. It was found that the feelings of anxiety become more threatening when the language instructors' manner of error correction is rigid and humiliating and when they consider language class a performance rather than a learning place. Due to this fact that the researchers have decided to organize the activities such as friendly match, English talent platform and extensive English class in order to reduce anxiety among PTSS students.

Some of the respondents also reported that they know certain vocabulary items and sentence structures but they do not come out right when needed in any communicative situation. This indicates that they tend to feel panic when they have to speak in English language due to lack of practice, either in the classroom or in the society, these difficulties are likely to continue causing trouble for them to communicate in English language. However, for effective alleviation of language anxiety, the comparison of the results obtained in this study with those of the past studies suggests that there do not seem to be any specific remedies for language anxiety. Language anxiety can be postulated, may not require any 'special treatment' but what it does demand is the careful attitude of the language teachers in order to understand and to effectively diagnose this phenomenon in the learners. Then, it requires the application of modern approaches that lay emphasis on enhancing learning opportunities in an environment that is conducive to learning.

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