

Speaking anxiety among freshmen at English for Specific Department, Hanoi University

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Abstract: This study was conducted within the context of the English for Specific Department (ESPD), Hanoi University. The research aimed to find out the level of speaking anxiety among freshmen at ESPD as well as the factors that influence their speaking anxiety. A quantitative approach was employed with the use of the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) to obtain the responses from 75 students currently studying a one-year intensive English course at ESPD, majoring in different fields. Following that, the data was analyzed by SPSS IBM software with the descriptive analysis and frequency analysis. The results of the case study stated that these students experienced a medium level of speaking anxiety. In addition, the fear of negative evaluation is perceived by students as the most significant factor affecting their speaking anxiety, followed by communication apprehension and test anxiety.

Keywords: Speaking anxiety, communication, freshmen students, significant factor

1. Introduction

Freshmen students in Vietnam when transferring from a highschool environment to university seem to encounter a number of challenges in terms of speaking and listening to English as a foreign language due to the fact that they have focused mainly on grammar and reading to prepare for the national highschool exam. Specifically, as observed in the class, students tend to have certain anxiety when speaking in class. Furthermore, speaking anxiety is believed to adversely affect students' speaking performance in class (Djahimi et al., 2018). With that being said, this research paper aims at finding out the level as well as the main factors of their speaking anxiety. To be more specific, the Public Speaking Class Anxiety Scale (PSCAS) developed by Yaikong and Usaha (2012) is used to determine the level of speaking anxiety and the main factors that influence their speaking anxiety.

2. Research content

2.1. Literature review: In the process of second language language acquisition, Krashen (1981) emphasizes in his model that the Affective Filter plays a crucial role. To be more specific, affective factors include anxiety, low inhibition, low self-esteem, and low motivation. With that being said, it is essential to minimize the factors that contribute to the decrease in the speaking performance (Dörnyei, 2005). Therefore, having a deep understanding of students' speaking anxiety might gradually improve the performance of teaching and learning speaking in EFL classes.

2.2. Methodology and research design

This study employs a quantitative research method.

The PSCAS survey is used to determine the level and the primary factors affecting students' speaking anxiety.

2.2.1. Research context and participants

This research is conducted at the English for Specific Department (ESPD) at Hanoi University. To be more specific, students studying different majors such as Tourism, Accounting, Finance and Banking, and Information Technology are required to attend an one-year intensive English course at English for Specific Department if they do not possess an IELTS certificate with the minimum score of 6.0 overall (no skill is under 5.0). In this first year at ESPD, students are offered various courses focusing both on English language macro skills.

2.2.2. Data collection instruments

To get quantitative data, PSCAS survey is designed online via Google form and distributed to students during pronunciation lessons in the lab room, which makes it easier for them to access the questionnaire and submit immediately.

Content Validity: The scale was proved to be applicable with content validated and proofread by three English teachers with more than ten years of experience, two PhD assistant professors, an English native speaker, and students in English program (Yaikong & Usaha, 2012).

Internal Reliability: The Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal reliability of the survey and the coefficient result obtained was 0.84 which is acceptable (Yaikong & Usaha, 2012).

Construct validity: The survey was also validated

in terms of construct after the Principal Axis Factoring method of extraction was used, and four main elements of the survey are communication apprehension, test anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and comfort in using English (Yaikong & Usaha, 2012). Based on the factor analysis, four main factors affecting students' speaking anxiety is presented in the survey

2.2.3. Procedure for pilot study and the main study:

Before distributing the questionnaire to the respondents, the researcher had the questionnaire proofread by three colleagues who are teachers at ESPD.

2.2.4. Data management and analysis:

The responses are obtained online from Google form which does not only allow me to keep track of the number of responses received but also to extract an excel file with detailed answers of the interviewees.

As stated above, the questionnaire is distributed to students in the lab room, which is already equipped with one internet connected PC.

2.2.5. Ethics: Prior to distributing the questionnaire to the students, the researcher spent time talking about the content and purpose of the study and confirmed that their answers were used for academic purposes of this paper only. Besides, the researcher asserted that their identities were kept anonymous and that their answers did not have any impact on the grade of the subject that the researcher was teaching them at the moment whatsoever. Additionally, respondents were given chances to ask any questions about the study if they were not clear and they could also withdraw from the study anytime if they felt uncomfortable answering the survey.

2.3. Findings presentation

2.3.1. Level of students' speaking anxiety

Having got the result from 75 students studying at English for Specific Purposes Department via PSCAS survey, the researcher exports the data to an Excel spreadsheet and imports to SPSS IBM software to get the descriptive data including the data on Mean of their answer: Mean Interval Interpretation, the Mean score of 3,41 indicates a medium level of speaking anxiety experienced by sampled students.

2.3.2. Factors influencing students' speaking anxiety

Using SPSS, the data of statements in each factor in a total of four factors (Communication apprehension

factor, Test anxiety, Fear of negative evaluation, Comfort in speaking English) thoroughly classified in table 3 is extracted to get the result on frequency analysis. Using frequency analysis, the frequency and percentage of students' answer for each likert scale in single statements is shown clearly. After that, the average frequency of scale "Agree" and "Strongly Agree" is calculated to express the percentage of students' agreement to each factor. The data on frequency and percentage of items in four factors is presented in the tables below.

Table 2.1: Frequency analysis of Communication Apprehension Factor

	2 [I start to panic when I have to speak English without a preparation in advance]		3 [In a speaking class, I can get so nervous I forget things I know]		5 [I get nervous and confused when I am speaking English]		15 [I dislike using my voice and body expressively while I am speaking English]	
	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent	Frequency	Valid Percent
(1) Strongly disagree	2	2,7	1	1,3	3	4,0	2	2,7
(2) Disagree	11	14,7	13	17,3	12	16,0	25	33,8
(3) Undecided	15	20,0	11	14,7	16	21,3	22	29,7
(4) Agree	28	37,3	37	49,3	37	49,3	24	31,1
(5) Strongly agree	19	25,3	13	17,3	7	9,3	2	2,7
Total Agree + Strongly Agree	47	63	50	67	44	59	26	34
Strongly Agree + Agree (Average Frequency)	41,8							

It can be seen from the frequency table that the average frequency of the Communication Apprehension Factor that students experienced is 41,8. Specifically, approximately two thirds of total students answering the PSCAS survey expressed that if they do not prepare their talk beforehand, they might feel anxious when speak in class, and their anxiety in speaking class may get so intense that they cannot recall things that they already know. Similar to that, 59% of freshmen at ESPD Department are nervous and confused when they are asked to speak something in English.

The average frequency of Test Anxiety encountered among students is 36,7, which is lower than that of the previously discussed factor called Communication Comprehension one. Looking closer at the items in this factor, 62% of students agreed that they might feel anxious regardless of their preparation prior to talking in English. Besides, more than a half of students taking part in the survey expressed an uncertainty of themselves when speaking English. In addition, more than a third of them are anxious when they are asked to speak in English by their teacher even though they have prepared in advance.

Moving on with the table illustrating the frequencies and percentages of students who possess a fear of negative evaluation in class. Overall, freshmen at ESPD Department suffer from the fear of negative evaluation with the frequency of 42,5, coming as the

factor with the highest frequency among four factors discussed in this research. In terms of six items showing students' fear of negative evaluation, 75% of participants answering the survey experienced a certain degree of anxiety when they are waiting to speak in English. Following this, 68% of students might experience a pounding heart when they are asked to speak in English. Not only do the students feel their heartbeat fast, but more than a half of them also feel the tightness and rigidity in their body. Besides, 58% of the students find that it is embarrassing for them to raise their hand to talk in English voluntarily. Last but not least, the fear of being laughed at by their friends is also a factor that influences 33% of freshmen at ESPD, HANU.

The final factor analyzed is students' comfort in speaking English. Looking at the data presented in the table, the frequency of students who feel comfortable when speaking English is only 13.8, which means that the rest of them do not feel the same way. Specifically, 15% of them feel confident and experience no fear when speaking English. Besides, one fifth of the students participating in the survey expressed that they feel relaxed to speak in English. In addition, less than a fourth of them (24%) showed a view of speaking English with confidence.

3. Discussion

Based on the findings presented in the previous section, several interpretations and conclusions are discussed below to reinforce the value of this study as well as provide answers to the stated research questions.

First and foremost, it can be concluded that freshmen at the English for Specific Department, Hanoi University experienced a medium level of speaking anxiety when speaking English with a mean score of 3.41. This result is similar to that of the study conducted in Thai Nguyen University by Le and Tran (2020) with 128 non-English major students. Also, when studying students at University of Technology Malaysia, Abdullah and Rahman (2010) draw the same conclusion on the moderate level of speaking anxiety among 60 students. This finding is also in line with the research done by Çağatay (2015) at a Turkish State University and Sugiyati and Indriani (2021) at English Department of Universitas Tidar, in which the conclusion is that the participants experienced a medium level of foreign language speaking anxiety. However, this medium level is also worth taking into consideration since it seems not to be significant at initial stage, it might hinder students from voicing

their own thoughts and opinions in English and gradually, it may have an adverse impact on students' communicative competence (Wu & Lin, 2014).

Moving on to elaborating the answer for the second research question of this study on the factors that influence students' speaking anxiety. Of all the four main elements of speaking anxiety presented by Yaikong and Usaha (2012) namely Communication apprehension, Test anxiety, Fear of negative evaluation, and Comfort in using English, the factor that have the most considerable influence on students' speaking anxiety is the Fear of negative Evaluation, followed by Communication apprehension, Test anxiety. Anwar and Louis (2017) draws the similar conclusion even though they employ a different analysis approach - the multiple regression analysis for quantitative data. However, this finding is not in agreement with few other studies mentioned in the literature review, in which fear of negative evaluation comes as the second major factor, after low self-confidence (Toubot et al., 2018). Besides, communication apprehension factor is perceived as the element that triggers students' speaking anxiety the most in University of Balearic Island (Amengual-Pizarro, 2018). In the factor of Fear of negative evaluation, respondents in this study express a strong agreement with the fact that the longer they wait to speak in English, the more anxious they get, and they might also feel certain tightness in different parts of their body. This might stem from the characteristic of Vietnamese learners who are reserved and reluctant to let others know their weaknesses (Le and Tran, 2020).

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