English Language Anxiety and Social Competence among Secondary School Students

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Abstract

Due to English language anxiety, students experience tension, nervousness, or sometimes become shy in the classroom. At times, they become frustrated too. The debilitating levels of anxiety in learning and using the English language can cause students to postpone language study indefinitely and keep themselves away from teachers, peer group, etc. This study reports a significant difference in the English language anxiety in subsamples based on gender, medium of instruction, type of school management and type of syllabus. The study was conducted on a sample of 800 students of Class IX drawn from 16 schools of Kozhikode and Malappuram districts of Kerala. The tools used for the study were the English Language Anxiety Scale and Social Competence Scale. The results were derived using statistical techniques such as percentiles, test of significance of mean difference, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and ANOVA. This study also brings out the relationship between English language anxiety and social competence in the total sample and subsamples based on gender, medium of instruction, type of school management and type of syllabus. The major findings affirm that students of Malayalam (regional language) medium have more English language anxiety than the students of English medium. Among English medium students, those of state schools have more English language anxiety than the students of central government schools. The study further revealed significant negative relationship between English language anxiety and social competence for the total sample. The study

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implies that if the medium of instruction is English, it helps in reducing English language anxiety,and as there is a relationship between social competence and English language anxiety, we may strive to improve the social environment of the classroom with constructivist patterns of learning.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a great tool which has made human civilisation possible. It is a uniquely human trait. It helps to embody our thought. According to Kennard (as cited in J.O. Gauntlett 1966), the measure of a man's mastery of a language is his ability to think in it. It is only when we think in a language that we can be truly using it. Though English is a compulsory subject in our schools, many students express their inability and sometimes even acknowledge their failure in learning it. One major reason for this is English language anxiety experienced by them. Due to English language anxiety, students experience tension, nervousness, or sometimes become shy in classroom. They may also become frustrated too. In India, as English is considered the associate official language, we can consider this problem as second language anxiety.

LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND SOCIAL COMPETENCE

Second language anxiety is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) define it as 'a subject feeling of tension apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with the arousal of the automatic nervous system' (p. 287).

Pappamihiel (2002) describes English language anxiety as 'social anxiety' (p. 330), dependent upon interactions with others. The debilitating levels of anxiety in learning and using English language can cause students to postpone language study indefinitely and keep themselves away from teachers, peer group, etc. This study reports the relationship between English language anxiety and social competence in the total sample and subsamples based on gender, medium of instruction, type of school management and type of syllabus. Goleman (1995) asserted that social competence determines how we handle relationships.

The school is a place to build relationships and to develop good communication skills as well as interest in education. But today, the education system is neglecting the affective domain and persuading the students to run after content knowledge and scores. The increased use of English in studies for comprehending and expressing ideas makes many students feel feeble before others. The stressful classroom environment increases the anxiety and makes these students unable to fully exhibit their potential due to the stressful situation they are in. Thus, the relation between

English language anxiety and social competence was explored among the secondary school students of Kerala.

Social competence refers to the skills necessary to be accepted and fulfilled socially. In the present study, social competence was operationally defined based on the emotional competence framework suggested by Goleman (1995). Thus, it is the sum total of the scores on the eleven factors viz., understanding others, developing others, service-orientation, leveraging diversity, organisational awareness, influence, communication, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst and coordination.

Related Studies

Worde (2003) identified non comprehension, speaking activities, pedagogical and instructional practices, error correction as those factors which may contribute to language anxiety. At the same time, a sense of community, pedagogical practices, classroom environment and teacher are considered as anxiety reducing factors. Chakrabarti (2012) found that test anxiety is the predominating anxiety component in the students, as compared to communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009) found that students were experiencing English language speaking anxiety as a result of the fear of negative evaluation from their peers, and perception of low ability in relation to their peers. Chu

(2008) revealed that shyness, foreign language anxiety and willingness to communicate in both Chinese and English were correlated. Moreover, shyness and foreign language anxiety had a relationship with each other. Hemamalini (2007) found that the process of learning English language could be improved by reducing the extent of language anxiety among the students by changing the classroom atmosphere. Liu (2006) found that the students felt the most anxious when they responded to the teacher or were singled out to speak English in class, and felt least anxious during pair work.

Methodology

The study was conducted on a sample of 800 students of Class IX drawn from 16 schools of Kozhikode and Malappuram districts in Kerala. The sample was selected using stratified random method, giving due weightage to gender, type of school management, medium of instruction and type of syllabus. The objectives set forth for the study are the following—

1. To find out whether there is any significant difference in English language anxiety in subsamples based on—
   • Gender
   • Medium of instruction
   • Type of school management
   • Type of syllabus

2. To find whether there is any significant relationship between

English language anxiety and social competence in the total sample and subsamples based on—

- Gender
- Medium of instruction
- Type of school management
- Type of syllabus

For the present study, the investigator used the following tools—

1. English Language Anxiety Scale (Lijy and Praveen 2012)

2. Social Competence Scale (Poduthas and Praveen 2003)

   English Language Anxiety Scale is a Likert type scale with five responses, viz., 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'undecided', 'disagree' and 'strongly disagree'. The investigator identified 'communication apprehension', 'test anxiety', 'fear of negative evaluation' and 'anxiety of English classes' as the four core components of the variable, English language anxiety. The reliability of the test was measured using split-half method and was found to be 0.90. The validity of the English Language Anxiety Scale was

ensured using face validity and concurrent validity. Concurrent validity of the test was determined by comparing it with Foreign Language Class Anxiety Scale developed by Horwitz et al. (1986), and was found as 0.76. The reliability of the Social Competence Scale was found out by test-retest method as 0.81. The validity is ensured through face validity and concurrent validity. The coefficient of correlation between the present scale and the external tool was found to be 0.73.

RESULTS

To find out whether there is any significant difference in English language anxiety in subsamples based on gender, a 't' test was performed (Table 1). Since the 't' value obtained (0.88) is lower than the tabled value at 0.05 level (that is 1.96), there was no significant difference in the mean scores of English Language Anxiety between boys and girls. It can be concluded that boys and girls have almost identical English language anxiety.

Table 1
Test of Significance of Mean Difference of English Language Anxiety between Boys and Girls

Total English Language Anxiety	Gender	Size the of Sample (N)	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value
	Boys	456	105.35	22.79	0.88
	Girls	414	103.97	23.72	

Table 2
Test of Significance of Mean Difference in English Language Anxiety between Malayalam and English Medium students

Total Language Anxiety	Medium of Instruction	Size of the Sample (N)	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value
	English	541	98.80	22.44	10.15
	Malayalam	329	114.40	21.19	

To compare the English language anxiety between students who study in Malayalam and English medium, a 't' test was done for the subsample medium of instruction. The results are given in Table 2. The obtained 't' value (10.15) is higher than the tabled value at 0.01 level (2.58). Hence, it can be concluded that students of Malayalam medium have greater English language anxiety than the students of English medium.

To compare the English language anxiety between students who study in the English medium schools but with different syllabi, viz., CBSE and SCERT, a 't' test was done and the results are given in Table 3. Since the 't' value obtained (3.20) is higher than the tabled value at 0.01 level (2.58), there exists significant difference in the mean scores of CBSE and SCERT syllabi when the medium of instruction is English in both the

cases. Hence, it can be concluded that the students studying the syllabus of State Board experience more anxiety (even when the medium of instruction is English) than the CBSE school students.

The collected data was analysed to find out whether there is any significant relationship between English language anxiety and social competence. This was done using Pearson's Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation. The coefficient of correlation between the variables English language anxiety and social competence for the total sample was found to be -0.22, which is significant at the 0.01 level. This indicates that the two variables are significantly related for the total sample.

The details regarding coefficient of correlation between English language anxiety and social competence for the subsamples gender, medium

Table 3
Test of Significance of Mean Difference in English Language Anxiety between CBSE and SCERT (English Medium)

Total English Language Anxiety	Type of Syllabus	Size of the Sample(N)	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value
	CBSE	162	94.12	23.15	3.20
	SCERT	379	100.80	21.85	

of instruction, type of school management and type of syllabus are given in Table 4.

English Language Anxiety and Social Competence with regard to the subsample gender.

Table 4
Details Regarding the Coefficient of Correlation between English Language Anxiety and Social Competence for the Subsamples

Sample	Category	Size of the Sample (N)	r	Significance of the Difference between Two Correlation Coefficients P value
Gender	Boys	456	-0.16	.02
	Girls	414	-0.29	
Medium of Instruction	Malayalam	541	-0.23	.61
	English	329	-0.27	
Type of Management	State govt.	247	-0.32	.64
	Aided	275	-0.37	
	Central govt.	48	-0.03	1.75
	Unaided	300	-0.30	
Type of Syllabus	SCERT	708	-0.32	.25
	CBSE	162	-0.01	

The variables—English language anxiety and social competence are found negatively related with each other. While we compare the different pairs of groups to find out of if the correlation coefficient is significantly different from the other, we find that though the groups differ in this relation, there is no significant difference in the relationship between

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study reveals that boys and girls have almost the same level of English language anxiety. The confidence to handle English does not seem to be affected by gender differences. This also suggests that any interventions for improving confidence in English should be implemented without any gender bias.

As the students of Malayalam medium have greater English language anxiety than the students of English medium, it is clear that a constant familiarity with the language instils confidence in handling the language. This suggests that even when the medium of instruction is in the vernacular language, exposure to English should be ensured through additional enrichment lessons including role-plays, supplementary reading, and other communication drills. However, another result suggests that students studying the syllabus of State Board experience more anxiety (even when the medium of instruction is English) than the CBSE school students. This makes us believe that the confidence to handle English has factors other than just exposure to English. Probably the socio-economic status, the hidden curriculum of the school and several other decisive factors may be contributing to the lower English language anxiety of the CBSE school students.

The study revealed a significant but negative relationship between English language anxiety and social competence. This suggests the need to provide opportunities for students to socialise in meetings and other clubs under the auspices of the school.

Conclusion

The findings reveal that boys and girls have almost the same English language anxiety. Therefore, any programme to reduce anxiety should address both the genders. The study also revealed that the students, with English as a medium of instruction have lesser anxiety to handle English than their counterparts who learn in their mother tongue. This finding suggests the inclusion of English in a more meaningful way in the academic programme. Among the English medium students, those of state schools have more English language anxiety than the students of central government schools. This could be because the hidden curriculum in CBSE schools promotes the usage of English in the school settings. The study further revealed significant negative relationship between English language anxiety and social competence for the total sample. As there is a relationship between social competence and English language anxiety, we may strive to improve the social environment of the classroom with constructivist patterns of learning.

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