PESSIMISTIC TOPICS TRIGGER THE LEARNERS TO ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THE PUBLIC SPEAKING ACTIVITY IN THE ESL CLASSROOM AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT:

In the second language learning classroom, at the higher education institutions, the language trainers especially General English teachers find training their students in speaking skills, a herculean task. The opportunities created to students by the teachers to speak, are commonly like 'self-introduction', 'introducing another person', 'speaking on a general topic like pollution', 'population', 'advantages and disadvantages of Cell phones', 'Globalization', and so on. The students feel that the above topics are not interesting to speak because those topics are frequently heard and they think that they don't have any new ideas to contribute. Some Professors try with debate, Turn court, Mono act, Group Discussion, etc. Even when the students are asked to present their views in seminars, they find it difficult to speak. These topics and techniques make the students to feel that these topics are useless to develop their speaking skill. So it obstructs their participation in speaking activities conducted in the classrooms. Therefore this paper focuses on how negative topics given to students make them actively participated in speaking activity.

Keywords: Pessimistic topics, involvement of students, speaking skill

INTRODUCTION

In the existing pattern of many syllabus, almost all the Universities, Autonomous and Private Colleges affiliated to the Universities, prepare an assumed syllabus based on the needs of the students. Leonore M.T. Derville in his book *The use of Psychology in Teaching* mentions "Teaching consists of stimulating others to attend, observe, associate, remember and reason" (Derville 1). At the same time, teachers those who train their students find very difficult to use their classroom autonomy to conduct speaking activities to their students because of the compulsion to complete the syllabus and also to prepare the students to face the semester written examinations. Even when a teacher tries to do so, according to

Carolina and Astrid, "First of all, students tend to have low participation in the classes and also oral practice has been a daunting challenge for language teachers" (Carolina & Astrid 65), which make the teachers even more difficult to conduct speaking activities. As Michael J.A. Howe in his *A Teachers' Guide to the Psychology of Learning* suggests, "Teachers and others are always looking for ways to improve learning. We want to find ways to learn more efficiently and more effectively" (Howe 1), a few teachers try on their own way to find time and encourage students to participate in speaking activity with the help of the optimistic topics like 'Youth of India', 'How can you say that you are a good personality?', 'India 2040', 'Boons of ICT', 'Globalization', 'Say about your native place', 'say about your college', 'Advantages of Love marriage and arranged marriage', 'Where will you find yourself after 5 years', and so on. But the results are not satisfactory, as many students still find it difficult even to come forward. This is the participation of the Students in Speaking Activities in Normal Classroom Situation.

Therefore in this study, at first, students were given inputs in basic grammatical skills and they were asked to speak in various optimistic topics. A very few students, around 10 out of 54 students , came forward voluntarily and spoke on the topic for an average of less than one minute. Some students, who came forward, around 15 students, were unable to communicate in English. Most of the students, around 25 in number, spoke with fear. Also, some students declined the opportunity in this situation while they were asked to speak on optimistic topics, they said "Sir, I can't speak", "Sir, I don't have new ideas to speak" and so on. The statement of Marinho, et al. lies as "Fear of speaking leads to communication impairments with an impact on the individual's political, social, and emotional life. The causes include lack of speaking practice, insufficient command of the topic, and/or a negative self-image" (Marinho, Medeiros, Gama & Teixeira 1). When students were motivated to speak on the above topics for scoring their Continuous Internal Assessment (CIA) marks to qualify themselves for their semester exams, almost all took part in speaking activity with the intension to pass their semester examination successfully and not in the intension of using their speaking skill. No one was ready to participate in the speaking activities with interest and involvement to develop their speaking skill. From the teachers point of view, the questions are as follows:

1) How many students come to participate in speaking activity with interest?
   ☐ around 20%   ☐ around 40%   ☐ around 50%   ☐ around 60%   ☐ around 80%
2) How many students come to participate in speaking activity for marks?
   ☐ around 20%   ☐ around 40%   ☐ around 50%   ☐ around 60%   ☐ around 80%
3) How many students are able to speak without mistakes?
   ☐ around 20%   ☐ around 40%   ☐ around 50%   ☐ around 60%   ☐ around 80%
4) How many students speak with involvement/real feeling?
   ☐ around 20%   ☐ around 40%   ☐ around 50%   ☐ around 60%   ☐ around 80%
5) Topics given to the students for speaking test/activity:
   ➢ _____
   ➢ _____
   ➢ _____

6) How do you motivate your students to speak?

☐ Oral motivation ☐ monetary reward motivation ☐ marks motivation

☐ Rewards ☐ Others, if any _____

7) How do the students get motivated?

☐ Marks ☐ External Force ☐ by providing chances ☐ Others, if any _____

8) How many students are able to speak when they are given chance in English?

☐ around 20% ☐ around 40% ☐ around 50% ☐ around 60% ☐ around 80%

9) How many percentage of students speak with fear?

☐ around 20% ☐ around 40% ☐ around 50% ☐ around 60% ☐ around 80%

10) In your observation, what makes them to participate with fear?

☐ The peer group ☐ The given topic ☐ Inability to speak

☐ Compulsion of the teacher ☐ marks ☐ Others, if any _____

ANALYSIS OF THE COLLECTED INFORMATION FROM THE STAFF MEMBERS

The Questionnaire was given to 35 staff members and they were asked to fill it. The analysis of the information collected from the staff members are as follows:

- Out of 35 staff members, 8 staff members have mentioned 60 % of students come to participate in speaking activity with interest.

- Out of 35 staff members, 10 staff members have mentioned 80 % of students come to participate in speaking activity for marks.

- Out of 35 staff members, 13 staff members have mentioned 20 % of students are able to speak without mistakes.

- Out of 35 staff members, 11 staff members have mentioned 40 % of students speak with involvement/real feeling.

- 46 % (app.) of the staff motivate the students orally.

- 14 % (app.) of the staff motivate the students through monetary reward.

- 17 % (app.) of the staff motivate the students through marks.

- 23 % (app.) of the staff motivate the students through rewards.

- 37 % (app.) of the staff say that the students get motivated by providing chances

- 23 % (app.) of the staff say that the students get motivated by external force.

- 10 of the teachers say that the students are able to speak when they are given a chance.

- 13 of the teachers say that the students speak with fear.

- Most of the teachers say inability to speak makes the students to participate with fear.

METHODOLOGY

Students were given chance to speak on various optimistic topics and various situations. The tendency of the students to speak in front of their classmates in an ESL classroom in general was collected from the teachers by using a questionnaire which is included above. After this, the teacher in the experimental group motivated the students to speak on the pessimistic things that are around them. Students were also instructed to give suggestions from their own experience in the college to change the academic infrastructural and overall views on altering the curriculum. It was observed that 40 students came forward themselves voluntarily to speak in front of the classmates. The highlight was students those who were hesitant to speak on positive topics and with positive views came and pointed out all the negatives around them. They were able to communicate very effectively. It was also observed that those who did not come forward and those who were hesitant to speak in English came forward and spoke in Tamil. These procedures were video-recorded.

OBSERVATION AND FINDING

In many situations, the students were unable to speak in front of others without hesitation, interest, involvement, feeling, understanding and fear. Farhan Raja in his article "Anxiety Level in Students of Public Speaking: Causes and Remedies" quotes "Morgan (2003) lists few things that hold great importance during a speech or presentation:

(a) intent to be open with your audience,

(b) intent to connect with the audience,

(c) intent to be passionate about your topic, and

(d) intent to listen to your audience." (99)

But in this case, students were able to overcome the language barriers and were able to speak in front of others. The intention at the beginning of this research was to make the students speak, but the unpredicted results were observed as mentioned above. When the students were asked to speak about their future or which is the best? Love marriage or arranged marriage, they spoke only from the experience of the others or from what they had watched in the movies. But when they were asked to speak on the present situation, they could speak from their heart and from their own experience. V. Sukumaran Nair in *Swami Vivekananda: The Educator* indicates that "The essential nature of education is making real use of the 'ideas' and not merely storing of facts by rote memory" (43). Likewise, the students were triggered to use their own 'ideas' in order to speak on the pessimistic topics. The following were the observations made while the students spoke:

❖ They came forward with much interest to speak.

❖ They spoke with much involvement and feeling on the given topic.

❖ The students spoke with understanding of the topic.

❖ The other important and shocking observation was that the students were asked to speak only in English but they started to share their views in their mother tongue (Tamil) too.

❖ The students were able to speak without any hesitation and fear.

OPTIMISTIC TOPICS FOR MAKING THE STUDENTS TO SPEAK

Topics like 'Globalization', 'India on 2040', 'Youth of India', etc. are all irrelevant for them. There are also many relevant topics such as 'Introduce Yourselves', 'Your hometown', 'Tiruchirappalli', 'Your ambition', 'Unforgettable incident', 'My Family' and so on. But the students were very much interested in speaking the negative or pessimistic part on those topics. Many spoke with great interest on these topics. All the topics have effect on the speaking of the student but pessimistic topics trigger the students in maximum numbers to speak.

SUGGESTION

The students were asked to speak about the unfulfilled desires or expectations that they want to experience in their educational institution and that they wanted to change in the systems followed in their institution in the present. The students' talents of speaking were brought out. So, it is observed that if their desires on those needs were fulfilled they may speak. This was the expectation or the need of the students. The Indian Express states "Negative perception of the school's social climate contributes to high absenteeism which in turn contributes to low test scores and poor academic achievement, researchers have said" ("Poor infrastructure conditions make students feel negatively about school" 2016). There lies another suggestion that the students are motivated not to think about all the pessimistic things which are unchangeable. Instead they should be trained to prepare themselves to face that situation in order to express their talents even these things are negative around them.

CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to investigate how pessimistic topics trigger the students to speak and to provide sufficient result which prove that the participation of the Undergraduate students is higher. A few articles were taken in the same area to validate the study and to construct upon which has already been done. To summarize, this research article proves that students those who have fear of speaking in front of the public came forward actively to perform the speaking activity by the pessimistic topics which is very close to their real life.

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