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## RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND ENGLISH LANGUAGE COMPETENCE: A CORRELATION STUDY

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### Abstract:

*English language has become a global language with the advent of Globalisation. Naturally English language learning has got increased importance as English is the language for the global communication. English is a second language for Indian and often mother tongue hampers the English acquisition of most of the Indians. NCF 2005 has underlined that significance of teaching of English as early as possible so that the learners may have a native speaker like fluency in English. Based on these guidelines Kerala government introduced English Language teaching from class 1 onwards. Teaching of English also affects the quality student acquisition of English. Anxiety is often produced when one tries to interact in English which can affect the language proficiency of the learners. Teacher competence in English and their anxiety can have an influential impact on learners. This study found out that there is a negative correlation between English language anxiety and English language competence of Elementary teacher trainees in Kerala. As elementary teachers have an influential role in developing different competence of the young learners including English language competence, this paper puts forward a number of suggestion to reduce the anxiety evoking situations and to improve English language competence of the trainees.*

### KEYWORDS :

English Language Anxiety, English Language Competence, Correlation

### INTRODUCTION :

“We must not forget for a moment that both knowing the nature and knowing personality is done with the help of understanding other people, understanding those around us, understanding social experiences”.

(Vygotsky)

### INTRODUCTION

‘Affect’ has been increasingly recognized as an integral part in providing effective learning experiences to students. Emotional warmth and support is necessary for effective classroom interactions through which students along with teachers actively engage in the construction of their knowledge. Affective language learning remains significant, as language skills are central in the learning and understanding world of words (Jane, 1999). In other words language is unique in capturing the breadth of human thought and endeavour (Crystal, 1997). When affective and cognitive aspects of learning are

integrated well, the language learning process can be constructed on a firmer foundation.

One of the important affective variables that play significant part in education is anxiety. Students experience anxiety in the classroom. It has the potential to interfere with their learning and performance. Language learning both first and second is a complex process. A startling level of anxiety exists in second/foreign language classroom. Second/foreign language anxiety is a complex psychological construct, which has been seriously studied from 1986. Horwitz E.K. (1986) defines language anxiety as 'a fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language'. Anxiety often stems from the traditional social structure of the classroom, in which the powerful teacher-centred atmosphere may inhibit interaction, or from the feeling that the learning experience is irrelevant or a waste of time (Shrum and Glisan, 1998). It is a situation specific anxiety and is manifested as communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. It can play facilitative as well as debilitating roles in student's language learning.

English has a prominent place in our national life, as it is the most common medium of interstate discourse as we are inherently challenged by the existence of multilingualism. Moreover English is a global language. Being multilinguals because of the existence of innumerable languages, Indians have the cognitive advantages in learning of languages. English, being a second language more than a foreign language is significant in the daily discourse and has great place in Indian education system. The communicational potential of second language cannot be realized immediately if language anxiety exists. Our classrooms can be places of anxiety provoking and can blunt the natural growth of the learners. It can be threatening in a world where English language competence is highly held and the teacher role in that is significant. Though English in India is deemed to the status of second language rather than foreign language English classes in India are anxiety-ridden. The role of teachers in creating anxiety also plays a very significant role. Here it becomes mandatory to know whether the teachers of English suffer from the English language anxiety. Teacher education has great role in developing necessary skills in the trainees to create an anxiety free classroom environment. Here it becomes relevant to search whether teacher trainees in teacher training institute suffer from English language anxiety. Let us first look into English language anxiety and its different dimensions.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY**

Language anxiety is fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the second or foreign language (Gardner and MacIntyre 1993). For the present research the target language is English. This anxiety is linked directly to performing in the target language, so it is not just a general performance anxiety. Language anxiety ranks high among factors influencing language learning, regardless of whether the setting is informal (learning language 'on the street') or formal (in the language classroom).

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY: STATE OR TRAIT**

Language anxiety sometimes arises in response to a particular situation or event (situational or state anxiety), but it can be a major character trait. Language anxiety can start as transitory episodes of fear in situation in which the student has to perform in the language; at this time anxiety is simply a passing state. Ideally language anxiety diminishes over time. However language anxiety does not decrease over time for all students. If repeated occurrences cause students to associate anxiety with language performance, language anxiety becomes a trait rather than a state.

#### **HARMFUL LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND HELPFUL ANXIETY**

Language anxiety can be negative or in other sense it can be debilitating because it harms learners' performance in many ways, both directly by reducing participation and creating overt avoidance of language and indirectly through worry and self-doubt. Harmful anxiety can be related to plummeting motivation, negative attitudes and beliefs, and language performance difficulties.

The language anxiety is sometimes helpful or facilitating in some ways. However Horwitz (1990) stated that anxiety is only helpful for very simple learning tasks, but not with more complicated learning such as language learning. Krashen (1985) contended that there is no helpful anxiety in language acquisition, which almost by definition requires that anxiety be zero, but that helpful anxiety might exist for language tasks in formal language learning situations.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND SELF-ESTEEM**

Unsuccessful learners have lower self-esteem than successful language learners. Whether this affects their overall self-esteem, partly depends on how important language learning is to the individuals involved. Self-esteem is vulnerable when the learner perceives himself or herself as very competent in the native language and totally inadequate or limited in the target language.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND TOLERANCE AMBIGUITY**

Tolerance ambiguity is the acceptance of confusing situations (Arnold Jane, 1999). Second language learning has a great deal of ambiguity about meanings, referents and pronunciation, and this can often raise language anxiety.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND RISK TAKING**

Students who are highly anxious about the frequent ambiguities of language learning often suffer reduced risk taking ability. It is more useful for language learners to take moderate but intelligent risks, such as guessing meanings based on background knowledge and speaking up despite the possibility of making occasional mistakes, rather than taking no risk at all or taking extreme, uninformed risks. Language learners, who fear ambiguity or whose self-esteem is low, frequently freeze up, allowing their inhibitions to take over completely.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND COMPETITIVENESS**

Competitiveness can lead to language anxiety. This happens when learners compare themselves to others or to an idealized image, which they rarely attain.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND SOCIAL ANXIETY**

Social anxiety can include speech anxiety, shyness, stage fright, embarrassment, social-evaluative anxiety and communication apprehension. Social anxiety occurs along with the prospect or actual presence of interpersonal evaluation. It can also be potential for language anxiety as language is acquired through social interaction.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND TEST ANXIETY**

Test anxiety can be part of social anxiety (Mash & Wolfe, 2002), particularly in an evaluative situation where the student is asked to communicate in the English language. Test anxiety is one of the sub variables of foreign language anxiety. Test anxiety is the tendency to become alarmed about the consequences of inadequate performance on a test or evaluation regardless of whether the fears are realistic. Students with test anxiety frequently experience cognitive interference and have a difficult time focusing on the task at hand.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES AND METHODS**

Activities such as oral presentation and skits in English are most anxiety producing situations. Along with speaking tasks writing, reading and listening tasks can also create fear, depending on the student. Some teaching methods such as community language learning can reduce language anxiety for many learners.

#### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ANXIETY AND INSTRUCTOR-LEARNER INTERACTIONS**

Instructor-learner interactions can also create anxiety. Harsh error correction, ridicule and the uncomfortable handling of mistakes in front of a class are among the most important instructor learner interaction issues related to language anxiety. Learning styles conflicts of teachers and students also can create anxiety in language classroom.



## NEED AND IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

English has become a global language and global citizens are required to equip themselves with multilingual skills for a worthy life. It gives access to information in the areas of business, finance, medicine, technology etc (Baker and Westrup, 2006). National Curriculum Framework 2005 recognized the role of English in creating multilinguals in India and it also recommended that the introduction of English in schools be done according to the aspirations of the people and state governments are given full authority to decide on it. Considering this and the rapid expansion and explosion of knowledge in this electronic age and findings in applied linguistics Knowledge Commission recommended early introduction of English in schools. According to NCF 2005 Position Paper of National Focus group on Teaching of English recognized that a language across curriculum should be adopted in primary schools. Heeding to the recommendations Kerala Curriculum Framework 2008 endorses English education from class one. These are some of the developments related to education in national and state level.

Developments in the field of socio-and psycholinguistics bring about paradigm shift in the approach from teacher-centered language teaching to learner-centered language learning and teaching. It is accepted that language is socio-culturally constructed (Kozulin et al, 2003). It becomes increasingly clear that to comprehend, students must construct their own meanings, integrate language systems in multiple ways when immersed in a language-rich classroom and interpret language relative to the social interactions in a classroom community (Collins Block, 1997). Here more than knowing about language, knowing the language becomes important. It is accepted if rich language input environment is provided second language can be acquired with same ease that of the first language since language is learned not in a conscious way (Crystal, 1995).

The role of elementary teacher has grown immeasurably that a high competence in English and mother tongue is a necessary prerequisite to be a successful elementary teacher. Elementary teacher training should be considered as preparatory and the trainees should be proficient in the English language. It becomes relevant that teacher training should be onset and ongoing and pre-service and in-service training should equip the learners to be better facilitator of language learning (NCF 2005). Developing competence in English becomes important for trainees as they are would be teacher for many who are the future of the nation. Kerala government has introduced English as subject from class one and also approved to conduct English medium classes in the Malayalam medium schools. It brings into notice the high competence the elementary teachers do require. Moreover this one of the recommendations of NCF2005 that multilingual situation, though challenging is to be used effectively as a resource for English language acquisition.

As part of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan for the Universalization of Elementary Education, 'Nootikku Nooru' (hundred out of hundred) an experimental try out is being done in some selected schools in Kerala to improve the quality of elementary education. One of the curricular areas they have identified where special programmes and strategies are used is English education in order to improve the competence in that language and the results of such try out though are good still faces the problem of a committed and competent teachers to implement it across the state, which is expected to bring about drastic changes in the quality of education. This also indicates the need of elementary teachers and teacher trainees to be competent in the English language.

There were reports that the primary teachers do lack competence in English language to engage these classes. Basic proficiency in English is mandatory to undergo elementary teacher training. The present study aims to know elementary teacher trainees' English language competence and whether language anxiety influences their English language competence as the developing competence in target language is inherently variable because of the learners' experiences and language exposure and environment (Gillian, 1996) and to know the preparedness of the trainees to real English classroom situations. It also tries to find out whether teacher education classrooms are anxiety ridden or not. Based on the findings we can look into alternatives to reduce the stress and anxiety in the English classroom.

Moreover in an emotionally exciting teaching style, the teacher can try to make his or her teaching as emotionally stimulating as possible which will be an important aspect of a good teaching as being emotionally literate (Sternberg, 1997). Relevance of understanding the affective aspect in the language learning can lead to more effective language learning. When dealing with the affective side of the language learner, attention needs to be given both to how we can overcome problems created by negative emotions and to how we can create and use more, positive, facilitative emotions. In the presence of such overly negative emotions such as anxiety, fear, stress, anger or depression, our optimal learning potential may be compromised. The most innovative techniques and the most attractive materials may be rendered inadequate, if not useless by negative affective reactions involved with language learning process.

Anxiety can wreak havoc with neurological conditions in the prefrontal lobe of the brain, preventing memory from operating properly and thus greatly reducing learning capacity. Fortunately language teachers are increasingly becoming aware of the importance of negative emotional factors and ways to handle them. Stimulating the different positive emotional factors such as self-esteem, empathy or motivation can greatly facilitate the language learning process.

Today emotional literacy is being recognized as very important. "There are times when the fabric of society seems to unravel at ever greater speed when selfishness, violence, and a meanness of spirit seem to be rotting the goodness of our communal lives.... There is growing evidence that fundamental ethical stance in life stem from underlying emotional capabilities. He puts forth as a solution "a new vision of what schools can do to educate the whole student, bringing together mind and heart in classroom" (Goleman 1995).

In a language classroom, which focuses on meaningful interaction, there is certainly room for dealing with affect.

Language teaching has become increasingly open to information from vital feeder fields (e.g. psychology, psycholinguistics, socio-linguistics, education and neuroscience). Gardner's (1989) interpersonal intelligence, which is characterized by the ability to understand and respond effectively to other, definitely proposes the need for emotional literacy.

Along with diversification of objectives of the language classroom has come a new view of the language teacher. This does not mean that language teacher no longer needs a firm command of the language being taught, or proper training in language teaching method. It means that these skills will be much more effective if teachers are also concerned with their own emotional intelligence, as this can make a great deal of difference in the language learning process from the point of the learner. But the personal growth view of language education focuses on the child; it emphasizes relationship between language and learning in the individual and the role of literature in developing children's imaginative and aesthetic lives (Pike, 2004).

#### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

"A Study on the Relationship between English Language Anxiety and English Language Competence of the Elementary Teacher trainees of Thrissur District in Kerala"

For the present study the operational definitions of important terms are given below.

English language anxiety is the subjective feelings of tension, apprehension, nervousness and worry experienced while performing in English and is measured in English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale.

English language competence is the acquired ability to perform adequately in English language with full comprehension and mastery over its syntax and which is measured in the English Language Competence test.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study has the following as objectives.

- 1) To find out the English language competence of elementary teacher trainees
- 2) To study the relationship between English language anxiety and the English language competence of elementary teacher trainees.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

Based on the above objectives the investigator formulated the following research questions for the study.

- 1) What kind of English language competence do elementary teacher trainees have?
- 2) what ways do the English Language anxiety of elementary teacher trainees related to their English language competence?

#### **PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY**

For the present study the researcher took survey method since it is a descriptive study. The

investigator administered the English Language Classroom anxiety Scale and English Language competence Test and thus data is collected from five TTIs in Thrissur district.

### **SAMPLING**

The entire elementary teacher trainees in Thrissur district was the population for the present study and using random sampling method the researcher selected five TTIs and 165 trainees among whom 52 belong to Government TTIs and 25 and 88 belong to government Aided and Unaided TTIs respectively.

### **TOOLS**

The investigator used two tools for the present study. They are English Language Classroom Anxiety Scale to measure English language anxiety and English Language Competence Test to assess the English language competence of the trainees.

### **STATISTICAL TECHNIQUES**

The investigator used the following statistical techniques for the present study. They are percentages for describing English language competence, Mean and Standard deviation for measuring English language competence and English language anxiety, t-test to find out the difference in the English language competence and English language anxiety of the male and female elementary teacher trainees, ANOVA to know the difference of English language competence and English language anxiety of elementary teacher trainees belonging to different Teacher Training Institutes and Pearson's correlation coefficient to know the relationship between English language anxiety and English language competence of the elementary teacher trainees.

### **MAJOR FINDINGS**

The present study revealed that even after many years of introduction to and study in, English and English classes are most anxiety provoking situations for elementary teacher trainees. So the affective variable anxiety is instrumental in reducing the competence in the target language. Here the correlation between English language anxiety and English language competence show significant negative correlation.

The study also showed that majority of the elementary trainees is moderately competent meanwhile there are noticeable group of trainees who are very less competent in English.

Among male and female trainees it is male trainees who are highly anxious in their Language classes and it is their English language anxiety, which highly negatively correlated with their English language competence.

Among trainees from different types of TTIs it is those from government TTIs who are highly anxious in their English classes. It is their English language anxiety, which highly negatively correlated with their English language competence and they are followed by elementary teacher trainees from Government Aided and Unaided TTIs.

### **EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS**

The present study is an eye opener since it helps us to recognize the existence of English language anxiety in Indian classrooms. Though the cognitive advantages of multilingual education has to be utilized to contribute to anxiety reduction in the classrooms, which will help in better language learning. Language learning is basis for learning other content area. In the context of globalization, English education has great significance in leading a worthwhile life. So, English classes have to be anxiety-free. Elementary teacher trainees require to be exposed to highly communication rich, language input rich environment which will ultimately lead them to be highly competent English teachers who play great role in paving foundation for the education of the many thousand children who go through their hands. Necessary steps are to be taken to reduce anxiety in teacher education as well as in schools and to improve English language competence. Elementary teacher training should have provision to develop necessary English language skills for, a teacher who has a repertoire of techniques to teach different skills/sub skills is more likely to succeed in teaching than one who has a limited number of techniques at command (Geetha Nagaraj, 1996).



### SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study is just an attempt in the field of Psychology of language learning. The studies in this area are rarely conducted in our country. More studies are to be undertaken to know the real nature of English language anxiety experienced by school and college students and what are the methods and practices that contribute to increase as well as reduce anxiety and competence in English language and what necessary strategies and approaches are to be taken to improve the quality of English language education in schools, colleges and teacher education Institutes.

### CONCLUSION

Thus we may conclude that English language anxiety plays a great role in debilitating more than facilitating in the acquisition of English language competence of elementary teacher trainees. We also found that English language anxiety and English language competence have significant negative correlation and it can be instrumental in reducing the competence in the English language. This study throws light into the fact that teacher training should be done in a free and comfortable contexts where English language learning and teaching becomes enjoyable where no anxiety is evoked.

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