

## **Strategies to Minimize Learner Anxiety in Speaking English as a Second Language**

Savithri Karunanayake<sup>1</sup>

Speaking is considered to be the most anxiety provoking aspect in a Second Language learning situation. This nervousness or anxiety seems to be triggering when the students are asked to speak in the second language in class. Through the preliminary investigations done, it was noticed that, in the context of the Faculty of Social Sciences & Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, there are surprising number of students who insist that they are anxious language learners. The students do not show any enthusiasm in speaking in the target language for any active practical purposes. In this backdrop, feelings of anxiety and nervousness are depicted by most of the learners when attempting to learn English Language. Therefore, this research aims at investigating the strategies that can be employed to minimize learner anxiety in speaking English as a Second Language. The study also attempts to shed light on the significance of the lecturer's role in creating a friendly and productive learning environment to stimulate students to use second language in the class room. To accomplish the objectives of this study, a total of 60 students learning for Bachelor of Arts degree at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka were selected. The sample selected for the study was two first year classes, each consisting of thirty students and the study took place in the academic year 2017/2018. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, direct observations, pre-test and post-test were utilized as the primary sources of data collection. Secondary data were gathered from books, related internet sources and journal articles. The research findings denoted that the main sources of speaking anxiety are stemming from certain teacher related factors, instructional practices, fear of negative evaluation and linguistic difficulties. In relation to this, several strategies have been explored in mitigating the learner anxiety in speaking English as a Second Language. It is proven that anxiety in speaking English could be treated efficaciously through less anxiety provoking pedagogic strategies such as group work, role plays, simulations, brainstorming sessions, games and some teacher related behaviours. That is, incorporating the communicative approach of language teaching in a strategic and prioritized way with a blend of digital technologies could succeed in tackling the speaking anxiety and making learning collaborative and interactive. Hence, it was apparent from the study that the implementation of the suggested strategies could make a significant difference in the speaking proficiency of the students, their patterns of behaviour and the classroom atmosphere, enabling them to produce real and natural language within the said context.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL); Learner Anxiety; Speaking Anxiety; Speaking Proficiency; Strategies

<sup>1</sup> Department of English Language Teaching, University of Ruhuna, Matara, Sri Lanka, *kalpanisavi@gmail.com*