ANXIETY VS. ENGLISH LEARNING

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Local and foreign studies have shown that anxiety in an English class has a significant impact to a learner which explains that most students experience the same when it comes to English. Students manifest anxiety-related behaviors which somehow block effective learning. Anxiety resulting from low actual/self-perceived English proficiency and feeling inferior may affect anxiety due to fear of negative social evaluation, difficulty in comprehension and fear of speaking English.

Such anxiety could lead to long term effects. Wang (2009) pointed out some effects of anxiety as follows:

1. Anxiety causes avoidance or reduced WTC (Willingness to Communicate)

Fear of making mistakes was one of the major reasons for the low class participation, which can be illustrated by the statement: "If I am not certain about it, I won't say anything in class. I was afraid of making mistakes" An interesting finding is that anxiety made them have very limited class participation, which, however, in turn generated more anxiety.

2. Facilitating anxiety –

Anxiety leads to short-term motivation. Facilitating anxiety motivates pupil to work harder and have better performance This facilitating anxiety can be captured by the following quote: I felt depressed when I knew all other classmates could understand the teacher, but I couldn't. I was nervous and depressed when I felt my performance was not good and I couldn't participate in class. I am worried I would be left behind others.
3. Anxiety causes poor performance

Most students think that anxiety made them perform worse, which can be illustrated by the statement: "Sometimes my brain went blank when I got nervous and anxious in class, and therefore I forgot the words I have learnt". The fact that poor language performance / proficiency was found to be both a cause and an effect of the anxiety my participants experienced shows the reciprocal relationship between anxiety and performance.

4. Anxiety impairs self-confidence and leads to low self-perception / feeling inferior

A pupil’s self-confidence or self-perception was negatively affected by anxiety and then they felt inferior, which can be captured by the quote: "When I was anxious, I underestimated my English and I kept thinking I could not understand spoken English at all and my overall English was so poor. I felt very inferior". Three of them had self-defeating thoughts when they were anxious. For example, one said: "I felt very nervous and anxious all the time in class. I felt helpless and I must look like an idiot. I felt I am so stupid".

5. Anxiety interrupts the English language learning process

Most students reported that they had difficulty concentrating in class when they felt anxious, which could be illustrated by the statement: "The morning class made me most uneasy. I could not concentrate in class."

6. Anxiety increases the planning time in communication

Some noted that when they were anxious, they tended to think a lot and make sure the sentence is correct before saying it. The following statement could represent what they said: I felt nervous when I had to speak English and when I said something but not sure if he/she understood me or not. I was nervous before I said something. I was thinking
what I should say and what the correct way of saying it is and how to say it in complete sentences.

We teachers must create a positive atmosphere for learners. While learners have already formed their attitudes or perceptions about learning, teachers play a significant role in creating conditions for them to develop a positive attitude towards learning especially in English subject.

We must help wipe out such anxieties so as to promote better communication. Teachers have the responsibility to build self-confidence among their students. Let students express their ideas with minimal corrections. Teachers can serve as guide in sentence formation until pupils can start by their own. If we lose hope from the very start and just teach lessons by translating in the mother tongue, then we are to lose grasp of what is intended to be learned.

References: