Abstract

OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF SPEAKING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A STUDY OF THE ROLE THAT SELECTED HUMANISTIC TECHNIQUES PLAY IN REDUCING LANGUAGE ANXIETY ASSOCIATED WITH ORAL PERFORMANCE IN THE TESOL CLASSROOM

By: A D Bowen
Degree: Master of Arts with specialisation in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages)
Supervisor: Mr P G Southey

Summary

The aim of this study was to investigate the role that humanistic techniques play in reducing feelings of language anxiety associated with oral communication in the TESOL classroom. Students in the experimental group attended classes which incorporated humanistic techniques such as journal writing and group work and where the affective needs of the students were taken into account. Students in the control group were provided with the normal course content along more traditional lines and their affective needs were not taken into account. Language anxiety was measured by means of questionnaires, journals and interviews. The results revealed that general feelings of anxiety about oral communication decreased in the experimental group. The experimental group achieved higher scores in the final written examination although there was no significant difference in the oral examination results between the two groups. The drop-out rate in the experimental group was lower than that of the control group.

Key Terms

English language teaching; TESOL; EFL; Foreign language anxiety; Test anxiety; Communication apprehension; Humanistic techniques; Group work; Journals; BALLI; FLAS
Declaration

I declare that, OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF SPEAKING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: A STUDY OF THE ROLE THAT SELECTED HUMANISTIC TECHNIQUES PLAY IN REDUCING LANGUAGE ANXIETY ASSOCIATED WITH ORAL PERFORMANCE IN THE TESOL CLASSROOM, is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

............................................. .............................................
SIGNATURE DATE
(MS AD BOWEN)
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the management of Wits Language School for granting me permission to conduct my research in their classrooms. A particular debt of gratitude is owed to Alison Beynon for her words of advice and encouragement throughout the course of this dissertation and to Judy Sternberg whose example in the classroom has always served to inspire my own teaching. A special thank you is also due to my supervisor, Mr Peter Southey, whose guidance and encouragement went beyond the call of duty.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to all the EFL students I have taught at Wits Language School and particularly to those who participated in this study.
Chapter One: Introduction

I. Research questions 3
II. Delimitations 5
III. Definition of terms 6
IV. Assumptions 8
V. Methodology 9
   A. Experimental group 10
      1. Questionnaires 10
      2. Learner journals 12
      3. Interviews 13
      4. Examinations 14
      5. Drop-out rate interview 14
   B. Outline of methodology for experimental groups 15
   C. Control group 16
      1. Questionnaires 16
      2. Interviews 17
      3. Examinations 18
      4. Drop-out rate interview 18
   D. Outline of methodology for control groups 19
   E. Table of similarities and differences between the
      methodology presented for the experimental and control groups 20
VI. Importance of the study 22
VII. Structure of the thesis 25
Chapter Two: Literature Review

I. Introduction 28
II. Anxiety from a psychological viewpoint 28
III. Foreign language anxiety 30
IV. Facilitative and debilitative anxiety 35
V. Communication apprehension 36
VI. Historical overview of language anxiety research 38
VII. The effect of language anxiety on oral performance 42
VIII. The effect of language anxiety on written and oral language tests 44
IX. The effect of language anxiety on drop-out rates from language courses 48
X. Practical methods for overcoming language anxiety 48
XI. Practical methods for overcoming test anxiety 51
XII. Humanistic techniques:
   A. Experiential awareness 57
      1. Increasing awareness of the language learning process 57
      2. Correcting erroneous beliefs 58
      3. The use of journals 60
   B. Group awareness 61
      1. The importance of group work 62
      2. Creating a sense of belonging to a group 64
      3. Increasing opportunities for oral communication 65
      4. Providing a supportive framework for oral preparation and oral presentation 66
XIII. Conclusion 67

Chapter Three: Methodology

I. Overview of the study 71
II. Details of the study 72
III. Methodology

A. Specific treatment of data for each research question

1. Research question 1
   a. Data needed
   b. Treatment and interpretation of the data
      i. BALLI
      ii. PRCA
      iii. FLAS
      iv. Mid-course questionnaire
      v. Post-course questionnaire
      vi. Journals
      vii. Mid-course interview
      viii. Post-course interview

2. Research question 2
   a. Data needed
   b. Treatment and interpretation of the data
      i. Written examinations
      ii. Oral examination

3. Research question 3
   a. Data needed
   b. Treatment and interpretation of the data
      i. Drop out rate interview form

IV. Reliability
### Chapter Four: Results: Presentation and Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I. Research question 1</th>
<th>97</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Discussion</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. PRCA results</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Discussion</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. BALLI results</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. The Foreign Language Anxiety Scale, Mid Course and Post Course questionnaires</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Discussion</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. FLAS, Mid Course and Post Course results</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Journals</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Positive experiences inside the classroom</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Negative experiences inside the classroom</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Positive experiences outside the classroom</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Negative experiences outside the classroom</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Mid and Post Course oral interviews</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. What makes you anxious about speaking in class?</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Suggestions for overcoming anxiety associated with speaking in the TESOL classroom</td>
<td>108</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
II. Research question 2
   A. Written examinations
      1. Discussion
      2. Written examination results
   B. Oral examination
      1. Discussion
      2. Oral examination results
III. Research question 3
   A. Drop out rate
      1. Discussion

Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations

I. Contribution to EFL practice
II. Limitations of the study
III. Practical implications for the TESOL classroom
IV. Suggestions for further research

Bibliography

Appendix

Appendix A: The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory
   (Administration 1)
Appendix B: The Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory
   (Administration 2)
Appendix C: The Personal Report of Communication Apprehension
Appendix D: The Foreign Language Anxiety Scale
Appendix E: Mid Course Questionnaire
Appendix F: Post Course Questionnaire
Appendix G: Example of a student journal
Appendix H: Written Examination results
Appendix I: Oral Examination results 152
Appendix J: Drop Out Rate Results 154