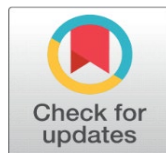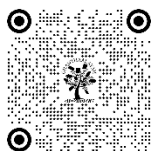# IMMERSIVE FLOW STATE APPROACH: A LANGUAGE ACQUISITION STRATEGY TO REDUCE NEGATIVE AFFECTIVE FILTER ANXIETY TO SPEAK ENGLISH

J. Rajkamal Petro[1], Dr. M. Beulah Hemalatha[2]

[1]Ph.D. Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English, Nazareth Margoschis College at Pillaiyanmanai, Nazareth -628617. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-627012, Tamil Nadu, India)
[2]Research Guide & Supervisor, Assistant Professor of English, PG & Research Department of English, Nazareth Margoschis College at Pillaiyanmanai, Nazareth -628617. (Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-627012, TamilNadu, India)

ABSTRACT

The Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1980) insists that negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, boredom, or lack of motivation can create a psychological barrier that impedes a learner's ability to speak a new language. In the context of second language acquisition, anxiety is a significant emotional filter that obstructs the learner's ability to grasp the contextual and situational elements of the language. This research aims to investigate whether flow theory, a positive psychology theory on optimal experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1970), can assist learners in overcoming the anxiety barrier when learning to speak English. An innovative learning approach, the Immersive Flow State Approach, was framed. A brief study was conducted with fifty-eight students over four weeks to explore this. The students' experiences were collected using the Experimental Sampling Method. Qualitative and Quantitative analyses were done. The results were analyzed. As the approach is effective, it is suggested that elaborative studies be conducted on the proposed research topic.

Keywords: Affective filters, Anxiety, Flow Theory, Optimal Experience

1. INTRODUCTION

In today's global network, communicating effectively in English has become increasingly essential. Students struggle with both emotional and language barriers to learn a second language. The affective domain is an integral component of language learning that influences students' motivation, engagement, and success. In recent years, there has been a growing interest in investigating foreign language learners' emotions and their impact on the learning process. Zoltan Dornyei suggested the need for studying second language acquisition through psychological learning theories.

Stephen Krashen proposed that emotional factors such as anxiety, motivation, and self-confidence can influence language acquisition. He named it 'Affective Filters'. According to him high affective learning inputs, like anxiety and lack of motivation, act as a filter for a learner to receive a language. On the contrary, if the affective filter is low, the learners can acquire the language effectively. Anxiety is a complex emotional experience that can be described by tension, uneasiness, and worry. Language anxiety refers to a learner's fear or anxiety when he needs to use a foreign language or a second language for expression (Zheng Yaoqing, 2021). Language anxiety encompasses the feelings of worry and negative fear-related emotions associated with learning or using a language that is not an individual's mother tongue (MacIntyre &

Gregersen, 2012, p.103). Foreign language anxiety, also known as Xenoglossophobia, is the feeling of unease, worry, nervousness, and apprehension experienced in learning or using a second or foreign language. Many researchers agree with the view that language anxiety is a complex psychological phenomenon unique to language learning. Anxiety leads to fear of failure and distracts focus. Anxiety occurs among students while communicating in front of peers or in situations compelled to speak in English as in group discussions and presentations. Reducing anxiety can improve the language acquisition process, by lowering the affective filter.

Flow theory proposed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as a positive psychology theory helps language scholars to study the impact of immersing students in a state of flow by allowing them to focus on the learning process. In the context of second language acquisition, as a means to effective communication, immersing in a flow state can enhance student engagement in the learning process. The bright side of the flow, or flow-enhancing experience entails a balance between task challenge and learner skill, where tasks are addressed with skills appropriate to the situation (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2019). When learners experience flow, they focus on the learning process by having clear goals, balancing skills and challenges, receive immediate feedback. The state of flow reduces anxiety among learners. In contrast, Flow barriers, or negative flow experiences are always associated with emotions, such as anxiety, boredom (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), apathy, and worry (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2002).

To induce flow while learning, the teachers can design effective teaching strategies to immerse the students in a state of flow to reduce anxiety. This helps to reduce affective filters and build confidence to enhance English speaking fluency.

2. FLOW THEORY AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

The relationship between flow and language learning has been studied in several studies. Yury Almetev (2018), in his research article "Theory of Flow: Implications for Foreign Language Education," discusses the Theory of Flow and its implications for foreign language teaching and learning. He presents a brief review of the existing research literature on the topic. He concluded that by immersing themselves in the activity and receiving positive emotions, students lose self-consciousness and lower their affective filter, which leads to higher communicative confidence and higher WTC in FL.

Joy Egbert (2004) investigates the presence of flow experiences in foreign language classrooms and how these experiences can enhance language learning. In the article titled, A Study of Flow Theory in the Foreign Language Classroom, Joy Egbert states, that flow can be experienced in language classrooms, providing an exciting and helpful guide for creating and adapting learning activities.

Various studies have been carried out on Language Learning driven by Flow theory and Flow experiences. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) identified seven characteristics of flow. Four of those characteristics in the language learning process are related to student engagement – A challenging activity that requires skills, Merging of action and awareness, Concentration on the task at hand, and Clear goals and feedback (Whitson & Consoli, 2009). The basic components of Flow Theory in Language Learning experience are 1. Balance between challenge and skill 2. Focused attention and intense concentration 3. A sense of control, and 4. Learner Interest (Burcu Senturk, 2012). Flow experiences can reduce language learning anxiety and promote a more enjoyable learning experience.

3. IMMERSIVE FLOW STATE APPROACH

A new learning strategy is required to improve the speaking fluency of second language learners and overcome the emotional barriers. Studies and evidence show that language barriers such as vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax, and grammar can be learned easily through various traditional and innovative teaching methods. But the need to address the negative emotional filters is overwhelming. There is a growing demand and need to help learners overcome negative emotional barriers such as anxiety, shyness, and fear of making mistakes. Hence a new learning approach is designed, focusing on addressing the negative emotional barriers of the learners.

The approach is grounded in Flow Theory. Csikszentmihalyi (1998) describes it as the emotional state of an individual who experiences interest, happiness, and satisfaction while engaging in a specific activity. While framing this new approach, the components and the essential characteristic features of Flow Theory are considered. This new approach focuses on the experience of Flow in the Language Learning process. The approach is termed the Immersive Flow State Approach. The Immersive Flow State Approach Is Defined As A Learning Approach Where Learners Are Immersed In The Learning Process With Intense Focus And Control Over The Tasks That Meet Their Ability To Improve Speaking Fluency.

To explore the effect of the Immersive Flow State Approach in reducing negative emotional filter anxiety, a research study was conducted with fifty-eight students from an Engineering College. The samples selected had their schooling with Tamil as the medium of instruction.

The research hypothesis is framed as the higher the Flow State the lower the Anxiety Level.

The purposive sampling method where researchers select participants based on specific characteristics, that are most relevant to the research study is followed for this study. The objective of the study is to explore how far the Immersive Flow State Approach helps students overcome their anxiety about speaking in English. Fifty-eight first-year engineering college students from regional medium backgrounds who are anxious to communicate in English were selected for the study. The current efficiency of the students speaking in English is observed in their English language lab class. A pre-test was conducted as a Responsive Assessment Task. In this task, a set of questions were framed and the students were asked to give responses orally. The average time taken to respond to the questions was noted.

Then a teaching intervention module was designed by the researcher for four weeks. The flipped Classroom Teaching Method was adopted to learn to speak. The students were asked to watch the assigned videos from the English Speaking Course; then the next day they were asked to practice the assigned conversation in the class. The task provider also asked questions related to the conversation. Finally, the students were asked to share their experiences, how they were focused while listening to the videos, and how anxious they were while conversing in the class.

Then a post-test was conducted as a Responsive Assessment Task. The average time taken by the students to respond to the given questions was calculated. Comparing the time taken by the students to respond during the pre-test and post-test, a data analysis was carried out to study the anxiety levels of the students before and after the intervention. A structured feedback questionnaire was collected from the students to share their experience on attaining the flow state. It was also evaluated to study the effectiveness of the Immersive Flow State Approach.

The pre-test and the post-test assessments were carried out as Responsive Assessment Tasks. A set of ten questions were asked of the participants. The questions were based on the introduction and likings about the participants. The time taken to respond to each question was observed and the average time taken by the individual was calculated. Comparing the average time taken to respond to the questions during the pre-test and the post-test, the difference in the anxiety level of the students after the intervention was calculated.

A questionnaire was designed to measure the flow experience and post-intervention anxiety level of the samples under intervention. Ten questions were framed. The first six questions were organized to study the flow state experience and the final four questions to test the anxiety level after learning intervention. The responses were taken as a five-scale rating based on their agreement with the given assertions. Results were evaluated as the mean value score with a 0-10 score as low flow; 11-20 as Moderate Flow, and 21-30 as high flow. The mean value of 0-10 signifies a high anxiety level; 11-20 signifies a moderate anxiety level and 21-30 signifies a low anxiety level.

The Feedback questionnaire on Flow State Experience collected from the students was also analyzed. The average value of questions 1-6 is 22.03, which signifies that the students experienced a high level of flow. The mean value of questions 7-10 is 22.09, which signifies that the students felt a low anxiety level. The study on the fifty-eight students reflects High Flow with Low anxiety. The study shows that the students experienced a positive learning experience with a highly optimal experience, which agrees with the Flow theory.

The research hypothesis "Higher the flow state lower the anxiety level" was proved by the study. The students who had experienced the higher flow state showed reduced anxiety levels in the post-test.

The students were selected from the engineering college regional medium students. There is a possibility for variations in the effectiveness of achieving a flow state with students from English medium backgrounds. As we lack objective measurements, there might be a chance of variations in the accuracy of the effectiveness. The research focused on addressing the emotional barriers of the students in speaking English. Hence an in-depth study can be conducted with more students from various colleges and long duration. Longer duration helps to analyze the effectiveness of the approach more effectively and accurately. The learning interventions with a few other effective language learning Apps, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods are also highly recommended.

4. CONCLUSION

The Immersive Flow State Approach is a strategy that helps students to reduce anxiety and enhance the learning process. The proposed hypothesis Higher the Flow Lower the Anxiety is analysed using the given data. Hence the Immersive Flow State Approach is an effective approach to teach students who are anxious to speak in English.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

Almetev, Yury. "Theory of Flow: Implications for Foreign Language Education". *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences*, 2018.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. "*Applications of Flow in Human Development and Education: The Collected Works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*". Springer, 2014.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. "*Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*". 1990.

Dewaele & MacIntyre. "The Effect of Classroom Emotions, Attitudes Toward English, and Teacher Behavior on Willingness to Communicate Among English Foreign Language Learners", Journal of Language and Social Psychology, vol 38, issue 4, 2019

Dornyei, Zoltan, and Erdi Simsek. "Anxiety and L2 Self-Images: The 'Anxious Self'." *New Insights into Language Anxiety: Theory, Research and Educational Implications*, 2017, pp. 51–69.

Egbert, Joy. "A Study of Flow Theory in the Foreign Language Classroom." *Canadian Modern Language Review*, vol. 60, no. 5, 2004, pp. 549–586.

Eryılmaz, Ali, and Onur Ergünay. "Development of Flow State Scale in English as a Foreign Language Context." *European Journal of Education Studies*, vol. 4, 2018, pp. 143–154.

Farokhi Pour, Sajad, et al. "A Dynamic Intervention for Removing Learning Anxiety: A Field Experiment on Removing Psychological Barriers to Speaking." *International Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 12, no. 1, 2018, pp. 25–31.

Krashen, Stephen. "The Input Hypothesis: An Update." *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics (GURT) 1991: Linguistics and Language Pedagogy: The State of the Art*, Georgetown University Press, 1992.

MacIntyre, P., and T. Gregersen. "Affect: The Role of Language Anxiety and Other Emotions in Language Learning." *Psychology for Language Learning*, edited by S. Mercer, S. Ryan, and M. Williams, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 103–118, doi:10.1057/9781137032829_8.

Nakamura, J., and M. Csikszentmihalyi. "The Concept of Flow: *Flow and the Foundations of Positive Psychology*", Springer, 2014, pp. 239–263, doi:10.1007/978-94-017-9088-8_16.

Ozdamil, F., and G. Asiksoy. "Flipped Classroom Approach". *World Journal of Educational Technology: Current Issues*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2016, pp. 98–105.

Schmidt, J. A. "Flow in Education". Elsevier, 2010.

Sendurk,AK, Burcu. "Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Flow in Speaking Activities", International Journal of Management Economics and Business, Volume: 8 Issue: 16, 283 - 306, 01.01.2012

Whitson, Carol, and Jodi Consoli. "Flow Theory and Student Engagement". *Journal of Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives in Education*, vol. 2, no. 1, May 2009, pp. 40–49.

Zheng, Yaoqing. "Review of Enlightenment of Emotional Factors in Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis on English Language Teaching Research in College". *Proceedings of the 2021 4th International Conference on Humanities Education and Social Sciences (ICHESS 2021)*, 2021