

Scrutinizing EFL Teachers' Attitudes towards the Use of the Discord Application in Reducing Students' Public Speaking Anxiety. Case of Teachers of English Language at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine, Setif2 University

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Abstract

The study aims at exploring teachers' attitudes towards the use of Discord application in reducing students' public speaking anxiety. It adopts an exploratory research design with a mixed method approach which aims at having an in-depth comprehension of the research topic in an accurate way to answer the research main questions. An interview was held with Eight EFL teachers of Setif 2 University to collect the necessary data. The data were analyzed through a thematic analysis (for analyzing the content of the interviews). The findings revealed that teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of the Discord application in reducing public speaking anxiety. In addition, teachers recommend learners to practice speaking as a main strategy to follow in order to reduce public speaking anxiety.

Keywords: Discord application; Public speaking anxiety; Teachers' attitudes.

1. INTRODUCTION

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In the twenty-first century, speaking is seen as the most crucial and essential skill for learning a foreign language. It demonstrates the linguistic competence and communication abilities of EFL students, showcasing their proficiency in utilizing the language for academic, professional and personal purposes. However, a significant number of EFL students commonly experience a psychological barrier known as speaking anxiety or communication fear. This obstacle poses adverse effects that can impede learners' overall academic progress and specifically hinder their speaking abilities.

The following chapter provides a theoretical overview of the subject being studied. It examines both public speaking anxiety and the use of discord application as a language teaching strategy to aid EFL students in reducing their anxiety levels and improving their public speaking performances, drawing on previous studies for comparison. In this regard, this research paper aims to explore the role of the Discord Application in reducing students' public speaking anxiety by addressing the following questions:

1. What are teachers' attitudes towards the Discord application for reducing learners' public speaking anxiety?
2. What are teachers' recommendations in reducing learners' public speaking anxiety in their language teaching classrooms?

2. Public Speaking Defined

Speaking is defined as the process of constructing and expressing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols in a variety of circumstances and scenarios (Chaney, 1998, as cited in Shrouf, 2011). Speaking is therefore an interactive process that requires the participation of two participants or more where meaning is first understood, then shared between these participants through verbal (words, expressions, and sounds) or non-verbal (body gestures, signs) means depending on a given context. According to Shrouf (2011), speaking is a crucial part of learning and teaching a second language and plays a significant role in communication. Furthermore, Torky (2006) states that speaking is the methodical fusion of sounds into coherent utterances in accordance with norms unique to each language. Based on this definition, speaking involves the production of sounds that convey words and expressions with shared meaning, enabling individuals to connect and interact with others. Public speaking, on the other hand, refers to the practice of delivering a planned and intentional lecture or presentation to a group of people, with the purpose of informing, influencing, or entertaining the listening audience (Matjai, 2019).

Therefore, it is easy to conclude that public speaking and oral presentations share similarities in terms of being organized and prepared in advance, following a systematic way that enables the speakers to clearly communicate their ideas and arguments to the listening group or audience.

3. Anxiety Defined

Broadly speaking, anxiety is the emotion people experience when they think something unpleasant could happen in the future. Other adjectives that convey anxiety-related emotions include "apprehensive," "uncertain," "nervous," and "on edge" (Lidbetter, 2010). Thus, anxiety is characterized by a sense of dread, concern, stress, and anxiousness that results from anticipating the worst-case situations and feeling like something horrible might happen in the future. According to (Adwas, Jbireal & Azab, 2019), restlessness, feeling tense or on edge, being easily tired, having trouble focusing or going blank, impatience, muscle stiffness, and annoyance are all common symptoms of anxiety. Additional symptoms may include sleep disturbance, lack of concentration, and difficulties with social, academic, or occupational functioning. Therefore, it negatively impacts students' ability to learn and how they mentally digest their learning.

4. Public Speaking Anxiety

Public speaking anxiety, also known as communication apprehension (CA), refers to a person's level of fear or tension related to current or projected communication with another person or group of people (McCroskey, 1977, as cited in Meluch, Feehan & Starcher, 2019). CA is a factor commonly associated with students' public speaking, as a significant number of EFL students experience anxiety when compelled to speak the target language (TL) in front of their classmates and instructors. Consequently, language anxiety often hinders the process of learning a foreign language. Furthermore, Meluch, Feehan, and Starcher (2019) suggest that CA and speaking anxiety are concepts that might be used interchangeably to describe students' dread of speaking in EFL classrooms. In the same vein, Bodie (2010) defines CA as the apprehension of speaking in front of others or in interpersonal settings, as well as the associated feelings of reluctance, awkwardness, and anxiety. It is important to know that one of the most frequent causes of students' speaking difficulties is the fear of running out of things to say consequently, students are generally scared to make mistakes when producing linguistic output, as they are learning a language that is foreign to them.

5. The Use of Discord Application in Language Learning

Discord is one of the most widely utilized apps today that is often used by both teenagers and adults. The following section will outline the precise features of this app.

5.1. Definition of Discord Application

According to Pearson (2022), Discord is a free communication application that enables users to communicate via text, voice, and video with friends, developers, and gaming communities. It is one of the most widely used platforms for online communication with hundreds of millions of users. Discord is compatible with various platforms and operating systems, including Windows, macOS, Linux, iOS, iPadOS, Android, and

web browsers. It was established in 2015 and the idea behind it was to provide desktop gamers with a straightforward voice communication mechanism through a lightweight application that wouldn't negatively impact the performance of the games (Horaczek, 2021). However, due to the numerous and useful functions that this application provides to its users, discord has been adopted for socializing and educational purposes, and many teachers now incorporate it into their teaching practices.

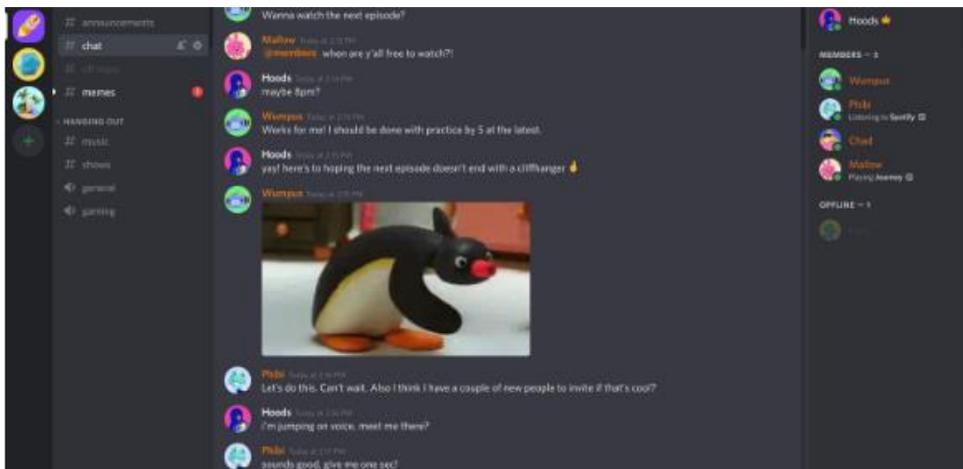


Figure 01: The Front Page of the Discord App (Pearson, 2022)

5.2. The Use of the Discord Application

Pearson (2022) has provided a thorough explanation of how Discord functions upon logging in. When it first launches, it shows the "Home" screen. This screen displays the main window, where the friends list is visible, and the left side of the screen shows the servers the user has joined. To initiate a conversation, users need to have someone to talk to. Other users can provide their unique Discord tags, which are made up of an identification number and case-sensitive username. By selecting the "Add Friend" button at the top of the home screen, users can establish contact with them. Once the friend request is accepted, users can engage in text, audio, or video chats with them directly on this screen. If there is a need to include additional participants in the conversation regularly, it is recommended to utilize a server. The primary goal of this program is to facilitate communication between users, offering a free, user-friendly platform that allows users to create chat groups and connect with like-minded individuals to share various online experiences.

6. Previous studies

Several studies have tried to explain how Discord is used as a learning tool. For instance, Wulanjani(2018) investigated its utilization and claimed that the Discord application promotes increased engagement, interaction, and activity among classroom students. According to Wulanjani,

Discord has the capacity to transform a traditionally monotonous listening class into a more engaging virtual experience. However, it is important to know that conclusions were primarily drawn based on interviews with select class members, rather than assessing the reception of alternate learning mediums by all students.

Cacho (2020) examined how the Discord application could enhance student engagement, communication, and performance by incorporating it as an optional part of the lesson. Cacho's findings revealed that 80.9% of students reported improved grades through the use of the application. In a survey consisting of 23 questions, 98.5% of the respondents expressed their willingness to see Discord used in future sessions, indicating a positive reception. It is worth noting that both studies focus primarily on student's opinions of the application's usage, with limited attention given to aspects such as accessibility or comparisons with similar applications.

7. Research Methodology

7.1. Research Design

This study targeted EFL teachers regarding the use of the discord application in reducing public speaking anxiety. To that end, an exploratory method endorsing a qualitative approach was opted through a random sampling technique, for the use of an interview as a data collection tool carried out with eight (8) EFL teachers at the level of the department of English at Setif-2 University. The study is qualitative in nature. Thus, the qualitative methodology was adopted as the most suitable to gain in-depth insights and to capture teachers' experiences and views accurately. The interview was held online via Zoom application, and the data collection was analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis. Accordingly, the findings are classified into the main themes related to the research questions addressed in this study.

7.2. Participants

This research population for this study comprises EFL teachers from Setif2 University. The sample consists of eight volunteer participants selected from the English language and literature department of the aforementioned university. These participants were chosen based on their teaching experience, which provides valuable insights for the present study. The selected teachers have a range of teaching experience, spanning from 3 years to 20 years or more.

7.3. Sample

A sample is a group of individuals or objects drawn from a large population for a measurement. In order to ensure that the results from the study sample can be applied to the whole population, the sample should be representative of that population (Jones, 1955; Salant & Dillman, 1994). A sample is required because, in addition to being time-consuming and inaccessible to the participants, conducting a study on the entire population is rarely practicable and almost never cost-effective (Leyman, 1983; Lohr,

1999). So it makes sense to choose a subset of people to represent the population when it is impossible to research the entire population. The study's participants are eight oral expression teachers at the department of Setif 2 University.

7.3.1. Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling is one type of non-probability or non-random sampling where specific contexts, people, or events are chosen deliberately in order to reveal crucial information that cannot be obtained from other alternatives (Maxwell, 1996). Malhotra and Birks (2006) provided many advantages of the purposive sampling method, describing that it is low-cost, convenient, not time-consuming, and ideal for exploratory research design. In this respect, the purposive sampling method has been used by the researcher to select their subjects.

7.4. Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

Kabir (2016) defines the data collection process as a defined, systematic procedure for gathering and measuring data on variables of interest in order to address specific research questions, test hypotheses, and evaluate findings. The aim of any data collection is to gather high-quality evidence, which can then be used in rich data analysis to create answers to questions that have been addressed. No matter the subject of study or preferred method for defining data (qualitative vs. quantitative), reliable data collecting is necessary to uphold the integrity of research. In other words, data collection procedures could vary from one research to the other, whether it is quantitative, qualitative or both, the common thing about this process however is that this process should be characterized with reliability of data and integrity of the data collection tools in order to maintain the integrity of the research itself. The data collection process is carried out through the use of different tools; each one is selected for its suitability and ability in collecting meaningful and relevant information that could serve the research objectives. The following tools are the ones used in the data collection process for the conducted study. The interview comprised a set of eight open-ended questions, with a few closed-ended questions included as well. The intention was to encourage EFL teachers to share their perspectives on the utilization of the Discord application and to delve into their overall attitudes regarding the application's potential in addressing public speaking anxiety. Additionally, the interview sought to gather insights from teachers who had prior experience using Discord as a means to overcome their own anxieties related to public speaking.

7.5. Teachers Interviews

The interview is the qualitative tool that is used in the present study to collect elaborated data from participants concerning their perceptions as EFL teachers towards the use of Discord application in reducing public speaking anxiety. Some of the questions which are related to anxiety are adapted from the study of Rebbouh (2016), whereas the rest of the questions

Application in Reducing Students' Public Speaking Anxiety. Case of Teachers of English Language at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine, Setif2 University are self-developed and designed to collect data that could serve the aim of the current study.

7.6. Description of Teachers Interview

The interview includes eight structured questions, each one aims at identifying participants' perceptions towards a particular aspect of the research topic. The first question aims to identify the frequency with which students encounter anxiety attacks in their EFL classroom. The second question seeks to explore the factors behind students' anxiety. The third question targets teachers' strategy to reduce their learners' speaking anxiety. The following question aims at exploring participants' recommendations concerning the use of online applications in reducing speaking anxiety. The next question seeks to determine the types and names of applications that teachers could recommend according to their experience. The sixth question aims at knowing whether participants are familiar with the Discord app and its use. Whereas the final question aims at exploring participants' attitudes towards the implementation of the app in their language teaching classrooms, the effectiveness of this app as a tool to increase students' engagement in the learning process, and the effectiveness of this app in reducing students' public speaking anxiety based on their experience in teaching. The interviews were held with eight teachers of English language from the University of Mohamed Lamine Debaghine online through the Zoom application. Each interview was conducted in a different time and date according to the participants' availability.

8. Results and Discussion

1. How often do your students encounter anxiety attacks in your oral classroom?

All teachers who were interviewed confirmed that their students encounter anxiety attacks and problems frequently when they are asked to speak or make an oral presentation. One of the teachers has even particularly stated that introvert learners are the ones who mostly face these attacks. This could be related to their learning personality where they tend to be more shy and dislike public presentations.

2. In your opinion, what are the factors that could cause this problem?

The majority of participants agree that two significant types of problems contributing to students' public speaking anxiety are psychological issues and linguistic difficulties. According to teachers, the first kind is marked by a lack of self-assurance and confidence, shyness, anxiety of making mistakes, stress, and trepidation while speaking in front of large groups. The second kind is characterized by students' insufficient linguistic background or input, poor vocabulary knowledge, low speaking competency, lack of communicative skills, lack of practice, and insufficient linguistic foundation, with a primary emphasis on vocabulary knowledge. It is also

conceivable to conclude that some of these problems are simply the outcomes of other factors, such as the ineffective communication of students.

3. What do you advise anxious learners to do in order to decrease their speaking anxiety?

There are different strategies that teachers follow to help their learners in reducing their public speaking anxiety. Two participants explained that the most effective strategy that they provide for their students is practice. They always advise them to practice speaking with their friends, family, and instructor in English to overcome their anxiety problems and to increase their familiarity with the speaking act. Other two participants add that students could practice their language production through watching movies and listening to songs to imitate the accurate language production by native speakers.

In addition, there is another strategy that is recommended by a particular teacher which is to rehearse their performance in front of the mirror, to prepare for their speech or presentations. Another piece of advice from a teacher is to concentrate on the subject matter rather than the audience, practice positive self-talk and positive thinking, create interactive group discussions, chat with native speakers, avoid awkward silences by taking a deep breath, use communication strategies, accept mistakes as a necessary part of learning, seek peer assistance, record oneself, and use online tools like Voice Chat. These techniques are beneficial and successful in enhancing learners' speaking. Regarding accepting one's mistakes, another participant gave a similar response. She claims that she encourages her students' mistakes and advises them to concentrate on the fact that learning happens through trial and error. She also constantly reminds them that they are foreign language learners and that speaking like native speakers is a utopian goal, so they need to set realistic speaking goals and try to achieve them by expressing every single idea. The last participant adds that preparation is the best approach, advising students to plan out their remarks thoroughly in order to boost their confidence. She also offers the advice to practice speaking, which is consistent with the first viewpoint of the other two participants, who think that repetition is the key to enhancing communication abilities and lowering anxiety.

4. Do you recommend the use of online apps as a way to reduce learners' speaking anxiety? Why?

All interviewees confirmed that they do recommend the use of online applications to reduce students' public speaking anxiety. Five participants provided evidence to support their choice, citing the capacity of these apps to boost motivation, self-confidence, and speaking skills through flexible language production practice. Another participant claimed that using online tools helps students develop their speaking, vocabulary, and pronunciation skills. She did not, however, think that these apps have a strong and noticeable effect on students' anxiety. Additionally, one of the participants brought out the fact that today's learners are tech-savvy and

choose to use these apps as part of their language learning process, which contributes to the reduction of their anxiety related to public speaking.

5. Which apps would you recommend in particular? Why?

Three interviewees stated that they were unable to specifically recommend any apps. Speakerlock and Ummo were suggested by one of the participants stating that it helps a lot to overcome speaking anxiety and fear. Another person selected Duolingo as the top application because it is well-liked and has a track record of success in language acquisition. Additionally, WhatsApp has been discussed by two additional teachers since it is believed to have a substantial impact on students' language acquisition by reducing EFL speaking fear. In addition, one of the participants suggested using the Zoom application, which students may utilize to explore new learning opportunities and boost their confidence when speaking English by creating a comfortable learning environment in a virtual setting. There are other online applications which were presented by another participant that include VirtualSpeech application; this application helps them practice speaking by providing realistic environments to train in with realistic audience, and interactive features such as sound distractions, voice analysis, upload presentations, and interactive courses, in addition to LikeSo application which offers an effective way to train against verbal habits and practice speaking articulately and confidently. Moreover, LikeSo provides a real-time analysis of the speech appropriateness and accuracy. One of the participants included all social media apps to be used in reducing public speaking anxiety because they give learners the opportunity to speak with different people.

6. Have you ever heard of the Discord app?

Surprisingly, only two individuals have acknowledged that they have used and are familiar with the Discord app, and one of them stated that he used it during the Covid 19 pandemic. The remaining teachers, however, asserted that they were unaware of the app and said that they had never heard of it and wish to know more about it.

7. If you knew that as a teacher, you could access breakout rooms to facilitate classroom activities akin to face-to-face lessons, unlimited meetings for extended learning sessions, and a dashboard for organizing and saving critical information even when the class is not live :

a. Would you like to implement the app as one of your language teaching strategies in your EFL classroom? Why?

Eight of the nine participants have expressed open support for using Discord as a complementary language teaching strategy because it would allow for more oral interaction and practical use of the English language, extend the time allotted for doing various pedagogical tasks by meeting virtually, and improve students' understanding of the lessons' content. Only

one participant, however, stated that she was unsure if she would ever consider using the app in her language classes.

b. Do you think it would be effective in promoting your students' engagement in the lesson activities?

There is only one participant who stated he was unsure of the effectiveness of the Discord application in increasing students' participation in the class activities. While the remaining eight participants concurred that they think Discord can encourage students' involvement and engagement in the lesson content because it gives them more opportunities to communicate, interact and allows them to continue honing their language skills outside of the classroom.

c. Do you think it would be effective in reducing their public speaking anxiety?

The interview data showed that only one teacher disagreed with the efficacy of the Discord application in lowering students' public speaking anxiety because there is still interaction between the teacher and students. In addition, they justified that digital platforms in general provide opportunities for constant language practice from home, they save time and energy and facilitate the language learning process, and more importantly, they increase students' motivation and satisfaction which in turn reduces their public speaking anxiety. The Discord application also allows for the creation of highly customizable text and voice channels where people can communicate freely and in real-time. It makes it easy to talk every day, and hang out more often, easing stress, and help building confidence.

8. What are your attitudes towards the use of this app in classroom teaching?

Most of teachers show positive attitudes towards the use of this application even those who didn't try it before. Two teachers prefer to remain neutral until they give it a shot and see whether it is worth it or not.

9. CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that most teachers have a favorable attitude towards the use of the Discord application as it provides a platform for effective communication between them and their students. It is worthy to mention that discord application may pose certain technical challenges especially for teachers who are not well-versed in technology. In addition, teachers recommend learners practice speaking as a main strategy to follow in order to reduce public speaking anxiety. To overcome anxiety problems and enhance their comfort with speaking, learners can adopt various strategies. These include practicing speaking with friends, family, and instructors in English. Additionally, other techniques involve rehearsing in front of mirrors, focusing on the material rather than the audience, cultivating positive self-talk, participating in interactive group discussions and chats with native speakers, embracing mistakes as part of the learning process, seeking help from peers and employing self recording and online applications. By implementing these diverse strategies, learners can effectively reduce their speaking anxiety.

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11. Appendices

Appendix 1: Teachers Interview

Dear teachers,

This interview is part of an ongoing study that aims to explore both students' and teachers' attitudes towards the integration of Discord application into language teaching pedagogy and its role in reducing learners' public speaking anxiety. This application is a free communication app that allows its users to exchange audio, video, and text chat with friends, gaming communities, and developers. The app has shown to provide learners with a virtual meeting space where they can gather online and share their knowledge. We would like you to answer some questions that would help us in finding solutions for the research problem. Your participation is highly appreciated.

Questions

1. How often do your students encounter anxiety attacks in your oral classroom?
2. In your opinion, what are the factors that could cause this problem?
3. What do you advise anxious learners to do in order to decrease their speaking anxiety?
4. Do you recommend the use of online apps as a way to reduce learners' speaking anxiety? Why
5. And which apps would you recommend in particular? Why?
6. Have you ever heard of the Discord app?
7. If you knew that as a teacher, you can access breakout rooms to facilitate classroom activities akin to face-to-face lessons, unlimited meetings for extended learning sessions, and a dashboard for organizing and saving critical information even when the class is not live:
 - a. Would you like to implement the app as one of your language teaching strategies in your EFL classroom? Why?
 - B. Do you think it would be effective in promoting your students' engagement in the lesson activities? C/ Do you think it would be effective in reducing their public speaking anxiety? How.....
8. What are your attitudes concerning the use of this app in language teaching and learning?

Thank you for your cooperation.