ABSTRACT

There is a lack of research on the effects of Second Life (SL) as a virtual language-learning environment on speaking anxiety among English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, whereas related literature is insufficient in terms of providing insight about Turkish EFL context. Therefore, this experimental study aims to examine the effects of the use of SL on speaking anxiety. In the chapter, a background questionnaire and an anxiety scale were administered to 44 EFL learners assigned to the control and experimental groups before and after speaking activities performed in traditional and SL settings. Findings suggest that there is no significant correlation between speaking activities that take place in traditional settings and SL environment concerning the levels of speaking anxiety. It is recommended that the extent to use SL should be moderated during speaking practice because SL does not offer a flawless solution to speaking anxiety.
INTRODUCTION

Speaking as a productive language skill is an essential element in learning a foreign language context. However, it is mostly neglected during the language learning process due to its challenging nature (Nazara, 2011). In addition, speaking skill is generally not preferred since it is hard for teachers to assess learners while they are speaking (Egan, 1999). Instead of dealing with the challenging features of speaking skill, teachers simply prefer to focus more on structural aspects of language while teaching English (Bahrani & Solatani, 2012). Baleghizadeh and Shahri (2014) suggest that speaking is sustenance for other language skills and must be equally scattered in the language learning process. In addition, language learning includes the ability to communicate in the target language; thus, communicative objectives should be signified more effectively (Richards, 1983). Furthermore, Hu (2010) suggests that communicative competence is the main element in language learning. Grammatical and lexical competence that teachers focus on more can be achieved through speaking practice. However, both teachers and learners seem to be avoiding speaking during language learning by using only brief spoken patterns (Nazari, 2007). The reason for the avoidance to speak English can stem from some factors as follows: inability to appreciate the importance of communicative language learning/teaching, challenging nature of speaking, hardships faced during assessing speaking performance, lack of exact definitions concerning CLT and foreign language speaking anxiety (Aydin, 2013a; Egan, 1999; Guzel & Aydin 2014; Hu, 2010; Lochland, 2013; Nazari, 2007).

In the Turkish EFL context, the most common problems encountered during language learning are the issues that stem from the use of productive skills such as writing and speaking. As Subasi (2010) states, EFL learners encounter many oral challenges in EFL classes. For teachers, speaking is hard to assess and control and it is quite time-consuming in terms of preparing content for lessons. For learners, on the other hand, speaking is not desirable because it is challenging to express oneself in spoken form. Guzel and Aydin (2014) suggest that on the verge of oral performance, learners hesitate and feel anxious about speaking. Therefore, speaking is one of the most problematic areas in language learning in the Turkish EFL context. Thus, learners suffer from problems caused by speaking as a productive skill. One of the most common problems triggered by speaking skills is regarded as anxiety (Aydin, 2008; Guzel & Aydin, 2014; Dalkilic, 2001; Subasi, 2010). As Subasi (2010) suggests, learners endure many hardships during an oral performance such as sweatiness, shaking-knees, nervousness and loss of memory. Due to anxiety-related reasons, speaking performances decrease and is negatively affected. In other words, anxiety is a significant variable in language learning and language achievement is correlated with anxiety (Batumlu & Erden, 2007; Dalkilic, 2001). Anxiety-related problems such as nervousness, sweating, shaking knees and cognitive failures
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