



A Quantitative Study On Communication Apprehension Among Students Of Government-aided High Schools

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Abstract

The paper focuses on communication apprehension among Class XI students of 5 government-aided high schools of West Bengal, India. PRCA and FIACS Theories have been applied to investigate causes and types of communication apprehension in school settings. 30 students, 15 teachers and 10 classes were randomly sampled; 3 Questionnaires and 1 Class Observation Schedule were used. Data Analysis showed that communication apprehension among students is a reality and it manifests during group discussion, answering teacher's questions, talking among friends and stage performances. Low confidence and poor communication skills, being prime factors, have persisted and aggravated with years and is prevalent even among students of upper grades because, down the years, teacher have juggled between curriculum transaction and student requirements. The repeated demotivation, borne out of non-responsive classes and poor class attendance, coupled with teachers' self-lack in professional understanding of mentorship, have often compelled them to give up on students' communication apprehension.

Keywords : Communication Apprehension, PRCA, FIACS, low confidence, teacher-centric

1. INTRODUCTION:

Communication apprehension refers to the fear or anxiety associated with real or anticipated communication situations (McCroskey, 1977). It, among school going students, is a pervasive and complex issue that can have far-reaching consequences on their academic performance, emotional well-being, and social relationships. As students navigate the challenges of academic rigor, social pressures, and personal expectations, they often experience feelings of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. This apprehension can manifest in various forms, such as test anxiety, fear of failure, social anxiety, and fear of rejection.

Research has shown that apprehension among students can lead to decreased motivation, lower self-esteem, and reduced academic achievement. Moreover, if left unaddressed, apprehension can perpetuate a cycle of negativity, hindering students' ability to reach their full potential. Communication Apprehension can manifest in various forms:

1. Test Anxiety: Fear or apprehension related to exams, causing poor academic performance.
2. Fear of Failure: Fear of not meeting expectations or failing to achieve goals, causing low self-esteem.
3. Social Anxiety: Apprehension about social interactions due to fears of rejection, criticism, or embarrassment.
4. Fear of Public Speaking: Afraid of speaking in public due to crowd pressure and mockery.
5. Math Anxiety: Fear related to math or numerical tasks.
6. Separation Anxiety: Fears related to separation from parents, caregivers, or familiar environments.
7. Generalized Anxiety: Excessive and persistent worry about everyday things, like school, relationships, future.
8. Performance Anxiety: Afraid of performing in public, such as in sports, music, or theatre. Stage-fear.
9. Existential Anxiety: Apprehensions related to life purpose, death, or of the unknown.
10. Cultural Anxiety: Apprehension about cultural differences, expectations, and stereotypes.

The present study has investigated the prevalence, causes, and consequences of apprehension among students in school situations. By exploring the experiences and perceptions of students, this research seeks to provide insights into the complexities of apprehension and identify potential strategies for mitigating its negative effects.

THEORIES APPLIED

It is applied research where the following two theories were applied to measure communication apprehension among students and to determine the talk type in classes experiencing communication apprehension, respectively:

a) Personal Report Of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) Method:

It is used to measure anxiety levels related to communication in different situations. This method was developed by James McCroskey in 2005, it contains 24 questions, each indicating CA levels. Scores can range from 24-120. Scores below 51 represent people who have very low CA. Scores within 51-80 represent people with average CA. Scores above 80 represent people who have high traits of CA (McCroskey, 2005).

In the present study, Questionnaire Data Analysis has been done as per modified version of PRCA Method. The items focused on 4 components that dealt with CA in school settings: during (a) group discussion, (b) answering teacher's questions, (c) talking among friends (d) stage performances.

b) Flanders Interaction Analysis Category System (FIACS):

It is a system developed by Flanders to analyse classroom communication. The main concept behind it was to observe and categorize verbal interactions in a classroom setting between student and teachers and vice versa; and, thereby, to measure rates of teacher influence and student participation. In this method the verbal behaviour is classified in to ten groups that help to understand patterns of interaction and identify the areas that potentially improve teaching methods. (Flanders, N.A. 1970).

In the present study, Classroom Observation Data Analysis has been done as per FIACS.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Literature review has shown various factors causing Communication Apprehension (CA) among students:

- Personality traits: Introversion, low self-esteem, and perfectionism (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987)
- Past experiences: Traumatic or negative communication experiences (Honeycutt & Ramsey, 2001)
- Cultural and social factors: Cultural differences, social norms and expectations (Gudykunst & Toomey, 1988)

Research has also explored the consequences of CA among students:

- Avoidance of communication situations (McCroskey, 1977)
- Decreased academic performance (Daly & Miller, 1975)
- Reduced social participation and relationships (Honeycutt & Ramsey, 2001)

Interventions, aimed at reducing CA among students, have shown promise; few to mention would be:

- Communication skills training (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987)
- Cognitive-behavioral therapy (Honeycutt & Ramsey, 2001)
- Supportive learning environments (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988)

3. OBJECTIVE:

To investigate the prevalence, causes and types of communication apprehension among Class XI students of Govt.-aided schools of West Bengal.

4. RESEARCH METHOD:

A) SAMPLE FRAME: 5 Government-aided High Schools of West Bengal were sampled for Data Collection:

Sample	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
Class XI Students	30	Random sampling method
Teachers	15	
Classroom Observation	10	

B) TOOLS

1. Questionnaire for students -

SET 1- To measure communication apprehension among Class XI students as per PRAC-24 Theory.

SET 2- To find situations manifesting communication apprehension among Class XI students.

2. Questionnaire for teachers -

SET-3- To know teachers' views on students' communication apprehension (Open-ended & Close Ended)

3. Classroom Observation Schedule - 10 classes observed (2 classes from each of the sampled 5 schools).

C) DATA ANALYSIS:**I. Analysis of Students' Responses to Close-ended Questionnaire Items as per PRCA Method:**

STUDENT NAME	GROUP DISCUSSION =18-(score-2,4,6) + (score-1,3,5)	ANSWERING QUESTIONS =18-(score- 8,9,12) + (score- 7,10,11)	CLASS TALK AMONG FRIENDS =18-(score-14,16,17) + (score-13,15,18)	ON-STAGE PERFORMANCE =18-(score-19,21,23) + (score-20,22,24)	PRCA VALUE
Participant 1	10	17	18	17	62
Participant 2	10	12	11	16	49
Participant 3	13	21	17	17	68
Participant 4	11	20	16	23	70
Participant 5	11	20	16	23	70
Participant 6	11	16	15	19	61
Participant 7	12	19	22	22	75
Participant 8	10	17	19	21	67
Participant 9	22	15	18	16	71
Participant 10	22	21	12	16	71
Participant 11	18	19	15	29	81
Participant 12	15	16	20	24	75
Participant 13	17	16	20	25	78
Participant 14	18	19	16	20	73
Participant 15	9	15	16	26	66
Participant 16	9	15	16	27	67
Participant 17	10	17	15	23	65
Participant 18	17	13	10	13	53
Participant 19	18	8	8	10	44
Participant 20	17	17	17	13	64
Participant 21	19	15	14	21	69
Participant 22	15	16	15	22	68
Participant 23	22	18	18	15	73
Participant 24	21	20	18	13	72
Participant 25	19	18	14	24	75
Participant 26	13	14	12	13	52
Participant 27	18	10	14	15	57
Participant 28	21	17	15	16	69
Participant 29	22	14	14	6	56
Participant 30	13	10	10	8	41
TOTAL	450	485	461	530	1926

Table 1. shows PRCA Method application to measure Communication Apprehension (CA) among students.

$$\text{Mean CA value among Students} = \frac{\sum \text{All student CA value}}{\text{Total number of student}} = \frac{1926}{30} = 65.4$$

An average value of 65.4 shows that CA levels among sampled students were neither too high nor too low as illustrated in Table 2.:

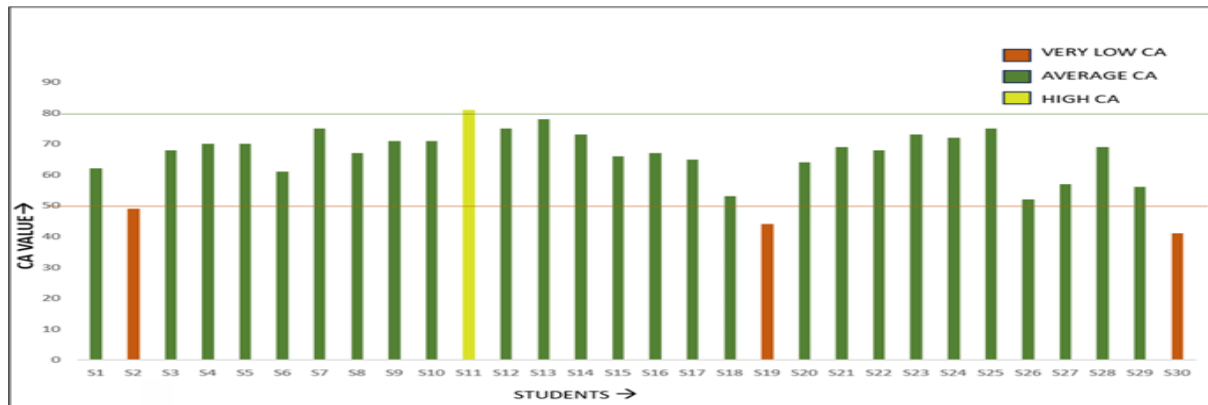
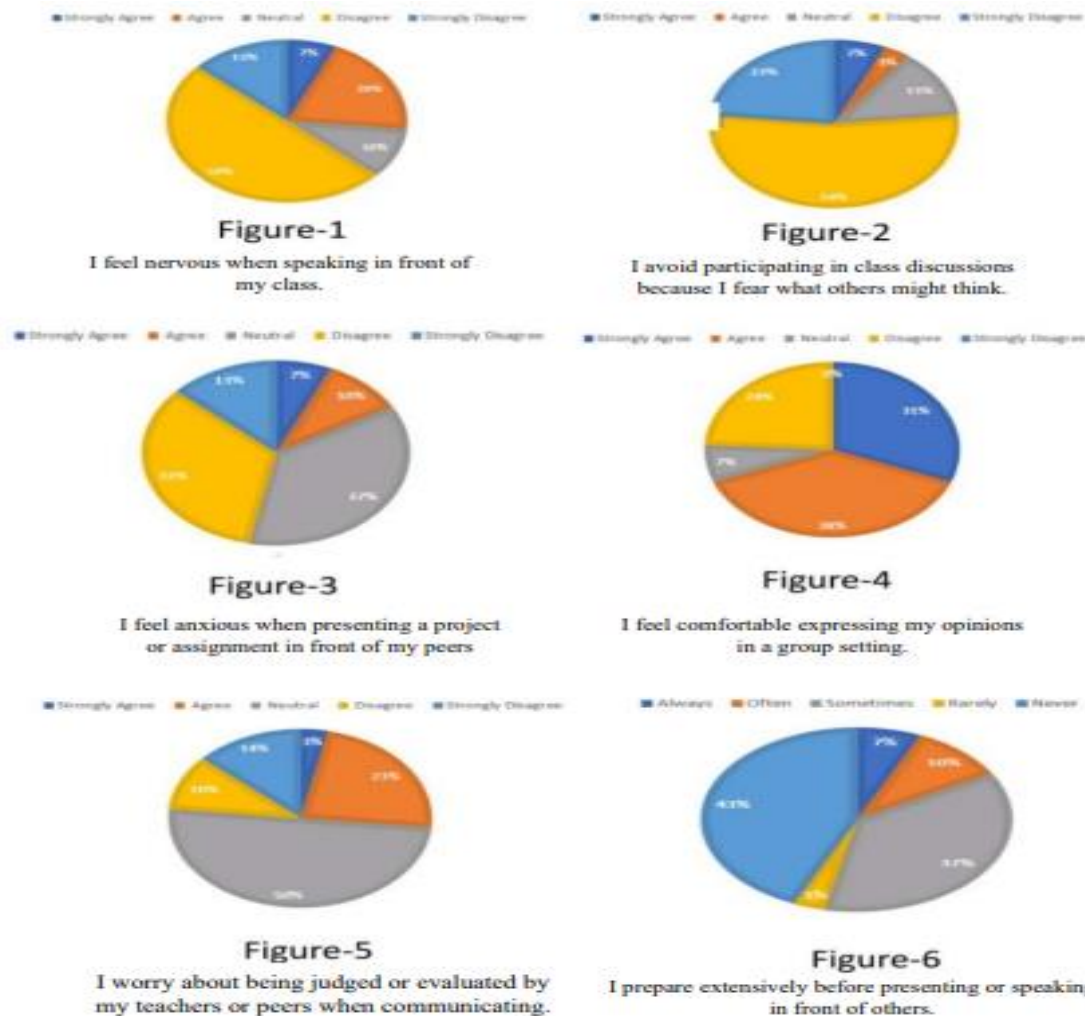
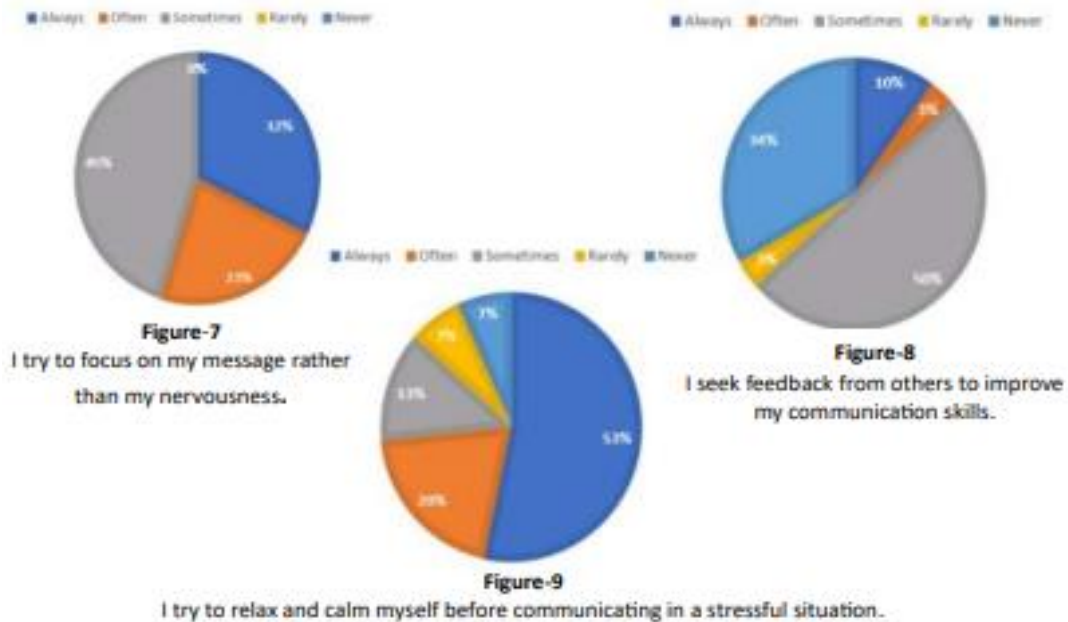


Table 2. is a graphical presentation of Table 1.

II. Analysis of Students' Responses to Open-ended Questionnaire Items:





As per the above pie-charts,

- Fig. 1 shows that although 50 % of students have the confidence to answer in class, half the class feared responding to teacher's questions.
- Fig. 2 shows that though 54% enjoyed group discussion, the remaining hesitated because of peer pressure.
- Fig. 3 shows that more than 30% experienced peer pressure while presenting projects/assignments in class.
- Fig. 4 shows that 38% students are afraid to share views confidently in class.
- Fig. 5 shows that 40% students feared being judged in class for what they say or how they look.
- Fig. 6 shows that 43% students required extensive preparation before a class oral presentation. It implies low confidence and communication apprehension.
- Fig. 7 shows that 45% students is often so consumed by their nervousness while class presentation that they forget what to communicate and it compromises the quality of their content delivery.
- Fig. 8 shows that 50% students ignored feedback on their presentations.
- Fig. 9 shows that 53% students do try to calm themselves down in stressful situations.

III. Analysis of Teachers' Responses to Questionnaire Items:

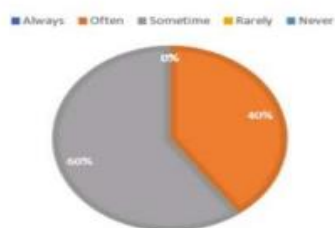


Figure-10

How often do you notice students exhibiting communication apprehension in your classroom?

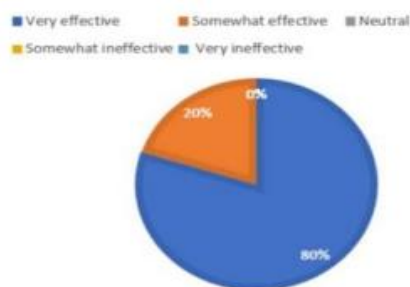


Figure-12

How effective do you think your strategies are in reducing communication apprehension among students?

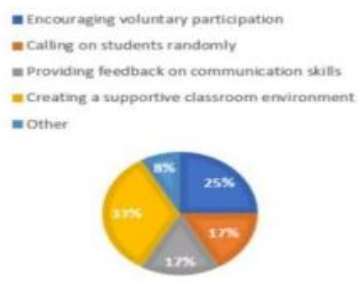


Figure-11

Which of the following strategies do you use to encourage students to participate in class discussions?

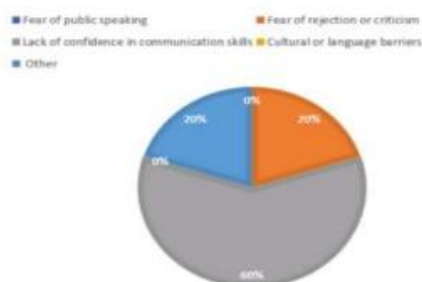


Figure-13

What do you think is the primary cause of communication apprehension among students?

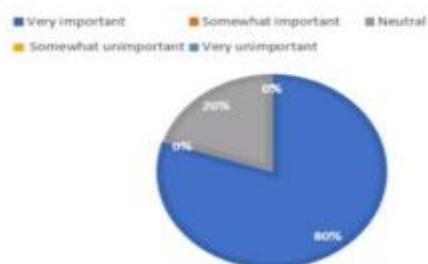


Figure-14

How important do you think it is to address communication apprehension in the classroom?

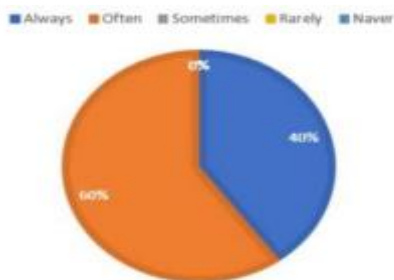


Figure-15

How often do you provide feedback to students on their communication skills?



Figure-16

Which of the following resources or training would you find most helpful in supporting students with communication apprehension?



Figure-17

How confident do you feel in your ability to support students with communication apprehension?

j) Fig. 10 shows that 60% teachers have witnessed students' exhibiting communication apprehension.

k) Fig. 11 shows that while 33% teachers used supporting classroom environment, 25% believed voluntary class participation as means to reduce communication apprehension.

- l) Fig. 12 shows that 80% believes that if teachers' strategically endeavour, they would surely be able to reduce students' communication apprehension.
- m) Fig. 13 shows that 80% teachers believed that poor confidence level and communication skill are root causes for students' communication apprehension.
- n) Fig. 14 shows that 80% teachers agreed that students' communication apprehension should be addressed to improve their class performance.
- o) Fig. 15 shows that only 40% teachers always provided feedback on students' class communication quality.
- p) Fig. 16 shows that LTMs (Learning & Teaching Material) used in Classrooms, if properly used for student questioning, can reduce their communication apprehension.
- q) Fig. 17 shows that only 20% teachers feel themselves to have the required skill to address and eliminate students' communication apprehension.

IV. Analysis of Class Observation Data as per FIACs Theory:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
1										//	2
2	/	/	//	///			/	//	//	/	13
3	/	/		//					/	/	6
4		//	//	/	//	///		//		/	13
5		/		/	/	//	/	/	/		8
6				///	////		/	/		//	12
7		///		/		/		///			8
8		//		/		///	///		/		10
9		/		/		/		//			5
10		//	/	/		//	/			/	8
Total	2	13	5	14	8	12	7	11	5	8	N=85

Table 3. shows Classroom Interaction Matrix as tallied during Class Observation.

As per Table 3,

$$1. \text{ Teacher Talk (TT) percentage} = \frac{c1+c2+c3+c4+c5+c6+c7}{N} \times 100$$

$$= \frac{2+13+6+13+8+12+8}{85} \times 100$$

$$= 72.94\%$$

$$2. \text{ Indirect Teacher Talk (ITT) percentage} = \frac{c1+c2+c3+c4}{N} \times 100$$

$$= \frac{2+13+6+13}{85} \times 100$$

$$= 40\%$$

$$3. \text{ Direct Teacher Talk (DTT) percentage} = \frac{c5+c6+c7}{N} \times 100$$

$$= \frac{8+12+8}{85} \times 100$$

$$= 32.94\%$$

$$4. \text{ Student Talk (ST) percentage} = \frac{c8+c9}{N} \times 100$$

$$= \frac{10+5}{85} \times 100$$

$$= 17.64\%$$

5. Silence or Confusion (SC) percentage $= c10/N \times 100$

$$= 8/85 \times 100$$

$$= 9.4\%$$

6. Indirect & Direct Ratio (I&D) percentage $= c1+c2+c3+c4+c5+c6+c7 \times 100$

$$= 2+13+6+13/8+12+8 \times 100$$

$$= 121.42\%$$

CLASS TALK TYPE	%
TT	72.94%
ITT	40%
DTT	32.94%
ST	17.64%
SC	9.4%
I&D	121.42%

Table 4. shows percentages, as observed, for each Class Talk Type

As per Table 4,

Teacher's rate of verbal communication is the highest (72.94%) and that of students' is the least (17.64%). It implies that it has mostly been a quiet class with most of the time covered by teacher's classroom instructions and occasional interaction through questions with students. The 32.94% Direct Teacher Talk implies the time percentage spent on providing instruction or text/content illustration. The 40% Indirect Teacher Talk implies the time percentage spent on answering students' queries, requests or on class discipline and attendance. Overall, the high percentages of total Indirect & Direct talk of teacher (121.42%) shows that students have not much participated in Classroom Communication either because it is a teacher-centric class or because of communication apprehension.

5. FINDINGS :

As per data analysis,

- Communication Apprehension (CA) levels among students were neither too high nor too low (Table 2.).
- The apprehension took place in various situations. The present study analysed CA during group discussion, answering teacher's questions in class, talk among friends and on-stage performances.
- Anxiety during on-stage performance was the highest whereas during group discussion was least (Table 1.). The difference, as found, was due to low confidence level and poor communication skills among students (Fig. 13.)
- Low confidence is well manifested in students, fearing on-stage lone presence more than speaking within group. Worsened by peer pressure (Figs. 1, 2, 3, 5 & 7), low confidence is experienced more in the former than during latter.
- Poor communication skill, being another factor for CA, is obvious in students, requiring extensive preparation before a class oral presentation (Fig. 6).
- Teachers observed that there is indeed a high rate of CA among students (Fig. 10) which adversely affected class performance (Fig. 14).

- vii. Feedback on students' class participation and responses or stage-performance can combat CA. It would at least aware them of where they stand as far as the quality of their communication skill is concerned. But it was found that, in most of the instances, neither students worked on the feedback (Fig.8) nor teachers always cared to provide one (Fig. 15).
- viii. As further strategies to mitigate CA, teachers recommended supportive classroom environment and voluntary class participation (Fig. 11). Freedom to use language without the fear of being ridiculed for funny pronunciation and to express views without the fear of being criticized, possible only in a supportive classroom environment, can eventually stamp out CA among students. As other means, mentoring and effective use of learning-teaching material (LTM) to engage students in class responses through critical observation of LTM can also counter CA (Fig. 16).
- ix. However, the above strategies are easier said than done (Fig. 17). Apart from content knowledge, teachers would require mentoring skills, job experience and a sympathetic understanding of students' psycho-social status.
- x. Teacher-centric classes with higher rate of Teacher Talk than Student Talk (Table 4.) exhibited higher rate of communication apprehension.

6. CONCLUSION:

Communication apprehension among students is, hence, a reality and can significantly impact their personal growth. If unaddressed, it disrupts confidence and hinders their performance in both home and school life. If not always, the apprehension is often borne out of students' poor communication skill. They would want to share or speak up but hesitate due to integral struggle for right vocabulary. These is mostly true in their English language classes. Poor confidence was, however, found to be the prime cause for communication apprehension. It can be either because of difficult or broken homes, or for being an introvert, a lone child, or a victim of abuse and/or school ragging; psychological impact in all these situations would irrevocably damage confidence, staying quiet within one's illusory world feels safe and happy. In school settings, the study has found students' communication apprehension manifested mostly during group discussion, answering teacher's questions, talking among friends and stage performances. Teachers' role, in such circumstances, become paramount as they now need to play the dual role of mentors and facilitators. Although they know what it is meant to be a mentor, often they lack in professional skills. To be a mentor is not just about being kind and communicative. It would require understanding of the psycho-social status of the problem-child and intervene or counsel accordingly. Teachers are unable to do so because they either lack in hands-on experience of mentoring or are too work-loaded, forced to juggle between curriculum and student requirements. The pressure to complete the syllabus and the repeated demotivation, borne out of non-responsive classes and poor class attendance, compel teachers to give up on students' communication apprehensions. The class continues to be a quiet one with teacher doing most of the talking ; apparently it might seem to be a disciplined class, but, if closely, observed, it emerges to be a teacher-centric class where teacher has acquired the centre-stage to finish the syllabus as exam is round the corner.

7. LIMITATIONS:

The study has focussed only on the communication apprehension of Class XI students of Govt.-aided schools of West Bengal. Primary classes, private schools and schools in other States were not sampled.

8. RECOMMENDATION

For students-

- Encourage them to share their concerns with friend family or a mental health professional.
- To regularly engage in activities like deep breathing meditation or yoga to manage anxiety.
- To enrol in public speaking courses, join a debate club or participate in group discussion to build confidence.

For teachers

- To create a supportive and non-judgemental classroom environment to encourages participation.
- A good listener is a good speaker and a good speaker have very low communication apprehension (CA), so by offering communication skill training within class in the 4 language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) to students, both in mother tongue and mostly in English, teachers can lower communication apprehensions among students.
- Teachers should, themselves, take short term in-service courses on the art of mentoring or counselling school students.

For institute

- Provide communication skill-based training to students.
- Organise faculty development programs for teachers on the art of mentoring or counselling school students.
- Recognize and reward students who demonstrate excellent communication skill.

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