



Influence of academic self-handicapping on effective learning outcomes in English language classroom

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Abstract

Academic self-handicapping, as the term indicates, is making ourselves handicapped in academic activities especially to protect our self-esteem. This is a very serious issue as far as English language education is concerned. Students and other stake holders of English language teaching should be aware about academic self-handicapping in English classroom so as to improve the acquisition of proper grammatical structures in the classroom for better communication. The investigator made an attempt to explore the reasons behind academic self-handicapping among students at secondary level using a questionnaire (ASHQ) and also to identify the major effects of academic self-handicapping from the perception of teachers using a structured interview. Purposive random sampling technique was used to select the sample of 60 secondary school students and 30 secondary school English language teachers. Data was collected through survey method. The results of the study revealed that nature of language, mind set, afraid of mistakes, self-esteem and negative attitude were the major reasons behind academic self-handicapping among students in the classroom. It was revealed from the perception of teachers that low achievement, low acquisition of skills, unable to construct grammatical structures and poor learning outcomes were the major effects of academic self-handicapping. Keeping in view that English is a skill subject and communication is the basic aspects of language, there is a great need to help the learners in removing their handicaps and use effective measures to protect their self-esteem in the classroom.

Keywords: academic self-handicapping, effective learning outcome, English language classroom

Introduction

In the teaching learning process of English language classroom, there are many situations where students experience threats to their self-dignity and self-esteem. Major elicitations of these threats are in using grammatical structures of English language in written and oral communication, pronunciation, fluency in language and so on. Often students overcome these hurdles of language using academic self-handicapping. It is somewhat a coping strategy for students to protect their self-esteem and making themselves safe from the teasing of friends and insults in the classroom. They overcome their inferiority complex through the mechanism of academic self-handicapping in English language classroom. A common strategy for regulating this kind of self-esteem threat is self-handicapping, which has been defined as constructing impediments to performance to protect or enhance one's perceived competence (Berglas & Jones, 1978) [3]. Examples of academic self-handicapping include procrastinating, effort withdrawal, and claiming test anxiety or illness (Urduan & Midgley, 2001). There is substantial agreement in the literature that academic self-handicapping has negative effects on important educational processes and outcomes such as motivation and achievement (Martin, Marsh, & Debus, 2001; Urduan, Midgley, & Anderman, 1998; Zuckerman, Kieffer, & Knee, 1998) [9, 11]. There is a large negative correlation of academic achievement and academic self-handicapping (Midgley & Urduan, 1995, 2001). The result of these studies clearly and vividly reveals that there is a significant effect of academic self-handicapping and achievement of the students

in the education process.

Need and Significance of the study

But the fact is that there are little studies in the area of English language related to academic self-handicapping. There is a great need of identifying the academic self-handicapping of students in English language classroom. It is in this subject, students find it difficult to get through the functional aspect of the language. The result of the study will help the English language students and teachers in drawing a general conclusion concerning the effect of self-handicapping on achievement and this in turn will help the teachers to direct the student activities in such a way remove their self-handicapping and direct them towards functional aspect of the language. Moreover, findings suggest that the negative consequences of self-handicapping could be more or less pronounced under different circumstances. Leondari and Gonida (2007), for instance, reported that self-handicapping and achievement were more closely related in elementary compared to high-school students. As these elements themselves might be differently related to academic achievement, the choice of a self-handicapping scale might already predispose studies to reach dissimilar conclusions about the relation of self-handicapping to achievement (Urduan & Midgley, 2001).

Methodology

Data was collected from 60 secondary school students to identify the reason behind their academic self-handicapping in English language classroom. Survey was conducted in the

study from the sample of 30 secondary school English language teachers to identify the effect of academic self-handicapping among students in English language classroom.

Objectives

- To identify the causes of academic self-handicapping in English language classroom among students in the perception of students
- To identify the effects of academic self-handicapping in English language classroom among students in the perception of teachers

Tools

- Academic self-handicapping questionnaire
- Structured Interview

Statistical techniques

- Percentage Analysis

Results and Discussion

This section deals with the analysis and discussion of the causes of academic self-handicapping among students

Table 1: Results of the causes of academic self-handicapping among students

S. No.	Cause	Percentage
1	Nature of the language	98
2	Mind set	83
3	Afraid of mistakes	80
4	Self esteem	80
5	Negative attitude	73
6	Lack of interest	72
7	Lack of motivation	62
8	Over confidence	23

As per the table it is revealed that students are having various reasons for self-handicapping in English language classroom. It is the nature of the language that leads to self-handicapping in learning English language as per the opinion of majority of students. Students are even afraid of mistakes and are under the impression that, grammatical or spelling mistakes may lead to low self-esteem among peers in classroom.

Discussion on causes of academic self-handicapping in English language classroom

On A detailed analysis of the questionnaire, the investigator identified that there are several reasons revealed by the students for their academic self-handicapping in the English classroom. It is clear from the table that understanding the reasons behind academic self-handicapping will help teachers a lot to overcome the issue. Detailed description of the analysis is given below.

- **Nature of the language:** Most of the students in the Indian context are finding difficulties in the English language classroom. Because of the nature of the language, with its irregularities in spelling and rules of grammatical structures which have wide difference compared to mother tongue. Pull of mother tongue is a great hurdle in front of the students using the second language English.
- **Mind set:** Students are having fixed mind set English

language compared to growth mind set. They believe that

their efforts are just in vague and they could not develop the skills in English language as their intelligence is not enough for that. They believe that language skills are not going to develop even if they work hard.

- **Afraid of mistakes:** In fact, their handicapping behavior often increases the likelihood of failure. Rather, handicappers are concerned with how they would appear to others if they perform poorly, however they define “poorly.” For handicappers, it is not failure that produces shame, but the reaction of others to that failure. Others may infer that a lack of ability causes failure, and it is this inference that holds the potential to produce shame and direct handicapping behavior.
- **Self-esteem:** English is a skill subject, rather a content subject. Students are continually confronted with tasks and situations in which information about their ability and intelligence is on public display. In such a situation; students in the English language classroom are more afraid about their mistakes. They prefer to be silent in the class to avoid the teasing of friends at their grammatical mistakes. By doing this, ability will be discounted as a causal attribution, and one’s image of competence as well as one’s self-esteem will be buffered. Self-handicappers are primarily concerned about their self-worth and less about their actual performance.
- **Negative attitude:** Students are having the attitude that there is no need of grammatical accuracy in English language to pass the exam. For them learning grammar and constructing grammatically correct sentence is a herculean task. They don’t need a new language as they have their own mother tongue. Many of the students are not even ready to accept the importance of English language as they already have the mindset that they are not moving outside for a job.
- **Over confidence:** There are some students who are under the notion that they can do very well in the language classroom. May be it is true to some extent. But the great pit fall in this circumstance is that, this attitude may correlate with less hard work and less time spending for studies. This method of self-handicapping among kids is usually seen in English language classroom.
- **Lack of interest:** Interest has a direct correlation with that of the motivation and achievement. Lack of interest among the students in learning the language is leading them to find out excuses to avoid failures in the English classroom. This leads to a tendency of procrastination and finally affecting the overall performance of the learner. Much stress on pronunciation, accent and intonation in the classroom along with intra and inter language interferences are motivating the tendency of self-handicapping.
- **Lack of motivation:** In order to indulge the students in the activities of second language, there is a high need of motivation. Motivating students in an English language classroom is entirely different from that of other subjects. Since it is a foreign language, teachers have to use variety of techniques to engage the students. Lack of motivation in the classroom leads to failure in recognition of the importance of the language and this further leads to self-handicapping.

This section deals with the analysis and discussion of the effects of academic self-handicapping on students in learning English language

Table 2: Results of the effects of academic self-handicapping among students

S. No:	Cause	Percentage
1	Low Achievement	100
2	Low acquisition of Skills	98
3	Unable to construct grammatical structures	95
4	Poor Learning outcome	89
5	Withdrawal from school works	76
6	Poor study habits	72
7	Low feeling	70

All the teachers unanimously opined that academic self-handicapping is effecting the overall achievement of the learners and their performance in English language. It is further effecting the enhancement of the four fold skills of the language and also in constructing grammatical structures of English language. According to teachers, students developed poor study habits and are showing reluctance in participating extracurricular activities for developing communication skills.

Discussion on effects of Academic self-handicapping in English Language Classroom

Teachers gave a detailed description on which the investigator made an in-depth analysis regarding the effects of academic self-handicapping in English language classroom. It is vivid from the description that academic self-handicapping is affecting all the areas of language learning and acquisition. Detailed description of the analysis is given below.

- **Low Achievement:** Academic self-handicapping leads to lower achievement in the English language. It is affecting the development of communication skills of the learners. The skill of speaking is highly influenced by Academic self-handicapping. As the students keep themselves away from oral communication activities; to avoid failures and to protect their self-esteem, acquisition of language rests as a dream for every student. Self-handicapping and low achievement become entangled in a self-perpetuating cycle over time.
- **Low acquisition of Skills:** As per the opinion of teachers Academic self-handicapping is affecting the skill acquisition of students, especially the speaking and writing skill of learners. They show reluctance and deliberately find excuses to skip themselves from co-curricular and group activities.
- **Unable to construct grammatical structures:** They are far behind in the area of constructing grammatical structures and even pronunciation. As per the opinion of teachers, grammatical construction is possible only when the learners use the language in contextual situations and get acquainted with discourse oriented pedagogy. Due to Academic self-handicapping students are finding it difficult to construct grammatical structures.
- **Poor Learning outcome:** over all learning outcome of the students, as far as English language is concerned, the learning outcome is the development of communication skill of learners. Development of creativity, aesthetic sense

and self-study habits are also considered as other major learning outcomes which are negatively affected by academic self-handicapping.

- **Withdrawal from school works:** Self-handicapping has been linked to increased withdrawal and negative coping strategies. As per the opinion of teachers most of the students are reluctant to do pair work, role plays, discussion and debate in English classroom. It is adversely affecting their engagements in school works.
- **Poor study habits:** Development of good study habits is highly essential for development of language skills. As opined by teachers, as a result of self-handicapping; students are using poor study habits. They are procrastinating studies which lead to rote memorization of the unit content and acquisition of language is not taking place.
- **Low feeling of self-determination:** low feelings of self-determination. Handicapping is associated with low academic achievement, mental and behavioral withdrawal from school work, a pessimistic perception of academic performance, and perhaps depressed levels of self-esteem.

Measures to tackle the effects of Academic self-Handicapping

- To reduce self-handicapping in students, teachers can deemphasize social comparison and competition in classroom among students and focus on individual growth, improvement and comprehension of the academic matter (Anderman & Anderman, 1999) ^[2].
- Avoid public display of student achievement and explicitly support student autonomy and intrinsic motivation (Midgley, 1995) ^[7].
- Students should be made aware of Intelligence as a modifiable characteristic, that can be improved through effort and students are to be praised for the strategies they employ to complete a task instead of praising them as smart, as the latter may encourage to think them of ability as fixed, a view that contributes to self-handicapping (Dweck, 1999) ^[4].
- Teachers should use proper corrective measures in the language classroom. The responses of the learners should be clarified using proper corrective feedback.
- Activities should be planned as per the level of intelligence and interest of the learners in English classroom.
- Consciousness raising tasks should be implemented in the classroom to focus on grammatical structures in the language.
- Interaction enhancement should be there in the classroom to avoid the communication gap between teachers and students.
- Teachers should give consistent and contingent response to the oral and written communication of students so as to develop the confidence level of learners and there by reducing the reluctance of the learners in using this second language.
- Make the students aware about their strength and weakness. They should be guided properly to understand the reasons for their failure in producing the language fluently and effectively.
- Teachers and parents can reinforce or secure individuals'

self-esteem through self-affirmation and this will hold good in situations only when the affirmation focuses on a domain other than the one that is being threatened (Finez & Sherman, 2012) ^[5].

Conclusion

Academic self-handicapping is directly associated with withdrawal of the students from using the language and it leads to poor performance in the language. Better identification of the causes and effects of self-handicapping help well the teachers to lead the process of in English classroom from learning acquisition. Self-esteem of the students should be protected. It is an essential factor. But the method of protecting self-esteem should not be self-handicapping. There should be positive ways to cope with the various hurdles that students face in the language classroom. Because handicapping is part of a cycle of reduced academic effort and lower achievement in school, it may represent early stages of disengagement in the classroom.

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