

FACE MASK CONTRIBUTION IN IMPROVING STUDENTS' CONFIDENCE IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASS

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Abstract

This article aims to reveal the outcome of the new normal habit of wearing face mask and its contribution in boosting or improving students' self confidence in speaking English. The habit which was once forced as the token of keeping someone healthy and to break the spreading of corona virus -19 disease during the pandemic turns out to be a bless in disguise. The subdue of the pandemic is the good news to educators as well as students. Teaching and learning activities conducted from home has raised other issues regarding the behavior and mental health of students. The restriction in socializing bored the students. The opening of schools and allowing students and teachers have interaction during the teaching and learning activities is followed by health protocols, one of them is wearing face mask. Face mask is obligatory. The reluctance and the awkwardness in wearing the face mask in the beginning has become the reluctance and awkwardness in taking the mask off. Students in English speaking classroom admit the fact that they feel more comfortable and more confidence expressing themselves during presentation or speech delivering with their masks off when the wearing of face mask is no longer obligatory. The approach of this writing is descriptive qualitative. Observations, field notes and interview were conducted to eighty-one high school students who use English as their second language at school. The finding is surprising. Twenty-five percent of the students claim that their self-confidence improve when they wear mask during class presentation.

Keywords: face mask, English, confidence, speaking, classroom

Introduction

The Corona Virus Disease (COVID) -19 has led the world into indescribable situation. The disease changed the life of millions of people globally. The pandemic had caused death of millions. It affected all sectors including schools. The pandemic affected more than 1.5 billion students and youth with the most vulnerable learners were hit hardest. Some gains already made towards the goals of the 2030 Education Agenda were lost. (Unesco,2022) The online learning has become the only alternative in ensuring that the students were studying without having direct contact with other teachers and students.

For three years, people lived in alarmed, suspicious, and solitary. Avoiding others were considered the best way to block the spreading of the virus. Even after the pandemic claimed to be subsided, people have always been alarmed and cautious of the situation. One of the ways to break the virus chain is by wearing mask. Mask became the 'must' item to have and wear everywhere.

The new protocols declared to always wear mask, wash hands either with soap and water or hand sanitizer, avoid crowd if possible and not to go out if not necessary. It was difficult to live a life of new normal. However, people are started to get used of the situation.

Coming back to school or campus after the pandemic by conducting face-to-face teaching and learning activities has given new experience to both teachers and students. It was awkward at first to get to the classroom not being able to see the face of others completely because of the mask. Indeed, mask wearing is an obligatory indoors and outdoors. After some time, the mask wearing is no longer awkward or strange to both teachers and students. Believe it or not, it is considered as fashion. Mask produced in colors and styles. Leaving mask behind would mean forgetting something crucial.

Mask-Wearing and Studying

In the beginning, wearing mask during the teaching and learning activities seemed to be difficult especially in the language classroom such as English. The first few weeks, wearing mask while communicating with teachers and friends are quite strange, teachers and students needed to make sure that their voices could reach the others. Afterwards everything ran smoothly up until today. Problems still occur when it comes to speaking in English especially when the students are required to give presentation in front of the class. Soft voice which most of the time blocked by the mask is another obstacle. Every individual has different vocal range when asked to speak in front. Sometime, the teacher needed to put down the mask when the students did not clear hearing certain words or phrases. Referring to the writer's experience and observation, after one year of wearing mask during teaching and learning activities, such obstacles often occur.

Mask-Wearing and English-Speaking Classroom

"The human voice is used for two main types of inter-human communication : speech and singing" (Sundberg,J; 2021). In English classroom, the type of inter-human communication used is speech. Therefore, an audible and clear voice is crucial. A research on misunderstanding in English as Lingua Franca conducted in 2013 reported that over 86% of the tokens of misunderstandings involve pronunciation. (Deterding, David & Mohamad, Nur Raihan; 2016).

Masks filter speech and sound along with the virus. Lecturing and discussion are fundamental pedagogies in higher education, so masks can fundamentally restrict teaching and learning. The inability to hear becomes even more of a problem in larger classrooms. (Landau, Jamie;2020)

The above report and statement as well as shared experience by educators strengthen the fact that communication is considered successful when no restriction in

any form. Thus, the writer, as the person who experienced this find similar difficulties in communication barriers in terms of understanding.

The pandemic has now subsided, the mask-wearing is no longer obligatory, however, wearing mask is now carried out voluntarily. Students and teachers' cautiousness has turned the mask-wearing as a token of self-protection especially in the crowded places. Similar happens in the classroom, although mask-wearing rule is loosen up, teachers, especially students are reluctant to take off the mask in the classroom.

Seeing this fact, good news for the language teacher, especially English since the communication barriers are no longer the problem is the successful of teaching English especially speaking. However, students reluctant in taking off their mask becomes another challenge for the teachers in measuring the successful of the language teaching, especially for the speaking skill.

Mask-Wearing and English-Speaking Confidence

Mask-wearing has turned into something else, from forceful act which is obligatory to trends in fashion. Wearing-mask becomes fashion, masks start to come in colors, models and even accessories to be worn along with the masks. After wearing the masks for long time, another feeling emerges with it. Not being able to show straight forward emotion has given another advantage for some people. Hiding the flaw on the face and facial expression itself has brought another encouragement in the interaction.

Human faces provide valuable information about not only the identity of a person but also their emotional state (Bruce & Young, 1986 cited in Grenville & Dwyer.2022). However, not every individual find mask-wearing is comfortable. Some researches have been conducted in figuring out whether mask-wearing is indeed boost the self-confidence or the other way around. However, there is no valid proof whether self-confidence has relationship with the mask-wearing.

Methodology

The research was conducted by applying descriptive qualitative research design. The writer is intrigued to reveal the fact why students of English speaking classroom are reluctant to take their mask down due to their soft and clarity of the message conveyed. The research is conducted by way of observation, interview and field note taking during the observation. The objects of research are eighty high school students. These students use English as their second language at school.

Findings

Relying on the writer's experience and observation in the classroom, the write has encountered interesting phenomenon. The observation and interview conducted at school towards eighty high school students show that students are more confidence and comfortable with their mask on while doing their presentation. In order to have clear voice and be heard by others, students were asked to put down or take their mask down. To the writer's surprise, some of the students were reluctant to speak without their masks on with the reason of uncomfortable to speak and had no confidence delivering the speech facing the teachers and the class without their mask on. Another reason of their wearing mask is they are able to hide the 'flaw' on their face which effect their confidence.

During the reading class, on the contrary, only few students were reluctant to take off their mask, since according to them, the students were only facing the books they read and not the other students.

The body language of the students show their discomfort when asked to take off the mask during the speaking. They often look the other way avoiding eye contact, sometimes fidgeting. When the teacher gives them choices whether to have their mask on or off. Most of them choose 'off' with the reason that they feel more comfortable

wearing the masks on rather than not wearing them. Twenty students out of eighty feel more confident during their speaking in front of the class with their mask on. Some of the students who do not mind taking their mask off, stated that if they could, they prefer doing English presentation with their mask on. The reason they were not able to take their mask down is their soft voice.

The mask which previously was forced to be worn has now become the shield over whatever flaw the students thought they have. The shield was then turned into the weapon to boost their confidence.

The persistence in keeping the mask on during speaking is often resulted in the failure in conveying the message since not all students have wide vocal range.

Discussion

The “New Normal” after COVID 19 which lead us to new positive and healthier habits has somewhat resulted in new trend and this new trend brings us to the feeling of comfort. Wearing mask is one of the new habit that brings comfortable feeling. The feeling of missing something whenever we forget wearing the mask. This new habit of wearing mask brings positive vibes to many students. The vibes of boosting confidence. The observation and conversation held between the teacher as the writer and students have opened up new horizon that mask has improved students’ confidence in conveying ideas, presenting their thought using English in front of the classroom. If, in the future, some or maybe numerous students keep on wearing mask in the classroom during the speaking English lesson, they are free to do so on one condition that their voices are loud enough to be heard and understood by others.

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