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Reducing Speaking Anxiety and Enhancing Foreign Language Enjoyment Through Dogme ELT: Evidence from Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

Foreign language learning involves not only the development of linguistic knowledge but also emotional experiences that can shape learners' classroom participation. Speaking anxiety may discourage learners from communicating, whereas foreign language enjoyment (FLE) can contribute to more positive learning experiences. Although previous research has examined Dogme English Language Teaching (ELT) in relation to classroom interaction and speaking development, its potential relationship with both negative and positive emotions warrants further investigation. This study examined the effects of Dogme ELT on speaking anxiety and FLE among 60 intermediate Iranian EFL learners. A quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control-group design was employed, with 30 learners in each of two intact classes. The experimental group received Dogme-oriented speaking instruction, while the control group followed conventional textbook-based instruction. Data were collected using a 25-item Speaking Anxiety Scale and a 10-item FLE questionnaire. Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) indicated significantly lower posttest speaking anxiety in the Dogme group, $F(1, 57) = 10.874$, $p = .002$, $\eta p^2 = .160$, and significantly higher posttest enjoyment, $F(1, 57) = 6.218$, $p = .015$, $\eta p^2 = .098$, after controlling for pretest scores. These findings suggest that conversation-driven, learner-responsive instruction may support learners' emotional experiences alongside their opportunities to communicate. However, the use of intact classes and a single institutional context requires cautious interpretation. The study contributes to discussions of affect-sensitive language pedagogy by considering anxiety and enjoyment together and identifying practical ways to incorporate Dogme principles into EFL classrooms.

Keywords: *Dogme ELT; speaking anxiety; foreign language enjoyment; EFL learners; learner-centred teaching*

1. Introduction and Review of Literature

Speaking in a foreign language requires learners to retrieve vocabulary, organize ideas, produce comprehensible language, and respond to others in real-life situations. These demands can make classroom speaking challenging, particularly when self-conscious learners fear making mistakes or being negatively judged. Although speaking practice is essential for communicative development, learners do not always participate confidently. Their emotional experiences may influence how readily they contribute to discussions, take risks, and respond to opportunities to use the target language.

Foreign language classroom anxiety has been widely discussed in second language research. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [1] conceptualized it as a situation-specific form of anxiety associated with foreign language learning. In speaking activities, anxiety may be especially noticeable because learners must communicate while managing linguistic demands and the social expectations of the classroom. This issue is relevant beyond any single national setting: language teachers in different educational contexts need to consider how classroom organization, feedback, participation expectations, and opportunities for communication may shape learners' willingness to speak.

However, understanding learners' emotional experiences requires more than examining anxiety alone. Foreign language enjoyment (FLE) provides a complementary perspective on language learning. Dewaele and MacIntyre [2] demonstrated that enjoyment and anxiety can coexist, suggesting that positive and

negative emotions should not be treated as opposite ends of a single continuum. Their work also highlighted the importance of teachers and peers in learners' emotional experiences. Consequently, language teaching approaches should be considered not only in terms of the linguistic knowledge they present but also in terms of the classroom conditions they create for participation and engagement.

Dogme ELT, also known as Teaching Unplugged, offers one possible approach to creating such conditions. Introduced by Thornbury [3] and further developed by Meddings and Thornbury [4], Dogme emphasizes conversation-driven teaching, learner-generated content, and attention to emergent language. Rather than relying entirely on a predetermined textbook sequence, teachers respond to learners' contributions and develop language work from the communication taking place in the classroom.

This does not imply that Dogme removes teaching or corrective feedback. Teachers support communication, notice linguistic difficulties, and help learners express meanings more effectively. What makes it distinctive is that classroom interaction and learners' immediate communicative needs provide an important starting point for instruction. When learners discuss meaningful topics, they have reasons to communicate; when they encounter linguistic difficulties, the teacher can provide relevant language support. These features may create opportunities for both participation and language development.

Previous studies have examined Dogme from different perspectives. Worth [5] explored the approach from learners' perspectives, while Xerri [6] investigated its use in a mainstream ESL context. Sarani and Malmir [7] examined Dogme in relation to speaking skills and willingness to communicate, reporting that its effectiveness varied across proficiency levels. More recently, Türegün Çoban and Özbek [8] investigated Dogme in relation to speaking skills, self-efficacy, and speaking anxiety. Together, these studies provide a basis for further investigation, while also indicating that the effects of Dogme should not be assumed to be identical across learners and settings.

An important question, therefore, is whether Dogme-oriented instruction is associated with changes in both speaking anxiety and enjoyment. Examining these two emotional dimensions together offers a broader perspective than focusing on anxiety reduction alone. It may also help teachers consider how learner participation, responsive feedback, and meaningful conversation can be incorporated into practice without assuming that one size fits all.

The present study addressed this issue through the following research questions:

1. To what extent does Dogme ELT affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking anxiety?
2. To what extent does Dogme ELT affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' foreign language enjoyment?

2. Method

2.1 Participants and Research Design

The study involved 60 intermediate EFL learners at a private language institute in Tehran, Iran. The participants were Persian-speaking learners aged 18–28, with 30 learners in each of two intact classes. The learners' proficiency was checked using the Oxford Placement Test, although they had also been identified as intermediate through prior proficiency evidence.

The study employed a quasi-experimental pretest–posttest control-group design. One class received Dogme-oriented instruction, while the other followed conventional textbook-based instruction. Participants were not randomly assigned, as the learners could choose between a conversation class and a regular course after completing the preceding course level depending on their language learning goals.

2.2 Instruments

The Oxford Placement Test was used to establish learners' proficiency levels. Speaking anxiety was measured using the 25-item Speaking Anxiety Scale developed by Chowdhury [9]. Each item used a five-point response scale, producing possible total scores from 25 to 125. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability index of this scale in the context of this study was assessed to be .81. Meanwhile, the face and content validity of the Speaking Anxiety Scale was confirmed by three experts in EFL.

FLE was measured using a 10-item questionnaire based on Dewaele and MacIntyre [2]. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, with total scores ranging from 10 to 50. Its reported reliability coefficient in the pilot study was .70. These instruments provided self-reported measures of participants' emotional experiences before and after the instructional period.

2.3 Procedure

The intervention lasted 15 sessions, each 90 minutes long, with classes meeting twice a week. In the experimental class, the speaking-focused component followed Dogme principles. The teacher initiated conversations and encouraged learners to introduce topics related to their interests and needs. Discussions developed through questions, responses, and learners' contributions rather than being determined exclusively by a textbook sequence.

The teacher provided assistance when learners had difficulty expressing particular meanings or producing appropriate vocabulary and structures. Language problems arising during interaction were noted and addressed through feedback, including discussion of relevant grammatical and lexical errors after speaking activities. This procedure aimed to maintain communication while also directing learners' attention to language that emerged during it. Approximately 45-60 minutes of each 90-minute session were devoted to the speaking-focused component, with the remaining time allocated to feedback on the learners' emergent language, including vocabulary, grammar, language functions, and discourse patterns. The control class was taught by another EFL teacher using the *World English 3* coursebook. The teacher followed the textbook units, activities, and related homework. Both groups attended 15 sessions of the same duration. The speaking anxiety scale and FLE questionnaire were administered before and after the instructional period.

2.4 Data Analysis

The pretest and posttest questionnaire scores were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA). For each outcome, the posttest score was the dependent variable, instructional group was the independent variable, and the corresponding pretest score was entered as a covariate. This procedure was used to compare the groups' post-intervention scores while statistically controlling for their initial scores.

3. Results

3.1 Speaking Anxiety

Speaking anxiety decreased in both groups, but the reduction was greater in the Dogme group. The experimental group's mean score declined from 102.03 (*SD* = 10.03) at pretest to 96.63 (*SD* = 9.43) at posttest. The control group's mean decreased from 105.00 (*SD* = 10.85) to 103.90 (*SD* = 10.16).

After controlling for pretest anxiety scores, ANCOVA indicated a statistically significant difference between the groups, $F(1, 57) = 10.874$, $p = .002$, $\eta p^2 = .160$. The result indicates that the Dogme group had lower adjusted posttest speaking anxiety than the textbook-based group. The partial eta-squared value suggests a substantial group effect within this sample, although it should not be interpreted as proof that the same effect would occur in other settings.

3.2 Foreign Language Enjoyment

The FLE scores increased in both groups, with a larger increase in the Dogme group. The experimental group's mean rose from 36.10 (*SD* = 4.40) to 39.13 (*SD* = 4.51), whereas the control group's mean increased from 34.97 (*SD* = 4.66) to 36.37 (*SD* = 4.84).

ANCOVA showed a statistically significant difference in adjusted posttest enjoyment scores, $F(1, 57) = 6.218$, $p = .015$, $\eta p^2 = .098$. Thus, the Dogme group reported higher post-intervention enjoyment than the textbook-based group after pretest scores were taken into account.

Taken together, the results show that the Dogme group demonstrated lower speaking anxiety and higher FLE relative to the control group at posttest. The findings concern measured emotional outcomes; they do not, by themselves, establish precisely which classroom processes produced these differences.

4. Discussion

The first research question examined whether Dogme ELT affected speaking anxiety. The results indicated that anxiety declined in both groups, but the decrease was greater among learners receiving Dogme-oriented speaking instruction. The adjusted difference between groups was statistically significant, with a partial eta-squared value of .160. This finding is consistent with the possibility that classroom interaction organized around learners' own contributions can provide a supportive context for speaking.

One possible explanation concerns the relationship between communicative purpose and participation. In Dogme-oriented lessons, learners were encouraged to introduce topics and express their opinions rather than respond only to predetermined textbook prompts. When learners can contribute ideas that matter to them, speaking may become more purposeful. This may help some learners focus on communicating meaning rather than concentrating exclusively on the possibility of making errors. Nevertheless, the study did not directly measure learners' perceptions of autonomy or topic relevance, so these explanations should be regarded as plausible interpretations rather than demonstrated mechanisms.

Teacher presence may also account for the mentioned results. In the experimental class, the teacher provided scaffolding when learners struggled to express themselves and addressed language emerging from classroom conversation. Such support can help learners continue communicating without requiring them to focus on the form. At the same time, the procedure included attention to grammatical and lexical errors. The findings therefore should not be interpreted as evidence that correction is unnecessary. Rather, they suggest that the timing and context of feedback may be worth considering when teachers aim to sustain communication while supporting accuracy.

The anxiety result also relates to Horwitz et al.'s [1] account of foreign language classroom anxiety. Speaking takes place under immediate communicative and social demands, which can make it particularly challenging for learners who are concerned about evaluation. A classroom that allows learners to contribute to the direction of conversation and receive responsive assistance may offer a different experience from one organized primarily around a fixed sequence of materials. Additionally, as learners do not carry the burden of taking summative tests, they may not experience the same amount of anxiety as in test-oriented courses. However, because the present study did not measure fear of negative evaluation, tests, participation patterns, or feedback preferences separately, it cannot identify which aspects of the classroom were most influential.

The second research question concerned FLE. Enjoyment increased in both groups, but the Dogme group showed a larger increase and significantly higher adjusted posttest scores. This result is important because it broadens the discussion beyond the reduction of negative emotion. Dewaele and MacIntyre [2] showed that anxiety and enjoyment can coexist in language classrooms; consequently, lower anxiety should not automatically be taken to mean that learners are enjoying their learning. In the present study, the two outcomes were measured separately, and the results suggest that the Dogme group experienced a more favorable pattern on both measures.

The conversation-driven nature of the intervention may help explain this pattern. Learners had opportunities to select topics, exchange ideas, and respond to classmates without being concerned about final evaluation. These activities may have supported a sense of involvement and made English a resource for expressing personal meanings rather than merely completing assigned exercises. The teacher's assistance may also have enabled learners to remain engaged when they encountered linguistic difficulties. These interpretations are consistent with the emphasis on interaction in Dogme [3], [4] and with earlier work exploring learner perspectives and classroom practice [5], [6].

The findings also contribute to the wider discussion of innovative language teaching. They suggest that affective considerations can be incorporated into methodological decisions rather than treated as separate from language development. This is relevant to teachers working in different educational settings, including classrooms where curriculum requirements make it difficult to abandon coursebooks. Dogme principles do not necessarily have to be adopted as a complete alternative to textbook-based teaching. Teachers may

instead introduce learner-generated discussion, respond to emerging language, and create opportunities for learners to influence classroom interaction while continuing to meet syllabus requirements.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted in light of the study's design. The participants came from one private institute, and the sample consisted of 60 learners in two intact classes. The absence of random assignment limits the extent to which differences can be attributed to the instructional approach alone. The opportunity to choose between a conversation class and a regular course may also have introduced pre-existing differences in learner preferences or motivation. In addition, both outcomes were measured through self-report questionnaires, and the study did not directly investigate how learners experienced particular activities or feedback practices. These limitations mean that the results should not be generalized automatically to all Iranian learners or to EFL contexts worldwide.

Future research could address these limitations by involving larger samples across multiple institutions and educational contexts. Where feasible, researchers could use random assignment or stronger methods of controlling for pre-existing group differences. Classroom observations, learner interviews, reflective journals, or recordings of interaction could also help explain how learners respond to learner-generated topics and emergent-language feedback. Further work might investigate whether proficiency, prior speaking anxiety, learner preferences, evaluation method, or teacher experience influences the outcomes of Dogme-oriented instruction.

5. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

This study examined the relationship between Dogme-oriented speaking instruction and two emotional outcomes among intermediate Iranian EFL learners. The Dogme group demonstrated significantly lower adjusted posttest speaking anxiety and significantly higher adjusted posttest FLE than the textbook-based group. These findings suggest that conversation-driven, learner-responsive instruction may offer affective as well as communicative benefits, although the quasi-experimental design does not establish an unequivocal causal explanation.

Several practical implications follow. First, teachers can give learners opportunities to suggest topics and connect classroom discussion with their interests. Second, teachers can provide timely vocabulary and grammatical support when communication breaks down, then revisit relevant language after the discussion. Third, feedback can be delivered in ways that help learners continue expressing meaning while still attending to accuracy. Finally, teachers can incorporate these principles selectively within existing course requirements rather than assuming that textbooks must be abandoned entirely.

The central contribution of the study is its joint consideration of speaking anxiety and enjoyment. The results encourage language teachers and researchers to consider not only how instruction supports learners' linguistic development, but also how classroom practices may shape their emotional experiences. Further research across different contexts is needed to establish how consistently these outcomes can be reproduced and which features of Dogme-oriented instruction are most closely associated with them.

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