



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

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Abstract

Foreign language learning is influenced not only by learners' linguistic knowledge but also by affective factors. Anxiety can negatively affect learners' participation and communication, whereas enjoyment can contribute to positive classroom experiences. Dogme English Language Teaching (ELT), also known as Teaching Unplugged, is a learner-centered approach that emphasizes conversation, learner-generated content, emergent language, and limited use of teaching materials. Although previous studies have examined Dogme in relation to language learning and speaking, less attention has been paid to its possible effects on learners' emotional experiences. The present study investigated the effect of Dogme ELT on speaking anxiety and foreign language enjoyment among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design was used with 60 intermediate learners at a private language institute in Tehran. The experimental group received 15 sessions of Dogme-based instruction, while the control group received conventional textbook-based instruction. Data were collected using a speaking anxiety scale and the Foreign Language Enjoyment Questionnaire and were analyzed through ANCOVA. The findings showed that the Dogme group had significantly lower speaking anxiety and significantly higher foreign language enjoyment than the control group. The findings suggest that conversation-driven and learner-centered instruction may provide a more supportive classroom environment for learners' emotional experiences.

Keywords: Dogme ELT; speaking anxiety; foreign language enjoyment; EFL learners; Teaching Unplugged

1. Introduction and Review of Literature

Foreign language learning is a complex process in which both cognitive and affective factors play an important role. Among the affective factors, anxiety has received considerable attention in second and foreign language research. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope [1] introduced the concept of foreign language classroom anxiety as a situation-specific form of anxiety related to language learning. Learners may experience anxiety when they have to communicate in the target language, particularly when they are concerned about making mistakes or being negatively evaluated. This can be especially important in speaking activities because learners have to produce language in real time.

At the same time, researchers have increasingly investigated positive emotions in language learning. One of the most widely studied positive emotions is Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE). Dewaele and MacIntyre [2], in a large-scale study of foreign language learners, showed that enjoyment and anxiety can coexist in the same classroom. They also found that learners' perceptions of teachers and peers were important in their experiences of enjoyment. Thus, learners' emotional experiences cannot simply be understood in terms of the absence or presence of anxiety. Both positive and negative emotions need to be considered.

One teaching approach that may have implications for learners' emotional experiences is Dogme ELT. Dogme was introduced by Thornbury [3] as a response to the increasing dependence on published materials in language teaching. The approach, later developed by Meddings and Thornbury [4], is generally characterized as conversation-driven, materials-light, and focused on emergent language. In a



Dogme classroom, the teacher does not necessarily begin with a fixed lesson plan or textbook sequence. Instead, classroom conversation and learners' contributions provide the basis for developing the lesson.

This approach gives learners opportunities to talk about topics that are meaningful to them and allows teachers to respond to learners' immediate linguistic needs. When learners have difficulty expressing an idea, the teacher can provide the necessary language and later focus on the vocabulary or grammar that has emerged during the interaction. In this way, language learning and communication take place together rather than being treated as completely separate activities.

Previous studies have reported positive perceptions of Dogme and its potential for promoting classroom interaction and speaking opportunities [5], [6]. Sarani and Malmir [7], for example, investigated the effect of Dogme on L2 speaking and willingness to communicate and found that its effects could vary according to learners' proficiency levels. More recently, research has continued to examine Dogme in relation to speaking anxiety. Türegün Çoban and Özbek [8], for example, reported that Dogme reduced speaking anxiety among a group of EFL learners. Although this provides relevant recent evidence, further research is needed across different learner populations and contexts, particularly concerning the relationship between Dogme and positive as well as negative emotions.

Therefore, the present study investigated whether Dogme ELT could affect Iranian intermediate EFL learners' speaking anxiety and foreign language enjoyment. The following research questions were addressed:

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 Design

The participants were 60 intermediate EFL learners studying at a private language institute in Tehran, Iran. They were between 18 and 28 years old and were Persian-speaking learners of English. None of the participants had lived or stayed in an English-speaking country for more than six months. The participants belonged to two intact classes, with 30 learners in each class.

The study used a quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design. One group received Dogme ELT instruction and the other received conventional textbook-based instruction. Since intact classes were used, the participants were not randomly assigned to the groups.

2.2 Instruments

The Oxford Placement Test was administered to establish that the participants were at the intermediate level. Speaking anxiety was measured using the 25-item Speaking Anxiety Scale [9] used in the study. The questionnaire used a five-point Likert scale, and its reliability coefficient was .81. Foreign language enjoyment was measured using the 10-item Foreign Language Enjoyment Questionnaire based on Dewaele and MacIntyre [2]. It used a five-point Likert scale, and its reliability coefficient in the pilot study was .70.

2.3 Procedure

The treatment was conducted over 15 sessions. Each session lasted 90 minutes, and classes met twice a week. The experimental group was taught according to the principles of Dogme ELT. The teacher did not use a textbook or arrive in class with a pre-assigned lesson. Instead, conversations were initiated with the learners, and students introduced topics according to their interests and needs. The teacher continued the discussions by asking questions and encouraging learners to express their opinions. When learners had difficulty producing particular words or structures, the teacher provided assistance. The teacher also gave feedback on language that emerged during the activities.



The control group was taught by another EFL teacher using the assigned textbook. The teacher and learners followed the activities and homework provided in the coursebook. Both groups received the same number and duration of instructional sessions. The speaking anxiety scale and Foreign Language Enjoyment Questionnaire were administered before and after the treatment. ANCOVA was used to compare the posttest scores of the two groups while controlling for their pretest scores.

3. Results

The descriptive results showed a decrease in speaking anxiety in both groups, but the decrease was greater in the Dogme group. The mean score of the experimental group decreased from 102.03 (SD = 10.03) before the treatment to 96.63 (SD = 9.43) after the treatment. In the control group, the mean decreased from 105.00 (SD = 10.85) to 103.90 (SD = 10.16).

The ANCOVA results showed a statistically significant difference between the two groups after controlling for the pretest scores, $F(1, 57) = 10.874$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2 = .160$. Therefore, learners who received Dogme ELT demonstrated significantly lower speaking anxiety than those who received textbook-based instruction.

The results for foreign language enjoyment showed the opposite pattern. The mean score of the Dogme group increased from 36.10 (SD = 4.40) to 39.13 (SD = 4.51), whereas the control group increased from 34.97 (SD = 4.66) to 36.37 (SD = 4.84). The ANCOVA showed a statistically significant difference between the groups, $F(1, 57) = 6.218$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .098$. Thus, the learners in the Dogme group reported significantly higher levels of foreign language enjoyment after the treatment.

4. Discussion

The findings of the present study showed that Dogme ELT had a significant effect on both speaking anxiety and foreign language enjoyment. Learners in the Dogme group experienced a greater decrease in speaking anxiety than learners in the textbook-based group. One possible explanation is related to the type of classroom interaction created through Dogme. In this approach, learners are given opportunities to speak about topics that are generated from their own interests and classroom needs. They are not required to follow a predetermined sequence of speaking activities. This may make communication more meaningful and reduce some of the pressure associated with speaking in a foreign language.

Another important feature of the Dogme lessons was the teacher's immediate response to learners' linguistic needs. When students could not find a particular word or structure, the teacher provided assistance rather than expecting them to produce the language independently. The teacher also gave feedback on language that emerged during communication. Such support may have helped learners feel more comfortable when communicating and may consequently have contributed to the reduction in speaking anxiety. The finding is also consistent with the recent study by Türegün Çoban and Özbek [8], which reported reduced speaking anxiety following Dogme instruction, although their participants and educational context were different.

The increase in foreign language enjoyment can also be related to the nature of the Dogme classroom. Dewaele and MacIntyre [2] emphasize the importance of teachers and peers in learners' experiences of enjoyment. In the present study, learners were actively involved in choosing topics and developing conversations. They had opportunities to express their opinions, interact with their classmates, and use English for meaningful communication. These experiences may have contributed to greater enjoyment.

The findings are also in line with previous research suggesting that Dogme can create opportunities for learner participation and interaction [5], [6]. However, the present study adds an affective dimension to this research by showing significant differences in speaking anxiety and foreign language enjoyment. The results therefore suggest that the value of Dogme may extend beyond providing additional opportunities for speaking practice.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted with caution. The study used two intact classes and a relatively small sample from one private language institute. Therefore, the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to all Iranian EFL learners or other educational contexts. In addition, although the quasi-experimental design provides evidence of differences associated with the instructional treatment, random



assignment was not possible. Further research using larger samples, different contexts, and qualitative data could provide a more detailed understanding of how learners experience Dogme classrooms.

5. Conclusion and Implications

The present study examined the effect of Dogme ELT on speaking anxiety and foreign language enjoyment among Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The findings showed that the learners who received Dogme instruction experienced significantly lower speaking anxiety and significantly higher foreign language enjoyment than those who received conventional textbook-based instruction.

The findings suggest that teachers may consider incorporating some Dogme principles into their classrooms, particularly learner-generated topics, meaningful conversation, emergent language, and responsive feedback. Dogme does not necessarily require teachers to abandon textbooks completely. Rather, its principles can provide opportunities for learners to use English more actively and to participate in classroom decisions. In this sense, Dogme may be useful not only for developing communicative competence but also for creating a more supportive and enjoyable learning environment.

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