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SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNER'S USE OF FORMULAIC LANGUAGE AND ITS IMPACT ON SPEAKING ANXIETY AND COMMUNICATIVE CONFIDENCE

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Abstract

The development of communicative competence is the key concern of second language acquisition. Learners develop this ability by using various strategies to maintain their affective factors. Formulaic language used during communication is one of the most widely used strategies which reduces barriers of anxiety and improves communicative confidence. This research aims to investigate how learners use formulaic expressions as a shortcut to overcome hidden speaking anxiety and to appear more confident. This research employs a quasi-experimental approach to prove Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) which claims that affective factors act as barriers and they hinder second language acquisition. The study focuses on the communicative behavior of learners. The sample consists of 30 participants who learn English as a second language which is a considerably sufficient sample size for the experiment. A pre-test and post-test were conducted to drive the experiment. The data about affective variables was collected from the tests and then results of pre-test and post-test were compared. The intervention phase was provided for 3 weeks in which learners were given instructions about formulaic expressions and their use in normal conversation. After the tests, the study showed that formulaic expressions help to reduce anxiety and increase communicative confidence. Therefore, it is proved by using Krashen's hypothesis that learners who experience anxiety face difficulties in communicative tasks and they overcome their fear by using formulaic language.

Keywords: *Formulaic Language, Communicative Confidence, Anxiety, Second Language Acquisition*

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, researchers have acknowledged that communicative competence in a second language is not just a concern of linguistic knowledge or proficiency but also a concern of psychology. Consequently, it is an interplay of affective, social, and cognitive factors; therefore, it is a complicated psycholinguistic act. Language anxiety, peculiarly spoken, is a barrier for second language learners. Learners inhibit their participation during conversations because of fear and lack of confidence. It diminishes their communicative performance. Some learners use effective strategies to hide their anxiety in social interactions. Effective strategies help learners to reduce internal barriers (Shoaib et al., 2021). Therefore, learners rely on formulaic language in their social interactions.

Formulaic language is the use of fixed expressions that are prefabricated. It consists of multi-word units, i.e., lexical bundles, collocations, and idioms that are routinely used in conversations. Native speakers use formulaic chunks for fluency in everyday interactions. Whereas second language learners use these chunks as ready-made expressions which they fit in their conversation in order to become fluent. The use of fixed expressions in conversations gives learners a communicative confidence which in turn reduces their speaking anxiety.

The line of inquiry is oriented with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982). A high affective filter is activated by fear and low self-esteem which creates obstruction in reaching the input to LAD i.e. language acquisition device (Noor & Mustafa, 2025). In contrast, confidence and high self-esteem maintains the affective filter and input freely reached to LAD (Nadeem, Shafaqat & Mustafa, 2025). According to Krashen (1982), anxiety creates barrier and blocks input which reduces performance. The familiar expressions lower the affective filter. In this way, formulaic chunks serve as a "safe linguistic routine" which in turn increases communicative confidence. This hypothesis was originally formulated to explain the association between emotional state and input-based learning. As spoken influences and reflects the emotional state of learners. So, any instructional approach which encourages confidence and lessens the anxiety can create more favorable conditions for acquisition. Although when instructions for formulaic language are very effectively implemented, learners feel a sense of preparedness which lowers their affective filter. Formulaic expressions help restrain and prevent this mechanism by lowering psychological risks during speaking. Formulaic sequences are acquired as a whole, and they are used in predictable communicative situations, so learners do not rely on conscious rules. Therefore, learners rely on stored chunks that are automatically processed and which contributes to a more relaxed, affective state. In this way, formulaic expressions serve not only a linguistic resource but also an effective tool facilitating lower affective filters.

Second Language learners struggle during communication. They experience fear of making mistakes or grammatically inappropriate sentences; this results in increased anxiety at the time of communication. Hence, they began to lose confidence. In fluent communication, the massive cognitive load can be stressful particularly for those learners who have insufficient skills about automatization of grammatical structures. Mental efforts in constructing sentences rise which tend to intensify anxiety. Formulaic language acts as a cognitive shortcut which lowers this load. Formulaic expressions enable learners to effectively participate in communication without any stress, and they can fluently communicate with minimal conscious effort. Many learners are unable to respond or are misunderstood only because of linguistic gaps. Formulaic language functions as a safety net which enables learners to maintain communicative momentum.

Communicative confidence is the ability to communicate effectively and express thoughts, ideas, and opinions clearly. Confidence and performance are intimately related to each other. Learners who speak well are fluent communicators because they receive positive feedback, thus, they are confident. Formulaic expressions promote communicative confidence by providing learners an immediate and practical means to express themselves. When learners effectively use formulaic chunks in real communication, they encounter communicative success which encourages their ability to interact. This success acts as a positive reinforcement which promotes self-confidence which, according to Krashen, lowers affective filters. This research conducts a pre-test and post-test to provide empirical evidence on a group of learners to test speaking anxiety and communicative confidence.

1.1 Research Objectives

1. To examine whether the use of formulaic expressions decreases learner's anxiety during communication.
2. To investigate that formulaic language promotes learner's communicative confidence.

1.2 Hypotheses

H1: The learners who use formulaic expressions experience low speaking anxiety.
H2: The learners who use formulaic expressions feel more confident while communicating.

2. Literature Review

In second language acquisition, the study of formulaic language and its correspondence to affective factors, i.e. anxiety and communicative confidence, holds an important place. Research has acknowledged that formulaic chunks comprise a major area of natural language use, and it also contributes to communicative ease and fluency. To examine the role of psychological factors in the development of communicative confidence and anxiety management during language acquisition, it is necessary to understand related theoretical framework which in this case is Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982). This literature signifies the increasing interest in formulaic language as a cognitive shortcut, until now only a few studies have examined their affective dimensions. This research synthesizes the claim that learners use formulaic chunks to break the barriers of anxiety and strengthen communicative confidence. Wray (2002) defined formulaic chunks as expressions, continuous or discontinuous of words or other components which appear to be prefabricated. This conceptuality clarifies further research that view formulaic expressions are not only collocations or idioms but also consist of a wide range of lexical bundles and multi-word units that are used commonly in daily conversation. Wood (2015) highlights that formulaic expressions are linked with "natural discourse patterns," which provides speakers with "ready access to familiar phrasing, supporting spontaneous interaction" (p. 34). Such conceptualization emphasized that formulaic sequences are grounded in psycholinguistics regulations. Learners retrieve chunks effortlessly than individually constructing the utterance word by word and then implicate the chunks to lessen the cognitive load. Research related to cognitive processes demonstrates that formulaic language facilitates real-time speech production. Studies indicate that formulaic language is processed more rapidly than novel language because they are stored as a "general rule" as a whole, rather than compositionally (Liu & Shi, 2022, p. 2). Moreover, Siyanova-Chanturia and Pellicer-Sánchez (2018) note that native speakers also depend heavily on formulaic language during fluent conversation which allows them to maintain natural fluency with minimum hesitation. Learners override their analytic processing, which results in smoother speech and confident utterances. When learners become able to speak more fluently using prefabricated chunks then they experience fewer stress which evokes anxiety.

Speaking anxiety is one of the most crucial barriers in second language acquisition. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) described foreign language anxiety as a disparate combination of beliefs, self-perceptions, behaviors, and feelings in relation to classroom language learning. It is acute particularly in communicative tasks. Various studies have argued that speaking anxiety may disrupt lexical retrieval and impair self-monitoring, which interferes with speech production. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) note that anxious learners consume mental processes in self-evaluation and worry, leaving behind cognitive processes for planning speech. Anxiety thus becomes mentally overwhelming and results in communication breakdown. This affiliates with Krashen's (1985) postulate that anxiety raises the affective filter and prevents learners from successfully acquiring a language. When learners get anxious, the internal barrier rises which blocks input and becomes a source of hindrance for output also. As a consequence, any strategy which helps to lower the cognitive burden or creates a safe zone for learners helps to reduce this affective filter. Therefore,

Krashen's affective filter hypothesis (1982) has been used greatly as a framework in SLA. It analyzes how emotional factors intervene language processing. According to this hypothesis, self-confidence, motivation, fear, and anxiety are the affective variables that reinforce a learner's ability to acquire a second language. In this way, learners with high motivation, self-confidence and low anxiety are successful second language learners and vice versa (Krashen, 1985). Lower affective filter improves learners to participate effectively in communicative tasks whereas higher affective filters trigger psychological barriers which interrupt fluency (Noor & Mustafa, 2025). Scholars argued that learners with high anxiety keep themselves away from communication even if they have enough linguistic knowledge (Arnold, 2007). Consequently, affective factors also play a key role in shaping the communicative behavior among learners.

Formulaic chunks are the linguistic devices; they reduce mental efforts when used strategically. Some scholars refer to formulaic language as linguistic security. Learners feel safer and communicate more comfortably when they process ready-made expressions. Wray and Perkins (2000) emphasized that formulaic language acts as "processing shortcuts" that lighten the load during language production (p. 11). It means that learners who use these expressions experience a fluent speaking process with less psychological strain. A number of empirical studies linked formulaic sequences with increased fluency which is further connected to greater communicative confidence. Boers, Eyckmans and Stengers (2021) formulated that learners who widely used formulaic language in communication exhibit faster speech and less pauses. Furthermore, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) claim that anxious learners lose control during communication, and that perceived control signifies speaking comfort. Formulaic language offers familiar linguistic and mental readiness. Labov (1972) described linguistic insecurity as a type of self-doubt that forms speaker's confidence during interactions. Linguistic insecurity in actual is the individual's fear of being judged for speaking inadequately.

Only a few studies focused explicitly on formulaic language in terms of a strategy that learners used to reduce anxiety while communicating. Numerous existing studies view formulaic expressions in relation to vocabulary development. Studies such as Siyanova-Chanturia and Pellicer-Sánchez (2018) focused on formulaic expressions in relation to the discourse but do not explore affective factors. However, research on communicative anxiety does not examine linguistic strategies that learners use; they only focus on internal psychological conditions that learners experience. Meanwhile Arnold (2007) observed that "language learning is intensely an emotional experience" (p. 13). Assassi and Benyelles (2016) also focuses on communicative competence only. However, Learner's use of formulaic expressions to reduce their communicative anxiety and to improve communicative confidence remained underexplored. Learners use formulaic language as a shortcut to become fluent and to conceal their anxiety. Therefore, this study aims to analyze this research gap.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical basis of this research mainly focuses on Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982). It explores how emotional factors (i.e. anxiety and self-confidence) contribute to second language acquisition. Dulay and Burt (1977) are the pioneers of the concept of an "affective filter." Later Krashen strengthened this idea in his Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), i.e. one of the hypotheses in the Monitor Model. This hypothesis supports the "acquired system" rather than the "learned system". Krashen (1982) hypothesized that learners may have appropriate linguistic

competence, but they fail to process it effectively due to high anxiety. According to the affective filter hypothesis, a second language learner may not process comprehensible input if there is a "mental block" (Krashen, 1985). This mental block becomes a source of hindrance for the input to reach LAD (Language Acquisition Device). The concept of LAD has been introduced by Noam Chomsky (1965) which argues that it's an "innate capacity" of a human being to process input. An acquirer must be open to the input provided for successful language acquisition, and the affective conditions must be optimal. When affective conditions are not optimal, the affective filter is high, and the acquirer posits less input. They may understand the message but couldn't acquire it. Whereas acquirers facing favorable conditions will seek more input and have low affective filter (Rabbi, 2015). Affective filters encompass two situations as shown in figure 1 and 2. When the filter is up or high, the affective filter acts as a barrier and input fails to reach the LAD. In this way, the learner fails to acquire language when the filter is up; this usually happens when learners are anxious or low confident. On the other hand, the situation is reversed when the filter is low or down, the affective filter doesn't hinder the input to reach the LAD. However, a learner can successfully acquire a language when the filter is lowered down. It usually happens when the learner is motivated, less anxious, and confident.

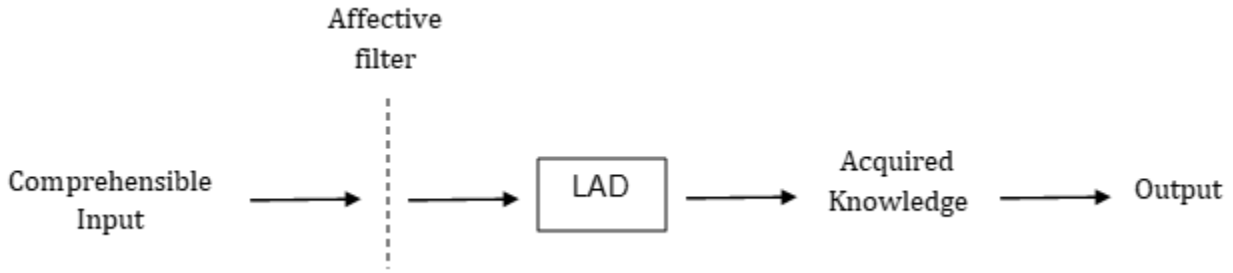


Figure 1: Affective factor in low anxiety situation adapted from (Senouci & Larbi, 2021, p.31).

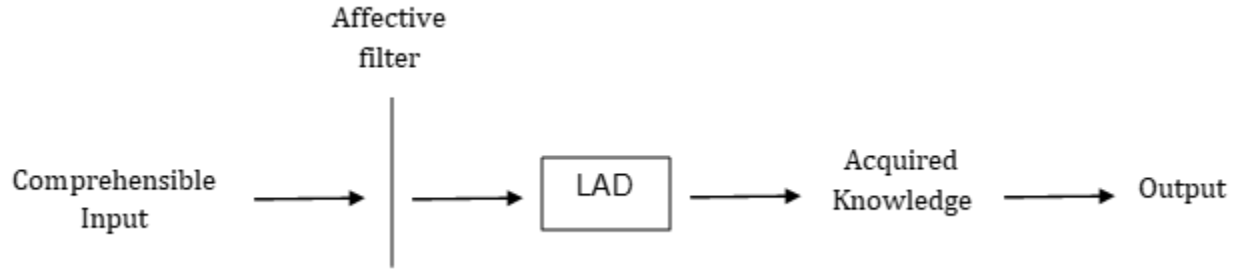


Figure 2: Affective factor in high anxiety situation adapted from (Senouci & Larbi, 2021, p.31).

Several researchers supported Krashen's assumption about the communicative aspect, which is a shift from grammar-based instruction. This research fosters oral communication and examines spoken context particularly because it heavily depends on the learner's real-time language output. When learners depend on formulaic chunks in communication, their anxiety is reduced. In Krashen's point of view, when the affective filter is lowered, the learner experiences minimum hesitation and fear (1982). As a result, learners enjoy communicative confidence to speak fluently.

Therefore, formulaic language serves a tremendous role of affective regulation strategy which reduces anxiety and maintains fluency.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design followed by pre-test and post-test. This design was suitable because it allows to examine the observational changes in affective variables, i.e. how formulaic expressions can reduce conversational anxiety and helps to boost-up confidence. This study does not focus on the comparison between the experimental group and the control group while it examines the changes that take place within the same group of learners following two testing phases. The observational method used in this research is "non-participant observer" i.e., the researcher considered it convenient and accessible to employ someone to take observational tests.

3.2 Participants

The participants for this study include 30 matric-level students. 15 students among them were from grade 10 whereas 15 from grade 9. The participants belong to a homogeneous educational background and linguistic environment that is, all students learning English as a second language. None of the students were exposed to formal instructions about formulaic expressions before the study began. This homogeneity results in minimum extraneous variables in relation to proficiency levels in educational contexts.

3.3 Sampling technique

This study employs a convenience sampling technique because it was easy to access for the researcher. The institute gave permission to conduct the research. This research is not based on random sampling; everyone in the classroom participated. The sample size was 30 which was enough to observe meaningful patterns of change in anxiety level and communicative confidence among learners and how they use formulaic expressions in their daily conversation.

3.4 Data collection

Data was collected through "observations" by the researcher. Some structured tasks were planned for communicative interactions. The fundamental variables under inquiry were the affective factors, particularly anxiety and communicative confidence, and the other one is the use of formulaic language in oral communication. Observational methods can best record communicative confidence and anxiety because they are overt behaviors. Therefore, avoidance, hesitation, speech breakdowns, willingness to communicate, learner's eye contact, voice volume, and willingness to sustain communication can only be manifested through observations. Moreover, ethical considerations were fully respected while collecting data, the student's identity remained anonymous, and the data collected was highly valid and reliable.

3.5 Pre-test Technique

The pre-test was conducted before the intervention of instructions on formulaic expressions. It involved oral tasks and speaking activities in the classroom. The pre-test observed the natural behavioral patterns when learners are not exposed to formulaic language instructions. Oral tasks were structured to evoke spontaneous speech. The tasks were deliberately retained non-specialized

and familiar to the students to observe their natural anxiety and confidence level more effectively. When learners were performing oral tasks, the researcher observed them silently. An observational checklist was also marked. The indicators for anxiety used in the checklist were, long pauses, reluctant to speak, visible nervousness, self-correction and self-monitoring, scattered speech and avoiding eye contact etc. Similarly, communicative confidence was indicated by willingness to communicate again and again, clarity, and apparent comfort without any stress during conversation. The Researcher also marked the use of formulaic expressions which learners naturally used during their tasks.

3.6 Intervention phase

The intervention phase was conducted for 3 weeks; students were given instructions to use formulaic expressions in their daily conversation. This phase doesn't aim to analyze the learner's effectiveness, rather focusing on the internalization of formulaic expressions. This phase actually provides awareness to learners of how they can use prefabricated chunks in speech. It was a type of preparatory phase for learners which focuses on whether access to formulaic chunks influences the learner's affective state or not.

3.7 Post-Test Technique

After the three weeks of intervention period, a post test was conducted which was similar in nature to the pre-test conducted before. This test was conducted to see whether the use of prefabricated chunks in the second language facilitates learner's communication and reduces their anxiety level during spoken tasks or not. This test was conducted using an observational checklist. The researcher examined through keen observations and marked the indicators of anxiety, communicative confidence, and learner's use of formulaic expressions to cover their anxiety. The same criteria were applied to both tests. The results of pre-test and post-test will be compared in the end to see the improvement.

3.8 Limitations

This research has various limitations:

1. This research constitutes a small sample size which limits the generalizability of its results. Results may vary for large scale study.
2. Audio and video recordings were not permitted by the institute.
3. This research does not use any control group; changes were recorded within the same group of participants.
4. The data was collected only from class of female students.

4. Data Analysis

The observational checklist revealed the extent of anxiety, communicative fluency, and use of formulaic expressions. The pre-test and post-test scores were compared. The average or mean value gets through the scores showed improvement or deterioration. Student's anxiety was indicated by their restless movement, avoidance of eye contact, pauses, fear of making mistakes and embarrassment when they fail to answer correctly. The scores were marked on the basis of these key factors. The communicative confidence and fluency were recorded on the basis of student's ability to speak freely in front of classmates, willing to give opinion in English and want to

participate in tasks repeatedly. Furthermore, student's use of formulaic language was marked on the basis of their natural use of chunks in several communicative tasks.

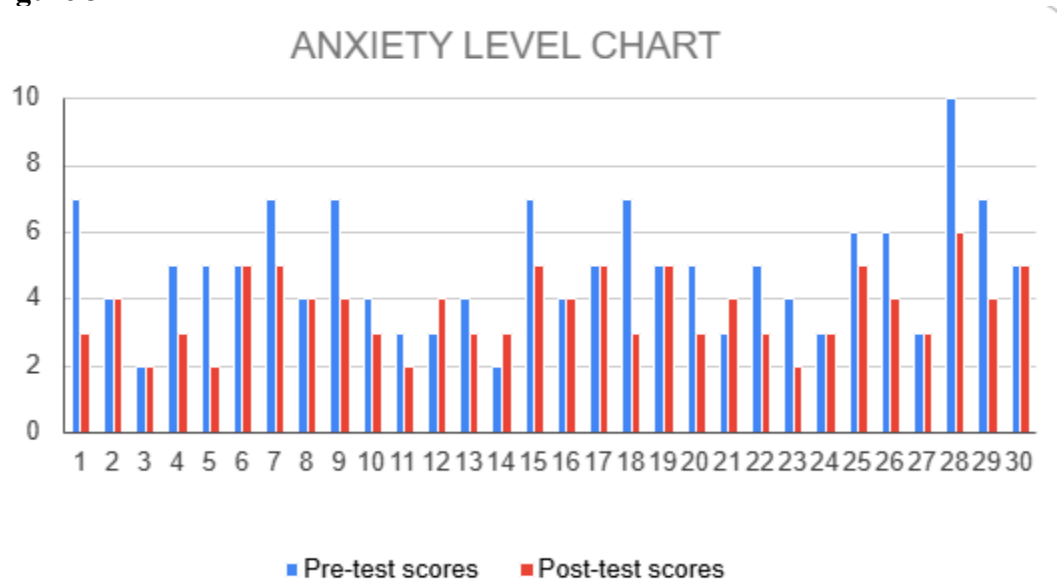
Table 1

ID	ANXIETY LEVEL		COMMUNICATIVE FLUENCY		USE OF FORMULAIC CHUNKS	
	Pre-test scores	**Post-test scores**	**Pre-test scores**	**Post-test scores**	**Pre-test scores**	**Post-test scores**
1	7	3	7	10	6	9
2	4	4	8	14	5	7
3	2	2	13	13	7	7
4	5	3	10	11	6	8
5	5	2	9	9	7	9
6	5	5	8	7	6	6
7	7	5	11	12	6	5
8	4	4	9	9	7	8
9	7	4	10	9	7	11
10	4	3	11	12	8	9
11	3	2	11	14	7	6
12	3	4	14	13	11	11
13	4	3	14	14	7	7
14	2	3	14	16	11	13
15	7	5	8	9	7	9
16	4	4	14	14	7	8
17	5	5	9	13	6	6
18	7	3	13	15	7	9
19	5	5	11	14	7	5
20	5	3	9	10	7	8
21	3	4	13	14	7	11
22	5	3	8	12	9	11
23	4	2	12	15	7	8
24	3	3	10	13	7	9
25	6	5	13	15	7	9
26	6	4	12	11	7	11
27	3	3	12	12	9	8
28	10	6	5	9	6	7

29	7	4	8	9	9	10
30	5	5	12	12	9	10
SUM	147	111	318	360	219	255
AVERAGE (MEAN)	4.9	3.7	10.6	12	7.3	8.5

The graphical representation of anxiety, communicative fluency and formulaicity along with the scores are mentioned:

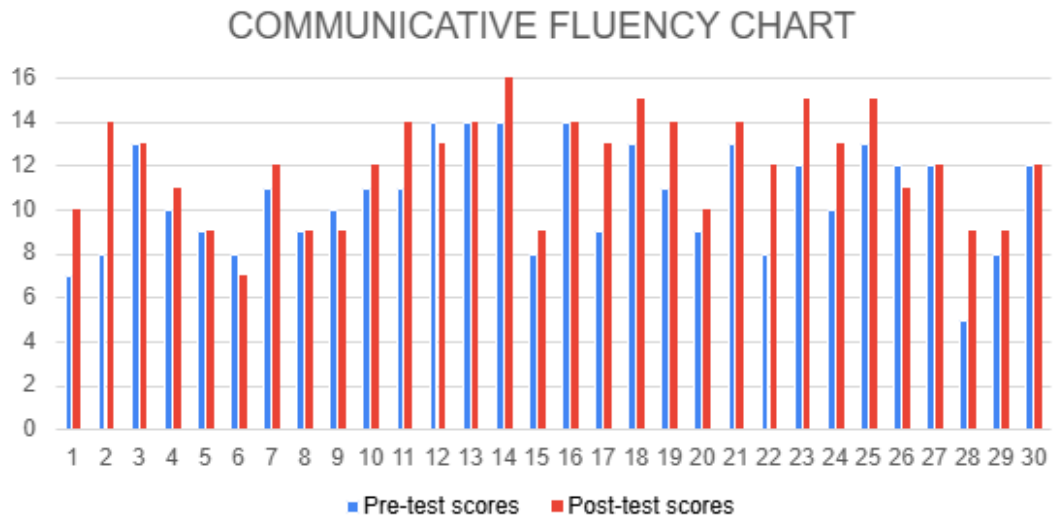
Figure 3



Out of 30 students, 17 showed fewer anxiety in post-test as compared to pre-test. There is a visible reduction of anxiety level. The mean value of the scores decreased from 4.9 to 3.7, which is an evidence showing that the use of formulaic expressions reduces anxiety.

$$\text{Pr}\, e\ test\ Anxiety\ level\ >\ Posttest\ Anxiety\ level$$

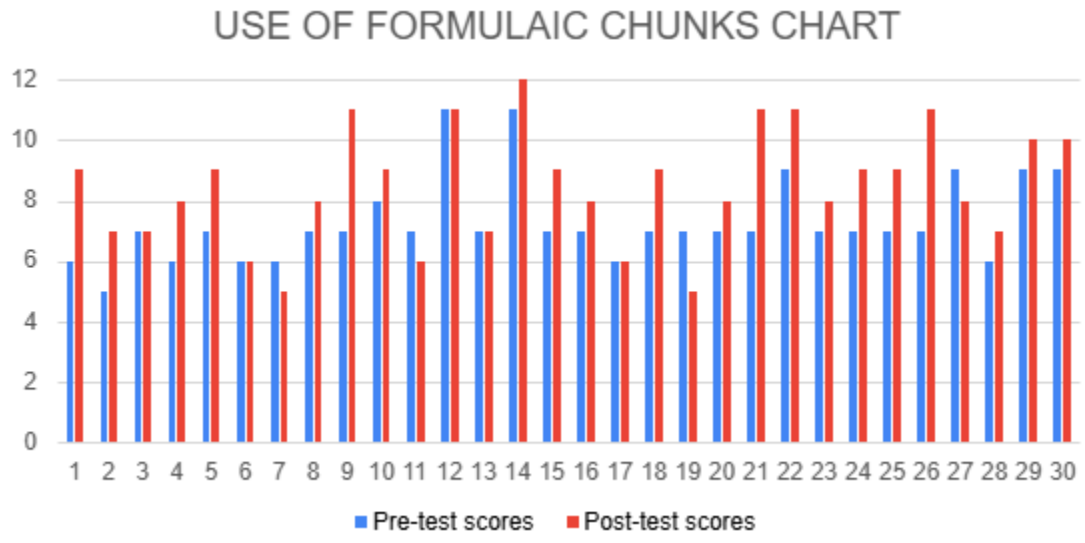
Figure 4



The mean fluency of pretest is 10.6 whereas the mean fluency of posttest is 12 which shows improvement in posttest than the pretest. Therefore, post-test communicative confidence is greater than the pre-test because fluency is directly related to communicative confidence.

$$\text{Pr}\,e\ test\ Fluency\ <\ Posttest\ Fluency$$

Figure 5



21 out of 30 students showed improvement in the use of formulaic language. By the end of the experiment, 70% students showed communicative fluency using formulaic chunks in different communicative tasks.

$$Formulaic\ Chunk\ in\ \text{Pr}\,e\ test\ <\ Formulaic\ Chunks\ in\ Posttest$$

5. Discussions

The analysis of the data gathered through an observational checklist revealed a lower level of anxiety in post-test as compared to pre-test. In pre-test various students showed behaviors which reflected higher anxiety such as learners frequently used long pauses and more hedges in their speech, they avoided eye contact, they showed fear of making mistakes and spoke very softly in a very low voice. However, highly anxious students do not show willingness to participate in tasks in pre-test. On the other hand, learners showed a remarkable change in anxiety level. It was clearly observed that the students who were anxious at the time of pretest were less concerned about fear of making mistakes; they developed eye contact and reduced hedging and pauses. This is because learners were aware of using ready-made sentences during conversational tasks. Therefore, fewer anxiety-related behaviors were observed in the post-test, which showed improvement in the post-test.

The level of communicative confidence also showed improvement in the post-test as compared to pre-test. In pre-test several students were not confident which affects their communicative fluency. In the observational checklist, three ratings were used, i.e. low, medium, and high. They were coded as 1,2, and 3 respectively. A student showing any variable indicating low confidence was marked by 1 and showing high confidence was marked by 3. In pretests majority of students were rated low and medium level confidence having lesser score whereas in post-test students showed improvement in confidence level and students were marked by higher scores as majority of students indicated medium and high confidence. In post-test learners become more able to speak confidently in front of classmates, they become able to complete the speaking tasks with fewer pauses, and they become willing to speak again and again. Thus, learners showed communicative effectiveness and improved confidence at the end of the study.

Results from the observational checklists also showed that students began to use formulaic chunks in conversation more frequently in the post-test as compared to pre-test. During pretest students were unaware about formulaic chunks, but instructions were given to students before post-test i.e. in the intervention phase. In pre-test students used few and limited formulaic chunks, but they used these chunks from medium to high rating. The observations from the test showed that students increasingly used formulaic expressions. In post-test, students used a minimum of one formulaic chunk produced naturally. They tried to start their conversation by using a formulaic expression etc. Although many students were still hesitant, overall improvement and positive changes were recorded.

The results of this research were analyzed through the theoretical lens of Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982). In post-test, the observational checklist revealed reduction in anxiety therefore, the emotional change; which was high in pretest, highlighted a lowered affective filter. This reduction in anxiety indicates that students were comfortable and had less fear of making mistakes. Furthermore, post-test results indicate that students showed more confidence and were willing to communicate because of ready-made expressions. This willingness suggests that students become more open to interaction and participation, which lowers the affective filter. Students get linguistics support through formulaic expressions which reduces learner's stress. Krashen (1982) claims that emotional barriers either do not teach grammar but they create conditions which let acquisition to occur.

Consequently, this study highlights that the learners who appear anxious face difficulty in learning

because of lack of confidence whereas those who appear less anxious can speak easily. Anxiety get reduced through the knowledge of familiar expressions. Formulaic chunks help to increase communicative fluency which results in an increase of communicative confidence. This shows that communicative fluency has a direct relation with communicative confidence. However, communicative confidence is inversely proportional to anxiety, i.e. the greater the communicative confidence, the lesser the level of anxiety will be. Hence, formulaic chunks become a source to reduce learner's anxiety.

$$Communicative\ Fluency \propto Confidence$$

$$Confidence \propto \frac{1}{Anxiety}$$

This experiment concluded that the comparison of pre-test and post-test results showed a decrease in anxiety level and an increase in communicative confidence and fluency using formulaic language. Students also used formulaic expressions as a shortcut to reduce anxiety because familiar expressions create less threatening conditions, provide support, and give communicative confidence. Therefore, this study supports Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the role of formulaic language in second language acquisition. The use of formulaic language helps to reduce anxiety and elevate communicative confidence. A quasi-experimental approach was used and observational checklists from pre-test and post-test contribute to formulate results. The findings declared a clear improvement from pre-test to post-test. It is revealed through the observations that students showed fewer anxiety, improved communicative confidence, and increased use of formulaic language. The results were interpreted through the theoretical framework of Krashen (1985) which highlights that the use of formulaic language lowers the affective filter because it reduces fear and hesitation. This facilitates the claim that reduced affective barriers support effective second language acquisition. Despite the favorable findings, this research also has many limitations aforementioned. This study mentions the value of formulaic language as a strategy in second language acquisition. It provides linguistic support which helps to maintain anxiety level and communicative confidence.

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