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CONFIDENCE MASTERY AS THE FUNDAMENTAL TASK IN LEARNING A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract

The aim of language learning is not only to achieve academic success carried out by fluent speaking and mastering the grammar and vocabulary, but is also to focus on psychological comfort of students to participate in their education - to receive and perform. Learners' self-esteem plays the fundamental role in any language classroom. How students feel about learning is closely related to their ability to learn. The teachers' task is thus not only to provide knowledge and information but also to immerse themselves into the student's mind and discover the best way to awake the learner's will to communicate. This paper focuses on two aspects that impact the emotional state of the learner, the academic and the psychological. The students of two different levels of English have answered the questionnaire assessing their attitude, anxiety and motivation towards learning English. Each opinion has been evaluated and put into relationships with the ability to relax, understand, learn and enjoy at the same time. Their (answers') analyses have become the base of several teaching techniques that build and encourage students' confidence as the main condition to start any cognitive process. Confidence mastery has thus played the fundamental role in the present survey.

Key Words

Introduction

Everyone accepts the notion that language is a means of communication, but there is much less agreement about just what is involved in the ability to communicate, Dr. Leon James (1971) points out. When talking about learning a foreign language, this work focused on the speaking skill as a way of gaining learners' self-confidence first, even though mastering a foreign language also involves listening and writing abilities. Oral communication in the foreign language has been shown to be especially anxiety provoking (Horwitz 1991, as cited in Arnold, 1999). When it comes to expressing students' thoughts, teachers find themselves being challenged from two sides of the problem. One side of mastering the communication skill is to support an 'individual's originality and skill (E.De Bono, 1970) while provoking students' thinking as well as to teach them to have their own opinion by having them explain things and situations. This process deepens their cognition and learning itself (Kotekova, 2010), and it creates the other part of teacher's challenge. However, speaking a foreign language is not simply the ability to produce words and sentences. Learners have to find courage to express something in a different language, so gaining confidence to speak becomes the fundamental requirement. This is a task in itself. Confidence can have many different meanings. It could be defined as belief in one's own abilities, in which case confidence in speaking English would really just come down to not being afraid to speak. This particular reason of students' disability to speak was an important inspirational point why the author of this paper decided to analyse the reasons of anxiety and develop certain techniques that would help students get rid of this fear. The author's long-term experience in challenging her learners to speak has taught her that students need a very positive and relaxed approach of a teacher first, but how to obtain positive attitude in students themselves was the task for particular techniques of this paper to discover. This paper's main tool was the author's observation during her teaching process which was consequently applied into the questionnaire and its specific questions given to students. Each student is an individual that is why each answer given by him/her was carefully analysed, and accordingly new techniques developed. Techniques presented in this paper are accompanied by concrete samples of students' answers that significantly influenced their (techniques') development. The outcomes of their (techniques') successful influence were then gathered, and their impact on students is illustrated at the end of this paper (section Results) with concrete quotes of learners who were interviewed after these techniques had been used in author's teaching process. The interview contained conformable to questionnaire enquiries. In the field of communication studies oral, communication apprehension has been associated with low self-esteem (McCroskey, 1977, as cited in Arnold, 2007). The way one thinks has an astronomical impact not only on the whole journey through life, but it is an integral part of the learning process. The contribution of the individual himself to the learning process, according to James Leon (1971), is inherent to the nature of the mind as information processing and storing device about which little of the substance is known today. Thus English teaching and learning a foreign language need to be looked at not only from an academic point of view but also from a psychological view. The students' answers to the questions in the questionnaire were of a very strong proof of this. They were divided into two groups, psychological and academic, according to factors influencing students' anxiety. These factors then have become the base for new technique. One of them developed and applied in the present study was certain psychological approach of a teacher towards the learners in order to obtain

their confidence. The teacher, as Odera (2009) sees him, has many roles; he is an academician, a specialist, a methodologist and also a caregiver, and an ethical mentor among many others. The teacher has to consider emotionally relevant individual characteristics that influence how she/he will respond to a situation (Gardner, 1993). According to Casselmann (1967), the social teacher respects individual thinking and decision making of students, he/she supports their activity, and he/she gives them an opportunity to show their personality. The rules of lectures and mutual cooperation are made together. As the author of this paper has observed, students usually face anxiety when asked to communicate in English even though they have already spent several years studying it. Teachers usually have to deal with quite a few problems concerning confidence which most often puts the class into a silence when having to react. The reasons are various. At this moment in language teaching history, as Horwitz (2007) points out, the necessity of focusing on the emotional states of learners falls into the most important demands. Understanding the emotional vulnerability of language learners (Horwitz, 2007) becomes a crucial influential factor in teaching process. The present research aimed its focus at finding out why students do not talk and consequently what would help them express what they really think in a foreign language. An interesting issue whether self-esteem is a cause or an outcome of an academic achievement (Rubio, 2007) was the leading principal of the present survey so was the conceiving the idea of how to bridge the gap between the areas of self-esteem and a foreign language learning (Rubio, 2007). Motivation affects self-confidence, which in turn influences proficiency in English, says Yashima (2004). The most effective method to evaluate success (psychological and academic achievement) and reasons of non-success (lack of self-confidence) in learning a foreign language is to ask questions. A questionnaire

which, as mentioned above, was created and provided by the author while observing learners' reactions during traditional teaching, was aimed at specifying the questions in a way that would help a teacher not only to identify what components self-esteem consists of, but also at, according to the students' answers, developing the motivational techniques to encourage confidence in the language classrooms. The final step of this paper's methodology was applying new techniques in teaching process. Their impact on learners was then revealed when interviewing the students themselves and documenting their positive quotes illustrated at the end of this paper. "Healthy" self-esteem, as Arnold (2007) emphasizes, is when the students have both a positive, accurate belief about themselves, and their abilities and also the commitment and responsibility that comes when they see themselves as able to complete worthwhile goals. Self-concept determines behaviour, says Arnold (2007). She then continues that what students feel about them will affect the way they approach the learning experience and also their relationship with others.

Material and Methods

The questions of why language learning is much more ego-involving than other fields of study and what can be done to assist the learners' emotional journey (Horwitz, 2007) were the focus of the first part of this study. The reason why students do not feel very comfortable expressing their opinions and thoughts including any kind of reaction in a foreign language is, as Arnold points out (2007, as cited in Fontecha 2007), because they are deprived of their normal, familiar vehicle of expression. Arnold (1999, as cited in Fontecha 2007) then continues that "in fact, *language shock* may occur when learners fear the new words, and the target language does not reflect their ideas

adequately, perhaps making them look ridiculous or infantile". The main tool of the paper's methodology was to observe how students feel during traditional learning process where positive attitude of a teacher was natural but not applied in any teaching technique particularly and then asking specific questions which would help identify components and reasons of learners' low self-esteem. Questionnaire with specific questions was created by the author and given to students of two different levels. Analysing the answers was the crucial step of methodology followed by their application into new teaching techniques. In the first part of this paper the answers helped to identify some of the components of self-esteem (i.e. reasons why students do not talk). Rosenberg (1965, as cited in Mruk, 2006) views self-esteem in terms of a feeling, attitude, or belief concerning one's worth as a person. Taking into account the psychological character of most of the students' constraints, it is necessary to think of an ethical approach in teaching. Švarcová (2011) presented the valuable quote by Ripley and Simpson (2007) who said that the aim of an ethical education is a positive influence on attitudes, value system, norms and rules, not only gaining knowledge, but particularly the ability to communicate, to accept ethnic and other differences, and to solve social problems in a socially acceptable way. Intrapersonal intelligence, according to Ripley and Simpson (2007), involves having access to one's own feelings, being able to discriminate them, label them and then use the knowledge to inform behavioural choices. After the main components from the learners' answers had been identified, they were divided into two groups, psychological and academic. Each answer was analysed and then applied in developing a new technique which would help to eliminate learners' anxiety to speak from the psychological point of view and at the same time compliment teaching techniques from the academic character of the students' reasons. The target group for this survey was the students of the University of Life Sciences in Prague studying pre-intermediate (A2) and intermediate (B1) levels of English. Anonymous questionnaires with questions of exact interpretation have been answered by seven classes of two different levels of English (190 students in total), in which learners were kindly asked to answer honestly. A wide scale of possible techniques – as shown in the second part of this survey - has been developed inspired by the answers to these questions:

- Are you confident to speak English?
- If yes, what motivates you?
- If no, why not? What do you miss/need?
- What are the strong points of your English lesson?
- What are the weak points of your English lesson?
- What would you change/suggest doing in a different way?

As Vostra (2011) and her colleagues state, the evaluation by students represents an important source of information for teachers and the university's management. A personal judgement of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes an individual holds towards himself, (Coopersmith, 1967, as cited in Arnold, 2007) has become the crucial inspirational information for the present paper.

The first step after obtaining the questionnaire with answers was to focus on negative feedback. The factors participating in lack of the students' self-confidence inspired the author in developing following technique. Technique1 has been developed based on the answers to the question:

- *Are you confident to speak English?*

As seen from the character of the question, it involved the psychological as well as the academic dimensions of the lessons

from the learners' point of view. The answers provided a valuable source for proposing suitable teaching technique. The following is the students' answers to the question:

Psychological factors:

- No, I am not confident; I am shy to talk in front of my classmates.
- I don't like when many people are looking at me, that's why I sit in front, so my classmates don't see me.
- I am afraid to say something because it is difficult to talk in front of many people.
- I am shy to express what I think; I am not sure if my opinion is correct.
- I am afraid I would say something stupid, and my classmates would laugh.
- I have a problem speaking in front of other people even though I understand the topic.
- I don't want to embarrass myself by saying something wrong.

Academic factors:

- I don't like talking because I don't think I can talk, I don't have the vocabulary, I am afraid I would make mistake, I don't want to be embarrassed.
- I don't want to talk because I don't remember the grammar.
- I am shy and when I want to say something, I usually forget what I wanted to say.
- I don't think I can say something that would make sense.
- I am not sure if I use the right words.

Methodology has been surveyed and applied on both levels of English (A2, B1) equally. Black and Wiliam point out (1998) that

teachers have to manage complicated and demanding situations, channelling the personal, emotional and social pressures in order to help students learn and become better learners in the future. Lack of self-confidence is a negative emotion that does not help students grow. Drawing on particular psychological failures of the students, the following technique was suggested to start the lesson with; as an important part of the positive influence on students' attitude:

TECHNIQUE 1: USING (POSITIVE) QUOTES TO INSPIRE TOWARDS POSITIVE MINDSET

Low self-esteem undermines the actual qualities and abilities of a student. Therefore, the teacher must act as an instrument of change in the learner's mind-set and put forth an effort to make it otherwise. As Fontecha (2007) emphasizes, particular attention must be given to understanding and enhancing the role of a teacher as a facilitator, a teacher who includes learners' inner processes into the instruction. The author of this paper has managed to perform quite a successful step by starting the lesson with a quote that supported the faith in each student: "*Whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you are right*" (Budha). The quote is written on the board and then asked to be explained. The aim is to evoke a positive attitude and an atmosphere of hope in the class. Many students have expressed (as seen in some answers) that they are shy to talk in front of other students, they are not sure and they don't feel comfortable for some reason. Arnold (2007) explains this factor saying that we may be judged by what we say, since we know that when we speak in the foreign language we cannot yet express ourselves fluently and we see the self that we present as a limited version of our real self. The positive quote should pacify learners' negative feelings. Even though the character of the answers also involves

academic reasons (i.e. lack of vocabulary, fear of disability to say something correctly), they naturally fall into the group of stress-causing factors. They can all be approached by learners' positive attitude taught within Technique1. After clearing up the quote's meaning for everybody, there comes another question from the teacher, trying to make students see relatedness of the quote with their studying: "What have you chosen to do? Are you going to pass an English exam because you want to or are you going to sit and wait if you are lucky enough to pass?" This specific quote truly pushes doubts aside if embraced correctly. Whatever one chooses to focus on becomes reality and if one's mind-set is positive, the outcome is positive. The teacher should guide them along towards an optimistic attitude.

There are plenty of other quotations that can be used to encourage learners' self-esteem, for example:

'*Always do what you are afraid to do*';

'*Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.*' (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

'*Be not afraid of growing slowly; be afraid only of standing still*' (Chinese proverb)

'*We learn wisdom from failure much more than success. We often discover what we will do, by finding out what we will not do.*' (Samuel Smiles)

Techniques that were developed further have been inspired by factors given in the answers to the following questions:

- *What do you need not to be shy to speak?*
- *What are the weak points of the lesson?*
- *What would you change /suggest doing in a different way?*

Considering learners of both English levels (A2, B1), there was generally 'language anxiety' (Gardner, 1993) and lack of self-confidence expressed.

Psychological factors:

- The teacher always makes some fun comments; it makes the atmosphere to be fun and helps me relax.
- I think too much of other people what they would think about me when I talk, and they are faster and know better, it makes me nervous that I am slower.
- I am not really sure what to say because I am afraid the class will say I am not right.

Academic factors:

- I would like to talk about something that I am interested in.
- I know how to talk because the grammar is written on the board.
- It is so good when our teacher helps us when we do not know what to say, she gives us more supportive questions.
- I like when we practise new vocabulary a lot, using it in the topics being discussed.

Every single learner does possess confidence; it just must be awakened by proper means or listened to by a supportive teacher. The important part of this paper's methodology was thus revealing the reasons causing students' lack of self-esteem. Human understanding of people requires an ability to stand in relation to a person as a person, pointed out by Threvarthen and Hubley (1978). Drawing on key elements hidden in the answers above, such as positive atmosphere in the class, fear from being judged by classmates, notes written on the board, lack of vocabulary, this survey has developed techniques that include psychological and academic aspects together.

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TECHNIQUE 2: ASSESSMENT IN THE SERVICE OF STUDENT'S CONFIDENCE.

In other words, 'SAY WHAT YOU SAY, AS LONG AS IT'S YOUR OPINION'. An integral part of this technique is having students understand that by saying their opinion, they cannot make mistakes. The teacher should make sure that every single individual in the class is aware of the fact that he/she participates on patchwork of different attitudes and that each approach is the right one as long it is his/her own. Supporting the idea of the positive quote technique (TECHNIQUE 1), learners should again be reminded that '*failure teaches success'*. Students usually have problems saying what they think because they are afraid of making a mistake or they are not sure if their opinion is correct. That is why they usually stay quiet. The teacher should not allow this to be an obstacle. This technique again provides a chance to gain contact with students by discussing and explaining another interesting quote: '*The biggest mistake in our life is to be afraid we make one*'. This encourages them to express their opinion even though they make grammatical mistakes. The teacher should create a relaxed atmosphere and let learners talk. Positive assessment from the teacher should follow a way of appreciation of creating learners' own opinions. Stiggins (1999) supports this idea of using assessment to build the student's confidence in the service of school improvement. Another evaluation of the teacher follows when he corrects mistakes and writes them on the board.

TECHNIQUE 3: NOTICES WRITTEN ON THE BOARD

This technique is thus closely connected with the previous one. Academic factors mentioned in students' answers only prove their preference and need for notes and vocabulary written on the board. For example:

- Grammar and vocabulary written on the board would help me to say more correct sentences.
- I miss vocabulary from the topic we should talk about.
- I wish I had all the words which I could use to make a sentence ready in my head.
- I don't talk because I forget the words I wanted to use.
- I don't remember how to use new grammar

New vocabulary and new grammar written on the board and left to be constantly seen and followed when needed by learners help them gain confidence to start talking. They have the frame which they follow, so they feel safely guided. In the meanwhile, they create their own opinion, they are sure that if they just add their words into the grammar pattern from the board, their announcement won't be such a disaster they would have to be ashamed of. This is a very important factor that positively influences their state of mind, and it is the hint for the teacher on how to overcome learners' initial fear from talking.

TECHNIQUE 4: 'OPEN MIND' TOPICS

Several answers of the learners have inspired this survey to promote more 'open-mind' topics for discussion during the lesson. When students have a chance to talk about the subject they are familiar with, their mood is immediately improved and encouraged. When students can relate to the topic, it is much easier and much more convenient for them to discuss it. The topics should include everyday reality, e.g. going shopping, meeting friends, their dreams, jobs they might have, ambitions, dialogues in the pub, problems at school. These basically substitute the English speaking environment that learners miss often. Also, if there is an unknown word, the teacher tries to explain that in English, not translate it for them. On the

top of that, this technique should definitely be supported by TECHNIQUE 3 (Notices Written on the Board). Each unknown word or phrase is put on the board to stay visible for learners so they can use it again at any time.

TECHNIQUE 5: DIALOGUES GUIDED BY MORE CONFIDENT STUDENTS

Not all students suffer from lack of confidence when asked to talk. These students were paired with less talkative ones who on the other hand were inspired by them to speak in a very natural way, keeping everyday reality present in their discussion. The point of this technique is to have more confident students in the role of the speaking guides. They thus subconsciously acquire responsibility for helping their weaker colleagues to answer their questions to complete the task properly. The aim is to shift their more energetic and knowledgeable approach off to their slower speaking mates by gently and inconspicuously teaching them new words in questions asked by them. The less competent student thus only follows the speaking frame of the stronger one, even using the same new vocabulary, to make it easier for him/her to participate in the dialogue. The goal of this technique is fulfilled when both students fluently discuss some 'open-mind' topic.

TECHNIQUE 6: SELF-ASSESSED TESTS

Stiggins (1999) asks what if a student decides to manage the risk of failure by cheating. Does that lead to the maximum learning? The academic factors of learners were considered.

- I don't like writing tests because I usually fail and then I look bad in front of my classmates.
- I can't remember all the grammar, so sometimes I try to see what my friend is writing to make sure I get better results.
- I don't like tests; it always shows I don't remember many new words.
- It is so stressful to write tests; I don't like it. I prefer speaking.

This technique has tried to involve our learners in the assessment process. It is an important part of converting the weaknesses (fear of failure) into the strength and the inner belief (a will to progress). This technique has offered writing tests in the class followed by correcting them right after, with the important difference – they correct it themselves! This was shown to be very attracting to students (questionnaires have discovered). A student reads an answer aloud, to everybody, and if a mistake is made, other students try to find it and correct it. On the top of that, all mistakes are explained straight away, while still seen and reflected by students themselves. Another test which contains the same grammar from the previous test follows, so students have the chance to remember the corrected mistakes and not to make them again. The tests are analysed again and evaluated the same way as before - by shared assessment of the whole class.

Results

Even though the target group was the students of two different levels of English (A2-Pre-intermediate and B1-Intermediate), the work did not carry out any significantly different factors influencing the different levels of English, as was revealed in interviews with learners themselves. The present paper's aim was to look for the golden rule for language teaching (Arnold, 2007) and learning. Stevick (1980, as cited in Arnold, 2007) states that success in this process depends "less on material, techniques and linguistic analysis, and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom". The author's

survey has put both aspects of the language mastering (techniques and mutual learners' intrinsic feelings) into relation where they are being reciprocally influenced. Some of the techniques have worked on the basis of academic achievement first (TECHNIQUE 3, 5 and 6) which in consequence worked very well in gaining students' confidence. In the empirical tradition, psychologists are most apt to refer to the non-drive-based motivation as intrinsic motivation, suggesting that the energy is intrinsic to the nature of the organism, (Deci and Ryan, 1985). Gaining self-confidence of a student requires getting immersed into the 'intrinsic' side of a learner. The teacher should adopt strategies that are gentle, considering a learner's personality. Teachers are there to become the important guides to break students' anxiety to speak and awake their self-esteem. Teachers should change and improve their teaching practise by making systematic observations. It is a form of self-evaluation (Sertl, 1998). This survey has gained the important weaknesses and strengths in students through anonymous questionnaires. Drawing on these outcomes, it has been suggested that the most important aspect is to work in a friendly and relaxed atmosphere which was obtained by analysing a positive quote at the beginning of the lesson (TECHNIQUE1). The present paper proved the technique's fundamental influence on the learners' positive self-esteem and relieving strains, as students had declared themselves within interviews organized by the author after new techniques had been applied. It has definitely encouraged them to start studying and realise the concept of willingness to give it a try with the possibility of making mistakes. When they tried hard, they soon found out that 'what goes around comes around'. 89% of students (out of 190 in total) have become positively thinking and were actively participating in the lessons, being an inspiration to less confident classmates. 11% missed some of the points of the quotes' meaning at the beginning, or were not sure about their own comprehension, but after clearing it out, they did not have any problem to follow and get inspired. Their teacher was also always participating, believing that if he just raises

his students' confidence, they will become capable learners (Stiggins, 1999). Introducing the lesson with a positive quote, followed by discussion, helped the teacher to evoke a different point of view in learners in order to achieve the goal and successfully fight the feeling of futility. Some of the outcomes said by the interviewed students, after techniques were applied, are as follows:

- When I am in a bad mood, I hear the sentence and it makes me laugh or think; I forget my bad mood.
- When I realise that teacher does not want to fail me and I can pass the exam even though I make mistakes, it gives me hope.
- I love it when I hear I am not the only one shy and scared because we talk about our feelings and discuss our problems in English with the whole class.
- When I hear other students opening their mind to us, classmates, I feel more comfortable.
- I did not understand the quote in the beginning, but the teacher gave us some hints and then it was such fun.

THE ASSESSMENT IN THE SERVICE OF STUDENT'S CONFIDENCE (TECHNIQUE 2) has shown the learners' true appreciation of the positive attitude of the teacher in spite of the fact they made a lot of mistakes. Stiggins (1999) strongly supports this idea by saying that re-evaluation must centre on how we use assessment in pursuit of the student's success. As soon as the learners found out no punishment or penalty followed their announcements, their own opinion, they relaxed and stopped being afraid. They felt supported emotionally, that failure did not mean anything, that it was fine to make mistakes. *'The biggest mistake in our life is to be afraid we make one'* was the quote that 100% of the students appreciated. They liked the idea of being able to make mistakes and at the same time being

natural and not wrong, because everybody can make mistakes. The present technique was also very much supported by the teacher – trusted academic guide – reminding the students that without their mistakes, teachers would have no job. After introducing learners with this particular quote their comments such as

- I am afraid I make mistakes, so I rather say nothing.
- I am shy to say what I want because I am not good at speaking.
- have changed into:
- No pressure is put on us, we can say what we want and nobody gets mad.
- If I say something wrong, the teacher says it is ok, he corrects my grammar and that helps me to relax and not be afraid of making another mistake.
- The feeling that it is not a catastrophe if I make a mistake; it makes the lesson so much fun, we correct our mistakes together.
- I am so proud of myself; I have just managed to put my own opinion together.

Since evaluation is necessarily involved in our sense of worthiness (Horwitz, 2007), self-esteem plays its distinctive role as a cause of academic achievement (Rubio, 2007) again. By contrast, Stiggins (1999) does emphasize that if these students are to come to believe in themselves, then they must first experience some believable form of academic success as reflected in a real classroom assessment. This reversed sequence of confidence being an outcome (and not the cause) of academic achievement (Rubio, 2007) has also been revealed thanks to OPEN-MIND TOPICS discussions (TECHNIQUE 4). Exposing students to topics to which they could relate and discuss gives them another advantage of sort of the substitution of an English environment. This has been appreciated by them, as documented in the interview:

- I enjoy open discussions; we do not always talk about grammar but we still speak in English.
- What really helps me to talk is when I hear my classmates around me talking.
- I really love having to explain everything in English; even I am not sure how to say it and it is a completely unknown word. But I learn a lot how to think.
- Discussing familiar, every day topics in English, makes me feel as being in some English speaking country when I hear everything said only in English.
- It is so nice not having to speak grammar every lesson, but we discuss some fun topics too.

This particular technique has found out that students' familiarity with the topic helps them to find words easier. Their ability to speak is also enhanced by seeing notes and phrases on the board. Over 90% of the learners have found this TECHNIQUE4 as a perfect psychological support for their mind. The target group of this survey were language classes where English is a second language for all students. When learners compare themselves and are compared to native speakers, they will inevitably come up short (Horwitz, 2007). As Horwitz (2007) continues, such comparisons, in turn, likely contribute to poor self-esteem. Even though learners usually miss the real English environment, according to their answers, they very much appreciate when being able to discuss everything in English thus experiencing a nice substitution of it. Discussions thus bring not only practise in speaking but also learning new words from others, as most of the learners (90%) have expressed supportive feeling from

hearing others speaking. The process of explaining the unknown word in English is connected to TECHNIQUE 3 (NOTICES WRITTEN ON THE BOARD). It also subconsciously supports analytical thinking of the learners. The unknown vocabulary from different articles students have gone through lately was written on the board as well, and they could use it to explain what they needed, and at the same time they could see words' semantic connections to the actual topic. Without seeing the notes on the board, learners usually looked for some old words they had known for years. They relied on them and kept using them all the time. By being able to see new vocabulary and grammar structures on the board, they expressed themselves in a much more comfortable way and accomplished their task of explaining, following and putting the words together. They were found to immediately gain self-esteem; they started feeling more confident because they had achieved their 'little' academic success – they were not afraid to make sentences, not even their own opinion.

- When I see the words on the board, it is easier for me to put the sentence together.
- Grammar is always difficult to follow, but I can do it when I see it, and I just fill in the right words into the pattern seen on the board.
- Explaining everything in English, not being allowed to translate really brings much fun to the lesson because I think we all learn how to say it only using words we know. That is why we want to learn more new words.
- It is so much different and better not translating the new words straight into Czech, but we always have to find the way to explain it in English.

Fear of making mistakes comes from not being sure about grammar and vocabulary. If this is written and seen all the way through the lesson, learners have a chance to use the new vocabulary and thus practise it, as they have revealed when being interviewed afterwards. Most of the students did not feel disadvantaged because they did not know the words. They felt encouraged, managing to get rid of their fear to express what they think. As soon as they heard themselves speaking, they gained the first sign of courage that helped them to try again. We must strive to keep students from losing confidence in them as learners, emphasizes Stiggins (1999).

- I like speaking English in the class and I like hearing my classmates. It helps me hear new words I did not know before.
- Teacher asks really good and interesting questions, and they make us think about other things than just grammar.
- We discuss very interesting social topics. It helps me talk and reflect my life.
- I have learnt especially how to discuss things and what to think about things.

TECHNIQUE 5 (DIALOGUES GUIDED BY MORE CONFIDENT ONES) has proved that less confident students were inspired and motivated by the more confident ones who lead dialogue with them just like if they met on the streets, being friends, discussing and interested in usual things, if possible, using vocabulary written on the board. The students were put into the natural situation of an everyday dialogue so they did not feel discomfort from being the centre of attention by the classmates watching them talking; at the same time, language was seen as the tool for creation and maintenance of social relations, as mentioned by Richards and Rodgers (1987). Their *interactional*

view (Richards, Rodgers, 1987) sees the language as the vehicle for the realization of interpersonal relations which can, on the other hand, help in building a relaxed attitude and confidence in less language-competent learners. Pleasure from talking and lack of self-esteem were supported and strengthened reciprocally. With the responsibility shifted onto them, the stronger students felt good but not self-important about it because at the same time they had to make sure that their less competent partners in terms of speaking had to be able to express themselves thanks to them. On the other side, the less confident learners felt comfortable because they were not shut down by stronger ones speaking, they were not blamed for not saying a word but by contraries following stronger students' questions and exact words, they were able to express their thoughts. When considering the learner's self-esteem, it is necessary to recognize how learners feel about themselves and about language learning (Horwitz, 2007). Sonia Casal (2004, as cited in Rubio, 2007) also describes that classroom activities which incorporate goal interdependence, resource interdependence, and role interdependence can help to foster healthy self-esteem on a personal and a social dimension.

- I am not shy when everybody is asked to speak, so it is not just me talking.
- When we talk in pairs, when we have to make dialogues, and it helps me not to be shy.
- It helps me when my classmate asks me something and we can talk what we usually talk every day.
- When my friend uses a new word in the question, I try to remember it because I have to use it in my answer.

- It is so good when my friend who is good at speaking asks me something and I can only answer so that I don't have to make a sentence on my own.

TECHNIQUE 6 (SELF-ASSESSED TESTS) has followed Stiggins' (1999) statement which says that we have focused so heavily on the development of over sophisticated psychometrics and test development tactics that we have almost completely ignored the other 99% of the assessments that happen in students' lives. These tests (in Technique 6) have definitely destroyed the sign of present fear in the learners by shifting the role of teacher's test assessment to the students' task. Black and Wiliam (as cited in Stiggins, 1999) cite that if pupils are given only marks or grades, they do not benefit from feedback on their work. Once the student gets a chance to analyse his formal mistakes and then gets another option (within another test) to apply just gained knowledge, his self-esteem starts rising, inspiring him to try again and do better. Due to the possibility to share opinions and suggestions when evaluating their mistakes themselves, 99% of the students were not tempted to cheat. This feeling has strongly supported their positive self-esteem giving them more will to learn. Finding out that it does not have to be stressful or fearful to write a test, but that it can become fun and motivation to participate in their own education, has become the inspiration itself for all participants of the learning process. Confidence within TECHNIQUE 6 represents the cause of an academic achievement.

- It is unbelievable how relieving it can be to write the test.
- I love the feeling that I do not have to worry about the mistakes because I will have to look for them myself and that is such fun and different from normal test.

- Writing the test and then correcting my own mistakes is such a motivating factor because I remember mistakes more if I find them myself.

See the breakdown of the results in tables 1 - 6.

TECHNIQUE 1: USING (POSITIVE) QUOTES TO INSPIRE TOWARDS POSITIVE MINDSET	
Pre-intermediate level (A2)	
Before	After
I am quite stressed because I know I will not say much. I do not like languages because it is difficult to express my thoughts what I want to say. I am shy to speak in front of my classmates.	When I am in a bad mood, I hear the sentence and it makes me laugh or think; I forget my bad mood. I love it when I hear I am not the only one shy and scared because we talk about our feelings and discuss our problems in English with the whole class. I did not understand the quote in the beginning, but the teacher gave us some hints and then it was such fun.
Intermediate level (B1)	
Before	After
Speaking foreign language causes stress in my head. I do not feel comfortable talking in front of my friends.	When I realise that teacher does not want to fail me and I can pass the exam even though I make mistakes, it gives me hope. When I hear other students opening their mind to us, classmates, I feel more comfortable. Teacher asks really good and interesting questions, and they make us think about other things than just grammar.

Tab. 1: Breakdown of the results: technique 1

TECHNIQUE 2: ASSESSMENT IN THE SERVICE OF STUDENT'S CONFIDENCE	
Pre-intermediate level (A2)	
Before	After
I am afraid I make mistakes, so I rather say nothing.	If I say something wrong, the teacher says it is ok, he corrects my grammar and that helps me to relax and not be afraid of making another mistake. The feeling that it is not a catastrophe if I make a mistake; it makes the lesson so much fun, we correct our mistakes together.
Intermediate level (B1)	
Before	After
I am shy to say what I want because I am not good at speaking	No pressure is put on us, we can say what we want and nobody gets mad. I am so proud of myself; I have just managed to put my own opinion together.

Tab. 2: Breakdown of the results: technique 2

TECHNIQUE 3: NOTICES WRITTEN ON THE BOARD	
Pre-intermediate level (A2)	
Before	After
Grammar and vocabulary written on the board would help me to say more correct sentences. I wish I had all the words which I could use to make a sentence ready in my head. I don't remember how to use new grammar	When I see the words on the board, it is easier for me to put the sentence together. It is so much different and better not translating the new words straight into Czech, but we always have to find the way to explain it in English.

Intermediate level (B1)	
Before	After
I miss vocabulary from the topic we should talk about. I don't talk because I forget the words I wanted to use.	Explaining everything in English, not being allowed to translate really brings much fun to the lesson because I think we all learn how to say it only using words we know. That is why we want to learn more new words. Grammar is always difficult to follow, but I can do it when I see it, and I just fill in the right words into the pattern seen on the board.

Tab. 3: Breakdown of the results: technique 3

TECHNIQUE 4: 'OPEN MIND' TOPICS	
Pre-intermediate level (A2)	
Before	After
It is not interesting to talk about the subject which I do not know at all but it is in our textbook. I cannot find the words which would express what I want to say.	What really helps me to talk is when I hear my classmates around me talking. I really love having to explain everything in English; even I am not sure how to say it and it is a completely unknown word. But I learn a lot how to think. It is so nice not having to speak grammar every lesson, but we discuss some fun topics too.

Intermediate level (B1)	
Before	After
I miss English speaking environment where I could try to use new words from the lesson. I would prefer talking about my hobby which I know very well so I can talk about it.	I enjoy open discussions; we do not always talk about grammar but we still speak in English. Discussing familiar, every day topics in English, makes me feel as being in some English speaking country when I hear everything said only in English. We discuss very interesting social topics. It helps me talk and reflect my life.

Tab. 4: Breakdown of the results: technique 4

TECHNIQUE 5: DIALOGUES GUIDED BY MORE CONFIDENT STUDENTS	
Pre-intermediate level (A2)	
Before	After
I do not like when I am the only one speaking in the class, I do not like attention. I am not sure If I ask the right things about the subject.	I like speaking English in the class and I like hearing my classmates. It helps me hear new words I did not know before. It helps me when my classmate asks me something and we can talk what we usually talk every day. It is so good when my friend who is good at speaking asks me something and I can only answer so that I don't have to make a sentence on my own.

Intermediate level (B1)	
Before	After
I do not know what kind of questions I should ask. It is quite difficult to talk about interesting topics because I am not sure how to make a dialogue amusing.	I am not shy when everybody is asked to speak, so it is not just me talking. When we talk in pairs, when we have to make dialogues, and it helps me not to be shy. When my friend uses a new word in the question, I try to remember it because I have to use it in my answer. I have learnt especially how to discuss things and what to think about things.

Tab. 5: Breakdown of the results: technique 5

TECHNIQUE 6: SELF-ASSESSED TESTS	
Pre-intermediate level (A2)	
Before	After
I don't like writing tests because I usually fail and then I look bad in front of my classmates. I can't remember all the grammar, so sometimes I try to see what my friend is writing to make sure I get better results.	I do not have to be afraid to make many mistakes because we correct them together with the whole class. There is such a difference to discuss mistakes together, I can remember them better.

Intermediate level (B1)	
Before	After
I don't like tests; it always shows I don't remember many new words. It is so stressful to write tests; I don't like it. I prefer speaking. It's such a teasing feeling writing a test because I tend to look into my friend's paper not to make so many mistakes.	It is unbelievable how relieving it can be to write the test. I love the feeling that I do not have to worry about the mistakes because I will have to look for them myself and that is such fun and different from normal test. Writing the test and then correcting my own mistakes is such a motivating factor because I remember mistakes more if I find them myself.

Tab. 6: Breakdown of the results: technique 6

Discussion

Learner's confidence is an integral part of language mastering. Students were interviewed after new techniques had been applied and important results, based on the relationship between self-confidence and academic achievement (Rubio, 2007), were carried out. As Stiggins (1999) points out, students succeed academically only if they want to succeed and feel capable of doing so. If they lack either desire or confidence, they will not be successful (Stiggins, 1999). Research has come out with an inspirational set of suggestions hidden behind the answers. 84% of the total (190) students have expressed their lack of confidence when having to speak. The reasons of not being brave enough when asked something in a foreign language were of different kinds although they are definitely in the tight relationship. Self-esteem is a psychological and social phenomenon, in which an individual evaluates his/her

competence and own self according to some values, which may result in different emotional states, and which becomes developmentally stable but is still open to variations depending on personal circumstances (Rubio 2007). This only supports the principal idea of the present paper that successful academic achievement (speaking a foreign language) falls into both psychological and academic accounts of learners but it mainly comes out as a consequence of gaining a confidence. There were some reasons of the academic character; students do not really have an environment where they could use and practise English every day, because of which they are not able to react quickly. They are unable to put their thoughts into understandable opinions because they suffer from a lack of vocabulary and thus are afraid of making mistakes. This is consequently followed by a fear of speaking a foreign language which falls among the psychological reasons of problems with speaking. The psychological factors were found to be blend together with academic ones. The results perfectly correspond with Arnold's (2007) belief that our attitude about the self as a language learner includes what we believe ("I am capable of learning the language" or "I can never learn") which leads to our feelings about learning process ("pleasure" or "pain") and this in turn will determine our behaviour (approaching or avoiding opportunities of further learning). Some studies have shown that self-esteem is mainly an outcome of achievement (Calsyn, 1971 as cited in Rubio 2007). Present work does support this particular sequence (that confidence is definitely accomplished after students did something successfully, e.g. creating their own opinion, making their own sentence) which is well demonstrated by, for example, the ability to participate in the dialogue - TECHNIQUE5 – Dialogues Guided by More Confident Students; TECHNIQUE 2 – The Assessment in the Service of Student's Confidence or TECHNIQUE 3 – Notices

Written on the Board. These particular techniques have provided learners with the means to succeed in their language learning, as Arnold (2007) points out, while at the same time reducing any limiting false beliefs about their worth and their abilities. Learners must both *be* competent and *feel* competent, says Arnold (2007). Arnold (2007) continues that we cannot lead them to expect the road toward language learning to be free of obstacles. We – the teachers – can help them make the right step when faced with hesitation or doubt by using the right friendly techniques. Students following the vocabulary written on the board (TECHNIQUE 3 – Notices Written on the Board), felt more capable of making the sentence and expressing their opinion. Szynalski (2011) cites that the gap between 'knowing how it should be done' and 'doing the right thing' is small. He further states that once you have enough correct examples in your memory, it is relatively easy to transform and combine them into sentences (Szynalski, 2011). For students to be finally able to structure their opinion properly, even enriched by new vocabulary, it was found out that notes on the board are truly as much an academic as a psychological guide, awaking the learners' self-esteem. Thus can TECHNIQUE 4 (Open-mind Topics) join TECHNIQUE 5 (Dialogues Guided by More Confident Students) and support the learners' lack of confidence by putting them together with the more competent speakers in the class, thus strongly reducing their anxiety and fear from not being able to speak. Giving them an opportunity to discuss topics that are relevant made them feel comfortable and more competent also in vocabulary as well. Brown (1991, as cited in Arnold, 2007) calls this procedure "reframing beliefs through mental imagery". It means that visualizing speaking the language fluently and interacting with people (Brown, 1991, as cited in Arnold, 2007) helps the learners pretend and naturally be part of the imaginary English speaking environment which

consequently enhances their self-esteem and belief in themselves. As there exists a very close relationship between our feelings and our mental images, Arnold (2007) cites further, if students experience a strong mental image of themselves performing language learning tasks successfully, this can reduce negative beliefs and provide a good starting point for effective bottom up work on the language. TECHNIQUE 5 thus helps students from both aspects – those suffering with lack of confidence and those being stronger at speaking skills – by encouraging either of them reciprocally by being successful in dialogues, thus making them feel good about themselves. The 'stronger' one helps the 'weaker' one to be able to make the consistent speaking pair. The individual simply feels that he is a person of worth; he respects himself for what he is (Rosenberg 1965, as cited in Arnold, 2007). Another way to help students gain the positive energy was when TECHNIQUE 2 (Assessment in the Service of Students' Self-confidence) was applied. When communication is a goal of language instruction, says Yashima (2004), such questions as "communication with whom?" and "for what?" arise, and a social psychological perspective becomes relevant, continues Yashima (2004). When the students found themselves in a situation where they could try to formulate their own opinion without focusing on the fear of making mistakes, they immediately relaxed and were found to communicate by sharing their opinions freely, even subconsciously eliminating grammar mistakes. Such enormous psychological effect was noticed when the learners' anxiety had ceased thanks to the teacher's appreciation of their own opinion. Analysing Rubio's (2007) issue whether self-esteem is a cause or an outcome of an academic achievement, the survey has carried out the results that both factors work reciprocally although positive self-esteem still plays the fundamental role when confidence influences positive attitude. In spite of this outcome,

some of the present survey's techniques make the author inclined to believe that even though the learners had been shy and not feeling comfortable in the beginning, they received a psychological (positive) support successfully provided by the positive quotes and their discussion. TECHNIQUE 1 (Using Quotes to Inspire the Positive Mindset) has carried out the results of self-esteem being the cause of academic achievement (Rubio, 2007), thus also an interesting motivational factor. Among the learner's internal factors of central importance, is the image of self, Arnold stresses in her work (Arnold and Brown, 1999, as cited in Arnold 2007). She then continues that how we evaluate that self-negatively or positively – will determine our self-esteem. The perceptions one has of on self significantly affect attitudes, behaviours, evaluations, and cognitive processes, says Arnold (2007). That is why TECHNIQUE 1 being the starting point of each lesson, has helped to change the students' attitude, their fear or anxiety about their self-concept into positive perspective on their academic competence. The learners immediately started trying to participate in the discussion supported by the teacher. He is the 'trusted guide' who by choosing positive quotes and trying to explain them evokes not only a supportive atmosphere in which he can better encourage learners to work hard to reach their learning potential (Arnold, 2007) but also inspires the learners to start believing in their own abilities. A student who has formed a belief that he can't learn a language is right – he can't...unless he changes his belief (Arnold, 2007) – nicely quoted by Budha and picked as the beginning of the lesson: "Whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you are right". Disposition to see oneself as competent enough to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness (Branden, 1994, as cited in Horwitz, 2007) defines some of the confidence' components discovered within this study – ability

to deal with a problem of lack of confidence through experiencing success by opening himself/herself to give it a try. No one can predict what will work, but people who try and fail have a higher probability of success than those who are doing nothing for the fear of failure (Szinalski, 2011). Thus, we cannot ignore the factor that "the highest human priority is the need for self-acceptance" (Ehrman and Dornyei, 1998, as cited in Arnold 2007). Beliefs are strong perceptual filters, cited by Puchta (1999, as cited in Arnold, 2007). They are so influential in the learning process because they operate on the level of our identity, Puchta continues (1999, as cited in Arnold, 2007), thus, if we, for example, correct students' errors in an insensitive manner, what they may perceive is that we reinforce their belief that they are not capable of learning the target language or even that they are not valuable human beings. Self-concept of each individual learner plays the most important role in any kind of learning. TECHNIQUE 6 (Self-assessed Tests) has tried to reduce the initial students' stress from writing the test and instead of getting a bad mark from the teacher, and it has offered a much funnier approach towards it by giving them an option to evaluate their own tests, explaining their own mistakes without being punished by a bad mark or negative assessment by the class, thus destroying their temptation to cheat. Even though the amount of mistakes was not lower (that is not the aim of this technique), it did not discourage learners in their willingness to try again and be better. Their self-esteem has definitely been positively stimulated and at the same time, it became the cause of the learners' academic success. Learners need to be aware of their worthiness and capabilities, but the more effective way than telling them they are capable is to help them experience how well they can learn (Arnold, 2007).

Conclusion

This paper has tried to create some new teaching practises that can possibly enhance and deepen students' understanding of themselves as individuals and how to overcome their own fear of speaking in a foreign language. Gaining self-confidence is a difficult task which needs specific attitudes and strategies. This survey has come out with some interesting components of self-esteem, such as worthiness, competence or belief in oneself. It is a challenge not only for the teachers but also for the learners themselves. As can be seen from all the techniques presented in this survey, they are reciprocally interconnected, supporting each other. They connect the psychological and the academic issues of the obstacles preventing students from speaking. By applying them into the structure of the lesson, they nicely build self-esteem in the learners step by step. Starting a lesson by introducing students with a positive quote awakes positive thinking which consequently fills the learners with energy and the will to communicate, which this survey has put as the main goal when learning a foreign language. If there is a case where students happen to see the problem in expressing their thoughts, they can immediately rely on the source of grammatical and vocabulary information written on the board and just follow the pattern. In the situation of having to make a dialogue, they on the other hand not only appreciate topics that are relevant to them, but they happily listen to their more competent - in terms of speaking - partners who naturally and subconsciously lead them to fluent reactions with latter's own skills and prearranged questions. When it comes to depending only on learners' own knowledge and abilities to write the test, students do not look for the best way to cheat and they are not even stressed out from the results. They know they will assess their own test afterwards; they do their best just to find out

what they are good at and what they should focus on more. All the techniques strongly support gaining the positive self-esteem as the fundamental cause of the academic success, and confidence becomes its consequential outcome. The influence of confidence or academic achievement still remains reciprocal where the teacher is given a very important role not simply as an educational-guide but also as an emotional one. Teachers should not just use traditional ways of passing knowledge to students. Teaching grammar and doing exercises being enriched by an enthusiastic atmosphere through positive sentences would make students give themselves a little thought. They start looking at the problem from a modified point of view, a positive one. It helps open their mind and be generally relaxed based on a friendly atmosphere from exchanging different opinions. This survey has also noticed that the students find talking about philosophical topics amusing. They make them think with pleasure and not within the threat of the negative assessment which is never likely to become part of the enjoyable way of learning. Their own opinion is truly appreciated. Modification of traditional teaching has been applied by the assessments done by the students themselves. This research has proved that it definitely shifts the character of the whole learning and teaching process into a more pleasant way. Lack of self-confidence and fear of negative assessment slowly but surely disappears, and learners show interest in improving, especially in noticing their mistakes and a strong support by the teacher. The techniques used in this paper tried to overcome the signs of frustration, as noticed or decoded from the questionnaire, by considering the emotional side of the learners. A fun and friendly approach is developed thanks to the concept of awakening the 'will' to speak. The techniques have confirmed the close connection between self-confidence and the learning ability of the students. Confidence mastery thus should always play a prime role in the teaching process of a foreign language.

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