

Strengthening Assertive Communication in English among Saudi Students

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Abstract: *Assertive communication is open and the most effective form of communication. Assertive communicators can express their needs, desires, ideas, and feelings while considering the needs of others. They aim at a win-win situation for both sides, balancing one's rights with that of others. Being assertive involves taking into consideration one's own and other people's rights, wishes, wants, needs, and desires. The present study is important as it provides insights to English teachers in developing /enhancing /strengthening assertive communication in English among university students. The participants of the study constituted 34 undergraduate female students of the Department of English, Samtah University College, Jazan University. A questionnaire has been adapted to meet the requirements of the study which was designed to measure students' proficiency in two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs, and thoughts while respecting others –even when it is difficult. It consisted of 20 question items on a 5-point scale. The English teacher planned for modeling assertive communication in English among the students, based on the students' responses in the assertive communication questionnaire. Summing up this study, the researchers have observed that university students should enrich their communication skills, develop interaction skills, improve behavioral skills, conflict management skills, develop self-regulation, self-confidence, self-reflection, self-awareness, and self-efficacy. It also clearly indicated that English teachers should take up the responsibility to train university students in assertive communication in English to prepare them for future to meet personal, professional, communicative, and global challenges.*

Keywords: Assertiveness, Communication, English teachers

1. Introduction

Effective communication fosters a good working relationship between people, which in turn improves morale and efficiency. It is crucial to communicate effectively in negotiations to ensure the goal. Any interaction is a two-way process and therefore responses may differ, depending upon the relationship with the other person. The benefits of effective communication in personal and professional settings are building trust, preventing, resolving problems, providing clarity and direction, create better relationships, increase engagement, improve productivity, and promote team building.

People tend to communicate with others in different communication styles. Understanding different communication styles will radically improve the quality of relationships. Awareness of communication style when relating to others will help build strong relationships without conflict with others. "A communication style or conversational style is the way in which we share information with others. The three basic communication styles are: aggressive communication, assertive communication, and passive communication. People respond differently when communicating in different situations such as in a passive or assertive or aggressive way.

Assertiveness is being able to express feelings, wishes, wants, and desires appropriately and is an important personal and interpersonal skill. In all interactions with other people whether at home or at work, with employers, customers or colleagues, assertiveness can help to express oneself in a clear, open, and reasonable way, without undermining one's own or others' rights. Assertiveness is often seen as the balance point between passive and

aggressive behaviour, but it is probably easier to think of the three, as points of a triangle.

In the context of education, assertiveness may be defined as the ability to express one's beliefs, wants or feelings in a self-assured and direct manner. Test, Fowler, Wood, Brewer, & Eddy, (2005) stated that assertiveness is a marker of self-efficacy and a key component of self-advocacy. Researchers and educators like Buell & Snyder (1981), Lane, Wehb & Cooley, (2006) considered assertiveness to be an essential skill for adolescents, as it can help them engage in effective interpersonal behaviors that contribute to their academic success and social development. Gaumer Erickson & Noonan, (2016) defined assertiveness as expressing our wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others– even when it is difficult.

1.1 Research Questions

- 1) What is the level of student's proficiency in two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others-even when it is difficult?
- 2) What are the strategies that can be used to enhance assertive communication in English among Saudi students?

1.2 Research Objectives

- 1) To measure the level of student's proficiency in two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others-even when it is difficult.
- 2) To suggest strategies to strengthen / enhance assertive communication in English among Saudi students.

1.3 Research Hypotheses

- 1) There exists no significant association between the two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others—even when it is difficult among Saudi students.
- 2) There exists no significant association between assertive communication and the strategies to develop assertive communication in English among Saudi students.

1.4 Research Significance

In today's progressing world, we rely on sharing of information, resulting in greater emphasis being placed on having good communication skills. Learning a foreign language for professional communication is not only just acquisition of language skills but also encompasses a whole range of skills that include functional, interpersonal, and assertive communication skills required for the future world. The university environment should encourage future professionals to learn how to develop effective assertive communication skills. It helps university students to become more efficient in dealing with people, maintaining better relationships and reduces stress from tutors and administrators. If university students develop assertive communication skills, they will gain a better understanding of self-criticism and constructive criticism which helps them to perform to their full potential and start their career in a successful manner. The students in order to deliver and receive information quickly and accurately should be productive. As the saying goes, it is not what you say but how you say is what that counts. To communicate well is to understand and be understood. In fact, the present study is important as it provides insights to English teachers in developing assertive communication in English among university students.

2. Literature Review

Shedding light on the contribution of some previous research is fundamental since it will help to suggest and propose solutions concerning the research problem.

2.1 Theoretical Background

Assertiveness has gained scholarly interest in the recent times. The concept of assertiveness has been interpreted by many researchers in different fields such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, and pedagogy. It has pointed out, the importance of assertiveness in English language teaching and learning as well as in developing student's communication skills. In the context of workplace, communication and assertiveness are regarded as important skills which will improve an individual's interpersonal relationships. Assertiveness will also have an impact on English faculty's communicative style. It would enable English language teachers to find ways to help students reach their fullest potential in English communication and is believed that it could improve the students' presentation skills (Yong, 2010). Assertiveness can be viewed in two different contexts – situational and personal. It is relevant to identify students' level of assertiveness in different contexts and their perception for future benefits.

Situational context

Assertiveness tends to be situation-specific in some people. They are assertive in terms of academic tasks. When given a task, they will insist on knowing the purpose of the task before execution. In other words, they are determined when it comes to task accomplishment, while may be less assertive in social contexts.

Personal context

Some people tend to be more assertive in terms of their interpersonal relationships with people in society i. e., in social contexts.

Assertiveness in different situations:

- One can be assertive without being authoritative or rude.
 - People can be assertive in different situations like when they are speaking to their colleagues, asking someone to return what they have borrowed, dealing with housemates, communicating their feelings to their friends/ family.
 - Assertiveness comes through one's experience that they learn, to adapt their behavior and model oneself. It can also be learnt from parents, teachers, friends, and media.
 - People will be able to see differences in the words used, voice modulation, body language and the ultimate outcome of the communication by assertive communicators.
 - Assertive behaviour includes:
 - Being open in expressing wishes, thoughts and feelings and encouraging others to do likewise.
 - Listening to the views of others and responding appropriately.
 - Accepting responsibilities and being able to delegate to others.
 - Regularly expressing appreciation of others for what they have done or are doing.
 - Being able to admit to mistakes and apologise.
 - Maintaining self-control and behaving as an equal to others.
- (<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/assertiveness.html>)

2.2 Related Studies

Shedding light on the contribution of some previous researchers is fundamental since it will help to suggest and propose solutions concerning the research problem.

Lange, A. J, Jakubowski (1976) affirmed that psychologically, assertiveness means ability to assert personal rights and express personal opinions and feelings openly and directly respecting the rights of others. Zakahi, W. R. (1985) examined the relationship of assertiveness to communicative competence and communication satisfaction. The results indicated that assertiveness was related to communicative competence. Salter, Andrew (1996) was the founder of conditioned reflex therapy, an early form of behaviour therapy which emphasized assertive and expressive behaviour as the way to combat the inhibitory personality traits which Salter believed, were the underlying cause of most neuroses. Scollon, R and Scollons, S (2001) stated that involvement- independence parameters might canalize communication interaction among talk partners. They assumed that expression of "common opinion, belief,

attitude, knowledge and sympathy" "serve as examples of expressiveness and independence". Thus, assertiveness concept is a subject matter for many researchers of communication and personality, who highlighted various aspects and elements associated with this concept depending on the goals and targets. William, T. O'Donohue (2008), proclaimed that "Assertive communication of personal opinions, needs, and boundaries has been conceptualized as the behavioural middle ground, lying between ineffective passive and aggressive responses". Such communication "emphasizes expressing feelings forthrightly, but in a way that will not spiral into aggression". Back, R, Back, K, and Michel, F (2008) distinguished assertive behaviour from dominating/aggressive and passive behaviour.

Khairul Anuar Rusli, Mohd Azrin Mohd Nasir, Nurashikin Amir Hamzah (2011) investigated to understand the relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students. The findings indicated a significant relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour. Nur'ain Balqis Haladina, Noor Aireen Ibrahima, Azizah Rajaba (2013) conducted a study which aimed to discover the level of assertiveness among undergraduates. It reported on two factors i. e. communicative competence and situations that may have a significant relationship on an individual's level of assertiveness. The findings indicated a high level of assertiveness but a significant difference in the level of assertiveness in different settings. Lopez, M. (2016) defined assertiveness as confidence (psychological property) as well as forthrightness and clarity (its linguistic expression) in terms of asserting personal rights or advancing personal opinions. Acharya VA, Sharma PSVN, Nair S. (2016) expressed that assertiveness is an important communication skill that influences one's interpersonal relations. It is known to play a role in stress management, conflict resolution and developing a positive self-concept.

Galato Sitato (2018) examined the relationship between assertiveness and academic achievement motivation of adolescent students in selected secondary schools. Regarding relationship between assertiveness and academic achievement motivation, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between them. Additionally, it was found that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between parental educational status and assertiveness. E. Stolyarova, M. Fedotova, K. Prigozhina, A. Dmitrieva (2018) enunciated that teaching and learning assertiveness in the ESL classroom focused on the specific techniques, discourse activities, cultural differences and classroom interaction relevant to real life business situations will enhance assertive communication among the students. Claudia G, F et. al, (2018) conducted a descriptive and co relational study with the aim of knowing the relationship between level of assertiveness, academic performance and various components of anxiety in a sample of Mexican high school or secondary students, as well as exploring possible differences related to sex. Social skills in their most advanced form are aimed at solving any immediate problems of a situation while minimizing the likelihood of future problems. This is also known as assertiveness, a variable that can be related to academic performance and the level of

anxiety in adolescents. Elena Mirela Samfira (2020) investigated and identified international and national universities which promote website interventions to develop their students' assertiveness.

2.3 Literature Gap

The literature review indicated a plethora of studies have been undertaken to address the impact of assertiveness in communication among university students. The need of the hour is that future professionals should learn how to develop effective assertive communication skills in English. If university students develop assertive communication, they will gain a better understanding of the inter-relationship between assertiveness and communication, since it plays a key role in students' communication skills. All in all, the Saudi Arabian and international studies have shed light on how assertiveness influences the communication process among the students. Therefore, the present study was an ardent effort to fill the gap of literature by concentrating on the feasible aspects in developing assertive communication in English among university students.

3. Research Methodology

Analytical and descriptive methods of quantitative research was used to measure student's proficiency in two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others—even when it is difficult.

3.1 Design

The present study measured the relationship between two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others—even when it is difficult in terms of correlation. Since such a relationship is liable to be investigated through co relational tests, the study followed a co relational design which concentrated on studying the variables in relation to one another. Correlation is a statistical measure that indicates the extent to which two or more variables are related to each other. A positive correlation indicates the extent to which those variables increase or decrease in parallel, and a negative correlation indicates the extent to which one variable increases as the other decreases. It is zero correlation when there is no relationship between the variables.

3.2 Sample of the study

The sample of the study constituted 34 undergraduate female students of the Department of English, Samtah University College, Jazan University. The researchers made use of quota sampling which required the representative individuals who were ranging between the ages of 25 and 30.

3.3 Data gathering Instrument:

The data gathering instrument was a Questionnaire which was adapted from one of the previous studies done by Gaumer Erickson, A. S. & Noonan, P. M. (2018) in a way to meet the requirements of the research study. The

questionnaire was designed to measure student’s proficiency in two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others—even when it is difficult. It consisted of 20 question items related to assertiveness on a 5-point scale. Some questions were framed negatively and therefore reverse scores were designated. Please refer to Appendix A1 for the Questionnaire.

3.4 Data Collection

The study was conducted in the Department of English, Samtah University College, Jazan University. The data was collected from 34 undergraduate female students who were between the ages of 25-30 and they formed the sample of the study. An online survey questionnaire was administered to the female students of the Department of English to collect the data. The participants have been informed about the significance of the study. The investigator clarified the

students’ doubts, raised while giving their responses in the questionnaire.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data gathered from the participants was analysed. Chi square and correlation have been calculated.

4. Results

The responses of the students in the Assertive communication questionnaire have been reported. The chi square values have been calculated based on the responses of participants:

4.1 Responses of the Students in Assertive Communication Questionnaire

Table 1: Component 1: Express wants, needs and thoughts even when it is difficult (+ve and -ve scores)

S. No	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Chi Square	Significance
I. Express wants, needs and thoughts even when it is difficult (Positive score)									
1	I stand up for my friends if they are doing something I do not feel comfortable doing.	4 11.76	3 8.82	13 38.24	8 23.53	6 17.65	34 100.00	9.240	NS
2	I speak up when someone is not respecting my personal boundaries.	9 26.47	9 26.47	6 17.65	7 20.59	3 8.82	34 100.00	3.650	NS
3	I express my opinions, even if others disagree with me.	9 26.47	4 11.76	4 11.76	8 23.53	9 26.47	34 100.00	3.940	NS
4	If I disagree with my teacher, I talk to her about it.	8 23.53	12 35.29	4 11.76	4 11.76	6 17.65	34 100.00	6.590	NS
5	If a person has borrowed money and is overdue in returning it, I will talk to the person about it.	8 23.53	7 20.59	7 20.59	7 20.59	5 14.71	34 100.00	0.710	NS
6	I am able to tell people how I am feeling.	10 29.41	4 11.76	8 23.53	6 17.65	6 17.65	34 100.00	3.060	NS
7	If I do not like the way someone is being treated, I speak up about it.	3 8.82	1 2.94	5 14.71	10 29.41	15 44.12	34 100.00	18.940	**
8	I speak up about things I really care about.	3 8.82	2 5.88	6 17.65	11 32.35	12 35.29	34 100.00	12.180	*
I. Express wants, needs and thoughts even when it is difficult (Negative score)									
9	I often have a hard time saying “No”.	7 20.59	5 14.71	10 29.41	5 14.71	7 20.59	34 100.00	2.470	NS
10	When an argument is over, I often wish I would have said what was really on my mind.	8 23.53	2 5.88	1 2.94	10 29.41	13 38.24	34 100.00	15.710	**
11	I tend to just go along with what everyone else wants instead of stating my own thoughts.	13 38.24	6 17.65	7 20.59	4 11.76	4 11.76	34 100.00	8.060	NS
12	I sometimes avoid asking questions for fear of sounding stupid.	4 11.76	4 11.76	6 17.65	9 26.47	11 32.35	34 100.00	5.710	NS
13	I tend to bottle up my emotions rather than talk about my feelings.	6 17.65	4 11.76	9 26.47	4 11.76	11 32.35	34 100.00	5.710	NS

Note: NS = Not significant, * = significant at 5 per cent, ** = significant at 1 percent

Table 2: Component 2: Respect others even when it is difficult (+ve and -ve scores)

S. No	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Chi Square	Significance
II. Respect others even when it is difficult (Positive score)									
14	I am careful to avoid hurting other person’s feelings, even when I feel that I have been wrong.	4 11.76	1 2.94	2 5.88	9 26.47	18 52.94	34 100.00	28.650	**
15	I avoid attacking someone’s intelligence when I disagree with their ideas.	3 8.82	1 2.94	10 29.41	8 23.53	12 35.29	34 100.00	12.760	*
16	I listen to other person’s opinions, even if I disagree with them.	2 5.88	3 8.82	4 11.76	10 29.41	15 44.12	34 100.00	18.060	**

17	In disagreements, I make sure that I understand other points of view.	3	2	9	10	10	34	9.240	NS
		8.82	5.88	26.47	29.41	29.41	100.00		
18	In discussions, I communicate that I am listening through body language.	4	2	5	5	18	34	23.940	**
		11.76	5.88	14.71	14.71	52.94	100.00		
19	Even in an argument, I do not interrupt the other person.	5	4	12	3	10	34	9.240	NS
		14.71	11.76	35.29	8.82	29.41	100.00		
II. Respect others even when it is difficult (Negative score)									
20	I have a hard time controlling my emotions when I disagree with someone.	7	4	8	9	6	34	2.180	NS
		20.59	11.76	23.53	26.47	17.65	100.00		
Note: NS = Not significant, * = significant at 5 per cent, ** = significant at 1 percent									

5. Discussion

The responses of the students in the Assertive communication questionnaire have been reported in Table 1 and Table 2. The chi square values have been calculated based on the responses of participants and have been interpreted/discussed.

Table 1: Component 1: Express wants needs and thoughts (+ ve and-ve scores)

Chi square values for Positive statements

Chi square values for 1 to 6 items have been 9.240, 3.650, 3.940, 6.590, 0.710 and 3.060 respectively and not significant at 0.01 level. Chi square value for item 7 has been 18.940 and is significant at 1%. Chi square value for item 8 has been 12.180 and is significant at 5%.

Chi square value for Negative statements

Chi square value for item 9 has been 2.470 and is not significant at 0.01 level. Chi square value for item 10 has been 15.710 and is significant at 1%. Chi square values for items 11 to 13 have been 8.060, 5.710 and 5.710 respectively and are not significant at 0.01 level.

Table 2: Component 2: Respect others (+ve and-ve scores)

S.No	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total	Chi Square	Significance
II. Respect others even when it is difficult (Positive score)									
14	I am careful to avoid hurting other person's feelings, even when I feel that I have been wrong.	4	1	2	9	18	34	28.650	**
		11.76	2.94	5.88	26.47	52.94	100.00		
15	I avoid attacking someone's intelligence when I disagree with their ideas.	3	1	10	8	12	34	12.760	*
		8.82	2.94	29.41	23.53	35.29	100.00		
16	I listen to other person's opinions, even if I disagree with them.	2	3	4	10	15	34	18.060	**
		5.88	8.82	11.76	29.41	44.12	100.00		
17	In disagreements, I make sure that I understand other points of view.	3	2	9	10	10	34	9.240	NS
		8.82	5.88	26.47	29.41	29.41	100.00		
18	In discussions, I communicate that I am listening through body language.	4	2	5	5	18	34	23.940	**
		11.76	5.88	14.71	14.71	52.94	100.00		
19	Even in an argument, I do not interrupt the other person.	5	4	12	3	10	34	9.240	NS
		14.71	11.76	35.29	8.82	29.41	100.00		
II. Respect others even when it is difficult (Negative score)									
20	I have a hard time controlling my emotions when I disagree with someone.	7	4	8	9	6	34	2.180	NS
		20.59	11.76	23.53	26.47	17.65	100.00		
Note : NS = Not significant, * = significant at 5 per cent, ** = significant at 1 percent									

Chi square values for Positive statements

Chi square value for item 14 has been 28.650 and is significant at 1%. Chi square value for item 15 has been 12.760 and is significant at 5%. Chi square value for item 16 has been 18.060 and is significant at 1%. Chi square value for item 17 has been 9.240 and is not significant at 0.01 level. Chi square value for item 18 has been 23.940 and is significant at 1%. Chi square value for item 19 has been 9.240 and is not significant at 0.01 level.

Chi square value for Negative statement

Chi square value for item 20 has been 2.180 and is not significant at 0.01 level.

Table 3: Correlation between Component 1 v/s Component 2

S. No		r value	p value	significance
1.	Correlation between Component 1 v/s Component 2	0.849	0.069	NS

From the Table: 3 above, it is evident that r value is 0.849 and p value is 0.069. It can be interpreted that correlation is not significant at 0.01 level and there is a no relationship between Component 1 v/s Component 2. It is evident that majority of the students do not have assertive communication in English. Thus, the null hypothesis formulated that “there exists no significant association between the two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others—even when it is difficult among Saudi students” has been accepted.

As the research questions and objectives were stated earlier, the research hypotheses were developed to address the feasible nexus between the two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others—even when it is difficult, among Saudi students. The first research question was to know the level of student’s proficiency in two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others—even when it is difficult. The first research objective has been achieved by measuring the level of student’s proficiency in two essential components of assertiveness as expressing your wants, needs and thoughts while respecting others—even when it is difficult, and the null hypothesis has been accepted.

The second research question was, to know what strategies could be used to develop assertive communication in English among Saudi students. The second research objective has been achieved by suggesting strategies to develop assertive communication in English among Saudi students. It is evident from the correlation values between Component 1 v/s Component 2 that the correlation is not significant. Thus, the null hypothesis formulated that “there exists no significant association between assertiveness and the strategies to develop assertive communication in English among Saudi students”, has been accepted.

It is noteworthy that the findings of the present study overlap with what have been examined by earlier researchers. The findings have been in line with the research studies of Lange, A. J, Jakubowski (1976), Zakahi, W. R. (1985), Scollon, R and Scollons, S (2001) William, T. O’Donohue (2008), Khairul Anuar Rusli1, Mohd Azrin Mohd Nasir, Nurashikin Amir Hamzah (2011), Nur’ain Balqis Haladina, Noor Aireen Ibrahima, Azizah Rajaba (2013), E. Stolyarova, M. Fedotova, K. Prigozhina, A. Dmitrieva (2018) and Claudia G, F et. al., (2018) proclaimed that assertiveness is a crucial factor in the process of communication and displayed its impact on the other variables.

The findings of Nur’ain Balqis Haladina, Noor Aireen Ibrahima, Azizah Rajaba (2013) reported on two factors (communicative competence and situations) which indicated a high level of assertiveness but a significant difference in the level of assertiveness in different settings. The results of Zakahi, W. R. (1985) specified that assertiveness was related to communicative competence. The findings of Khairul Anuar Rusli, Mohd Azrin Mohd Nasir, Nurashikin Amir Hamzah (2011) indicated a significant relationship between interpersonal communication competence and assertive behaviour among secondary school students. Galato Sitato

(2018) recorded that positive relationship between assertiveness and academic achievement motivation is statistically significant. The results of Claudia G, F et. al., (2018) outlined that assertiveness is a variable that is related to academic performance and the level of anxiety in adolescents. Acharya VA, Sharma PSVN, Nair S. (2016) results recommended that assertiveness is an important communication skill that influences one’s interpersonal relations. E. Stolyarova, M. Fedotova, K. Prigozhina, A. Dmitrieva (2018) suggested that teaching and learning assertiveness in the ESL classroom will enhance assertive communication among the students.

The statistical findings based on the students’ responses in the Assertive communication questionnaire indicated that majority of the students do not have assertive communication in English and the level of assertiveness was not satisfactory among the university students. Hence, the teacher planned for an intervention program like modeling assertive communication in English among students.

5.1 Modelling Assertive Communication in English

Kristin Stuart Valdes (2018) has suggested modeling assertiveness among students. The teacher has to enhance instructional practices by determining which characteristics of assertive, aggressive, and passive are most prevalent in the students and then, reinforcing the importance of assertiveness. The teacher has to combine the targeted instruction with guided and independent practice and alter instruction accordingly. This allows teachers to engage in a process of data-driven decision making in order to increase their students’ fundamental ability to confidently express their wants, needs and opinions while respecting others-even when the situation or topic is difficult. The students who lack assertiveness skills may hesitate to share their thinking openly or ask clarifying questions when they are confused in a classroom. The teachers should boost their students’ assertiveness skills and their own by teaching some simple communication techniques that can be used in and out of the classroom. After introducing and discussing the assertiveness techniques, students should be engaged in role-plays to give them a chance to practice them. They should present various problems, brainstorm about assertiveness techniques usefulness, and then allow students to role-play and evaluate the effectiveness of their choice. They should suggest few sample phrases of language of assertiveness to the students to express their points of view assertively in different situations.

5.2 Creating scenarios to suggest strategies to enhance Assertive Communication in English among students:

Kristin Stuart Valdes (2018) has suggested strategies to enhance assertive communication in English among students.

i) Saying ‘No’ politely: Sometimes students or teachers may feel stressed to go along with other fellow mates’ ideas or invitations. For example-“Do you want to share my project?” and/or “Do you want to co-plan this lesson?”. Such invitations may cause anxiety if one wants to decline the idea. To respond assertively to such requests is to say ‘No’

politely. One might say, with a smile, “Thanks for asking me, but I’m not interested” or a simple “No, thanks”.

ii) Setting a boundary: It is a common thing that students are asked by their peers to do things that are outside their comfort zone, such as “Will you let me cut in line?” or “Can I copy off your paper?” An assertive technique for responding to such invitations is to set a clear and firm boundary or borderline by saying, “No, I’m not comfortable with that.” They can simply set a clear borderline and hold to it.

iii) Requesting for some thinking time: People sometimes ask questions that one is not ready to answer. One might need more information, a chance to weigh other options, or time to reflect on feelings about the situation. An assertive technique for responding to such questions is to ask for some thinking time: “I’m not sure how to answer that right now. Can I get back to you later today?” A key point to ask for the amount of time we need, whether it is later the same day or some other.

iv) Stating one’s needs: It sometimes happens that people ignore or disrespect others’ needs. If one recognizes this, one can address the problem by stating one’s needs in a polite way. For example, a student might say to a peer, “I need space to hang my coat in the closet.” And a student might say to a teacher, “Could you please repeat that? I need to hear the directions again”.

v) Using an “I feel” messages: Sometimes with friends, teachers, and colleagues who care about them, students and teachers can use an “I feel” message to assertively communicate their feelings and emotional needs. A student may say to a friend, “I feel sad when you cancel our plans, because I love to socialize with you.” This gives the friend a chance to understand the speaker’s feelings and try to oblige them.

Using phrases with “I”-Language of Assertiveness to “Express Points of View Assertively”. (Student Health and Counselling Services, 2020).

Statements using “I” – feeling messages

- I think.....
- I feel.....
- I want.....

Statements of personal reference

- This is the way I see it
- This is how I feel
- This is what it means to me
- In my opinion

Statements of compromise

- I would like to hear your views on.....
- I would like to hear your thoughts on.....
- I would like to understand your views on.....
- I am confused with your stand on.....
- Could you tell me about them?
- Would you tell me more about how you see the situation?

- How does the situation look like from your perspective?
- Take time to think...
- I think we are viewing the situation in two different perspectives.
- I would like to discuss this in an hour.

Statements to acknowledge what others say

- If I understand you correctly.....
- Your view is....., is that right?

Statements to provide feedback

- Is that what you meant?
- I heard you say....., did I understand you correctly?

vi) Knowing how to respond to aggression: Sometimes when one communicates assertively, the other might give an aggressive response that might erode the value of one’s feelings. The best thing to do in such a situation may be saying something like, “I think I communicated my thoughts clearly, so there’s nothing more to talk about.”

5.3 Practice Assertive Communication (Student Health and Counselling Services, 2020).

Express simple requests:

- “May I have a copy of the syllabus?”
- “Can you (please) direct me to the Administrative office?”

Express an opinion, thought or feeling:

- “I thought today’s lecture was really interesting!”
- “I felt anxious about the questions in the exam”.

Combine a simple request with an opinion, thought or feeling:

- “Professor Sara, I enjoyed today’s lecture, but I was (feeling) confused about the theoretical principles. Would you be able to review this with me?”

Practice expressing more difficult feelings with “I feel messages” or the DESC approach:

- Describe the situation, Express how you feel, Specific suggestions and/or compromises, Continued Communication or Consequences.

Be mindful of the appropriate time, place, and manner you approach the listener:

- For example, informing your roommate that you would like to discuss something at dinner is better than trying to share while he is otherwise busy.

Aim for direct, appropriate eye contact when speaking to someone:

- Direct eye contact when speaking to someone varies with cultures. Speak clearly and audibly without raising your voice, retaining normal expression of emotion. Remember that we also communicate by our behaviour, facial expressions, and voice tone!

Create a hierarchy or steps from least intimidating situation to increasingly challenging situations where one may practice one's assertive skills:

Examples may be:

- Using a simple request,
- Asking a question during your instructor's office hours,
- Gaining everyone's confidence in the class with your affirmation or opinion on what another student just shared.

6. Conclusion

English language teachers should take up the responsibility to train assertive communication in English among university students, to enhance students' outcomes. The students should enrich their communication skills, develop interaction skills, improve behavioral skills, conflict management skills, develop self-regulation, self-confidence, self-reflection, self-awareness and self-efficacy, ability to seek assistance and resist peer pressure. All students should develop an awareness of the benefits of assertive communication skills in English. They should be ready to acquire both verbal and non-verbal assertiveness skills, increase awareness of personal rights and employment requirements. This study clearly indicated that assertive communication in English should be developed among university students to prepare them for future personal, professional, communicative, and global challenges.

7. Acknowledgement

This study has been carried out by Dr. Sobhana Nandyal Panduranga. Ms. Amna Madkhali (faculty), Ms. Amal Alharathi (student) and Ms. Hanan Shipan (student) of the Department of English, Samtah University College, Jazan University have assisted in conducting the study. We are highly thankful to Ms. Seham Arishi, Coordinator, Dept. of English and Dr. Ayesha Arishi, Dean, Samtah University College, Jazan University for all the support extended to conduct this research study and ensuring its successful completion.

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