Teachers' Language Insecurity in English as a Second Language Instruction: Developing Effective In-Service Training

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Abstract : This study reports on primary school second language teachers' sources of language insecurity. Furthermore, it aims to develop an in-service training course to reduce anxiety and build sufficient English communication skills. Language/Linguistic insecurity refers to a lack of confidence experienced by language speakers. In particular, second language/non-native learners often experience insecurity, influencing their learning efficacy. While language learner insecurity has been well-documented, research on the insecurity of language teaching professionals is limited. Teachers' language insecurity or anxiety in target language use may adversely affect language instruction. For example, they may avoid classroom activities requiring intensive language use. Therefore, understanding teachers' language insecurity and providing continuing education to help teachers to improve their proficiency is vital to improve teaching quality. This study investigated Japanese primary school teachers' language insecurity. In Japan, teachers are responsible for teaching most subjects, including English, which was recently added as compulsory. Most teachers have never been professionally trained in second language instruction during college teacher certificate preparation, leading to low confidence in English teaching. Primary source of language insecurity is a lack of confidence regarding English communication skills. Their actual use of English in classrooms remains unclear. Teachers' classroom speech remains a neglected area requiring improvement. A more refined programme for second language teachers could be constructed if we can identify areas of need. Two questionnaires were administered to primary school teachers in Tokyo: (1) Questionnaire A: 396 teachers answered questions (using a 5-point scale) concerning classroom teaching anxiety and general English use and needs for in-service training (Summer 2021); (2) Questionnaire B: 20 teachers answered detailed questions concerning their English use (Autumn 2022). Questionnaire A's responses showed that over 80% of teachers have significant language insecurity and anxiety, mainly when speaking English in class or teaching independently. Most teachers relied on a team-teaching partner (e.g., ALT) and avoided speaking English. Over 70% of the teachers said they would like to participate in training courses in classroom English. Questionnaire B's results showed that teachers could use simple classroom English, such as greetings and basic instructions (e.g., stand up, repeat after me), and initiate conversation (e.g., asking questions). In contrast, teachers reported that conversations were mainly carried on in a simple question-answer style. They had difficulty continuing conversations. Responding to learners' 'on-the-spot' utterances was particularly difficult. Instruction in turn-taking patterns suitable in the classroom communication context is needed. Most teachers received grammar-based instruction during their entire English education. They were predominantly exposed to displayed questions and form-focused corrective feedback. Therefore, strategies such as encouraging teachers to ask genuine questions (i.e., referential questions) and responding to students with content feedback are crucial. When learners' utterances are incorrect or unsatisfactory, teachers should rephrase or extend (recast) them instead of offering explicit corrections. These strategies support a continuous conversational flow. These results offer benefits beyond Japan's English as a second Language context. They will be valuable in any context where primary school teachers are underprepared but must provide English-language instruction.

Keywords : english as a second/non-native language, in-service training, primary school, teachers' language insecurity
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