

Factors Affecting Students' English Speaking Performance in Classroom Participation

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to identify the psychological factors contributing to students' difficulties in acquiring English language skills. The research employed a case study of qualitative approach, gathering data through interviews. The subject of the research is fourth semester of university students in Jambi who have been accomplished some three other levels of speaking classes. Findings revealed that students encountered various challenges influenced by psychological factors when speaking English, including lack of motivation, anxiety, low confidence, shyness, fear of making mistakes, learning environment conditions, and performance-related factors. Among these issues, the primary factor observed was the fear of making mistakes. Many students expressed apprehension about speaking English due to pronunciation difficulties and a fear of making errors, leading them to avoid speaking English altogether.

Keywords: Psychological factors, speaking performance, classroom participation



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1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking English poses a formidable challenge for nearly all language learners across varied contexts. Within academic spheres, there is an escalating need for individuals in different disciplines to effectively employ English as the principal medium of instruction (Yilidz, 2021). English is also mandated as a core subject in Indonesia from elementary school through university, implying that students receive instruction in English for numerous years. Given this situation, it is intriguing to explore why students are often perceived as underachievers in spoken English despite this extensive exposure to the language.

Furthermore, teachers frequently apply classroom participation methods to encourage students to actively engage and interact with one another. Classroom participation is believed as one effective method to assist students in stimulating where students are engaged in activities that require them to speak English, thereby enhancing their proficiency in the language. Dancer and Kamvounias (2005) defined engagement as a comprehensive process in which learners actively prepare, participate in discussions, enhance group and communication skills, and attend sessions. However, the difficulties students encounter in English speaking can often be attributed to their cognitive abilities or psychological factors. As Harmer (2007:345) points out, students may be hesitant to speak because of shyness or a lack of confidence in expressing themselves, especially when they are required to share personal information or opinions in front of others. Psychological factors and insufficient prior knowledge of the English language among students were identified as barriers hindering their speaking skills (Maswhani and Damio, 2022). This reluctance can stem from a fear of judgment or a discomfort with public speaking, which affects their overall participation and performance in speaking activities.

Numerous experts emphasize that psycholinguistic factors play a crucial role in detrimentally affecting students' speaking performance. Ellis (2000) further elaborates that learners frequently engage in self-reflection regarding their practice, identifying specific challenges they face and actively seeking solutions to overcome these challenges. This process involves not only recognizing the problems but also discussing and implementing effective strategies to enhance their speaking proficiency. Therefore, considering the issues above, this study will discuss the psychological factors that affects students' speaking performance.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking Performance

Speaking performance refers to the observable or measurable ability of individuals to effectively convey their message to listeners by adhering to specific rules, ensuring clear understanding of the intended meaning. Learning to speak is often viewed as the most challenging aspect for language learners (Pinter, 2006). Richard (2008) further emphasizes that effective English teaching involves helping students communicate and use the language effectively, particularly through speaking activities. Brown (2001) supports this by suggesting that providing ample opportunities for students to engage in speaking activities is crucial for enhancing their fluency and confidence in English. In summary, speaking proficiency not only plays a central role in how students assess their language learning progress but also presents a significant instructional focus for educators aiming to cultivate effective communicators in English. Richard (2008) asserts that many language learners gauge their success in English courses by their improvement in speaking proficiency, highlighting the critical role of speaking ability in their overall evaluation. This underscores the importance for teachers to prioritize the development of students' speaking skills.

Classroom Participation

A growing recognition of classroom participation in speaking activities believed gives benefits to the learning process. Gaining a deeper understanding of what encourages and hinders classroom participation is crucial. This understanding can empower teachers to devise more effective strategies, address obstacles that deter student engagement, and foster a supportive and encouraging learning environment (Aslan and Sahin, 2020). Furthermore, to actively engage as learners in the classroom, students should take on the role of information seekers. This involves asking questions, expressing opinions, or responding to queries from both the instructor and their peers, demonstrating active participation in the learning process (Abdullah, Bakar, and Mahbob, 2012). Liu (2001) categorized student behaviours in the classroom into four types: full integration, participation in circumstances, marginal interaction, and silent observation. In full integration, students actively engage in class discussions, carefully consider what to say, and participate spontaneously and naturally (Zainal Abidin, 2007). The circumstances in which students practice speaking play a crucial role in determining their success in this skill. Maximizing opportunities for students to engage in speaking activities effectively enhances their ability to perform well. It is important to provide students with frequent chances to practice speaking because this aspect significantly affects their overall learning experience in English.

Psychological Factors

It has been acknowledged that various psychological factors intricately impact students' speaking performance during practice sessions, with each factor influencing the others in interconnected ways. According to Schwarz (2015), psychological factors like fear of errors, anxiety, shyness, low confidence, and lack of motivation significantly impede students' speaking skills. The discussion above underscores the crucial role of psychology in affecting the proficiency of students' speaking abilities. Participation in circumstances occurs when students' involvement is influenced by various factors such as socio-cultural, cognitive, affective, linguistic, or environmental influences, leading them to participate less frequently and only speak at appropriate times. Marginal interaction describes students who primarily listen rather than actively participate in classroom discussions. Unlike those who engage actively, these students prefer to take notes and observe discussions rather than contribute verbally.

Psychological factors refer to cognitive and emotional elements, including low motivation, fear of errors, confidence issues, anxiety, and shyness. It originates from the learner themselves include cognitive and emotional aspects. These factors encompass a lack of motivation, fear of making mistakes, low confidence, anxiety, and shyness. These aspects can affect how comfortable and willing learners feel when participating in speaking activities. Ariyanthi (2016) observed that students actively engaged in sharing ideas, views, and knowledge with their peers. However, she encountered an obstacle in her school where students were hesitant to take risks due to fear of ridicule from classmates and judgment from teachers. Furthermore, Nijat, Atifnigar, Chandran, Selvan, and Subramonie (2019) suggested that dealing with students' difficulties the proposed solutions might be such as engaging activities, supportive teacher involvement, fostering a positive learning environment, and developing a strong teacher-student rapport to overcome psychological barriers that hinder their English speaking abilities. Teachers should strive to reduce classroom anxiety to enhance language learning effectiveness, employing strategies like warm-up activities, group tasks, and conversational exercises to bolster students' confidence (Aeni, Jabu, and Rahman, 2017).

Language Anxiety

Language anxiety can arise from external factors such as social and cultural environments, especially where both native language (L1) and second/foreign language (L2/FL) learning occur. Additionally, the target language represents a different cultural community, which can predispose individuals to anxiety due to

concerns related to ethnicity and foreignness. Hasehemi (2011) found that feelings of tension or nervousness in foreign language learning predominantly revolve around two fundamental tasks: listening and speaking. This is because, during communication, these skills are inseparable and interdependent (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986:29)

Low Confidence

Insufficient encouragement from teachers is a significant factor contributing to students' lack of confidence (Brown, 2001). According to this perspective, it is evident that the teacher did not prioritize convincing students and instilling belief in their ability to speak English proficiently. Consequently, students lose confidence in their skills and become demotivated to use English. On the other hand, Students perceive their English proficiency as inadequate, indicating significant challenges in language comprehension (Budiana and Nurwaliyah, 2019). This issue appears critical and requires attention. This underscores the crucial role of support and encouragement in fostering and bolstering students' confidence

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed descriptive qualitative methodology. This means that the researchers aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the factors influencing language anxiety among EFL students. Descriptive qualitative research focuses on exploring phenomena in their natural setting through methods such as interviews, observations, or document analysis (Fawa'id, 2023). Therefore, This suggests that the researchers were interested in how students' psychological states (specifically related to anxiety about using English) influenced their behavior and interactions in these specific settings. The primary focus was on understanding how psychological factors manifest in both classroom participation and social contexts within speaking classes. The study involved 30 EFL students who were in their fourth semester and were majoring in the English Education Program at the Islamic University of Jambi. This demographic was chosen likely because they would have sufficient exposure to English language classes to experience and articulate language anxiety. Unstructured interviews were chosen as the method to collect data. Unstructured interviews are open-ended and flexible, allowing participants to freely express their thoughts and experiences. This approach was deemed suitable because of the initial uncertainty about what data could be gathered from the respondents. Furthermore, it allowed the researchers to explore various aspects related to their research goals without imposing rigid questions or constraints. The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia. This decision was made to ensure clear communication between the researchers and the participants, as well as to prevent potential misunderstandings that could arise from language differences. Conducting the interviews in Bahasa Indonesia would likely make the participants more comfortable and ensure that they could articulate their feelings and experiences accurately.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section contains summarized data gathered throughout the research process which uses descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative research methods are employed to offer a thorough portrayal of a specific phenomenon or event by exploring its characteristics, context, and complexities in depth. The analysis focuses on the data obtained from the students' interview based on the psychological factors such as fear of mistakes, anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation.

After having interview with the students, the findings indicate that a significant number of students faces significant challenges with anxiety dan self-confidences. Many students struggle to speak English in classroom participation. Out of 30 students, 13 students mentioned that during speaking activities, they didn't understand the topic being discussed. They responded;

“Sometimes I don't understand the instructions given, so I have to ask my groupmates,” (S6, CA)

“I prefer to stay silent rather than make mistakes; I let other classmates answer instead.” (S13,CC)

There reasons deal with the use of their first language to communicate with both teachers and classmates, even during the classes. Moreover, Thaler (2021) stated that lacking sufficient linguistic tools in the target language, particularly during oral production activities, can lead to the development of speaking anxiety. It has also been demonstrated that when students speak in English for only a short amount of time, their lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes become apparent. Students have fewer chances to practice speaking English, possibly due to a lack of speaking activities. Bourezzane (2015) in her research found that Students face various psychological obstacles, with the fear of making mistakes being the most significant factor influencing their task preferences and ultimately reducing their opportunities for speaking

The absence of an English-speaking environment in the classroom contributes to limited participation in real-life situations. Additionally, many students struggle to speak English because they have negative

perceptions such as shyness, lack of confidence, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes. Out of 30, 17 students feel anxious when having classroom presentation;

"I feel anxious about performing; once I'm in front, it feels like everything I want to say disappears. I get cold sweats; I'd rather work on problems than speak up. I don't know why, either." (S2, CB)

"No way, if I have to step forward, I'm too scared. I'm not the type who dares to come forward; I start sweating immediately." (S4, CC)

Self-centered participation sometimes makes students feel uncomfortable because they have to perform alone in front of the class, compared to group participation where everyone is involved. Tang (2016), in her used drama as a method of classroom participation found that Students felt comfort in a group environment centered on collaboration and interaction rather than individual performance. For example, when preparing for a drama production, students didn't work independently but collaborated and interacted with group members. In fact, A method that engages every student in activities has demonstrated greater efficacy in reducing students' apprehension about speaking alone, particularly in speaking classes. (L2). Liu and Jackson (2014) emphasized that this anxiety significantly impacts students' inclination to engage in classroom discussions and frequently leads to reluctance in speaking. The source of this anxiety stems from limited chances to practice spoken English, challenges in articulating ideas effectively, and overall insufficient proficiency in English. Furthermore Hashami (2011) adds that Many language learners find formal language classroom settings to be significant sources of stress and anxiety due to the pressure to achieve correctness and clarity in using the target language. Another research conducted by Jaya, Petrus and Pitaloka (2022) signifies that when students are given a speaking activities with minimal time to prepare and reflect on the topic, they experience pressure, leading to lower speaking performance. However, this isn't the sole reason for students' poor performance in speaking tests. In open-ended questions, some students also mentioned lacking confidence in speaking, experiencing anxiety, having limited vocabulary, and struggling with grammar.

In addition, Studies have highlighted the profound impact of language anxiety on learning to speak a foreign language. Researchers exploring language anxiety have put forward a range of strategies to address this multifaceted challenge. Furthermore, A research by Chahrazad & Kamel (2022) indicated that anxiety about speaking a foreign language could hinder students' performance in different situations. Additionally, the responses to the research questions provided further insights into the impact of anxiety on learning to speak a foreign language in the classroom. A commonly recommended approach by learners is to foster a classroom environment that is less formal and more welcoming, allowing students to make errors without fear of appearing inept or being judged negatively. This supportive atmosphere is believed to alleviate anxiety and enhance learning outcomes by encouraging more confident and spontaneous language use.

5. CONCLUSION

This section synthesizes data from student interviews focusing on psychological factors such as fear of mistakes, anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, and motivation. The findings reveal that many students experience significant challenges with anxiety and self-confidence, particularly in speaking English during classroom participation. Reasons include a preference for using their first language with teachers and peers, which limits English practice opportunities. Because of certain influencing factors, communication poses a challenge for both teachers and students (Bouzar, 2019). Teachers find it difficult to pinpoint an effective teaching method, while students struggle to grasp the necessary skills effectively. This environment, compounded by negative perceptions and anxiety, underscores the need for a more supportive and less formal classroom setting to alleviate these barriers and foster confident, spontaneous language use among students. Therefore, Teachers ought to encourage their students to speak English by fostering a positive and supportive classroom atmosphere. This includes cultivating a friendly rapport with students, ensuring they feel joyful and enthusiastic during lessons, and fostering a keen eagerness to learn and speak English (Leong and Ahmadi, 2017).

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