EFL LEARNER’S RELUCTANCE TO SPEAK IN ENGLISH CLASSROOM: PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Maisara¹

¹STAI Jamiatut Tarbiyah, Lhoksukon, Aceh Utara. Indonesia

maisarazn@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

As the most commonly accepted language throughout the world English offers many benefits in today’s globalization. Therefore, English is highly needed for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner either for their education purpose or their career development in the near future. Speaking perceived as the most fundamental skill to acquire since the ability to speak in English is considered as an obvious achievement for EFL learner. Unfortunately, most of the EFL learners are reluctance to speak during the language learning classroom due to many factors and psychological factor is one of them that commonly found. For that reason, this paper attempts to find out the physiological factor affecting students’ unwillingness in producing oral activity. The data was gathered through questionnaires and interview to 60 students of a Senior High School (SMA) in Lhoksukon, North Aceh. The results of this study showed that almost half of the students (48.3%) stayed outside of the speaking circle due to fear of making mistake, followed by their lack of confidence (25%), next, students’ shyness (16.7%), and the lowest frequency was dealing with lack of motivation (10%). Thus, a harmonious atmosphere should be created by the teacher in the classroom through emotional bonds between teacher-students and students-students to make students feel secure and welcome from any mistakes.

Key Words: EFL learner, reluctance, speaking, psychological factor.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and bon-verbal symbols in a variety of context as stated by (Channey and Burk, 1998). In the context of EFL/ESL teaching and learning, students’ verbal participation is essentially important in creating a real life situation during the English classroom since the aim of teaching English is to train students to be able to express meaningful and contextual communication skill in real life.
Being able to speak in the target language will greatly facilitate students’ participation in class and the learning of the subject matter. Hence, learners need to initiate and maintain conversations, to sustain group discussions, describe feelings and give reasons in an acceptable manner, and ask for more information or assistance as cited by (Brice, 1992) in (Goh & Burns, 2012). Hence, they can develop their ‘communicative competence’ or what they need to know to communicate in the classroom (Hymes, 1972; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Chang & Goswami, 2011).

In contrast, it becomes a common finding that most of the EFL learners tend to avoid speaking during language learning classroom. They believe that speaking is the greatest challenge in language learning. Consequently, most learners remain incompetent in producing oral activity. A common phenomenon observed by many ESL/EFL researchers is the students’ reticent behaviour. The researchers observed that students tend to be either quiet or to speak English with a trembling voice, make numerous unnecessary stops, or having shaking hands or legs, etc. during English lesson or oral English tests (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996). Similarly, students are reluctance to participate or speak using target language has always been considered as the main source of frustration, and failure for both instructors and students (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995).

There are many reasons why EFL learners’ put themselves away from speaking activity during English classroom. In spite of academic knowledge, it found that some psychological factors such as shyness and anxiety are considered as the greatest challenge for all language learners (Pinter, 2006). Similarly, some relevant research conducted found argue that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of mistakes are the factors commonly that hinder students from speaking (Burns & Joyce in Nunan, 1999; Schwartz, 2005 and Thornburry, 2005).

As a corollary, the writer is intended to find out the psychological factors affecting students’ reluctant to speak in English classroom at SMA 1 Lhoksukon, north Aceh.

**Psychological factors affecting students’ reluctance to speak**

For this scope, psychological factors are described with four components including fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, lack of motivation and shyness.

**Fear of making mistake**

Too often, students suffer in dealing with task or activity that requires them to express their own opinion and idea orally. This happen because they
fear of appearing foolish when they say inappropriate words in negotiating meaning or pronouncing. Again, this is also much influenced by the students’ fear of being laughed by other students or being criticized by the teacher. Causing someone to lose face results in a lost of cooperation even, in extreme occasions, with subtle retaliation against the professor months after the original action transpired (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). As a result, they choose to remain silent or stay away from participation. Again,

**Lack of confidence**

Another point to consider is that students’ lack of confidence. Confidence as the expression of “an attitude of approval and disapproval, and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy” (Brown, 1994). Low of confidence leads the students to a hesitation to open their mouth because they do not have belief that they can do it. They think that they do not have the ability to speak English well and their knowledge is limited (Brown, 2001). This underestimation attitude, for sure, avoids them from speaking or even trying to do so.

**Lack of motivation**

(Cherri, 2015) defines motivation as “the process that initiates, guides, and maintains goal-oriented behaviours. Motivation is what causes us to act, whether it is getting a glass of water to reduce the thirst or reading a book to gain knowledge.” Furthermore, Nunan (1999) stresses that motivation is important to notice in that it can affect students’ reluctant to speak in English. In other word, good motivation behaviour is highly needed in language learning, especially in speaking skill to encourage students’ in producing oral activity. Thus, teacher plays an important role in increasing students’ participation and motivation because the development of communicative skills can be only take place if learners have the motivation and opportunity to express their own particular personality the general population around them (Littlewood, 1981).

**Shyness**

(Bowen, 2005) believes that some shy learners are caused by their nature that they are very quite. This behaviour leads them to be shy because they find that speaking in front of their friends and teacher very intimidating. In addition, (Savin-Baden & Major, 2004) claims that most students do not ask question during the language learning commonly caused by their feeling of shy, lack self-esteem and fear of being wrong. In this case, students act themselves as a passive learner and remain silent during the speaking activity.
METHODS

The aim of this study is to bring four psychological factors that affect students’ reluctance in producing oral activity during English classroom and find out the students’ perspective on this issue. Descriptive qualitative design was used in this study and the data was collected through questionnaires and interview to 60 students in third grade of SMA 1 Lhoksukon, North Aceh.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data was calculated in percentage to find out the most dominant factors affecting students’ reluctant to speak during English classroom at SMA 1 Lhoksukon which is presented in table 1. In addition, further information about students’ perspective toward some speaking activities (discussion, interview, role play, and retelling) that psychologically hinder them from speaking is presented in figure 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological factors</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fear of making mistake</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of confidence</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shyness</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table points out that fear of making mistake was considered as the main factor affecting students’ reluctant to speak in English classroom. It is showed by 48.3% of the students felt worry when they were asked to speak in front of the classroom. The underlying reason for this circumstance because students were afraid of looking foolish in front of their friends when they said wrong words either in negotiating meaning or pronouncing. Again, students explained that their friends will skit by laughing or mocking at them when the fail to produce accurate English. Furthermore, afraid of being criticized by the teacher was also influential students’ response toward fear of making mistake.

Secondly, 25% of the students claimed that lack of confidence is something that happens to them when they tried to speak in target language. Some students felt that it was fearful and timid when they were asked to express their opinion or idea in an utterance. Moreover, they felt worry when their speaking partners did not understand about their spoken language and vice versa. Indeed, they will suddenly hesitate because they themselves are
EFL Learner’s reluctance to speak in English Classroom: Psychological Factors (Maisara)

not able to distinguish whether it wrong or correct. In this case, as they added, their limited vocabulary was also the reason why they were not confident to speak.

Another point to consider was students’ shyness during the English classroom. This kind of behaviour led them to remain silent while others try to speak. 16.7% of the participants believed that their shyness was also a source of problem in English classroom especially during the speaking activity.

Finally, the lowest frequency of psychological factors affecting students’ reluctance to perform in speaking was dealing with lack of motivation. They considered English as a complicated and difficult subject especially the speaking skill. Indeed, teacher’s lack of effort in motivating students’ participation during the speaking activity did not help them to take more of active participation and at last the students become bored and indifferent during the English learning process. Similarly, (Gardner in Nunan, 1999) states the causes of the students’ lack of motivation: e.g. uninspired teaching, boredom, lack of perceived relevance of materials and lack of knowledge about the goals of the instructional program.

In the last part of discussion, it is dealing with type of speaking activities and students’ psychological perspective against it. The writer categorized speaking into four activities namely; discussion, interview, role play, and retelling. The results can be seen as follow.

![Chart illustrating students' psychology perspective in four speaking activities](image)

**Figure 1. Students’ attitude toward speaking activities**

The chart illustrates the students’ psychology perspective in four different speaking activities that commonly take place in an English classroom (discussion, interview, role play and retelling).
Overall, fear of making mistake was the highest among all different activities and on the contrary, shyness was the least experienced by the student. In term of fear of making mistake, interview was considered as the greatest source of students’ fear of making mistake and followed by lack of confidence as the second reason that hinders students to participate in oral activity during the English classroom. In term of lack of motivation and shyness, the chart showed that on there was only in small amount of the students held it as the reason why they abstain from speaking activity.

Observing to the chart, it leads to the conclusion that most student defined fear of making mistakes was the biggest problem in producing oral and interview was believed to be the most challenging speaking activities.

CONCLUSION

Based on the discussion in the previous section, it can be concluded that fear of making mistake is the most influential factor affecting students’ reluctant to speak in English classroom. Consequently, it is important for language teacher to create a harmonious atmosphere in the classroom through emotional bonds between teacher-students and students-students to make students feel secure and welcome from any mistakes. Negotiation should be made among students by setting the rule that making fun of a wrong answer is not accepted. Further, errors are considered as a natural part of leaning foreign language, and students were encouraged to ask for help without running the risk of embarrassment (Dörnyei, 2001).

REFERENCES


