

THE CORRELATION BETWEEN STUDENTS' SPEAKING ANXIETY AND THEIR SPEAKING PERFORMANCE IN AN EFL CONTEXT

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Abstract

Numerous studies have been conducted in investigating the role of foreign language speaking anxiety on students' performance; facilitating (positive) or debilitating (negative) effects. Unfortunately, previous studies on this issue show that language anxiety negatively affected students' performance in most cases. This study aimed to find out the correlation between speaking anxiety and speaking performance in EFL context and investigating the major stressors of English speaking anxiety perceived by the students involved in this study. Mixed method was applied in this study. Then, three instruments were used to collect the data; a questionnaire named FLCAS (Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale), an interview, and a speaking test. The finding showed that there was no significant relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking performance. Furthermore, based on the finding from FLCAS and interview, the major stressors of speaking anxiety perceived by the participants were resulting from comparing one's speaking skill to others, getting a spontaneous question, being concerned if they were grammatically incorrect and used wrong pronunciation, not understanding what the teacher said, and being unable to convey something in the target language. These major stressors were basically stemmed from fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension.

Keywords: speaking anxiety, speaking performance, EFL, correlation, major stressors

Introduction

In Indonesia, English has been taught to the students since they were in an elementary school. Apart from the fact that the students have learned English for several years, it still cannot be denied that there are still many students who consider English difficult to be mastered, especially speaking skill.

There are several reasons which make speaking English is considered difficult by the students, it might relate to either students' linguistic competence or their psychological traits. Linguistic competence is associated with one's knowledge about the elements of the target language, such as: vocabulary, grammar, intonation, and pronunciation (Saville-troika, 2006). On the other hand, the factors related to psychological traits are motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety

(Krashen, 1982). In addition, this research only focused on the sources of difficulties in speaking English which related to psychological traits, especially which was caused by speaking anxiety.

Many studies have been conducted in investigating the contribution of psychological factors in students' learning process, especially anxiety. In fact, some researchers believe that anxiety becomes 'an affective filter' or a 'mental block' for the students so that it impedes them as they perform in the target language (Krashen, 1982; Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). Besides, many researchers also agree that foreign language anxiety negatively affects students' attitudes and achievement in language learning (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Aida, 1994; Awan, Azher, Anwar, & Naz, 2010).

Many studies related to foreign language speaking anxiety have been conducted. One of the studies focused on the sources of language anxiety in speaking English. Debreli in 2016 investigated the sources of language anxiety among Turkish university students. The study found that 'being unprepared' and 'being asked immediate questions' were the first two among the other sources. Debreli (2016) further explained that the reason his samples felt anxious was because they were fear of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated. The same findings also found by Khattak, Jamshed, Ahmad, & Baig in 2011. They (2011, p. 1) stated that "the findings from FLCAS and semi-structured interviews showed that the students felt anxious of being negatively evaluated and being corrected by their teachers in the classes". These findings were in accordance with Horwitz et al.'s finding (1986) who proposed three main sources of foreign language anxiety with fear of being negatively evaluated as one of the sources.

Another source of speaking anxiety which also related to fear of negative evaluation is comparing one's skills to the other students. A study conducted by Ansari in 2015 revealed that comparing one's speaking skills negatively in relation with their peers could lead them to speaking anxiety especially in EFL context. Then, getting a spontaneous question also becomes a source that provokes speaking anxiety. This statement is in line with Young's findings (1991) which confirms that being called on to respond orally in the target language is perceived as a strong source of anxiety by her samples.

Speaking skills play a vital role in communication process. Besides, having a good ability in speaking English clearly gives contribution to the students' success either in school or later in every phase of their life (Sari, Nurkamto & Pudjobroto, 2012). Then, concerning the importance of being able to speak in English and the role of anxiety in learning process, this research aimed at finding out the correlation between students' speaking anxiety and students' speaking performance. It also investigated the major stressors of speaking anxiety experienced by the students in learning English in the classroom. Further studies on this issue may provide language teachers with information on how to alleviate students' foreign language speaking anxiety.

Method

The research design applied in this research was mixed method. Then, correlational study also used in this research. According to Halonen & Santrock

(1999, p. 20), “correlational study is a method which has a goal of describing the strength of the relation between two or more events or characteristics”. The two variables that were examined in this research were students’ speaking performance as the dependent variable (Y) and students’ foreign language speaking anxiety as the independent variable (X).

The participants in this study were 96 students (about 30% from the total of the population). Then, the sampling technique which was used in this research was systematic random sampling. According to MacNealy (as cited in Latham, 2007, p. 134), in systematic random sampling, “the selection of the sample from the population list is made by randomly selecting a beginning and choosing every nth name”. In doing systematic random sampling, the list of students’ name was needed. Then, in selecting the sample, the researcher could choose any number and choose every nth name (e.g. every 5th; 5, 10, 15, and so forth would be chosen as the sample).

The instruments used in this study were Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), interview, and speaking test. FLCAS was a questionnaire designed by Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope (1986). FLCAS was distributed to find out the students’ level of anxiety and the sources of students’ speaking anxiety. Through this questionnaire, Horwitz et al. (1986) found three sources of students’ speaking anxiety including communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and test anxiety.

The interview was conducted to support the findings on the major stressors of speaking anxiety perceived by the participants from FLCAS. There were fifteen students who involved in this interview; ten female students and five male students. The students who participated in the interview were those who had high level of anxiety. Then the data resulted from interview was grouped based on the sources of speaking anxiety found in this study which would be explained in the finding and discussion section.

Speaking test was conducted to obtain students’ speaking scores with 2 teachers as the judges. This test was done to know the students’ speaking skill. Additionally, in measuring the students’ speaking performance, a speaking rubric known as Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM) designed by Daniels & Bizar as cited in Maulida (2016) was used. Role-play was chosen as the activity where the students’ speaking ability was assessed. Then in preparing the test, the students were asked to make a group of three and choose the topic for the role-play. After that, two teachers who were involved in this study would assess students’ speaking performance. Furthermore, a pilot test was also conducted to know the validity and reliability of SOLOM as well as the reliability of teachers’ assessment in determining the students’ speaking performance scores.

The data gained from the FLCAS and speaking test were computed by using SPSS to find out the correlation between students’ speaking anxiety and students’ speaking performance. Meanwhile, the data gained from interview section was analyzed and explained descriptively to support the findings on the major stressors of students’ speaking anxiety obtained from FLCAS.

Findings and Discussion

The Correlation between Students' Speaking Anxiety and Students' Speaking Performance in EFL Context

Pearson product-moment correlation was applied in finding out the correlation between the variables. From this formula, the r value obtained was .038, meaning that there was no relationship between students' speaking anxiety and their speaking performance. Furthermore, since the p value (Sig, (2-tailed)) obtained was .117 and it exceeded .05, then H_0 was accepted, meaning that there was no relationship between speaking anxiety and speaking performance.

Major Stressors That Cause Speaking Anxiety in EFL Context Reported by the Participants

Based on the result of FLCAS and interview, it could be concluded that the major stressors that cause speaking anxiety perceived by the participants in this research were: comparing one's speaking skill to others, getting a spontaneous question, being afraid if they were grammatically incorrect and used wrong pronunciation, not understand what the teacher said, and being unable to convey something in the target language.

Comparing one's speaking skill to others. The items related to this stressor (Item 7: I keep thinking that the other students are better at language than I am; and Item 23: I always feel that the other students speak the foreign language better than I do) gained the highest percentage from FLCAS, which were 60.4% and 55.9%. This result then was supported by the responses gained from the interview which stated that most of the participants (thirteen participants; all female students and three male students) assumed that their speaking skill was still low compared to their peers.

Getting a spontaneous question. This stressor belonged to communication apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986) and occurred in input stage (William & Andrade, 2008) in learning process. In FLCAS, the items associated with this stressor (Item 9: I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in language class; and Item 33: I get nervous when the language teacher asks questions which I haven't prepared in advance) were agreed by more than 40% of the participants. Then, based on the result of interview, most of the participants (fourteen participants; all female students and four male students) agreed that they did not like to be asked a spontaneous question by the teacher since they needed some times to prepare the answer. Some of the interviewee also stated that they would feel less anxious about speaking in class if they understood the question given by the teacher.

Being worried if they were grammatically incorrect and used wrong pronunciation. Eight participants (all female students) who involved in interview section admitted that they felt overwhelmed by certain rules in English, especially grammar and pronunciation. The rest admitted that they did not worry about it too much as long as they were able to speak or answer the question given by the teacher. In FLCAS, the item related to this stressor (Item 30: I feel overwhelmed by the number of rules you have to learn to speak a foreign language) was agreed by almost 40% of the participants. Additionally, the result from the interview also supported the finding of this research; some of the participants stated that they did worried if they were grammatically incorrect and used wrong pronunciation since it would make the meaning changed and they were also afraid that they would be negatively evaluated by their peers.

Not understanding what the teacher said. In FLCAS, item 4 (It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in the foreign language) and item 29 (I get nervous when I don't understand every word the language teacher says) were associated with this stressor and were agreed by more than 35% of the participants. This finding was also supported by the findings from the interview which stated some students agreed that they were afraid if they did not understand every word that was said by the teacher during the class. For this reason, it was necessary for the language teachers to ask the students whether or not the students understood about the material which was given by the teacher.

Being unable to convey something in English. This stressor was agreed by most of the participants as a major stressor of speaking anxiety. Several previous studies also found that 'did not know how to say something in English' was the source with the highest percentage in their research (see William & Andrade, 2008). Then, based on the interview responses, it was found that the reason behind this was because the students were afraid of losing face in front of their peers for not being able to respond in the target language and also afraid if their answers were incorrect or not understood either by the teacher or the other students. Furthermore, the interview section in this research also investigated the role of anxiety in learning process. In learning foreign language, the role of anxiety could be facilitating or debilitating. Facilitating anxiety was a type of anxiety which motivated the learner to 'fight' the new learning task, either by studying hard, practicing more or the other activities which showed that they had motivation to improve their capability (Scovel as cited in Khattak, et al., 2011).

Based on the interview responses, it was found that nine participants (six female students and three male students) agreed that being anxious motivated them to prepare well and do their best in every task given by the teacher. In other words, the role of foreign language speaking anxiety toward these students was facilitating effect. Nevertheless, the factor which motivated the students to master English was not only coming from speaking anxiety itself. The students could also feel motivated because of their interest in learning English, as a result of feeling envious because the other students spoke in English better, and simply because the students wanted to get a good grade in English. On the other hand, the rest of the students admitted that they did not feel motivated at all. In fact, they tended to postpone every individual task given by the teacher, coming late to the class intentionally or even choosing to miss the class.

Then, based on the result of interview, twelve participants (eight female students and four male students) stated that the factors which could help the students to reduce their speaking anxiety were associated with how the teacher delivered the lesson (e.g. having a teacher who had a good sense of humor and relating funny stories or real experiences with the topic that was being learned) and the type of classroom activity which chosen by the teacher (e.g. pair work or discussion in a small group to talk about certain topics or to do certain projects).

Having a teacher who had a good sense of humor and relating funny stories or real experience with the topic that was being learned were the examples of the factors that could reduce students' speaking anxiety. On the other side, pair work or discussion in a small group to talk about certain topics or to do certain projects was chosen as the classroom activities where language anxiety was alleviated.

Conclusion

This research was aimed to find out whether or not there was any significant correlation between students' speaking anxiety and students' speaking performance in EFL context and to investigate the major stressors of English speaking anxiety which perceived by the participants involved in this research.

The findings of the research showed that there was no significant relationship between the variables, either positive or negative relationship. In this study, the reason why there was no correlation between the variables might be caused by the role of anxiety in students' learning process was facilitating anxiety. As stated earlier, facilitating anxiety is a type of anxiety that motivates the students to improve their learning and performance. In other words, even though the students were anxious to speak in the target language, they would study and practice harder so that they could give their best performance, especially in English speaking test.

This research also discovered the major stressors of speaking anxiety perceived by the participants, which were: comparing one's speaking skill to others, getting a spontaneous question, being afraid if they were grammatically incorrect and used wrong pronunciation, not understand what the teacher said, and being unable to convey something in the target language. There were three main sources of speaking anxiety and the major stressors found in this study were stemmed from communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation.

In addition, concerning the existence and the contribution of anxiety in learning process, the researcher hopes that the students can be more active in English class without worrying too much on making mistakes in the target language and also hopes the language teachers will be aware of anxiety and are able to help the anxious students to feel more at ease during the class. Additionally, the language teachers should also ensure the students that making mistakes in speaking English is natural and part of learning process.

Furthermore, it is suggested for further researchers to focus on the other issues in speaking performance, anxiety, or both of them. Future researchers can also investigate the correlation between anxiety and speaking performance in EFL context in terms of different research location, different degree of education, or with more respondents involved since the present study only uses a small size of samples.

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