

EXPLORING LEARNERS' SPEAKING APPREHENSION IN AN ENGLISH CLASSROOM AT SMPN 5 LANGSA

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Abstract

This study explores language apprehension in speaking experienced by learners in a foreign language setting. It further investigates factors contributing to the anxiety and types of anxiety they experienced in practicing English. This research deployed qualitative research with a case study type of research. The subject of this study was 25 students in the ninth grade of SMPN5 Langsa. Observation and interviews were used to collect the data. To analyze the data the researchers used an interactive model of analyses suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994) consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings showed that factors that trigger language apprehension among the learners are low self-efficacy, lack of vocabulary and grammar mastery, de-motivated in learning English, and unsupportive language learning environment. Most of the learners experience state anxiety particularly when they are asked to share their thoughts in English spontaneously and to practice the target language in front of the class.

Keywords: *speaking, apprehension, speaking anxiety*

1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an activity to express ideas and receive information. In the context of English language learning, acquiring speaking skills allow learners to express themselves and it enables them to practice using language elements such as grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. However, most students in a foreign language setting face challenges in speaking due to language inhibition.

One of the language barriers most students encountered in speaking deals with language apprehension. There has been many research conducted about this issue in various aspects (Awan, Azher, & Anwar, 2010; Isnaini, 2018; Mesri, 2012). Anxiety considers a normal experience that reflects anticipation about events that might have negative outcomes for someone (Killu, Marc, & Crundwell, 2016). It is a feeling of anxiety when someone does something. In the context of speaking in the target language, language anxiety indicates an experience that leads to the negative building of emotion and low self-esteem as well as negative self-confidence by the learner at the time of speaking in a target language (He, 2018).

In such a situation, the learners may experience mental blocka, which made them unwilling to speak. Research conducted by (Lathifah, (2015) in the context of Pakistan examines that most the students experience anxiety in English language learning even though they find learning English engaging. In the Indonesian context, the majority of learners also experience foreign language apprehension. Junior high school students, in particular, tend to experience greater anxiety than

those who study at further education levels. The researchers consider that it is due to they start learning English at that level.

A preliminary observation conducted at SMPN 5 Langsa showed that the students exposed are anxious when a teacher asked them to practice English in front of the class during English subjects. Some of them hindered when they were asked to speak, they seemed worried, and being passive. Such phenomena are considered to happen in many English-speaking classes. Speaking is believed as a skill that most frequently evokes anxiety among students. Anxiety in speaking English is one of the highest problems in speaking class. This problem is considered important to be identified to help the learners learn the foreign language effectively, encourage their self-confidence as well as promote communicative competence. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate factors contributing to anxiety in speaking English of the students at SMPN 5 Langsa and the types of anxiety they experience in speaking.

Speaking is a productive aural skill that consists of generating a systematic verbal utterance to convey meaning. It includes aspects such as accuracy, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. All of them are used through controlled and guided activities (Mart, 2012). Speaking also represents the ability to process information that is accepted and responded to through verbal language. This ability is often interpreted as oral communication skills, where the speaker expresses himself through spoken words (Ayu & Ayu, 2016). Moreover, Nation & Newton, (2009) mention that speaking is a part of work or academic study and may engage in presenting reports

or presenting a perspective on a specific matter. Thus, speaking is the basic skill that is significant to learn in a foreign language.

Speaking functions to deliver messages or ideas of formal and sustained transactional and interpersonal conversation in daily life from the speaker to the listener. Richards (2008) made a helpful dissimilarity between the interactional functions of speaking, in which it serves to establish and maintain social relations, and the transactional functions, which focus on the exchange of information. It can use an expanded three-part version; talks as interaction, talk transaction, and talk performance.

Anxiety is a term used to describe an emotion of being panic or worried. Maina, Mauri, & Rossi (2016) define anxiety as fear of failure in certain situations and then being tried, ridiculed, or criticized by others. For this reason, those who experience anxiety often avoid contact with social situations. Furthermore, anxiety is placed among the outcome, negative, activating emotions. In other words, when an individual focuses, a negative emotion that may occur is anxiety (Szyszka, 2017) Anxiety is classified into two kinds: state anxiety and trait anxiety.

State anxiety can be defined as an immediate, subjective emotional state, related to the arousal reaction of the autonomic nervous system in response to certain stimuli such as feelings of conscious tension, fear, nervousness, and worry for example when someone gives a speech or takes an exam (He, 2018). It indicates an anxious reaction or feeling arouse in someone when he faces a particular situation. While trait anxiety is a relatively stable tendency to become anxious in a broad spectrum of situations that are considered threatening or dangerous. In a situation where learners require to use a foreign language, common symptoms they may experience when they are anxious include shaky hands, wobbly legs, stuttering, headache, and a sense of dread (Wati & Afrida, 2022).

Among factors that trigger anxiety is low self-efficacy, unmotivated to learn a foreign language, and lack of knowledge of vocabulary and grammar. Gender could also be a factor that leads to anxiety in using foreign language learners (Herwanto, 2013). as some students may feel anxious to practice English with the opposite sex.

2. METHOD

This study used a qualitative research method with a case study approach. Ardianto, (2011) describes a case study as a type of approach in research that examines one case in-depth, in detail, and comprehensively. This research was conducted at SMP N 5 Langsa in July 2020. The subject of the research was the ninth-grade students of SMPN 5 Langsa which consisted of 25 students.

To collect the data, the researcher used observation and interview. The observation was used to find out factors that trigger anxiety in speaking English. Observation is a data collection method that uses direct or indirect surveillance (Adi, 2010). In this study, the researcher used a non-systematic observation. The use of non-systematic observation aims to prevent the researcher from limiting the framework to be observed.

Meanwhile, an interview was conducted to find out the types of anxiety faced by the students during the speaking activity.

The researchers used a semi-structured interview. The purpose is to allow students to express their opinions and their feeling freely The researcher used an interactive model of analysis that consists of three steps as proposed by Miles & Huberman, (1994) they are reduction of the data, display of the data, and conclusion drawing.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Results of the observation showed that many students were inhibited to practice English during English lessons. When a teacher asked them to describe their colleagues, some of them kept silent and some others tend to use their native language. When the teacher spontaneously called their names to speak in front of the class, they were panic. They could not control their tone of voice and gestures when standing in front of their classmates. They scratched their heads repeatedly and some others tend to cover their face with a book they were holding when speaking.

Moreover, the learners produce many words unclearly. They tend to produce a word and correct its pronunciation repeatedly. The learners also faced difficulties in expressing their thought in the foreign language. There were many hesitations during the speaking uttered. The classroom situation was also unsupportive. When a learner practiced speaking in front of the class, he was being laughed at and mocked anytime he made mistakes and pronounce words unclearly. Obtaining an unsupportive response leads the learners to feel shy and inhibit speaking in the target language.

The result of the interview indicated that most of the students feel anxious to speak in the target language during the English subject. This is due to they had lack of idea on what and how to convey verbal messages in English due inadequate vocabulary. Another reason was that they were afraid of making mistakes while conveying their thought and considered the interlocutors may find it difficult to comprehend their ideas.

Fear of making mistakes is a factor that causes anxiety. Most of the students reluctant to speak as they were afraid of being mocked by friends in the class when they speak English incorrectly. This factor is also called language ego. Brown (2000) explains the language ego become part of self-

identity. Moreover, the problem of recognizing language patterns or grammar is another issue. The learners consider English is a difficult subject as it has typical language rules, which are different from their native language. A learner stated:

" I feel not confident to speak in English because I do not understand how to use the grammar and tenses rules. Those are so difficult."

Another reason was that they did not have an idea when they speak. One of the students said, " I do not know what to say when I have to speak in English, I have no idea." They could not come up with their ideas when they had to say something in English. Research conducted by Hosni (2014) mentioned that most students face speaking difficulties as oral development has largely been neglected in the language classroom.

The researchers also consider that their self beliefs were lacking. One of the students noted, "I often practice speaking English but I still cannot speak spontaneously."

Furthermore, another reason was they were afraid of making mistakes in speaking. A student proposed "I feel shy when making mistakes in speaking because my friends will laugh at me. So I chose not to practice". Being laughed at by friends is a serious threat for students. This often triggers language anxiety. Students assumed that when they were laughed at, they were judged as low achiever students. Moreover, some students also had a lack of opportunity to practice English in the classroom as teachers often ask smarter students. Low achiever students assumed that many other students were more proficient than them in English so they were reluctant to get involved in classroom activities. Students felt they did not have enough opportunity to express their opinions because their speaking skills were not as fluent as other high achiever students were. Besides that, the social environment factor also did not support students in speaking English. Students proposed they did not have friends to practice speaking English. "I cannot speak English because and rarely practice the language as don't have a partner to practice with." Such a situation leads some students to feel demoted in practicing the language as they did not possess supportive environments to practice the target language.

4. CONCLUSIONS

a. Conclusion

Language apprehension is one of the challenges in learning English, especially speaking. Students at junior high school, especially those who learn at SMPN 5 Langsa face several challenges in speaking. Among the factors that trigger the problems are the first is they have low self-efficacy. They assumed to have lower abilities than their classmates. The second is a lack of vocabulary and grammar mastery. The students are reluctant to speak as they find speaking in the target language is

complicated as they have to deal with the language rules. The third is de-motivated in learning English. The students often laughed when they made mistakes. This led the students a lack of self-confidence and inhibit speaking. The fourth is an unsupportive language learning environment. The students often found classroom learning not motivating, as they felt insecure to practice English. Students often tease those who pronounce English unclearly and incorrectly. They also find it difficult to find friends to practice the foreign language to develop their skills.

b. Suggestion

The learners have to allocate particular time to practice English to develop their confidence in speaking English. They also have to be encouraged not to feel afraid of making mistakes and willing to get involved in classroom activities.

The teachers are also required to maintain a supportive language classroom environment. It is also important to facilitate an anxiety free language learning environment and to provide engaging activities to encourage and motivate the students to speak.

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