

Psychological Factors Affecting EFL Students' Speaking Performance

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Abstract

Speaking has become one of important skills in learning a language especially English. Particularly, to speak in English for EFL student is not easy and need much effort to produce acceptable utterances in English. This article is aimed to investigate psychological barriers faced by Indonesian students which affect their speaking performance. Moreover, as this research is a qualitative study, direct observation is done to capture all of phenomenon happened in the speaking class in natural setting. In addition, interview is also conducted by the researcher to know what psychological factors influence their oral performance in the class. The research findings from observation and interview show that the students tend to feel anxious when performing their speaking because they are afraid of making mistakes. The feeling of fear of making mistakes, somehow related to the students' lack of self-esteem in using English so that they often combine their speaking with their mother tongue. Psychological barriers also appear in discussion session, where in this case some students do not want to participate because they are too, afraid of making mistakes, lack of self-esteem and motivation so they prefer to keep silent in the class. From the natural phenomenon happened in the speaking class, it can be concluded that psychological factors which hinder the students in performing their speaking are possibly caused by the feeling of too worried of making mistakes and the lack of self-esteem which are related to shyness and their anxiety level. By looking at this phenomenon, it is better for teacher to give their students assistance so that they can perform their English speaking better.

Keywords: *psychological factors, influence, barriers, speaking performance*

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of core components in English language proficiency which is highly important to acquire by students. To acquire this skill, students need a special ability rather than only mastering a language in terms of grammatical terms or semantic rules. The students need to collaborate those two important items and how to use the language based on context of situation where the language is used (Mahripah, 2014). Speaking is not merely opening mouth and say words and sentences, but it includes a cultural background of a target language which is spoken to get meaningful interaction (McKay, 2008). Furthermore, speaking is one of productive skills where this aspect becomes a parameter of successful teaching and learning in classroom (Richard, 2008). Therefore, the students need to fight so hard to have a fluent speaking. However, many teachers have tried to apply various activities to have their students practice their speaking such as group presentation, peer friends conversation, and also debate by rising a certain issue (Hidayat & Herawati, 2012).

Knowing above facts on how a language is used orally by a certain person, it is true that producing a good speaking performance in English is not easy for EFL students. In addition, acquiring English speaking is not as easy as first language especially for Indonesian students where English is a foreign language for them. It is very challenging for the students since it needs a great attempt because of its regularly present in the real life in everyday communication (Fauzan, 2016). It is a fact that English becomes one of compulsory subjects taught in Indonesia from elementary to university levels where it indicates that Indonesian students have studied English for many years. Based on this phenomenon, it is very interesting to highlight why Indonesian students still regard as low achievers in spoken English.

Difficulty of EFL students on performing English speaking probably caused by cognitive or psychological factors. However, if the students with a good cognitive ability still have a difficulty on speaking, main psychological factors as motivation, self-esteem, and anxiety are potential aspects in influencing the students' oral performance (Aouatef, 2015). Particularly, there are the feeling of being afraid in making mistakes, lack of confidence and motivation, shyness, and also anxiety which exist when the students have to speak in front of the class (Juhana, 2012). For instance, the behavior of being too shy, anxious, and fear of making mistakes are caused by opportunity that the students seldom to get to speak as well as corrections which are given by the teacher directly when the students are performing their speaking (Fauzan, 2014). Another theory notices that it is important to highlight that psychological or personality factors such as self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation are urgent aspects in assigning the successfulness of the students' language learning (Brown, 1994).

Furthermore, many experts point out that psychological factors give the most negative influence to the students' speaking activities (Bourezzane, 2014). Not only presents the negative influence, the psychological factors can make the students' English speaking performance difficult (Haidara, 2014). As an example, Putri (2014) has conducted a research on the correlation between anxiety as one of the psychological factors and students' speaking performance. As a result, there is a

significant positive correlation between low anxiety score got by the students and their speaking performance and significant negative correlation between the students who got high anxiety score and their speaking performance. In other words, psychological factors are potential to affect the students' oral performance in negative ways. In this research, the researcher is interested in investigating the psychological factors which affect the students' oral performance and which psychological factor hinders the students from speaking.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Importance of English Speaking Competence

It is obvious that English is a main language needed by many people all over the world since it has a great impact in so many aspects of life such as education, tourism, economic, etc. The importance of learning English is not only in written form but also how it can be used especially in daily life since it has been a mean of communication used by people around the world (Lathifah, 2015). It is supported by Ingram & Sasaki (2003) who say that mastering English speaking can bring people to be able to communicate with other people from different countries, so that English speaking becomes an important skill to learn and develop.

Particularly, speaking is one of skills which have to be mastered by students in learning English (Mustafa, 2015). Speaking is a medium for the students to understand materials taught by teachers and it becomes the top source of learning a language for the students (Al Hosni, 2014). The paradigm that develops in society is if one student has a good ability in speaking, it means that he has succeed in learning a language (Mahripah, 2014). In other words, it becomes a parameter for students whether they have reached successful language learning.

However, mastering English speaking seems never been an easy job for the students. Speaking needs an interpersonal skill to express what we feel, think, and our judgement towards one aspect of life (Mahripah, 2014). Therefore, there is a frustrated reality for many EFL students that they still difficult to use English in speaking even though they have learned it for so many years at schools (Alonso, 2012). This is what happened with Indonesian students when they are learning English. They start to learn English from the early age in Elementary School for six years, then continue to learn it in Junior and Senior High School for six years, but unfortunately their English language acquisition is underdeveloped particularly in speaking area.

Considering the importance of English speaking, the students had better to pay attention on how to deal with elements in a language particularly English. In this case, Hemerka (2009) points out three important elements that the students need to figure out in order to have a good English speaking which are explain briefly as follows:

a. Structural View

According to the structural view, a language which is contained with the structural aspects is closely related to how meaning is transferred. This

element is also concerning with how a language becomes acceptable so that the utterances of a speaker can be understood by other people in terms of the pronunciation, grammatical, and lexical aspects.

b. Functional View

In this part, a language is related to how the form of language is used in a communicative way. In this case, of course the structural view above is still related to the functional view because the language which has a structural element inside should be able to transform the speaker's intended meaning or play the role of language function.

c. Relating Forms to Meanings

In this part, particularly, a teacher has to make sure that proportion of teaching a language should be balance between the structural and functional views. A problem will come up when the teacher thinks that the ability of speaking spontaneously will appear directly when he has taught many grammatical items to the students. As a consequence, the students will produce their speaking in an awkward way, translate every single word in a dictionary, and become afraid of making mistakes because of the grammatical rules.

2.2 Main Psychological Factors which Hinder the EFL Students in English Speaking and Their Roles in Acquiring Second/Foreign Languages

It is obvious that psychological factors become important and influential elements which give a great impact on how the students acquire second/foreign languages particularly in speaking area. Therefore, it is important to point out those psychological factors based on various theories as follows:

a. Motivation

Motivation is regarded as the desire of the students in learning a language. It is not enough when the students just have the desire to learn the language, the students also need to provide a great effort to reach their goal (Ortega, 2009). In learning second/foreign languages, motivation can be divided into two factors, they are communicative needs of the students and their attitudes towards the language community (Lightbrown & Spada, 2001). In this case, the students will be motivated in learning a second/foreign language just because they need to learn and communicate it in a social large scale to support their professional ambition in the future. Therefore, they need to have a good attitude toward people who speak the target language because they need to have a contact with them. Furthermore, Gardner (2001) believes that integrative motivation is the most dominant form of motivation which is set in three kinds of condition, they are (1) the large proportion of the integrativeness, (2) the students' effort, investment, and enjoyment quantity in learning the language, and (3) the students' attitude towards teachers and curriculum used. In addition, another factor which contributes to the students' motivation is a manner or attitude to reasons of why they want to

perceive their intended result (Al Othman & Shuqair 2013). In short, their motivation can influence their decision on being involved or not to a certain situation in language learning such as in speaking class.

b. Anxiety

Anxiety is a natural psychological aspect which contains the feeling of fear which sometimes cannot be controlled (Javed et al., 2013). Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) seems to be occurred very often in the process of language learning. The students cannot neglect the existence of being afraid and have a great tension when they think of foreign languages (Ortega, 2009). To the more particular aspect in learning a language, in speaking, adults are different with kids where they tend to feel anxious whenever they make mistakes especially in public situation because it is related to an image and judgement from many people about their ability in performing their speaking (Latha, 2012). In addition, there is also a possibility of losing face and accepting ignorance from people who speak the second/foreign language if their speaking cannot be understood or not acceptable.

c. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is one of psychological factors which present much contribution in students' speaking performance (Lathifah, 2015). Those who have self-esteem are potential to perform speaking in more fluent way because they make the problem of making mistakes becomes the last matter to think about. In line with Lathifah, Dulay, Burt, & Krashen (1982) also mention that the students with high self-esteem will be in secure place and become successful in learning a language. On the other hand, self-esteem becomes one of big challenges for students to deal with their speaking performance mostly faced by adult students in university level (Jamila, 2014). It can be concluded that since self-esteem becomes one of the influential factors, it can be said that the students with high self-esteem will perceive better achievement rather than those who do not.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study is a qualitative study since the researcher analyses detail information from participants to capture the whole pictures of phenomenon happened in natural condition (Creswell: 1998). In line with Creswell, Patton (1990) points out that "qualitative methods typically produce a wealth of detailed information about a much smaller number of people and cases." In addition, the steps on doing the qualitative research include how to collect, analyse, and interpret detail description on narrative and visual data or what so called by nonnumerical, so that the researcher can get a clear view of the natural phenomenon which becomes the interest of the researcher (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Relying on those theories, the researcher presents data found in complete description on what psychological factors affecting the students' speaking performance. Particularly, it is important to

highlight characteristics of a qualitative research as follows (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992):

- a. The source of data is in terms of natural setting where the researcher becomes the key instrument.
- b. The presentation of the data is in terms of words rather than numbers.
- c. Qualitative researchers tend to evaluate the process rather than outcomes.
- d. The analysis of the data is in the form of inductive method where the intension is not for testing hypothesis but explore phenomenon happened descriptively.
- e. For qualitative researchers, meaning is the key point to be observed from the problem arisen.

3.2 Subject Of The Study

In this research, the subject is students from the fourth semester of English Department at Widya Gama Mahakam University Samarinda, Indonesia. The total number of the students in that class are twenty four students where the researcher only takes twenty one of them. The reason of taking only twenty one students is the rest of those three students only present for several times in the speaking class, so it makes them mostly never join to the classroom speaking activities. By having only twenty one students who are active in joining the speaking class, the researcher believes that she can meet the objective of qualitative sampling, where in this case is purposive sampling to choose participants who may give detail information related the needs of the researcher (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006).

3.3 Research Instrument

Research instrument is one of the primary elements for the researcher to examine the participants in order to get what she needs in her research. In this case, the researcher herself becomes the key instrument to explore the phenomenon happened in the speaking activities done by the students in the classroom. As Bogdan & Biklen (1992) mention that researcher as a key instrument is one of the characteristics of qualitative research where the researcher tends to investigate a natural setting of his/her research. Moreover, to help the researcher to get a clear image of the participants' oral performance, the researcher uses a videotape so whenever she needs she can repeat the recording many times.

3.4 Data Collecting Techniques & Procedures

In qualitative study, there are several techniques which can be used by the researcher to collect the data, they are observation, field notes, interview, questionnaire, and examining records (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006). In this research, firstly, the researcher observes the participants directly in the classroom when the students are performing their speaking in speaking activities. Secondly, in certain, field notes is used by the researcher to support her direct observation in order to capture all phenomenon happened when the speaking activities take place. Lastly, the researcher also interviews the participants related to the psychological aspects which

become the barriers for them in performing their speaking. Specifically, the data is collected in following steps:

- a. The researcher finds the best sit in order to have a clear voice and expression of the students when they are performing speaking
- b. The videotape is set at hidden place so that the students do not feel worry and act in natural way
- c. The researcher starts to do the direct observation by watching the participant in the speaking class as well as having field notes of anything happened during the speaking activities. In this case, the researcher acts as a passive observer where she does not include to the speaking activities directly as students and teacher. In addition, the observation is held twice for "news anchor and reporter" topic (group) and twice for "three minutes talk" topic (individual).
- d. The researcher interviews the participants regarding with the psychological barriers they face during their speaking performance.

3.5 Data Analysis

After getting the data through above techniques, it is very important for the researcher to point out how she analyse the data gathered. It is The Data Analysis Spiral which is proposed by Creswell (1998) that the researcher used in this research as follows:

Data managing. In this first step, the researcher organizes the data obtained by using the techniques of collecting the data into folders then converts them into sentences.

Reading and memoing. In this step, the researcher reads and writes memos related to the field notes from the direct observation, transcription from the interview and the videotape.

Describing, classifying and interpreting. In this part, the researcher gives a clear description regarding with the data found in detail. In addition, the researcher classifies and chooses which data meet to the researcher's purposes in this research as well as interpret the data

Representing and visualizing. After above three steps, the researcher displays the data found in terms of text and figures.

4. Findings and Discussion

Before presenting result from the two kinds of data collecting techniques used by the researcher, it is important to explain the speaking activities in the classroom briefly. There are two kinds of topics which are set by the teacher as the students should perform their speaking, they are "News Anchor and Reporter" and "Three Minutes Talks". On the first topic, the students were asked to make groups which consist of three students for each group. In this case, one student acts as a news anchor in a studio while two other students have an interview section on location where a certain event such as disaster happened. On the contrary to the first topic, the second topic is an individual activity where each student should find a material about world

invention then present it in front of the class. In addition to this activity, their friends may ask questions after one student presenting his/her material.

Based on the data gained from observation regarding with above speaking activities, the researcher found that the psychological factors affecting the students' speaking performance in group or individual activities are kind of same. Firstly, most of the students feel anxious when performing their speaking. It is showed where they tend to repeat what they said when their speaking goes wrong. It is supported by the result from the interview that they are afraid of making mistakes so whenever they feel that they have mistakes in speaking, they directly repeat what they said. Secondly, they are lack of self-esteem in using English. It is indicated by their behaviour of combining their speaking with Bahasa Indonesia.

Furthermore, in the second topic which is "Three Minutes Talks", the psychological barriers appear that hinder the audience to ask questions. In this case, the interview result shows that some of them said that they are afraid of making mistakes, so that they prefer not to say anything. Another factor that makes the audience do not want to participate is they feel too shy, where in this case, somehow has closely related to the factor of fear of making mistakes. Moreover, the reason of lack of motivation is also being a barrier for the audience. It is indicated from their action of not paying attention to their friend's performance and get themselves busy in doing other activities during the speaking activity such as playing with their cellphones. Uniquely, the factor is related to the interview result where they feel that they do not have a good capability in English, so they prefer to be just a listener. In other words, they do have lack of self-esteem so they do not want to say any words.

It is obvious that in acquiring a second or foreign language is affected by psychological or personality factors. They are considered to be intrinsic elements which are fundamental in determining the success of language learning of students (Brown, 1994). In addition, Brown also points out that self-esteem, anxiety, and motivation become the most influential factors for the students in acquiring a language besides inhibition, risk-taking, empathy, and extroversion.

Concerning with the research findings above, the result shows that most of the students are anxious in performing their speaking. There is no doubt about this fact because Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) generally can be found in many classroom activities especially in speaking (Zia & Sulan, 2015). Anxiety has a negative connotation of reflecting a negative tension from one student in performing their ability and becomes one of the dominant factors in influencing the students' achievement (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014). This result implies that the students should work hard to figure out or at least to minimize this factor if they want to present better performance in speaking. It is because anxiety is one of the prominent aspects which can affect the students' language learning particularly in speaking (Mustafa, 2015).

The next case is the lack of self-esteem which is showed by the students in the speaking class. This psychological factor is potential to hinder the students from speaking because it has a positive correlation with the students' speaking

performance Heyde (1979). Furthermore, it has close relationship with the position of English as a foreign language for them and their incapability in English. In this case, they judge themselves as low achievers in English especially in speaking so it makes them do not want to participate. Those students, who are lack of confidence feel that they are doubt with their own ability and inferiors among other students (Elia & Irianti, 2015). This belief potentially hinders them in trying to speak and being in their comfort zone to be silent in the class because of their judgement on their speaking competence. Moreover, it is very interesting to know that the lack of self-esteem is closely related to the students' anxiety level. In other words, the level of the students' anxiety is one of measurements that indicate how confident the students are (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982).

Moreover, another factor of psychological aspect which comes up in the result above is the presence of the students' lack of motivation. This factor, besides anxiety and self-esteem, becomes the psychological factor which affect their decision whether they will speak in English. Hence, it is important for teachers to be aware that motivation has a significant impact to the students' achievement in language learning as it is considered to be one of the most dominant factors to determine whether the students succeed or failed in acquiring a language (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2013).

In addition, the act of being shy is also appeared to become a barrier that makes the students reluctant in contributing in the speaking class. Related to this matter, it is very interesting to know that shyness can be the factor of the lack of self-esteem (Mustafa, 2015). It indicates that shyness is potential to be multiple sources of the reluctant of students in performing their speaking so that the teacher had better to pay attention to this factor so that the students are helped to do the best in their speaking performance.

Above psychological factors possibly occur because of the excessive usage of the students' mother tongue where in this case, of course has different pattern with English such as pronunciation, stress-pattern, and intonation that make the students often confuse in using the foreign language they learned (Latha, 2012). Moreover, the feeling of being afraid of making mistakes also potentially trigger above psychological factors. In this case, the students do not want to be laughed by their friends because of their mistakes. They tend to concern on how their friends will see them and they do not want to be teased because of their performance (Elia & Irianti, 2015).

5. Conclusion

Based on the result of the research above, there are several psychological factors which become the barriers for the students in performing their speaking, they are anxiety, fear of making mistakes, shyness, lack of motivation, and lack of self-esteem. These psychological factors not only appear from one student who is presenting his speaking competence in front of the class, but also from other students who act as audience in individual speaking activity. In fact, from the result of this research and also supported by other studies from other researchers, one

psychological factor is related to others such as the act of being anxious, shy, and lack of confidence can be the result from the feeling of fear of making mistakes, and the lack of self-esteem also can be caused by shyness. In addition, to measure how confident the students are, it can be seen from their anxiety level in performing the speaking in the classroom or to decide whether they want to participate or not. Through this result, the researcher can draw a conclusion that psychological factors can potentially give a great impact to the students' speaking performance especially for EFL students. Therefore, teacher plays an important role to decrease these factors and help the students so that the students can do better in their speaking performance.

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