

DIFFICULTIES OF SPEAKING THAT ARE ENCOUNTERED BY ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS AT AL MARGEB UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to explore the speaking difficulties encountered by English language students at Al Margeb University, and to discover the causes of such difficulties. Speaking English has been a vital importance in international communication. Speaking fluent English is a common problem among the nonnative speakers. The second language learners have gone through a variety of cases to learn how to speak not only correct grammar and using the right vocabulary but with correct accent and pronunciation. Many obstacles, therefore, have been known as the predictors of such a problem among the language learners. According to the review of literature, appropriate speaking instruction was found to be the learners' priority and a field in which they need more attention. In this paper the writer highlight the speaking difficulties encountered by English language students at Al Margeb University, which are considered to be the most urgent for every teacher, such as fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence and lack of motivation. This paper can be useful to teachers to consider their language learners' speaking needs in English language teaching and learning context.

Key words: Spoken-Performance, Learners' Characteristic, importance, problems, factors.

INTRODUCTION

The learning of English speaking skill is a preference for a lot of English learners. Language learners sometimes evaluate their success in language learning based on how well they have improved in their spoken language ability (Richards, 1990).

Speaking fluent English is a common problem among the nonnative. Speaking is one of the most difficult skills language learners face in language learning. It is believed that speaking is the most important of the four language skills. Many learners' stated that they had spent so many years studying English language but they cannot speak it appropriately and understandably (Bueno, N. A. et al., 2006).

The significance of the speaking is indicated with the integration of the other language skills. Speaking helps learners develop their vocabulary and grammar skills and then better their writing skill. Students can express their emotions, ideas, and show the various functions of language.

This review paper traces out the speaking problems, and factors affecting speaking performance. It also highlighted the causes that make the students face difficulty to communicate in English and suggests some solutions that may help to overcome the difficulties.

Speaking Problems

The writer has noticed during his career and teaching at Al Margeb University that the students face some difficulties in speaking during discussions in different courses. What are the difficulties that face the students of English at Al Margeb University in speaking? & what are the suitable solutions? The researcher has been noticed that there are some psychological factors that hinder students from practicing their speaking in class. Each of them is explained below and the possible solutions to overcome them.

Fear of Mistake

As argued by many theorists, fear of mistake becomes one of the main factors of students' reluctance to speak in English in the classroom (Tsui in Nunan, 1999; Yi Hua, 2007; Robby, 2010). With respect to the fear of making mistake issue, Aftat, (2008) adds that this fear is linked to the issue of correction and negative evaluation. In addition, this is also much influenced by the students' fear of being laughed at by other students or being criticized by the teacher. As a result, students commonly stop participating in the speaking activity (Hieu, 2011). Therefore, it is important for teachers to convince their students that making mistakes is not a wrong or bad thing because students can learn from their mistakes.

Causes of Fear of Mistake

The primary reason of fear of mistake is that students are afraid of looking foolish in front of other people and they are concerned about how others will see those (Kurtus, 2001). In addition, Hieu (2011) and Zang (2006) cited in He and Chen (2010) explain that students feel afraid of the idea of making mistakes as they are worried that their friends will laugh at them and receive negative evaluations from their peers if they make mistakes in speaking English. Students' fear of making mistakes in speaking English has been a common issue especially in an EFL context like in Al Margeb University in Libya. As argued by Middleton

(2009), most EFL students are afraid to try and to speak in a foreign language they learn. In this context, as he adds, students do not want to look foolish in front of the class

Possible Solutions to Overcome Fear of Mistake

In terms of possible solution to overcome students' fear of mistakes, Zua (2008) gives several suggestions. First, she suggests that emotional bonds between students and teachers should be built. This way, the students are expected to feel comfortable with their teacher and believe that the teacher will help them if they make mistakes.

Second, Zua further states that the teacher should improve the students' concentration when learning English. This can be done, as she suggests, by creating a supporting learning atmosphere. Finally, the last suggestion is that the teacher creates a harmonious atmosphere that can reduce students' nervousness. In this context, how to deal with errors in conversational English of students is worth discussing and emphasizes that mistakes in communication are keys to carry out a communication.

Shyness

Shyness is an emotional thing that many students suffer from at some time when they are required to speak in English class. This indicates that shyness could be a source of problem in students' learning activities in the classroom especially in the class of speaking. Therefore, paying attention to this aspect is also quite important in order to help the students do their best in their speaking performance in the classroom (Gebhard, 2000). In line with this, Baldwin (2011) further explains that speaking in front of people is one of the more common phobias that students encounter and feeling of shyness makes their mind go blank or that they will forget what to say. As they say, their inability to show their ability in speaking is also influenced much by their feeling of shyness.

Causes of Shyness

Regarding to the cause of shyness, Bowen (2005) and Robby (2010) argue that some shy learners are caused by their nature that they are very quiet. In this case, the students are not very confident and tend to be shy because most of them find it very intimidating when speaking English in front of their friends and teacher. In addition, Saurik (2011) identifies that most of English students feel shy when they speak the language because they think they

will make mistakes when they talk. They are also afraid of being laughed at by their peers. In this sense, they are afraid of being laughed at by their friends due to their low ability in speaking English.

Possible Solutions to Overcome Shyness

In terms of possible solution to overcome shyness, Pesce (2011) says that it is urgent that teacher creates a friendly and open classroom environment. By doing this, shy students are hoped to feel fine of making mistakes in their learning. This way, students will not worry of their imperfect pronunciation and grammar. As a result, they dare to speak in their speaking class. Solving the shyness problem, Chinmoy (2007) suggests that in order to help students to be more confident in their speaking that convince students to look upon shyness as a thing to overcome and do not run-on silence.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of tension, apprehension and nervousness associated with the situation of learning a foreign language (Horwitz et al cited in Nascente, 2001). Furthermore, Nascente writes that, among other affective variables, anxiety stands out as one of the main blocking factors for effective language learning. In other words, anxiety influences students in learning language. Therefore, paying attention to this factor of learning should also be taken into consideration.

The fact that anxiety can affect students' learning is also shared by other researchers like *Horwitz (1991)* as cited in Sylvia and Tiono (2004). He believes that anxiety about speaking a certain language can affect students' performance. It can influence the quality of oral language production and make individuals appear less fluent than they really are. This explanation suggests that teachers should make an attempt to create a learning atmosphere which gives students more comfortable situations in their learning activity.

Causes of Anxiety

Regarding the causes of anxiety, Horwitz and Cope (1986, in Zhao Na, 2007) based on the findings of their study, found out three main causes of students' anxiety i.e. communication apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation. The communication apprehension refers to the students' low ability to communicate in the target language. Their low ability in this aspect, in many cases, causes anxious feeling among many

students. The second cause which is test anxiety deals with students' fear of being tested. The last cause has to do with other students' evaluation. In this case, as mentioned above, very often that other students' evaluation causes anxiety among students themselves. In addition, fear of being evaluated by their teachers is also another factor affecting students' anxiety (Liu, 2007; Zhou, et al 2004). All these show that understanding students better and being skillful in managing classroom should be part of the teachers' concern. As suggested by Harmer (2007), to reduce this anxiety feeling, teachers need to pay attention to each student's strengths and weaknesses so that they can create a learning method which accommodates all students in the classroom.

Possible Solutions to Overcome Anxiety

In order to overcome anxiety, Koichi Sato (2003) on his research about improving students' speaking skills suggests that teachers should be more careful about anxiety which can be intense in students and find techniques that allow students to participate more in oral activities. In addition, providing students with positive reinforcement (Keramida, 2009), motivating students (Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1993 cited in Keramida, 2009) and creating an ease environment in class are important to be noticed by the teacher since it can lower students' anxiety, increase their confidence, and encourage their willingness to communicate (Chan, 2002 cited in Noon-ura, 2008). Dealing with anxiety in students' learning, Tsui (in Nunan, 1999) explains that to deal with the reluctant students, teachers should accept a variety of answers. This way, the students can feel more confident in answering the teacher questions and participating in every activities of the class.

Lack of Confidence

It is commonly understood that students' lack of confidence usually occurs when students realize that their conversation partners have not understood them or when they do not understand other speakers. In this situation, they would rather keep silent while others do talking showing that the students are lack of confidence to communicate. In response to this, Tsui cited Nunan (1999) says that student who lack of confidence about themselves and their English necessarily suffer from communication apprehension. This shows that building students' confidence is an important part of teacher's focus of attention. This means that the

teacher should also learn from both theories and practical experience on how to build the students' confidence.

Causes of Lack of Confidence

He and Chen (2010) state the main cause of students' confidence is their low ability in speaking English. In this case, as they add, many students think that their English is bad and feel that they cannot speak English well. The other cause of students' lack of confidence also deals with the lack of encouragement from the teacher (Brown, 2001). In this context, many teachers do not think that convincing students that they are able to speak English is important. As a result, as Brown adds, students find the learning demotivating rather than motivating. This suggests that encouragement becomes a vital thing in order to build the students' confidence. Therefore, giving students encouragement and showing that they will be able to communicate well in English plays a role in students' success of learning.

Possible Solutions to Overcome Lack of Confidence

With regard to possible solution to overcome the students' lack of confidence, Ye Htwe (2007) shares the strategy to build students' confidence. He says that maximizing students' exposure to English is a good way to build the students' confidence. In line with this, Kubo (2009) adds that to build students' confidence to speak English, teachers can provide regular opportunities to practice proper pronunciation and intonation, and to converse freely. By doing this, students will experience a greater sense of ability to speak English. Therefore, teacher should create a comfortable atmosphere in which learners are encouraged to talk in English and are praised for talking.

Lack of Motivation

With regard to the issue of motivation in learning, Nunan (1999) stresses that motivation is important to notice in that it can affect students' reluctance to speak in English. In this sense, motivation is a key consideration in determining the preparedness of learners to communicate. Zua (2008) further adds that motivation is an inner energy. She says that no matter what kinds of motivation the learners possess it will enhance their study interest. It has been proven in many studies that students with a strong motivation to succeed can persist in learning and gain better scores than those who have weaker motivation of success showing that building students' motivation to learn is urgent for every teacher.

Causes of Lack of Motivation

With respect to the causes of lack of motivation, Gardner in Nunan (1999) elaborates 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. These four, as he further says, very often become source of students' motivation. Uninspired teaching, for example, affects students' motivation to learn. In this context, monotonous teaching, in many cases, reduces the students' motivation due to their feeling of boredom. This shows that paying attention to those four factors is vital. In response to the issue of motivation, Babu (2010) argues that lack of motivation in learning causes students' hesitation to speak English in the classroom. He says that the background of this situation is that students are not motivated by the teachers towards the communication in English. In line with what Babu says, Siegel (2004, in Aftat, 2008) believes that motivation is a product of good teaching. In his further explanation, Aftat emphasizes that to motivate students to learn well and actively communicate in English, teachers should have passion, creativity and interest in their students. In other words, students' motivation is really influenced by the teachers' teaching performance. Therefore, it is important that teachers also show enthusiasm in their teaching performance.

Possible Solutions to Overcome Lack of Motivation

Aftat (2008) suggests that to encourage students' motivation, teachers should provide constant encouragement and support as well ask questions that reveal the basis of a students' problems. Doing this becomes very important because encouragement also gives students a feeling of secure and welcome in their learning. Other suggestions to increase students' motivation are shared by Liu and Huang (2010). They say that to overcome students' lack of motivation, teachers can do activities like promoting students' awareness of the importance of English, enhancing students' interest in English, and developing their self-confidence.

CONCLUSION

The paper showed that students who have higher motivation and lower anxiety can speak easily and effectively. Thus, students should have a friendly and cooperative environment that can help them overcome their difficulties in oral performance. Based on the

review of the literature of the study, teachers should understand their students' interests and feelings, improve their learners' self-confidence, and choose the best teaching method to keep their learners' involved in the speaking activity.

Suggestions: the writer suggested carrying out more studies and researches about speaking difficulties encountered by English language students.

BIO-PROFILE

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