Speaking Anxiety and Strategies Used by ESL Learners to Overcome in Their Classroom: a Case Study in Management and Science University (MSU) Shah Alam, Malaysia

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Abstract: This research study aiming at identifying the sources of the ESL students' speaking anxiety in English speaking comprehension and identifying the strategies used by ESL students to overcome speaking anxiety in English class. This research used a qualitative approach that employed a case study and gathered the information through interviewing 8 undergraduate students from a private university in Shah Alam Malaysia. All the interview questions covered three components, they were communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and test anxiety and the strategies that were used by the respondents to overcome their speaking anxiety. The data analysis technique used was descriptive qualitative. As the result, the researcher found that anxiety, commonly felt by most second language learners contributed by some factors that came from the students and also from teachers. Therefore, to deal with these conditions, both teachers and students need to take part in contributing to what they can do to eliminate the speaking anxiety. Since the success of learning language mostly depends on the communication skills that definitely requires a lot of effort to make the learning journey meaningful.

Introduction

Today, English is spoken and written in nearly every country in the world. According to Gill (2000), it is critical to be fluent in English in Malaysia since it is regarded as a second language. Siew (2014) discussed the importance of language nowadays and how studying a foreign language is required to widen one's cultural perspectives. According to Yeo, Chin, and Ting (2016), English is a required course for university enrollment. As a result, students are encouraged to master the four key English language abilities of writing, speaking, reading, and listening. Siew (2014) also emphasized the necessity of developing one's capacity to communicate in English.

Numerous attempts are being made to improve students' English skills since the government is worried about the never-ending problem of English competence among higher education institutions students. This is backed by Yeo, Chin, and Ting (2017), who found the fact that despite years of English as a required subject in school, Malaysian students had a poor understanding and ability to speak in language. Still in the same line of the opinion Naghadeh (2013) stated that most individuals, including students and adults from diverse backgrounds, regard giving a speech or a presentation as the number one reason for their anxieties. Then, according to Siew (2014) mentioned that the lack proficiency of English

even commonly happens in graduates students. Even another trouble fact that most learners feel much better not participating in language lessons during Mukminin et al., (2015),

Meanwhile, the factors that contributes to that situation have been mentioned by a number of researchers. Misbah, et a., (2017), mentioned that most Malaysian's are still lack in English because English is not their first language, students are still lack of vocabulary and the last one is related to the family finance case which those who have low income commonly cannot use English well. Then, another mentioned that the vital reason of the students' Speaking weakness is from the psychological factors such as anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence and lack of motivation (Brown, 2001; Elhadi, 2015; Gebhard, 2000; Scwarz, 2005 in Nijat, Nizafullah et al.,2019). That statement also mentioned Oztürk and Gürbüz (2014) that speaking is the competence that gives the most anxiety among the other language abilities.

Thus, dealing with those issues, this research study aim at discovering the reseources and offering strategies of students' speaking anxiety in class especially for undergraduate students. Hence, students get will confidence in speaking English that definitely affect their academic performance and learning experience at the same time.

Research Method

To provide the detailed research data regarding the respondent's experiences, actions, feelings, and opinions, the current researcher used a qualitative approach. Furthermore, to produces detailed deeper answers from the respondents regarding to the factors and how students overcome their speaking anxiety, this study employed a case study. Meanwhile, for sampling, this research study employed purposive sampling of 8 undergraduate students from a private university in Shah Alam. The data was obtained through a semi-structured interview. All the interview questions covered four components, they were: communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, test anxiety, and the strategies that were used by the respondents to overcome their speaking anxiety. All of them have been adapted from Young (1991), Ohata (2005), Tanveer (2007), Zhiping & Paramasivam (2013). For dependability, the researcher had executed a pilot study to review the questionnaires before conducting this research study. The data analysis technique used was descriptive qualitative.

Results and Discussion

Speaking refers to an interactive process of constructing and formulating meaning that includes producing, receiving, and processing information. Its meaning and form depend on the context which includes the purpose of speaking and the respondents that will receive the information (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Besides, speaking is a productive skill that can be empirically and directly observed. Especially in the classroom speaking requires the interaction between teachers and students which depends on the classroom's environment and tasks that are given by teachers. Usually, speakers do not speak in complete sentences which use less specific and distinct vocabulary than in written language (Brown, 2004). As noted by Vanderkevent (1990) that there are three components that require in the successful speaking activities, those are: speakers, listeners, and utterances. On the other hand, more specifically, Harris (1974) mentioned that Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency, and Comprehension are the speaking components that make both speaker and listener be in the same perception.

However, even though students have known that components but the problems are still popping up. One of the biggest is students feel anxiety. It causes the students to be unable to communicate in English effectively. As Brown (2001) stated that students actually

know what they wanted to say but the feeling of anxiety has stopped them from doing so. Language anxiety can affect one's ability to communicate in many ways, depending on the type of difficulties the person has encountered (Siti Faridah & Nabilah, 2015). The issue of having anxiety while speaking is very common nowadays.

In Malaysia, the official language used is not English, many researchers have conducted their studies related to speaking anxiety among students in primary school, secondary school, and the higher institutions level. Nuraqilah and Aminabibi (2018) mentioned that local graduates in Malaysia have a serious paucity in speaking English and this issue worries about the graduates' employment in the future. As the English language is not the official language in Malaysia, MacIntyre & Gardner (1994) mentioned that foreign language anxiety can be defined as the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts, including speaking, listening, and learning.The factors influencing the act of speaking anxiety among undergraduate students in Malaysia, which is found as bellow;

1) Fear of Negative Evaluations

Nur Aqilah and Aminabibi (2019), in their case study among Malaysian undergraduate students, stated that the influencing factor which affects students' oral performance is due to communication apprehension. The students were mostly starting to sweat and panic when they are asked to speak in front of their classmates noted by Firooz and Mehdi (2017) in research conducted on Iranian English learners. The same line of finding was also got by Liu and Jackson (2008).

2) Language Environment

Rao (2019) in his paper asserted that students who studied abroad should realize that almost all textbooks in all majors are written in English. Though the students whose English is not their mother tongue are aware of the usage of English as a medium of instructions and communications, they still feel hesitant to use the language in speaking. Insufficient exposure to the English language and the limited opportunity to use English in speaking has resulted in the EFL learners facing some speaking anxiety in the classroom (Akkakoson, 2016). Speaking in English while English is not the speaker's native language could be a treacherous process as the speaker needs to speak with full self-confidence as when the speaker can speak smoothly, it shows that he or she has a high level of proficiency in learning English as a foreign language. However, not all EFL learners are able to speak fluently in class.

Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013) conducted some observations and interview sessions to eight Ph.D. students in one local university in Malaysia found out that one out of eight respondents mentioned that he felt so frustrated and disappointed as he is not a native speaker in English hence he always forgetting about vocabulary and grammar when he is speaking. Then, the previous research interviewed international or exchange students in any English-speaking countries. As their response that they chose to minimize their interaction with the native speakers (Tanaka, 2007; Xu, 2010). Correspondingly, exchange students who are taking core subjects with the English native speakers prefer to sit quietly and remain inactive in classroom (Miller, 2000; Morita, 2009; Vandrick, 2000).

3) Motivation and Teachers' Role

In the English as a Foreign Language classroom, teachers play an important role in order to increase the students' motivation in speaking English. Students' anxiety levels will be increased once the teachers perform an unfriendly attitude towards them. Jomaa and Jupri (2014) conducted a face-to-face interview with a group of nine

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students of different nationalities and a student from Malaysia is included. According to the findings, the respondents claimed that teachers' cold approaches to students somehow lead the students to be demotivated to speak in English In the English of as a second Language, teachers play an important role in order to increase the students' motivation in speaking English. Students' anxiety level will be increased once the teachers perform an unfriendly attitude towards them.

Jomaa and Jupri (2014) conducted a face-to-face interview with a group of nine students of different nationalities and a student from Malaysia is included. According to the findings, the respondents claimed that teachers' cold approaches to students somehow lead the students to be demotivated to speak in English. Ehrman (in Yan, 2012) describes the teacher's role as the most skillful actor in performing whole learning activities. They can be a motivator, a guide even a joker who can boost the students interest, motivation and envolement in studying. In other previous studies mentioned the significant relation between the students' perception of their teachers' autonomy support and self-regulated learning (Schuitema et al., 2016). Meanwhile, a study conducted Thoonen et al. (2011) detected that teachers' sense of self-efficacy had a positive effect on students' motivation. Teachers' role to students is very significant as it will escalate students' motivation to be engaged with the classroom activities especially in speaking. In other past studies, a significant relation was shown between the students' perception of their teachers' autonomy support and self-regulated learning (Schuitema et al., 2016). Another study conducted by Mulyani (2018) asserted that three of her respondents mentioned they are too lazy to practice speaking in English as they have low motivation to use the language in daily life. Thoonen et al. (2011) organized a study and detected that teachers' sense of self-efficacy had a positive effect on students' motivation. Teachers' role to students is very significant as it will escalate students' motivation to be engaged with the classroom activities especially in speaking.

Ways to Overcome Speaking Anxiety

According to Asysyfa et al., (2019) students overcome their speaking anxiety with practice pronouncing the words in English to improve the sound of the words. Other than that, they would try to speak in front of the mirror to motivate themselves to speak in front of their classmates. Furthermore, they will build and develop a positive mindset when their teachers ask them to speak in English. According to Sulastri & Ratnawati (2018), speaking anxiety could be reduced by concentrating on learning English and self-motivation. Huda (2018) suggested that students need to familiarize themselves with speaking English in their daily life and classroom. When the students are used to speaking English with their friends and small group, they would be able to present in front of the class.

Lecturers also play a role to overcome students' speaking anxiety. According to (Huda, 2018) lecturers should provide a safe and comfortable classroom environment for the students because it would reduce students' speaking anxiety. Other than that, lecturers also should encourage the students to speak in class by conducting activities; pair work activities or small group activities. This is to encourage and build students' confidence.

Therefore, relating to the previous research that have same focusing on, the current researcher classified the findings based on the research questions that have been grasped through semi-interviewed, they are;

1) Finding from research question one

What are the sources of ESL students' speaking anxiety when they are asked to speak in English?

For the first research question, there is one theme: cultural environment with six codes emerged from the analysis of 8 respondents: Lack of Confidence, English is not the First Language, Fear of making mistakes, Speak Publicly, Lack of Practice, Spontaneous Tasks

Table 1. The Number of Interview Questions According to Instrument

Research Objective	Number of Interview Questions
To identify the sources of the ESL students' speaking anxiety when they are asked to speak in English	1,2,3,4,5,7

Codes/ Respondents		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Lack of Confidence		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
English is not the First Language		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Fear of making mistakes			✓		✓	✓		✓	✓
Speak Publicly			✓	✓			✓		
Lack of Practice							✓		
Spontaneous Tasks		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓

The main findings of research question one is that the questions are categorized in Foreign Language Anxiety theory: Communication Apprehension, fear of negative evaluation, and Test anxiety. Even though this theory is used for foreign language learners, this study also discovered that this theory can be used for second language learners because learning new languages would cause anxiety for the learners.

The majority of our participants mentioned that they have speaking anxiety due to lack of confidence and spontaneous tasks which 6 out of 8 participants agreed with. Other than that, they lack confidence because they are afraid of making mistakes; grammatical errors, pronunciation, and being evaluated by their peers. We can see that due to different phonological factors and grammar structures, it triggers anxiety in participants. As in the speaking components, phonics and grammar are few of the components that speakers need to develop and master speaking skills. Lack of speaking skills would cause speaking anxiety.

All factors that have been mentioned by the participants are from their environment; they are afraid of evaluation by their peers, teachers, and culture; how they pronounce their words, and the phonological factors. We can see that having a positive environment where the students do not feel threatened or being judged, would help them to reduce their speaking anxiety. Based on the theory, we can see that the factor that could trigger speaking anxiety is Communication Apprehension where students could have a hard time communicating and using the targeted language. There are four possible sources that make students feel anxiety in speaking. They are; Lack of confidence, English is not the first language, Fear of making mistakes, and Speak Publicly.

2) Finding from research question two
What are the strategies that are used by ESL students to overcome speaking anxiety in English class?

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For research question two, there are four themes: Affective Strategy, Behavioral Strategies, Classroom Environment, and Lecturer Supportive Feedback with 13 codes emerged from the analysis of 8 respondents.

Table 3: The Number of Interview Questions According to Instrument

Research Objectives		Number of Interview Questions							
To identify the strategies that are used by ESL students to overcome speaking anxiety in English class.		6,8,9,10,11							
Themes	**Codes/ Respondents**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Affective Strategy	Relaxation		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓
	Self-motivation			✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
	Training			✓			✓		
Behavioral Strategy	Avoidance of eye contact						✓		
	Preparation and practice			✓	✓				
	Using English in social media					✓			
	Watching English movies & listening to English song	✓				✓			✓
Classroom Environment	Lecturer give space and opportunity to students		✓			✓			
	Less anxious in small and comfortable class		✓			✓			
	Two-way communication between students & teacher						✓		
Supportive feedback from lecturer	Understanding student		✓	✓				✓	✓
	The role of teachers	✓		✓	✓	✓			

Technically, each student has their own preferences and learning style that could help to contribute to the improvement of their English language skills. The usage of social media nowadays has helped with the expansion of vocabulary and build their knowledge of the structure of the language. As an example, people nowadays like to watch videos from English speakers on YouTube. Students can observe how the natives speak and how they interact with other people. Exposure to English songs and movies does affect students' performance in using the language. Three out of eight respondents specifically mentioned that this exposure left good impacts on their vocabulary and their confidence level.

In terms of teacher roles, it is crucial for teachers or educators to play their role in helping the students who are affected by these issues. A good educator is someone who is caring and supportive towards the students' learning journey. Students will always need the guidance from the educator and the way the educator exhibits caring gestures will definitely increase students' motivation to learn and reduce their anxiety level.

Hence, the strategies that can be used to minimize the speaking of the students have been classified into 4 categories. The four strategies are inclusive of effective strategy, it includes relaxation, self-motivation, and training. The second is Behavior strategy, it includes avoiding eye contact, preparation, and practice, using English in Social Media, watching English movies, and listening to English Songs and lastly, lecturers give spaces and opportunities to students. The third is Classroom environment, it includes less anxiety in small and comfortable classes and two ways of communication. The fourth is supportive feedback from the lecturer., It can be achieved through understanding the students and the role of teachers.

Conclusion

From the whole research activities in this study, it can be assumed that speaking anxiety, commonly felt by most foreign language learners, is contributed by some factors. It can be from the students and also from teachers. Therefore, to deal with these conditions, both teachers and students need to take part in contributing to what they can do to eliminate the that problems. Since the success of learning activities mostly depends on the communication skills which requiring a lot of effort from both parties to make the learning to be more meaningful.

Recommendation

Few recommendations for further research can be made based on the limitations of the study. It is suggested for the researchers to have more respondents while investigating this study. Future researchers can conduct the next research in this area with a greater number of university students to ensure that more definite results will be obtained. Future researchers should do comparison studies on speaking anxiety in both face-to-face and online classrooms. Future research should take into account more elements that may influence speaking anxiety, such as the class mode. Last but not least, we cannot deny that besides students, teachers as the instructors in the class may be affected with anxiety too. As a result of this, future researchers should also pay attention to the anxiety experienced by teachers, not just from the perspective of the students. This is equally important in order to improve both teaching and learning processes as a whole. Nobody should be left behind as the room for improvement for both sides is always there.

Meanwhile, the implication of this research that focu on the speaking skill is one student's weakness in learning English ca be a proof that it is really common to find that even university students still find challenging to utter their opinion and thoughts by using English. As the result given, the factors that make students feel so are couples. Hence, to minimize those possible problems and to make English speaking be familiar both students and teachers need to take part through applying some possible strategies that have been provided in the research result.

For students:

Students can take relaxation to a certain condition that may make them feel afraid and anxiety. Then, students also can make their own motivation through understand that everything in studying is need a process. Another way to make students keep on the track of

"Improving" training and practicing become the most reasonable strategies of all. As the medium of learning is overwhelming, students can learn through it too. Take examples; watching English movie subtitles or speaking English and for those who love listening to music, they can learn through it. It can be from its lyric and pronunciation. The last but not least, when students are speaking English and they do not feel really okay with that, then avoiding eye contact can be one of the options to make them confident enough.

For teachers:

As a learning coach there are a couple of strategies that can be implemented in learning and especially in improving the Speaking skill of the students based on the result of this research are; The first, all teacher needs to do when they want to make improvements and at the same time want to make students less stressed and anxious in speaking is through giving their students space and opportunity to students. Then, the next one is to understand the student. Understanding does not mean teachers do not give challenges in learning. Understanding means here is that teachers understand that every student has their own learning strategies, styles, weaknesses, and strengths in learning. Therefore, teachers can improve their teaching methods and approach to help their students. Furthermore, another way is through making a small class or group. The number of students in class can give a huge impact on the students' learning outcomes. Especially in speaking. The larger the class is the lesser the chance for students to get involved in any learning activities. Then another way is communication. Generally speaking, Good communication is main the key all relationships and no exception in learning. In this case, two-way communication between teacher and students. Here, teachers can give feedback and motivation towards their students' learning progress individually as a way to appreciate their effort in learning and a way to build good relationships with them.

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