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EFL Speaking Anxiety among Senior High School Students and Policy Recommendations

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Abstract

This report drew on a larger study which was to describe and understand the sources of senior high school students' English language speaking anxiety at senior high schools in Jambi, Indonesia. The purpose of this paper was to report some findings from the qualitative interview data on the sources of senior high school students' English language speaking anxiety at one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia. Data were collected through demographic profiles and semi-structured interviews with senior high school students. The demographic data were analysed descriptively while the interview data were transcribed and analysed line by line to generate and develop codes and themes. An analysis of the interview data revealed that five major themes were related to students' English language speaking anxiety, including (1) low speaking skill due to lack of vocabulary and grammar, (2) fear of negative responses from others, (3) low self-esteem to speak in English, (4) fear of being evaluated by teachers, and (5) cultural influences to speak English due to a more teacher-centred style. Suggestions and policy implications are also discussed.

Keywords: *List a few (3-5) key words here*

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Introduction

This report drew on a larger study which was to describe and understand the sources of senior high school students' English language speaking anxiety at senior high schools in Jambi, Indonesia. The purpose of this paper was to report findings from the qualitative interview data on the sources of senior high school students' English language speaking anxiety at one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia.

As a non-English speaking country, learning English as a foreign language has been a challenging subject for Indonesian students as they learn the complex language merely at school. Regardless of the complexity, English in Indonesia has been part of the Indonesian government policy through the Ministry of Education and Culture. The educational curriculum of Indonesia has been designed to integrate all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and elements of language in English subject at senior high schools. The integration is for the reason that all senior high schools students are expected to be able to reach an informational level in English (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2006). However, even though English has been a compulsory subject at senior high schools, in reality, many senior high schools students cannot speak in English either with their classmates or with their teachers. Many of them are silent in the classroom during the English lessons. This fact is in line with what Young (1990) claimed, "Speaking in the foreign language is often cited by students as their most anxiety-producing experience" (p. 539) and speaking in a foreign language has been in general acknowledged as the most anxiety-provoking skill (Price, 1991; Palacios, 1998). Foreign language speaking anxiety experienced by foreign language learners may contribute to their failure to learn the target language. Anxious foreign language learners are likely to think about evaluations from others and this condition may be worse when they are not able to control their anxiety.

Generally, anxiety is defined as "a state of apprehension, a vague fear" (Scovel, 1978, p. 134) while Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) defined anxiety as "the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system" (p.125). In foreign language contexts, Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) who were one of the pioneers to conduct a study of the sources of foreign language anxiety by developing and constructing the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) defined foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.31). Furthermore, they identified three sources of foreign language anxiety, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Following Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), Young (1990) developed a questionnaire to scrutinize more analytically the sorts of speaking-oriented practices that lead anxiety to language students. Additionally, Young (1991) listed six potential sources of language anxiety, including personal and interpersonal factors, learners' beliefs about language learning, and instructors' beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language tests. The literature indicates that anxiety may bring about difficulties not only in speaking or oral communication but also in the acquisition, retention and production of the target language.

Research into language anxiety in second and foreign languages in general has been done by many scholars such as Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), Young (1991), Price (1991), MacIntyre and Gardner (1994), Kitano (2001), Pappamihel (2002), Batumlu and Erden (2007), Liu (2007), Na (2007), Aydın (2008), Williams and Andrade (2008), and Cui (2011). Additionally, a number of previous studies have documented foreign language speaking anxiety including Young (1990), Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert (1999), Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), Woodrow (2006), Tinjaca and Contreras (2008), Liu and Jackson (2008), Tsiplakides and Keramida (2009), Subaşı (2010), Fang-peng and Dong (2010), Mak (2011), Zhiping and Paramasivam (2013), Yahya (2013), and Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014).

While a growing body of previous studies have addressed language anxiety and foreign language speaking anxiety, not much research, however, specifically explores the sources of senior high school students' anxiety to speak English at senior high schools in Indonesia. This study is an attempt to fill a gap in the foreign language speaking anxiety literature on the Indonesian senior high school students. The purpose of this paper was to report some findings on the sources of senior high school students' anxiety to speak English, particularly on what leads students to be silent in the classroom. One main question that guided this study was: What are the sources or factors of English language speaking anxiety among senior high school students?

Methods

Design of the Study

The purpose of this paper was to report some findings from the qualitative interview data on the sources of senior high school students' anxiety to speak English at one senior high school in Jambi,

Indonesia. Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 33) declared that the aim of doing a qualitative study was historically “to explore, explain, or describe the phenomenon of interest.” A case study is one of the five qualitative traditions (Cresswell, 1998, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Moreover, Merriam (1998) wrote that a qualitative case study was an intensive and holistic description, explanation, and analysis of “a bounded system” (p. 27) or phenomenon such as a person, a program, an institution, a process, a social unit, a group, and a policy. For Cresswell (1998, 2007), the bounded system can be restricted by time and place and the case can be a program, an activity, or individuals. Also, as Merriam (1998) wrote that to explore the area of inquiry that has not been conducted profoundly, an exploratory case study is one of the fitting approaches that can be employed by qualitative investigators. Merriam (1998) further explained that by exploring a previously understudied topic, qualitative investigators have various chances for doing research on relevant issues and aspects as is the case with Indonesian senior high school students’ English speaking anxiety. In this study, we used a case study as our research strategy to help us to describe the sources of English language speaking anxiety encountered by students at one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia.

Research Site, Access, Sampling Procedures, and Participants

As part of a larger study which was to describe and understand the sources of senior high school students’ English language speaking anxiety at senior high schools in Jambi, Indonesia, this paper was to report some findings from the qualitative interview data on the sources of senior high school students’ English language speaking anxiety at one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia. In terms of sampling, in this study, we used purposeful sampling with a convenience case strategy and followed what Cresswell (2007) suggested, “The concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for the study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problems...” (p. 125) and “convenience cases, which represent sites or individuals from which researcher can access and easily collect data” (p. 126). The strategy was chosen as we had there was access to do research and collect data from students at the site as in qualitative inquiry, getting access is very essential in doing and collecting data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Cresswell, 1998, 2007; Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; and Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990).

At the beginning, we planned to recruit 25 senior high school students from the site of the study. Cresswell (2007) wrote that in a qualitative case study, the unit of analysis was related to “studying an event, a program, an activity, more than one individual” (p. 78). However, as in this study every student was entirely volunteered to participate in this study, we were finally able to have 10 participants. The participants were (pseudonyms) **M1** (17 years old and male), **M2** (17 years old and male), **M3** (16 years old and female), **M4** (17 years old and female), **M5** (17 years old and male), **M6** (17 years old and female), **M7** (17 years old and female), **M8** (17 years old and female), **M9** (16 years old and male), and **M10** (17 years old and male). Additionally, to protect the rights of human participants, the researchers also masked the names of the research site through the use of pseudonyms.

Data Collection, Analysis, and Trustworthiness

In this study, data were collected through demographic profiles and semi-structured interview guided by an interview protocol. The data were taken during spring 2014. As it was not easy to interview each participant due to his or her reluctance or limited time, several interviews were conducted. Each interview lasted between 30 and 40 minutes. Also, all participants elected to use Indonesian language during the interview, but readers were provided with English translations.

For the analysis of the data, the demographic data were analyzed descriptively in which every participant’s information was described. Then, the interview data were transcribed and analyzed line by line to generate and develop codes, themes, or categories from all participants. The next step, the data were translated into English and all the English translations of the data were returned to the participants to have their feedback. This article just presents the English version.

To ensure the credibility of the inquiry or the trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mukminin, 2012) of the study or to verify the accuracy of data, findings, and interpretations (Creswell, 1998), the data were shared among us for the analysis. The interview data (either in Indonesian or in English) were returned to all participants to get their feedback.

Findings

This study was intended to report the sources of English language speaking anxiety encountered by students at one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia. The analysis and discussions were organized around participants’ voices, feelings, and thoughts on the sources of English language

speaking anxiety they encountered. An analysis of the interview data revealed that five major themes were related to students' English language speaking anxiety, including (1) low speaking skill due to lack of vocabulary and grammar, (2) fear of negative responses from others, (3) low self-esteem to speak in English, (4) fear of being evaluated by teachers, and (5) cultural influences to speak English due to more teacher-centred style (Table 1).

Table 1. Themes of the sources of students' English language speaking anxiety

No	Themes	Participants (N=10)
1	low speaking skill due to lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge	All
2	Fear of negative responses from others	All
3	Low self-esteem to speak in English	All
4	Fear of being evaluated by teachers	All
5	Cultural influences to speak English due to a more teacher-centered styles	All

Low Speaking Skill Due to Lack of Vocabulary and Grammar Knowledge

Within this theme, the participants of this study reported that they had a low speaking ability in English due to a variety of problems. Mostly, they admitted they lacked vocabulary and grammar knowledge, leading them to be anxious or hesitant to speak English. For example,

I am afraid of making mistakes due to lack of vocabulary. (M1)

The problem that I am facing is particularly I know a little vocabulary. (M2)

What makes me anxious to speak is my lack of vocabulary. (M6)

I am afraid of making mistakes to speak English because I lack vocabulary. (M8)

Additionally, participants declared that they had problems in grammar, particularly in the arrangement of words in correct order. It indicated that English structures had become barriers for participants in improving their speaking skill. For instance,

I have some difficulties in English grammar, in response to the meaning I a little bit understand. But when I am requested to speak spontaneously I get difficulties to arrange words. It is quite difficult. (M3)

A lot of mistakes that I make in speaking English, sometimes I know the meaning but the grammar and pronunciation of the words become the problem. So that is why I become anxious and doubtful to speak. (M5)

It can be seen from the statements that due to students' lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, they faced speaking anxiety in English both inside and outside the classroom. Their problems stemmed from lack of vocabulary, grammar, and wrong pronunciations, which prevented them from communicating in English.

Fear of Negative Responses from Others

The participants in this study voiced fear of negative responses from others as an important source of anxiety about speaking in English. Participants reported that they were mocked once they tried to communicate in English with their friends or teachers inside or outside the classroom. This bad atmosphere made the participants anxious about using English. They reported,

When I tried to speak in English, many friends of mine mocked and teased me and I was like an object of fun. (M2)

I am afraid of making mistakes. I feel embarrassed once my mistake is noticed then I am mocked by my friends. (M8)

I do not dare yet to use English because my friends like mocking and it makes me down. (M10)

The fear of negative responses from others was one of the causes that made participants not want to speak English. Mocking was the specific reason why they were nervous in speaking English. Owing to mockery, they did not dare to speak English. Teasing not only made them worried but also decreased their motivation to speak English.

Low Self-Esteem to Speak English

The next factor influencing participants not to speak in English is their low self-esteem. In this theme, the participants' motivation in speaking English would be decreased if they were judged as superior people on account of using English with their friends. For instance,

When I speak English but I am considered overacted by others. So, I had better not speak in English. (M5)

If I speak English, people will think that I am going to show my superiority in English. (M7)

Unfortunately, too anxious, I cannot speak English to anyone; I am embarrassed to be mocked. (M4)

The data indicated that students who spoke in English were regarded to pretend to be superior by their own mates. Moreover, initiating to speak English was still judged as "showing off". This negative association demotivated them to speak in English and let students have low self-esteem to speak in English during the lesson or outside the classroom

Fear of Being Evaluated by Teachers

The teacher has an important role in the classroom. The teacher holds the power in arranging the classroom. In other words, students enjoy a subject or not, or is successful or not in a subject depends on the teacher. So, teacher's behavior in the classroom is very important. However, one of the sources of anxiety shared by students in classroom is fear of failure to speak English to teachers. Participants reflected that their English was not as good as their teacher. The participants were shy about their mistakes in speaking English were especially when noticed or evaluated by their teacher. For example,

I am afraid of speaking in English as my English teacher is more competent in English. ...I am afraid of being evaluated by the teacher. (M4)

I feel reluctant and... not dare to speak English in the classroom...making mistakes in front of the class will be embarrassing. (M10)

My English teacher is more knowledgeable so I am anxious to speak English with him. (M7)

Those statements showed that the students were afraid of speaking English to the teacher because they were afraid of making mistakes in their conversation. In addition, they thought that their English teacher was perfect and superior in English. This kind of feeling makes participants afraid of being evaluated by their teacher when they make mistakes in speaking English inside the classroom.

Cultural Influences to Speak English Due to a More Teacher-Centred Style

Culture can have a big effect on a learning process, especially, learning a foreign language. In this theme, the participants of this study reported that in their school, the culture of learning focusing more on a teacher-centred style influenced their ability to speak English as teachers were more dominant in the classroom. They reported,

I will speak in English when the teacher asks me to speak up. (M1)

I do not want to speak first, but once the teacher gives me a chance I will take it. (M2)

In my mind, teacher should guide me to speak, not me being the first. (M3)

I am just waiting for a question from teacher, if not, I will just keep silent. (M4)

This is what I always do in the English language lesson, for instance, before the teacher asks me to speak, I will not do it. (M5)

You know in the classroom, I do not dare to initiate speaking in English, I let the teacher or others be the first. (M6)

I always wait for being chosen by the teacher, then I speak or do what the teacher asks as I am afraid of misunderstanding the order from the teacher. (M7)

In learning English, I want to be ordered first; I am brave enough to initiate speaking first. (M9)

I am not brave to initiate speaking before the others do first.
(M10)

The data above indicated that due to the culture of a teacher-centered style in learning English, participants did not have enough courage to initiate communication in English in the classroom. This might be caused by the dominance of the teacher in teaching and learning English. Without any stimulus from the teacher, they would not speak English; preferring to be silent in the English class.

Discussion

The English language policy in Indonesia makes it clear that English is a compulsory subject at junior and senior high schools across the country. With this policy, the English language in Indonesia requires schools, teachers, parents, and students to facilitate students to learn to communicate (speaking) in English. How has the policy been implemented at the classroom level? What do students face and experience in the target language classroom, particularly in English language speaking? This current study found the sources of English language speaking anxiety encountered by senior high school students, which were described and interpreted from participants' personal reflections and perspectives. The findings of this study shed light on understanding of the sources of English language speaking anxiety in a non-English speaking country and described what aspects of English language speaking anxiety are being unnoticed. From the perspective of Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), foreign language anxiety as "a distinct complex of self-perception, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (p.31). Furthermore, they categorized three sources of foreign language anxiety, including communication apprehension, test anxiety, and fear of negative evaluation. Young (1991) identified six potential sources of language anxiety, including personal and interpersonal factors, learners' beliefs about language learning, instructors' beliefs about language teaching, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and language tests. In this study, regardless of the participants' characteristics, we found five major and interwoven themes related to students' English language speaking anxiety, including 1) low speaking skill due to lack of vocabulary and grammar, (2) fear of negative responses from others, (3) low self-esteem to speak in English, (4) fear of being evaluated by teachers, and (5) cultural influences to speak English due to a more teacher-centred style.

Among the sources of students' English language speaking anxiety, low speaking skill due to lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge was reported by participants as one of the reasons why they were not only quiet in the classroom, but also they might never speak English outside the classroom with their teachers and friends. Lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge is much related to personal factors of the participants (Young, 1991; Subaşı, 2010; Tianjian, 2010). Also, the finding of the study is consistent with what Liu (2007) found that lack of vocabulary, low English proficiency and memory disassociation were the sources leading to English language speaking anxiety.

Additionally, participants in this study reported that two influential sources of English language speaking anxiety much resulted from the fear of negative responses from others and fear of being evaluated by their teachers. These findings are consistent with the findings of previous studies which found fear of negative evaluation from others as one of the strong and major sources of language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Young, 1991; Aydın, 1999; Kitano, 2001; Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002; Woodrow, 2006; Liu, 2007; Williams, & Andrade, 2008; Aydın, 2008; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; Subaşı, 2010; Mak, 2011; Yahya, 2013; Zhiping & Paramasivam, 2013; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014). Fear of negative evaluation from others has resulted in participants in this study being anxious to speak English inside and outside the classroom. Particularly, they did not want to speak English because they would be mocked or teased by their own classmates.

Another influential source of English language speaking anxiety reported by the participants in this study was "Low self-esteem to speak English". This result is consistent with what other previous researchers (Young, 1991; Mac Intyre & Gardner, 1994; Cheng, Horwitz, & Schallert, 1999; Kitano, 2001; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Tsiplakides & Keramida, 2009; Fang-peng & Dong, 2010; Mak, 2011; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2014) found although they did not particularly use the same phrases. For example, Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert (1999) found that low self-confidence seemed to be an important component of English language speaking anxiety while Öztürk and Gürbüz (2014) found fear of making mistakes was an influential source of speaking anxiety. In this study, the participants seemed to underestimate their own ability and they perceived that they would be mocked or criticised in their foreign language learning classroom. Also, they perceived that they were less competent than other students in their classroom and that speaking English was viewed something beyond their capability to learn

However, unlike the findings of the previously mentioned studies, one of the findings in this study revealed that cultural influences to speak English due to a more teacher-centred style was another major source of speaking anxiety in English that blocked participants from using English inside and outside the classroom. In fact, all participants were afraid of talking to the teachers because they were afraid of making mistakes in the conversation. Participants had over assumption toward the teacher's English ability. In this case, culture has a big effect on a learning process and could make students quiet in the classroom. In this study, the teacher seemed to dominate in the English class leading participants to feel reluctant to speak English with the teacher.

The five major themes related to Indonesian senior high school students' English language speaking anxiety found in this study are much intertwined with each other. Each factor has its own role for every participant in this study. The five sources of English language speaking anxiety indicate that learning to speak English in Indonesia as a non-English speaking country requires the awareness of the teachers with regard to the existence of anxiety among EFL learners. With this, teachers can learn to provide a friendly, encouraging and motivating classroom environment for the learner and so raise up their self-confidence with the knowledge that mistakes are common in learning a foreign language and every learner experiences the same thing.

Limitations

As part of the larger study, the findings of the qualitative study should be considered in the light of several potential limitations. First, the participants were solely limited to ten senior high school students at one public senior high school in Jambi City, Indonesia. Participants may not be representative of all Indonesian senior high school students. So, generalization of the findings should be cautious. Second, although in this study, data from interviews were presented and biases in analyzing data were considered perceptions might uniquely influence the interpretations of the data. This was countered through member checking to establish trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Owing to several reasons (e.g. participant's time and willingness), a more prolonged process of interaction with the participants and the conduct of multiple interviews could not be done over a longer period of time. Such a limitation may result in lack of the depth of data gathered from the participants. Finally, these findings also may be limited because we analyzed of the condition of the data by combining male and female students from different backgrounds, which may have prevented from having some unique culture-specific issues associated with each participant's English language speaking anxiety.

Conclusions and Policy Recommendations

Living and studying in a non-English speaking country, it was not easy to decide what sources led Indonesian students to be silent in English language lessons and what factors acted bigger roles than others in the students' English language speaking anxiety as all of the factors seemed to be complexly interlinked. While inferences are restricted by the small sample size, the findings of this study contribute to the understanding of the sources of English language speaking anxiety experienced by Indonesian senior high school students and describe what should be done by schools, educators, teachers, parents, and students related to English language speaking anxiety. The five major themes related to Indonesian senior high school students' English language speaking anxiety that was found in this study have a quantity of implications either for Indonesian teachers of English or for non-Indonesian teachers of language. Additionally, the findings of the study have implications not only for teacher language education program but also for secondary language education programs.

To deal with the sources of English language speaking anxiety experienced by Indonesian senior high school students, educational policymakers, schools, and teachers should promote more encouraging speaking classrooms, facilitating and making students feel relaxed, motivated and confident. Teachers should facilitative students' speaking by providing various teaching methods, approaches, strategies, and techniques.

Teachers should also be aware of students' apprehension when they speak and make mistakes in front of their classmates. Teachers should be aware that students are sensitive evaluation by their peers and teachers. Language classrooms should be more non-threatening and non-anxiety-provoking environment. More importantly, to help students succeed in speaking English; teacher-centred style should be minimized in the language classroom. Students should be given more opportunities for practicing their target language.

For policymakers, schools and teachers should be provided with facilities and continuous trainings as learning English as a foreign language in a non-English speaking country requires more continuous efforts. Learners come to the school with a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds and schools and teachers should be provided with up-date methods, approaches, strategies, and techniques for teaching various and unique students.

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