A STUDY ON SECOND LANGUAGE SPEAKING ANXIETY AMONG UTM STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT : A study was carried out to determine the perceptions of University Technology Malaysia students towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when speaking in the second language. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to investigate students' anxiety level towards speaking English as a second language and to identify the types of speaking activities that caused high anxiety level among the students. Communication apprehension, fear of negative evaluation and general feeling of anxiety were among the factors studied in the research. The instrument used for the study was adapted from Horwitz's (1983) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). The questionnaire consists of 32 items, each one on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS version 10.0 Windows and were represented in the form of descriptive statistics which include percentages and mean. Results from the study show that students experienced moderate level of anxiety.

ABSTRAK : Kajian ini telah dijalankan untuk mengetahui persepsi para pelajar Universiti Teknologi Malaysia terhadap keresahan yang dialami oleh mereka apabila bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Secara khususnya, objektif kajian ini ialah mengenalpasti tahap keresahan para pelajar dan mengenalpasti jenis–jenis aktiviti komunikasi di dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris yang menyumbang kepada tahap keresahan yang tinggi di kalangan para pelajar. Antara faktor-faktor tahap keresahan yang dikaji ialah kebimbangan berkomunikasi, perasaan takut terhadap penilaian negatif dan perasaan umum terhadap tahap keresahan. Instrumen kajian yang diguna bagi mendapatkan maklumat daripada para pelajar ialah pengedaran borang soal selidik yang diadaptasi daripada Horwitz (1983) Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS). Borang selidik tersebut mengandungi 32 item dan responden diajukan dengan soalan berskala Likert melalui lima pilihan jawapan mengikut susunan 'sangat setuju' sehingga 'sangat tidak setuju'. Data-data yang diperolehi dalam kajian ini telah dianalisis dengan menggunakan perisian Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) versi 10.0. Keputusan kajian ini dipersembahkan dalam bentuk analisis deskriptif menggunakan taburan kekerapan dan nilai min. Hasil kajian ini mendapati para pelajar mengalami tahap keresahan yang sederhana apabila berkomunikasi di dalam bahasa kedua.

Katakunci : *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), fear of negative evaluation , Communication apprehension, general feeling of anxiety.*

INTRODUCTION

English is the language of international communication and it is widely used in Malaysia. It is anticipated that with the trend of globalization, this country will face more stiff competition from other foreign countries. Thus, Malaysian students should be well equipped with a solid education foundation and in training to remain competitive; including the ability to communicate in English. As a second most important language in Malaysia, English is extensively used in

education system from the primary up to tertiary level. It is also widely used in various professions such as the medical, engineering, legal and business. Therefore, it is very crucial for Malaysian students to be proficient in English so that they can use the language efficiently for academic purposes and later in professional setting.

Students who are proficient in English will have better chances to be employed by multinational companies after they have graduated. It is because the employers do not simply look at their excellent academic results but also their proficiency in the second language. Companies nowadays do not only select the best graduates who can deliver technical skills but also those that possess soft skills. These soft skills include the ability to communicate in English effectively. In fact, even job interviews are now conducted in English. Thus, confidence in speaking is very important to graduates because it can prove that they are the suitable candidate for the job.

In a nutshell, English becomes the second most important language to the students. It is because they need to master the language in order to excel in their study and to prepare them for the competitive job market. They have to compete with other graduates who not only have good academic qualifications but also good communication skills in English. Employers will choose the best candidates who are proficient in English to meet the demands of globalization.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

UTM students need to use English extensively for their academic purposes. Most of the academic books are in English and some of the subjects are taught in English. Moreover, the use of English as the medium of instruction in class, require students to be proficient in the second language. Despite having learned English for 11 years in schools, students still have difficulty to use the language effectively.

Most of students have problem in speaking the second language especially in the English class. It can be more stressful when they are expected to speak in the second language before the fluency is achieved. Krashen, who was interviewed by Young (1992) stated that speaking can cause high anxiety level and the reason for this is that teachers often expect beginners to perform beyond their acquire competence. In early stages, the teacher force learners to break the silent period before they are ready and they have to use aspects of language that they have not yet subconsciously acquired. As a result, learners will show poor speaking performance because they are not competent in using the target language.

A student who believes that one must never say anything in English until it can be said correctly will probably avoid speaking most of the time. Indeed, some learners prefer to keep quiet during English lesson because they are reluctant to speak in English. Anxious learners tend to think about negative evaluations from other people and the situation becomes worse if they cannot control their anxiety. In order to overcome this problem, teachers should make learning context less stressful for students and use suitable teaching methods that can help learners to minimize their anxiety feelings in second language classroom.

Every learner has his or her own experience in anxiety especially in language learning. Teacher should help learners to cope with anxiety because it can prevent them to perform well in the second language. Thus in this study, the researcher wants to determine students' perceptions towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when learning the second language and to investigate student's anxiety levels towards speaking English as a second language. In addition, this study also intends to identify the type of activities that can cause high anxiety level in speaking.

OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

The objectives of this study are:
(i) to determine students' perceptions towards the feeling of anxiety they experienced when learning the second language.
(ii) to investigate students' anxiety level towards speaking English as a second language.
(iii) to identify the types of speaking activities that can cause high anxiety among the students.

SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

From this study, educators especially lecturers in UTM and other higher learning institutions will get useful information about student's anxiety level in speaking English as a second language. The information will help them to design effective teaching methods that can help to reduce language anxiety and to create less stressful learning atmosphere.

The findings from this research also can be used to help students to find suitable strategies to overcome their anxiety problem. It is very important to ensure that they can perform well in English so that they will have competency in the second language.

SCOPE OF STUDY

The study on second language speaking anxiety focuses on first year students of UTM. They are chosen from two different faculties which are Faculty of Chemical and Natural Resources Engineering (FKKKSA) and Faculty of Geoinformation Science and Engineering (FKSG). The students are selected to be the respondents for this study during the English Language Communication Workshop. The workshop is organized specifically for first year UTM undergraduates to provide them with training in group interaction skills and basic oral presentation skills. This workshop aims to enhance students' confidence in communicating in English as well as enrich their vocabulary in English through a variety of interactive activities. Questionnaire was distributed randomly to the students in order to collect data for this research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research procedure
Before the actual data collection period, a pilot study was conducted to test validity of the questionnaire as well as to get feedbacks and suggestions from the respondents.

Respondents of the study

The study was conducted on first year UTM students from two different faculties which are Faculty of Chemical and Natural Resources Engineering (FKKKSA) and Faculty of Geoinformation Science and Engineering (FKSG). There were a total of 60 respondents involved in this study. Thirty-two were female students while another 28 students were male.

The students were selected by their faculties to participate in the English Language Communication Workshop for First Year Students. The workshop was organized by English Language Support Programme (ELSP) and the aims were to enhance the students' confidence in communicating in English as well as enrich their vocabulary in English through a variety of interactive activities.

Research Instruments
For the purpose of this study, a set of questionnaire was adapted from the Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) by Horwitz (1983). The FLCAS was developed by Horwitz in order to examine the scope and severity of foreign language anxiety. The items that are presented in the FLCAS are reflective of communicative apprehension, test anxiety and fear of negative evaluation.

However, in this study, the researcher adapted the questions based on the items of negative evaluation, communication apprehension and general feeling of anxiety. It is because the items are related with speaking anxiety as a second language. The questionnaire consisted of 32 items, each on a 5-point scale ranging according to Strongly Agree (scale point 5), Agree (scale point 4), Neither Agree or Disagree (scale point 3), Disagree (scale point 2) and lastly Strongly Disagree (scale point 1).

FINDINGS

SPM English Language Result : 10 (16.7%) participants obtained A1 and 11(18.3%) participants achieved A2 which are considered as excellent in the SPM English paper. 15 participants (25%) scored B3 followed by 16 (26.7%) participants for B4. These showed us that there were 21 respondents possessed good English proficiency. There were a total of 8 participants who scored C5 and C6 in their SPM English paper. Lastly, from the 60 respondents none of them failed the SPM English paper.

MUET Band : 15 (25%) participants achieved Band 2 for MUET which is considered poor. This is followed by band 3 with 45 (75%) participants. The findings tell us that most of the respondents were not equipped with good English language proficiency when they entered the university.

58 respondents (96.7%) experienced a moderate level of anxiety towards speaking English as the second language and only 2 respondents (3.3%) who experienced low anxiety level. These findings suggest that a majority of students experienced moderate feelings of anxiety when communicating in English with other people. In the real language use situation, it is normal for second language learners to feel some anxiety. As stated by Hadley (1992), moderate feelings of anxiety in second language learning might help students to create the desire to learn, to motivate and to get the students realize that they have to work harder in order to acquire the target

language. On the other hand, if students experience low level of anxiety, they may be so relaxed that they do not really learn or acquire any new things and as a result, the process of language acquisition will not be successful. For students who experience high anxiety, they may perceive a second language learning situation as threatening to them and may respond to this threatening situation by showing poor learning performance. The view that anxiety can affect learner's learning performance is supported by MacIntyre and Gardner (1989) who found that students with high communicative anxiety tended to have lower scores on oral and written vocabulary tests. The results presented in their research tend to indicate that anxiety might lead to deficit in learning and performance.

DISCUSSION ON FINDINGS

For the purpose of this study, the researcher has identified the students' anxiety levels according to the three factors of second language anxiety. They are Communication Apprehension, Fear of Negative Evaluation and General Feeling of Anxiety.

Based on the analysis of Communication Apprehension factor, the findings show that majority of the students who took part in the study experienced moderate level of anxiety or nervousness when communicating with other people especially in English class. In other words, the respondents seem to have confidence to speak in the second language and there are several possible explanations for this result. First, the students might have exposure in speaking in English because they were the participants of the English Language Communication Workshop. Probably, participation of the students in communicative activities held by the workshop helped to build their confidence in communicating in the second language. Second, the students might feel comfortable to speak in English with their friends because they have same level of proficiency. Most of the respondents achieved Band 2 and Band 3 in their MUET exam and the results show that they are weak in English.

However, there are a number of of students who thought that they feel nervous when they have to speak without preparation and felt very conscious about speaking in English in front of other students. The results of this study seemed to confirm the findings of a study by McCroskey (1997) who found that majority of people experience communication apprehension when speaking to a group of people in a formal setting.

Another reason that might contribute to higher anxiety level is oral performance. According to Hadley (1992) most of students experienced performance anxiety when they need to perform in front of the class. When they feel nervous they may hesitate or stumble or simply look uncomfortable and become silent. In other words, anxious students feel a deep self-consciousness when asked to risk revealing themselves by speaking the second language in the presence of other people.

Finally, based on the findings, the students also felt overwhelmed by the number of rules that they have to learn to speak in English. A possible explanation for this might be that the focus of learning activity is on form rather than the overall meaning. This means that if language teacher only focuses on the grammatical structures or linguistic features in class, students will feel

unmotivated to learn the target language. Students should be exposed to the correct use of language so that they can apply the knowledge in appropriate context.

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