

## **Factors that contribute to the learners' speaking problem**

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English language in schools has been one of the concerns in the country where it is used widely as a second language. The declining standard of English among school children and the younger citizens, in general is a worrying state. It is important to study the contributing variables to speaking problem. Fauziah Hassan & Nita Fauzee Selamat (2002) stated that the school system in Malaysia focuses in developing reading and writing skills compared to listening and speaking skills. They believed that the teaching and learning is towards the examination oriented. Based on the survey that they have conducted, the main factor contributing to the low proficiency of English among learners is limited opportunity to use English outside the classroom. This is followed by learners' negative attitude towards English, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, insufficient exposure to English, imbalanced in the focus of language, skills, ineffective syllabus, inadequate teaching material, ineffective teaching methodology and lack of time to study.

Another case study by Pillay (1995) states that rural students have the tendency to underperform compared to the urban students. One of the reasons is caused by the low socio-economic status of the rural students and less exposure to English outside the classroom. Urban students who come from the higher economic status have greater exposure to English outside the classroom, thus possess a higher level of competence. The gap is due to their attitude and the environment which the students are exposed to. The rural students come from the low socio-economic status and are exposed to a limited number of materials in English. Thus, they possess a lower level of competence compared to the urban students who are exposed to a variety of material in English. Besides that, Chang and Shu (2000) believe that there is a positive relationship between the learning environment and students' motivation. Students' motivation is largely affected by their affective filters. According to the affective filter hypothesis (Lightbrown & Spada, 1999), certain emotions such as anxiety, self-doubt and boredom interfere with the process of acquiring the second language. They function as a filter that reduces the amount of language input that a student is able to understand. These negative emotions prevent efficient processing of the language input. Students learning in rural schools are bound to face a higher affective filter compared to the students learning in urban schools.

Another study by Ju Lin & Warden (1998) showed that most of the students had either fear or unpleasant feelings about their past English learning experiences. Part of that experience included physical punishment dished out by teachers and insulting comments from classmates or friends and even parents due to poor performance in examinations. Fear to speak could also be related to fear of making errors and losing face while in classroom oral communication.

It is important to learn more about the causes of speaking anxiety so that learners know how to overcome this. In a seminar Laskowski (1996) admitted over 41% of people have some fear or anxiety dealing with speaking in front of a group. Fear envelops in many forms such as fear of rejection, social judgement, speech anxiety and negative experiences. Fear of rejection is a common cause of public speaking anxiety. Individuals may fear that people may not pay attention to what they have to say or that their speech will not be welcomed. When individuals are about to speak in public, they have a fear that their ideas may be disregarded. Another cause of speaking anxiety is negative social judgment. This happens when an individual is focused on how one will be accepted by the audience as an individual. This makes the person to care less about getting the message across but more on how people will view them as an individual. The individual may be embarrass and shun from speaking. Speech anxiety happens when individuals feel anxious about their way of speaking, worrying that they may stutter or forget their speech. Speech anxiety involves any negative instances in speaking that may occur pertaining to the individual's deliverance of his speech. Finally, people who have had negative experiences in public speaking are likely to experience anxiety causing him to feel hesitant in speaking again in public.

Another cause contributing to the low proficiency of the students is they are not utilizing the facilities provided which are mostly in English (Rosli and Malachi, 1990). For example, although almost every school has access to technology such as internet, students are not motivated to use it because of the wide use of English medium as instruction. At home, wide use of mother tongue and watching English programmes with subtitles do not help them to improve their communication. Besides, students find the materials in English medium difficult to comprehend, thus hampering them from using it. According to Brown (2000) some foreign language teachers intentionally carry a strong foreign accent in their speech and teaching manners to assert their national identity. The teacher could not handle standard

English appropriately and sufficiently. It is a fact that identity crisis is detrimental to second language learning and its motivation. To minimize this crisis and unblock the way of assimilation to the target culture is by proposing a combination of instrumental-integrative motivation.

Norris (2001) agreed that structured exams, schools and instructors are forced to educate students in a manner which are geared towards sitting for examinations. These exams are a rigorous test of grammatical understanding of the English language, with students being required to translate complex passages and have knowledge of extensive vocabulary and grammatical structures. The focus of the exams is not directed toward the speaking and listening skills of students. For this reason schools see no need to prepare students for something which will not be examined.