

A STUDENTS' RELUCTANCE TO SPEAK ENGLISH AT SEVENTH SEMESTER STUDENTS OF ENGLISH STUDY PROGRAM AT UNIVERSITY OF PASIR PENGARAIAN

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the factors contributing to the reluctance of seventh-semester students in the English Study Program at the University of Pasir Pengaraian to speak English. This study employed a descriptive qualitative method. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with 16 students who demonstrated a high tendency of reluctance in speaking English. The questionnaire was developed using a Likert scale and covered five main aspects: lack of confidence, shyness, anxiety, lack of motivation, and fear of making mistakes. Interviews were conducted to support and clarify the quantitative findings. The results revealed that most students experience psychological and linguistic barriers that affect their confidence in speaking. The most dominant factors include fear of making mistakes, concern over negative judgment from classmates, and limited vocabulary and pronunciation skills. These findings indicate the necessity for more supportive and interactive teaching approaches that foster speaking confidence. This research is expected to contribute to the development of more effective English language teaching strategies and serve as a reference for future researchers in examining speaking reluctance in the context of higher education.

Keywords: : speaking reluctance, English language, language anxiety, students, psychological factors

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the four essential language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing that are crucial for communication in any language. Among them, speaking is often regarded as the most challenging yet most important skill to master, especially in a foreign language

learning context. According to Nunan (2003), speaking is the productive oral skill that involves producing systematic verbal utterances to convey meaning.

For students majoring in English, speaking is not only a requirement but also a reflection of their overall language

competence. Brown (2004) notes that speaking is a productive skill that can be directly observed and measured through performance, making it a critical indicator of students' proficiency. Furthermore, it serves as a foundation for daily interactions, classroom participation, and professional communication in the future.

Despite its significance, speaking remains one of the most difficult skills for students to develop. Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners experience psychological and linguistic barriers that hinder their speaking performance. Boonkit (2010) points out that speaking requires not just language knowledge but also the ability to use it fluently under pressure, which often leads to stress and reluctance among learners.

One of the most common challenges faced by students is the reluctance to speak English, even after years of formal instruction. This reluctance is often attributed to factors such as lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, shyness, and anxiety (Harmer, 2001; Jenkins, 2007). These psychological factors create a learning environment where students are more likely to stay silent than to risk speaking up and making errors.

Reluctance can also be influenced by linguistic factors such as limited

vocabulary, weak grammar, and poor pronunciation. When students feel that their language skills are inadequate, they tend to withdraw from speaking tasks, even in informal settings. According to Leong & Ahmadi (2017), students' unwillingness to participate in speaking activities often stems from a perceived lack of language competence, which reduces their confidence and motivation.

Furthermore, the classroom atmosphere can play a significant role in students' willingness to speak. If students feel judged or corrected harshly by peers or teachers, they may develop a fear of speaking. Horwitz et al. (1986) explained that language anxiety is a real psychological barrier that can negatively impact student participation and performance in oral activities.

At the University of Pasir Pengaraian, particularly among seventh-semester students of the English Study Program, the researcher observed a recurring pattern of reluctance to speak English. These students, despite being in an advanced stage of their academic journey, still exhibited low participation in English speaking tasks and classroom discussions. This observation indicates a persistent and unresolved issue in their speaking development.

Given that speaking is a fundamental goal of language learning, this phenomenon raises important questions: Why are students still reluctant to speak English despite years of instruction? What specific factors contribute to their hesitation? Understanding these questions is essential to improving the effectiveness of speaking instruction in EFL contexts.

The issue of speaking reluctance is not only relevant for academic success but also for future career development. English graduates are expected to be confident speakers who can communicate effectively in both local and international settings. If reluctance to speak persists, it could limit students' academic growth and

professional opportunities. Therefore, it is important to investigate the underlying causes of this issue in order to find meaningful solutions.

This research, entitled "Students' Reluctance to Speak English at Seventh Semester Students of English Study Program at University of Pasir Pengaraian," aims to explore the psychological and linguistic factors that contribute to students' reluctance to speak English. By identifying the main reasons behind this reluctance, the study seeks to inform educators on how to better support students and create a more encouraging learning environment that fosters speaking confidence and competence.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES

English as international language has four common skill to learn, they are listening, speaking, reading and writing. For students in language class speaking is the most important skill for English language learning. By oral speaking, the teacher measures the level of their ability and understanding. Oral speaking is the part due to in language class (Harmer, 2001). The statement has been supported by Aydogan (2014), argues that Speaking is the productive skill in the oral mode. It like the other skills is more complicated than it

seems at first and involves more than just pronouncing words.

Speaking is one of the macro skills of English language teaching and learning. It is not easy to define what is mean by terms such as speaking skill since it has been defined in various ways in different disciplines. The statement has been supported by Boonkit (2010), argues that speaking is one of the macro skills necessary for effective communication in any language particularly when speakers are not using their mother tongue.

Reluctance as adjective word in language, reluctance is unwilling to speak in English. Reluctance to speak is one of the reasons why the students shy to speaking English. According to Jenkins (2007:15), reluctance means reticence to speak up or come forward silence and reserve. The theory explain that reluctance is retience to speak up. Therefore, the students to be silence and not active in learning English especially in speaking activities. Thus, it can be hindered the students to participate in classroom interaction.

Reluctance students have received the message over time that the students are poor students. As a result, the students feel frustrated, inadequate, confused, or even ashamed (Hebb, 2000). The statement is also supported by Harmer (2001:345), students are often reluctant to speak because they are shy and predisposed to expressing themselves in front of other people, especially when they are being asked to give personal information or opinions. The theory explains that reluctance is reticence to speak up. Therefore, the students to be silent and not active in learning English, especially in speaking activities.

Reluctance means reticence here belongs to the category of foreign language anxiety,

which stands for the feeling of uneasiness, worry, nervousness and apprehension experienced by non-native speakers when learning or using a second or foreign language (Li & Liu, 2011). Reticence is a communication problem with cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions and is due to the belief that one is better off remaining silent than risking appearing foolish (Keaten & Kelly, 2000).

Hornby, (2000) means hesitating before doing something because the students do not want to do it or because they are not sure that it is the right thing to do. Reluctance is a noun means as hesitancy, hesitation, disinclination, and indisposition. It also means the quality or state of being idleness. Furthermore, according to Longman dictionary of contemporary English (1987), the term of Reluctance is identified as unwilling, and perhaps slow to act. From explanation above students' reluctance means that the hesitation of person who is studying at a school in learning because of some reasons. One of the reasons is the student are not sure to learn.

Hafsah (2017) said that reluctance is the students" condition or feeling of unwillingness to speak English due to psychological constructed, other factors in

individuals in the classroom and the quality of being reluctant or inactiveness of the student. Student reluctance to use English in class may stem from various reasons, including internal challenges and peer influences. Another factor complicating communication is emotional state. Reluctance is a potential contributor to student inactivity (Burgoon, cited in Ningrum et al.). When students hesitate to participate, they merely sit and listen until bored. Reluctance refers to struggling speakers (Burgoon, cited in Ningrum et al.). Communication apprehension is one reason students struggle to communicate in English. In this context, students hesitate to utilize their limited English skills due to multiple factors.

The reasons of reluctant that come from the individual self or what the students feel when they are speaking English. According to some theorist, there are some identified reasons for reluctant such as lack of confidence, shyness, anxiety, lack of motivation, fear of mistake, lack of vocabulary, lack of confidence and lack of preparation.

Researcher found that many students struggle to speak English due to discomfort

with evaluation. Students fear judgment, worrying about making mistakes. This anxiety leads to reluctance, causing them to remain silent. Some students are hesitant to use English publicly, fearing errors. Others avoid speaking English in class due to embarrassment over peer correction (Dorney, 2005). The learning process occurs, but students feel uneasy about correction, perceiving mistakes as failures due to shame.

In this research, the researcher analysed the students' reluctance in speaking at Seventh Semester in English Department of Pasir Pengaraian founding the problems were experienced by students when learning to speak English. Most problems that make students were reluctant to speak English was identified in the two different aspects namely linguistic problems and non-linguistic problems. Linguistic problems are problems that make students speaking skills poor such as lack of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. Meanwhile, non-linguistic problems or psychological problems are the problem encountered by students related with their feeling in doing speaking practise such as lack of confidence, anxiety, and shyness.

METHODS

This research is a descriptive qualitative research. According to sugiyono (2013:2) scientific way to get data with a specific purpose. Meanwhile, the model of research design used in this research is qualitative. This Research is conduct at English Department in University of Pasir Pengaraian. The researcher is conducting this research towards the Seventh Semester of English Study Program. In collecting the data, researcher using questionnaire and interview. After collecting data through questionnaire and interview the data will analysed to draw the conclusion. The analysis of each instrument was elaborated.

Data from questionnaire are collect to determine reasons of students' reluctance in speaking English. In utilized Likert scale which ranged from 5 to 1 and make in the form of checklist (√).

This section describes the research approach used, respondents involved in the study, if any, which should be kept confidential, instruments, procedures of collecting the data, and ways of analyzing the data. The blueprint of the instrument may be provided if necessary. Commonly used statistical formula should not be putting this section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Indicator Variable 1 (Students Reluctance)

Table 1. Analysis of Indicator from Variable 1

NO	Indicators	Level of agreement based on the Likert scale				
		SA	A	U	D	SD
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English.		43,75%			
2	I feel my English language is not good.			43,75%		
3	I think that keeps me silent is my poor English proficiency.		37,5%			
4	I talk less because I am shy.		50%			
5	I am afraid of being seen foolish if I make too many mistakes when I speak English.		50%			

6	I am afraid of making mistakes in speaking English in front of my classmates	50%			
7	I am afraid others will laugh at me if I make some mistakes in speaking in English.	50%			
8	I get tense and nervous when I am speaking English.	50%			
9	I feel my heart pounding when I am called upon to answer a question in English.	43,75			
10	I feel more anxiety in speaking English because my friends always correct me in very bad day.	75%			
11.	I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation.	50%			
12..	I feel unmotivated in speaking English because I have lack of speaking ability.	50%			
13.	I am not motivated in speaking English because I have lack of speaking ability.	75%			
14.	I fee unmotivated to improve myself confidence in using English.	62,5%			
	$\frac{Skor \% = \text{Jumlah skor variable 1}}{16} = \text{Jumlah}$	$\frac{656,6}{16} = 41,03$			

Based on table 1 above present an analysis of indicators from Variable 1, which refers to students' reluctance in speaking English. This analysis is based on data collected using a Likert scale that includes five levels of agreement: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The data reflects student responses to 14 statements that represent various psychological factors contributing to their reluctance to speak English, such as anxiety, shyness, fear of

negative evaluation, lack of motivation, and low self-confidence.

According to the data, a significant number of students experience high levels of psychological barriers. A total of 43.75% of students strongly agreed that they do not feel confident when speaking English, and the same percentage also strongly agreed that they believe their English proficiency is poor. Furthermore, 37.5% strongly agreed that their low English ability prevents them from speaking, while 50% strongly agreed with several statements

indicating emotional discomfort: they speak less because they are shy, they are afraid of being seen as foolish if they make mistakes, they are afraid of making mistakes in front of classmates, they fear being laughed at when making errors, and they feel tense and nervous when speaking English.

Additionally, 43.75% of students reported that their heart races when they are suddenly asked to respond to a question in English. A higher level of anxiety is revealed by the 75% of students who strongly agreed that they feel more anxious when classmates correct them harshly or in an unsupportive way. Half of the students admitted that they panic when they are required to speak without preparation. Motivational issues are also evident, as 50% of students felt unmotivated to speak due to their lack of ability, while 75% expressed that they are not motivated at all for the same reason. Lastly, 62.5% of

students strongly agreed that they feel unmotivated to improve their self-confidence in using English.

Overall, the total score for this variable was 656.6, which, when divided by the number of indicators (16), resulted in an average score of 41.03. This value indicates a high level of reluctance among students to speak English. The data suggests that the main barriers to speaking English are not merely linguistic, but rather psychological, including anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low motivation and self-confidence. Therefore, it is essential for educators to implement supportive teaching strategies, create a safe and non-judgmental learning environment, and provide encouragement that fosters students' confidence and motivation, allowing them to engage more actively in spoken English communication.

Analysis of Indicator Variable 2 (Students Reluctance)

Table 2. Analysis of Indicator from Variable 2

NO	Indicators	Level of agreement based on the Likert scale				
		SA	A	U	D	SD
1	I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English.		31,25%			
2	I feel my English language is not good.			31,25%		
3	I think that keeps me silent is my poor English proficiency.				50%	
4	I talk less because I am shy.		68,75%			

5	I am afraid of being seen foolish if I make too many mistakes when I speak English.		31,25%			
6	I am afraid of making mistakes in speaking English in front of my classmates		31,25%			
$\text{Skor \%} = \frac{\text{Jumlah skor variable 2}}{16} = \text{Jumlah}$		$\frac{243,75}{16} = 15,23$				

Based on table 2 above present that an analysis of the indicators from Variable 2, namely Students' Reluctance in speaking English. The analysis is based on the Likert scale, which includes five levels of agreement: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). The aim of this analysis is to identify psychological factors that contribute to students' hesitation or unwillingness to speak English in the classroom.

There are six indicators analysed in the table. The first indicator, "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English", shows that 31.25% of respondents agreed, indicating that nearly one-third of students feel a lack of confidence when speaking English. The second indicator, "I feel my English language is not good", also received 31.25% agreement, reflecting that many students perceive their English skills as

inadequate, which may contribute to their reluctance to speak.

The third indicator, "I think that keeps me silent is my poor English proficiency", received a response of 50% Undecided, suggesting that half of the respondents are unsure whether their low English proficiency is the main reason they remain silent. The fourth indicator, "I talk less because I am shy", received the highest level of agreement, with 68.75% of students strongly agreeing. This reveals that shyness is the most dominant factor contributing to students' reluctance to speak English.

For the fifth indicator, "I am afraid of being seen foolish if I make too many mistakes when I speak English", 31.25% of students agreed, indicating a considerable fear of negative judgment when making mistakes. Similarly, the sixth indicator, "I am afraid of making mistakes in speaking English in front of my classmates", also received 31.25% agreement, reinforcing the idea that fear of embarrassment in front of peers

significantly hinders students' willingness to speak.

Overall, the total score from all indicators in this variable is 243.75. When divided by the total number of indicators (16), the average score obtained is 15.23. This score indicates that, in general, students' reluctance to speak English is fairly significant. Based on the data, it can be concluded that reasons such as shyness, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes or being judged by others are the primary reasons behind students' hesitation in speaking English. Therefore, it is important for educators to adopt supportive approaches and create a safe and encouraging learning environment, so that students feel more confident and comfortable using English in spoken communication.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of this research is based on the analysis of data collected through a questionnaire and interviews conducted with seventh semester students of the English Study Program at the University of Pasir Pengaraian. The aim was to explore the reasons

that contribute to students' reluctance to speak English. The findings from both instruments indicate that students' reluctance is largely influenced by

psychological barriers, followed by linguistic difficulties.

From the questionnaire results, it was found that a majority of students experience strong psychological discomfort when they are required to speak English. One of the most prominent reasons is shyness, where 50% of respondents strongly agreed that they talk less because they are shy. This is supported by responses in the interviews, where students expressed that they often feel embarrassed or uncomfortable when speaking English, especially in front of their classmates. They admitted that shyness made them hesitant to initiate conversations or respond voluntarily in class.

Another major factor discovered was fear of making mistakes and fear of being laughed at. The questionnaire showed that 75% of students strongly agreed that they are afraid others will laugh at them if they make mistakes in speaking English. Furthermore, 62.5% strongly agreed that they are afraid of making mistakes in front of their classmates. These fears were echoed during interviews, where students reported that they sometimes remain silent because they are worried about how their peers will react. Some stated that they had previously been corrected harshly or even

laughed at, which discouraged them from trying again in future speaking tasks.

The results also revealed high levels of anxiety. Around 50% of students agreed that they get tense and nervous when speaking English, and 43.75% strongly agreed that their heart pounds when they are suddenly called upon to answer in English. The interview data confirmed this emotional tension. Students explained that speaking English without preparation made them panic, and some mentioned that even when they understood the material, anxiety blocked their ability to express it verbally. Additionally, the questionnaire showed that lack of motivation is a key contributing factor. A significant number of students (75%) strongly agreed that they are not motivated to speak English because they feel they lack speaking ability. During interviews, some students admitted that they see no improvement in their speaking skills, which lowers their motivation further. Others felt that their efforts are not appreciated or encouraged, leading them to feel that trying to speak English is not worthwhile.

Despite psychological factors being dominant, linguistic challenges also played a role in students' reluctance. The questionnaire indicated that many students felt their vocabulary, grammar, and

pronunciation were insufficient. Some students agreed that they were afraid of speaking because they might use incorrect grammar or forget vocabulary. In the interviews, students mentioned that they often know what they want to say in their minds but struggle to express it in English. This language gap contributes to their hesitation, especially during spontaneous speaking activities.

Overall, the findings from both the questionnaire and the interviews demonstrate that students' reluctance to speak English stems from a combination of internal emotional states and perceived language limitations. However, the emotional and psychological barriers such as shyness, anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and low motivation were consistently identified as the most dominant reasons behind students' reluctance.

These results emphasize the importance of creating a supportive and positive learning environment where students feel safe to express themselves without fear of judgment. Instructors should also provide consistent encouragement and constructive feedback, and allow students to build confidence through gradual exposure to speaking opportunities, both individually and in group settings. By addressing both emotional and linguistic challenges,

students can be guided to become more confident and willing to engage in English speaking activities.

The interview results provided deeper insights, confirming that difficulties in speaking English, particularly concerning grammar and vocabulary, as well as a lack of self-confidence, are at the root of the problem. Students felt their English was not good, lacked confidence, and were shy or afraid of being laughed at by friends, and feared making mistakes. These findings are

supported by Hamouda (2012), who states that low English proficiency, fear of public speaking, negative evaluation, shyness, lack of confidence, lack of preparation, and fear of making mistakes are among the causes of students' speaking problems. Anxiety about losing face in front of classmates and teachers also emerged as a major inhibiting factor, as concerns about their proficiency and fear of making mistakes diminished their confidence and hampered oral interaction.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the research conducted on seventh semester students of the English Study Program at the University of Pasir Pengaraian, it can be concluded that the students' reluctance to speak English is influenced by a combination of linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Linguistic problems include lack of vocabulary, poor grammar mastery, limited pronunciation ability, and inadequate fluency, all of which hinder students from expressing their thoughts confidently in English. Meanwhile, non-linguistic, such as shyness, low self-confidence, anxiety, lack of motivation, and fear of making mistakes, were found to have a more dominant impact.

The analysis of questionnaire and interview results revealed that the most prominent psychological barrier was fear of being judged or ridiculed, especially when students made mistakes while speaking in front of their classmates. This fear has led to a high level of anxiety and a tendency to avoid speaking tasks. Moreover, the data also showed that a significant number of students lacked the motivation to improve their speaking skills and self-confidence, mainly due to previous negative experiences, peer correction, and internal doubts about their ability to perform well in English.

Furthermore, the research findings indicated that even though students were aware of the importance of speaking English for academic and professional purposes, they still struggled to

actively engage in speaking activities. This reluctance was also reflected in students' tendency to remain silent during class, hesitation to speak without preparation, and discomfort in expressing themselves spontaneously.

In conclusion, the reluctance to speak English among the students is a result of multiple interconnected reasons. These findings suggest the need for educators to adopt more supportive and student centered teaching approaches, such as creating a safe and encouraging classroom environment, providing frequent and low-pressure speaking opportunities, offering constructive feedback, and developing students' self-efficacy through continuous encouragement and positive reinforcement. By addressing both linguistic and emotional barriers, educators can help students gradually overcome their reluctance and build greater confidence and motivation to use English actively and effectively in real communication contexts.

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