REDUCING STUDENTS' FOREIGN LANGUAGE ANXIETY IN SPEAKING CLASS THROUGH COOPERATIVE LEARNING

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Abstrak. One of the challenges in teaching English as a foreign language to students in Indonesia is the existence of Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) that are faced by students at any level of education. FLA has hindered the students in mastering English, especially in Speaking Skill, it is shown by their performances in the class which are too nervous, shy, unwilling to participate and lack of confidence.Gardner and McIntyre,(1987) stated that FLA negatively impacts the quality of learning and is a critical factor in learners' success or failure in learning a foreign language. Based on the aforementioned statements, it means reducing students' language anxiety can enhance their overall learning experience and improve motivation and achievement.Thus, for many years, some researchers have attempted to find the most suitable techniques and methods to help students overcome this problem. Some of which is by providing them a conducive learning environment, the culture of caring and of course, a non-threatening atmosphere in the classroom. For that reason, this paper isintended to propose a technique to reduce the students' anxiety; that is cooperative learning. By using cooperative learning, it is expected that it can overcome this problem, as this technique offers a good language-learning environment in which the process of learning dealing with cooperativeness rather than competitiveness. This is in line with Krashen (1982). He, through his Affective Filter Hypothesis, contends that one of the factors of language acquisition to happen is in a low-filter language-learning environment.

Key Words: foreign language anxiety, learning environment,cooperative learning.

Introduction

Foreign language learning occurs in the formal situation of a classroom, and the learner has hardly any access to the target language beyond the classroom door (Brown 1993). In this formal situation, the students receive instruction and practices in the items entirely related to the basic skills of the target language–listening, speaking, reading and writing.To some extent, for some students who learn English, this kind of language learning is very stressful and triggers anxiety; especially, when the students should use the language in communication in the speaking class.Many of them state that they are left with nothing but uneasiness to express what they have in mind verbally. The uneasiness is characterized by being shy, apprehensive and having fear of negative feedback of the language use. Especially, due to their fear of being badly evaluated by both teachers and peers, they are reluctant to participate.As a result, the students are having the anxiety to use the language for communication, not even in small talk.Some researchers regard this phenomenon as Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) or Communication Apprehension (CA) (McCroskey, 1977, McIntyre, 1986, Horwitz, 1991).

Especially in Indonesia, this problem is not a new phenomenon. In every level of education, from elementary to senior high school even in university level, we can see so many students still unable to get a good achievement in English subject, especially in speaking skill. This phenomenon is proven by the onlysmall number of the students who

are able to speak or communicate using English in the classroom or daily life. Speaking has become the most challenging skill to be mastered form all 4 skills in English. Kevin Dalton,Public Relation of*Indonesia Australia Language Foundation (IALF)*states that what the students complaining today is a general phenomenon, that are the student's difficulties in using the language structure like tenses, article, vocabulary etc.(Tribunnews, 2014). He also asserted that one of the biggest problems is that they feel really depressed. They think that they should speak English perfectly, and usually unwilling to speak English until their ability is good. They are shy and do not want to take a risk to make mistake. So, they stay back and that is not a good way of learning English. They should have the determination and feel happy when learning it and never be afraid of making mistakes (Tribunnews, 2014)

Foreign Language Anxiety (FLA) or Communication Anxiety (CA)

One of the greatest challenges that learners must face in learning language is the existence of anxiety in the English as a foreignlanguage (EFL) classroom. Consequently, EFL learners are confronted with a situation where they undergo a kind of apprehension which inhibited them from being able to use the language for communication.

Foreign Language Anxiety can be described as the feeling of uneasiness, worry, nervousness,and apprehension. These feeling particularly confront language learners when they learn or use the language. As early as 1993, H.D. Brown predicts that the construct of anxiety was intricately intertwined with self-esteem, inhibition, and risk-taking and that it played an important effective role in second language acquisition

In relation to anxiety building, Young (1992) formulates that speaking is probably considered as the most stressful one among the four skills from the perspective of both FL teachers and learners. Meanwhile, Friedman (1980) justifies that when the ability and desire to participate in the discussion are present, but the process of verbalizing is inhibited, shyness or reticence occurs. Further, MacIntyre (1995) illustrates that, if a student is required to speak in the target language, s/he may become anxious, and this anxiety can lead to worry and rumination.

Recently some researchers from different countries conduct studies within the area of the Communication anxiety, such as:

a. A study by Thaher (2005) entitled "Communication Apprehension Among An-Najah National University Students" which reported that Communication Apprehension or Anxiety is a result of a combination of psychological, instructional and socio-cultural factors. these factors are interrelated and intersect. For example, the students' attitudes toward speaking English in the classroom can be affected by their instructional and socio-cultural backgrounds.

b. Tanveer (2007) also studies the same issue entitled "Investigation of the factors that cause language anxiety for ESL/EFL learners in learning speaking skills and the influence it casts on communication in the target language". The finding shows that every factor or situation that creates possibilities or enhance the chances of exposing the student's deficiencies and language imperfections in front of others is likely to cause language anxiety. This situation could be either classroom interaction in the form of open class forum, group participation or class presentation, or giving a short talk in any public event is likely to challenge learners' communicative abilities.

c. Xianping who examines the language anxiety perform by University students in China entitled "Language Anxiety and Its Effect on Oral Performance in Classroom" in 2008. He found that there was a reverse relationship between language anxiety and the quality of oral performance, that is, the higher the anxiety score, the lower their performance score

In conclusion, recent research generally concludes that the foreign language learning is indeed highly anxiety provoking. In the other words, if learning is meant to be successful, this anxiety problem exists among the EFL learners must be handled with care. Referring back to the disadvantageous it may bring to students' achievement especially to their oral communication skills, it will take a great effort for teachers and learners in decreasing this problem of anxiety to a minimum.

The Cause of Foreign Language Anxiety in the Classroom

The instructional factors which involving the interaction between teachers and students in language learning environment are proven to be the cause of foreign language anxiety. According to Tanveer (2007), basically, there are four major causes of anxiety to exist in a language learning environment. Those causes are listed as follows:

1. *Strict and Formal Classroom Environment,*
   The learners feel more anxious and under stress in the classroom environments that follow the traditional behaviorist theorist of learning.

2. *Presentation in the classroom*
   Like discussion in open-class-forum, giving a short talk or presentation in the class has also been reported to be highly anxiety-inducing, one of which makes the classroom environments more formal and stressful for the learners. Horwitz and Cope (1986) reported that students are very self-conscious when they are required to engage in speaking activities that expose their inadequacies, and these feelings often lead to "fear or even panic".

3. *Fear of making mistakes and apprehension about other's evaluation*
   Learners feel afraid and even panic because of the fear of committing mistakes or errors in front of others. As expected, the participants were sensitive to both peer and teacher evaluation of their speaking.

4. *Role of language instructors*
   The teachers authoritative, embarrassing and humiliating attitude toward the students, particularly when they make mistakes, can have severe consequences on learning cognition and their willingness to communicate in the class.

The learning processes in a classroom are highly anxiety provoking. The environment which is strict and formal make the students feel like being watched not only by the teacher but also their classmates. Many of the students become competitive that they should perform a perfect English, and so a high-tension environment is created. In the classroom, the students are also required to do presentations as part of learning activities. Here, the students are also having fear of making mistakes and apprehension about other's evaluation, in this case, their classmates. Another factorworsens the problem of anxiety is that one of the methods used by most language teachers such as, calling on students one after another in seating order in

which in learners' opinion is an extremely anxiety-provoking technique. This method is certainly building tension and anxiety. By just sitting there knowing that in a few minutes learners are about to be called, they tend to have greater anxiety.

Kunjana Rahardi stated that the English language learning in Indonesia is too rigid. He added that the focus of the English language learning should be changed to be enjoyable and motivate the students to practice it actively (Tribunnews, 2014).In relation to this problem, Kevin Daltonsuggests that one of the steps is to create an English Club. "many students said that I do not have money to join an English Club". I said, "you do not need money, just find someone in your neighborhood or elsewhere and meet up once or twice a week for an hour to practice your English Speaking" (Tribunnews, 2014). From Rahardi and Dalton statement, it can be concluded that in learning English we should create an enjoyable environment which is conducive for every student to express their English language. In this case, by being cooperative with other students or learners in an English Club or in other places which is low anxiety tension.

Effect of Foreign Language Anxiety on Students Language Learning

Once the students suffer from foreign language anxiety, several consequences seem to emerge in the classroom related to the classroom interaction. For instance, anxiety has proved to lessen the students' effort to be involved in the classroom activities, in which they prefer to remain silent, listening and watch, which also can be taken as unmotivated. Further, foreign language anxiety can also affect second language acquisition.

Based on Krashen (1982) affective hypothesis theory, the higher the anxiety the higher the affective filter will be; when the filter is up then it will block the comprehensible input to come into the LAD (language acquisition device).

Anxious students also forget previously learned material, volunteer answers less frequently and have a greater tendency to remain passive in classroom activities than their less anxious counterparts. Anxious learners suffer from mental blocks during speaking activities, lack confidence, are less able to self-edit and identify language errors and are more likely to employ avoidance strategies such as skipping class. Therefore, as the learners feel that their learning is on the verge of failure, at the very last moment many learners commit to dropping out of school due to inability to cope with this problem.

Pertaining to this fact, English teachers seem to be challenged to find strategies to help learners by creating conditions that provide the students with more opportunities to communicate in the target language in a relaxed, supportive environment. Horwitz and Cope (1986) point out that as teachers, we cannot completely eliminate foreign language anxiety, the only way to reduce the student's anxiety is by providing them a non-threatening language learning environment and also a culture of a caring environment. Further, Recommendations also suggested by Horwitz and Cope (1986) in their study are that teachers strive to:

- create a low stress, friendly and supportive learning environment;
- foster a proactive role on the part of the students themselves to create an atmosphere of group solidarity and support;
- be sensitive to students' fears and insecurities and help them to confront those fears;
- use gentle or non-threatening methods of error correction and offer words of encouragement;

- make judicious use of purposeful group work or collaborative activities;
- use relevant and interesting topics for class discussions and exercise
- attend to the learning styles or preferences of the students; and
- hear and appreciate the voices of students for valuable insights, ideas,and suggestions.

In accordance with the explanation above, in this case, the use of cooperative learning technique is considered suitable. As this technique can foster active participation, a sense of community, emotional support and provide more opportunities for students to use the target language.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative Learning isa small group interactive instructional strategy that allows students to work collaboratively on meaningful tasks. Students are working to help themselves and others in the group to learn. Some research points out that Cooperative Learning provides more opportunities for students to produce language(Slavin, 1983a; Harel, 1992; Chamot and O'Malley, 1987; Long and Porter, 1985, as cited in Nagahashi, 2009).

1. In addition, Cooperative learning is not simply students working in groups. Johnson, Johnson, and Smith (1991) identify the following elements as foundational to Cooperative Learning:
2. Positive interdependence- students must work together to achieve the goal.
3. Individual accountability-each student in the group is responsible for doing their share of the work. If one person does not contribute his/her share, the group suffers the consequences.
4. Face-to-face interaction-Some parts of the activity must be completed through group interaction, feedback, reasoning, and teaching and encouraging one another.
5. Use of collaborative skills-developing and practicing trust-building, leadership, decision-making, communication, and conflict management skills.
6. Group processes-group planning, identifying group goals and group assessment.

Cooperative learning is characterized by several common elements that include:(1) positive interdependence, where the group has a common goal and each member'scontribution is important to the group's success; (2) face-to-face group interactions inwhich each member is encouraged to participate, help others succeed, and learn from eachother; (3) individual and group accountability in which members divide the work and areindividually responsible for specific tasks; (4) development of small group social skillsinvolving negotiating and use of group interaction skills; and (5) group processing, whichinvolves students reflecting on the group's experience (Johnson and Johnson, 1994 cited inSaovapaWichadee (2010)

Cooperative Learning to reduce Foreign Language Anxiety

By working collaboratively, the students should responsible to work on their part, therefore, there is no way that the anxious students to withdraw from the activities in the classroom. Further, they will have more opportunity to share their thought and opinion with their friends or give feedback to others-as the students are proven to be more comfortable to talk with friends.

In line with the above explanation, Kagan (1985) have also listed several advantages of cooperative learning that this technique can help students to:

1. motivate students;
2. construct their own knowledge;
3. develop social and group work skills necessary in life;
4. promote positive interaction among students;
5. learn through active involvement rather than sitting and listening and watching.

Meanwhile, SaovapaWichadee (2010), mention that there are two reasons why cooperative learning if effective in reducing FLA; (1) Since cooperative learning helps to create a supportive environment, students arenot much stressed and have reduced anxiety in class, (2) Cooperative learning provides a less anxiety-producing context in terms ofdiscussing, creating, and thinking in a group, rather than in a whole class. In such anatmosphere, students may feel more comfortable to study and try out new ideas.

There are a lot of activities that can be used to engage the students to participate in cooperative learning both in pair and group. Being involved in those activities, the reluctant students will have more opportunities to share ideas, discuss, and express whatever comes to mind with their peers and group members. In fact, in cooperative learning, the cooperativeness is the goal rather than competitiveness, therefore, the students will feel less intimidated and not feel afraid of being put down or criticized due to the mistakes they will make in their speaking. The teacher as the facilitator of the learning should assist the students during the learning process and give feedback to students' mistakes in a friendly way. Several activities both in pair work and group work can be used to make them involve in the learning process in the classroom, some of them are think pair share, three steps interview, roundtable, and group investigation.

Here are some activities that can be implemented in the classroom using some of the cooperative learning suggested bySaovapaWichadee (2010), such as:

1. *Think-Pair-Share* - To increase individual accountability, have students jot down their ideas before turning to a partner to discuss them. The teacher can walk around the room and look at what they are writing to see who understands the concept. It also prevents students from adopting their partner's attitude easily or just sitting back and letting their partner to all the thinking.

    Spelling – The teacher calls out a word, has them think of the spelling, then

    designates one person to turn and whisper the spelling to their partner. The partnergives a thumbs-up to show agreement or corrects the spelling.In short, Think-Pair-Share provides an opportunity for all students to share theirthinking with at least one other student; this, in turn, increases their sense of involvementin classroom learning.

2. The second group work activity the teacher can employ is "Numbered Heads Together." Its structure is derived from the work of Spencer Kagan (2003). A team of fouris established. Each member is given numbers of 1, 2, 3, 4. Questions are asked of thegroup. Group members work together so that all can verbally answer the questions. Theteacher calls out a number and that number in each team is asked to give the answer. Bydoing this, everyone in the team must participate and be able to answer the question. Thisactivity is usually conducted to enhance students' reading

comprehension skill. One greatbenefit includes students being able to learn from each other. They must work together toensure that everyone can understand and answer the question. This activity is one way toreduce anxiety in class.

3. The last activity, which fits the learner-centered approach, is called "Peer Review," an activity requiring students to read each other's draft and give comments on it. "Peer Review" provides students with the opportunity to learn how to give and receive constructive feedback. The main goal of using peer review is to help both writers and commentators to improve their writing. The peer review is usually conducted in pairs. The students are trained on the principles of peer correction and how to give feedback so that they would not encounter any difficulties when giving comments. Peer review training should be available before the lesson started officially. This means they will be taught how to follow the review procedure step by step, how to consult a dictionary when in doubt, how to write up a comment, etc. Through peer review activity, students will experience supportive peer feedback which helps to increase their motivation and attitude towards studying English. The feedback from peers is less threatening than teacher's, so they gain less anxiety in class.

Based on the cooperative activities suggested by BySaovapaWichadee (2010) above, it is concluded that by working cooperatively, the students will be confronted to a less formal and friendlier situation, therefore, the students will feel safe and secure in producing the language even though if they still make mistakes.

Yvonne C. Miller (2008) said that Cooperative learning is a form of active learning where students rely on their peers to help them learn the material. Cooperative learning may be formal or informal. They are:

1. Jigsaw method, where the material is divided into parts and each student becomes the subject matter expert on different parts in order to teach the rest of the group.

2. Having students conduct discussions in pairs on specific lesson objectives during class. There are numerous methods for incorporating cooperative learning in the classroom. Whether structured or unstructured, cooperative learning should have five maincomponents to be effective–positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction,individual accountability, interpersonal skills, and group processing. Researchers have proven the positive effects of cooperative learning. Specifically, collaborative testing has proven to be an effective technique in improving academic performance, reducing anxiety and fostering positive attitudes towards the course material.

From the above examples, it can be concluded that by providing a conducive and friendly environment in learning English, the student will feel more motivated and willing to participate. This is because they have the same role in the learning activities which require them to work or study collaboratively.

Conclusion

Anxiety can have negativeeffects on the language learning experience and that diminishinganxiety seems to help increasing language acquisition, retention, and learner motivation. Therefore, teachers and learners must understand the importance of foreign language anxiety awareness. By using cooperative learning, foreign language anxiety, in particular, may be diminished by providing opportunities for students to develop their oral communication skill in small, supportive groups of their peers.Eventhough the focus

is on reducing the anxiety, the long-term goal is still improving the students speaking skill.

It should be noted that this techniqueisnot fixed because the causes of students' reluctance to speak are varied. Teachers need to adapt these techniques to suit their class situation. Furthermore, many of these solutions should be implemented simultaneously so that they can support each other in tackling the problem from different angles, creating a better chance that the problem will successfully be solved.

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