

FACTORS INFLUENCING EFL LEARNERS' WILLINGNESS TO SPEAK ENGLISH IN THE CLASSROOM

Nailin Nafisah¹, Ahmad Hilal Madjdi², Fitri Budi³, Rismiyanto⁴

¹ Muria Kudus University (English Education Magister Department, Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Muria Kudus University, Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia)
nailinnafisah@gmail.com

² Muria Kudus University (English Education Magister Department, Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Muria Kudus University, Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia)
achmad.hilal@umk.ac.id

³ Muria Kudus University (English Education Magister Department, Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Muria Kudus University, Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia)
fitri.budi@umk.ac.id

⁴ Muria Kudus University (English Education Magister Department, Teacher Training and Education Faculty, Muria Kudus University, Kudus, Central Java, Indonesia)
rismiyanto@umk.ac.id

ABSTRACT

In the term of English as Foreign Language, the learners have few chances to be exposed to English for communication. A very common problem faced by many EFL teachers in the classroom is the learners have lack willingness to speak. The present study is conducted to know the EFL learners' perception of factors that influence their willingness to speak English in the classroom. The qualitative research is conducted by having questionnaire with 10 EFL learners in Kudus to discover such factors. Several factors were identified in this research, including topic of discussion, task type, interlocutor, and teacher's role. It is expected that teachers would choose certain approach aims at facilitating students to participate more during the class.

Keywords: *EFL learners; willingness to speak English; classroom.*

In this modern era, the skill to communicate in the target language becomes the focus of English language study. Nunan (2000) explains that the success of the teaching and learning process is measured in terms of the ability to carry out conversations in a target language. With this skill, Kim (2019) states that learners can cross-culturally transfer and share their ideas, messages, information, and even their feelings. Speaking activities can take place if both communicant and communicator have the same degree of

willingness to communicate. Lee (2022) explained that learners must have a strong of willingness to communicate so that they can acquire English speaking skill.

Zhou et al., (2020) explained that learners' willingness to speak refers to their readiness to communicate with other learners in the dimension of spoken mode. Within the English classroom context, learners' willingness to speak is defined as learners' intention to interact with others in the target

language, in this sense, English. There are several factors that influence learners to become willing to speak. According to Zeng (2010, as cited in Ramli et al, 2021), there are several factors that influence students to become willing to communicate. Those factors include the classroom, teacher's supports, students' personalities, and their self-confidence.

In Indonesia, the learners study English as Foreign Language. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is the term used to describe the study of English by non-native speakers in countries where English is not the dominant language (Nordquist, 2020). EFL teaching has its shortcomings, learners are too passive, and learners rely on teachers to acquire information for learning (Si, 2019). Of course it will be different situation if they have the supporting environment that use English for daily communication. This condition is also found in Qudsiyyah Putri Islamic Boarding School. The learners do not use their English for their real life. Most of them are too passive and dependent on the teacher. The learners in Qudsiyyah Putri Islamic Boarding School have lack of willingness to speak English language.

Some previous studies whose contents addressed willingness to communicate classroom factors, have been done by Lee and Hsieh (2019) and Prasetyo, Wibawani, and Drajadi (2019). Those studies were conducted in some countries, and that of Indonesian context seems to be merely identical to the study conducted by Prasetyo, Wibawani, and Drajadi (2019). Hence, to fulfill this empirical gap and to work on the portrayed phenomenon above, the present study is conducted to probe into plausible factors that affect English learners' willingness to speak in the classroom context in more detail. Aligned with the field where the phenomenon is encountered, this study is conducted at Islamic Boarding School in Kudus.

METHOD

This study applied a descriptive analysis qualitative method to reveal the factors influencing learners' willingness to speak in the English classroom context. The respondents of this study were 10 English learners in the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grade who had already taken an intensive English program called as English Coach Training. The respondents of this study aged from 14 to 16 years old. They were selected as the respondents resting upon on a purposive sampling technique. There were four basic criteria underlying their involvement as the respondents. Those criteria subsumed the following: 1) The respondents were officially the learners in Qudsiyyah Putri Boarding House; 2) the respondents had already taken an intensive English program called as English Coach Training; and 3) the respondents were voluntarily willing to take part in the present study. The author invites the respondents to participate by sending a draft interview via whatsapp group.

In order to get some data about the factors, an open-ended questionnaire was used in this research. The questionnaire asked the respondents to identify factors that make them willing to speak in the class. The aim of using open-ended questionnaire was making the respondents feel free to share and getting more information about factors that influence students' willingness to speak. To protect the respondents' privacy, the data is presented in pseudonyms. The author grouped the answers from the interviews and then analyzed the factors that influence their willingness to speak based on the answers from the respondents

FINDINGS

From the data, it was found that there are four major factors that influence learners' willingness to speak English in the classroom. The factors are presented below.

Topic of Discussion: The factor that was found to exert an influence on the learners' willingness to speak English is topic of discussion. The features of the topic that are important to the learners are topic familiarity and topic interest. Topic familiarity is equally important to the individuals who took part in this study. They believe that this factor significantly influences their degree of willingness to speak and that when they benefit from enough knowledge and information concerning a particular topic, they would be more willing to speak about it. Izza, for example, expresses the fact that the more information she has about a certain topic, the more willing she speak about it.

I would be more willing to speak of the topics are familiar or interest me. Because if the topics are not familiar, I will be more focus to listen and try to understand it.

Risa also feels most of her friends think similarly, about the topic familiarity.

The factor that influences my speaking in class is the topic, if the topic being discussed I understand or know about it then I will participate in speaking, but if I do not really understand then I do not participate in speaking.

A not-boring topic is also becomes one the factor as the respond from Nela:

If the topic discussed by the teacher is not boring and can liven up the class, it will make me respond to what is discussed by the teacher, not only always discussing about lesson, not being stuffy when teaching, etc.

Another characteristic of topic that the respondents refer to is topic interest. They believe that the more interested they are in a certain topic, the more willingness they would display to speak about it. Dini, for example, argues that:

The first is the topic, i think topic is very influential. I have experienced it myself, if the topic in my class is very interesting and exciting then i will be very eager to respond and will not be bored. But if the topic is boring in my opinion then i will be lazy to respond.

Rona also has the same responds about the topic interest.

One of the things that influences learners to speak in class is the topic brought by the teacher. If the teacher brings an interesting topic to learners then learners will have a desire to respond or talk about the topic presented by the teacher and vice versa if the topic brought by the teacher is not so attract or take the attention of learners so learners do not have the desire to speak in class because learners feel they do not fit the topic given by the teacher.

Task Type: One major factor that the interview respondents described as having an impact on their willingness to speak in class is task type, that is speaking individually, in pairs, or groups. One respondent, Kana, seems to be more willing to speak in pairs or groups than individually. She is more willing to speak in pairs and groups because she can be more active in interacting with her friends.

It can also go through the assignments given by the teacher, namely by working in groups. With this method, learners will be more active in interacting with other people so that they can train learners' courage in expressing their opinions, besides that also in this group work method learners will be trained to listen and respect the opinions of others.

Meanwhile, Izza gives the different respond. She feels that the group work will slow down the work. She is of the view that when in groups, the time allotted is naturally shared among the members of the group and

thus a limited amount of time is given to each member to speak.

Personally I prefer to do the task in a pair or individual, because I don't really like group work. It will slow down the work. Division of task is not working well, and at last it will be same because I finished it by myself.

Interlocutor: Some respondents also respond the interview by stating that interlocutor influences their willingness to speak. Izza states that:

In speaking, interlocutors also play the important role. If we suitable with the partner of course we will speak more, especially when the partner is our close friend. We will definitely be more comfortable to have a conversation each other. But adjusting speaking ability is also important to matching each other.

Linta adds the more competent interlocutors can help to stimulate ideas.

Learners prefer to talk with more competent interlocutors than those who are chatty and outgoing, also who have lots of ideas that can be more stimulating ideas.

Dini also has the same respond that she will be happier if the interlocutor is friendly, chatty, and active.

Teacher's Role: Another factor the respondents described as influencing their degree of willingness is the teacher in the classroom. Bila believes that the way of the teacher in conveying the topic is one of the factor.

In my opinion, the factors that influence learners to want to talk in class depend on the topics conveyed by the teacher and also the way the teacher interacts with their learners. If the teacher can make the class atmosphere more exciting and fun, then it is likely that learners will always

ask questions about the topics presented because they feel comfortable with the classroom atmosphere.

The teacher creativity to set up the classroom activity is stated by Izza:

I think if the teachers are creative and do exciting methods to teach us it will be better. The teachers also have to approach with us and make a warm conversation so that we don't feel awkward or unsure to speak more in the class.

And Defa:

Each teacher must have a way to help his learners understand with their creativity.

The way of teaching also becomes the factor that make the learner interested in the teacher. Nela states that:

If I am interested in the teacher, then it will make me respond more to him when teaching. What attracted me to this teacher, among other things, was his way of teaching, which in essence he had his own characteristics when teaching.

Meanwhile, Fada blames the teacher that always too serious and monotonous so that she will just talk a little.

I like to talk, if the teacher is fun, relaxed, the explanations are easy to understand, there is a time for serious and a time for jokes, not always monotonous with learning material but interspersed with game, quizzes, stories, or watching. But, if the teacher is always serious, rarely kidding, always monotonous learning material, and sometimes its hard to understand the material being explained, I will talk a little or just listen when its explained.

Afterall, one of the respondents also mentions about the personality. Dini states that:

However, do not forget that the self-confidence factor also greatly influences learners' willingness to want to speak in front of the class.

This sense of lack of confidence can also be attributed to one's perceived competence of his or her abilities as well as the degree of anxiety one feels in a particular setting.

DISCUSSION

Based on the interview data, a number of factors were perceived by the learners to have an impact on their degree of willingness to speak in English classes. Findings of the present study showed that willingness to speak is affected by some factors.

Since the current study focused on foreign language classroom setting, the classroom environmental factors identified as influencing willingness to speak are classroom-specific, such as task type, topic, teacher, and interlocutors. The findings are in line with the statements of Cao (2009, as cited in Wulandari 2015), topic given, task type (pair, group and team work), interlocutor and teacher are factors influencing learners' willingness to speak.

The respondents' concern about the topic they are discussing and its fundamental role in making them active or passive in discussions. This implies that to generate willingness to speak among individuals, they need to discuss topics they are interested in, with which they are familiar with and for which they are prepared to talk. The learners would talk more about the topic that more interesting and they would feel reluctant to talk about the boring and unfamiliar topics. Wang and Wang (2012) also found that topic interest will have mutual influence, and people with great interest in one area will often show strong ability in that field. By having strong interest, learners might take the initiative to read books on this topic and participate actively in class activities to get more information. This is indicative that teachers should provide learners with such

topics in order to encourage them to speak. To do this, teachers need to know their learners' area of interest.

Task type (individual, pair, group and team work) is the second factor affecting learners' willingness to communicate. The learners expressed preference for the project work which involved teamwork rather than teacher-fronted activities. Running a pair-or group work in class gives learners greater opportunities to speak than in the case of speaking individually. Wulandari (2015) also described that such activities create a more relaxed atmosphere in classroom, reduce anxiety, and thus result in an increase in both quantity and quality of practice.

The third factor influencing learners' willingness to speak is interlocutor. Cao (2009, as cited in Wulandari 2015) described that learners preferred to talk to interlocutors who were more competent than them, who were talkative and outgoing, also who had a lot of ideas that could stimulate more ideas. If the learners are familiar with the interlocutors, they will feel more comfortable to talk. Moreover, if the interlocutors are more competent, it will stimulate the learners to get more ideas. The interlocutor is a key factor contributing to learners' willingness to speak or not.

The fourth factor contributing to learners' willingness to communicate is teacher. Based on Cao (2009, as cited in Wulandari 2015), learners tended to be more willing to ask questions and participate more actively in class when they liked the teacher. Conversely, the teacher could also have a negative effect on learners' willingness to speak in class. When the teacher is monotonous, the learners will be bored and not actively involved in the classroom activity. Nazari and Allahyar (2012) also argued that teachers have been institutionally bestowed the right to create, manage and decide the different types of learners' interactions carried out in the classroom.

The problem is worse in an EFL context such as that of the present study, since in such environment, learners do not have much exposure to the target language outside the classroom. Equipped with this knowledge, learners need to try to take every opportunity to speak in the foreign language and take an active role in class discussions. They must be aware that if they want to improve, there is no secret other than practice.

CONCLUSION

As demonstrated in the discussion, willingness to speak is influenced by some factors. The factors identified in this research were topic of discussion, task type, interlocutor, and teacher's role. Thus, teachers should not attribute learners' reticence to one single factor such as personality or shyness. They need to be aware of the factors that could encourage or discourage the willingness to speak among learners. Therefore, it is really necessary for language teachers to promote factors that facilitate the willingness to speak and remove those that hinder it. They should also be mindful of the interactions between the learners and teacher while planning learning activities. Further, the results of the study demonstrated that different learners displayed different behaviors according to contexts and that their preferences were not uniform. As an example, there is a learner who more willing to speak individually, while others preferred to speak in pairs or groups. Such differences clearly support the necessity of practicing a wide range of

activities in language classrooms, for example pair or group activities, as well as individual practices. Teachers need to consider that different learners learn the language differently and that there is no fixed teaching methodology that appeals to all learners. As a result, such differences need to be taken into account while planning teaching and learning activities.

By knowing the factors, it is expected that teachers would choose certain approach aims at facilitating students to participate more during the class. Besides, teachers can also select teaching techniques to make the learners participate actively in the class. Teachers are suggested to create activities that involve all the learners. Teachers need to motivate the students by ensuring them that making mistakes are something normal to happen in language learning process. Teacher needs to tolerate the student's mistake and gives motivations to make them confidently speak during the class. Further research needs to be conducted to explore strategies to help students reduce even eliminate unwillingness to speak in the classroom.

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