

PROMOTING STUDENTS' SELF-CONFIDENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND THEIR ORAL PERFORMANCE

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ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted at a private university in Ho Chi Minh City University of Technology (HUTECH) using both quantitative and qualitative approach. 165 first-year English-major students were invited to participate in this study. In order to exploit the data, the researcher employed two research instruments, which include questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews. The result of the exploration showed that the students had low level of confidence in participating in speaking class. Moreover, students' performances were influenced by a number of factors both individual and situational ones. To the next attempt, some pedagogical implements are to figure out to teachers to help promote their students' self-confidence in participating in speaking activities, including using communication strategies, creating a good learning environment, promoting positive attitudes and a positive atmosphere and avoiding strict correction.

Keywords: Affective factors, oral performance, Self-confidence, Second Language Acquisition, psychological factors.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduce the Problem

The utmost goal of English language teaching and learning is to give learners the ability to use English effectively and accurately in communication (Davies and Pearse, 2000). Therefore, English communicative competence is now considered a golden key to successful integration into the world as well as the final objective of language learning. Learners who speak English very well can have a greater chance for better education, finding good jobs, and getting promotions. Thus, holding classroom conversations in English should be one of the main targets that language teachers would like to achieve.

Following the real requirement of language acquisition, in the recent years research on Affective factors has been conducted widely in relating the progress of language acquisition of students, especially to their oral performance (Hanton, Mellalieu and Hall, 2003; Akin, 2007; Otacioğlu, 2008). As identified in language research, among variables of Affective factors such as self-confidence, motivation, and anxiety, self-confidence specifically plays a vital role in language input and output as it has been identified as an important role and key characteristics to start any action especially for speaking in L2. Therefore, the growth of research into this construct has become the focused theme of language researchers around the world in the last decades.

1.2 Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to implement, analyze and examine the extent to which student are confident to speak in classroom. More importantly, it is expected to examine the possible causes of the lack of confidence among language students when come to oral language performance and acquisition in the classroom context; why those learners in EFL classes often lack of confidence when speaking the target language (English) in communicative situations. Likewise, it is to figure out the solidarity between self-confidence and speaking skill achievement and raise pedagogically teaching techniques to which teachers can apply to help promote them to speak up confidently in the classroom.

To tackle the issues, this paper attempts to address the following research questions:

To what extent are the students confident to speak English in speaking classes?

What are the factors that affect the students' confidence to speak in speaking classes?

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 What is self – confidence?

Self-confidence generally has been defined as a “belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations or accomplish a task” and thenceforward the term is more accurately refers to specific self-confidence (Richard-Amato, 2003). In Linguistic, self-confidence has been considered as self-perception of second language competence and a low level of anxiety (Clement, 1986). Brown (2001, p. 23) stated that self-confidence is something a learner believes in his or her own ability to accomplish the task as someone say “I can do it” or self-esteem principle, i.e.,. “The eventual success that learners attain in a task is at least partially a factor of their belief that they indeed are fully capable of accomplishing the task.”

2.2 Self-confidence in Second Language Acquisition

Self-confidence has been considered as a major factor that can deeply influence the language learners' performance. Research has confirmed that Self- confidence has strong impact on language acquisition process. If the students do not have confidence, they are often seen to be in a state of being inhibited and timid, reluctant to present their talk in front of classroom. The lack of self-confidence in these students results in an “unwillingness to communicate” in a foreign language.

According to Krashen (1981) Affective Filter can be figured as of being inhibited, tired, dispirited, tense, or angry, the input is prevented from being processed. Following that, it is considered as a mental block, caused some symptoms like high anxiety, high inhibition, low self-esteem, and low motivation in the process of acquiring a second language. These negative emotions prevent efficient processing of the language input, and on the contrary, the positive emotions promote the efficiency of the process.

Also, (Clement, 1986) found that a high level of stress and anxiety creates a filter that impedes learning, blocks the intake, and reduces self-confidence and L2 acquisition. Similarity, Brown (1994) stated that when learning a new language, some learners are more confident when being exposed to it. To some other people, they tend to experience anxiety and inability to effectively comprehend or communicate well in another language. Due to this reality, it is significant for

teachers to dig into its causes, effects and pedagogical implications so that they can ameliorate their teaching outcome as well as their student's performance in the class.

2.3 The vital role of orally confident practice in learning speaking

English communicative competence is now considered a golden key to successful integration into the world as well as the final objective of language learning. To this argument, Ur (2000) stated that speaking might be considered as the most important and very necessary for effective communication of all the four language skills; because people, who know a language, are usually referred to as speakers of that language (Brown & Yule, 1983). Undoubtedly, using of English as a foreign language in oral communication is one of the most common but highly complex activities that is necessary to be considered when teaching the English language, (Al-Sibai, 2004).

More importantly, in the previous study made by Horwitz et al., (1986), the researchers claimed that when language learners have a self-confident, they tend to expose to the language easier and thus more willing to participate in a conversation. Taking about this issue, MacIntyre et al. (1998) also claims that students' reluctance to speak in a second language when given the opportunity is related to the concept of lacking confidence to speak up. It is obvious from this then that to maximize the proficiency of individual language use; we need to minimize the factors that create the state of being inconfident or inhibit when developing speaking skills.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

The subjects of this paper consist of two selected groups of respondents. In this research, no subjects are identified by their real names due to confidentiality. The participants of the study are consisted of 165 voluntary first-year English- majored students at HUTECH. After having all the students answer the questionnaires, six of them were chosen to be interviewed. Students were randomly chosen to ensure the interviewer's unbiased perception of interviewees. It was indicated that the majority of them were female (81.5%) while only (18.5%) of the total were male. The age of these students ranged from 18 to 19. However, the majority of the participants were 18 years old, which accounted for 85.3%; 14,7% of them were 19 or 20 years old. As their major is English, it is obvious for us to assume that it is of interest to them, and on top of that, it is assumed that the students had some motivation to learn English, and had a positive attitude toward learning English.

3.2 Research instruments

To understand the L2 confidence of the students in the classroom performance, in this study, In order to guarantee maximal dependability and accuracy of data collected, both quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in this study. According to Vockell and Asher (1995), quantitative and qualitative methods have the greatest value when combined. Consdelli and Wrigled (1999) also stated that the best research design is a mixed method design that integrates the quantitative and the qualitative approach. Data gathered from these sources is cross-validated to increase the level of quality and validity.

3.3 Data collection procedure

In this study, the data collection was carried out around May, when most tertiary students in Vietnam were going to prepare for school years' final-term examinations in Semester 2 of the 2018-

2019 academic year. The interviews and questionnaires were conducted in the (HUTECH) campuses.

According to (Kumar, 2011) the questionnaire survey can be conducted in different ways such as a mailed questionnaire, collective administration or administration in a public place. In this study, to distribute the questionnaire to the questionnaire participants, the researcher employed collective administration, as it is believed this ensures a high response rate as well as being a quick way of collecting data. For the quality part, prior to carrying out the interview, the researcher gives a notification to the interviewees of this procedure to be sure that they would agree to willingly take to part in the procedure. The interviewees were also told that their conversations with the researcher were going to be recorded in order to collect and analyze the data. Moreover, they were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the protection of their identities.

3.4 Data analysis procedure

The data collected in the study was of two types, quantitative and qualitative. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was used to analyze data from the questionnaire in terms of means (M) and standard deviations (SD), as well as percentages, using SPSS. For the Likert scale questions, in addition to simple descriptive statistics using Mean (M) and Standard Deviation (SD), the frequency analysis was also employed to enhance the depth of the analysis. For the qualitative result, students' responses to open-ended questions were coded and analyzed by themes through using a content analysis method. Besides, these answers were also summarized and presented in the form of quotations when necessary to provide more insights into the issue.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presented data collected through questionnaires passed out to 165 first-year English-major students. The most crucial questions listed in the questionnaires which function to back up the thesis questions were picked out, modified and transformed into open-ended questions for interviews with six randomly selected students to seize a sharper picture of their insights. Their perceptions and opinions were approached by means of face-to-face discussions to gather information regarding their personal challenges when they have to deal with low self-confidence in learning English speaking skills.

4.1 Results of Research question 1

Results of Research question 1 aimed at exploring the extent to which the first-year English-major students were confident to communicate in speaking classes. Table 1 below displays the data reflecting the extent of students' self-confidence in learning speaking skills at PU.

Initially, as displayed in table 1, the result depicts a picture of the reactions of students when posed a question by their English teacher. Through the figures, what the researcher can imagine is a picture of a silent and reluctant atmosphere. Firstly, the number of students who volunteer to speak is very humble. The percentage of "always", "often", and "sometimes" constitutes 0%, 4.3%, and 20.9% respectively. Conversely, a huge number of 42.8% and 32% of the respondents negatively agreed that they rarely and never volunteer to speak, (M=1.92). Accordingly, it seems to be obvious that the willingness to speak confidently in the speaking lessons is still very low in this context.

Table 1: Students' reactions to the teacher's English questions

Order	Statement	N	R	S	O	A	Mean	SD
1	Volunteer to speak	32.0	42.8	20.9	4.3	0	1.90	0.86
2	Expect the teacher to ask more	14.5	27.8	39.8	15.9	2	2.61	.999
3	Have ideas but don't dare to answer	9	18	44	21.5	7.5	3.02	1.020
4	Just listen and keep silent	12	23.4	33.1	24	7.5	3.06	1.09
5	Avoid seeing teacher's face	21	27.5	43.5	6	2	2.38	.938
6	Do not want to be called	8.5	25	50	12.5	4	2.77	.890
7	Be afraid of being called to speak	12.6	26.6	42.7	13.1	5	2.70	1.01

Likewise, among the six students being interviewed, most of them admitted that they rarely volunteered to speak in speaking classes. For example, one of the students expressed:

[...] "I like to speak English. However, I rarely volunteer to speak when my teacher posts English questions because I do not know how to answer, even when I have some ideas in my mind, I don't dare to speak out."

Similarly, lack of confidence of the students was also shown in their response to the statement "expect the teacher to ask more" when only 17.9% of them admitted that they "always" or "often" do that, (M=2.61). Plus, a lot of participants, (M=3.02) realized that they often "have the ideas but they don't dare to answer" their teacher's questions. The choice of this statement hinted that after having the ideas, students experience a rational conflict or they will raise their hand or they keep silent. This is when reluctance or the lack of self- confidence happens among students most.

Then, coming to the statement "Just listen and keep silent", "sometimes" received the greatest favor with 33.1% participants. Surprisingly, the two options "often" and rarely" shared the nearly same proportion of 24% while 23.4% of them. The rest of them 7.5% opted for "always" and 12% for "never". This is also a usual phenomenon happening in English class. When students do not have self- confident to expose themselves to the language, they would keep silent.

Besides, the number of students who avoid seeing their teacher's face is quite considerable. The percentage of "sometimes" constitutes 43.5%. From the statistics, it can be seen that many students tend to ignore looking at their teacher in order not to respond to the questions posted. This is clarified through one comment of a student answering the interview:

[...] "I often ignore to see my teacher's face when she posts an English question because I do not know how to answer, even when I have some ideas in my mind, I don't dare to speak out. I am not confident about that."

Next, the data also indicated a rising problem among many respondents when come to the statement "do not want to be called" or "be afraid of being called to speak". There were many of them voted "always", "often" or "sometimes" to the two statements, with (M =2.77 and M= 2.70) respectively.

4.2 Results of Research question 2

Exploring major factors affecting students' self- confidence in speaking section in the classroom was the aim of research question 2. Based on the findings in this study, those students appeared rather silent and seemed to lack confidence and this was influenced by both their individual characteristics and situational factors, which result in their behavior.

Students' self-perception of language competence

Table 2: Students' self-perception of language competence

No	Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
1	The lack the aptitude or gift to learn a new language	18	8.5	12	42.5	19	3.84	.900
2	The low self-perception of competence in English	22.3	16.3	3.9	49.6	7.9	3.60	1.02

In regards to the statement “the lack the aptitude or gift to learn a new language”, there was a large portion (61.5%) of the participants believed that they have no aptitude in learning English. This selection has a remarkably high mean score of 3.84. Similarly, there was also a great agreement (57.5%) among students towards the reason “low self-perception of competence in English creating the lack of confidence.” The (M=3.60) is also elevated. The current results demonstrated that the learners are pessimistic about their language ability and they tend to accept it. Obviously, the participants made the assumption of inadequacy due to a lack of language competence, and many students were not confident to speak. One student remarked in the interview that:

[...] “I believe that I am not gifted in learning English because I invest quite a lot of time to master my English but it turned out that the learning outcome is not as good as what I have expected in this subject.”

Also, 4 out of the 6 respondents made the same answer that they did not dare to speak willingly as they feel a lack of language competence, among them, S4 made the assumption that he had low communicated competence by saying that:

[...] “I assume that my English ability is not good enough to make me feel confident, so I do not want to speak in front of the class”.

Caring about task and topical knowledge

Table 3: Caring about task and topical knowledge

No	Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
01	Being unsure about the answers	14	8.8	19	55	3.2	3.93	.997
02	Finding the tasks difficult	5.0	12.7	43.7	27.4	11.2	3.27	.992

The result goes on to demonstrate the perception of students about lacking the competence to speak when coming to the statement “being unsure about the answers”, for which a large number of them, 58.2% said they voted for “agree” or “strongly agree” to it. Only 22.8 % of the total expressed the opposite opinion of disagreeing and strongly disagree, (M= 3.93). Along with that, as shown above, the questionnaire asked if the students found the task difficult and if this would result

in their unwillingness to talk confidently. The results revealed that 27.4% of students chose to agree and 11.2% of them said they strongly agree with the statement. Interestingly, a larger percentage of them, (43.7%) stayed neutral, which means they were reluctant to talk but did not realize whether it was due to the level of task difficulty or not. Meanwhile, 17.7% of them either disagree or strongly disagree on the issue. The mean score of this statement is 3.27. The results gained from the interview are also in agreement with the response of the students in the questionnaires. Here below is a comment from one of the students:

[...] “Normally, if I do not know the answer, or if the task is difficult for me, I choose to keep silent rather than say something wrong”.

Fear of being inadequacy

Table 4: Fear of being inadequacy

No	Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SD
01	Caring about and grading evaluation.	8.0	15.1	29.2	29.2	18.5	3.32	1.110
02	Being afraid of making mistakes and being corrected	5.0	11.9	29.9	42.3	10.9	3.22	1.003
03	Caring about negative feedback and evaluation from the teacher and friends	16.3	22.4	20.8	34.2	6.3	3.11	.933

The research’s result also reveals that the perceived influence of grading is another indicator that might inhibit students from speaking up. It appears that learners seemed to feel concern when they speak when their oral performance might be graded. As shown, of all the respondents, 29.2% of them said they agree and 18.5% said they strongly agree about the influence of grade evaluation on their oral performance. Only 8% of participants stated they strongly disagree; 15.1% of the participants stated they disagree, while 29.2% remained neutral. It could be argued that in learning speaking, caring about grading could partly create a negative effect on students’ speaking participation.

When being asked if “being afraid of making mistakes and being corrected” might play a barrier preventing students’ from oral performance, a large number of the students admitted that they care about that issue. In particular, 42.3% of the participants said they agree and 10.9% of them “strongly agree” to the statement. On the other hand, 16.9% of the total said they disagree or strongly disagree with this, or they might consider mistakes as a sign of learning. The remaining 29.9 % of the participants were undecided, (M=3.42).

The passiveness of the students was also due to concern about having “negative feedback and evaluation from teacher friends”, when being asked, 40.5% of them chose “agree” and “strongly agree”. However, it is noticed that the number of students choosing “strongly disagree” and “disagree” were 38.7% totally, slightly lower compared to the positive response. This indicates they were somehow slightly mindful about their teacher and friends’ negative feedback and evaluation upon they said something wrong.

The results from the interviews also showed that students’ reluctance to speak in class was the result of the perception of fearing inadequacy.

Talking about the teacher’s influence, an interviewee reasoned:

[...] “It seems to us that some teachers are easier going than others. When they study with teachers who are considerate and friendly, we can be motivated to work harder and aim higher.”

Discussion

When come to the result of research question 1, regarding to the extent to which the students show self-confidence to speak up in the classroom, the result mentioned above indicated that even being English major students, a large number of them were still very passive and did not seek out opportunities to communicate in English, and others did not put much effort in on improving their oral ability while they were trying to master the language. This is clearly shown when up to 31.5% of the students admitted that they just listen and keep silence when their teacher asked an English question. This goes contrarily with what has been concluded by many language researchers, that is, language learners can master their oral communication only when they seek out practice opportunities to take part in, (MacIntyre & Charos, 1996; Hashimoto, 2002; McCroskey and Richmond, 2005).

Regarding to research question 2, finding factors preventing the students from confidently speak out in class, it is obvious that the huge obstacle to which the students encounter during their speaking sessions in the classroom is self-perceived language competence. Following the belief of being inadequacy, the participants assumed their level of linguistic proficiency was low. This led to the state of being reluctant as well as reducing their willingness to speak up. This is obvious when a relatively large number of respondents (57.5%) admitted that low self-perception of competence in English could demotivate their confidence to speak up when learning speaking. Besides, other factors could be the barriers to reducing students' confidence in speaking up. Those factors were being afraid of making mistakes and being corrected, the background knowledge for discussion, the difficulty of the task, grading evaluation, negative feedback and evaluation from teacher friends and so forth.

The difficulty of the task is one of the main objective causes that result in inhibition in learning speaking skills according to students. This factor, with the high mean score (3.27), represents general agreement to the statement. Normally, in a class, students are divided into two categories in terms of doing the tasks. One would be “too easy” which exerts very little effort and the other is “too tough” where no matter how hard the students work, they are unlikely to find much success. In this context, only 17.7% of the respondents were confident that the difficulty of the tasks is not the reason causing inhibition. Meanwhile, a big proportion of them agreed that the task difficulty has an influential role in their performance. This finding is strongly supported by the literature shown in previous research as (Nguyen Minh Hue, 2010) stated that if learners confront the task or assignment that are supposed to go beyond their ability, they seem to unwilling or reluctant to fulfill them.

In language teaching, students make mistakes and teachers provide feedbacks are considered as a natural and necessary stage of language acquisition process. When students make mistakes, this implies that learning is taking place. However, many students do not understand this and they are always afraid of making mistakes and losing face if those mistakes are corrected by teachers. Moreover, according to Littlewood (2007) inhibitions and apprehension could be created for the students in a language classroom. When a student feels that it is safer not to try a specific task rather than to try and take the risk of failing and embarrassment, he loses motivation to do that task, (Mahdi, 2015). Peer concern is also responsible for making a student less motivated (Kuramoto, 2002).

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary of the research findings

Firstly, students' reaction toward learning English speaking skills in the classroom at the research site revealed that there are still many issues that need to be considered. The results of this study indicate that the students who took part appear to have a low self-confidence while they are learning speaking skills in the classroom; in other words, unwillingness does exist in the classroom of students who major in English. It can be concluded that WTC still exists among a majority of the students. The findings of the present study also have revealed that the selected students' self-confidence were influenced by a number of variables, both trait-like and situational ones which led them unwilling to speak.

5.2 Limitations of the study

Under the constraint of time and other certain conditions, this research is far from being perfect and there are several inevitable limitations. Under the constraint of time and other certain conditions, this research is far from being perfect and there are several inevitable limitations. It is noteworthy to raise some limitations to the present study. Firstly, due to time constraints, the study only focuses on students majoring in English of HUTECH University. Secondly, the small sample taking part in the interviews is one obvious limitation. Thirdly, the findings of the first research question showed that the 165 students answering questionnaire showed low self-confidence extent when learning speaking skills. However, this finding is rather preliminary because no score norm has been established (Peng, 2007). Moreover, the questionnaire items of the second question given to students may not cover all issues related to self-confidence and as such the identification of more possible factors that would affect students' confidence is recommended. Therefore, the study probably would obtain more reliable data for its generalizability if it would have been conducted on other students and throughout other similar contexts in Vietnam.

5.3 Pedagogical implications

The findings of the current study claim that students considered that their teachers' techniques, manner, as well as behaviors in providing feedback, giving error correction, arranging tasks could be the obstacles for them to speak up calmly in the classroom. This seems evident as it is supported by much of the literature as many previous language researchers said that students expected to speak in class only when they feel safe and free of strain. As stated in his research, Krashen (1981) stated among the variables possibly affecting language acquisition, self-confidence is considered one of the most important indicators as with a high level of confidence; students would be willing to take some risks to expose to the language in order to be successful. In order to motivate students to talk willingly, it is vital that teachers should follow some useful techniques to enhance learners' self-confidence to speak in language classrooms.

Firstly, teachers have to be aware of their roles in boosting students' self-confidence. Teachers can be functioned as psychologists, models, explorers, partners, and mentors (positive roles) but not as testers and judges (negative roles). Primarily, teachers are explorers. Self-confidence is considered a hidden treasure, and it needs to be discovered. They should use some good activities to seek the traces of self-confidence inside their students. Moreover, teachers are seen as models of self-confidence. Because students learn best by modelling and imitation, teachers themselves have to be models of self-confidence. Also, psychologists are who teachers have to be. They should be really understanding and tactical in dealing with complex and delicate psychology of different

students. Then, they should be partners or facilitators. They are the one facilitate students in the activities. They should not be commanders because they will reduce the self-confidence of students.

Secondly, to avoid a lack of self-confidence, it is vital for the teacher not to focus too much on the correction. It cannot be denied the vital roles of correction in language teaching and learning. However, it goes without saying that teacher's correction should be considered as an art and a necessary skill that each teacher needs to pay attention to whenever they are on stage to deal with students with different personalities, different backgrounds, and different levels. Accordingly, teachers should know when to give feedback and how to comment properly. Harmer (1998) believed that if the teachers correct whenever there is a problem, the conversational flow, as well as the purpose of the speaking activity, will be destroyed. In the same manner, Baker and Westrup (2003) stated that if the students are corrected all the time and with severe correction, they can find this very demotivating and become afraid to speak. Moreover, it is vital that the teacher create a relaxing learning environment in class. According to Lile, (2002), "a student will find it difficult to perform in a stressful environment". He also mentions that "the lessons must be very simple, yet fun and interesting, with a lot of changes from a writing exercise, to speaking, listening, back to writing, and so on".

5.4 Conclusion

With the main purpose of investigating students' L2 self- confident extent and examining factors, which influence their L2 performance in classroom, the paper is believed to have shed some light on the research field by employing a combination of mix-method (questionnaire survey and interviews) to identify students' confidence in the classroom environment. It is evidently that the gained data in this study has contributed valuable empirical evidence to the theory that Self-confidence is vital in language learning. As figured out, Self- confidence has strong impact on language acquisition process, In order for language students to become satisfied with a lesson, it is required to produce a stress-free classroom. It is also necessary that there must be a trust between a teacher and the students while learning the language. In that case, much communication in a targeted language will consequently be developed. Moreover, by realizing their improvement and achievement, students always gain a feeling of success.

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