

FEAR OF ENGLISH PUBLIC SPEAKING: CAUSES AND CONQUEST

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Abstract: *This study tries to find out what factors causing students' fear of English public speaking and what methods could help them to conquer it effectively. This is a descriptive qualitative study where the data for the research were collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed to all students of the sixth semester at English Study Program of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis – Riau. The questionnaire was set based on relevant literature review and also focused on condition of the students based on daily observation done by the researcher during his several years of teaching Public Speaking subject to the students. After collecting the data, the researcher sorted the data by summarizing and choosing the specific category, displaying and verifying the data analysis and making the conclusion from the finding data. The result of this study reveals the factors that caused the fear of English public speaking facing by the students and the methods that could help the students most effectively to conquer their fear of English public speaking.*

Key Words: *Fear, English, Public Speaking*

INTRODUCTION

As a lecturer of Speaking and Public Speaking subjects for several years at English Study Program of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis, the researcher has been facing some problems related to the students' fear of public speaking. The fact is that, it is always hard to ask the students to speak English in front of the audience. For example, it is quite difficult for the campus to

find out students who are willing to give a speech or to be the master of ceremony for certain English or international events in campus. In other side, there are some international events, such as English Camp (working together with Politeknik Melaka, Malaysia), Practitioner Lecture, and some other English competitions which need students to come forward as a master of ceremony, as a speaker or

a participant for English competitions. Most of them usually refuse to do so because they do not have enough confidence. They might not be confident with their English or with the idea of speaking in front of many people - or with both of them.

Feeling fear of public speaking seems to be the ‘illnesses of many people. Most of people suffer from the fear of public speaking or ‘*glossophobia*’ when they are asked to stand in front of audience to give a speech. It is rarely that we find ourselves getting serious pounding heart, shaky hands or legs, dry mouth, trembling voice, cold sweaty palms, or even lose our ideas and hesitate while delivering a speech. As Nikitina (2011:14) states that fear of public speaking ranks among the top dreads, surpassing the fear of heights, the fear of spiders or even the fear of death itself. Similar problem is also suffered by most of the students of English Study Program in State Polytechnic of Bengkalis.

It is an understandable fact that giving a public speech is the problem of many people. As Lucas

(2011:9) says: “Many people who converse easily in all kinds of everyday situations become frightened at the idea of standing up before a group to make a speech”. However, in the country where English is used as a foreign language (EFL), such as Indonesia, the fear of public speaking has turned into double, those are: in one side is the fear of making a speech in front of audience, and in the other side is their fear of their capability in English itself.

Based on the above problems, this research tries to answer the following questions:

1. What factors that make students of English Study Program of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis feel fear of giving English Public Speaking? Is that the matter of making a public speech or is it the English itself?
2. What is the most effective way do the students think can help them to ‘conquer’ their fear of English Public Speaking?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Different from our neighboring countries such as

Singapore or Malaysia, In Indonesia, English is learned and spoken as a foreign language (EFL). It means that English is learned and spoken only at schools or universities, but not in daily communication. English learners in Indonesia do not have ready access to using English as a tool of communication during their daily lives, outside the classroom (Sulistyo, 2012). This condition might causes a limited opportunity having by the students to practice their English.

Furthermore, in a small region such as Bengkalis, this problem can become more serious since the schools at villages where students of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis mostly coming from are limited in many sources, such as the facilities, the teachers' quality, etc. This fact is similar to what has said by Yuono (2005) that English teaching and learning in schools in Indonesia, especially in rural areas, is not ideal. Some factors such as teachers' qualifications, teachers' time availability, the number of students per and facilities, which all significantly affect the success of

teaching and learning English in Indonesian schools.

The above conditions might also be very possible in effecting the students' confidence on their English, especially an English public speaking.

Speaking and Public Speaking

Speaking is a way to express someone's ideas to others. Speaking also defines as a process of communication between at least two people. Speaking is used as a means of communication among people in a society in order to keep the relationship going on well.

Brown and Yule as cited by Richards (2015) say that there three functions of speaking, including: Speaking as Interaction, Speaking as Transaction and Speaking as Performance.

For this research, the third function 'Speaking as Performance' is necessary. As Richards continues that speaking as performance refers to public talk, that is, talk which transmits information before an audience such as public announcements or speeches.

The examples of speaking as performance including:

- Giving a class report about a school trip
- Conducting a class debate
- Giving a speech of welcome
- Making a sales presentation
- Giving a lecture

The main features of speaking as performance are:

- There is a focus on both message and audience
- It reflects organization and sequencing
- Form and accuracy is important
- Language is more like written language
- It is often monologic

Some of the skills involved in using speaking as performance are:

- Using an appropriate format
- Presenting information in an appropriate sequence
- Maintaining audience engagement
- Using correct pronunciation and grammar
- Creating an effect on the audience
- Using appropriate vocabulary
- Using appropriate opening and closing

Furthermore, to result good English speaking, someone has to master the five components (Brown: 2004), including: Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency and Comprehension. The five components are explained as follows:

a. Pronunciation

Pronunciation refers to the ability to produce easily comprehensible articulation. There are 3 basics teaching technique can help students in learning pronunciation, including: exhortation, speech training and practical phonetics.

b. Grammar

Grammar is the set of logical and structural rules that govern the composition of sentences, phrases, and words in any given natural language.

c. Vocabulary

Vocabulary means the appropriate diction which is used in communication.

d. Fluency

Fluency is the smoothness of flow with which sounds, syllables, words, and phrases are joined together when speaking.

e. Comprehension

Comprehension is the ability to understand completely and be familiar with a situation, facts, etc. It refers to the ability of understanding the speakers' intension and general meaning.

Fear of Public Speaking

Public Speaking is a skill that has to be mastered by almost everybody. Not only for academic purposes or for business goals, Public Speaking skills are also something useful for personal and social life. For students, the ability of delivering speech in front of the audience will give them a precious capital to compete in the future business world.

Lucas (2012:4) says, "Through out history, people have used public speaking as a vital means of communication". Public speaking generally can be applied to all types of majors and occupations and is seen by

employers as a necessary skill for job seekers. No matter what your interests are, developing speaking skills will help you for your personal, professional, and social life.

However, giving a public speech is, in fact, not an easy thing to do for many people, including the students. Even though they have made good preparation and have done series of trainings, they sometimes still have the anxiety feeling when they are asked to stand and talk in front of people, whether it is towards a large group of audience or only small number of people.

Liu (2007) in Subandowo (2017) stated that speaking anxiety generally could be caused by two factors; the external or internal factors. These factors including lack of preparation, lack of practice, memory dissociation, fear of making mistakes, fear of being the focus of attention. Also, fear of the audience statues, size of the audience, fear of the venue/place, the time of the day, personal state and the bad experiences made in the last performance.

So what is it that makes the fear of public speaking so strong and so weakens? Why do many students suffer from speech phobia every time they are asked to talk in front of other people? How can they conquer the fear of speaking in public and increase their communication skills?

How to Conquer the Fear of Public Speaking?

According to Kitchen(2011), there are at least five keys that people can effort to conquer their fear of public speaking, such as:

- *Learn to be relaxed.* Relaxation techniques involve learning to control your breathing, to lower your heart rate, and to lessen the tension in your muscles. These techniques work best when paired with gradual exposure to public speaking.
- *Challenge our beliefs about public speaking.* Another way to conquer the fear of public speaking is to challenge our beliefs about our ability to prepare and deliver an effective and impactful speech. If we are

speaking to under a dozen, we can see their eyes and their faces and read how you're doing. In larger groups – we often feel a 'mass of humanity' staring back at us in judgment. If you see one person yawning you tend to think that everyone you can't see clearly is also bored.

- *Make Good Preparations.* A public speaking performance is only the culmination of a thorough process of preparing and rehearsing our presentation. The more prepared we are, the less worried we will be about looking nervous, forgetting our lines, or losing our train of thought.
- *Practice more.* The more experience we get, the more confidence we will gain. Finding and creating opportunities to speak gives you the chance to practice what you have learned and get better at it. In addition, it helps you learn how to use your own experiences to continue improving your presentation skills.
- *Ask for professional helps.* Getting help can be a more

effective way of achieving results than doing it alone. Asking professionals for help, provide opportunities for building our skills in public speaking.

As stated above, there many theories and findings have been made to answer the fear of public speaking problem. However, through this small research, the writer tries to prove how the existing theories work to his students and also tries to find solution as the most effective ways to overcome the problem of English public speaking among the students at State Polytechnic of Bengkalis.

METHODS

This study was conducted using a descriptive qualitative research method. As Travers (2001) says that a qualitative study has strong correlation with activities and behaviors with human groups. A descriptive qualitative method would be suitable in interpreting the data including developing the description of an individual or setting, analyzing the data for themes or categories and finally

making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically (Creswell, 2013).

Data collection method

The data for this research were collected through a self-administered questionnaire that distributed to all 20 students of the sixth semester of English Study Program at State Polytechnic of Bengkalis. These students were chosen because they had learned and practiced Public Speaking during their Public Speaking class in the previous semester and they also had learned other English subjects such as Speaking, Vocabulary, Grammar and Pronunciation. Besides, the data have also been collected through series of observations done by the researcher along with his teaching-learning activities for several years with the students.

The questionnaire was started with a general question about respondents' feeling towards the idea of giving an English public speaking. Then, the questionnaire continued to the three polar questions: *First*, the questions related to student's problems in

English speaking (*Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency and Comprehension*). *Second*, related to their problem in giving a speech in public. This question was divided into two factors: internal factors (lack of preparation, lack of practice, memory dissociation, fear of making mistakes, fear of being the focus of attention) and external factors (fear of the venue/place where the speech given, the time when the speech delivered and the bad experiences made in the last performance, and the size/number of the audience). The *third* question was related to the methods that the students think could help them in conquering their fear of public speaking more effectively.

The questionnaire also provided with some essay questions as to give the room for the respondents to describe more facts about their feelings. The questionnaire was set based on relevant literature review and also focused on condition of the students based on daily observation done by the researcher during several years of teaching Public Speaking subject to the students.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Most of the students felt fear of English public speaking because: *first*, they felt worry about their capability in English and also, *second*, they were not confident about speaking in front of people. Their English speaking problem included: Pronunciation, Grammar, Vocabulary, Fluency and Comprehension. Moreover, there were two factors affecting the students feel fear of giving speeches; they were internal and external factors. The internal factors consist of lack of preparation and practice, memory dissociation, fear of making mistakes, fear of being the focus of attention. The external factors included fear of the venue/place where the speech given, the time when the speech delivered, the size/number of the audience and the bad experiences they made in the last performance. Furthermore, there were several methods could help the students to conquer their fear of public speaking, including: learn to be relax, challenge our beliefs about public speaking, make

good preparations, practice more, asking professional help.

Discussion

Students Fear of English Public Speaking

The data proved that all of the sixth semester students at English Study Program of State Polytechnic of Bengkalis felt *fear* of English public speaking. Moreover, the research showed that 85% of the students felt fear of English public speaking because they were not confident of both: their capability in English speaking and also their ability in speaking in front of public.

Students' Problem in English

Based on the result from the questionnaire given about the students' English speaking capability, the students felt worry mostly about two components, they were: Grammar and Fluency. These two components reached 55% of the total respondents. However, some of the students were also not confident with their capability in Vocabulary, Pronunciation and also comprehension.

Students' Problem in Giving Public Speech

a. Internal Factors

The data showed that two dominant internal factors causing the students fear of public speaking; they were their fear of making mistakes and also fear of being the focus of attention. These two factors represented totally 75% of the students' answers. Some of their statements such as: "*I'm afraid when I'm speaking and I forgot what I have to say and get stucked*" and "*I think the audience eyes that always scared me*" were real examples about the students feeling that drives them feeling fear of public speaking. In other side, lack preparation and practice and their problem about memorizing materials seemed not really matter to the students where only few students worry about those factors.

b. External Factors

None of the students felt fear about the venue/place of the performance and only few students worried about the time of their performance. For the external factor, the data clearly revealed that 90% of the students' answers went to these

two factors, they were: the size of the audience and their bad experience in the last performance as the external factors that caused their fear of public speaking.

Effective Methods to Conquer Fear of Public Speaking

For the effective methods that can conquer their fear of public speaking, most of the students believed that good preparation and practice were the most effective methods for them. The data showed that 63.6% of the students believed in good preparation and much practice as the most effective method for them to conquer their fear of public speaking. In other side, some students also thought that by learning to be relax, challenging their belief about their own ability in public speaking or some professional aids could also help them to conquer their fear of public speaking; but the percentage of those factors were not really significant.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

As a lecturer for Speaking and Public Speaking subjects at a

polytechnic in a small city such as Bengkalis where most of the students coming from schools in villages, one of the challenges here is about how to make the students speak English confidently, especially speaking in front of audience (public speaking).

This research proved that the students' problem here is not solely about giving a speech in front of audience but also their problem about English itself. For a public speech, the students are facing the moment where in one side they have to take a deep breath to hold their serious hearth shaking from the eyes of the audience, while in the same time, they also have to take care of their grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation _ a quite complicated task to do. Therefore, giving extra time for the students to have good preparation and to practice more seem quite important to be done by the lecturers or related academic leaders, as for example through campus extra-curricular activities, such as English club, where the students can have more chances to improve their skills both in English and public speaking.

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