

Obstacles Facing Learners in Speaking English: Non-English Teachers' Perspective, Putra Batam School

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ABSTRACT

Teachers who did not major in English in Batam face several obstacles to speaking English. The researcher observed less participation from these teachers in daily communication using English in school. This influences the competency in English of students. The purpose of this research was to explore the obstacles to speaking English among these teachers in Sekolah Putera Batam, Kepri. This naturalistic-qualitative method research uses the one-on-one interview as the technique of collecting data. In analysing the data, this research uses the descriptive qualitative method to capture the obstacles. Analysis of the descriptive data analysis show 27 categories of external and internal obstacles to speaking English that the teachers faced. The internal obstacles, which arise from the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains, are poor English grammar mastery, fear and limited English-speaking skills, while the external are former English teachers, materials, time and facilities.

Keywords: Affective, cognitive, competency, English speaking, learners' obstacles, non-English major teacher, psychomotor

INTRODUCTION

Obstacles faced by teachers who did not major in English (hereon referred to as non-English major teachers) are caused by internal and external factors. The internal factors are found in the teachers themselves, while the external factors are their former English teachers, the teaching materials, teaching method, time, space and facilities. In this case study, the non-English major

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teachers who were selected were adult learners who studied English in Sekolah Putera Batam as an extra activity.

The internal factors that were obstacles to these teachers were knowledge (cognitive), interest (affective) and skill (psychomotor). Adult cognition is a mental process of knowing that includes aspects such as intelligence, memorising, categorising, describing situations verbally, connecting and gathering ideas and solving problems. Bloom described three domains of learning i.e. the cognitive domain (knowledge classification), the psychomotor domain (physical skills or task classifications) and the affective domain (attitude and values) (Micklich, 2011, p. 263).

The aspects related to the affective domain that are obstacles to speaking English for these teachers are attitude and interest. Teachers who are keen to speak English and who have positive attitudes in learning English will enthusiastically participate in learning and speaking English. A large number of variables are implied in considering the emotional aspect of human behaviour in the language learning process (Brown, 2007, p. 144).

Obstacles to speaking English that are related to the psychomotor domain include the mastery of general and linguistic skills. The general skills include asking, answering and expressing ideas, while the linguistic skills include reading, listening, speaking and writing. These skills are necessary for implementing English as a communication tool.

Another factor that is an obstacle for these teachers is gender. Jacobsen, Eggen and Kauchak (2009, p. 155) claimed that males relied heavily on bottom-up reading strategies more than females. They are likely to be more interested in challenge, while females value the feeling of achievement (p. 155). In addition, males ascribe less importance to foreign language acquisition than females.

The teachers themselves raise obstacles to their ability to speak English. These obstacles stem from the affective domain and include the teachers' interest and sense of responsibility, self-discipline, commitment to the profession, confidence, respect, honesty and self-control. Good attitude exhibited by teachers creates a conducive environment and facilitates smoother delivery of teaching materials in the English classroom, while poor attitude displayed by teachers causes their students to not pay attention when they are conducting classes.

Teachers' skills are also important. Skillful teachers are adept at classroom management, teaching creativity, delivering learning materials, using suitable teaching methods, using learning media, empowering students and evaluating their teaching abilities and students' learning. Teachers who have mastered teaching skills can deliver material and conduct classes well. Those who have not experience difficulties in delivering material, causing students to feel bored. English teachers should have competence and performance; competence

refers to knowledge of the language and how to use it well, while performance refers to actual production (speaking and writing) and comprehension (listening and reading) of linguistic events (Brown, 2007, p. 246).

The obstacles teachers face in speaking English in terms of the learning process are related to the quality and quantity of teaching materials. Quantity of teaching materials refers to the amount of materials needed for use within the class period. Loading too much content on students in too short a period is not conducive for achieving learning competencies. However, if the teaching materials brought to the classroom are insufficient, on the other hand, students will have difficulties in achieving the competencies for lack of support. The appropriate amount of materials will significantly help students achieve the basic competencies determined. Quality of teaching materials is also important and is related to the level of difficulty and whether the materials can engage the students' interest or not. Materials that are appropriate will help students develop the targeted competencies. If the materials are too difficult for students to understand, they will impede the progress of the students as the students would lose confidence and feel incapable and desperate. On the other hand, if the materials are too simple, the students would become complacent. Interesting materials that suit the level of the class and provide some challenge for students are necessary for ensuring that students make progress in the English classroom.

Another component that affects students' learning is the teaching methods. Obstacles in this area are related to the suitability of the teaching methods, the clarity of the methods and the students' involvement in the learning activities. The selection and application of teaching methods should suit the teaching materials, teachers' ability, students' level and characteristics and the facilities. The clarity of the teaching method is important to prevent student boredom and disengagement in the learning process. Teachers' mastery of teaching methods directly impact the quality of the learning process.

This case study set out to discover the obstacles that non-English major teachers in Sekolah Putra Batam faced in speaking English in order to provide a clear description of those obstacles so that solutions can be found to overcome them. This research was conducted among non-English major teachers who were enrolled as adult learners of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course in Sekolah Putra Batam, Batam.

Obstacles Faced by non-English Major Teachers

An obstacle is a material or nonmaterial thing that stands in the way of literal or figurative progress, blocking the way ahead, while a hindrance interferes with progress, delaying it and an impediment interferes with the proper functioning of a system.

Speaking as a skill. Speaking is one of two productive skills in language teaching.

Speaking is the interactive act of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, processing and utilising both verbal and non-verbal components (Burns & Joyce, 1997, p. 76). Speaking consists of producing systemic verbal utterances to convey meaning (Nunan, 2003, p. 98). Based on this definition, speaking emphasises the use of language interactively in order to make meaning of what is said. It shows that speaking concerns meaning, which involves both verbal and non-verbal symbols in the process of interaction. According to Bygate (1987, p. 5), there are two basic features that make speaking a skill. He distinguished between motor-perceptive skills, which are concerned with correctly using the sounds and the structures of a language and interactional skills, which involve using motor-perceptive skills for the purpose of communication.

Speaking, therefore, can be considered a skill for several reasons: Firstly, we do not know how to assemble sentences in the abstract. Secondly, we have to produce sentences based on prevailing circumstances. Harris (as cited in Imanin, 2010, p. 8) mentioned five important competencies in speaking i.e. pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. It is important to learn these competencies in order to speak fluently and to communicate meaningfully. van Ek and Trim (1998, pp. 22–23) declared that there are two objectives of comprehensive foreign language learning. They are first, communicative ability, which encompasses linguistic competence,

sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence and socio-cultural competence and second, social competence, which encompasses optimal development of personality, cognitive development and affective development. The communicative approach to learning language aims to enable learners to use a foreign language for their own purposes (van Ek & Trim, 1998, p. 22).

Problems with speaking and speaking activities. According to Brown (2007, p. 256), the characteristics of spoken language can make oral performance easy or difficult. Problems with speaking are caused by clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, use of colloquial language, stress, rhythm and intonation, affective factors and interaction. Problems that can arise from speaking activities include inhibition, having nothing to say, low participation and mother-tongue interference.

METHODOLOGY

The naturalistic qualitative approach was used for this research, which involved collecting data, analysing it and interpreting it. As the method involved observing what people did and said, it was also subjective. This research also used the descriptive method in describing the data.

The sample consisted of 55 adult learners (21 males and 34 females) who worked as teachers of non-English courses at primary and high-school levels at Sekolah Putera Batam, Batam, Kepri, Indonesia and

studying English. Their ages ranged from 27 to 47 years of age. The research used open-ended questions to collect primary qualitative data (Johnson & Christensen, 2014, p. 234). The respondents were asked about the obstacles they faced in speaking English in school. In-depth interviews were conducted with the respondents to consolidate the data, while observation was done to capture their attitude in speaking English (Berg, 2001, p. 52). The data were then grouped into external and internal factors that acted as obstacles. Reduction was used to avoid capturing the same data. Categorical data analysis was made to find the grand substantive theory to discover the primary obstacle to speaking English faced by these adult learners. The findings were then explained descriptively.

RESULTS

Internal Obstacles

The obstacles to speaking English caused by the learners were identified as arising from three major domains: cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains.

Cognitive domain

The most number of obstacles to speaking English seemed to stem from the learners' cognitive domain. Teachers should use different teaching methods for EFL and ESL learners and should indeed be aware of the different needs of the two groups of students (Lightbown & Spada, 1993, p. 66). Data on the cognitive domain revealed

five problem areas among the respondents: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, structure and meaning. Of these, grammar seemed to be the most difficult challenge for the respondents. This was followed by vocabulary, structure, pronunciation and meaning. The problems were identified as being (1) low mastery of grammar, (2) limited vocabulary mastery, (3) poor pronunciation, (4) difficulty in structuring sentences, and (5) weak semantics.

Affective domain

The second biggest problem area for the respondents was the affective domain. They explained that they were often held back by negative emotions and feelings such as (1) shyness, (2) fear, (3) nervousness, (4) lack of confidence, and (5) doubt.

Psychomotor domain

Obstacles stemming from the psychomotor domain were fatigue, habit and limited skill in speaking English. The respondents explained that their job was tiring because of the long working hours and the workload, which included having to check students' assignments after work. In addition, they also had to attend to their families. The strain was such that they had little strength left to deal with the stress of having to master a foreign language. In addition, it was habitual for them to speak the language they were familiar with and fluent in, that is, the language they used daily to meet all their communication needs. Finally,

the respondents elaborated that they had trouble with listening, writing and speaking English. They believed that they needed to master these skills as well to be able to speak English well.

External Obstacles

External obstacles that affected the respondents were their former English teachers, materials, time and facilities.

In terms of the cognitive domain, the respondents explained that their teachers of English had lacked knowledge and mastery of the language, and this had created a deficit in their own knowledge and mastery of the language. In terms of the affective domain, the respondents said that their teachers had been lazy and had not given them good

materials when teaching them English. Finally, in terms of the psychomotor domain, the respondents stated that their teachers had not been able to effectively explain the language items they taught. Their approach to teaching had not been good.

The respondents explained that they had not received good materials when learning English and this had affected their learning. The teaching methods had also not been effective. They had also not had sufficient time to learn and master English. In addition, they had received little support in learning English.

Evidence

The chart below shows all the obstacles as identified by the respondents in this study.

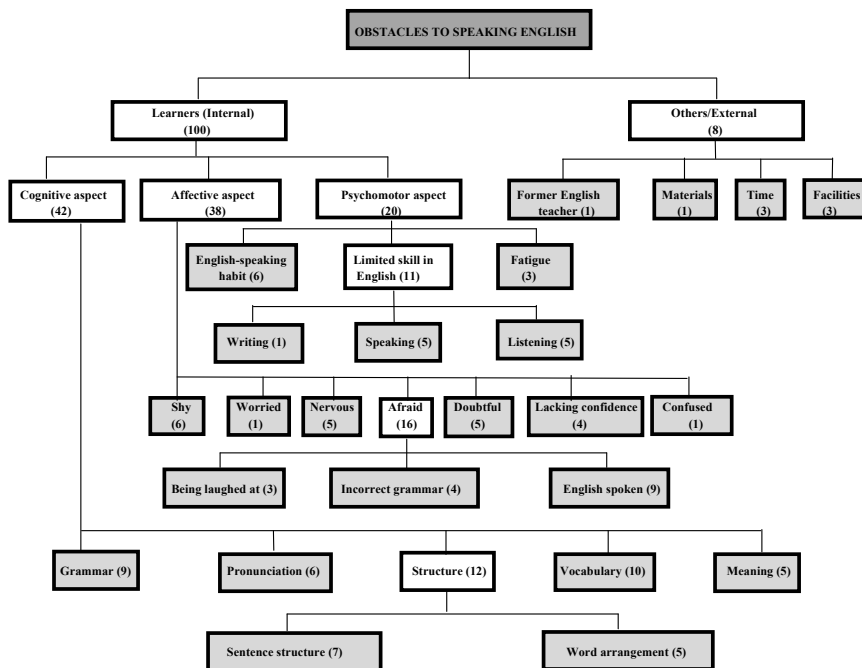


Figure 1. The 27 obstacles the respondents faced in speaking English

DISCUSSION

The study identified internal and external obstacles that prevented the respondents from speaking English. The internal obstacles stemmed from the cognitive domain, the affective domain and the psychomotor domain. In terms of the cognitive domain, the respondents struggled with low grammar mastery, and lack of knowledge regarding the parts of speech. In addition, they did not understand the use of English tenses. They also had very limited vocabulary and their pronunciation was poor. Morley (as cited in Zhang & Yin, 2009, p. 141). Poor pronunciation is one factor that makes EFL learners reluctant to speak English. They were also not able to structure sentences properly. Finally, the respondents were not able to identify the meaning of English sentences in oral activities.

In terms of the affective domain, the respondents were psychologically affected by negative feelings and emotions such as shyness, worry, nervousness, especially of speaking in public, fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, lack of confidence and doubt, and these made them reluctant to speak English. They experienced these feelings and emotions when they attempted to speak English.

Finally, in terms of the psychomotor domain, the respondents stated that fatigue because of work, not speaking English habitually and their limited English skills were the reasons they preferred not to speak English.

The external obstacles that kept the respondents from speaking English were having poor teachers of English, being given poor materials, having too short a time to study the language and not having adequate support facilities to aid them in learning the language.

Grand Substantive Theories

The 27 substantive theories identified in this study can be grouped into four grand substantive theories namely, (1) inadequate grasp of vocabulary and grammatical rules, (2) negative feelings and emotions that affected them psychologically, making them reluctant to speak English, (3) fatigue, and (4) limited skills in English.

CONCLUSION

The respondents in this study identified 27 categories of obstacles they faced in speaking English. The main obstacles came from the respondents themselves; these internal obstacles stemmed from the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. The significant obstacles to speaking English were identified as poor grammar and vocabulary mastery, negative emotions and feelings, fatigue and lack of proper support. These obstacles were narrowed down to four grand substantive theories namely, inadequate grasp of vocabulary and grammar, negative emotions and feelings, fatigue, seldom speaking English as a habit, limited English skills and lack of support.

Research Implications

The implications of this research are:

- a. Inadequate grasp of English grammar and vocabulary can be caused by the students themselves, early experience of learning English, poor teachers or poor materials.
- b. Inadequate grasp of English grammar and vocabulary is the main obstacle that prevents learners from speaking English.
- c. Learners' affective weaknesses can be caused by lack of knowledge of English.
- d. Affective weaknesses such as shyness, worry, nervousness, especially at having to speak in public, fear of making mistakes and being laughed at, lack of confidence and doubt are obstacles to speaking English.
- e. Fatigue makes learners feel lazy and sleepy during the language activities, and prevents them from acquiring skill in speaking English.
- f. Learners need adequate time to pick up English.
- g. Limited skill in writing and listening can affect the speaking skills of learners.
- h. Language learners need a supporting structure to help them pick up the language and become skillful users of it. Such a structure includes materials, a conducive environment and other users of the language with whom the learners can practice speaking English.

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