
Investigating the Factors of English Language Speaking Anxiety Among Engineering Students in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin (PSMZA) Dungun, Terengganu.

Aiza binti Zainal Abidin¹, Norazelina binti Ghazali²

¹ General Studies Department, Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia
E-mail: aiza@psmza.edu.my

² General Studies Department, Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia
E-mail: norazelina@psmza.edu.my

Abstract

This study investigated the factors of speaking anxiety among Engineering Students in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin. The objectives of this study were to explore whether the lack of content to speak, making mistakes in grammar component and negative feelings contribute to the factors of English speaking anxiety among engineering students in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin. Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) was used to administer this study to 80 engineering students from various departments in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin. From 33 items in FLCAS 12 items were chosen to measure the factors of English language speaking anxiety among engineering students in PSMZA. The findings revealed that students suffer from speaking anxiety because they are confused when they speak more in Communicative English Classroom, the students also feel anxious as they are weak in grammar. Study revealed that negative feelings towards speaking assessment affected their marks because they keep thinking of negative evaluation from lecturers as all assessments for Communicative English courses are designed to focus on communicative ability of the students.

Keywords : *Anxiety; Communicative English; Speaking*

I. INTRODUCTION

Polytechnic graduates contribute to the development of Malaysia. All engineering students in polytechnic have to complete three Communicative English courses throughout their study in order to obtain a diploma in their field of study. The demand from industry makes The Ministry of Higher Education to introduce the communicative element in the English language new syllabus starting 2010. The English language courses taught in polytechnics have been changed from English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to Communicative English (CE) in response to the Outcome-Based Education (OBE). [1] said that OBE is an educational theory that requires students to be active, responsible participants in their own learning and with their own pace of learning.

Hence, the assessments designed for the latest courses are related to communication skills that can prepare themselves for employment as the students need to focus on what they can achieve in a communicative English classroom. Focusing on the communicative part, it gives the students chances for best practice in speaking. [2] said that it is critical to implement Communicative Language Teaching

(CLT) in the classroom in order to increase the number of productive workers who can successfully communicate in English. However, the students face difficulties in speaking more than other language skills used in the communicative English classroom.

A number of studies have shown that speaking is not only seen as one of the most constructive skills that plays a significant role in communication but the most anxiety-provoking skill [3], [4], [5]. Conveying messages, expressing feelings, exchanging ideas and information are the ways to communicate with other people. Students in polytechnics are a group of people who undoubtedly need to acquire the English language because it is very helpful for their education as well as their future. However, students are comfortable using their mother tongue in their daily communication and using the same language in the Communicative English classroom when they interact with their classmates even though there are instructions to use English in the classroom.

In some cases, students communicate half-way using English with their lecturers but because of some difficulties they stop and fail to convey any

messages using the target language. To support this claim, [6] in her research said that when students attempt to communicate in English, some of them have a high tendency to switch to their mother tongue occasionally. This happens because speaking is challenging and there are many processes and levels of learning before students are able to master the language. All these reasons contribute to the speaking anxiety among the students.

Furthermore, throughout these processes, students encounter many factors that give positive and negative impacts toward the learning process. Anxiety is one of the factors that can be considered to be a major character that contributes to this situation. According to [7] anxiety can be defined as a complex concept dependent upon not only on one's feelings of self efficacy but also appraisal concerning the potential and perceived threats inherent in certain situations. [8] claimed that anxiety may affect an individual's communication or willingness to communicate or produce and [9] shared the same view on anxiety as the appalling factor causing debilitating in speaking foreign language.

This research is primarily to explore the factors that lead to speaking anxiety among Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin (PSMZA) students majoring in the Engineering field of study. At polytechnic, students need to concentrate to learn English in preparation for a future career.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In recent years, fresh graduates fiercely compete to be the best candidate when searching for a job. Graduates possessing competencies in their field of studies are needed by potential employers as they are expected to contribute to the excellencies of the company. [10] has emphasized the importance of organizations to hire qualified people. From the list of competencies, acquiring good communication skills are needed to secure the post applied. Being able to speak effectively helps fresh graduates to succeed in their career. [5] write that when learners master the English language speaking skills, they have chances to be employed with good positions in multinational companies after completing their study.

However, for many people, speaking is the hardest skill to acquire when it comes to the English Language. [5] said that speaking has always been a critical skill for ESL/EFL learners. These students may have the capabilities to read, listen and write but they are poor at speaking. Even though the English language is widely spoken in major cities in

Malaysia and considered as a second language in educational contexts, students still encounter problems in speaking. These situations did not only happen in urban areas but in the entire country including in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin.

A vast majority of students are having a hard time speaking English effectively. Thus, anxiety is believed to be one of the reasons that restrains the students from using English as their medium of communication. According to [11] anxiety is the feeling of tension and apprehension that is connected to the second language contexts in every language skill. In Communicative English class, speaking becomes an important skill to achieve compared to other communication skills and for the students, it is a highly anxiety-provoking skill to acquire. Lecturers are experiencing the same situation in all Communicative English classes when students failed to express themselves successfully. As [5] claimed that English second learners (ESL) who experience communicative anxiety, fail to speak effectively. [12] said anxiety can be associated with challenges to self-potential and a perception of certain conditions as dangerous.

It suggests that speaking anxiety creates fearness among the students when they need to perform in the target language. Hence, the situation may contribute to the low performance in their speaking and affect the achievement in communicative assessments. [9] observed that students in higher education institutions who speak English as a second language experience speaking anxiety, which has a negative impact on their speaking performance both in and out of class. Several studies ascertained gender, self-perception or self-esteem, social environment, cultural differences, social status, and formal classroom environment as the key factors of foreign language speaking anxiety. [13] claimed gender has been recognised as an influential factor in most parts of the Arab world in terms of speaking anxiety.

Female students were found to have higher levels of anxiety than male students in seven Arab countries whereas there was a significant difference between males and females in Iraq, Palestine, and Jordan. On the contrary, [14] and [15] share the same view in their research which indicate that Malaysian University students suffer a high level of English Language anxiety because fear of making mistakes, fear of negative judgments, and emphasis of culture on the need for positive outlook and saving face. [9] finds that failure to use error-free sentences in conversation and unable to express themselves in a wide range of communicative situations are the factors of English speaking anxiety among a group of postgraduate students in Pakistan. However there

are no significant differences between genders related to English language anxiety.

Whereas [16] discovered external factors, mainly the teacher's unfriendly attitude towards students in English speaking classes, multiple questions and being criticized by classmates on presentations and internal factors including fear of committing mistakes and fear of failure were the main contributors to the English language anxiety among students. In addition, [17] determine the factors of English speaking anxiety are due to fear of affecting conversation in public, fear of negative evaluation and fear of being inaccurate while speaking.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This small-scale research was done to explore the factors of English speaking anxiety among Semester Four students in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin and this study was administered using the quantitative descriptive research method. [18] defines quantitative research as a process of collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and writing the results of a study.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
The more I try to speak, the more confused I get	3.81*	1.26
I feel anxious when teacher asks me to explain something in English	3.45	1.35
While explaining in English, I am worried that I translate word by word from my native language	3.58	1.35
I never feel quite sure even I am well prepared for English language class	3.37**	1.38

Note. *The highest and **the lowest

By referring to **Table 1**, all the items are based on content to speak in an English language classroom and revealed that the vast majority of students ($M=3.85$, $SD=1.26$) specified their anxiety level is high when they try to explain more on a topic. The students became confused and lost in their

A. Research Instruments

A set of questionnaires was adapted and developed from Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) Horwitz et.al 1986 to measure the factors of participants' English language speaking anxiety in the Communicative English classroom. FLCAS is based on five-point Likert Scale, (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree and 5=strongly agree) to obtain reliable results. The responses were keyed in SPSS (Version 28.0) for the accurate data before analyzing to get the final results for the study.

B. Participants

The participants are among engineering students in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, Dungun Terengganu. There are 80 participants consisting of 55 females and 25 male students from various engineering courses (Mechanical Engineering, Electrical Engineering and Civil Engineering) who were selected in this small-scale study. All these students are taking Communicative English Courses throughout their three years study in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin. In completing all the courses, it is compulsory for them to complete various assessments related to communication skills.

presentation. While students ($M=3.37$, $SD=1.38$) are still disturb by anxiety even though they are well prepared for English language class. This happens when they usually compare their ability with other friends.

Table 2

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
I feel afraid that other students will laugh at me when I start speaking in English	3.55	1.29
I feel afraid that the teacher will highlight grammatical mistakes while speaking	3.70	1.27
I am afraid my English language teacher is correcting every mistake I make	3.95**	1.11
It disturbs me when I cannot speak English effectively because of my grammar	3.96*	1.03

Note. *The highest and **the lowest

After analysing the items on Table 2 based on grammar skill, it can be seen that the majority of students ($M=3.96$, $SD=1.03$) suffer from anxiety because they are really concerned about their grammar skill. They feel anxious about their ability to construct sentences correctly and speak effectively because of their weaknesses in grammar. Additionally, students ($M=3.95$, $SD=1.11$) also reported that they are afraid when their teacher corrects every mistake they make while speaking. Students are easily distracted when committing grammar mistakes and this situation contributes to the anxiety to speak in their Communicative English classroom.

Table 3

Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
It frightens me when I don't understand what teacher is correcting	3.85	1.30
I can feel my heart pounding when I'm going to be called on in English language class	3.85**	1.21
I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is saying in English	3.93*	1.20
I start to panic when I have to speak without preparation in English language class	3.90	1.20

Note. *The highest and **the lowest

The result of **Table 3** indicates that the students become anxious when they do not understand the explanation given by their teacher ($M=3.93$, $SD=1.20$). The students feel disappointed and upset as they need to ask for clarification about the topic again from their teacher. This situation distributes the high level of anxiety among them. Whereas many students ($M=3.85$, $SD=1.21$) also suffer anxiety as their heart beats when they are going to be called by the teacher. One of the assessments is on Job Interview and the students need to complete the assessment face to face. Thus, this situation hits them and they feel uneasy, fearful and uncomfortable as they have to face their teacher alone.

Based on the results of the analysis, the major findings noted that inability to present relevant content, weaknesses in grammar skill and the negative feeling are the key factors of the majority of students' English speaking anxiety in the Communicative English classroom in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin. Due to the inefficiency

of the English language, these students do not have the ability to speak in English effectively and this contributes to high levels of anxiety when completing their activities and assessments in the Communicative English classroom. [19] state that anxiety is related to speaking activities done in classroom and it exposes the students with embarrassment when they perform in the foreign language classrooms. These situations happen as all communicative assessments acquire students to speak in front of a specific audience. [20] claims many factors of anxiety in speaking foreign language classroom including fear of interacting with native speakers, delivering oral presentation and presenting in front of classmates. Individual Presentation, Mock Job Interview, Group Discussion, Group Presentation are the list of assessments that need to be completed by the students in obtaining a diploma in their field of study. Students who suffer from anxiety are unable to deliver effective content in their speaking tasks and this affects their marks in every communicative assessment in English language classroom. [21] indicate that students with high levels of anxiety usually achieve low results in evaluation and students become more anxious in English language speaking because of low results.

The fear of committing grammatical mistakes also contributes to the anxiety among students. In the Communicative English classroom, students are explained by their lecturers on the rubric that requires them to follow some criteria. The necessity to achieve good content in presentation, follow correct grammar rules and at the same time they have to accomplish the delivery components (articulation, voice projection, gestures and eye contact) makes the students become anxious. They were afraid of making grammar mistakes as it is part of the evaluation. Thus, this definitely affects their performance and easily loses marks as they are focusing more on the grammar component. This finding is in line with the findings by [9] which state that students with inefficiency in grammar of the target language could lose good marks in class speaking activities. [22] also shares the similar finding that fear of negative evaluation makes many foreign language learners experience anxiety.

Other than that, the findings indicate that students suffer from anxiety because they have negative feelings when coming to English language classrooms. Majority of students reveal their weaknesses in the English language when they do not understand what the teacher is saying in English. The inability to understand because of their lack of knowledge of English makes them anxious when the teacher starts asking questions about the topic learned. The students feel disappointed or upset as

they need to answer the teacher's questions. This claim is supported by [23] who said that students are scared to complete speaking task and think negatively towards it when communication competency is the main focus in English language classroom. At this stage students' anxiety is at a high level as they need to speak in front of others on something they are not sure of. [21] state that one of the causes of anxiety is mainly related to understanding teachers' questions, friends, and in the learning stage.

V. CONCLUSION

This study was carried out to investigate the factors of English speaking anxiety among students and to provide a relevant outcome that anxiety is very common among polytechnic students. Reviews from various studies have enlightened to validate the relevance of this small scale research. [24] say that anxiety is a subjective feeling of tension and worry adjoined with the autonomic nervous system. Thus, the research findings confirmed the above statement that students in Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin suffer from anxiety when they are in Communicative English Classrooms which affect their academic achievement.

This study suggests more studies on factors or causes of English speaking anxiety among Malaysian students to be explored in the future. It is important as interested parties could have better knowledge on the factors or causes that trigger English speaking anxiety among Malaysian students. Based on this study, there are few suggestions to lower the English speaking anxiety in Communicative English classrooms. First, The teacher have to explain to students that making mistakes are common and feeling stress are part of the learning process. Besides, the teacher needs to ensure students understand the task given thoroughly by asking them to explain in very simple English. Other than that, the teacher can arrange a mock presentation so that students are comfortable with the environment and can feel the task given as a real presentation. Instead, carrying enjoyable group activities that make students forget about their fear of speaking in English. Making a mock presentation with free interruption from teachers so that students can develop their confidence in delivery.

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AUTHOR'S INFORMATION

<p>First Author: Aiza bt Zainal Abidin</p> 	<p>General Studies Department, Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia</p> <p>E-mail: aiza@psmza.edu.my</p>
<p>Second Author: Norazelina bt Ghazali</p> 	<p>General Studies Department, Politeknik Sultan Mizan Zainal Abidin, Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia</p> <p>E-mail: norazelina@psmza.edu.my</p>