

SCRUTINISING THE UNIVERSITY EFL STUDENTS' PHOBIA OF ERRORS MAKING IN SPEAKING: A CASE STUDY OF ADJARRA UNIVERSITY CENTER

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Abstract

The main aim of this study is to investigate the factors that cause the fear to University EFL students while speaking, especially those of Adjarra Campus. By using a mixed method (quantitative method and qualitative method), this study aims at knowing and understanding the causes related to the fear of speaking English language by the selected university students. Questionnaire is addressed to students; and lecturers have been interviewed. The findings show that the majority of EFL students of Adjarra Campus suffer from different psychological barriers in which fear of making mistakes is considered as the most affective which diminishes their chances of speaking.

Key words: *fear, mistakes, psychological barriers, speaking*

Résumé

L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'explorer les facteurs qui causent la peur chez les étudiants du Département d'anglais du Campus d'Adjarra. En utilisant la méthode mixte (méthode quantitative et celle qualitative), cette étude vise à connaître et comprendre les causes liées à la peur de parler la langue anglaise par les étudiants. Un questionnaire a été adressé aux étudiants; et les professeurs ont été interrogés. Les résultats ont montré que la majorité des étudiants du Campus d'Adjarra souffrent de différentes barrières psychologiques dans lesquelles la peur de commettre des erreurs est considérée comme la plus affective qui diminue leurs chances de parler.

Mots clés : *peur, erreurs, barrières psychologiques, le parler*

Introduction

Learning English has become a need of the students. In every country, students are compelled to study and learn English language.

In teaching English, as one of the productive skills, speaking activity must focus on how to assist students to use and to communicate in English (Richard, 2008:19). This is important as Richard further says: *“Most students often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their English course on the basis of how much they feel they have improved in their speaking proficiency”*. According to Nunan (1991:39), being able to speak the language is the most crucial aspect of the foreign language learning process, and knowing a language is often associated with the ability to have a conversation in the target language. Thereupon, teachers’ efforts should be focused on developing students’ ability to speak so long as learning to speak is considered as the greatest challenge for all language learners (Pinter, 2006:49).

In fact, the growing demand for speaking English by the students is hindered by some factors. Keeping in view the key importance of English language in schools, it is noted that students started learning English at different levels. Besides, they have been learning English for years; though, they encounter some difficulties in terms of speaking it effectively. The main concern of this study is to explore the causes of students’ fear of speaking English as well as the possible solutions to overcome the factors. Living in a non-English speaking environment, these learners face limitations on the use of the target language, i.e., lack of sufficient exposure to the language and shortage of opportunities to speak it. As a result, learners may be under pressure and vulnerable to fear once they are required to interact in English. Moreover, speaking is assumed to be the most stressful among the four skills of language performance (Zhang, 2019:93). In the same line with this, speaking is also the most challenging skill among four basic language skills (Murphy, 2011; Mauranen, 2006).

The study is carried out to find suitable answers to the questions:

- How does the training prepare students to speak English language effectively?
- What makes EFL students afraid of speaking?

The main purpose of this study is to find out answers to the questions formulated, to identify some of the main problems EFL students face while speaking English and provide specific tips for them to overcome the fear of speaking English. To develop this study, a deep theoretical analysis has been carried out to gather updated information on all causes that affect students' speaking; how these factors affect their performance, and the different solutions that experts provide to overcome the fear of speaking English.

1. Literature Review

1.1 Speaking

Speaking is generally described as “the verbal use of language to communicate with others” (Fulcher, 2003:23). Speaking is the delivery of language through the mouth. To speak, we create sounds using speech organs such as the lungs, vocal tract, vocal cords, tongue, teeth, and lips. It is one of the four language skills, which are: listening, speaking, reading and writing. This vocalized form of language usually requires at least one listener. Speaking is a skill which means not only to be known or learned but to be practiced. Ur (2012:561) considers speaking as the most important skill among the four skills because people who know a language are referred to as speakers of that language. This indicates that using a language is more important than just knowing about it because —there is no point knowing a lot about the language if you cannot use it (Scrivener, 2005:146).

1.2 The Nature of Speaking Skill

Speaking is a process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts (Kayilu 2006:163). In line with this issue, there have been some relevant researches conducted. In effect, Nunan (1999:67), Schwartz

(2005:109), and Thornbury (2005:305) argue that psychological factors such as anxiety or shyness, lack of confidence, lack of motivation, and fear of mistakes are the factors commonly that hinder students from speaking.

Sato (2003:52) finds that students of English are not highly competent in speaking due to their fear of making mistakes. The same finding is also shared by Yan (2007:137) who finds that students fail to join in the English discussion because of their vocabulary problems and fear of making mistakes resulting in their inability to speak English well. Besides, she says that students find speaking English as a stressful activity especially if they have to perform something using English.

1.3 Factors that Cause Speaking Difficulties to EFL Learners

Zhang (2009:93) argues that speaking remains the most difficult skill to master for the majority of EFL learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English. According to Ur (2016:121), many factors cause difficulty in speaking, and they are as follows: Inhibition, Nothing to say, Low or uneven, Mother-tongue use.

Besides, Rababa'h, (2005:24) points out that many factors cause difficulties in speaking English among EFL learners. Some of these factors are related to the learners themselves, the teaching strategies, the curriculum, and the environment. For example, many learners lack the necessary vocabulary to get their meaning across, and consequently, they cannot keep the interaction going.

Furthermore, language is best learned when the learners' attention is focused on understanding, saying and doing something with language, and not when their attention is focused explicitly on linguistic features (Kumaravadivelu, 2003:27).

1.4 Psychological Factors that Hinder Students from Speaking

It has been mentioned earlier that some psychological factors hinder students from practicing their speaking in English class. Each of them is explained below.

1.4.1 Language Anxiety

Language anxiety can be considered in the high rank among the other factors. According to Brown (1997:3), second language or foreign language learning is a complex task that is susceptible to human anxiety which is associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, and apprehension. Brown also reports that language anxiety is fear or apprehension occurring when a learner is expected to perform in the language or foreign language. Therefore, language anxiety is a negative concept that refers to a kind of state of discomfort associated with learning a new language.

Specifically talking, some learners can be anxious if they perform in front of their classmates such as in role-plays and oral presentations or if they talk and the others look at them as in classroom discussions. In other words, they become anxious if they are put in the spot. Moreover, a long number of first-year students may experience anxiety more than the others since some of them were used, before, they enrollment to the university, to be passive. Horwitz (2010:10).

1.4.2 Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is trusting, believing, and being sure about one's abilities and good qualities. Ur (2012:123) defines it as "The evaluation which the individual makes and customarily maintains concerning himself: it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval and indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself/herself to be capable, significant, successful, and worthy. In other words, it means the belief that the learner has about his/her abilities to carry out an activity. Being confident is one of the most important aspects of learning language or foreign language. A

student with self-confidence, even with low linguistic competence, means that he/she is not shy of being ridiculous or fear of making mistakes when participating in the classroom activities.

More specifically, Ur (2012) studies the effects of self-confidence on the performance of an oral production task; and she found that self-confidence is associated positively with performance on oral production measures. As a result, the study comes out with the importance of self-confidence as a variable in the second language learning process. At this point, self-confidence is considered as a motivating factor.

Also, it can be found a linguistically competent student but he/she lacks the self-confidence to perform a task or even to share his/her opinion by using English. For instance, some students tend to compare themselves with their classmates. Then, they start to underestimate their abilities if they are better than them, in their opinion. That means that a lack of self-confidence comes from learners' doubts about their abilities. Therefore, this can result in low performance and consequently on a low level of EFL learners' oral proficiency.

Going deeply, the majority of EFL first-year students may lack the self-confidence to perform or to participate in oral classroom activities since it is generally their first time to do so. Jones (2007) claims that students who have never worked together before may lack confidence. Moreover, some students may also lack confidence if they are not well prepared in advance for the task in particular during a spontaneous conversation. Furthermore, students who lack confidence prefer to avoid challenges and risk-taking of criticism. Therefore, their chances of speaking in English will be reduced and their level of oral proficiency will be negatively affected. For that reason, students with a low level of self-confidence need a lot of support and encouragement from the teacher to let them feel confident.

1.4.3 Fear of Making Mistakes

It is well-known that through errors we learn only when we are aware of them and willing to improve. However, EFL learners consider mistakes as something forbidden, which should be not committed. Their fear of making mistakes, especially, when they talk using English, comes as a result of their emphasis on accuracy more than fluency. They think that they have to speak with correct grammar or they will be laughed at by their classmates. Additionally, in some cases, students' reluctance can be due to being continually corrected by the teacher for every mistake they make. Moreover, fear of making mistakes is more related to a lack of confidence. Students with a low level of confidence often fear of being laughed at or fear of losing face in front of their classmates.

Many studies have investigated the relationship between the fear of making mistakes and EFL learners' performance. They have found that fear of making mistakes can harm learners' performance. That means that their opportunities to speak can be diminished. As a consequence, the learners' level of oral proficiency will hinder. More precisely, Ur (2012:118) reports about the difficulties that inhibit the student from a talk. He informs about students' fear of making mistakes as one of many problems. He says:

Unlike the other three language skills, speaking requires some degree of real-time exposure to an audience. Students are often inhibited about trying to say things in a foreign language in the classroom because they are worried about making mistakes, scared of criticism or losing face... Accordingly, EFL learners prefer to keep silent all the time to avoid committing mistakes particularly during activities in which they are not pre-prepared or which involve a degree of improvisation.

While other learners hesitate to answer any question unless they are completely sure it is correct in meaning and grammar, some students do not take the risk to make the mistakes. Moreover, ‘honor learners’, as Doyle (2008:22-23) calls them, fear to take the risk of making mistakes to not lose face. He states that error will reveal that they might not be as smart as they want their peers [or even their teachers] to think they are. Consequently, making errors should be taken seriously by the teachers. This does not mean that all learners’ mistakes should be corrected. However, the teacher should teach his/her students that errors are keys to language learning. More importantly, teachers’ feedback should focus more on getting students’ messages across in a fluent way regardless of its accuracy, as Nation (2010) argued.

1.4.4 Shyness

According to Zua (2008), shyness is “a temporary emotional reaction triggered by encountering new people and situations”. Cheek (ibid) refines this definition, stating that shyness is the tendency to feel tense, worried, or awkward during social interactions, especially with unfamiliar people. Manning and Ray (1993) claim that shyness and self-confidence are not total states to which people are assigned permanently. For instance, they explained, some people are shy on some occasions and not on others, while others are shy most of the time. Therefore, they conclude, shy people probably are shy only at certain times and under certain circumstances. Generally, shyness is a situational and occasional feeling of embarrassment.

In case of EFL, shyness is an emotional thing that many students suffer from at some time when they are required to speak in English class (Juhana, 2012:101). Accordingly, she adds, this indicates that shyness could be a source of problem in students’ performance in the classroom especially in the class of speaking.

More than that, over shyness, may hinder the students from accomplishing their ultimate goals of learning English. In detail, shy students may prefer some activities such as pair discussion in which they are not required to stand up to talk or to play ridiculous roles and all the eyes are on them.

Importantly, first-year students are the most category that may be exposed to shyness because they are unfamiliar with the activities of the classrooms. Nevertheless, for some students, eventually, shyness can be overcome over time. However, for some students, it is considered as a real problem. In this case, shyness can be viewed as a trait that can be difficult to be overcome.

1.4.5. Lack of Motivation

It is early mentioned that motivation is a key to students' learning success (Songsiri, 2007). Concerning the issue of motivation in learning, Nunan (1999) stresses that motivation is important to notice in that it can affect students' reluctance to speak in English. In this sense, motivation is a key consideration in determining the preparedness of learners to communicate. Zua (2008) further adds that motivation is an inner energy. She says that no matter what kinds of motivation the learners possess it will enhance their study interest. It has been proven in many studies that students with a strong motivation to succeed can persist in learning and gain better scores than those who have weaker motivation of success showing that building student's motivation to learn is urgent for every teacher.

2. Methodology of the Study

2.1 Target Population and Research Instruments

Through this study, both teachers and learners of Adjarra Campus English Department have been addressed as the primarily source of data collection in this school community. The participants consisted of fifty-four (54) EFL students. The main instruments that

have been used to carry out the research are questionnaire and interviews.

2.1.2 Questionnaire to Students

This instrument is consisted of (10) questions addressed to EFL students of Adjarra Campus. The questionnaire aims at evaluating their oral capacity in English so as to reveal what prevents them from speaking English and what will be of use for them to overcome the fear and become good English speakers.

2.1.3 Interviews to EFL Teachers

For interviews, some lecturers of Adjarra Campus English Department were interviewed. The aim is to know the challenges faced by students in speaking and the strategies to foster their oral skills.

3. Data Presentations, Analysis, Discussion and Interpretation of the Findings.

3.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

3.1.1 Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data Collected from Questionnaire

Table 1: Students' English level

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Very good	4	7.41 %
Good	37	68.52 %
Average	13	24.07 %
Poor	0	0 %
Total	54	100 %

The results in table 1 show that sixty-eight point five two percent (68.52%) of the students have a good level in English. Then, the second category with seven point four one percent (7.41%) has a

very good level in English which can be interpreted as mastering of the language performance skills. Twenty-four point zero seven percent (24.07%) of students show a level of language performance skills below the average.

Table2: Students’ capacity of expressing themselves orally

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	41	75.93 %
No	13	24.07 %
Total	54	100 %

The results in table 2 show that the majority of the students (75.93%) can express themselves orally whereas the minority of them (24.07 %) confessed that they are not in capacity to express themselves orally.

Table 3: Students’ attitudes towards the difficulty of speaking

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	20	37.04 %
No	34	62.96 %
Total	54	100 %

The results in table 3 reveal that more than half (62.96%) of the learners said that speaking skill is not difficult to be mastered. However, the rest (37.04%) said that it is difficult to be mastered. This implies that the level of language performance skills is not the issue faced while trying to communicate.

Table 4: Factors that prevent students from speaking English fluently

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Fear of making mistakes	30	55.56 %
Lack of self confidence	11	20.37 %
Anxiety	2	3.70 %
Lack of motivation	6	11.11 %
Shyness	5	9.26 %
Total	54	100 %

The majority of students (55.56%) complained that fear of making mistakes is what prevents them from speaking English, contrary to some students (20.37%) who lack self-confidence. However, it shows three point seven percent (3.70%) students with anxiety factors; those students who are not motivated represent eleven point one one percent (11.11%) while shyness represents nine point two six percent (9.26%) for other students. This is the assurance that the level, rather very good or good of the English language, is not the problem which hampers the students to communicate but other factors apart from the linguistic factors such as fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, anxiety, lack of motivation and shyness known as non-linguistic factors.

Table 5: Students' states of mind during participation

Options	Frequency	Percentages
Comfortable	7	12.96 %
Uncomfortable	47	87.04 %
Total	54	100 %

The results in table 5 show that the majority of the learners (87.04%) are uncomfortable when they participate in oral presentations in front of both lecturers and classmates. However, twelve point nine six percent (12.96%) of them are comfortable. This shows how the non-linguistic factors influence learners to such extent that they feel uncomfortable. By so behaving, they cannot speak fluently English language in front of lecturers and mates. Feeling uncomfortable can be the result of the high degree of fear of making mistakes and other psychological factors.

Table 6: Place where the fear occurs

Options	Frequency	Percentages (%)
In the classroom	9	16.67
Outside the classroom	11	20.37
Speaking with someone that speaks fluently	34	62.96
Total	54	100

The results in table 6 show that sixteen point six seven percent (16.67%) of students feel the fears of speaking the language in the classroom while twenty point three seven percent (20.37%) of them feel it outside the classroom. Sixty-two point nine six percent (62.96%) of students feel the fears when they are interacting with someone who speaks the language fluently.

Table 7: Students' ability in language skills

Option	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Speaking	09	16.67
Writing	13	24.07
Listening	11	20.37
Reading	21	38.89
Total	54	100

Students' ability in language skills is clearly stated through table 7, it can be noticed that twenty point three seven percent (20.37 %) out of the EFL students are good in listening while sixteen point six seven percent (16.67%) of them are good in speaking. However, thirty-eight point eight nine percent (38.89%) of the students said that they are good in reading skill, whereas twenty-four point zero seven percent (24.07 %) are good in writing skill. The analysis shows that a few numbers of students are good in speaking. This confirms their impressions previously mentioned, which maintain that they have both some linguistic and non-linguistic problems which inhibit their speaking performance.

Table8: The frequency of teacher's motivation for the students

Options	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Always	20	37.04
Often	15	27.78
Sometimes	14	25.93
Rarely	4	7.41
Never	1	1.85
Total	54	100

It can be deduced from the results in table 8 that thirty-seven point zero four percent (37.04%) of the students are always motivated by their teachers on many different sides. Twenty-seven point seven eight percent (27.78%) of them are often motivated, which can lead to positive effects on their rate of participation. On the other hand, while twenty-five point nine three percent (25.93%) of them reported that they are sometimes motivated, seven point four one percent (7.41%) of them are rarely motivated. Also, the rest of the students which represent the minority, one point eight five percent (1.85%) of them state that they are never motivated. It is then recognised that the lecturers do their best to satisfy their learners. And the remaining depends on the students' will to practise and perform themselves in speaking.

Table 9: The person responsible for solving the problem of fear of speaking

Options	Frequency	Percentages (%)
Students	10	18.52
Lecturers	8	14.81
Both students and lecturers	36	66.67
Total	54	100

The results in table 9 show that sixty-six point six seven percent (66.67%) of the students put all the responsibility on both the students themselves and lecturers while eighteen point five two percent (18.52%) of them put it on the students themselves. However, fourteen point eight one percent (14.81%) of them put the responsibility on the lecturers. The deduction that comes to view regarding the students' opinions suggests that the responsibility is shared between students and lecturers.

Table 10: Aim of the training towards speaking skills mastering

Responses	Quantity	Percentages
Attempts	42	77.78
No Attempts	12	22.22
Total	54	100

The results in table 10 show that twenty-two point two two percent (22.22%) did not attempt the question while seventy-seven point seven eight percent (77.78%) attempted it. Based on the attempted response, some students said: **‘the training is more focused on teachings methods and procedures to transfer knowledge to students than social communication aspects’**

Roughly, it can be concluded that the general aim of English training is not fulfilled to some extent. But taking into account the current educational system (Competency-Based Approach), it can be said that students should not just rely on what they are taught at school, they have to find a way out to be exposed to the speaking aspect of the language by solving the fear of making mistakes which prevents them the most from speaking the English language.

4.2 Presentation and Analysis of Data Collected from Interviews with the Lecturers

In regarding to the interview with lecturers on this study, useful information was gained. They all admitted that there are several factors that make students be afraid of speaking English albeit the fact that they are university learners, studying the language as their major subject. Students faced a lot of challenges; reasons of their uncomfortable status while communicating in English through oral capacity. The first question was: what are the challenges faced by students in speaking? One of the lecturers asserted that ‘the kernel

question (1) encompasses phonological, lexical/semantic, grammatical, discursive and pragmatic aspects. Students face pronunciation problems when they attempt to speak English. They lack vocabulary items. They seem not to know how to combine words to form meaningful sentences or where they obviously combine words in a more or less acceptable syntactic structure, these combinations seem to be influenced by their native language. They also lack the knowledge of discourse organisation, order, etc.; i.e., they lack the knowledge of how to make texts. Whatever people do with language, they do it via texts. They also lack pragmatic knowledge. That is to say, they lack the knowledge of the complex dimensions related to talk. For instance, how many of them know that there are unstated expectations, assumptions, shared background knowledge, etc., in any interaction?'. It is important to mention that fear of speaking the language is not only related to a psychological factor, but there are also other challenges such as perfectionism.

The second question is about the solution brought by the lecturers to foster students' oral skills; lecturers mention most the importance of being in an Anglophone area. A lecturer views fear as something which is not real, but as a thought which is just created by students themselves. He clarifies fear as a choice for when the environment changes, psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, shyness etc. surely disappear. Therefore, students need to be taught the culture of English language. Language and cultural studies are not separable. Finally, it was discovered from the discussions that for students to overcome the fear of speaking, one needs to conquer the state of perfectionism.

5 Suggestions and Perspectives

5.1 Suggestions to Lecturers

The problem raised by this paper is a non-linguistic problem faced by most of the students which is "fear". To overcome such a problem, lecturers can behave in a friendly manner, being helpful

and cooperative, making students feel comfortable when speaking in the classroom environment. This can also reduce, although not eliminate the anxiety between students and lecturers to a considerable extent. They can also examine the feelings that cause fear and anxiety among students. It is essential to think positively, to realise that everyone can make mistakes learning a language, and those errors are a crucial part of English language learning process. Furthermore, they can encourage students to be confident in making mistakes to obtain communicative skills and their response towards students' errors should be tactful and pedagogical. Salami and Daheou (2019:371) also suggest that teachers should decide carefully when and how to correct the students' mistakes so that learners should not be fearful of making mistakes and their conversation should not be disrupted.

5.2. Suggestions to Students

Students have to face their fear of the language, knowing that every language learned ought to be spoken; this means that EFL students need to speak the English language more consistently with one another so as to overcome their fear, as well as building their oral competence. They have to develop self-confidence by allowing themselves to make the mistakes within and outside the school premises because practice makes perfect. They should also have in mind that whoever speaks the language fluently started like them, and everybody makes mistakes so far as such a person is not a first speaker of the language or a native.

Students need to practice the core skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. They need to create an English speaking environment where they can learn passively. The best way to learn is through speaking. Also, students should get materials like: articles, newspapers, novels, broadcasts to broaden their vocabulary. Moreover, they should use English whenever they can. English should not be translated from their native language. Thinking in English will help them improve their fluency.

Conclusion

The incapacity of some Beninese university students to speak English fluently and accurately after some years of study is due to various factors. The purpose of this study consists in shedding light on the causes of students fear as far as speaking skill is concerned.

The results from interview show that the lack of perfectionism could not be of great help for EFL students. Owing to the answers given by the respondent students, it has been found out that, Beninese University EFL students' oral proficiency is hindered by many factors which could be classified as linguistics problems and non-linguistics ones.

The findings show that the majority of EFL students of Adjarra Campus suffer from different psychological barriers in which fear of making mistakes is considered as the most effective one on their tasks' preference and on diminishing their chances of speaking. Finally, the study comes out with suggestions to lecturers in helping their students to control and overcome their psychological barriers and, thus, to enhance their level of English oral proficiency and recommendations to students

Suggestions have been proposed. The most important one, speaking skills do not stand alone but, they are supported by the mastery of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation, and the study of some linguistics problems and non-linguistics problems accordingly, the lecturers of these subjects need to improve student's mastery.

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Annex Pages

Questionnaire to Students

INSTRUCTION: Tick only one of the following statements as it reflects your own feelings about the given issue and reply for questions if needed.

1-what is your level of English? Good Very good

Average Poor

2-Does your level enable you to express yourself orally?

YES NO

3-Do you find speaking skill difficult to be mastered?

YES NO

4-What prevents you from speaking English Fluently?

Fear of making mistakes Lack of self-confidence

Anxiety Lack of motivation Shyness

5-How do you feel when you participate in oral presentation in front of your teacher and your classmates?

Comfortable Uncomfortable

6-When do you feel the fear of speaking English?

In the classroom Outside the classroom

Speaking with someone that speaks fluently

7-What are you good at? Speaking Writing

Listening Reading

8-How often does your teacher motivate you to participate in oral classroom activities?

Always Often Sometimes

Rarely Never

9-Who do you think have a big role to manage your phobia of errors?

Students Teachers Both

10-How does the training prepare you to speak English?