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English Speaking Anxiety Among Trainee Teachers in the Institute of Teacher Education Tengku Ampuan Afzan

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to uncover the causes of English speaking anxiety of trainee teachers at the Institute of Teacher Education Tengku Ampuan Afzan, Kuala Lipis, Pahang and propose strategies to reduce the causes of anxiety. One of important aspects that influences speaking skills is psychological factors, namely beliefs, feelings, and behaviors. To collect in-depth data, this study included semi-structured interviews with seven trainee teachers enrolled in English for Young Learners lessons from June to August, observations, and document analysis. Documents were observed and analyzed to support conclusions from the interviews, which were transcribed verbatim to reveal four themes: (i) physiological and psychological changes, (ii) having a restricted English vocabulary, (iii) grammatical and pronunciation issues, and (iv) lack of self-confidence. The finding suggested that the psychological element of trainee teachers' concerns about English speaking skills at the Institute of Teacher Education Tengku Ampuan Afzan in the field of Early Childhood Education should be properly addressed. Improving trainee teachers' English speaking skills can have a significant impact on preschool children's knowledge of the learning strands of language and communication particularly in the English.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The cultural diversity of Malaysian society creates a conducive natural environment to enable Malaysians to master skills in more than one language. This is codified in the Malaysian Education Development Plan 2013 - 2025 (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2013), which expects that Malaysian students would be able to master English or other foreign languages as an added value. The importance of English proficiency is indisputable even though Malay is the national language in Malaysia. This global language is widely used and needs to be mastered, especially students who will explore the field of knowledge in education, then applied in the world of work.

Bachelor's Degree Program with Honors in Education (PISMP) at the Institute of Teacher Education aims to produce trainee teachers who are competent and have experience with basic teaching abilities. One of the program's educational goals is to improve communication skills by promoting Malay as a language of knowledge and strengthening English. This demonstrates that English proficiency is highly valued among trainee teachers. In accordance with this, trainee teachers in the field of Early Childhood Education are expected to take several English subjects in order to increase their English competency. The trainee teachers will study "English Language Proficiency," "English Language for Young Learners," and "Communicative English for the Teaching of Young Learners." Of course, requiring trainee teachers to complete certain English subjects will raise their level of English competency, which will be useful when they are placed in schools later.

What is the benefit of having a high degree of English proficiency? Because of the introduction of the Revised National Preschool Standard Curriculum 2010 (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2010) and the Policy To Uphold the Bahasa Melayu and to Strengthen the English Language (MBMMBI), the emphasis on English proficiency has begun in early childhood education. The timetable has changed, with more time allotted to English language teaching slots, and the concept of instructional language is emphasized in the KSPK. The implementation of teaching and learning using English as the language of instruction is 600 minutes per week for national primary schools and 400 minutes for national type Chinese and Tamil schools. The Ministry of Education (Moe) has introduced "the Roadmap 2015-2025: English Language Education Reform in Malaysia," which has emphasized the implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which has also begun in preschools (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2018). The evolution of the early childhood education curriculum emphasizes the need of trainee teachers having a high degree of English language proficiency.

A high level of English proficiency means that trainee teachers can master listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills and writing skills very well. However, the possibility of the trainee teacher not being able to master all four language skills very well can occur. This is because language is divided into two main aspects, namely receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing). Both talents are interconnected; an individual must first master listening skills before being able to master speaking abilities. When opposed to productive skills, receptive skills are easier to master (Rao, 2019). As a result, it is not impossible if the trainee teachers has excellent receptive skills but just adequate production abilities. As a result, trainee teachers is unable to master English speaking abilities.

Psychological elements such as self-esteem, self-confidence, self-efficacy, and emotions (anxiety) have important influences on English skill mastering. Anxiety is a major contributor to damaging learning processes, including the use of English as a second language. Language

anxiety, according to Horwitz et al. (1986), is described as complicated distinctions in perceptions, feelings, and actions associated to language learning that exist rather than as idiosyncrasies of the language learning process. Anxiety consists of three interrelated factors namely communication that is not smooth, fear of negative assessments and anxiety tests. Non-fluent communication refers to shyness that stems from fear or worry about communicating with others. The second component is the fear of negative evaluation refers to "worrying about the evaluation of others, avoidance of situations that will generate evaluation and the expectation that others will make a negative assessment of the self. Test anxiety, on the other hand, refers to a type of performance anxiety that stems from the fear of failure through the results of a test or evaluation.

Institute of Teacher Education is a higher education institution that prepares prospective teachers for employment in schools. The objective of Institute of Teacher Education is to train competent teachers through a dynamic teacher development program in order to provide world class school education. The necessity of English proficiency among Institute of Teacher Education trainee teachers has been explained here by world class school education.

However, various limitations impede trainees from understanding the English language, particularly for trainees in the field of Early Childhood Education, which is not an option in English. According to the structure of Bachelor's Degree Program with Honors in Education (PISMP), trainee teachers in the field of Early Childhood Education only take a few English subjects that focus on adding inputs and skills related to language development for children, pedagogy, approaches, strategies, techniques in teaching and learning, and language systems (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2018). Trainee teachers do not have many opportunities to practice their English speaking skills, which leads to mastery of the English language, particularly productive skills (speaking and writing).

Unsatisfactory competence of the trainee teacher in speaking skills is a severe issue because the trainee teacher will be put in a nursery / kindergarten / preschool after graduation and will be dealing with children. Trainee teachers in Early Childhood Education bear a significant deal of responsibility for developing children who not only have the privilege of knowing a second language, particularly English, but who can also speak English confidently. Is it possible to have a children that can confidently speak English? The solution is determined by the teacher's ability. The children do not have role models in learning English if the trainee teacher does not have a good command of English speaking skills. Furthermore, teachers are unable to properly execute English teaching and learning, particularly in terms of English speaking skills. This might be ascribed to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which claims that for the implementation of "scaffolding" in speaking skills, there should be a "More Knowledgeable Other" (MKO) in learning (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Furthermore, the Revised National Preschool Curriculum Standards 2010 and 2017 establish a target of 50% English language education for national primary schools and 40% national type Chinese and Tamil schools (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2017). Several academics have done studies on the implementation of teaching and studying English in National Preschool Curriculum Standard for preschools. The findings show that teachers themselves admit to being less skilled at teaching English (Abdullah et al., 2017), that the use of English as an instruction language is frequently replaced with the child's mother tongue because teachers are less skilled at speaking English (Mustafa et al., 2018), and that teachers lack the practice of effective strategies for teaching English, which leads to a weakening of English proficiency among children (Mustafa & Ahmad, 2017). This

demonstrates how serious the problem will be if the trainee teachers in Early Childhood Education does not learn English, particularly speaking skills.

Why does a person struggle to communicate in English? There are two factors that determine performance in speaking skills: linguistic factors and non-linguistic factors. Linguistics includes grammar, sentence order, language pronunciation, knowledge of sentence context, vocabulary, and language fluency. Non-linguistic components of personality include self-esteem, personality type, motivation, self-efficacy, self-confidence, and anxiety. According to Majzub (2013), early childhood education teachers lack confidence in their ability to speak English. This finding is consistent with the findings of Mustafa et al. (2018), who found that teachers have difficulty using English due to a lack of abilities and self-confidence in English. Lack of self-confidence is a psychological factor linked to anxiety among English teachers. This demonstrates how a lack of self-confidence can cause anxiety in English teachers. Teachers who lack confidence in their ability to speak English will experience anxiety when speaking English.

The goal of this study, based on the problem description, is to investigate the concerns about English speaking skills among trainee teachers in Early Childhood Education who have taken the subject of English Language Proficiency and are attending English for Young Learner classes. This research looks at how trainee teachers share their experiences and reflect on themselves while taking English Language Proficiency and English for Young Learners course. The research objective for this study are: "What is the trainee teacher's retrospective on the concern of English speaking skills?"

1.1 Theory

Krashen (1985) pioneered a theory of second language acquisition known as the Monitor Theory, which is used in this study to explain the relationship between language acquisition and mastery. Krashen argues that because humans have the ability to understand language learning, they are intrinsically capable of learning a second language. In other words, Krashen's Theory is an extension of Chomsky's LAD theory (Luo, 2024). According to Krashen (2008), second language acquisition is similar to first language acquisition in that it involves unintentional language learning. Krashen's Monitor Theory combines five ideas, including the "Natural Order Hypothesis," the "Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis," the "Monitor Hypothesis," and the "Input Hypothesis."

The "Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis," the "Monitor Hypothesis," and the "Affective Filter Hypothesis" are three theories closely related to this study. Krashen defines competence in second language acquisition as placing greater emphasis on the language acquired rather than the language learned. Acquired language relieves stress and helps improve speaking skills. In the "Monitor Hypothesis," Krashen claims that the concept of monitoring only encompasses learning, not acquisition, and serves as a speech monitor to improve speaking ability. Only the proper use of a monitor can improve communicative competence. However, too much monitoring can sometimes be a hindrance, as a focus on language accuracy can decrease linguistic fluency.

The "Affective Filter" hypothesis is a natural element possessed by all humans (Hajimia et al., 2020). A filter is a mental screen that can block information from reaching the language acquisition center, thus slowing the acquisition process. Humans express fear, shame, or courage, which affects this filter. This hypothesis explains how affective elements influence, but do not cause, language acquisition. If an individual consistently feels fearful, nervous, shy, or introverted, the affective filter closes tightly, and the process of learning a second language becomes difficult (Kozma, 1991; Puleo, 2024). Thus, high levels of anxiety decrease

speaking skills, while low levels of anxiety increase speaking skills. Krashen's Monitor Theory in reducing anxiety and improving English speaking skills can be seen in **Figure 1** below.

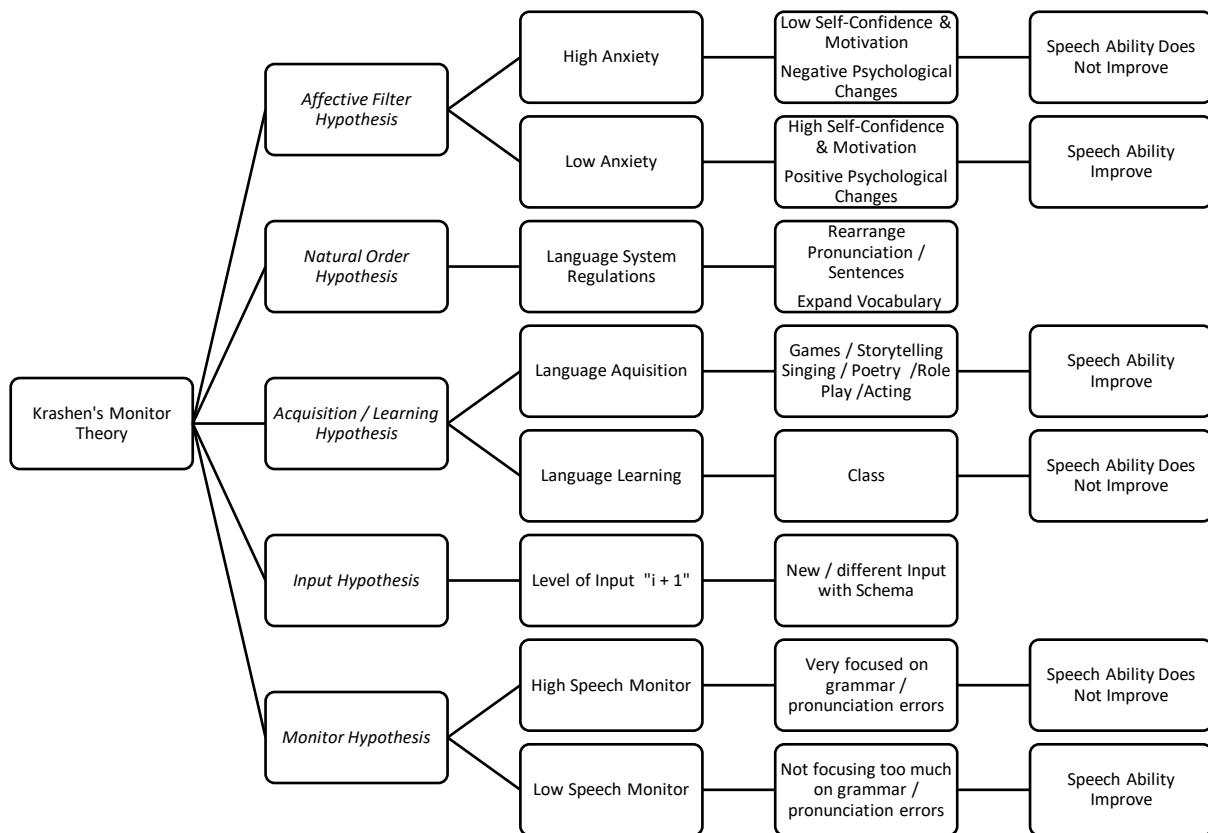


Figure 1. Krashen's monitor theory in reducing anxiety and improving English speaking skills.

2. METHODS

This qualitative research design aimed to investigate concerns about English speaking skills among prospective teachers at the Tengku Ampuan Afzan campus Teacher Training Institute. The study employed a purposeful sampling technique, with a sample of seven prospective teachers enrolled in an English Language Proficiency and exhibiting characteristics such as shyness, fear, and stuttering when speaking English in English for Young Learners classes. Data collection was conducted through triangulation methods and sources, including in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Data came from teacher trainees of Bachelor's Degree Program with Honors in Education (PISMP) semester III Year 3 and observations during English for Young Learners class activities, particularly activities involving speaking skills and materials/documents from the prospective teachers' work.

The prospective teachers were interviewed in a semi-open-ended format to explore prospective instructors' concerns about speaking English during English for Young Learners sessions. The interview approach was used because the researcher could examine the prospective teachers' individual and personal experiences and attempt to understand the meanings they attached to these experiences (D'Amico, 2024; Puleo, 2024).

Transcripts from interesting interview sections, labeled with specific headings, were collected, coded, and categorized. After the coding process was complete, related

categories were grouped into larger categories to form themes. Topics were assigned to the data based on the research objectives, taking into account the quality and reliability of the collected data to develop conclusions based on thematic analysis.

Other data supporting/strengthening the prospective teachers' opinions were collected by the researcher herself through observations during classroom activities and reviewing related documents. The theme coding process was also recorded in the researcher's observation notes and document analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Finding

The outcomes of data analysis from interviews with seven trainee teachers, researcher observation notes, and document analysis linked to the hindsight of trainee teachers on worries about English speaking skills are reported in response to the following survey questions: "What is the trainee teacher's retrospective on the concern of English speaking skills?" These data sources were carefully examined to provide a comprehensive and accurate picture of how trainee teachers perceive their own challenges related to speaking English, especially when they are required to communicate in academic or real-life settings. The triangulation of interviews, observations, and documents also strengthens the reliability and validity of the conclusions drawn from this research.

Findings: Concerns about English speaking skills among trainee teachers.

An analysis of interviews with seven trainee teachers revealed that all of them displayed fear when speaking English, particularly due to worries about making mistakes and being judged by others. According to the research, there are four major factors that raise concerns about English speaking abilities, which include psychological aspects, limited vocabulary knowledge, lack of practice and exposure to English, and the influence of classroom or social environments. These concerns suggest that trainee teachers continue to struggle with confidence and fluency, showing that further support and intervention are needed to help them improve their English speaking skills effectively.

3.1.1 Changes in physiology and psychology

"...When I was invited to speak in class, I felt unhappy and terrified because I didn't speak English fluently...." "I, too, stuttered when speaking English..." (R2)

"...I was feeling a little down and embarrassed to speak English...In my daily existence, I hardly use English...I was concerned that I might use a term that would cause people to misunderstand or mock me..." (R4)

"...I feel depressed...there is also a fear of speaking in front of people...sometimes I feel like my voice is going to slow down..." (R1)

"...I was depressed, stammering and embarrassed when I was asked to speak in class...because I am used to using Malay and Chinese during class and daily life..." (R3)

"...I haven't spoken English in a long time and don't speak it fluently...When I was required to introduce myself in front of the class, I was terrified and ashamed..." (R6)

"...I felt depressed, scared, embarrassed and stuttered because my speech in English was not fluent..." (R7)

"...At first, I was very concerned...I am hesitant to speak English because I believe my English is inferior than that of my friends..." (R5)

3.1.2 Have a limited English Vocabulary

"...sometimes I can't speak because I don't know how to speak English..." (R7)

"...sometimes I find it hard to find the right words to express my thoughts...there are times when I need to use apps like Google Translate to make sure what I'm saying is accurate..." (R2)

"...I always get stuck when I speak English. I don't know what word to use..." (R6)

"...I've been having trouble figuring out what words to use when writing a sentence..." (R1)

"...I am not good at developing vocabulary in English..." (R4)

"...It's hard to speak English..it's hard to explain the words we use..." (R3)

"...I don't have the confidence to speak to others in English..." (R5)

3.1.3 Grammar and pronunciation problems

"...I stuttered while speaking English because I was afraid of strange and wrong pronunciation so that lecturers and friends did not understand my presentation..." (R3)

"...my English is poor and in poor condition...this is due to my lack of knowledge in "grammar" as well as some words I am not sure of pronunciation..." (R6)

"...the students in the class were able to speak fluently. I am afraid that when I speak English, I am speaking the wrong language..." (R7)

"...I always worry about whether my pronunciation is correct or not..." (R4)

"...I am less confident because I use less English in my daily life...as a result, I was less experienced and less confident when speaking English..." (R5)

"...I lack self-assurance..." "I'm so bad at English..." (R3)

"...I have a problem with confidence in English..." (R7)

"...due to lack of confidence, I have trouble communicating with others in English..." (R6)

3.2 Discussion

According to the findings, four factors create concern for English speaking skills: physiological and psychological changes, a restricted English vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation issues, and a lack of self-confidence. Anxiety can be caused by physiological and psychological changes such as fear, humiliation, stuttering, panic, sweating, and feeling depressed, which will have a direct impact on trainee teachers' English speaking skills. Anxiety is also linked to a lack of confidence in one's ability to communicate in English. Teachers with low self-esteem will also have poor English communication abilities. This is demonstrated by the Roysmanto (2018) study, which is a correlation study between self-confidence and speaking skills among students, with the findings indicating a favorable association between self-confidence and English speaking skills. The findings are also consistent with the findings of a study conducted by Aulia & Apoko (2022), which is a study on the self-confidence of students who study English as a foreign language in terms of speaking skills. The findings revealed a strong association between students' self-confidence and English speaking abilities.

Based on the study's findings, one proposal for improving English speaking skills among trainee teachers is to lessen tension in the classroom. Teachers should accept trainees' faults when speaking English by providing an environment that supports the concept of a stress-free environment. Speaking exercises in couples or small groups, as well as oral tests,

can be conducted (Alnahidh & Altalhab, 2020). This phase is especially important for students who originate from rural areas with poor socioeconomic position and parents with a low educational background, because the environment can also affect an individual's command of the English language.

At the same time, it is more significant if guidance can be provided to inculcate problem-solving abilities, boost self-confidence, and develop empathy with others in order to minimize anxiety. Trainee teachers should not be afraid to participate in activities that require group interaction or the use of psychological services (Badrasawi et al., 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

Thus, this study clearly reveals that the concerns of trainee teachers about their speaking skills must be addressed by multiple parties, including educators, institutions, and the trainee teachers themselves, so that the challenges they face can be minimized effectively. Psychological variables play a major role because they influence one of the most significant aspects of mastering English-speaking skills, such as confidence, anxiety, and readiness to communicate in real-life situations. Therefore, the trainee teachers' concerns for English as a second language have had a significant impact on the development and mastery of their English-speaking abilities, making it crucial to identify and reduce the psychological barriers that hinder progress.

Your English-speaking skills will suffer if you are terrified of the English language, as fear can limit your ability to participate and practice, while your English-speaking skills will increase if you are not fearful of the language and instead feel confident to use it continuously in communication. This condition is consistent with Krashen (1985) ideas, which are driven by the Monitor Hypothesis that has been introduced, emphasizing that emotional factors such as anxiety and self-confidence greatly affect language acquisition and performance. In other words, the lower the fear and anxiety, the greater the opportunity for trainee teachers to develop better fluency and accuracy in speaking English.

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