

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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ABSTRACT

STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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One of the greatest challenge for English teacher is to integrate students' participation in classroom since the students' active participation in English language classroom is important in relation to second language acquisition. This quantitative study aimed to identify the students' level of participation in English classroom and the factors that affected their participation. Questionnaires were distributed to 313 form four students from SMK Bandar Kuching No.1, Kuching, Sarawak. The results revealed that the majority of the students were actively participating in English language classroom and gender was not one of the factors that affect students' participation. English language proficiency was considered as the major factor although self-efficacy and English language classroom anxiety also have significant relationship with students' level of participation in English language classroom. The outcome may imply that the English language teachers should be careful in maintaining the students' active participation in English language classroom. Both teacher and students should be aware of the factors that affect students' level of participation in English language classroom.

ABSTRAK

PENGLIBATAN PELAJAR DALAM KELAS BAHASA INGGERIS

Namini Devi A/P Simanjalam

Salah satu cabaran terbesar untuk guru Bahasa Inggeris adalah untuk menyepadukan penglibatan pelajar dalam bilik darjah kerana penyertaan aktif dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris adalah penting untuk menguasai Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian kuantitatif ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti tahap penyertaan pelajar dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris dan faktor-faktor yang menjejaskan penglibatan pelajar. Soal selidik diedarkan kepada 313 pelajar Tingkatan Empat dari SMK Bandar Kuching No.1, Kuching, Sarawak. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa majoriti pelajar melibatkan diri secara aktif dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris dan jantina bukan satu faktor yang menjejaskan penglibatan pelajar dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Kecekapan dalam Bahasa Inggeris dikenalpasti sebagai faktor yang utama disamping kemujaraban diri dan kebimbangan dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris juga mempunyai hubungan yang signifikan dengan tahap penglibatan pelajar dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Hasil kajian ini boleh mengimplikasikan yang guru-guru Bahasa Inggeris harus memelihara penglibatan aktif para pelajar dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris. Guru dan pelajar harus sedar tentang faktor-faktor yang menjejaskan tahap penglibatan pelajar dalam kelas Bahasa Inggeris.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Overview

This chapter consists the details on the background of the study, problem statement, research objectives and research questions in order to answer the objectives of the study. The significance of this study and definition of key terms that were used in the study was also discussed in detail.

1.1 Background of the study

In the recent English language teaching context, one of the greatest challenge for English teacher is to integrate students' participation in classrooms. Brenner (1994) described participation as the student being present in the learning situation (as cited in Black, 1995). This means that in some manners, students are meaningfully engaged in the learning task at hand and are working through it at their own speed and in their own way. The forms that this 'working through' may involve any or all of the four skills which are identified as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Brenner also added that participation in classroom can also be revealed in a

student's body language or action. Sometimes it is visible as students takes on different roles within the learning situation. For example, in a small group of discussion, a student may take on the role of facilitator, helping to make the connections between the several speakers in the group. Thus, active role taking is also considered as a form of participation.

Moreover, Black (1995) indicates that participation can take many forms in the classroom, and some of the forms could not be easily identified or recognisable by the teacher. Thus, students' participation includes speaking and also many other forms of students' actions which some of it are outwardly visible and some are not. So, thinking and making of connections which are done by the students quietly in their own minds is also considered as participation even though it is often hidden from the teacher and difficult to evaluate. On the other hand, according to Lee (2005), participation usually means students speaking in classroom such as answering teacher's or other students' questions and asking questions to get the better explanation and clarification. Lee also added that making comments and joining in discussions by sharing their opinions, thoughts and ideas are also considered as students' participation in classrooms. Students who do not participate in those ways mentioned above are often considered to be passive in the classroom. In other words, active learning strategies serve as useful educational tools only when all students participate all of the time.

Furthermore, Tsui (1998) also indicates classroom interaction as the students' participation in classroom. The focus was on the negotiation of meaning between learners and their relation to second language acquisition. In other words, the more learners participate orally and the more they were engaged in the negotiation of meaning, the better they will acquire the language. Moreover, Marzano (2000) considered classroom participation as the student participates in classroom activities and discussions without being asked. According to Zolten and Long (2006), paying

attention, being on task, responding to questions, participating in group discussions, asking questions, seeking help and making good use of class time also considered as classroom participation. In addition, O'Brien (2007) stated that participation means completing the assigned readings, asking questions about anything in the readings or discussion that needs clarification or expansion, offering ideas and responses, listening to the ideas and responses of others, and paying attention and showing respect in the classroom to the teacher and to other students.

In general, classroom participation requires students to speak and interact in the classrooms to indicate that they are actually learning and paying attention. Thus, based on the aim of the Malaysian English Syllabus which was stated by the Ministry of Education, it gives greater emphasis to students' involvement in classroom learning. An important form of involvement is student's participation in classroom interaction by seeking and giving information, expressing thoughts, feeling and ideas, asking and answering questions and participating in discussions. Tsui (1995) also stated that when students listen to the teacher's instruction, when they express their opinions, answer questions and carry out task and activities, they are not only learning about the language but also using the language (as cited in Tsui, 1998).

Hicks (1995) and Palinscar (1986) also pointed out that discussion which requires students to participate and share their opinions and ideas permits teacher to provide information and explanation in an efficient manner besides checking students' understanding about the lesson (as cited in Chu and Kim, 1999). It also corrects students' errors and misconceptions, as well as scaffolding students' performance in the classroom regarding the lesson. In other words, correction and explanation by the teacher on the spot will help the students to understand better and will remain in their long term memory. According to Chu and Kim (1999), participation in the classroom can enable students to develop social skills, increase recall of information, improve presentation skills, and increase their scope for

improving the quality of work. Thus, it can be helpful for students to learn English language to be used in their daily life.

Besides that, Zolten and Long (2006) stated that participating in classroom activities provides a critical opportunity for learning new skills. Participation helps students to make deep, meaningful connections in the mind that are important in learning. Signs of problems with classroom participation can include low grades in examination and incomplete work coming home as homework. Kordalewski (1999) also indicated that when students exercise their voices in classrooms, they practice and develop a range of advanced thinking skills.

However, some English language classrooms are still very much tied to traditional overt teaching methods, teacher-centred classrooms and minimal student participation. In other words, students remain silence and depend to the teacher where teacher has to talk most of the time. This is because of their belief that teacher is the source of the knowledge and students must listen to them in order to be comprehensive. Kordalewski (1999) also indicated that in some classrooms, student voices were barely heard because the teacher monopolizes classroom talk, and knowledge was treated as residing entirely with the teacher. But, students can only learn best when they are actively participate in the learning process. Learning occurs best when it is a cooperative effort between a student and a teacher. According to Houghton (2001), studies showed that meaningfully involved students have more positive relationships with teachers, and can be successful student in the classroom (as cited in Xu, 2006). Thus, class participation is one major vehicle towards achieving quality learning.

Furthermore, Xu (2006) also consider learners' participation in classroom as one of the aspects of interaction. Thus, Xu pointed out that it was an opportunity for learners to practice the second language and to produce output. Students can learn

better the correct usage of English language if they practice in their daily life. Hence, English language classrooms actually create an opportunity for students to participate in the lesson and learn the language. However, Myhill (2006) stated that there is a strong relationship between gender and participation in interaction with the teacher, with girls being more inclined to offer a response, either through putting a hand up or through joining in a collective response. On the other hand, boys are more likely to be off-task. It is worth noting, however, that boys are also inclined to shout out, related to the task, and initiates talk, which may suggest that they are particularly resistant to teacher orchestration of classroom talk and are keen to take more ownership of the discourse.

Followed by that, there are also many other factors that affect students' participation in the English language classrooms which are identified from previous researches. As an example, Pajares (2005) reported that students' self-efficacy beliefs impact their academic performance by influencing the choices students make and the course of action they take. In other words, students selectively choose to engage in tasks about which they feel confident and avoid task where they feel less competent. The focus on students' perceived competence and their desire to participate in the learner's level verify the consideration that self-confidence and language anxiety are determined by perceived competence (MacIntyre, 2003). Moreover, Woodrow (2006) also indicated that there was a significant negative relationship between second language speaking anxiety and oral performance in second language learning classrooms. Besides that, Ohata (2005) pointed out that English language learners expressed serious concern about various kind of evaluative situations in which their knowledge and performance of English were to be monitored by people around them.

Hence, the factors that affect students' participation in English classroom should be taken into account since Tsui (1998) indicated that numerous studies have been done on learner participation where the focus has been very much on the amount

of learner participation, the negotiation of meaning between learners and their relation to second language acquisition. The assumption seems to be the more learners participate orally and the more they were engaged in the negotiation of meaning, the better they will acquire the language. Followed by that, the research done by Lim (2003) on ESL/EFL learners also indicated that students were used to viewing teachers as authority figures in class. Students tend to believe that a teacher is a person who knows everything. Therefore, students tend to be quiet and just wait for the knowledge from the teacher to be transmitted to them.

Furthermore, Lim (2002) also indicated that students have a fear of making mistakes when speaking English (as cited in Lim, 2003). Thus, students tend not to speak much in class, appear reserved, rarely ask questions, and do not express opinions since they may have low English language proficiency and self-efficacy. In other words, the researches indicated that factors such as gender, English language proficiency, self-efficacy and classroom anxiety were really affects students' participation in second language or English language classroom.

1.2 Statement of Problem

In Malaysia, English language is considered as a Second Language (ESL) as it is necessary to be taught in every school. This is to make sure that students get the chance to learn English in order to be comprehensive in understanding and using English. Students have to be comprehensive in English language because it is an international language. In other word, English as a medium of interaction is crucial for the country's development. Thus, the students who are the pillar and future generation were encouraged to learn English in their classroom.

As a result, in schools, five periods per week with forty minutes per each period is allocated for English subject. This is to make sure the students and teacher can

concentrate better on English language and conduct as many activities as possible so that students can get enough practice in learning English. This can be supported by the learning outcomes in the Malaysia English Syllabus. The learning outcomes which have been identified for the three areas of language use require learners to perform tasks and achieve outcome both in oral and written form (Malaysian English Syllabus, 2003). The three learning outcomes are language use for interpersonal purpose, language use for informational purposes and language use for aesthetic purposes. In other words, learning English language requires interaction as a practice in real life context. Therefore, learners' participation in English classrooms is very crucial to make sure students acquire the knowledge because it is based on real usage of English. This is because learners' participation in classroom is one of the aspects of classroom interaction to practice language (Xu, 2006).

Since Malaysian English syllabus focused on learners' participation in term of interaction, so, every English classroom has to make sure the students can participate actively. The English language classrooms which may still very much tied to traditional overt teaching methods, teacher-centred classrooms and minimal student participation should focus on encouraging students' participation. Hence, the aims of this study were to identify the level of students' participation in English language classrooms besides discovering the factors that affect students' participation in English language classroom such as gender, language proficiency, self-efficacy and English language classroom anxiety.

1.2 Research Objectives

The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. find out the students' level of participation in English language classroom.
2. identify the factors that affect students' participation in English language classroom.
3. identify the relationship between factors and students' level of participation in English language classroom.

1.3 Research Questions

In order to find the answers for specific objectives, the following research questions are addressed:

1. What was the students' level of participation in English language classroom?
2. What were the factors that affect students' participation in English language classrooms?
3. Were there any relationship between the various factors (gender, language proficiency, self-efficacy, English language classroom anxiety) and level of students' participation in English language classrooms?

1.5 Significance of the study

The findings would serve as a guide or insight for teachers and learners regarding the factors discouraging students from participating in English language classroom. Students with low English language proficiency are bound to feel that their self-esteem is being undermined when they were required to speak in front of their peers. They tend to have low self efficacy where they do not have enough confidence of their own capability by comparing themselves with other students.

Thus, the avoidance of participation is an attempt to protect one's self image by avoiding the risk of making a mistake, being laughed at by peers, and are being negatively evaluated by the teacher. It is important that English teachers recognise that anxious students are desperately trying to avoid humiliation, embarrassment and criticisms, and to preserve self-esteem. Teachers must be aware to what extent the teachers' behaviour can make it worse. Otherwise, whatever strategies the teacher adopts to overcome the problem will definitely fail.

The finding also may inform the teachers and learners regarding the factors contributing to students' non-participation in English classroom. This would assist teachers and learners to take into account the ways to overcome students' problems such as fear of participating in classroom interaction and thus increase motivation. By participating in classroom interaction, students are given the opportunity to listen and interact with their peers and teacher. This will encourage students to be more interactive during teaching and learning process.

Furthermore, it is hoped that by looking at the present situation of some of the Malaysian secondary school students' participation in English language classrooms, this will create awareness among teachers and students about the importance of students' participation in classroom interaction particularly in improving their communicative and thinking skills. It also can generate awareness in building the self-confidence in students' learning. Hence, the effort by the Ministry of Education to encourage learners to communicate effectively and efficiently in English in social and professional situation might be achieved.

1.6 Operational Definition of Terms

1.6.1 Participation

According to Lee (2005), participation usually means students speaking in class which consists of answer and asks questions, make comments, and join in discussions. Students who do not participate in those ways mentioned above are often considered to be passive in the classroom. Besides that, according to Zolten and Long (2006), paying attention, being on task, responding to questions, participating in group discussions, asking questions, seeking help and making good use of class time also considered as classroom participation. This is also similar with O'Brien (2007) who stated that participation means completing the assigned readings, asking questions about anything in the readings or discussion that needs clarification or expansion, offering ideas and responses, listening to the ideas and responses of others, and paying attention and showing respect in the classroom to the teacher and to other students.

Thus, in general, classroom participation requires students to interact in the classrooms to indicate that they are learning and paying attention. Hence this study defines students' participation in English language classroom as interacting with teacher or peers in form of answering and asking questions, making comments, and join in discussion by giving opinions and responds. Besides that, it also emphasis students' attention to the teacher and peers to make sure they understand their questions or opinions so that they can express their thoughts and feeling to make sure their active participation in the classroom and also in the lesson.

In other words, during teaching and class discussion, students should not put down their head on the desk because were not enough sleep and were should not chat with other students. Furthermore, students should not use small group discussion to

discuss issues irrelevant to the lesson and also should not do homework for this or other classes during class time. On the other hand, students should take notes to indicate that they are paying attention and voluntarily have to put up their hand to ask or answer the questions and to share their opinions and ideas.

1.6.2 English Language Proficiency

Olaniran (1993) indicates language proficiency is an ability to speak out with correct use of English with no linguistic mistakes (as cited in Lee, 2007). According to Yakutake (1996), students' self perception of their English language articulation may also highly correlate with their oral performance in the classroom (as cited in Zhou and Sakamoto, 2005). Zhou and Sakamoto also stated that English proficiency is often interacted with a number of aspects of classroom dynamics, such as how teacher and peer students reacted to their language proficiency and how they perceived themselves as nonnative-English speakers. Hence, those students who have low language proficiency often felt pressured by the possibility that their English might not be understood by others and felt awkward. So, in this study, students' language proficiency was identified through the result in the standardized PMR English examination. Based on the PMR English examination result, Grade A is considered very good and followed by Grade B which is good, Grade C is moderate, Grade D is poor and at last Grade E is considered fail. Therefore, students who failed in their PMR English language examination are considered having low language proficiency.

1.6.3 Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is based on Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory which is developed as a reaction to the behaviorism of the 1950's (Sewell & George, 2000). Behaviorism derived primarily from the work of B. F. Skinner during 1940's, who

manipulated the behaviors of white rats in laboratories. In the 1960's, Skinner's principles were applied to changing human behavior. Behavior theory is based on the belief that all human behavior is learned. Followed by that, Bandura's theory introduce the idea that individuals can observe, judge, self-reward, self-punish and therefore self modify their own behavior. This is also supported by Coleman and Webber (2002) who stated that cognitive-behavior modification employed social learning theory to help individuals change beliefs and behavior in the classroom.

Based on Bandura's theory, Mills, Pajares and Herron (2006) define self-efficacy as personal beliefs in one's capabilities. Students with high self-efficacy also often demonstrate accurate self-evaluation of their academic performance. According to Marat (2005), motivation, self-regulation, attribution, goal setting, choice of strategies for attaining goals, feedback, and culture are some of the major determines of self-efficacy. Thus, students' own beliefs about their ability in English language which lead them to participate in classroom are examined in this study.

1.6.4 English Language Classroom Anxiety

Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope (1986) outlined a theoretical framework for the investigation of levels of anxiety of foreign language students into three components (as cited in Casado & Dereshiwsky, 2004). The first component is 'communication apprehension' in which the authors proposed that language students have mature thoughts and ideas but an immature second language vocabulary with which to express them. The inability either to express themselves or to comprehend one another leads to apprehension. In a foreign language classroom, language learners' oral tasks include not only learning a second language but also performing the language. Therefore, communication apprehension in a foreign language context is different from that in other context (Chan & Wu, 2004). Language students who test