Seating Arrangements in Discussion Groups as the Factor of the Students' Willingness to Speak in English as Foreign Language Classroom

Ella Ismi Anggriani, Isna Humaera
IAIN Kendari, Indonesia

Corresponding e-mail: humaerauk@gmail.com

ABSTRACT
This research reports the extent to which the teacher factor causes the willingness of students to speak in a foreign language class. Looking at many students who do not speak when in a foreign language class, this study is therefore conducted to see in terms of which teacher factors can make students want to talk. This research uses a qualitative approach with student reflection documents. The researcher selected 25 students as participants in this study. This research was conducted by observation and taking data through filling reflections conducted by students through Google Form. From the results of the reflection analysis the researcher found that each student had the same opinion in expressing their way to talk in class, that is by looking at or depending on what method the teacher used in the classroom. In this case, the method used by the teacher in the classroom is the method of seating arrangements in discussion groups.
Keywords: Teachers' Factor; Willingness to Communicate (WTC).

INTRODUCTION

Teachers who like communicative language teaching like to motivate students who show high level of willingness to communicate in a second/foreign language. However, the students tend to be reluctant to produce ineffective interactions and language production (Freirmuth & Jarrell, 2006). So, it is true that the idea of Willingness to Communicate (WTC), which is actually the intention and desire to start communication, plays a key role in learning a second/foreign language (Macintyre, Dornyei, Clement& Noels, 1998). Some researchers, for instance (MacIntyre, Baker, 2003) and other researchers like Macintyre, Dornyei, and Clement (1998) argue that the fundamental objectives of L2 education should be a willingness to communicate in language learning because WTC is expected to facilitate the process of language learning so that WTC is higher among students leading to the increased opportunities to practice in L2 and use of authentic language. Furthermore, as said by Ya-ni (2007) for many language learners, learning to speak is far more important than learning to read and write. Obviously, mastery of speaking skills is a priority for many language learners, and students often measure their level of success based on improving their speaking abilities.

To explain more about the concept of WTC in English as a foreign language context (EFL) and to investigate possible relationships with other factors are parts of this research objective. When the purpose of language teaching is to encourage students to communicate effectively, it is very important to know why some students are reluctant to speak in language classrooms (MacIntyre, 2007). Such reluctance will make students lose interest in learning languages. Thus, they will notice that they are not making progress in their learning. Based on the experienced of the researcher, the fact is that in an EFL environment where this research took a place, students do not get used to use English outside the classroom. There are not many opportunities for students to practice their language, and their practice is limited to the classroom environment. If they do not take the opportunity to speak in class, there is no chance for them to practice their language. This will prevent students from developing their speaking skills.

As said by MacIntyre (2007) and what the researcher observed at the pre-observation class, in language classrooms is that when given the opportunity to speak, most language learners are not so eager to take part in class discussions. This has always been a concern among language educators because after all, language learners need to practice learning foreign languages successfully. Otherwise, they will not be able to use what they have learned to communicate in real situations. Many language students complain that they are not good at speaking. In fact, this could be a result of their unwillingness to speak and inadequate speaking practices in language classrooms.

Based on the preliminary study, the lecturer who teaches in the same course but at a different level (Speaking 1) said that there are not many students actively interact with peers and lecturer. The lecturer assumes this happens because students feel that they cannot speak or that most students are afraid that if they speak they will speak wrongly. Accordingly, this research is important to carry out to investigate the factors underlying the students' WTC and whether the seating arrangement affects their willingness to speak. After gaining information related to this issue, it is expected to become the reference for the lecturers, teachers, as well as students to do something better and find alternatives to cope with the issue. Besides, using the WTC model MacIntyre et al. (1998) as a framework, current studies are expected to give little attention to this problem. Therefore, this research is one of the first attempts to look at teacher factors that make the willingness to speak English among EFL students with the aim of adding to the existing literature in this field and filling the gap. It is worth mentioning that this study uses a narrow definition of WTC, which is oral communication.

RESEARCH METHOD

This qualitative study employed a descriptive approach to answer the research questions because this method uses a deep examination of a situation or event by using systematic methods of observing, collecting data, analyzing information, and reporting the results. This research used a qualitative method, which is a method that described the information as it is in accordance with the variable under the study (Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007). It was used to describe the phenomenon in teaching about how the teacher can make students willing to communicate in class and what students experience or feel about the method used by the teacher who is able to

get students willing to speak in the class that can be found through observation and reflection. After gaining the data, the researcher coded the data based on the provided themes.

FINDING

There were 35 students participated in this study. However, the reflection data collected were only 23 students, because some students did not have access to the internet. There are six reflection questions given to students and the answers to these reflections use Indonesian to make it easier for students to write their own opinions (see Nurfaidah, Lengkanawati, & Sukyadi, 2017). In this case, the researcher found that each student had the same thoughts but the way they expressed them in different words. The following are the results of the researcher's analysis of students relating to seating arrangements as a factor in students' willingness to speak.

Seating Arrangement in the Class

The chart below tries to reveal the students' answers about whether the method used by the teacher was interesting or not:
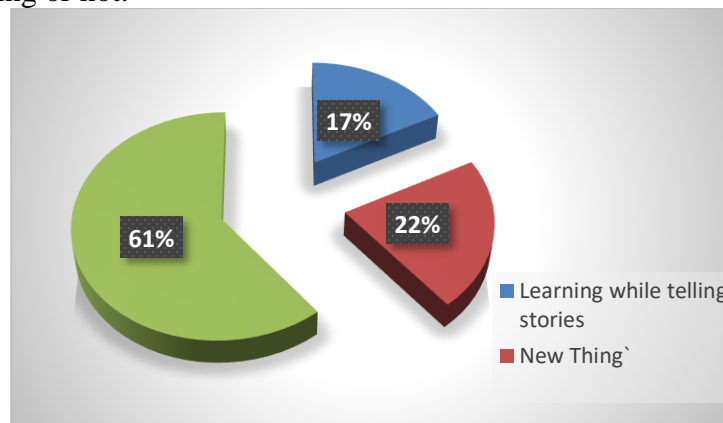
Graph 1 *Students' opinion about seating arrangements' benefit*

In this case, the researcher assumes that all students consider sitting arrangement to be an interesting thing in the learning process in the classroom. With this sitting arrangement, as many as 61% of students become easier to interact when the learning process in class is ongoing. Then 22% of students discover something new with the existence of a method like this sitting arrangement where there are some students who begin to get familiar with talking to each other because they are united in a group. Finally, 17% of students feel that this method students can learn at the same time tell stories or exchange ideas with each other with each group of friends. The following sections include the statement from several students to support the interpretation of the data above:

> *"Of course, it is interesting because we are freer to interact with other friends. [Easer to interact] (S8)*

"In my opinion, it is very interesting because this is the first time to do in class with the position of exchanging opinions in turn with members of their respective groups. [New thing]" (S5)

"In my opinion, seating arrangements are quite interesting, because I can learn while sharing experiences with friends like when we gather outside the classroom. [Learning while telling stories]" (S2)

Students' Willingness to Speak within Arranged Seating

The chart below tries to reveal the students' answers about whether the method can make students want to talk or not:
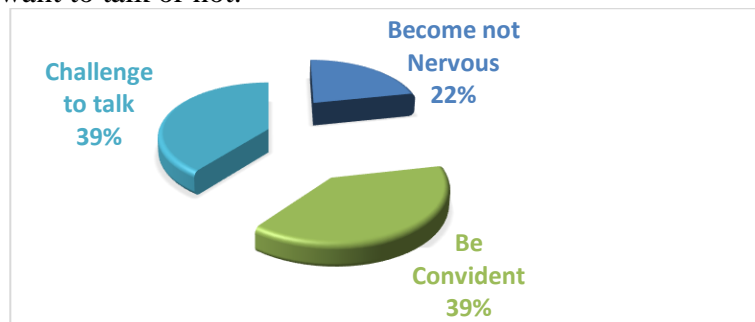
Graph 2 *Students' reasons why they want to talk*

From the questions above, all students answer the same thing that is "Yes", students want to talk when the lecturer uses a sitting arrangement in a small group discussion while in class. As many as 39% of students feel challenged to speak and feel confident when in the discussion group because almost all students, when put together into a container or group of students, will talk even though what they are talking about is not all true. As they said:

"Yes. The seating arrangement made me want to talk because I was challenged to listen, write, and then repeat it. [Challenge to talk]" (S7)

"Yes, because I enjoy it more when interacting with groups and I get a lot of new knowledge from my group. [Be confident]" (S13)

This can be a reference or challenge for each student in the group to want to talk casually and confidently. Then the last is 22% of students are not nervous when talking because the people they are talking about are the people they always see when they are in class. This can be a practice material for students to want to talk before speaking in front of many people or in public. Here is the statement from the S2:

"Yes, because I am not too nervous about having to talk to friends in the group, I can also ask friends if I am wrong."

Students' Reaction when Asked to Speak English

The chart below tries to reveal the students' answers about how students feel when the teacher asks a question suddenly.
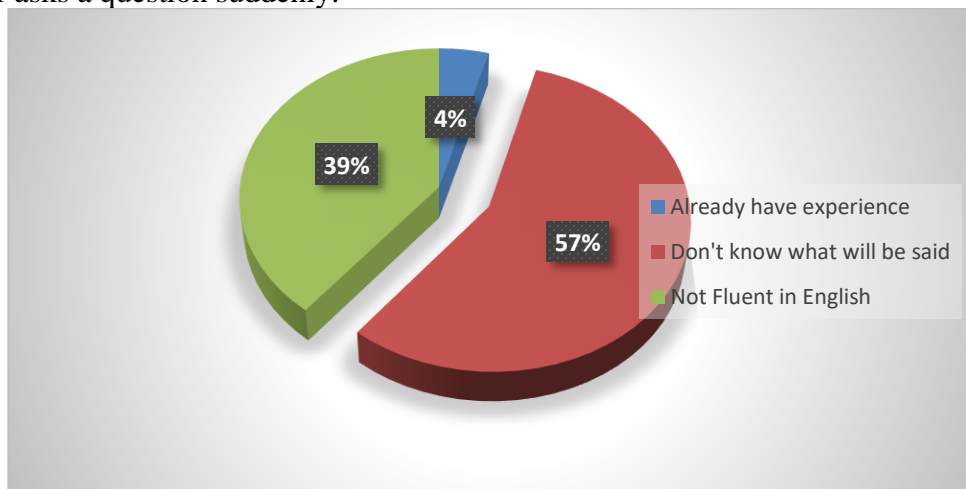
Graph 3 *Reasons why the students panicked*

When all students are asked, "When the teacher suddenly asks you to speak or answer questions in English, do you feel panicked or anxious?". Only 4% of students said that the students did not feel panicked, because they already had the experience to speak in English before. Then 39% of students still feel it is not too fluent to use English which makes a sense of panic in students emerge. Finally, 57% of students in their hearts understood what they would talk about when they were told to speak suddenly or answer questions, but in order to issue a sentence in English, the student did not know what to say. Their grounds of the answer as in the following:

> *"No, because I have gained experience when appearing in a drama that makes me mentally divert. [Already have experience]" (S1)*

> *"I will be surprised because there is no preparation or panic with the questions given and also feel anxious whether I will speak properly or fear that later I will be wrong in speaking. [Not fluent in English]" (S16)*

> *"Yes, usually I do not know what to say, because I am too nervous and I usually don't even answer questions. [Do not know what will be said]"(S2)*

DISCUSSION

The finding showed that the method used by the teacher is the method of seating arrangement in a small group discussion. With this method, there is a teacher factor intended in this study. To begin with, the results of this study show the same results as studies conducted by Eddy (2015) that social factors such as grouping students are proven to create a positive atmosphere in the classroom. The willingness score to communicate students on the initial reflection data reflects some affective factors that interfere with students to start communicating

(for example, anxiety, lack of linguistic competence) but eventually change to increase during task performance influenced by teacher factors (for example, in -pair-discussion, small group discussions) accompanied by the support of interlocutors (for example, smiling teachers, student-teacher relations) which shows the dynamics of WTC learners.

Several factors are conceived to impede their willingness to communicate related to their internal factors, for example, anxiety, self-confidence (see, for example, Cao, 2014; Peng & Woodrow, 2010) and external factors, for example, class environment, interlocutors, corrective feedback (see, for example, Fadilah, 2016; Peng, 2016; Zarrinabadi, 2014). Conversely, students who have high motivation, but low linguistic features do not necessarily lead to success in communication. Peng (2016) put forward "cognitive blocks" as students' self-confidence is mitigated by a lack of knowledge or critical thinking abilities that lead to student anxiety.

As said by MacIntyre (2007) that when given the opportunity to speak, most students are not so eager to take part in class discussions. However, this research proves that most students take part in important roles in every discussion. One of the reflection questions asked, "Does the method of seating arrangement in small group discussions can make you want to talk"?. Then S9 said, "Yes, because with this method, when I or one of my group's friends is confused in talking, we can help each other". With these question and statement, it can prove that this research has reached the research question to be achieved.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions of this study are drawn from the findings and discussion of the data collected. The findings show that the teacher factor that was found in order for students to speak English in a foreign language class was by using the seating arrangement method in the discussion group. In short, this study has provided supporting evidence for previous findings from WTC learners relating to the underlying variables as well as fluctuations of students from WTC which are triggered by the context of teacher factors in the classroom. Learners' reasons for not wanting to communicate are interesting and challenging issues to discuss, therefore, further research on the WTC may need to investigate such issues which are not only skewed by reasons but also the processes and implications for ELT research and classroom context.

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