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Speaking Anxiety among ESL Learners in the Malaysian Classroom

By Hazwati Hashim

The challenges ESL learners face in speaking English in Malaysian classrooms are influenced by various factors. These challenges include speaking anxiety, lack of self-confidence, nervousness, inhibition, vocabulary limitations, and communication apprehension (Nijat et al., 2019; Yahaya et al., 2021; Bayuong et al., 2019).

ESL learners often struggle with self-confidence, fear of negative evaluation, shyness, and worry about making mistakes, which impede their speaking skills (Nijat et al., 2019). Additionally, task-based approaches, psychological factors, and language learning strategies are crucial in addressing these challenges (Yahaya et al., 2021; Bayuong et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the impact of psychological factors on speaking performance, such as communication nervousness and fear of negative evaluation, significantly affect ESL learners' ability to speak English proficiently (Bayuong et al., 2019). Implementing task-based approaches can help alleviate speaking anxiety among low-proficiency ESL learners, enhancing their confidence and reducing nervousness during speaking activities (Yahaya et al., 2021).



Image 1: Malaysian Lecture Hall

Moreover, identifying language learning strategies and understanding the obstacles ESL learners face in speaking skills are essential for improving their speaking proficiency.

ESL learners' challenges in speaking English in Malaysian classrooms are complex and require a manifold approach. Addressing these challenges involves addressing speaking anxiety, enhancing self-confidence, implementing effective teaching strategies, and understanding the psychological factors that impact speaking performance. By focusing on these aspects, educators can better support ESL learners in developing their speaking skills and overcoming obstacles in language acquisition.

Additionally, to address speaking anxiety among Malaysian students, it is crucial to understand the factors contributing to this issue and implement effective strategies to

alleviate anxiety and enhance speaking skills. Research indicates that speaking anxiety significantly impacts students' oral performance and language learning outcomes (Taly & Paramasivam, 2020; Ibrahim & Hashim, 2021).

Factors such as fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and self-related perceptions contribute to speaking anxiety among students (Erdiana et al., 2020; Sholikhi, 2022). Therefore, it is essential to identify these factors and develop targeted interventions to support students in overcoming anxiety.

One effective approach to dealing with speaking anxiety is the implementation of external and internal coping strategies. External approaches may include creating a supportive learning environment, providing constructive feedback, and incorporating technology to enhance speaking practice (Mohamad et al., 2022).



Image 2: Malaysian Classroom

Internal strategies, such as enhancing self-confidence, developing effective communication skills, and promoting positive thinking, can also help students manage anxiety (Aini et al., 2022; Ramamurthy, 2019).

Additionally, collaborative learning strategies are beneficial in reducing speaking anxiety among students (Aulia et al., 2020). Furthermore, task-based approaches have shown promise in reducing speaking anxiety and improving speaking skills among ESL learners.

By engaging students in interactive and meaningful speaking tasks, educators can create opportunities for practice, feedback, and gradual exposure to speaking situations, thereby building students' confidence and reducing anxiety. Pair work activities have also effectively reduced speaking anxiety by providing a supportive and less intimidating environment for students to practice speaking.

In conclusion, addressing speaking anxiety among Malaysian students requires a comprehensive approach that combines external and internal coping strategies, collaborative learning methods, task-based approaches, and supportive learning environments. By implementing these strategies, educators can help students build confidence, improve their speaking skills,

and overcome anxiety barriers, ultimately enhancing their overall language learning experience.

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