

Students' Oral Classroom Participation: What Influences Them to Speak Up?

Honesty Trila¹ and Desvalini Anwar²

¹ Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia, ✉ (e-mail) honesty_trila@gmail.com

² Universitas Negeri Padang, Indonesia, ✉ (e-mail) desvalinianwar@yahoo.co.id

Abstract

Studies on oral participation in the English classroom have been recently conducted. These reveal that there is a growing awareness that oral participation can have consequences beyond the success of language learning. Factors that influence students' oral classroom participation might vary. This research is mainly attempted to identify the factors that influence students' oral classroom participation in English classroom. A qualitative study was employed where the data taken from observation and questionnaire to 54 students of English Tadris Department at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Imam Bonjol Padang. The result of the study showed that factors related to Role of Faculty, logistics, grading and personality traits gave strong influence toward students' oral classroom participation. Specifically, interesting topic selection and supportive classmates impact the level of their participation. Thus, it is expected that this research, considering the influenced factors, can give contribution to English lecturers, the other researcher, and the students on how to promote the level of participation become more active, confident, and creative to participate in classroom orally.

Keywords: *oral classroom participation, influencing factors*

Introduction

Being in the classroom, both teachers and students perform a variety of different types of actions in order to accomplish classroom activities. Among these actions, classroom participation is a fundamental interactional and pedagogical task in which students display their engagement. Besides, participating in the classroom discussion and responding to teacher's questions seem to be an indication of learning for many teachers. Those are also the ways for students to show their engagement in the classroom.

There are several reasons why participation is important in the process of learning. Two studies conducted by Lim (1992 cited in Nunan, 1999, p.48) and Tsou (2005:47) have both shown that the students' classroom participation is related significantly to the improvement in language proficiency. It can be seen from students' behavior or actions during the teaching and learning process at class. When students speak up in class, they learn to express their ideas in a way that others can understand and when students ask questions, they correspondingly learn how to obtain information to enhance their own understanding of a delivered topic. Therefore, students participate actively in class shows that their academic achievement seems to be higher than those who are passive in class participation. In addition, the importance of oral participation in classroom discussions and know very well the extent to which the students' engagement and involvement in the presentation of lessons is vital because it helps them practice and develop their speaking skill as well.

Students' classroom participation can be viewed in two ways; oral participation and non-oral participation, which is related to behavioral responses while in class. According to Abdullah (2012), The behaviors of students in classroom may range from passive to active participations. They may just sit quietly, taking notes, listening, doing something else, or asking questions, giving opinions, or answering questions posed (Mohd Yusof, et al 2011; Hussein, 2010; Bas, 2010). The first four is a passive type of behaviors or non-oral participation, while the latter is an active type of classroom behaviors which shows the students' oral participation. Since Jones (1999:254) states that oral participation in students' classroom participation, is the most recognizable form and is frequently graded by instructors or lecturers, then, it could be identified that this study focused on students' oral classroom participation based on preliminary research done in Tadris Tarbiyah Faculty in which the English Department students as the participants.

In the university level, participation between lecturers and students is integral in the process of learning. Students, who are actively involved in classroom participation, will reflect their higher satisfaction and attention level to the lesson. This is because students will learn how to think critically and enhance their intellectual development if they are an active participant in the classroom.

Regarding students' engagement in their classroom participation, some students prefer to overtly speak and participate orally in the class, while others may just sit and follow what is happening in the class, without being particularly active in the session. In this case, it cannot be claimed that those passive students who do not speak are not participating in the class. Yet, it is essential to investigate the factors why some students participate, and other students do not.

From the preliminary observation during the *General Speaking* class in Tarbiyah Faculty of UIN Imam Bonjol Padang, regarding the lecturer-student talk in discussion, some students were active in participation orally and some were not. For those who tended to be passive, being shy and afraid to make mistake were the things that indicating their passiveness. While explaining the lesson, student with non-verbal attentiveness was positively associated with engagement. They kept good eye contact and nodded head in responding lecturer's talk. The good ones were the ones who sit in front row of sitting management at class. The lecturer was quite communicative and friendly to the students. He approached each student by coming closer to students. Those were some items of factors that might influence students' oral participation at class such as; students' confidence, language proficiency, sitting management, and lecturer's trait.

There have been a variety of reasons identified in prior studies as having influence in students' classroom participation. Based on the preliminary research previously, in this research the writer combined and chose the opinion from the experts that related to factor influencing students' oral classroom participation.

The first factor lies in the personality traits of the students. In *personality traits*, students, as individuals, differ in personalities and not everybody is the same. Confidence is a key trait that students struggle with and has a direct effect on participation (Weaver & Qi, 2005). Anxiety and nervousness inhibit students from communicating instead of building their confidence through participation. Research has shown that this is linked to classroom apprehension which can be mitigated by allowing students to prepare for discussion prior to class.

The second important factor that affects the students to participate active orally is logistics factor. This consists of classroom size, sitting arrangement, and type of the course (Rocca, 2010). Karp and Yoels (1976) found that while the number of students who participate in any given classroom is often the same, courses which have more than 40 students have fewer overall interactions per class period. Seating arrangement is another logistical variable which impacts student participation. Traditional row and column seating (Browsers, 1986) allows for less participation than a U-shaped/circular/semicircular arrangement (Fassinger, 1995b; Ferguson, 1986; Fritschner, 2000). The type of course can have an impact on whether students participate. Students are more likely to ask question, give idea and comment to the interested topic delivered at classroom.

Grade and the role of faculty are the third and the fourth factors influencing students' oral classroom participation. *Grading* is an effective method that can be used to increase levels of participation. If participation has a positive impact on a student's grade, they are more likely to participate in classroom discussion (Fassinger, 2000:32). Boniecki and Moore (2003) suggested that offering extra credit might be a better way to reward participation than giving a separate grade. And the last one is role of faculty. Lecturers are seen as the leaders of authority within the classroom, the way they build their relationships with students is critical in getting them to participate.

Classes with higher participation levels perceive their professors to be approachable, inclusive, promoters of discussion, and supportive (Fassinger, 2000). Positive classmates' trait factor is one important finding from the study by Siti Maziha, Nik Suryani & Melor (2010) on undergraduate students in the classroom of a university in Malaysia. There found that the traits shown by peers or classmates play an important role in providing incentives for students to participate in class discussions.

In Indonesia, studies on English classroom participation have been scant. Theresa Benedicta W investigated on *Factors Contributing to Students' Reluctance to Participate in English Class* in 2015. The study focused mainly on students' motivation and anxiety of junior high school in Central Java. The result showed that the reason why students in SMP Stella Matutina Salatiga are reluctant because the students avoid class activity, some of them were having trouble with anxiety and motivation. Another research was conducted by Fitri Ayu Wandika (2014) at SMA Pertiwi Padang. The title of her research is the *Students' Reluctance to Speak in English Classroom Interaction at Senior High School* and it exposed that linguistic factor and social factor were the dominant factors.

Both studies above were done in Junior and Senior high school level of education in Indonesia. As Fassinger (1995) has observed that research on participation is "dominated by studies of children; less is known about the dynamics of classrooms containing adults or young adults" (p.25). Moreover, both previous studies observed the cause or factors of students who do not participate at class. Thus, first, there is a lacking in the literature that searched for evidence in university classrooms and from the perspective of students (young adults) themselves. Afterward, from the present study, the writer would like to emphasize the

research in exploring the factors that influence students to participate orally at class based on their perspective. This led to provide an actual explanation and insight into their feeling and perceptions.

Method

Students’ oral classroom participation, as defines as the acts of involvement in the class activities, is a subjective experience, which varies from individual to individual. In order to capture the diverse range of subjects’ experiences and perspectives, then, the research design used for this study was a qualitative research method, which is considered an appropriate strategy as “it begins with individuals and sets out to understand and interpret their experiences of a particular phenomenon.” (Cohen et al, 2000:23). Moreover, Gay (2000:16) states that qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting in order to obtain understandings about the way things are, why they are that way, and how the participants in the context perceive them.

This research was conducted in the Faculty of Education (Tarbiyah) at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Imam Bonjol Padang, West Sumatra. Since writer focused on students’ oral classroom participation in *General Speaking Class* two intact classes of 54 second-year students in the English Department were the participants of this research.

The purposes of this study were to find out 1) the factors that influence students’ oral classroom participation in *General Speaking Class*, and 2) the dominant item of each factor that influence students’ oral classroom participation in *General Speaking* ,then, observation and questionnaire were the instruments in collecting the data.

Before using observation and distributing the questionnaire, validating process had been done to make sure that the observation and questionnaire were understandable to do. The writer did four times of observation in two classes namely A and B started on September 26th up to October 12th and distributed 32 statements of questionnaire (Table 1) which had 4 options Likert Scale (Strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree).

Table 1. The Indicators of the Questionnaire

Variable	Indicator	Sub. Indicator	No. Questions (item)	Total
Factors Influencing Students’ Oral Classroom Participation	Personality Traits	Confidence	1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8	8
		Anxiety		
		Language barrier		
		Classroom apprehension		
	Logistics	Classroom size Sitting Arrangement Type of course	9,10,11,12,13, 14,15,16	8
	Grading	Participation reward	17,18,19,20, 21,22,23,24	8
Role of Faculty	Lecturer traits	25,26,27,28, 29,30,31,32	8	
	Classroom climate			
Total				32

In analyzing the data, two major methods were used depending on the type of data obtained from each instrument. For example, the data from the questionnaire were analyzed quantitatively and the data obtained through observation sessions, on the other hand, were analyzed qualitatively.

The quantitative data, which were in the form of frequency distributions, were analyzed using simple descriptive statistics, i.e. percentage. In questionnaire with a four Likert-Scale options, for each scale, a point will be assigned. The points assigned for each scale were 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Based on the percentage obtained from the calculation, it can be classified with a score interpretation criteria displayed in Table 2.

Table 2. Score Interpretation Criteria

Range	Classification
0% - 20%	Very weak
21% - 40%	Weak
41% - 60%	Enough
61% - 80%	Strong
81%- 100%	Very Strong

Score interpretation criteria is used to help the writer interprets the percentage and to see the level of influence of the most dominant factor. The researcher only classifies the percentage of the most dominant factor based on its classification to see how influential the factor is. The higher the percentage, the stronger the influence will be.

Results and Discussion

The result of two instruments; observation and questionnaire show that the students had cited four factors that influence them to participate orally. Ranked most influential was the role of faculty (93%). The role faculty itself was related to positive lecturer traits and positive classroom climate as well. Lecturer who are friendly and approachable as well as supportive classmates encouraged them to participate well made them comfortable to participate orally at class.

Logistics ranked second in the list of most frequent factors selected as influencing student' participation. 85% of the students mentioned that having interested topic delivered at class, working in the small group, and sitting in a U-shaped/circular/semi-circular seat promoted their level of participation.

The third influential factor is grading (81%). In grading, students tended to be more motivated when the lecturer grades students' oral participation. Besides, they also presumed that graded participation motivated them to volunteer more frequently to participate at class.

The ranked last which still remained as a very strong influential factors are personality traits. 80% of the students enjoyed and felt confidants in sharing the ideas in front of the class. in order to avoid the classroom apprehension and fear, they then prepared some notes so that they know what to ask in classroom discussion.

Rooted from the explanation above, the answer of the second research question is also in line with the answer of the first research question. There were eight items followed each main factor. The dominant items of each factor can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. The Dominant Items of Each Factor

Factor	Item	Score (SA+A)	Percentage
Personality Traits	S8: I prepare some notes so that I know what to ask	137	87%
Logistics	S16: I like to participate when the topic is one of my interest	200	99%
Grading	S17: I become more motivated when lecturer grades students' oral participation	171	93%
Role of Faculty	S30: Supportive classmates make me comfortable to participate orally (speak) at class.	192	99%

This study discovered that based on the four main influential factors proposed, the role of faculty, including lecturer's traits and classmates' traits, was the most influential factor in encouraging oral participation among the students. This finding confirms the results of studies done by Mustapha (2010), Susak (2016), and Fassinger (2000). They also found that classroom instructor (lecturer, in this case) and other classroom climate played an important role in shaping classroom participation.

The traits mentioned by students in this study were being encouraging, approachable, and understanding among the lecturer, students, and peers. These were consistent with several studies which also found that students participate more when lecturer engaged in behaviors that are encouraging and supportive as well.

Related to the dominant items of each factors which influence their oral participation, the first ranked chosen by the students was interested topic (99%), followed by supportive classmate (99%), grading the participation (93%), and preparing some notes to ask (87%) ranked last. The interested topic ranked highest was in line with result study stated in Susak (2016:25). Course content influenced the level of participation from students as they were more willing to participate if they were interested in the subject matter being delivered.

Participation as a component of the students' grade impacted heavily on the level of participation within the classroom as was confirmed by literature (Fassinger, 2000 and Susak, 2006). Students would participate more in classes where they knew it would affect their final grade and was indicated in the course policy set by lecturer in the beginning of the meeting. Thus, lecturer may want to consider incorporating participation into their course policies as a part of their grading scheme or as a form of extra-credit in which to stimulate and promote students' oral classroom participation in *General Speaking Class*.

Conclusion(s) and Recommendation(s):

This research identified various factors influencing students' oral classroom participation, students' oral classroom behaviors, and the lecturer's perception of students' oral classroom participation at *General Speaking Class* at Universitas Islam Negeri (UIN) Imam Bonjol Padang. Regarding to research findings, first, it is concluded that there are four factors which influentially affect students' oral participation in *General Speaking Class*. Ranked most influential was the role of faculty. Logistic factor ranked second, grading factor ranked third, and personality traits ranked last.

The second issue is about the interested topic as the dominant item of the influenced factor. This fact was clearly observed during the teaching and learning process at class which turned the students became actively participating, raising more ideas, and be the information seeker among them.

Several recommendations for further research based on the results of the study can be highlighted regarding students' oral participation and the factors that contribute to their participation. Suggestions in this case were addressed, at first, to the lecturer of *General Speaking Class* or other English instructors. The lecturer as seen by the students, as an authority in classroom, is expected to be friendly, approachable, and motivated in promoting students' participation. This then give opportunities to use the language freely and create effective strategies so that they do not only develop students' proficiency and accuracy in the language, but students should also be able to use the language confidently in their everyday life. For the students, they are suggested to be more active in class in which all their contributions are significantly important for their learning outcomes.

Acknowledgments

In preparing this research, writer was in contact with many people, researchers, academicians, and practitioners. They have contributed towards her understanding and thoughts. In particular, writer wishes to express her sincere appreciation to UIN Imam Bonjol Padang and Hidayat al Azmi who expertise that greatly assisted on this paper.

References

- Boniecki, K. A., & Moore, S. (2003). Breaking the silence: Using a token economy to reinforce classroom participation. *Teaching of Psychology*, 30, 224-227.
- Bowers, J. W. (1986). Classroom communication apprehension: A survey. *Communication Education*, 35, 372-378.
- Cohen, M. (1991). *Making class Participation a Reality*. PS: Political Science and Politics, 24(4), 699-703. Retrieved from <http://journals.cambridge.org>
- Fassinger, P.A. 1995. *Professor and Students' Perception of Why Students Participate in Class*. *Teaching Sociology*. 24. p 25-33
- Ferguson, N. B. L. (1986). Encouraging responsibility, active participation, and critical thinking in general psychology students. *Teaching of Psychology*, 13, 217-218.
- Fritschner, L. M. (2000). Inside the undergraduate college classroom: Faculty and students differ on the meaning of student participation. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 71, 342-362
- Gay, L.R. 1987. *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Application*. Ohio: Merrill Publishing Company.
- Karp, D. A. & Yoels, W.C. (1976). *The college classroom: Some observation on the meaning of student participation*. *Sociology & Social Research*, 60, 421-439.
- Mustapha, M.S., (2010). *Understanding classroom interaction: a case study of international students' classroom participation at one of the colleges in Malaysia*. *International Journal for the Advancement of Science & Art*. 1(2), 91-99.
- Nunan, D., 1999. *Second Language Teaching and Learning*. Canada: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Rocca, K. A. (2009). *Participation in the College classroom: The impact of instructor immediately and verbal aggression*. *The journal of Classroom Interaction*, 43(2), 22-33. Retrieved from <http://www.jciuh.org>
- Susak, Marija. 2016. *Factors that Affect Classroom Participation*. Croatia: Rochester Institute of Technology-Croatia. Retrieved from <http://scholarworks.rit.edu>
- Tsou, W. (2005). *Improving speaking skills through instruction in oral classroom participation*. *Foreign Language Annals*, 38 (1), 46-55. doi:10.1111/j.1944-9720.2005.tb02452.x
- Wandika, A.F. (2014). *Students' Reluctance to Speak In English Classroom Interaction At Senior High School A Study At Sma Pertiwi 2 Padang*. Retrieved from jim.stkip-pgri-sumbar.ac.id

- Weaver, R. R., & Qi, J. (2005). *Classroom organization and participation: college students' perception*. The journal of higher education, 76(5), 570-601. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2005.0038>
- Wijaya, T.B. (2015). Factors Contributing to Students' Reluctance To Participate In English Class.