

EFL learners' attitudes towards their English language oral errors: the case of grade twelve students.

Amare Wondimu Gebremariam, Department of English Language and Literature, Hawassa University, Ethiopia

amare2083@gmail.com

DOI: 10.29322/IJSRP.9.05.2019.p8939

<http://dx.doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.9.05.2019.p8939>

Abstract

The EFL learners are reluctant to speak English in spoken class than practicing the target language through trial-and-error. There is less progress in their spoken skill and they have poor achievement in spoken assessments. Thus, the study was to find out the students' attitudes to their English language oral errors. To do so, 100 systematically sampled grade 12 students and their English language teachers were respondents of the study. The study has come up with the following findings. Majority of the students hold erroneous attitudes towards their English language oral errors. They are afraid of making oral errors, demand perfect accuracy, fear of taking risks of making errors. They lacked opportunities which encourage their learning of speaking English. Thus, they had decreased communicative competence in spoken English. This is because of their negative attitudes to their English language oral errors. They feel that their oral errors are indicators of their weakness and they perceive errors as bad habits to be avoided.

Key Words: EFL, English language, learners' attitude, oral error

I. INTRODUCTION

Language is primarily spoken and the learning of any language involves trial-and-error. Specifically, oral errors in learning foreign/second language are more frequent due to the absence of time for organizing thought. It is also frequent because of fear of doing wrong when the learners practice speaking of the target language in front of the teacher and other students. This may result in more erroneous utterance which may affect meaning and communication. This means if they do not practice speaking through trial-and-error, they keep on uttering erroneous speech (Atkins, Hailom Nuru, 1996)

English has become a dominant language in business, finance and banking, science and technology, popular culture and international relations around

the world. It is widely accepted that fluency in the English language is a key to success in life. A student's attitude toward learning the language is one of the leading predictors of success in learning English. So, teachers and educators should take motivation and attitude factors into consideration when designing English language training and instruction (Hall, 2009).

According to Nunan and Lamb (1996) and Erlenawati (2002), learners' attitudes are derived from variety of sources like previous learning experiences, personality traits, teaching and learning practices, social context and so on. These attitudes of learners to the processes and strategies of EFL learning may foster or hamper the success of their learning. Similarly, Erlenawati (2002) claims that attitudes can "influence learners' motivation to learn, their expectations about language learning, their perceptions about what is easy or difficult about a language, and the strategies they choose in leaning". In the same way, learners have their own self perceptions of their errors in learning EFL which may influence their success in learning the language.

Learners' attitudes to their language learning strategies have influential roles in the effectiveness of foreign language learning. They influence the learners' success in learning FL in a number of ways. They determine the learners' motivation to learn and their predisposition about the nature of FL learning. Thus, learners' attitudes may predispose learners to make efforts to learn or not to do so, or may cause learning to be impaired or even unsuccessful.

Learners with positive attitudes, who experience success, will have these attitudes reinforced. Similarly, learners' negative attitudes may be strengthened by lack of success... (Ellis, 1994: 198-199).

This shows that learners' attitudes influence their success in language proficiency and the attitudes themselves in turn are influenced by these successes. In general, the attitudes learners hold towards the context and nature of language learning as well as their own learning practices may either impede or enhance their success in the attainment of language proficiency. Accordingly, learners' attitudes towards their English language oral errors also affect their success in learning to speak English (Atkins, Hailom and Nuru, 1996).

Though learners' attitude having such a critical effect on the learners' success in foreign language learning, it is less studied in general. Majority of the research literature are on error treatment and on error correction. There is no enough evidence found especially in the local research literature accessible to the researcher shows a research conducted specifically with respect to learners' attitudes towards their English Language oral errors except few studies undertaken on error treatment and attitudes of students and teachers to errors and to learning EFL in general.

As a result, the researcher has intended to investigate EFL learners' attitudes towards their English language oral errors by focusing on the case of grade twelve students.

II. METHODOLOGY

For choosing the required sample, different principles and techniques were used. Among the 17 preparatory schools in the zone, three schools were taken purposively. Then, the number of students in each section of each school was identified. To achieve generalizable, valid and reliable data, stratified random sampling and systematic sampling techniques were used.

This is to obtain representative samples as grade 12 students of these schools were grouped into 13 sections.

Thus, to determine the sample size to be taken from each section, the formula $n/N \times N_i$ was applied;

- n = total number of the sample wanted
- N = total number of target population and
- N_i = the number of each stratum or of each section.

Similarly, systematic sampling was used to determine the individual student taken from each section. To do so, first, the complete name list of each section was obtained; then, to decide the specific interval of the individuals selected from each section's name list, the formula $N/n=K$ was applied; (Wiersma, 1995:292)

- ❖ N = total population of a section
- ❖ n = the number of sample taken from a given section and

- ❖ k = a common factor used to determine the interval of the individuals to be taken from the name list.

So, every k^{th} interval in the name list of each section was selected until the number of wanted sample of the section was covered. The same was done for all the sections. Three groups of Focus Group Discussions with six students each were also used in this study. High achievers, medium achievers and low achievers of the students were selected from the three schools purposefully. This is to get more information about the topic from the students through free discussion. In this study, individual semi-structured interview was used with five grade 12 English language teachers of the three schools. Among the three tools discussed above, questionnaire is the major tools of this study because it consists of different kinds of large items. Furthermore, it was responded by a large number of respondents of the study in relation to the respondents of other tools.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

No	Item	Respondents										Non-response		Total	
		Agree		Strongly agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree					
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1	I fear of making errors/mistakes in speaking during learning English	41	41	30	30	6	6	12	12	11	11	0	0	100	100
2	I worry about making errors/mistakes in speaking in learning English	40	40	29	29	8	8	15	15	8	8	0	0	100	100
3	I feel I should practice speaking in English though I still make oral errors	50	50	21	21	2	2	17	17	10	10	0	0	100	100
4	I feel my own oral errors are indicators of my weakness	47	47	20	20	0	0	20	20	13	13	0	0	100	100
5	I feel my own oral errors are very harmful to my English oral communication	32	32	38	38	5	5	15	15	10	10	0	0	100	100
6	I feel I learn from my errors in a memorable way	12	12	20	20	6	6	40	40	22	22	0	0	100	100
7	I think it is difficult for me to avoid later on unless my teacher corrects me every time I make errors	33	33	30	30	3	3	21	21	13	13	0	0	100	100
8	My errors are useful evidences of progress in learning to speak English	14	14	12	12	3	3	48	48	20	20	3	3	97	100
9	I do not fear of making errors in oral production in English	10	10	11	11	5	5	54	54	20	20	0	0	100	100
10	I am not worried about making errors in English classroom oral interaction	17	17	10	10	10	10	40	40	23	23	0	0	100	100
11	I feel my oral errors are useful to my learning of spoken English	10	10	15	15	6	6	29	29	40	40	0	0	100	100

12	I should not say anything in English until I can say it correctly	45	45	20	20	2	2	12	12	8	8	3	3	97	100
----	---	----	----	----	----	---	---	----	----	---	---	---	---	----	-----

Table 1: Learners’ attitudes towards their English language oral errors

As it is seen from Table 1 above, 71% of the respondents (41% agreed and 30% strongly agreed) confirmed that they fear of making errors in speaking and only 6% of the students have neutral attitude on the issue. However, 23% (12% disagreed and 11% strongly disagreed) rejected that they do not fear of making errors in speaking English. It can thus be deduced that majority of the subjects are fear of making errors in speaking where some students disapproved of doing so. This tells us that a large number of the learners hold erroneous attitudes towards their own English language oral errors.

In the same Table it is evidenced that among the subjects, 23% disagreed, 69% confirmed and 8% were neutral with the statement “I worry about making errors in speaking in learning English”. This may show that small number of the students do not worry about making errors in speaking while most of them worry about making oral errors in learning English. From this it may be inferred that some of the learners’ attitudes is positive towards their own English language oral errors but that of most of them is not.

The Table shows that among the respondents, 71% said that they feel they should practice speaking English though they make oral errors, and 27% rejected and only 2% are neutral about the issue. This tends to reflect that majority of the students seem to believe that they should speak English though they make errors but only a few students do not. The implication is that most of the students are theoretically aware that practicing speaking is necessary even if errors appear.

The Table again shows that out of the subjects, 67% confirmed and 33% disapproved the statement, “I feel my own English language oral errors are indicators of my weakness”. This seems to show that most of the respondents feel that their own oral errors indicate their weakness, but some of them do not. From this it can be deduced that most of the students seem to hold erroneous views to their own oral errors.

Here it is also read that among the respondents, 32% approved, 62% disapproved, while 6% of the subjects have undecided opinion about the statement, “I feel I learn from my errors in a memorable way”. This may indicate that some of the learners are theoretically informed that errors are useful evidences in leaning where most of them do not. This may show us that most of the students do not feel that errors are important in learning language.

Among the respondents, 63% confirmed, 34% disapproved and 3% were neutral to the idea that errors are difficult to avoid later on unless their teacher corrects them as soon as they make spoken errors. This implies that most of the respondents say that errors should be corrected as they occur because they are difficult to eliminate in the future. However, some of the students have shown their disagreement on the issue. It may be deduced here that most of the students hold erroneous thoughts about their own English language oral errors.

In the case of the item, “my errors are useful evidences of my progress in learning to speak English,” among the respondents, 68% rejected, 26%

confirmed and 3% showed undecided opinion about the matter. From this, it could be deduced that most of the students feel that their errors are not useful indicators of their learning. On the contrary, about one-fourth of the students believe that errors are useful indicators of progress of their learning. It can be inferred from this that most of the learners hold negative attitude to their own spoken errors.

Concerning the statement, "I do not fear of making errors in oral production in English," among the subjects, 74% showed their disagreement, 21% approved and 5% have neutral opinion. This shows that the majority of the students fear of making oral errors while some of them said they do not fear of doing so. This is also similar to item 10 on which majority of the students confirmed that they fear of making errors. This may also show that the majority of the students hold erroneous view towards their own oral errors.

The information in the Table shows also that 27% of the respondents are not worried about making oral errors, whereas 63% disconfirm and 10% are neutral that they are worried about doing so. This again may show that some of the students do not bother much about making oral errors perhaps due to their realistic attitudes and most of them do because of their negative attitudes.

As the data in the Table indicates among the subjects, 69% disapproved, 25% approved, and 6% have neutral opinion that their oral errors are useful to their learning of spoken English. This shows that majority of the students don't think that their oral errors are useful to their learning of spoken English. Some of the students, however, think that their oral errors are useful to their learning of spoken English. It is also true in the case of item 5

where majority of the students think that their oral errors are not useful to their learning of spoken English.

The data indicates also that among the subjects 20% rejected, 75% confirmed and only 2% of them have neutral opinion that they should not say anything in English until they can say it correctly. Majority of the students expect perfect accuracy and minority of them do not expect perfect accuracy before fluency. This may tell us that majority of the students are not informed that perfect accuracy may be impractical.

In this part of the data from the 12 items of the learners' attitudes to their own oral errors, except on item number 3, on the rest 11 items majority of the students indicated that they have negative attitude towards their English language oral errors.

In the same manner, the result also shows that majority of the subjects confirmed that their own English language oral errors are harmful or not useful to their oral communication or learning of spoken English.

To sum up, as can be witnessed from the learners' responses, majority of the respondents reported that they fear of making oral errors. Besides this, they think that their own oral errors are indicators of their weakness. In addition to these, they prefer frequent and on-the-spot correction by the teacher to get rid of errors. So according to this result, majority of the subjects tend to have negative attitudes towards their own English language oral errors. Generally speaking, although Brown (1994) comment that one's errors are signs of progress of learning, most of the learners said that errors are signs of their weakness and are not signs of learning.

IV. CONCLUSION

From the study it was deduced that majority of the students tend to have negative attitudes toward their English language oral errors. In other words, they afraid of making English language oral errors, they demand perfect accuracy and they feel their own English language oral errors are indicators of their weakness. Besides this, they feel that their own errors impede their learning of spoken English and oral communication. In addition, they prefer frequent and on the spot correction to 'get rid of' the errors. They are ashamed and fear of uttering anything in English and are reluctant and inhibited, though they have interest to practice spoken English.

It was further identified that a large number of the learners are concerned more with accuracy than fluency, are nervous, fear of taking risks of making errors and lacked opportunities which encourage their learning of speaking English. They had decreased communicative competence in spoken English because of their negative attitudes to their own English language oral errors though they are ready to participate in communicative activities.

Therefore, it can generally be concluded that majority of the learners hold negative attitudes towards their English language oral errors due to some factors. As a result of this, a considerable number of the students are left with little chances to communicate in spoken English. Hens, this leads them to unsuccessful way of practicing spoken English and results in weak performance of English language speech competence.

AUTHOR

1. Amare Wondimu Gebremariam, Lecturer, Department of English Language and Literature, Hawassa University, Ethiopia, amare2083@gmail.com

V. REFERENCES

- [1] Atkins, J., Hailom, B. and Nuru, M. (1996). Skills Development Methodology Part I. Addis Ababa: A.A.U Printing Press.
- [2] Hall, S. (2009). Studies on attitudes towards learning English. Retrieved http://www.ehow.com/way_5766640_studies-attitudes-towards-learning-english.html
- [3] Nunan, D. and Lamb, C. (1996). The Self-directed Teacher: Managing the Learning Process.
- [4] Erlenawati.(2002). Beliefs about Language Learning: Indonesian Learners Perspectives, and Some Implications for Classroom Practices''. URL – www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi-hb67475/is-3-46/ai-n28968689.
- [5] Ellis, R. (1994). The Study of Second Language Acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [6] Wiersma, W. (1995). Research Methods in Education. An Introduction. USA: Allyn and Baccon
- [7] Brown, D. (1994). Principles of Language Learning and Teaching (3rd Ed.). New Jersey Prentice Hall Regents.

