An assessment of factors contributed to the EFL learners' negative attitude towards their English language oral errors

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Abstract

As my previous study indicates, majority of the EFL learners are reluctant to speak English in spoken class than practicing the target language through trial-and-error. They have negative attitude towards their oral errors. Thus, the purpose of this study was to assess factors contributed to the EFL learners' negative attitudes to their English language oral errors, and to identify the effects of the attitudes on the EFL learners speaking skills. To do so, 100 systematically sampled preparatory school students and 5 their English language teachers from three Preparatory Schools were selected. The study has come up with the following findings. Majority of the learners identified that they fear of their classmates' ridicule and negative evaluation. A large number of them are concerned with accuracy than fluency in speaking English. Furthermore, their English teachers' frequent corrections of their oral errors have negatively influenced them. Similarly, they think that their teachers' expectation of perfect accuracy on them during English language oral practice is the other one. To sum up, the points stated above are some of the factors that negatively influenced the learners on the English language oral production.

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

I. Introduction

Attitudes, like other cognition and affect in human beings, develop early in childhood. They are the result of different interdependent factors. As to Brown (1994) and Erlenawati (2002), learners' attitudes are derived from variety of sources such as the learners' socio cultural background, parents' and peers' attitudes, learners' previous experience in education or language learning, uncritical acceptance of popular wisdom, teaching and learning practices and the social context of language learning. These factors cause a dimension of either positive or negative attitudes.

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. As Littlewood, (2008)states, the logic was that when learning a second language a person will tend to use mother tongue structures in second language production, and where L1 structures differ from the L2, mistakes will be made.

Learning to speak a foreign language constitutes taking the risk of making errors and its complex unpredictable consequences. As described earlier, there appears either positive or negative views from the learners themselves to their own oral errors. These attitudes of the learners towards their own oral errors stem from array of variables like the learners' socio cultural background and personality traits, other people's attitude, classroom social reaction, the teacher's perception and treatment of the learners' oral errors, the learners view of the teachers' role and their own level of expectation of their own performance and achievement in the language proficiency (Richards, 1986; Ellis, 1994).

On the one hand, learners may hold positive attitudes towards their own oral errors as a result of the following factors. Firstly, as cited by McKeating

(1981) and Atkins and associates (1995) if learners are brought up and live in a society who view errors as something natural, unavoidable and crucial, the learners' too think of their own oral errors as something useful, tolerable and then to be improved in learning. Secondly, if the learners' have got middling anxiety and high self-esteem, and willingness to take risks, Brown (1994), claim that the learners tend to use the language at the expense of fear of making errors. Thirdly, Van Patten and Glass (1998) witness that where there is a positive feedback and tolerant reception of the learners' spoken errors by the classmates, the learners do not fear making errors in learning to speak in the foreign language. Fourthly, the positive perception to and tolerant, freer and unobtrusive treatment of learners' oral errors by the teachers enable the learners develop realistic attitudes towards their own speech deviations

In contrast, the learners' may hold erroneous attitudes towards their spoken deviations as a result of some reasons listed below. To begin with, if the society in which the learners are brought up and the people with which they interact see errors as failure which deserves punishment and elimination, the learners as well think of errors as a sign of failure to be eradicated at all as (Shim, 2007), the learner with extremely high or low anxiety, or one with low self-esteem or one who is unwilling to take risk may have negative attitude to making speech errors. As a result, the learners become reluctant to say anything in the target language and remain with little or no opportunity to learn the language through trial and error approach.

As discussed above, learners may hold either positive or negative attitudes towards their own speech errors. These learners' different attitudes of their own speech deviations in turn have either positive or negative impacts on

the learners' learning of speaking in EFL. The learners' positive attitudes towards their own oral errors create relaxed, anxiety-free condition and increased opportunities to learn speaking without fear of committing oral errors. In line with this, Littlewood (1984), Tsui (1996) and Erlenawati (2002) indicate that learners with favorable attitude to their own oral errors are more ready to engage in practicing speaking in the language taking the risk of making errors. As a result of this, the learners will enjoy to willingly learn speaking and successfully communicate orally using the foreign language English.

Similarly, learners' erroneous attitudes towards their own oral errors lead to language anxiety and use of ineffective strategies of learning speaking. First, learners, with negative attitude who are more concerned about their errors, and their performance, according to research findings referred to by Van Patten and Glass (1998), are so anxious about participating in oral production for fear of negative evaluation and criticism. Next, learners who have the attitude that errors in oral production will impede the FL learning progress refuse to engage in communicative activities, avoid speaking, hesitate to say anything and become reluctant to make the most of an opportunity to use the FL they are learning as explained by Ellis (1994) and Erlenawati (2002). In addition, learners with negative attitudes are reticent, less concerned with trying to express what he/she would like to say and have low readiness to respond in speaking in EFL classroom (Ellis, 1994).

To sum up, learners' with positive attitudes towards their own oral errors have increased opportunity to participate in oral communication so that they get increased communicative competence; whereas, learners' with negative attitudes towards their own spoken errors are unwilling to take risks of

making errors to participate in speaking in EFL classroom, hence get decreased communicative competence.

Learners' self-exposure to practice and use the English language without fear of making errors can remove inhibition. Teachers themselves must hold positive attitudes towards the learners' errors, and must be informed that errors are natural, unavoidable, crucial, and can be improved through practice (Ellis 1994). Likewise, teachers or concerned bodies have to offer consciousness-raising activities that enable the learners understand that they will make mistakes every time, mistakes are inevitable, they should not demand perfect accuracy in pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary in learning to speak the English language (Yang, 2010).

In the same way, teachers, counselors and learning specialists, as discussed by Yang (2010), after identifying the learners with erroneous attitudes, have to inform and advice students on effective language learning strategies in general and on the nature and implication of oral errors in particular. These information and advice help the learners understand that errors are unavoidable natural part of language learning, can be made by everyone every time, and can be improved through time. They also indicate the learners that errors show what they have learnt and will need to learn, and that they have to emphasize fluency over accuracy for the sake of communicating effectively though errors occur. Concerning this, studies reveal that "errors have less effect on the intelligibility of speech than many SL learners assume though intelligibility suffers as the number of errors increases" (Littlewood, 1987: 87).

Hence, the learners can understand that errors are natural, unavoidable, crucial in language learning, that some amount of language acquisition is beyond their control and that improvements can happen over time; so that they develop more favorable attitudes towards their own oral errors and be able to make use of opportunities to engage in learning and communicating in speaking English.

According to the CLT approach, making errors is a healthy part of the language learning process. When the students practice using the target language through trial- and-error, they gradually workout better ways of saying things (Spratt et al., 2010). As opposed to this, most of grade 12 students prefer silence in spoken time than practicing the target language through trial-and-error. As a result of this, there is less progress in their spoken skill throughout the year and they have poor achievement in spoken assessments. As my previous study indicates, these students perceive errors as bad habits to be avoided.

Though learners' attitudes towards their English language oral error have significant roles in the learners' success in learning foreign language, it seems that no local study related to factors of learners' negative attitudes towards their English language oral error is found in the research literature especially in the case of the study focus area. As a result, the researcher has intended to investigate factors of EFL learners' negative attitudes towards their English language oral error by focusing on Batu Terara Preparatory School, Robe Preparatory School and Dinsho preparatory School of grade 12 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 $^n/_N$ $\textbf{x}$ $\textbf{Ni}$ was applied;

- ➤ $\textbf{n}$ = total number of the sample wanted
- ➤ $\textbf{N}$ = total number of target population and
- ➤ $\textbf{Ni}$ = 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 $^N/_n = \textbf{K}$ was applied; (Wiersma, 1995:292)

- ❖ $\textbf{N}$= total population of a section
- ❖ $\textbf{n}$= the number of sample taken from a given section and
- ❖ $\textbf{k}$= a common factor used to determine the interval of the individuals to be taken from the name list.

So, every $\textbf{k}^{\textbf{th}}$ 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

Table 1: Factors affecting learners' attitudes towards their English language oral errors

No	My attitudes to my English language oral errors are influenced:	Respondents										Non-response		Total	
		Agree		Strongly agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree					
		No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
1	Because I am afraid of taking risks of error-making	50	50	22	22	3	3	10	10	15	15	0	0	100	100
2	Because I fear of criticism (negative evaluation) on my own oral errors by other students	37	37	30	30	5	5	10	10	18	18	0	0	100	100
3	Because I fear of ridicule from my classmates when I make oral errors	45	45	20	20	9	9	13	13	13	13	0	0	100	100
4	Because I am less worried to take risks of making oral errors	10	10	12	12	12	12	30	30	36	36	0	0	100	100
5	Because of my English teacher's criticism (negative evaluation) on my spoken errors	20	33	13	13	3	3	40	40	20	20	1	1	99	100
6	Because of my English teacher's frequent correction of my own oral errors	52	52	22	22	6	6	10	10	9	9	1	1	99	100
7	When my classmates give positive feedback to my spoken errors	40	40	31	31	5	5	12	12	12	12	0	0	100	100
8	Because my classmates have positive attitude to my own oral errors	15	15	14	14	6	6	40	40	25	25	0	0	100	100
9	Because my English teacher has positive attitude to my own oral errors	42	42	24	24	3	3	20	20	11	11	0	0	100	100
10	Because my English teacher is sometimes tolerant of my own oral errors	19	19	10	10	8	8	49	49	14	14	0	0	100	100
11	Because my teacher expects perfect accuracy on me when I speak	46	46	30	30	2	2	13	13	9	9	0	0	100	100
12	Because my teacher informs me that perfect accuracy is impossible in learning a foreign language	19	19	16	16	4	4	31	31	28	28	2	2	98	100

13	Because I feel that perfect accuracy in speaking a foreign language is impossible at once	21	21	12	12	4	4	40	40	23	23	0	0	100	100
14	Because I always demand perfect accuracy in speaking English	47	47	24	24	2	2	16	16	11	11	0	0	100	100

As Table 1 shows, out of 100 respondents, 72% confirmed (50% agreed and 22% strongly agreed), 25% disconfirmed (10% disagreed and 15% strongly disagreed) and 3% are neutral about their attitudes are influenced in that they are afraid of taking risks of making errors (item 1). From this it can be understood that the majority of the students said that their attitudes to their own English language oral errors are affected by their afraid of taking risks of making errors. Whereas only one-fourth of them reported that their attitude is not affected by their afraid of taking risks of making errors. This implies that one of the factors negatively affecting majority of the learners' attitudes to their own English language oral errors is their being afraid of taking risks of making errors.

According to the students' responses to item 2, 28% of them disconfirmed, 67% of them confirmed and 5% of them hold neutral opinion about that their attitudes are influenced due to their fear of other students' criticism on their own English language oral errors. This tells us that for the majority of the students, negative evaluation from their classmates has affected their attitude on their spoken errors.

Similarly, response to item 3 displays that 26% of the students rejected, 65% of them confirmed and 9% of them were neutral about the influence of ridicule from other students when they make oral errors. This implies that most of the respondents identified that fear of ridicule from their classmates is an influencing factor to their attitude while some disagreed that it isn't. This shows that other learners' ridicule is also an impeding factor that negatively affects majority of the learners' attitudes to their English language oral errors.

Like those rated item 1 with the same purpose, among the subjects rated item 4, 66% disconfirmed, 22% confirmed and 12% were neutral about that their own attitudes were influenced in that they are less afraid of taking risks of making oral errors. Despite a bit dissimilarity in the number of respondents, both items 1 and 4 indicate that the majority of the subjects indicated that their being afraid of taking risks of making English language oral errors affected their attitudes to their own oral errors. However, some of them said that their being afraid of taking risks of making English language oral errors did not affect their attitudes. It means being afraid of taking risks of making English language oral errors is also one of the factors negatively affecting the majority of the learners' perceptions of their own English language oral errors.

Concerning item 5, from the respondents, 60% disconfirmed, 33% approved and 3% showed neutral opinion that their teachers' negative evaluation of their errors affected their attitudes towards their own spoken English errors. From this it can be understood that teachers' negative evaluation did not influence the attitude of most of the students towards their own spoken deviations though it does for some of them. Teachers' negative evaluation in this case is not a problem for most of the students.

In the case of item 6, 74% of the respondents approved, 19% of them disapproved and 6% of them have undecided attitude about that their attitude towards their spoken errors are affected by their teachers' frequent correction of their own oral errors. This may imply that the attitude of about majority of the students is negatively affected by their teachers' redundant correction of their own oral errors.

On item 7 among the subjects, 71% agreed, 24% disagreed and 5% were neutral that their classmates' positive feedback to their own English language oral errors has influenced their attitude to their English language oral errors. This perhaps may show that the attitude of most of the students is positively influenced by their classmates' constructive feedback to their errors but this is not true for some of the students. As to this and evidence from item 2 above, for the majority of the students their classmates' constructive feedback to their own oral errors has partly contributed for their positive view to their own oral errors.

When we glance at the responses to item 8, 29% of the subjects approved, 65% of them disapproved and 6% of them were neutral that their classmates' positive attitudes have impact on their attitude to their own English language spoken errors. This may tell us that the attitude of some of the students is positively influenced by the positive attitudes of their peers to their own oral errors. However, this may not be real for most of the students. It may be inferred from this that other learners' positive attitudes have erroneously shaped most of the students' attitudes to their own English language oral errors.

In item 9, 66% confirmed, 31% disconfirmed and 3% were neutral that their English teachers' positive attitudes have influenced their attitudes to their own English language speech errors. This tends to indicate that most of the students have positive view towards making English language oral errors as a result of their teachers' positive attitudes to their oral errors.

The result of response to item 10 shows that out of the raters, 63% disconfirmed, 29% confirmed and 8% have undecided opinion that their attitude to their oral errors is affected because their teachers are sometimes tolerant of their oral errors. This may indicate that most of the students' attitudes to their spoken errors are negatively shaped by their teachers' intolerance of their errors.

As displayed in Table 1, response to item 11 gives the data that 76% of the subjects agreed, 22% disagreed and 2% were neutral that their attitude on their own English language oral errors is affected because of their teachers' expectation of perfect accuracy on them. The implication is that the majority of the students' attitude to their own English language oral errors is affected in that their teacher demands perfect accuracy on them when they speak English.

The Table also reads that from the respondents 59% disapproved, 35% approved and 4% had undecided opinion that their attitude is affected due to the fact that their teacher informs them that perfect accuracy is unrealistic in learning foreign language. From this we can deduce that the attitude of most of the learners to their own English spoken errors is not positively influenced by their teachers' advice that perfect accuracy in learning to speak FL is unrealizable.

As it can be seen from the Table, 63% of the respondents disagreed, 33% of them agreed and 4% of them were neutral that their attitude is influenced by their feeling that perfect accuracy in speaking foreign language is impossible at once. This tends to imply that the attitude of most of the students to their own English language oral errors is affected because of their unrealistic belief that total accuracy in speaking FL is achievable at once.

Similar to the responses to item 13 above, among the subjects, 71% approved, 27% disapproved and 2%

undecided that their attitude to their own English language oral errors is affected by their demand of perfect accuracy in speaking English. This seems to reflect that their demand of perfect accuracy contributed to wrongly influence their attitude for the majority of the students. It can be deduced here that the majority of the students' demand of perfect accuracy in speaking English language made them to expect total correctness more than passing their message in speaking.

The major results of this part can be discussed here. In the category of factors identified as causes for positive attitudes are items 4, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12 and 13. Though these items are expected to have positive influences by nature, majority of the students' attitudes to their oral errors were negatively influenced by them. The only item that positively influenced the students' attitudes towards their English language oral errors is item 9. On this item, most (66%) of the students indicated that their English teachers' positive attitudes to their oral errors influenced them positively. However, some (31%) of them were negatively influenced by the issue.

On the other hand, factors spotted as causes for negative perceptions are 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, and 14. As it is indicated by the students, majority of them were negatively influenced by all of these items.

IV.   Conclusion

In general, majority of the students have identified that they fear of their classmates' ridicule and negative evaluation, and their English teachers' negative evaluation on their own English language oral errors. Consequently, these factors have influenced their attitude probably in the wrong direction. Likewise, their English teachers'

information about impracticality of perfect accuracy of foreign language at once has promoted their attitude towards their oral errors. Majority of the students disagree that perfect accuracy in speaking FL is impractical. They always expect perfect accuracy in speaking English and it seems to reflect that this expectation has negative impact on their attitude to their own English language oral errors.

Furthermore, they also feel that their attitude to their own English language oral errors is hindered by their teachers' unrealistic expectation of perfect accuracy on them when they try to speak English. This, as to Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) and Yang (2010), will result in inhibition of students' oral production until, as they think, perfection is achieved. It could be deduced from the findings that majority of the learners identified that they are afraid of taking risks of making errors. They also always expect total accuracy in speaking English and their English teachers' frequent corrections of their errors have negatively influenced them. They think that their teachers' expectation of perfect accuracy on them during English language oral practice has negative influence on them to practice English language orally.

V.   References

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