

ENGLISH STUDENTS' ACADEMIC-EMOTIONS IN LEARNING SPEAKING AT THE BEGINNING OF ONLINE LEARNING TIME AMID COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A narrative study

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Abstract

Academic emotions are essential factors for students' successfulness in language learning. The present research was aimed at portraying academic emotions of Indonesian undergraduate students majoring English during transition from face-to-face learning to online one in speaking course due to COVID-19 pandemic. This study used qualitative method, particularly narrative study. The participants were four students majoring English language education of a private university in West Java, Indonesia. They took part in this study voluntarily. To gain the needed data, interviews were conducted. The data, was firstly analysed using Mile and Huberman's (1994) concept of analysing qualitative data. Further, Hascher's (2009) types of academic emotions was employed for further data analysis. This study revealed that negative emotions – bored, less motivated, doubtful, sadness, and worry – emerged because there was discrepancy between the students' conception and the reality regarding what and how learning speaking were.

Keywords: Academic Emotions, English-Department Students, Online Learning

INTRODUCTION

Various emotions are commonly experienced by students in academic life either in primary, secondary, or tertiary levels of education. Happiness, pride, confidence, sadness, hope, enjoyment, anger and boredom may colour students' study period. Based on previous studies – either psychologically, educationally, or neuro-scientifically – emotions have important role in students' learning process (King & Chen, 2019). Some of the studies were conducted by Derby and Leupold (2015), Noyes et al. (2015), Pekrun (2011), Pekrun (2014) and Zull (2006). During this COVID 19 pandemic time, more factors potentially trigger emotions since people's activities are restricted to decrease the rate of virus transmission and to save people's life. Due to Corona virus pandemic, in April 2020 school closure was done by 172 countries national wide and affect almost 1.5 billion students or 84.8% of total enrolled learners (UNESCO, 2020). Then, since the pandemic, distance learning has been growing. Online or virtual teaching-learning process have replaced the inside-physical classroom courses. The online courses refer to the learning process or the courses conducted either (a) entirely using internet (pure online) or (b) combining traditional and internet-mediated (blended or hybrid) courses (Nguyen, 2015). This reality raised problems both academically and psychologically, especially to students. Regarding this, scholars have been interested in doing researches in accordance with their expertise. For instance, the works of Mirahmadizadeh et al. (2020) about students' emotions towards the schools' closure during the COVID-19 Pandemic, Zhang and his colleagues (2020) about students' emotional and learning management due to COVID-19, Shahzad et al (2020) about ESL learners' attitude toward virtual teaching in COVID-19 pandemic time, Baloran

(2020) about students' attitudes, anxiety and strategy during COVID-19 pandemic. However, studies concerning students' emotion during distance and virtual learning under COVID-19 pandemic time tend to be in general context, not specified to particular courses and sub-skill subjects, in particular in English speaking class. Therefore, a study to look at this is a necessity. In response to this need, the present research is aimed at portraying the emotions of Indonesian undergraduate English students learning speaking skill during online learning due to COVID-19 pandemic. It is expected that the result of this study eases policy makers to facilitate better learning experiences for English students learning speaking using virtual mode.

Academic Emotions

In our daily life, we commonly experience a range of feelings such as happy, excited, hope, angry, sad, fear, disappointed, bored, motivated, reluctant, etc. Likewise, in academic life, either in primary, secondary, or tertiary level of education, different emotions are frequently experienced by students. Many things may become the sources of students' emotions, both inside the classrooms (e.g. teaching methods, learning activities, learning materials, classroom situations; learning devices and facilities, etc.) or outside the classrooms (e.g. parents, neighbour, relatives, government's policy, etc) (Hascher, 2009; Pekrun, 2014).

Many researches have established that emotions are essential in students learning. For instance, Zull's (2006) work exposed that emotion affects human's brain and therefore it is a fundamental aspect of learning process. It is supported by Noyes, Derby and Leupold (2015) who showed that emotions affect students' intellectual development, cognitive processes and learning achievement. Besides, Pekrun (2011) revealed that emotions influence students' learning engagement and achievement. In addition, Pekrun (2014) found that students' interest, learning motivation, learning strategies, and self-regulation are frequently controlled and influenced by students' emotions.

In a broader sense, emotion can be defined as students' responses which immediately emerge regarding to academic environment (Ouweneel, 2014). In a narrower sense, as defined by Schutz et. al's (2006), emotion are students' "ways of being in the world that emerge from appraisals about perceived success at attaining goals or maintaining standards or beliefs during activities as part of social-historical contexts." In line with it, Hascher (2009) characterize emotions into three: affective reaction, situation-bounded, and self-awareness. Further, he maintained that pride, happiness, enjoyment, sadness and other affective reactions are connected to an event or incident. These emotions then drive the experiencer to self-awareness. Therefore, based on the aforementioned concepts, in the present study, academic emotions refer to affects – such as happiness, hope, disappointed, fear and relax – that emerge as reactions to certain environments or activities which are found or experienced by students in an academic context.

Students with positive emotions tend to be more motivated to participate and achieve better performance in their learning (Fredrickson, 2013). It is because positive emotions support learners to be open-minded, have positive thought, envision goals, and cope with challenges (Pekrun et al., 2002). In contrast, studies found that negative emotions obstruct learners from memorizing learning materials and applying higher order thinking processes. However, some studies also found that negative emotions may increase students' cognitive awareness and control after they successfully do behavioural adaptation. In turn, this can facilitate students' learning processes and performance (Valiente et al., 2012).

METHOD

This study used qualitative method (Yin, 2001; Punch, 2009), especially narrative study since it was aimed at telling a group of students' story or experience in learning speaking in the beginning of COVID 19 pandemic time in order to understand and take lesson from those experiences (see Clandinin & Conelly, 2000). The participants were four students majoring English language who were taking English speaking course at a private university in West Java, Indonesia. They took part in this study voluntarily. To gain the needed data interviews were conducted. The data, then, analysed using Mile and Huberman's (1994) framework of analysing qualitative data and Hascher (2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Based on the data, it was found that in the transition time from the mode of offline learning to online learning made the students experience negative emotions in learning speaking. This was based on the students' responses.

[Student A]

I felt bored and unmotivated. It was because we could not see and interact to each other directly. To me, learning speaking is learning and practicing speaking English well and fluently along with good gesture. We have to have direct interaction and communication using English with our lecturer and peers.

Student A believed that learning speaking should be done by practicing speaking English directly face to face with his classmates and lecturer inside physical classrooms. It is proved by his utterance, "we could not see and interact to each other directly We have to have direct interaction and communication ...". He believed that learning speaking English would be better if he could interact, speak and use his gesture or body language within real interaction. However, when the COVID 19 pandemic forced many countries in the world to do lock down, campuses have been holding teaching and learning process virtually. In the transition time, the change from the offline to the online learning made him down. He felt English speaking course done virtually was boring and unmotivating. He said, "I felt bored and unmotivated". His emotions are actually also experienced by many students around the world. For instance, Dhawan (2020) stated that some studies revealed that students experienced boredom during online class. In other word, remote learning, especially for speaking course, is dissatisfying. This finding is also found by Selvanathan et al.'s (2020) that university students dissatisfied with the online learning because of the barriers to do the interaction between the students and their lecturers and their peers during the online learning. It is reasonable that these negative emotions experienced by this student as there was a discrepancy between his conception about how learning speaking should be and the reality or situation he experienced. This has been maintained by Hascher (2009) that emotions are as affective reactions with self-awareness to a given situation.

Similar to student A, student B also had negative emotions as a reaction to the shift from traditional class to online one. The change of mode of learning, especially on English speaking course, made him shock and unmotivated to practice speaking English and prefer to be silent during the class.

[student B]

"I felt it is strange to have speaking class using online mode. I was not accustomed to it. I'd rather not speak."

Student B felt shocked experiencing learning speaking within virtual classroom. She said, “It is strange to have speaking class using online mode”. To her, speaking classes are normally held in real physical classrooms, not in online ones. She believed that English speaking classes were ideally conducted in the same rooms with physically presence both students and lecturers. In addition, she also felt shocked because learning using this mode was a new experience. It can be inferred from her statement, “I was not accustomed to it”. This hints that previously she never had online learning in this course. This situation unmotivated her to be engaged in the speaking class by being a silent student in the class. This is proved by her sentence, “I’d rather not speak”. This finding is in line with Pekrun et al. (2011) that in academic context, negative emotions are related to low motivations and engagement. In addition, studies also found that students see online learning as a boring and unengaging learning mode (Dhawan, 2020). Online learning is so challenging for this learner. Probably she needed help from her lecturer, friends, parents or classmates in order that she become a self-motivated and engaged in the course. As we have seen that students A and B responded to the online learning in speaking course with negative emotions. So did student C. She felt sad because of the change of learning mode.

[student C]

‘I was sad because the class was not conducted in a real classroom anymore. Online class is different from the class conducted inside real classrooms. I was not accustomed to online class. And I thought it was not effective.’

It is revealed that previously the speaking course was held in real classrooms, not in virtual ones. But because of the situation, the class moved to virtual class using Zoom meeting and Google classroom. Like the two aforementioned students, she also conceived that speaking class would be better if it took place in physical classrooms where both students-and-students and student-and-lecturers can interact face to face. She said, “*I was sad because the class was not conducted in a real classroom with face-to-face mode anymore*”. In other words, the new situations that she experienced was different from her expectation and it was her novel experience. Therefore, she felt sad. It is reasonable as online learning hinders students to communicate and interact directly with others. Further, online learning can lead learners to the feeling of being isolated, alienated and disconnected (Kebritchi et al., 2017).

In addition to the sadness, she also hinted that she did not feel comfortable or did not have (enough) readiness to study with it by telling the interviewer, “*I was not accustomed to online class*”. Unfortunately, she did not pinpoint explicitly the aspect which had made her not ready for the online learning; whether her (a) preference in the mode of learning during the course, (b) competence and efficacy in using internet and computer-mediated learning, or (c) ability to engage in self-autonomous learning (see Martin et al., 2020). However, based on her statement above, it can be inferred that the cause was that her preference of learning mode was traditional face to face learning mode. It is supported by her statement “*I was sad because the class was not conducted in a real classroom anymore.*”

Feeling sad was also experienced by student 4 when the speaking class turned to online one. She also had similar reason with student 3 did, that she had never had online class before.

[student D]

“Having virtual speaking class made me sad and worry because I had never got any class that way. I was worry about the speaking score that I would get. The problem was poor signal. It made our voice not clear and thus misunderstood. Speaking class commonly takes place inside the classroom, practicing speaking English in the classroom.”

In addition to sadness feeling, she was also worry about the learning achievement. It can be seen from the student sentence, “I was worry about the speaking score that I would get”. Her worry was triggered by the poor internet connection which made voice unclear and caused

misunderstanding among the people in the class, both students and lecturer. Actually, poor internet connection and devices are two of some big problems faced by Indonesian people for online learning. For example, based on the data from the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, as cited in The Jakarta Post (1 December 2020), good internet connection cannot be accessed by more than 50 % students in the outermost, border and disadvantage regions; meanwhile, outside those regions, 20% students do not have access to computers and 18 % to smartphones. In addition, poor internet connection also happens in other countries. For example, Selvanathan et al.'s (2020) study found that one of the barriers faced by university students in Malaysia in online learning during this COVID-19 pandemic is limited internet access.

CONCLUSION

The shift from face-to-face learning to online learning in speaking course was affectively shocking students. The discrepancy between the student's believes, expectations and the reality regarding *what* and *how* learning speaking should be had driven students to negative emotions: bored, less motivated, doubtful, sadness, and worry. Finally, it is expected that the students have positive thinking and self-autonomy to help themselves cope with the situation they find in order that they enjoy the learning process. Online learning is required during pandemic time.

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