Indonesian EFL Students’ Perception towards the Rolled Class Policy: A Study of Willingness to Speak English

Muh. Rafii
Muhammadiyah University of Luwuk, Luwuk Banggai, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia

Abstract: Willingness to speak English in the EFL classroom context has been one of the ongoing phenomena in English teaching and learning which are motivating to investigate. This research reports the results of investigation towards the use of the rolled class policy conducted at a faculty of Teacher Training and Education in Indonesia which is based on the need to increase students’ willingness to participate at the classroom. The research engaged the qualitative approach on the rolled class policy for the sake of searching out the contributions within teaching and learning process at the classroom with respect to students’ willingness to speak English. The participants of the research were 12 EFL students majoring English education generated from the snowball sampling at Muhammadiyah University of Luwuk, in which they had experienced the classroom arrangement randomly for three semesters. The data obtained by semi-structured interviews was analyzed qualitatively. The investigation shows that the rolled class policy done impacts on the classroom atmosphere, relationship among students, and students’ participation which contribute to favor students’ willingness to speak English at the classroom.

Keywords: willingness to speak, rolled class policy, classroom atmosphere, relationship, students’ participation

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I. Investigation

Since built in 2000, the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education has focused on teaching and learning in the area of education provided for tertiary level students. Currently, the faculty at which the research was done runs three education programs, namely education of sport and recreation, education of English, and Biology. In 2015, the faculty obtained the operational permit from The Minister of National Education of The Republic of Indonesia to run the program of English education. At the same year, the students of English education were born in to the curriculum.

Generally, in Indonesia, the curriculum of English education provides four years in learning process. At the first two years, it overwhelms four skills including listening, speaking, reading, and writing learning. Each of them is taught respectively. For instance, in the area of speaking, it consists of Speaking I, Speaking II, and Speaking III or even Speaking IV. Every faculty has different policy to decide the terms of the subjects. At this faculty, the subjects of speaking are Speaking for Everyday Communication (I), Speaking for Group Activities (II), Speaking for Formal Setting (III), and Speaking for Specific Purposes (IV), in which they are taught in the first, second, third and fourth semester respectively. In other words, students majoring English education must take them.

One of the predispositions of the students while learning the subject of speaking (I) emerged at the classroom then favored the faculty took policy of making rolled class was unwilling to speak English. This tendency was showed by lack of participation, and reluctant to speak. Those situations were delivered by English lecturers in the faculty meeting. Moreover, some of the students asked to the faculty in order to be sent into the same class (A or B) with their friends. The faculty regarded that the main factor affecting was students’ proximity. A number of speculations emerged such as the source of the students demographically was diverse regions, demotivation at the classroom, and apprehension or reticence in which those were deemed as the factors among students caused readiness to speak. Based on the considerations, the policy to rearrange them randomly into class A or B was postulated. This was lasting for three semesters (second, third and fourth), on the condition that each semester their class placement was arranged randomly. In Indonesian context, particularly at the tertiary levels, the use of such this is rarely conducted. It is regarded that to be somewhat troublesome administratively. All documents related to students in terms of favoring teaching and learning process are also changed.

Implicitly, such this policy tends to manage the classroom, in which the purpose of it was creating “a positive classroom climate” [1] in order that the process of teaching and learning at the classroom to be more effective, because of the increase of teaching and learning was affected by a classroom which well-managed [2],

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or developing supportive relationships among students to achieve the quality of classroom management [3]. To respond the symptom emerged at the classroom in the subject of speaking, considering that the attendance of the faculty was desirable in terms of keeping the stability of teaching and learning process at the classroom, the faculty applied the rolled class. It conducted the arrangement for the next semester, and in the fourth the classes (A and B) reverted to the initial class as in the first semester. The class in this regard was divided two classes (A and B) consisting about 22 students of each. After the final in the first semester, they were arranged to lay their class placement or position randomly into class A or B by looking at proximity and students’ preferences such as the faculty avoided to send them at the same class with students that they knew well or their closed. By all means, the students’ documents such as sheets were also changed. In the next semester, arrangement or rolling was reconducted.

The aim of this investigation was to find out roles, influences or things concerning the rolled class policy engaged towards willingness to speak English at the classroom in terms of students’ perception through learning experiences for three semesters while taking the subjects of speaking (II, III, and IV). Currently, while the investigation is being conducted, the classes (A and B) have been rearranged, they revert to their initial.

II. Literature Review

In the domain of teaching, for a teacher, students having willingness to participate at the classroom, expressing their ideas, thoughts or opinions using English pose an expectation. In other words, it is desirable in learning and teaching process. The concept of willingness to speak refers to the willingness to communicate (WTC) which is defined as “a readiness to speak in the L2 at a particular time with a specific person, and as such, is the final psychological step to the initiation of L2 communication” [4]. Willingness to communicate is also connected with motivation [5], apprehension or anxiety [6; 7]. In 1998, MacIntyre et al. conceptualize the pyramid model of WTC comprising desire to communicate and communicative self-confidence, motivation, attitudes, communicative competence and personality. Those potentially influence on WTC in the L2. In this respect, willingness to communicate is defined as the “readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person or persons, using L2” [8]. According to the model in the classroom context, desire to speak with a specific person and communicative self-confidence constitute immediate determinants influencing the construct of opportunity to communicate, while motivation plays a role to favor students’ desire, and attitudes displayed indicate as an event of the willingness to communicate.

Many scholarly researches in terms of investigating or analyzing the phenomena of willingness to communicate have been conducted. Different researchers have engaged either qualitative or quantitative approach to collect and analyze data. By using descriptive statistics, factor analysis and pearson correlation, [9] showed that willingness had close relationship with motivation, English proficiency and perceived speaking ability. Some motivation components such as prevention, motivated behavior, self and family influenced Korean EFL learners’ English learning. Similar investigation was also done in EFL Chinese students’ context using questionnaire, [10] found that EFL learners’ willingness to speak was closely related to the factors like motivation, character, self-confidence, interest, and culture. In line with the article given by [11], it described some variables referred to antecedents of willingness to communicate. They were communication apprehension, self-perceived communication competence, motivation, personality, content and context, and gender and age. With regard to the area of motivation, [12] found that motivation influenced the two components. They were communication confidence and WTC indirectly through self-perceived communication competence and communication apprehension.

Using panel discussion class at a Private English Language Institute (Arses), [13] investigated willingness to communicate for the sake of answering research questions as to Iranian EFL learners’ perception regarding their willingness to initiate communication across different context-types and different receiver-type. The study which was conducted showed that learners were highly willing to communicate in two context-types (group discussion and meetings) and one receiver-type (friend). Willingness to initiate to speak was caused by experiences before such as having group discussion and chat with their friends. In a similar study by using semi structured interviews with 20 students for the purpose of obtaining in-depth information, [14] found that 70% of the participants were quite willing to initiate communication with friends and less willing to speak in English with an acquaintance. Based on WTC questionnaire used to measure the Iranian students, [15] revealed that there was a statistically significant relationship between Iranian EFL students’ WTC and their speaking ability.

[16] researched 30 male and female adult Iranian intermediate EFL learners. The study was observation of three classes in terms of students’ turn of talk and talk time. The primary study focused on investigating the influence of class size towards students’ willingness to communicate. By using mean, standard deviation and one way Anova, the results presented how strongly class size affected the participation of learners in class discussions and WTC. The students were more willing to communicate in small classes and practiced oral skills.
[17] examined Iranian EFL learners regarding WTC in English, the relationship between WTC, communication confidence, and classroom environment. Using qualitative approach, the correlational analysis found that WTC had correlation with classroom environment. Whereas, using descriptive statistics, it indicated that students were willing to communicate in English inside of the classroom.

In qualitative area, using a qualitative descriptive multiple case study method, [18] researched the willingness to communicate (WTC) of Japanese university students. The findings revealed that students did not have significant opportunity to practice with other students in English in the class, and previous speaking skill experiences influenced their willingness to communicate. With respect to the classroom context, results of the quantitative analyses also reveal similar line. [19] examined relationship between the levels of willingness to communicate (WTC) inside the classroom and the use of language learning strategy among Turkish university students. Based on the analyses, the results exposed that WTC inside the classroom was correlated with language learning strategy use. The strategy adopted what was developed by Oxford (1990) including two broad categories, namely direct and indirect strategies.

With respect to conducting the research in the area of willingness to speak, the rolled class policy as the primary focus of this research, posed a reaction of the faculty towards a symptom of willingness to participate in speaking English by English education students emerged in teaching speaking lasting at the classroom. However, the aim of the research was to investigate English education students’ perceptions on the rolled class policy to find out contribution or an important role towards students’ willingness to speak through exploration of students’ learning experiences.

III. Methodology

To investigate students’ perception generated from language learning experiences for three semesters in the subjects of speaking towards rolled class policy, the research used interviews deemed “more appropriate to uncover the complex interaction of social, cultural and psychological factors within the individual learner” [20]. The research adopted the qualitative approach that functioned to “understand and interpret in depth regardless of the numbers of sites or participants” [21].

3.1 Participants

The research involved Indonesian EFL students at the tertiary level. All of the participants were students taking English education at the faculty of Teacher Training and Education. The research was conducted at Muhammadiyah University of Luwuk. They were sophomore students and had respectively accomplished Speaking for Everyday Communication (Speaking I), Speaking for Group Activities (Speaking II), and Speaking for Formal Setting (Speaking III). The participants in the research were 14 English education students generated from snowball sampling. Of 12, 10 were females and 2 were males. The ages of participants ranged from 19 to 21. Demographically, much more females involved in the research ensued because of their population in gender at the classroom.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather data. All interviews were conducted with the participants’ schedules, lasting at the campus in a private classroom provided, and having permission from the authority of the faculty of Teacher Training and Education. Each participant was asked to tell the experience perceived while learning at the speaking classes, in which they were exchanged randomly for three semesters within the rolled class policy. The interviews were in length from 40 to 60 minutes. Recorder was engaged to keep all the conversations or words from participants.

Analyzing data was done ongoingly or carried out at the same time with data collection [22]. In this regard, data analysis was conducted on the interviews recorded by looking at some important points in the data at first regarded to be proceed to the subsequent analysis or so-called as “coding” [23]. Following the tradition of qualitative method, the process of analyzing here was listening to the interviews which had been recorded for several times, read, and re-read the interview transcripts, and categorized into some categories, then finally “representing the data in figures, tables, or discussion” [24], or reporting results as what being investigated.

IV. Results

Having analyzed the data derived from the students’ learning experiences through the interviews, some emerged as the categories generated from the rolled class policy which was pertinent with the students willingness’ willingness to speak in the classroom context. The categories the students delivered are described below.
4.1 Classroom Atmosphere

One main factor that most described by the students while telling their learning experiences is about atmosphere inside the classroom. The atmosphere at the classroom has an important role to direct the classroom to be motivated or demotivated for EFL students. According to [25], it revealed that demotivations emanated from peers such as mocking can influence students’ motivation even inhibited willingness to start speaking in the class. Currently, they seem to be more willing to speak English due to the classroom is much more friendly and supported. They are more relaxed to use English at the classroom although still making mistakes.

“now, I have been returned to my first class as in the first semester but I feel different situation. When I was in the first semester, it’s like conflict in myself. You know I hesitate to speak. I wanted to speak but I had like burden if I spoke and I made mistakes. The classmate probably laughed. But, now at the same situation of the class, I feel relax, I enjoy. you know When I speak English and making mistakes the class laugh me, I’m easy going even I laugh with them but I don’t stop speaking” (Marwati).

“roll class make me to be at the same class with some friends, and to be at the same with others in different class in the first semester. This at last I mean the situation make me to know them all for example I know their character, interest, or sensitiveness. We build closed atmosphere. Because of the classroom is warm I’m brave to speak in groups discussion” (Fitriana).

Eventhough most of them described that they seemed to be more willing to participate at the classroom, Waldian and Alifanti expressed that they frequently have low willingness in this regard. It is caused the familiarity with the topics of discussion related, or they have no readiness while entering the classroom. Concerning situations at the classroom, they expressed that the classroom is much better than while they are in the last three semesters.

4.2 Classroom Relationship

Most of the students interviewed admitted that they had become intimate. There is a harmony peer relationship not only inside but also outside the classroom. Consequently, when they are in groups, they probably strike each other to support their group to strengthen viewpoints in a class activity. But, the end of the class, it reverts to be comfortable, undeniable such this situation there are piles of negative things emerged while discussing as Desi and Gita expressed.

“sometimes while discussing in groups, we get different topics. We have to support our opinions, facts or data and sometimes we have provoke other groups or blame or underestimate their ideas or opinion mm and we really strike each other. But, after discussing we back as friends and no gaps that come from this situation” (Desi).

Even, the students’ connections at the classroom become more proximate, in which the situation renders a good atmosphere to run classroom activities. It is desirable in learning process. Gita described that initially they prefer to be more willing to speak to the persons that they know. Terminally, they recognize each other. This makes them to remain active at the classroom eventhough in an activity using groups they are far away from their closed friends. This has not been inconvinience anymore with whom they have to be, because they have been comfortable with all class mates as Gita reported.

“in the first, inside the classroom, we are partial. We don’t have good connection with all class mates. Although this sometimes not seem physically. Today we can share to each other inside the classroom, and and we don’t need to request anymore to be with whom we are in groups in classroom activity” (Gita).

4.3 Classroom Participation

The faculty conducted “rolled class policy” as a part of the reaction to see the symptoms concerning classroom activities. Poor in taking part inside the classroom in activities such as group discussion, in pairs or willingness to participate individually by all means is not expected by the faculty or lecturers. Fear to initiate and communicate in the class is ample to describe by the students in delivering their experiences, in which while in the first semester all experienced it. Like some, Wirno and Leris revealed that fear to start speaking is initial situation encountered. It is daunting to control that situation. In addition, physically, it can be seen, in which the heart beats quickly and certainly it prompts to be nervous as Wirno revealed.

“while in speaking class, I am afraid to say or even to start to speak or to give my ideas is difficult. Like this when my turn come to speak I feel my heart beat very strong . . . I just see that some of the students in the classroom little interaction with me I mean I don’t speak too much with them because I don’t know very good about them” (Wirno).

Similar to Wirno, Leris also described that the situation appears imasmuch as he emanates from district, in which when all are inside the classroom a little interaction ensues. He does not recognize them as Leris said.
“I come from different region with my classmates. Not all of them I know. So, at first I realize that I have low willingness to speak. I am afraid to speak especially to speak individually. You know I like if we are in group while discussion because not all group member can speak” (Leris).

When describing the situation so far, particularly concerning the policy of rolling class, in which they are arranged randomly to be different classes and classmates, he said finding some changes.

“today, in my class, if I speak some still laugh me if I say wrong in words and pronunciation maybe because I still bring my local where I come from mm but I feel relax that not influence me and also because already know them well I mean like mm laughing if making wrong that’s just making the class more crowded. I like that” (Leris).

In line with this, Silvani also described that initial situation is different particularly in the first and the beginning of the second semester. She just found apprehension in which that bear them having unwillingness to speak. Currently, it changes. The connections become stronger among the classmates. “I don’t worry anymore if I give my opinion when standing in group discussion. Now, I have no doubt to say or to question anymore maybe I say wrong but I just smile” (Silvani).

V. Discussion and Conclusion

The policy of rolling classes finally provokes the classroom regarding having willingness to speak. However, environment inside the classroom positively correlates with the willingness to speak English [17]. By exchanging among students randomly, this way is initially protested. But, it is undeniably that, this pattern terminally bears the classroom to be relaxed, in which all students have known each other. [26] renders description that individuals’ willingness to speak emanate from the contribution of the classroom atmosphere. When the students are in an unworried or relaxed situation or the environment they have is friendly enough, they have predisposition to speak more. Moreover, the recent study describes that the classroom climate which refers to the atmosphere in the language classroom built up by students is one of the reasons of willingness to speak perceived by vocational students [27]. Concerning with this, creating a warm atmosphere is recommended to enhance students’ participation in EFL classroom and also motivate them to learn English [28]. In fact, classes arrangement done aims at building up soft relationship. This erodes gaps among students, or they begin to recognize each other, in which the situations ensue in some semesters respectively. In turn, when returned to their classes as in the first, the present classroom has postulated new atmosphere which is looser and more relaxed.

An internal prejudice generated from students themselves can conceive a barrier in terms of being anxious to participate in the classroom activities such as pairs or groups using English. When other students are regarded much more qualified or proficient, unwillingness emerges that can be seen an in Silvani’s experience. “in the second semester, I have some friends which better than me. Their English is very good. I like if they are same group with me when discussing. I don’t need to speak. I feel safe” (Silvani). In line with this, such this situation can be deemed as a negative feeling, that is, students consider others are better. It contributes inhibition to speak. This is framed by a perception that other students more proficient and experienced than themselves in the classroom [29].

In building communicative classroom, a good relationship among students is also needed particularly to exhort their willingness to speak in which the willingness correlates with their interaction. Even, effective interaction and language production can be handicapped by a lack of willingness [30]. Students themselves actually realize when relationships are not working, poor interactions emerge as one of the inhibitions in finding better communicative classroom. It is daunting to consider that relationships among students at the classroom context are easy to ensue. Compatibility, character, and familiarity which are very potential to inhibit lack of willingness cannot be generated soon. Indirectly, the classrooms’ rotation of this policy cause a particular pattern that occurs like gathering then separation and revert to gathering. This provokes an intimacy takes place among students. Regathering after separation poses their reunion. In addition, this pattern goes on for a long period of time. In this regard, the length can be a condition that constructs intimate relationships. Every student does not regard that making something embarrassing while speaking in front of their classmates is not the problem anymore. In other words, apprehension which is as one of the factors in having willingness does not exist, considering it poorly emerges among intimate friends.

Apprehension or anxiety tends to exhibit students’ unwillingness to participate in classroom activities. But, it only endures to unwarmed classroom situations. Another fact must also be received as a phenomenon that is students are likely to initiate to talk in a well-known atmosphere. This may be attributed to students’ familiarity. It is undeniably that, the rolled classes conducted offer a process of making familiarity among them. Initially, most of them protest to be in the policy pattern, now that they have to encounter unfriendly or new atmosphere and far from their closed friend. This may mean that at that time they actually would face anxiety soon.
However, the pattern designed make anxiety meets with another anxiety in different classes. They crash each other for many times. Those ensue every semester. Such this situation at last erodes fear of something having negative feedback, reticence or reluctant to speak perceived by the students. It can postulate creating a high participation in classroom communications. The more they know persons well, the fewer they feel fear. The intimacy of classmates at last can create a warmth that having high-quality of relationships among peers [31], or a climate of comfort derived from warm interactions [32].

In the classroom situation, the classes indicate in part to show a symptom referring to anxiety as part of students’ participation factor at the classroom, in which fear to initiate to speak is the key. [8] conceptualize anxiety as a interrelated variable to self-confidence in the Pyramid model. According to [33], “anxiety is associated with feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self doubt, apprehension and worry”. Some researchers have argued that anxiety (e.g fear of speaking, reticence or shyness) is an effective factor influencing willingness to speak. For instance, fear of evaluation by peers in class or making mistakes in front of the class are mentioned as inhibiting students’ participation in class [34], or reticence is regarded as a detrimental influence on the effectiveness in the process of language learning [26].

[35] give a description that more willing to speak in classroom activities can be the key to be successful in language learning. This situation, in turn, leads students to have an ability in speaking, as more willingness to speak correlates with the students’ participation. Thus, to increase students’ participation, what are regarding anxiety like fear of speaking, reticence, shyness and worry because of others are better in class must be eradicated. By all means, keeping the rolled classes as a good strategy to overcome unwillingness to speak English is not sufficient. In the EFL context, in light of its status as a foreign language and comprising of different cultures and local languages, for EFL students, unwillingness to speak English is likely to emanate from ample factors. Effective or combined strategies can be engaged to increase atmosphere, peers interaction and also high participation of students at the tertiary level. This is in terms of favoring willingness to speak for EFL students.

References

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