Original Article

Causes of Students' Limited Participation in EFL Classroom: Ethiopian Public Universities in Focus

Dawit Tesfaye Abebe and Demis G/Tsadik Deneke
Department of English Language and Literature, College of Social Science and Humanities, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia
Department of English Language and Literature, College of Social Science and Humanities, Jimma University, Jimma, Ethiopia
Email: todawit@gmail.com, demisgtsadik@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the causes of first year students' limited participation in the EFL classrooms with reference to Ethiopian public universities. The researchers conducted a survey study by developing a questionnaire comprising of 66 items and administered classroom observations in EFL settings. All students in Ethiopian public universities were the population of the study, and data were collected from 300 students of different departments in Ambo, Arba Minch, Haramaya, Jimma, Wollo Universities as sample. The data were analyzed and interpreted in terms of percentage. It was concluded that different factors like learners related, teachers teaching methods, physical environmental and others limited students' participation in the classroom. The researchers also recommended suggestions for the removal or minimization of those factors.
Key words: limited participation, public universities, reticent, EFL, ESL, styles, strategies

INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EF/SL) teaching and learning, students' verbal participation or engagement is essentially important in the classrooms. This claim complies with the conceptualization of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach of teaching English, which sees language being taught as a system for expressing meaning (Nunan, 1999). It is believed that when students engage in the classrooms with their teachers or among peers, they are compelled to be involved in the 'negotiation of meaning', that is to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts and opinions (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). In turn, the students 'communicative competence' or what they need to know to communicate, can be developed in the classrooms (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Chang & Goswami, 2011). Therefore, students' oral contribution is of great importance for class participation. Operating from the belief that verbal participation is associated with learning, students are always encouraged by their teachers to contribute to the classroom discourse, and their participation is often evaluated according to the amount and quality of their talk (Warayet, 2011). This practice has also become an evaluative benchmark for EF/SL teachers to reflect if they have conducted a good lesson or elicited sufficient responses from their students. Although participation may be graded in different forms, and vary substantially from one instructor to another according to the types of interactional activities and measured quality, the ultimate goal is somewhat to increase student involvement (Bean & Peterson, 1998). Generally speaking, with teachers' encouragement and efforts, students are always expected to be able to fully contribute in the classroom discourse. Nonetheless, the EF/SL classroom may be a frustrating place when most students remain silent in class, and only a small proportion of them actually participate (Fritschner, 2000). Despite the students being aware of the importance of spoken English, and knowing the fact that participation is encouraged, many teachers still experience a great deal of quietness in the EF/SL classroom. The students are said to remain non-participatory, quiet or behave passively. In the field of second language acquisition, this is a situation typically termed as 'reticence'. For EF/SL instructors, this is a kind of uncomfortable feeling as it reflects negatively on their instructional practice.

Many of them, in spite of having many years of teaching, still fail to decode the reticent behaviour, and work out suitable strategies to encourage their students to contribute more to classroom discourse. This experience also prompts us to find out more about reticence since it has always been denoted a problematic attribute that would hinder the development of oral proficiency in the English language. This specific chapter tries to highlight the background, research problem, objectives, scope, virtues and demerits of the study.

Background of the Study

No one can deny that active classroom participation plays an important role in the success of language learning (Tatar, 2005). As involvement and participation are essential for language acquisition, the more utterances the learners offer, the better their spoken language is and vice versa. This phenomenon is termed Matthew Effect that is "rich get richer, poor get poorer" (Chau, Fung-ming, 1996).When students produce the language that they are studying, they are testing out the hypotheses which they have formed about the language. When they respond to the teacher's or other students' questions, raise queries, and give comments, they are actively involved in the negotiation of comprehensible input and the formulation of comprehensible output, which are essential to language acquisition. Students, who are actively involved, reported higher satisfaction and higher persistence rates (Tsui 1996). The importance of learner participation is also stressed by Jackson (2002) who contends that participation provides the setting in which students can construct and shape identities as members of the classroom. Moreover, research has shown that participation in classroom activities is important in order for effective learning to take place (Tsui, 1996). The linkage between classroom participation and students' academic achievement is undeniable. A study by Liu (2005) finds that students who participate actively tend to have better academic achievement compared to students who do not participate. Students' oral participation can help students fill the gap between what they want to say and whether they are able to say it. Furthermore, it is a common belief that participation in verbal interaction offers language learners the opportunity to follow up on new words and structures to which they have been exposed during language lessons and to practice them in context (Liu, 2005). In spite of the growing expectation for verbal classroom participation in second and foreign language learning situations, uncommunicativeness research has captured the attention of language theorists and educators in recent decades (Macintyre et al., 2001; Tsui, 1996; Biggs & Moore, 1993; Liu, 2005; Van den Branden, Bygate, & Norris, 2009). By way of interviews, observations and questionnaires, research has demonstrated that engaging in classroom discussions is one of the most problematic areas for students, as identified by both teachers and students themselves (Kim, 2006). Second/Foreign-language learners, especially Asian learners often seem passive and reticent in language classrooms. Students often do not respond to teachers' questions and they do not volunteer answers or initiate questions. They tend to speak their L1 whenever the teacher is out of earshot. Teachers also recognize the fact that students will not produce answers unless they are called on. It is not surprising to find out that students often know the answers, but just do not want to volunteer to say them. They are reluctant to participate in classroom discussions. Some rarely respond to their teachers or actively participate in discussions. What accounts for this phenomenon? What can be done to help students take a more active role? From their observation and experience of teaching the EFL speaking skills for eight to ten years, however, the researchers have noticed that most of the students have serious deficiencies in speaking skills. This is especially observable when the students take the course entitled "Communicative English Skills" at first year level. The researchers observed that many students performed poorly in this course. Students have been observed to be either quiet or to speak English with a trembling voice, make numerous unnecessary stops, or having shaking hands or legs, etc. during English lessons or oral English tests (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996).

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In the classroom, learners' participation is necessary for the progress of instruction. Students' participation is not confined only to physical presence, but it means their mental presence. In class, their interaction should take interest in the class work attentively and listen to the teacher and give a give a good response. Regarding the importance of interaction, Mukkalel (1998:104) states that, "Interaction is a stimulus response situation with some degree of verbal or non-verbal exchange that would result in positive or negative feeling in the individuals who function as the agents of the interaction." Interaction is a creative and productive factor as even elementary forms of interaction that happen among human individuals involve intellectual and imaginative organization of elements involved in the interactional situation. Students can participate properly if they are free from all confusions and problems. Some students do not participate properly; they present in the class but do not pay attention to study. They do not listen to the teacher attentively and feel bored. Now we have to see the factors, which affect the action of the students in the class. Why they remain restless? Why they do not pay attention to the study? Many

factors affect their responses. Learners' attitudes are very significant. A neglected learner feels helpless and lonely. Personal and domestic problems, defective training of the teachers, their attitude, unsuitable course, way of examination, improper environment of school, mental level, deficiency of educational facilities, and conduct of class fellows, partial treatment, and act affect the participation of students. It is required to make a research whether these affect the responses of students. If yes, then how can these problems be resolved and how can enable students to participate actively in the EFL classes? Shockingly, this problem has also been noticed even by other instructors who have been offering the same course to different groups. The same problem has also been observed in many SL/FL countries. It has been found that many SL/FL students are passive in language classrooms and choose not to use the target language most of the time, especially when responding to teachers' questions and discussions (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Tsui, 1996). As a result, both teachers and students have become frustrated and often complain about the quality of the learning outcome. This makes it urgent to examine this phenomenon to better understand the causes of the students' reluctance to participate in the English language classroom and ultimately enhance the learning and teaching of oral English there. Teachers have been institutionally bestowed the right to create, manage and decide the different types of students' interactions carried out in the classroom. More precisely, teachers, as those who, one way or another, could shape the curriculum in its direct application with respect to content and topics for discussion and the specific methodological procedures which determine who talks, how they talk, who they talk to and how long they talk, hold a responsibility for creating participation opportunities and increasing them in classrooms (Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Xie, 2010). Macintyre et al. (1998: 548) stress the importance of "opportunity", as "intention must combine with opportunity to produce behavior". This implies that "without such an opportunity, reticence will be encouraged as the learners' wish to communicate is not stimulated" (Lee & Ng, 2009: 303). This opportunity is important in the EFL classroom in which students hardly ever get the opportunity to use the language for communication purposes (Walsh, 2002). Tsui (1996) conducted an action research project through which he planned to study teachers' better understanding of their students in terms of participation or being reticent. To do so, she investigated with 38 Hong Kong English teachers who had videotaped their classes to specify the possible problems of their pedagogical teaching. Almost all the teachers observed the fact that teachers' talk is much more than students' talk during a lesson. These teachers believed that making students talk was one of the most problematic parts of the students' engagement in the class, and it was in fact their primary concern. The teachers did their best to avoid the silence in the classroom as they felt failure when their learners failed to reply. In such a situation, teachers repeated or rephrased the question or finally answered themselves. Tsui (ibid.) also found that turn taking was not equal among the students and in some cases incomprehensible input intensified silence and put the selected student under stress. Xie (2010) mentions that if student pressure and the supervision over classroom interactions are reduced, learning opportunities will increase. In this case students' participation is leading them towards learning; in other words, having less control over the classroom content lets learners get engaged in topics which are highly amusing for them. In a similar manner, Donald (2010), referring to the role of teachers in learners' involvement, argues that students' fear of being corrected, the amount of wait-time and group work are among the factors influencing willingness to participate in the classroom discourse. Regarding this study, it looks at English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners' limited participations in classroom activities. The nature of silence in classroom is complex with different students possessing distinct beliefs, social norms, and cultural backgrounds. There are several factors that contribute to students' reluctance to speak up and participate in classroom activities, such as linguistic, psychological, and socio cultural (Harumi, 2010) issues. Awareness of sources of silence on the part of EFL instructors may decrease misinterpretations regarding students' level of engagement in language classrooms. It is in line with this reality that this study is intended by the researchers to be conducted. So, this study has attempted to look at the following research questions.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
The present study attempts to find answers for the following questions:
What are the causes of students' limited participation in English classroom discussions?
What are the strategies and styles used by the students and teachers to participate in the classroom respectively?
Are there any implications for overcoming these obstacles of students' reluctance to participate and interact with one another in class discussions?
Research Objectives
The objectives of this study are two-fold: the general and specific objectives.
General Objective

This study intends to examine the causes of students' limited participation in the English language classroom activities and discussions of public universities in Ethiopia.

Specific Objectives

Specifically to state, this study aims to examine psychological factors affecting students' participation in the classroom and to investigate physical factors that affect participation of students in the class.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study tried to shed light on the causes of students' poor participation in EFL classes at public universities in Ethiopia. So, in one way or another, it helps EFL teachers be aware of the factors that lead to non-participation in the class, and they can cope with this problem. Furthermore, the findings could enable teachers to develop approaches and practices for working with EFL students.

To sum up, this study is hoped to provide extensive insights into notions of silence, its effects on language learning, and how it is currently being addressed. Thus, the findings from the research would be of interest and useful for those who wish to reduce student's speaking reticence.

Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to the first year non-English majoring students of the public universities in Ethiopia at bachelor degree level. Besides, this research has been conducted to examine the causes of students' limited participation in the EFL classroom activities and discussions.

Limitation of the Study

To collect the data, the researchers used two tools: questionnaire and classroom observation check list. If other tools, for example, focus group discussion, both structured and semi structured interviews had been used, this study would have revealed further outcomes. This is one of the demerits of this study under discussion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature highlights the potential role of teachers' discourse and interaction strategies as one of the causes of learners' poor participation in the classroom activities. Through reviewing the relevant literature and by deriving some insights into the relationship between   language teacher talk and learners' opportunity to participate, we reviewed theories lay behind participation, ways in which teachers can intervene in their patterns of teacher-learner interaction to provide their learners with ample opportunities to volunteer ideas and to participate more in classroom activities.

Theories of Participation

Mark K. Smith (2007) elaborates the concept of Participation in learning projects and programmes as the motives for engagement in learning projects are often mixed and can operate at a number of levels. Besides, McGivney (1990) has provided a useful summary of some of the better known theories which she divides into single strand and composite involve a number of strands.

Need Hierarchy Theory

The main line of argument here is that participation depends on the extent to which a person has been able to meet a range of primary and secondary needs after and the influence of positive and negative forces (Maslow 1954). For example, as basic primary needs are met, one's economic and social position improves, higher needs are activated, and the balance between negative and positive forces shifts. As a result, people are more prepared to take part in educational activities (Miller 1967). It is suggested that people are more likely to participate in educational activities where there is some congruence between their perception of themselves, their self concept and the nature of the education programmed/environment. One of the key findings in the North American literature which has driven this is the correlation between the number of years spent at school and college, and the likelihood of taking part in education programmes after that (Boshier 1973).

Force-field Theory

This approach draws heavily on the work of Lewin (1947; 1952), Miller (1967), in particular, sought to draw together Maslow's and Lewin's theories to explain why socio-economic status class is linked to participation in adult education. He charts positive forces and negative forces and their relative strengths. This is then taken a step further by Rubenson (1977). He argues that education, like work, is an achievement-orientated activity, meaning that people who want to get ahead will put effort into personal achievement. Cross (1981), suggests that motivation emerges from the interaction of two factors: expectancy and valence.

Life Transitions Theory

The notion of 'transition' has assumed a much larger role in thinking about the take-up of education. This has been reflected, for example, in shifts in UK research concerning young people's participation in further education (Banks et al 1992). In North America populist accounts of the impact of 'life-changes'

(Sheehy 1976) have had a significant impact. The basic hypothesis involved is that participation in education projects is frequently linked to changes in life circumstances such as changes in job, the break-up of relationships, having children, bereavement and retirement.

Reference Group Theory

This theory is based around the assertion that people identify with the social and cultural group to which they belong - 'normative reference group, or with another to which they aspire to belong 'comparative' reference group (McGivney 1993). A number of studies point to the extent to which people's total environment and group membership creates an orientation to involvement in educational projects and programmes (Darkenwald and Merriam 1982).

This approach has now been developed at some length by (Courtney 1991).He argues that significant learning often takes place in organizational settings: schools, community groups, work. Thus, to seek motivation for learning, 'we might seek for those factors which motivate people to join or be part of organizations or for reasons why organizations compel as well as encourage forms of voluntary participation.

Language Learning and Classroom Participation

Classroom participation represents both a theoretical concern for researchers and a practical anxiety for teachers within foreign/second language pedagogy. As with theories of second language acquisition, second language pedagogy has explained how students can be participated in classroom activities using several teaching methods such as audio-lingual method and communicative language teaching. Such methods may produce different sorts of student participation because, for example, participating in language drills is not like in small group activity. Nevertheless, participation in the classroom is an essential part of language learning and students must engage in classroom activities in order to learn the foreign/second language. This assumption is explicitly formulated in learning theories such as learning by doing (Dewey, 1997 [1938]) and legitimate peripheral participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991). The assumption that students should be included and engaged in teaching and learning activities can also be found in pedagogical applications, for example in communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching (see, e.g., Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Moreover, the relationship between participation and learning, which seems to be associated to each other in several aspects, has been investigated in various studies (such as Firth and Wagner, 1997, 1998, 2007; Long, 1997; Mondada and Pekarek-Doehler, 2004).

Classroom participation has also been studied from psychological and sociolinguistic perspectives in order to describe why students can or cannot participate in their classes. Such studies have found that social factors such as the age, gender and culture of teachers and students (Fassinger, 1995), and organisational factors such as class size and curriculum (Howard et al., 1996) may affect classroom participation. These studies have been criticised by different researchers, however, because they focus on the factors mentioned above as explanations of student participation rather than analysing student participation itself.

Following this line of research which describes student participation in its own right through ethnographic observation, this study looks at how participation is organised within the time span of the classroom lesson. Before looking at how student participation is organized, it is necessary to explain what EFL students actually need to know in order to participate appropriately in their classrooms (Bloome et al., 2005). For example, Johnson (1995) points out, students need a degree of knowledge and competence to participate in, learn about and acquire a second language (p. 160). This knowledge, as Mortensen (2008) states, contains functional, social and interactional norms, and it can be analysed in terms of how the participants orient to the ongoing activity while classroom interaction proceeds (p. 11). Since this necessary knowledge for classroom participation can be seen clearly in and through the organisation of classroom interaction, the structure of this interaction needs to be studied in some detail.

Furthermore, as indicated in the previous chapter, in contexts such as Libya where English is taught as a foreign language, the classroom is the only place where students can learn the language and interact in English with the other students around them. In this case, understanding the opportunities for student participation in and through the organisation of classroom interaction in such contexts is also needed. Thus, the following sections are devoted to the organisation of classroom interaction.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the methodology and procedure of the study. It also describes the nature of design, sampling, population and sampling techniques of the study. It tells us about the instrument and the validation of the instrument.

Subjects

The subject pool of the study was limited to non-English majoring EFL learners in Ethiopian public Universities who found it difficult to participate in English classes. The population of this study consists of 300 university students who were enrolled in communicative English skills course, and students who attended the first semester of the academic year 2006 E.C from randomly selected six universities (Ambo, Arba Minch, Haramaya, Jimma and Wollo) in Ethiopia. The participants were recruited to answer a battery of questionnaires.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique
For the study underwent, 300 students from the six public universities were selected at bachelor level, and convenient sampling technique was used to select the sample, that is, simple random sampling technique (30%) of the total population.

Research Instruments
In order to undertake this schoolwork, the researchers exploited the following instruments in accordance with the nature of the research problem: questionnaire and classroom observations.

Questionnaire
The researchers prepared and used a questionnaire in order to investigate the causes that lead to students' reticence in EFL classroom discussions. The questionnaire used in this study consists of 66-items. The questionnaire is divided into two sections, Section A, and Section B. As for Section A, there were fifty-eight questions asking the respondents about the causes of their limited-participation in the class. Section B, on the other hand, was used to investigate the strategies used by the participants when participating. The researcher distributed 300 questionnaires randomly and read the items in front of the students to see if there were unclear items. The subjects responded to the English version on a 2-point Likert scale (1=Disagree; 2 =Agree).

OBSERVATION
In addition to the questionnaire, the researchers prepared 26 classroom observation check lists and implemented while the lesson, particularly speaking, was conducted three times per session to evaluate what teaching styles do language teachers use.

Validation of the Instrument
To ensure the content validity, the researchers discussed the problem with English instructors who have had experience in teaching English and then distributed the questionnaire to referees from the Department of English Language and Literature at Jimma University who are proficient in this area. They were asked to judge the appropriateness of each item for the overall purpose of the study.
The instrument was pilot tested to measure the validity and reliability. For sake of validity, the instrument was discussed with a panel of experts. The instrument was also field tested to make it understandable for the respondents. The Cronbach reliability coefficient was found to be 0.87.
To ensure the content validity, the researchers discussed the problem with English instructors who have had experience in teaching English and then distributed the questionnaire to referees from the Department of English Language and Literature at Jimma University who are proficient in this area. They were asked to judge the appropriateness of each item for the overall purpose of the study.
The instrument was pilot tested to measure the validity and reliability. For sake of validity, the instrument was discussed with a panel of experts. The instrument was also field tested to make it understandable for the respondents. The Cronbach reliability coefficient was found to be 0.87.

Data Analyzing Procedure
To analyze the data obtained from the questionnaire, the Statistics Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was is used. For Section A, the data obtained would be converted into frequency and later into percentage. The computed data were represented in tables.

RESULTS, DISCUSSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS OF DATA
This chapter deals with the tabulation, analysis and interpretation of the data collected from 300 students of Ethiopian public universities in the academic year 2013/14. The responses of questionnaire were presented in tabulation form and expressed in terms of percentage.

Analysis of Students' Questionnaire
The subsequent part of this study has been dedicated to the first Question "*What are the causes of students' limited participation in English classroom discussions?*" To answer this question, the researchers used the percentages for each of the items. A table is used to show the frequency and percentages of the students' responses for the items regarding the causes of the limited participation in the EFL class.

Speaking in Front of the Whole Class

Different activities in the classroom procedure, particularly ones that demand students to speak in front of the whole class, have been found to be the most anxiety provoking. The present study found that 53 % of students are afraid of speaking in front of others in class. This finding is similar to that reached by Koch and Terrell (1991) and Young (1991) who found that more than sixty-eight percent of her subjects reported feeling more comfortable when they did not have to get in front of the class to speak.

To speak in front of the whole class is a potentially risky business in many students' eyes. However, students feel a lot better when they are not required to face the whole class.

Lack of Preparation

Lack of preparation is another cause of students 'reticence to participate in English language class. The finding of the present study revealed that 53% of students feel nervous when speaking English without any preparation whereas 47% don't. This finding is consistent with that of the Study carried out by Mustapha and et al (2010) who found lack of preparation, fear of appearing unintelligent to their classmates or instructors, and feeling intimidated make students become less inclined to participate.

In Item 18, 51.3% of participants also get nervous when the teacher asks questions which they have not prepared in advance. However, more students attributed their anxiety to lack of preparation and expressed that they would feel less anxious and more confident to speak English with preparation, similar to those students in Tsui's (1996) study.

Calling on Students

The procedure the teacher used for calling on students was also one of the main sources of anxiety in the class. 56.3% of students feel their heart pounding when they are called upon to answer a question in English class. This finding is consistent with that reached by Arafat (2012) who also finds that students get more anxious when called upon to respond individually, rather than if they are given choice to respond voluntarily.

Incomprehensible Input

One of the reasons why the participants were unable or reluctant to participate was that they did not know what to say' during the class discussions. When asked how they feel when they don't understand what they say, 62.3% of learners said that they get anxious. The findings of the study revealed that knowing what to say was as important as knowing how to say. In fact, this finding is similar to that reached by Han (2007) who indicated that one of his students in the interview said, "I will only participate if I know what to speak".

Students also agreed with statements "I get upset when I don't understand what the teacher is correcting" Item 20, (57%); and "It frightens me when I don't understand what the teacher is saying, Item 19", (62.3%). They believed that in order to understand the target language message they must understand every word that was spoken. This finding is similar to that of another study by McCroskey (1992) who also reveals that many Asian students face some difficulties to participate in the discussion.

Fear of Volunteering to Ask or Answer a Question in Class

The issue of being afraid to speak in class for fear of making mistakes was of concern for learners. When asked how they feel concerning asking and answering questions during class, more than half of the participants (62%) said that they often felt afraid of asking a question to instructors during class. This finding is consistent with that of Liu and Littlewood (1997) who reported that the learners in their surveys get anxious if they raise comments and questions during English class. Many students (56.3%) are also reluctant to volunteer to speak or to answer a question in class because they are afraid that their answers were wrong'. This finding is similar to another study by Tanveer (2007) who indicate that most of the students were not used to volunteering to speak in class. They were not simply afraid of making mistakes.

Shyness

Shyness was another influencing factor which could affect students' participation. However, shyness, according to McCroskey (1992), is a behavior that could be the result of any one or a combination of the following factors: social introversion, unfamiliarity with academic discourse, lacking confidence in subject matter, and/or communication apprehension. The survey conducted in this study, as shown in Table 1, Item 3 revealed that more than half of the respondents (65.7%) believed that their shyness had affected their involvement in classroom discussions. The respondents responded that they talk less because they feel shy.

Fear of Making Mistakes and Being Laughed at

Fear of making errors is often cited as another cause of the perceived reticence and passivity. And this anxiety factor is also apparently related to certain aspects of learners' culture, such as the desire to be right and perfect and fear of losing face (Cheng, 2000). The findings of this study were in agreement with

this respect too. The participants (51%) frequently expressed that they feel afraid and even panic because of the fear of committing mistakes or errors in front of classmates. 77.3% of students expressed their anxiety of making mistakes because they think their mistakes make them feel incompetent. Moreover, 59.3 % of participant agreed with the statement "I am 'afraid of being seen as foolish if I make too many mistakes when I speak in class. They think this will distort their image in front of their classmates. Fear of being laughed at was one of the causes that contributes to the limited participation and reticence of students to participate in the class discussion. What is more, 67.3% of students announce that they don't like to participate in the class discussion because they are afraid of being laughed at.

Fear of Negative Teacher Traits

Negative lecturer traits affect students' participation in the classroom discussions. Many past researchers mentioned that negative lecturer traits discourage students' participation (Liu, 2005 and Tanveer, 2007). Similar to the previous studies, the present paper also found that many students mentioned that negative lecturer traits like having poor teaching skills (65.4%) and being impatient, Item 58 (62.2%) deter students from participating. The teaching procedure adopted by the teacher may be anxiety-provoking which inhibits students' participation.

Afraid of being criticized and embarrassed in front of classmates was also one of the factors that contribute to student's unwillingness to take part in classroom discussions. As such, 53.3% of students prefer to remain silent rather than to orally participate in the classroom so as to avoid teacher's criticism and any embarrassing situation. This result is in agreement with Tanveer (2007) who found that students prefer to remain silent or speak in a submissive voice due to their consciousness of their limitation in the new language.

Another negative teacher trait that discourages learners' participation was teacher's harshness and strictness. Around 86% of students agree with the statement " I am reluctant to participate in class because I am afraid of my teacher' harsh comments and negative gestures". Again, 52% of students expressed that they get more anxious when their teacher is very strict. At the same time, many students (72 %) reveal that they feel relax when their English teacher responds in a friendly way.

Fear of Negative Teacher Evaluation

The present study found that fear of negative evaluation was a source of anxiety in the English FL classroom. 51.7 % of students feel worried that they can't speak English well; their teacher will get a bad impression concerning their performance. Students remain reticent because they believe that the teacher evaluates them negatively if they make mistakes. And this perception may probably be due to the teaching attitude and practice the teacher applies. Remarkably, near to three fourth of students (74.3 %) get more apprehensive about making mistakes in front of teachers because they think it is more likely to influence their end-of-course results. This seems to indicate, as found by Price, 1991, that language anxiety is negatively correlated with language course grades. These findings suggest that assessment type and teachers' attitude towards assessment can significantly contribute to learners' anxiety. It might be beneficial if future research explores this issue in depth, particularly in EFL classrooms. Fear of teacher negative evaluation makes 63.7% of students at Ethiopian public universities like to see no marks for participation. This finding goes in accordance with that reached by Price (1991), who suggests that undergraduate students may overcome the fear of participating with assessment and may be more self-motivated and hence happy to participate independently, without a system of reward and punishment.

Fear of Teacher's Correction

The results of the studies previously cited indicate that the authoritative, embarrassing and humiliating attitude of the teachers towards students, particularly when they make mistakes, can have severe consequences on learners' cognition and their willingness to communicate in the class (Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991; Tanveer' 2007; Young, 1991). Consistent with the literature on language anxiety, 56% of students expressed their feelings of anxiety if they are corrected while speaking English in front of the whole class. 68.7% of the participants also feel more anxiety in the class because their teacher always corrects them in a very bad way.

Class Arrangement

Classroom arrangement was also one of the most frequent factors mentioned as influencing students' participation. In Item 14, 63.7% of the participants announce that they feel a bit nervous if they sit at the front of the class. More than three–fourth (78.3%) of students who liked to contribute in whole-class discussions tended to sit at the front of the class whereas for those (56.7%), who usually acted as observant, would prefer to sit at the back. 55% of the participants like to participate in a small and comfortable class, whereas 56.7%are reluctant to participate in large class.

Lack of Confidence

Another factor that contributes to the reluctance of students to participate in the class discussion was the

lack of confidence in using English as a vehicle for spoken communication. Many students (70.3%) don't feel confidence speaking in front of class. More than three-fourth of the students (78.3%) expressed their agreement with the statement: "I never feel quite sure of myself when I am speaking English in my class." Lacking confidence makes them believe their language skills to be weaker than those of others in class.

Comparison with Peers

Many students believed strongly and probably correctly that there was a great difference in English ability between them and their peers. They felt anxious, uncomfortable, and envious because of these perceived differences. The current study showed that 75.3 % of students feel more anxious in the EFL classroom when they felt other students were better than themselves. They constantly compared themselves with their classmates, feeling inferior to others. Such negative cognitions put serious impediments in their language development; this leads to heightened awareness of their deficiencies and consequently to reticence when are called upon to exhibit their competence in the target language.

Self-esteem

Another source of students' reluctance to speak spontaneously is self-esteem. Morrison and Thomas (1975) define self-esteem as 'the set of evaluative attitudes that a person has about him/herself or his/her accomplishments'. Studies have found that learners' self-esteem has some effects on the students' behaviour in the classroom. For example, Morrison and Thomas (1975) point out those students with low self-esteem say less in class and sit further back in the classroom compared to students with high self-esteem. Young (1990) also finds that learners' affective attitudes to English have a significant effect on their speaking self-rating. The more negative the affective attitudes, the lower the self-rating. Similar to these previous findings, the learners in this study more than half (55.7%) revealed that they don't really believe their English language is good. They feel a sense of unease speaking English simply because they do not think they are performing well enough.

Presentation in the Classroom

Like discussion in open-class-forum, giving a short talk or presentation in the class has also been reported to be highly anxiety inducing, one which makes the classroom environment more formal and stressful for the learners. The majority of participants (69.3%) agreed that speaking in front of the whole class or in public caused anxiety for most of the learners. Thus, the study reinforced the findings of the earlier studies by Koch and Terrell (1991) who found that a large number of their subjects considered oral presentation as the most anxiety-provoking activity in the class.

Lack of Practice

Lack of practice was another cause of students' reluctance to participate in the class. EFL learners (51.3%) didn't have much practice of oral English in class due to the limited class time. As a result, lack of practice provoked much anxiety in many students when speaking English to others in class, Tsui's (1996) studies.

Test Anxiety

An understanding of test anxiety is also pertinent to the discussion of foreign language anxiety. It is also important to note that 'oral testing has the potential to provoke both test and oral communication anxiety simultaneously in susceptible students' (Horwitz et al. 1986: 127). The present study found that fear of negative evaluation was a source of anxiety in the EFL classroom. 61.7% of students feel more anxious during oral tests. 57% of students agree with the statement that" the more I study for the oral language test, the more worried I get."

Peer Evaluation

One of the sources of students' reticence in the classroom discussions was negative peer evaluation. 48.43% of students are too concerned about their classmates will think of them when they speak English. More than half of students (69%) announce that they don't like to participate in the class discussion because they are afraid of being laughed at. Related to this is anxiety about standing out in a group or the likelihood of making a fool of themselves, especially when they are not confident about their English.

Lack of Practice due to Class Size

The class size is another reason contributing to student reticence as this restrictive pattern is aimed for teacher-centered transmission approach which in a way undermines student's active participation in expressing views. The present study finds that many students (56.7%) attribute their reluctance to participate in the class discussion due to big class size. This finding goes in accordance with the result of Chau, Fung-ming, (1996) who states that the big class size discourages students from expressing views as it is extremely threatening for teenagers to face a large number of people by themselves while speaking a foreign language which they may expose their weaknesses by making mistakes very easily.

Lack of Practice due to Class Time

Lack of practice due to the limited class time also affects students to participate in class. More than 69.8%

of non-English majors report the allotted time for practicing English in class is not enough. They didn't have much practice of oral English in class due to the limited class time. They do not have many choices to speak the language in their daily life. Moreover, some students (51.3%) feel anxiety because their teacher doesn't give them the needed time to process the questions that he asked. The students were not given enough time to respond. Because of their language, they need more time to think, to put words, to make sentences before they can speak in class.

Lack of Interest in English Class

Lack of interest in topics plays a very vital role in students' active participation in classroom activities. According to Zainal Abidin Bin Sayadi (2009) and Wang Ping (2010), "when something isn't interesting, most people are not willing to talk about it, while one can talk as much as he/she can on his/her interests". The same finding has been confirmed in this study in which many students (53.3%) stated that they felt uninterested in the English topics in the classroom discussions. They did not take part in class discussions if 'the lesson was boring'. 70.3% of students are reluctant to participate in class discussion because they are not interested in English.

Lack of Participation Due to Low English Proficiency

Low English proficiency was one of the main reasons that lead to reticence in EFL classes. As 73.7 % of students agree with the statement, "I think what keeps me reticent is my poor English proficiency". The finding of this study is similar to previous studies (Jackson, 2002; Tsui, 1996) who attributed student reticence to low English proficiency.

Poor Pronunciation

In line with the past research, pronunciation appeared to be a big cause of stress for EFL learners in this study. Pronunciation is an important issue across language groups because of its immediate effect on interaction. When you feel somebody does not understand you, you need to improve your pronunciation within a second, which is often hard and stressful. The issue of pronunciation anxiety has been found to be at higher level among Ethiopian public universities EFL learners in this study. 70 % of the learners get worried about their pronunciation when they speak in the class. 55.7 % of subjects expressed embarrassed if they mispronounced. This finding is similar to that reached by Thaher (2005) who reported that students are afraid of being laughed at or of being criticized by others due to inaccurate pronunciation.

Lack of Vocabulary

Lack of vocabulary was identified as a big source of student reticence in oral English language classrooms. 59.7 % of learners feel nervous speaking English because they do not have enough vocabulary (Item, 47). This caused a lot of trouble in talking to each other in English. This result is in accordance with Cortazzi and Jin (1996) who stated that students' poor vocabulary is one of the reasons why students are silent listeners rather than active participants in the oral English classroom. 58.3 % of students also express that they don't have exact words to express their ideas (Item, 46).

As learners can process only a limited amount of information at one time (Lightbown and Spada, 2006), many words do not come out when students are required to speak in hurry.

Grammar

With regard to linguistic difficulties, grammar in earlier studies has been found to be one of the most important aspects that the EFL learners find difficult when learning to speak a second/foreign language (Zainal Abidin Bin Sayadi, 2007). The present study found that many students (81.7%) agree with the statement "When I want to speak, I am not sure which tense to use". More than half (54%) of the students also don't participate because they are scared that they would make noticeable grammatical errors. This finding is similar to another study done by Tanveer (2007) who reported that the students in his study experience grammatical difficulties which can lead to the impression that anxious students are not capable communication in the second language.

Lack of Fluency

Thaher (2005) argues that inadequate conceptual fluency in English is a major struggle for English as Second/Foreign Language (ES/FL) learners. The existing study revealed that many participants (74%) struggled with their language fluency and stated that they are reluctant to participate because they can't respond quickly and fluently. On top of this, 54.7% of students get anxious to participate because they can't speak in complete sentences.

Lack of Opportunity for Practicing English outside the Classroom

In accord with the preceding research, the subjects expressed that limited exposure to English outside the classroom is a serious obstacle in the development of their communicative competency, which is troubling for EFL learners when they are required to speak (e.g. Lightbown and Spada, 2006). When asked whether they practice English outside the classroom, the majority of the students (81.6%) respond

that they don't have the opportunity to speak English outside the classroom.

Fear of Losing Face in Front of Others

Fear of losing face, (70.3) publicly or in front of their classmates through criticizing, caused many students to become anxious when speaking English in class. Causing someone to lose face results in a loss of cooperation and even, in extreme occasions, with subtle retaliation against the professor months after the original action transpired (Liu & Littlewood, 1997).

In conclusion, both EFL teachers and learners should be aware that reticence is a serious obstacle for achieving fluency in spoken English and that multiple variables contribute to it in language classrooms. More importantly, they should realize the urgent need to search for strategies to help students become more active to speak the target language in oral English classes.

Strategies Used by the Students when Participating in Classroom Interactions

Out of 300 students, 236 (78.62 %) agreed with the statement 'I think carefully about what to say and then say it out loud. 'The finding is consistent with another study carried out by Liu (2005) who reported that some students need more time to think and organize their thoughts before they can participate.

The second strategy used by the students was writing down and saying what they have written. By putting the ideas into a written form, the students would feel more confident. The survey carried out showed that 232 (77.4%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that they 'write and then say what they have written'.

The third strategy used by students was asking their friends who were sitting next to them what to say before they could participate. The survey conducted also showed that 193 (64.2%) of the respondents would ask their friends who were sitting next to them what to say before they could participate. The small discussions with their friends, according to the respondents, would enable them to check whether the answers or points they wanted to share to the whole class were correct and to avoid the unnecessary embarrassment. This finding confirms the results of another study conducted by Liu (2005) who reported that for some students, the strategy has enabled them to get some ideas on what to say and to check if what they want to say is correct, they will ask their friends first. One of his students in the interview says: '...I ask my friend what to say. My friend will tell me and then I will tell the class.'

As mentioned earlier, the respondents believed that knowing what to say was as important as knowing how to say it. Thus, the survey revealed that 242 (80.5%) of the respondents viewed content as the primary concerned when it comes to class participation. As such, when participating, 211 (70.4%) of the respondents did not mind if their grammar was wrong (Table 2, Item 61).

To ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and therefore would be able to contribute to class discussions, some students prepared some notes before the class began. Some students also prepared some questions to be asked during the lessons.

However, the habits of preparing notes and questions before the classes began were not widely practiced by many students. The survey showed that around half of the participants, 148 (49.06%) prepared some notes and 152 (50.94%) of the respondents prepared some questions to be asked (Table 2).

The last strategy used by the students was listening to other students' participation in order to improve their linguistic skills. The survey conducted also confirmed the point discussed above. As shown in Table 2, out of 300 respondents, 230 (76.7%) students admitted that they would 'listen to their friends' responses first before they could participate' as one of the strategies when participating in class discussions. This finding is reliable with that of Tatar (2005) who finds that students listen in order to form their own opinions or ideas on what to contribute to the discussions. According to Liu, this strategy is usually used by students who have inadequate content knowledge. By listening to other students' contributions, the learners have more time to think, form and organize their thoughts.

Classroom Observation Discussions of Styles Used by Language Teachers

Language teachers especially in EFL classes play an important part by encouraging learners for active participations. So, it is in line with this trait that the subsequent points are prepared based on researchers' wider reading and classroom observation experiences.

Styles Used by EFL Teachers in Classrooms

Learners need teachers and teaching cannot be defined apart from learning because they are interdependent. What makes teaching and learning even more complex is that the practices and the role of the teacher and learners vary from culture to culture because the values and worldviews of learners and teachers also vary from culture to culture.

Teacher's Roles

From the three observations conducted in each class, it was found that the EFL teachers highly encouraged their students to take part in the oral discussions. However, this does not mean that it was

always the same consistent few who frequently volunteered to answer the lecturer's questions (e.g. debates, class tasks) in all classes. This observation finding is in line with the students' perceptions whereby a majority of them did not answer the lecturers' questions in class frequently. A majority of them answered the lecturers' questions in whole. Overall, this is consistent with what has been suggested by Karp and Yoels (1976, cited in Weaver and Jiang Qi, 2005) that typically only a few learners in a class will engage in classroom discussion while the majority will remain reticent. It is proved that the vital role the teacher plays in making learners willing or unwilling to speak cannot be neglected. If a teacher pays equal attention to all members of the class, encourages everybody to take part in classroom debates and activities, and gives enough time to students to participate, he or she can considerably enhance the students' willingness to speak. On the contrary, the teachers who are dictators, tend to dominate a discussion and take the floor, impose their viewpoints to the learners and do not give much freedom to them to voice their opinions are indeed doomed to failure. Lisa (2006), too, contends that a student-centered approach is much more effective than a teacher-oriented one while enhancing learners' willingness to talk. As such, a teacher's attitude and teaching style can dramatically influence the learners' willingness to participate. Another important role of the teacher in this regard is creating a situation in which everybody feels relaxed to air out what they have in mind. Making such a stress-free environment can considerably contribute to an increase in the learners' degree of willingness to speak. Sun (2008) who highlights teachers' influential role in the process of learning the language. The researcher argues that all the behavior a teacher displays in class have an impact on the students' motivation to participate. The way a teacher conducts a lesson and the way he or she interacts with the students determine the learners' willingness to participate. If a teacher, for example, repeatedly pinpoints the learners' mistakes and humiliates them in front of others, such a behavior will have a negative impact on the learners. Teachers, therefore, are responsible for creating opportunities for learners to participate. Without creating such opportunities, learners will remain reticent as their wish to communicate is not attended to (Lee & Ng, 2010). In line with this, the participants in Liu's (2005) study complain that they are not given enough time by their teacher to speak in class, and that the teaching style of the teacher is a major factor in forming their willingness to speak behavior. More recent research (e.g. Sun, 2008; Cao, 2009; Tong, 2010; Zeng, 2010), too, confirm the findings of the present study and acknowledge the important role of teacher in facilitating or inhibiting learners' participation.

Role of the Topic

In language pedagogy, topic, if well selected in accordance with the learners' needs and interests, plays an indispensable role in stimulating learners. In the observations made, Ethiopian public universities students were oblivious to ask and answer the questions. And, interestingly, as opposed to what was claimed by a minority of the learners that they did ask their lecturers questions in class frequently, it was discovered that no question was asked by them throughout the observations even though lecturers opened the floor for them to pose their questions. According to Myers (1999, cited in Burchfield and Sappington, 1999), when dealing with subjective and socially desirable measure, most individuals have better perceptions of themselves than what they actually are. Therefore, this indicates that some students regarded involvement in asking questions a desirable behavior in the classroom. Consequently, they would rate their involvement in asking questions at a higher degree than their actual participation in the classes.

Interesting topics and fun activities are the most influential factors in determining learners' level of participation in class, for instance, activities like role-plays(Mustapha et al. 2010). Furthermore, the topic of discussion plays a vital role in making learners willing or unwilling to speak. To learners, topic familiarity, topic interest, and topic preparation are the essential features of a certain topic. Moreover, learners tend to discuss a topic that is controversial as well as a topic they feel they are more comfortable with (Riasati, 2012). It goes without saying that the type of topic under discussion influences the ease of language use to a great extent. Having enough knowledge about a certain topic and being familiar with the register enhance one's linguistic self-confidence, while lack of knowledge about a topic and its appropriate register result in one's avoiding communication (Macintyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels 1998). As Kang (2005) contends, some particular topics may bring about greater "responsibility" to involve; that is, one feels the need to discuss a topic because it is intrinsically and instrumentally interesting to him or her. Finally, one's lack of knowledge, interest, and preparation for a certain topic can greatly influence one's perceived competence since one feels he or she has nothing to contribute and hence prefers to remain silent. Such affective constraints can considerably reduce one's degree of willingness to speak.

The learners' concern about the topic they are discussing and its fundamental role in making them active or passive in discussions was another finding of the study. This implies that to generate willingness to speak among individuals, they need to discuss topics they are interested in, familiar with, and for which

they are prepared to talk. This is indicative that teachers should provide students with such topics in order to encourage them to speak. To do this, teachers need to know their students' areas of interest. Kang (2005) suggests brainstorming, taking a survey, and getting learners to propose discussion topics as the techniques teachers can adopt to identify the topics learners prefer to discuss. Another thing teachers can do is to get the learners to interview each other in order to know each other better and discover one another's area of interest. With this in mind, they can group them in more homogenous groups in order to increase their participation and involvement.

Reducing Learners' Anxiety

The findings of the study also showed that there is a negative correlation between willingness to speak and language learning anxiety. Moreover, anxiety was proved to be the best predictor of willingness to speak. As a result, if the aim of language education is to create willingness to speak among language learners, language learning anxiety needs to be removed or at least minimized. To achieve this goal, language practitioners need to be aware that the existence of anxiety can have a debilitating effect on the learners' achievement and that the "tension and discomfort related to language learning call for the attention of the language teaching profession" (Horwitz, 2001:122). In an attempt to aid in its prevention, teachers need to identify the causes of anxiety in language classrooms and take measures to obliterate them to the extent possible.

Teachers also need to help learners cope with their anxiety. One useful technique is to run activities that are less stressful to learners (e.g. pair and group work) and gradually move towards activities that may cause more apprehension (e.g. giving a lecture in front of class).The interview respondents of the present study, too, acknowledged that they are more willing to speak in pairs and groups rather than individually. Moreover, in handling with reticence, teachers should not show annoyance at the learners' reticence, as this will only aggravate the situation and will cause more anxiety. If learners get to know the teacher is getting annoyed at their reticence, they feel insecure and apprehensive. Another strategy a teacher can employ to reduce anxiety and hence create a friendly environment is to use humor from time to time, as this will reduce the tension of the class to a great extent and will establish rapport with the learners (Christophel, 1990). In dealing with passive and reticent learners, it is also recommended that teachers give them more opportunity to speak in a positive, caring atmosphere. Having seen the concern and care of the teacher, the reticent students will be gradually more willing to speak (Liu & Jackson, 2008).

As willingness to speak and language learning anxiety are shown to be correlated in the present study and given the fact that anxiety is proved to be the best predictor of willingness to speak, it is really necessary for language teachers to remove the students' anxiety so that they can have a more active participation in class. Teachers can tell learners that the way to achieve success on the journey of learning the language is paved through having active participation in class discussions. Being aware of this, learners will take conscious measures to be more active in classroom activities. Furthermore, teachers can hold private meeting with those language learners whom they feel are more anxious than others so that they can find the sources of anxiety specific to them (Riasati, 2011).

Fear of Evaluation Style

Students should feel that the teacher is not listening to them merely because of evaluating their language. One technique to achieve this is the way that teachers correct students' errors. In the researcher's experience, overt correction discourages learners from speaking and will create anxiety in classroom. Clearly, teachers need to take less obtrusive measures in error correction (Cutrone, 2009). In creating a secure environment, Kang (2005) suggests that teachers need to remove students' fear of making mistakes and losing face by listening to them attentively while smiling and then providing their feedback. In fact, fear of negative evaluation is a factor that causes anxiety while speaking, which will, in turn, discourage learners from speaking. Teacher' over corrections can "draw students' attention away from communication and toward a focus on form and accuracy" (Gregersen, 2003: 31). Teachers should also make learners aware of the fact that nobody is perfect and that everybody makes mistakes, especially in learning something for the first time such as learning a foreign language. With this in mind, learners will not always be obsessed with the fear of making mistakes and losing face.

Task Type

Research indicates that learners are more willing to speak in pairs and groups rather than individually. One reason could the fact that they feel more comfortable speaking with their peers rather than their teacher, since their peers' English proficiency level is similar to theirs, so they can feel more comfortable speaking to somebody who knows almost as much as they know. Moreover, during such activities, they have the chance to exchange ideas and hence learn from each other. In their study, Riazi and Riasati (2007) found out that pair and group activities are preferred to speaking individually. Around 65 percent of the participants who were Iranian EFL learners learning English in language institutes preferred to

practice their language in pairs and groups rather than on their own. Likewise, Cetinkaya (2005) showed that the individuals in his study preferred to speak in dyads or groups rather than speaking individually in front of a large group of people. Cao and Philp (2006), too, contend that running a pair- or group work in class gives individuals greater opportunity to speak than in the case of speaking individually. The participants in their study reported that they were more willing to speak in groups with a small number of participants, ideally three or four members, since they have the opportunity to help each other and learn from each other. As such, language teachers are advised to incorporate more pair- and group-work activities into their teaching syllabus.

Following Communicative Language Teaching Method

In the history of language teaching methodologies, a great variety of teaching methods and techniques have evolved, existed for some time and then disappeared and were replaced with a seemingly more effective teaching method. However, the one that is in the spotlight in the present century is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The goal of communicative language teaching is to encourage learners to engage in communication as frequently and efficiently as possible in the language classroom environment, hoping that such engagement will help them initiate communication in out-of-classroom settings (Richards, 2006). The goal of CLT is to train language learners who will be able to use their language effectively in communicative situations. It is the need to communicate that can remove reticence in class and fosters' classroom participation. CLT could, thus, be seen as the most effective way of encouraging inactive learners to participate in class activities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the importance often assigned to participation in classroom, it has been repeatedly heard that most students in Ethiopian public universities remain passive in EFL classes. This study aims to examine causes that limit first year undergraduate students' participation in Ethiopian public universities EFL classrooms. Questionnaire and observations were carried out, and the following conclusions have been drawn.

CONCLUSIONS

At the very outset, this study has attempted to examine the causes of students' limited participation in the English language classroom activities and discussions in Ethiopian public universities. It was found that students were submissive and quiet in language classrooms as a result of such reasons as fear of losing face, their inability to understand concepts, the passive learning styles they were accustomed to, lack of preparation before coming to class, and their perceived linguistic ability.

Moreover, it was revealed that very few students were willing to speak individually in class, while many more were expressed their willingness to participate in pair and group activities. A number of reasons were identified as contributing to the learners' reticence. Reasons include low English proficiency, fear of speaking, difficulty of the task, fear of making mistakes, unfamiliarity with the interlocutor and the environment, teacher' teaching style, and lack of familiarity with the task.

Besides, the researchers examined causes of students' silence in oral English lessons at the tertiary level, and they found that students who benefited from a higher proficiency level were more willing to speak in class. Moreover, giving a lecture was found to be the least favorite activity, while pair work was rated as a popular activity. Students' willingness to take part in class activities was found to increase as a result of their exposure to spoken language and familiarity with the environment.

Similar findings were achieved by Li and Liu (2011) who examined the issue of limited participation and anxiety in Chinese setting. In the same fashion, in Ethiopian public universities, it was found that many learners were unwilling to take risk with the language and thus preferred to remain silent during class discussion. A range of factors were identified as leading to reticence. These factors include lack of self-confidence, lack of preparation, fear of making mistakes, lack of knowledge or interest in the discussion, and teachers' teaching method. To sum up, in a recent qualitative study, Riasati (2012) explored Iranian EFL learners' perception of factors influencing their willingness to speak in language classrooms. Similarly, it is proved that the EFL classroom observation made by the researchers in Ethiopian public universities showed a range of factors including task type, topic of discussion, role of interlocutor, role of teacher, class atmosphere, learners' self-perceived speaking ability etc. It was also found that students' fear of evaluation and fear of correctness of speech reduced their willingness to communicate in EFL classes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions and conclusions made, the researchers would like to recommend the following ways to reduce the causes of Ethiopian public universities students' limited participation in EFL classrooms:

Creating a Warm Atmosphere to Motivate the Students to Learn English

First, teachers should help students develop a positive image of themselves and others. They should create a warm atmosphere to motivate the students to learn English. This can be accomplished by concentrating on classroom activities, creating problem-solving situations, dealing with language problems through group work and activities and correcting students' errors in a friendly way.

Lower Students' Anxiety in the Classroom

According to Young (1991), teachers can start with finding out what students are anxious about. Then teachers can help them ease some of their irrational fears and teach them strategies such as self-talks and doing relaxation exercises to deal with fears.

Names can be used in a Friendly and not Threatening Way

Teachers should help the students to know each other at the beginning of the semester. Names can be used in a friendly and not threatening way in order to bridge the gap between the teacher and their students.

Prepare More Topics which Are Related to Students' Life

In addition, as suggested by the participants, English teachers can prepare more topics which are not only interesting but related to student life so that students have the interest in and ability to talk about them in English

Introduce Opportunities for Students to Speak English outside the Class

Opportunities such as English clubs inside and outside the universities should be introduced to students. The benefits of and tactics for participation should be clearly explained to them. Classroom activities can also be linked to these club activities. For example, students can be asked in the class to report on their participation in the clubs or they can share their experience with their classmates. More opportunities for speaking English outside the class can also be created. For instance, students can be put into groups to do some projects and if possible, their group work should be recorded. They may also be asked to carry out and record interviews with foreigners who are visiting or living around.

Fear of Making Mistakes

The study also revealed that students were reluctant to take part in discussions for fear of making mistakes. Students should be informed that making mistakes is a part of learning process. Teachers should also encourage students to have the confidence to make mistakes in order to acquire communication skills. Furthermore, as a positive response to students' concern over the harsh manner of teachers' error correction, teachers' selection of error correction techniques as Horwitz et al. (1986) recommended, should be based upon instructional philosophy and on reducing defensive reactions in students.

Speak and Build up Their Self-confidence

It also may be advisable for EFL teachers to give even the most reticent students the opportunity to speak and build up their self-confidence in a positive, caring environment (e.g., by facilitating interactive group activities or calling on students in a non-threatening manner).

Improve the Students' Vocabulary Knowledge

The findings of the study suggested that many students were still having problems with the language. Lack of vocabulary and inability to master the English sentence structures were the two problematic areas identified. Thus, it is recommended here that activities to improve the students' vocabulary be planned. Apart from improving the students' communicative skills, language teachers should also focus on the grammatical aspects of the language.

Deal with the Problem of Overcrowded Classes

Teachers should deal with the problem of overcrowded classes by assigning students into small groups so that they will be able to discuss the materials outside of the class time. In addition, working in group enables the good students to help the less proficient students in the language. Groups can also be asked to present the materials they read. The process of preparing for the presentation will provide the students with more opportunities to use the language and improved their linguistic abilities.

The findings of the study also suggest that creating a relaxing environment leads to a higher degree of willingness to speak on the learners' part. One way to achieve this is by creating intimacy in class. It is recommended that teachers call the learners by their first names, as this will remove barriers between them. Another way is to choose topics that most of the students share an interest in. The more students know each other's interests, the more they will have in common and the more comfortable they are likely to be. Another technique for teachers is to show a personal interest in the students' lives (Cutrone, 2009). This is referred to as "the removal of teacher's mask" (Stevick, 1980). Some of the strategies Stevick suggests are creating a friendly rapport with the students, mingling with them in their small talks, and speaking to them individually from time to time.

Moreover, teachers need to create a supportive environment in language classes, which will dramatically influence the learning process. A supportive learning environment makes learners more motivated, confident, and less anxious in speaking English, and gives them a higher perception of their abilities (Lisa, 2006). Learners need to be taught to be supportive of each other and help each other to improve. Teachers need to help students to become acquainted with each other and feel that they are all members of a group. Creating a sense of cooperation rather than competition among students puts them at ease to use the language (Zou, 2004). Liu (2007) suggests teachers to be friendly rather than strict, as teacher's being strict discourages learners from speaking.

REFERENCES

1. Allwright, D., and Bailey, K.M. (1991). *Focus on the Language Classroom: An Introduction to Classroom Research for Language Teachers.* USA: Cambridge University Press.
2. Ashman, A.F., and Conway, N.F. (1993). *Using Cognitive Methods in the Classroom.* London: Routledge.
3. Bell, J. (1987). *How to Complete Your Research Project Successfully: A Guide for First-Time Researchers.* New Delhi: UBS Publishers Distributors Ltd.
4. Best, J.W., and Kahn, J.V. (1986). *Research in Education.* (5th edition). New Jersey: Prentice Hall.
5. Brown, H.D. (1994). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy.* NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
6. Brown, H.D. (2000). *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching.* (4th edition). New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.
7. Burchfield, C.M., and Sappington, J. (1999). Participation in Classroom Discussion. *Teaching of Psychology*, 26 (4), 290-291.
8. Dillon, J.T. (1988). *Questioning and Teaching: A Manual of Practice.* New South Wales: Croom Helm Ltd
9. Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
10. Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
11. Flowerdew, L. (1998). A Cultural Perspective on Group Work. *ELT Journal.* 52(4), 323-329.
12. Garton, S. (2002). Learner Initiative in the Language Classroom. *ELT Journal.* 56 (1), 47-55.
13. Good, T.L., and Brophy, J.E. (1997). *Looking in Classrooms.* (7th edition). New York: Addison-Wesley Education Publishers Inc.