EFL LEARNERS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE IMPROVEMENT OF THEIR ENGLISH SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

This study aims to describe EFL learners' attitudes towards the improvement of their English speaking performance. The data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to 131 students of Department of English Language Education. The results of the data analysis show that all respondents show positive attitudes towards the improvement of their English speaking performance. Although female students have more positive attitudes than male students, the difference is not significant. The results also show that students' attitudes towards their speaking performance change in accordance with their learning time. Their self-assessment of their speaking performance has a significant correlation with their attitudes. Their positive attitudes towards the improvement of their English speaking performance serve as a foundation to the success of the English language learning. Therefore, learners should pay attention to and maintain attitudes to improve their speaking performance.

Keywords: learners' attitudes, improvement, speaking performance

SIKAP PEMBELAJAR BAHASA INGGRIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING TERHADAP PENINGKATAN PERFORMA BERBICARA BAHASA INGGRIS

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan mendeskripsikan sikap mahasiswa yang mempelajari bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing terhadap peningkatan kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris mereka. Data diperoleh melalui angket yang dibagikan ke 131 mahasiswa Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris. Hasil analisis data menunjukkan bahwa semua responden memiliki sikap positif terhadap peningkatan kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris mereka. Meskipun mahasiswa putri memiliki sikap yang lebih positif daripada mahasiswa putra, perbedaaanya tidak begitu signifikan. Hasil penelitian ini juga menunjukkan bahwa sikap mahasiswa terhadap peningkatan kemampuan berbicara mereka berubah seiring bertambahnya waktu pembelajaran mereka. Penilaian diri mahasiswa terkait kemampuan berbicara mereka memiliki korelasi yang signifikan dengan sikap mereka. Sikap pembelajar yang positif terhadap peningkatan kemampuan bahasa Inggris merupakan dasar untuk meraih kesuksesan dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Oleh karena itu, pembelajar perlu memperhatikan dan mempertahankan sikap berbahasa untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara.

Kata kunci: sikap pembelajar, peningkatan kemampuan, kemampuan berbicara

INTRODUCTION

Many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students find using English for communication and improving their English speaking ability a great challenge. Li (2001), for example, reported that Korean EFL learners had great difficulty in expressing themselves in English when they were assigned to do communicative activities, and that they gradually lost interest in trying to speak English and became too discouraged to speak English anymore. Similar situation is also reported in Indonesian EFL context (see, e.g.,

Jazadi, 2000; Widiati & Cahyono, 2006). Despite several curriculum revisions and also implementation of the so-called 'communicative' approach, Jazadi (2000) contends that Indonesian university graduates who, in fact, have studied English for six years in junior and senior high schools and another year in university generally could not communicate adequately in English.

Of the multitude number of factors that could affect EFL learners' English speaking improvement and ability, learners' attitude seems to be of remarkable importance. Savignon (1983) stated that the ultimate success in learning to use a second language would most likely be seen to depend on the attitude of the learner. Similarly, Dornyei and Csizer (2002) stated, "Language learning without sufficiently positive language attitudes to support is a futile attempt". Positive attitude can support the language learning while negative attitude is likely to be a hindrance of achieving successful attainment of proficiency and at worse, as Gardner and Lambert (1972) said, can be dysfunctional to the language learning process. Hence, it is important for teachers to be aware of the attitudes of their students to be able to use teaching and learning activities in a more efficient way.

While some attitudinal studies on willingness to communicate (WTC) have been carried out such as those done by Dornyei (2003) and Yashima (2002), these studies did not quite capture learners' attitudes towards improving their speaking performance. Besides, these studies were conducted in monolingual EFL contexts. What more is that these studies were done in countries like Hungaria and Japan where there is seemingly wider access to learning resources, facilities, community supports, and contact with native speakers. Therefore, the present study set off to address EFL learners' attitudes towards improving their English

speaking performance in the EFL context of Indonesia where there are not many opportunities and resources for learners to improve their English speaking compared to other EFL contexts.

As reported in Sugirin (2002), a small group of people such as English teachers, interpreters, tourist guides, hoteliers, travel agents, diplomats, telephone operators, and a few other groups of professionals use English in the course of communication at work; however, outside their work, that is at home and in the local community, they actually speak either Indonesian or one of the local languages or dialects. Though English is a foreign language, it is indeed the first foreign language in Indonesia which gives it importance and is therefore taught formally at schools. The purpose of teaching English has been primarily to develop reading ability as a means of helping students to gain access to information and to read references; however, legislation does also provide a place for other skills (Lauder, 2008).

Since 1984, the Indonesian government through its ministry of education has advised the use of communicative approach at schools at all levels (Dardjowidjojo, 2000). Apparently, this advice is stated in the school curriculum. Regardless of the extent of time since the communicative approach was firstly introduced and executed in all Indonesian schools nation-wide, until recently, a number of studies (see, e.g., Ariyanto, 1996; Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Widiati & Cahyono, 2006) have reported that Indonesian learners commonly have not attained a good level of oral English proficiency.

The Indonesian learners' low oral proficiency is often reported to be due to several reasons. Class size, time allotment, learners' low motivation, and teachers' low speaking proficiency are frequently reported as the major sources (see, e.g., Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Lowenberg, 1991; Marcelino, 2005). In addition, Widiati and

Cahyono (2006) stated that Indonesian EFL learners' problems in developing their speaking ability were related to linguistic and personality factors. Linguistic factors covered components like pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, diction (word choice), fluency, and interactive communication, while personality factors included aspects like anxiety, low confidence, and lack of prior knowledge. They also mentioned that type of tasks provided by the teachers was a significant factor affecting the learners' speaking skills. Therefore, they suggested that teachers needed to create varied in classroom activities in order to enhance learners' speaking performance.

The above brief review reflects a fact that a lot of work and great effort are still needed to be done in order to improve the EFL learning situation in Indonesia. Despite the many problems faced in improving Indonesian EFL learners' speaking ability, there is no need for pessimism as Dardjowijojo (2000) said that failure in teaching English was not exclusively Indonesian. He explained that any country teaching foreign languages to all its young was bound to have such kind of result.

METHOD

Participants of this study were the students of English Education Department of Yogyakarta State University, located in Yogyakarta Special Regency, Indonesia. They were to-be-teachers and hence were commonly believed to have positive attitudes towards English speaking performance. Despite this expectation, there have not been sufficient empirical studies to support this position. Most of these students reported they learned English through the formal learning process within school. This was supported by the fact that only 37 (out of 125) students reported they took or have been taking additional English skill courses outside their school. In addition, they rarely practiced English speaking in their daily life. Few learners (26 out of 125 learners) reported they joined a speaking/ conversation club regularly, nearly every week or twice a week. Stratified random sampling procedure was used to identify a representative sample of 131 students from the department. The final sample was 125 representing students from all university year levels.

The questionnaire used in this study comprised three sections and all items were of closed type questions. The first part of the questionnaire elicited demographic information from the participants. The second part, which was the main part, consistedof 45 items and investigated participants' attitudes towards improving their English speaking performance. The final section asked participants to self-assess their English speaking performance and also their English proficiency in general.

The attitude items were constructed following the tripartite notion of attitude as suggested by for example, Baker (1992), Wenden (1991), and Mantle-Bromley (1995). Also, speaking framework of Common European Frame of Reference (CEFR) was adapted for the self-assessment section in that the items incorporated five speaking descriptors: range, accuracy, fluency, interaction, and coherence.

Before administering the questionnaire, a pilot study was carried out with respondents from parallel classes of the sample of the study at the same university to ascertain the validity and reliability of the questionnaire items used. The questionnaire was pilot tested twice until it finally reached the desired validity and reliability indices, particularly for section two as it assessed the attitudes of the participants.

The questionnaire was distributed at the end of English classes and took about 20-25 minutes to complete. The language

of the questionnaire was English, which was considered appropriate for the participants given the fact that they were English major students and that their courseswere conducted almost entirely in English.

In regard to data analysis, the study employed a number of data analysis techniques due to the different nature of the data. Data from section one were analysed descriptively. Data from section two and three were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Science). T-tes and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to find the significant differences among different groups. Finally, to investigate the relationship between learners' attitudes and their self-assessment towards English speaking performance, Pearson correlation was used.

RESULTS
Participants' attitudes towards improving their speaking performance

Taken as a whole, the data revealed that the learners had positive attitudes when they were asked about their beliefs, feelings, and behaviours in how to improve their English speaking performance. The mean score of the overall attitude construct was 4.00 out of 5.00, showing that on average learners were positive concerning using strategies to improve their English speaking performance.

Data in the above table reflects that learners' strong beliefs towards some aspects contributing to their speaking improvement were not simultaneously reflected in their feelings and behaviours towards those aspects. Rather, the data showed that there was a tendency of declining attitudinal values towards the tri-partite attitude components, with the lowest on the behavioural component ($x=3.89$, SD=0.324).

Another point that can be highlighted from the table above is that the mean scores of female learners are always higher in all of the three attitude components, and so is for the learners' overall attitude. As much as the data are concerned, hence, it can be said that female learners, on average, have more positive attitudes towards improving their English speaking performance than the male learners.

T-test was then carried out to see how significant the attitude differences between these male and female learners. The results show that the t-values for cognitive, affective, behavioural, and overall attitude components are -0.586, -1.105, -0.446, and -0.829 (with df=123). And since the significance values of those

Table 1. Learners' attitudes towards improving their speaking performance

	Mean ($\bar{x}$)			Std. Deviation (SD)		
	Whole Sample (N=125)	Male Sample (N=28)	Female Sample (N=97)	Whole Sample (N=125)	Male Sample (N=28)	Female Sample (N=97)
Cognitive attitudinal construct	4.1470	4.1136	4.1567	.34215	.32938	.34681
Affective attitudinal construct	3.9149	3.8268	3.9403	.47931	.40914	.49674
Behavioural attitudinal construct	3.8911	3.8596	3.9002	.42239	.37643	.43615
Overall attitude	3.9951	3.9504	4.0080	.32382	.30581	.32922

constructs are above 0.05, therefore it can be assumed that the attitude differences between male and female learners are not significant.

Results of ANOVA and Scheffe test

Despite the finding of learners' positive attitudes over the three attitude components, yet it is found that these attitudes are not linear – there is an up-and-down beat of attitudes as they go through different university year levels. The descriptive statistics shows that their overall attitudes in fact increase compared to their initial state, i.e. the learners' attitudes in the first year when they just entered the university year. However, this is not necessarily the same for each attitude component as can be seen in the figures below.

Of the four figures above, it is clearly presented that the learners' attitudes increase significantly in the second year but notably drop in the third year and begin to rise slowly in the fourth year. Meanwhile, when one sees the attitude stream of each component, it is apparent that figure1a (i.e. of cognitive attitudes) and 1c (i.e. of behavioural attitudes) present learners' lowest attitude score as being in the third year. However, it is only a slight fall below year 1 level and then starts to rise again in the following year, i.e. year four. Despite this finding, the learners' overall attitudes in general are increasing. These findings all together
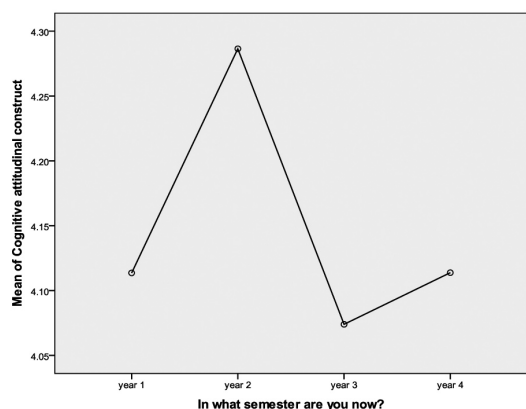

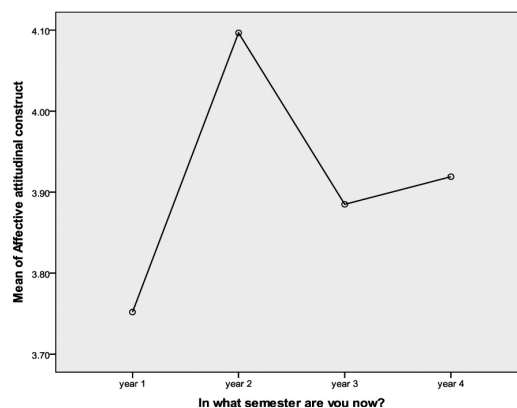Figure 1a. Mean plots of cognitive attitudes

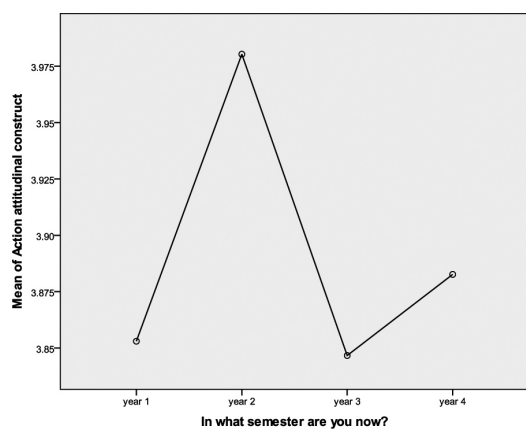Figure 1b. Mean plots of affective attitudes

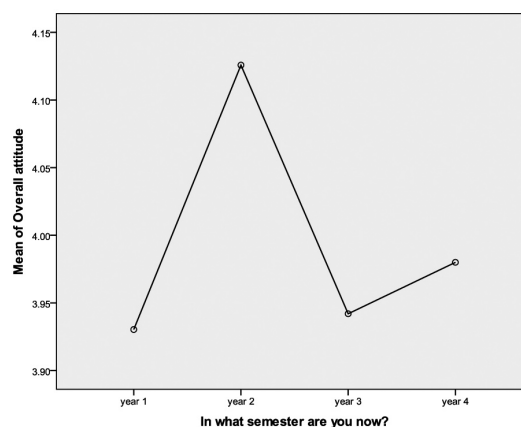Figure 1c. Mean plots of behavioural attitudes

Figure 1d. Mean plots of overall attitude construct

describe that attitudes of the learners' are not constant; they fluctuate variably as they go through different university year levels.

To see whether there is any significance difference of attitudes among learners in different university year levels, an ANOVA test is then carried out. The result of the test is provided below.

From the table above, it can be seen that of the overall attitude component there is no significant difference between the learners' attitudes in different university year levels, indicated by sig. value > 0.05 (i.e. p=0.66, df=3). However, when one sees each attitude component individually, it is apparently seen that there is a significant difference of affective attitude component between learners of different university year levels as the sig. value is 0.043 (in other word, the p value <0.05). Therefore, a post hoc test needs to be carried out to see what variables bring about the difference. The test result reveals that the significant affective attitude difference stems from the year 1 and year 2 learners which is indicated by the sig. value of 0.46 (i.e. p <0.05). Apart from this result, the differences of learners' beliefs and actions in improving their English speaking performance are not significant among those different learners. The detail result of the scheffe test is presented below.

The Most and Least Endorsed Items of Each Attitude Component

Details of the learners' attitude endorsement indicated that among the three attitude constructs, cognitive construct (which consists of 15 belief items) was found to have reached the highest score in terms of learners' attitude agreement. All participants conveyed their (strong) agreement that being able to speak English fluently was important for them. None of them had negative beliefs towards the importance of being able to speak English fluently and many believed that knowing many words was vital in order to achieve this speaking quality.

Taken as a whole, the findings present two major points: first, the learners have different degrees of agreement onto prominent aspects contributing to the improvement of their English speaking performance, and second, there is dissonance over the three attitude components held by the learners. The detail items which reach most and least attention are presented in the following tables.

Table 2. Results of ANOVA test

		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Cognitive attitudinal construct	Between Groups	.833	3	.278	2.457	.066
	Within Groups	13.683	121	.113		
	Total	14.516	124			
Affective attitudinal construct	Between Groups	1.849	3	.616	2.799	.043
	Within Groups	26.638	121	.220		
	Total	28.487	124			
Action attitudinal construct	Between Groups	.352	3	.117	.652	.583
	Within Groups	21.771	121	.180		
	Total	22.123	124			
Overall attitude	Between Groups	.748	3	.249	2.461	.066
	Within Groups	12.255	121	.101		
	Total	13.003	124			

Table 3. Scheffe test for affective attitudinal component

Dependent Variable	(I) In what semester are you now?	(J) In what semester are you now?	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval Lower Bound	95% Confidence Interval Upper Bound
Affective attitudinal construct	year 1	dimension3 year 2	-.34477*	.12017	.046	-.6855	-.0041
		year 3	-.13300	.12115	.752	-.4765	.2105
		year 4	-.16712	.11753	.570	-.5003	.1661
	year 2	dimension3 year 1	.34477*	.12017	.046	.0041	.6855
		year 3	.21177	.12017	.380	-.1289	.5525
		year 4	.17766	.11652	.510	-.1527	.5080
dimension 2	year 3	dimension3 year 1	.13300	.12115	.752	-.2105	.4765
		year 2	-.21177	.12017	.380	-.5525	.1289
		year 4	-.03412	.11753	.994	-.3673	.2991
	year 4	dimension3 year 1	.16712	.11753	.570	-.1661	.5003
		year 2	-.17766	.11652	.510	-.5080	.1527
		year 3	.03412	.11753	.994	-.2991	.3673

Results of Self-Assessment

Provided with a range of criteria, learners are asked to self assess their own speaking performance. The results are quite varied, but most of them rated their performance into a criterion stating that "I usually maintain flow of speech but use repetition, self-correction and/ or slow speech to keep going. I manage to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but use vocabulary with limited flexibility and also with limited range of complex structures". Unexpectedly, it was found that there was one student rated their speaking into scale 2, a criterion saying, "I only produce isolated words or memorized utterances. I cannot produce basic sentence forms and my speaking is often unintelligible". This malicious finding had raised a concern whether it was a learner's fault in filling up the questionnaire or it was a true state of learner's self-assessment. A follow-up qualitative data inquiry would be helpful to shed a light on this occurrence; unfortunately, it was not available in this small study. Yet, seeing the distribution of the overall learners' self-rating, it could be assumed that most of the learners rated themselves as being modest users with the self-rating mean score of 5.18 out of 9.00. Details of the learners' self-rating based on the assigned criteria are provided below.

Beside being asked to self-rate their speaking performance based on provided criteria, learners were also asked to rate their overall English competence based on five rating categories, corresponding to qualification categories such as poor, fair, good, very good, and excellent. Results revealed that 52.80% of the learners categorized their English in a fair category and a considerable number of learners (i.e. 39%) stated that their English were good. Similar number of learners rated that their English was either very good or poor. A few learners stood out that their English was of an excellent category. These results can be seen in the figure below.

Table 4. Three top items of each attitudinal component

| Rank of endorsement	Attitude components	Questionnaire item	Mean on a scale of 1-5	Standard of deviation	Percentage of endorsement (%)				
					Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	disagree	Strongly disagree
The three most endorsed items	Cognitive	C01. I think being able to speak English fluently is important.	4.82	.382	17.6 %	82.4 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
		C04. In order to speak English fluently, I think learners need to know many words.	4.45	.641	51.2 %	44 %	3.2 %	1.6 %	0 %
		C08. I think it is important for learners to be able to speak English spontaneously at any length with a natural flow.	4.33	.681	43.2 %	48 %	7.2 %	1.6 %	0 %
	Affective	A02. I feel satisfied when I can maintain my conversation at any length at ease.	4.16	.712	30.4 %	59.2 %	6.4 %	4 %	0 %
		A03. I agree with learners who also pay attention to grammatical accuracy when they speak English.	4.13	.833	33.6 %	53.6 %	4.8 %	0 %	0 %
		A08. I feel happy when I can use non-verbal language in order to support my speaking performance.	4.06	.693	23.2 %	64 %	8.8 %	4 %	0 %
	Behavioural	B04. I appreciate people who can speak using a wide range of English words.	4.32	.703	43.2%	47.2%	8.8%	0%	0.8%
		B09. I try as much as possible to be able to speak English spontaneously.	4.25	.618	32%	63.2%	2.4%	2.4%	0%
		B11. Sometimes I use non-verbal language to support my speaking performance where necessary.	4.18	.610	27.2%	64.8%	6.4%	1.6%	0%
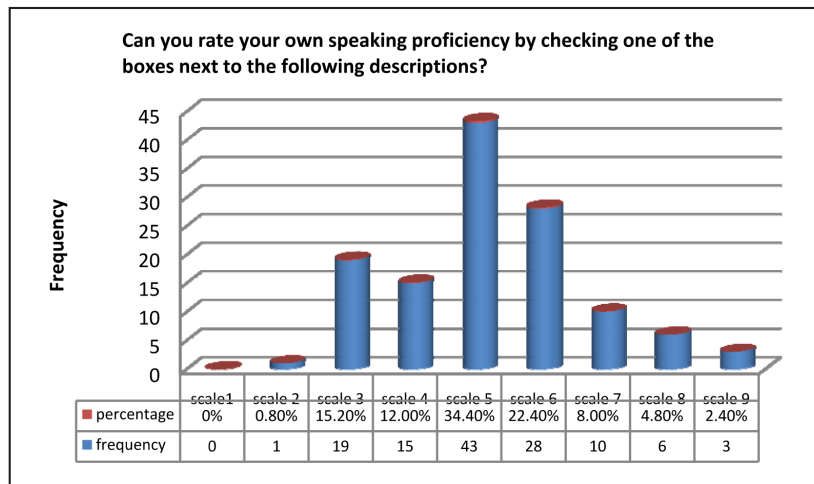
Figure 2. Learners' self-rate on their speaking proficiency

In as much information obtained in regard to learners' self-assessment, the quantitative data had shown that learners' self-rating on their speaking performance apparently in line with their self-rating on their overall English competence. However, one should not over-generalize this result into a wider Indonesian EFL context than this study setting as this self-rating result may be context specific, influenced by several aspects such as culture, beliefs, etc. as Littlewood, Liu, and Yu (1996) have suggested "Students' actual performance may be adequate

Table 5. The three low items of each attitudinal component

Rank of endorsement	Attitude components	Questionnaire item	Mean on a scale of 1-5	Standard of deviation	Percentage of endorsement (%)				
					Strongly agree	Agree	No opinion	disagree	Strongly disagree
	Cognitive	C13. I think learners need to be able to repeat back parts of what a co-speaker has said to confirm mutual understanding.	3.72	.819	11.2 %	60.8 %	17.6 %	9.6 %	0.8 %
		C15. I reckon that mastering and being skilful in using conjunctions and sentence connectors will improve learners' speaking performance.	3.80	.823	16.8 %	55.2 %	19.2 %	8.8 %	0 %
		C07. To improve their speaking performance I think learners need to make careful selection of appropriate words.	4.01	.654	18.4 %	67.2 %	11.2 %	3.2 %	0 %
The three least endorsed items	Affective	A01. I feel great when I can use many slangs and casual expressions during my speaking English.	3.66	.951	19.2 %	40.2 %	27.2 %	12 %	0.8 %
		A09. I often get frustrated when I cannot bring out clarity of ideas in my English speaking.	3.73	.970	19.2 %	51.2 %	13.6 %	15.2 %	0.8 %
		A04. I like to get engaged in speaking with people who can speak adorably, using accurately chosen words, appropriate with the current situation and condition.	3.80	.852	16 %	58.4 %	16.8 %	7.2 %	1.6 %
	Behavioural	B03. I always try to use as many slangs and casual/familiar expressions as possible in order to make my speaking sounds native-like and natural.	3.46	.947	8.8%	50.4%	20.8%	18.4%	1.6%
		B02. I like to use variety type of sentence patterns while I have a conversation in English.	3.56	.846	8%	54.4%	24%	12.8%	0.8%
		B01. I like to start a conversation in English with friends or teachers or more particularly with foreigners.	3.58	.918	12.8%	48%	24%	14.4%	0.8%

according to others, but they themselves may not evaluate it positively. Some may even think that they must speak perfectly in order to be judged competent as a person".

Relationship of Learners' Self-Assessment to Attitudes

It was reviewed in the earlier chapter that some language learning specialists advise that learners' attitudes contribute significant effects towards learners' achievement in language learning, including their oral performance. It was also noted that learners' perception of their oral speaking ability to some extent influences their oral performance, in particular their willingness to communicate in the second language being learned (see e.g. De Saint Leger & Storch, 2009). Yet, there are still relatively few discussions on whether learners' perception of their own speaking proficiency relates to their attitudes, specifically attitudes in improving their speaking performance.

The current study takes a concern on the above issue and therefore tries to shed a light on that matter. The correlation test was then carried out, investigating whether learners' self-assessment influence their attitudes in improving their English speaking performance. The Pearson's correlation coefficient $(r.)$ is < 0.30 (with $p < 0.05$) and therefore, it can be assumed that there is significant correlation between learners' self-assessment and

Overall my English is...

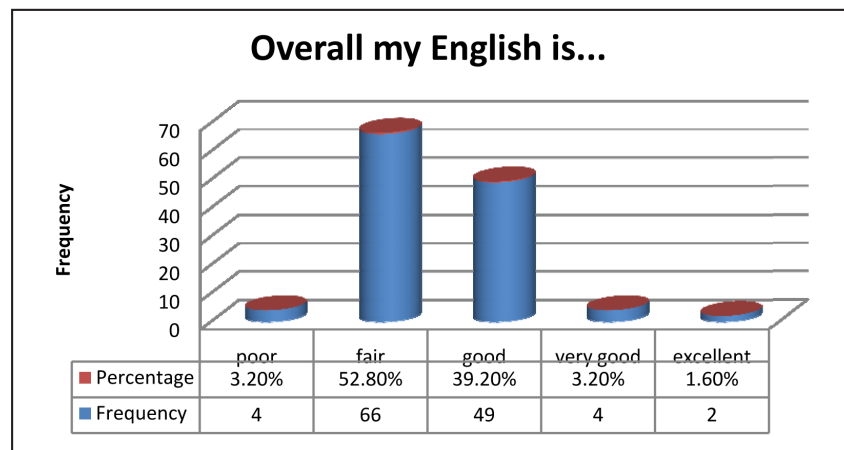|	poor	fair	good	very good	excellent
■ Percentage	3.20%	52.80%	39.20%	3.20%	1.60%
■ Frequency	4	66	49	4	2

Figure 3. Learners' self-assessment towards their overall English

their attitudes towards improving their English speaking performance.

DISCUSSION

One needs to keep in mind that the respondents of the study were learners of English Education Study Program from a particular state university in Indonesia (used to be a teacher training institution) and that a large number of them were of a female gender. These learners were supposed to be English teachers after their completion of the course in this university. This specific background context needs to be taken into account whenever people want to make use of the study findings as they perhaps cannot be generalized into a wider context of foreign language learning of adult learners in Indonesia.

The results of this study corroborate those of previous studies done in some Indonesian EFL contexts investigating English learning attitudes of the learners (see Bradford, 2007; Lamb, 2004, 2007). These studies revealed that Indonesian learners valued oral skills essential and of great importance in their English learning. Ideally, if learners hold positive beliefs onto something, likewise what they feel about and act upon the thing will be correspondingly positive. Albeit the result showing that the learners' affects and behaviours in improving their English

speaking performance were positive, learners' endorsement towards these two attitude components was, yet, not as high as towards their beliefs. People may need to be cautious of this finding, as Mantle-Bromley (1995) suggests that dissonance of the tripartite attitude components leads to attitude change. When the learners cannot maintain their positive affects and behaviours, it is, therefore, not likely for them to sustain their positive attitudes towards improving their English speaking performance. Mismatches between learners' beliefs, their affects, and their behaviours have been found in some previous studies in different Asian EFL contexts such as those of Yang's (1999) and Littlewood, Liu, and Yu's (1996). Respectively, they investigated attitudes of EFL learners of tertiary level in Taiwan and Hongkong and came with a finding showing that the learners expressed strong endorsement and beliefs towards the need to improve their oral skills, yet they held back from practicing actual speaking, particularly with the native speakers, due to a number of reasons – one of them was feeling afraid of making mistakes. Another finding of the present study lent a support to this phenomenon, in which most learners (>85% of the total respondents) put more value on accuracy aspect (both accuracy

in grammar and pronunciation) and hence they acted upon this aspect cautiously whenever they speak English.

Some studies on foreign language learning have resulted that there was a significant difference in learners' attitudes as far asgender is concerned (see Davies, 2004 and Wright, 1999). Despite the descriptive statistics of the present study illustrating that female learners remained showing better attitude scores at all times over the three attitude components, the t-test results suggested that there was no significant attitude difference between male and female learners. The contrary result achieved in this present study with those previous studies could be related to the nature of the foreign language being learned. In fact, both previous studies investigated foreign language learners' attitudes in French, a language which is frequently associated as a feminine language; whereas, the present study investigated foreign language learners' attitudes in English, a language generally associated as a neutral language, not exclusively associated with a particular gender (see. Dornyei, Csizer, and Nemeth, 2006:51).

The findings also suggested that learners' attitudes changed as they progressed onto different university year levels. Although the ANOVA test indicated that there was no significant difference of overall attitudes among learners in different university year levels; however, it was not necessarily true for their affective attitudes. Evidently, there was a significant affective attitude difference between learners of year 1 and those of year 2, with learners of year 2 having more positive attitudes. In addition, the findings also suggested that affective attitudes of learners of years 3 and 4 were higher than those of year 1 but still not as high as those of year 2. This finding supports Lamb's (2007), which reported that learners' initially very positive attitudes towards

language and expectation of success were maintained over their periods of learning. But, it is not necessarily the same for their attitudes towards the experience of formal learning in which Lamb reported as being likely to deteriorate.

Correlation analyses revealed that there was no significant relationship between learners' self-assessment on their speaking ability and their attitudes in improving their speaking performance. This result lends a support to a previous study finding reported by Littlewood, Liu, & Yu (1996) who said that there was a significant relationship between learners' affective attitudes to their speaking self-assessment: the more negative the affective attitudes, the lower the self-rating.

All of the findings above suggest four major points. First, being able to speak English well was valued important and hence endorsed by all of the learners. This indicates that learners perceive oral skills essential in their English learning and therefore, English teaching learning in this context in some ways need to coincide with this goal. Second, learners' attitudes in improving their English speaking performance changed as the learners progress into different university year levels. This indicates that their attitudes in some ways are not constant, which could be shaped and resulted from experiences they acquired during their classroom learning. If it is so, curricular intervention is apparently needed in order for them to sustain or improve their positive attitudes. Third, the learners' very positive beliefs were not equally reflected in their feelings and behaviours and thus, could be potential for attitude change to happen. Therefore, maintaining the balance of the three attitude components of the learners is crucial. To succeed in this, it is not only on the onus of the school teachers but also of the parents and of other related school stakeholders. Lastly, the different results achieved in the present study from those

of the previous studies that gender was not a significant factor determining the learners' attitudes corroborates one of the attitude theories in second language learning, i.e. the one saying that factors affecting learners' attitude are context specific, therefore it is hardly possible to have universally applicable attitude theory (see Kormos and Csizer, 2008 and Lamb, 2004).

CONCLUSION

To sum up the findings above, it can be said that the learners' attitudes towards improving their English speaking performance were positive; however, these learners' attitudes were not steady but changed unpredictably as they progressed into different university year levels. Apparently, it was also evident that these attitudes did not relate to the learners' self-assessment upon their speaking proficiency as well as upon their overall English. In regards to these findings, it should be emphasized that one should not overgeneralize the findings into broader Indonesian EFL context as Kormos and Csizer (2008) suggest that studies on second language motivation within different language learning setting, even when a fixed set of factors are used, may come about in different results.

Taken as a whole, it can be said that learners' positive attitudes towards improving their speaking performance are a constructive base for achieving success in their foreign language learning. However, without supportive curricular and learning environment, this potency is likely to diminish gradually and at worse can be detrimental to the learners' language learning process. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account what aspects do shape and influence the learners' positive attitudes in improving their speaking performances and work rigorously on those aspects in order to sustain and improve the learners' positive

attitudes. Similarly, any curriculum designers also need to weigh upon these aspects whenever decisions are being made. They also need to keep in mind that every foreign language learning context has its own characteristics which may be quite different from others, so is for its learners. Therefore, any decision made for the advancement of foreign language learning process ought to accommodate these matters as well.

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