ENGLISH SPEAKING DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS

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Abstrak

Bagi siswa EFL, khususnya yang belajar di fakultas keguruan, keterampilan berbicara merupakan keterampilan yang harus dikuasai. Padahal, keterampilannya harus di atas mereka yang tidak akan menjadi guru. Namun, ada beberapa siswa yang kemampuannya tidak sebaik yang diharapkan meskipun mereka telah belajar bahasa Inggris selama beberapa semester. Artikel ini melaporkan temuan survei kuesioner tentang kesulitan berbicara bahasa Inggris yang dialami oleh sekelompok mahasiswa tahun ketiga sebuah universitas di Indonesia. Berdasarkan pada berbagai perspektif teoretis, kesulitan yang dirasakan siswa dianalisis dalam kaitannya dengan kekurangan linguistik, proses bahasa lisan, keterampilan percakapan dan konvensi berbicara akademik, pengaruh afektif serta keterjangkauan kesempatan untuk menggunakan bahasa Inggris untuk komunikasi lisan dalam konteks pembelajaran siswa. Implikasi penting dari hasil untuk praktik pedagogis yang mendorong pengembangan keterampilan berbicara EFL dibahas dalam artikel ini.

Kata Kunci: berbicara, kesulitan dalam berbicara Bahasa Inggris, kemampuan bahasa, mahasiswa jurusan Bahasa Inggris di Indonesia

Abstract

For EFL students, especially those studying at faculty of teacher training, speaking skill is an evitable skill to master. In fact, the skill should be above that of those who are not going to be a teacher. However, some students' performances are not as good as expected despite the fact they have studied English for several semesters. This paper reports on the findings of a questionnaire survey of the English speaking difficulties experienced by a group of thethird year university students at from Indonesia. Drawing on various theoretical perspectives, the students' perceived difficulties are analyzed in relation to linguistic deficiency, oral language processes, conversational skills and academic speaking conventions, affective influence as well as affordance of opportunities to use English for spoken communication in the students' learning contexts. Important implications of the results for pedagogical practices that foster development of EFL speaking skills are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is a language activity to send messages and meaning, and for those learning English as foreign language (EFL), the speaking is a means through which a new language occurs to be then reacted. In fact, for young students the spoken form of language may become the pivotal source for language learning. Nevertheless, speaking obstacles can be challenging to the learners and create a lot of difficulties for them.

The ability to speak English as a second or foreign language well is an important goal for many learners (Kawai 2008). Richards and Renandya (2002) write that a large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking. However, developing the ability to speak in a second or foreign language is widely considered a daunting task for most language learners. Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000) point out that in some ways speaking can be considered the most difficult skill to acquire as it requires command of speech production sub-skills like vocabulary retrieval and choice of grammatical patterns, and sociocultural competence.

Compared with other language skills, the empirical data documenting learners' perceptions and experiences of speaking EFL are still rare. This paper reveals the findings on difficulties experienced by one group of university students from Indonesia. The research is based on the assumption that the knowledge derived from this investigation will provide insights tosupport development of ESL or EFL speaking skills.

Speaking can be directly and easily observed as we can see directly the body language and expressions used by the speaker. The main goal of teaching speaking is then to improve the students' oral productive skill. This indicates that using a language is more important than just knowing about it because ―there is no point knowing a lot about language if you can't use it (Scrivener,2005,p.146).

The use of English as a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) in oral communication is, withouta doubt, one of the most common but highly complex activities necessary to be considered when teaching the English language especially because we ―live at a time where the ability to speak English fluently has become a must, especially who want to advance in certain fields of human endeavor‖(Al-Sibai,2004, p.3).

The main objective of teaching speaking is to improve the students' oral production skill. Therefore, the activities in the classroom should aim at maximizing individual language skill, either receptive or productive. In this case the role of teacher in giving instruction is essential for the success of the students' learning. In fact, oral communication instruction was often ignored because of the misconception that oral communication competence will develop naturally over time and that the cognitive skills involved in writing automatically transfer to oral communication skills.

Lestari (2019) found some causes affecting student's problems, one of which is the lack of vocabulary. This condition makes the students find it difficult to speak in English. Another cause is that some students are afraid of making mistakes due to their imperfect pronunciation. The last factor is students prefer to use their mother tongue for daily communication.

METHODS

This survey study was followed by 30 first-second-third-year students from a university in Indonesia. The participants consist of 50% males and 50% females ranging from 19 to 25 years old. When the survey was taken the participants were studying in English education undergraduate program.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 20 items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from never (1) to always (5). The questionnaire were categorized into five subscales: (1) linguistic obstacles, (2) speech processing difficulties, (3) academic and conversational English skills, (4) negative affect and (5) access to speaking opportunities.

The questionnaire was presented in two languages: English and Indonesian and the students were told that their responses would not affect their status in their English courses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The reveal the difficulties encountered by the participants, the analysis uses combined percentages of the students who wrote *Always, Often* or *Sometimes* for each statement are reported below.

Linguistic Obstacles

According to Table 1, 86% of the students in this study reported a tendency to make grammatical errors. These results are further supported by the participants' responses to the item *I get stuck with grammar or vocabulary when speaking English to my teachers* (76%). Furthermore, the majority of the students reported *experiencing pronunciation problems* (76%). These results indicate the potential cavity in the participants' linguistic knowledge that could seriously affect their speaking performance. EFL learners tend to find it difficult to engage in the higher-level aspects of

utterance if they lack a good inter-language system (Hilton 2007). In short, these results reveal the role of grammar and vocabulary in building speaking skills.

Speech processing difficulties

Linguistic problems associated other language skills have been frequently discussed, but there are few studies on mental process within an EFL or ESL oral production. In fact this aspect is a pivotal factor in creating a good speaking performance. In this context, individual speakers are expected to produce a speaking performance that is fluent and linguistically accepted and contains comprehensible content (Swain 2005).

In this case, the participants' responses reveal unique characteristics of the Indonesian students. For example, 90% of the participants reported the experience *of thinking in Indonesian language when speaking English.* This means that when they speak in English, they tend to first think the ideas in Indonesian as their mother tongue and then translate them into English. Moreover, the participants' responses to the point *I avoid using*

difficult words and structures when speaking English (86%) show that they are not ready to use foreign language. Meanwhile, the participants' responses to the point *struggle to communicate effectively in English with my teachers* (80%) reveal that according to most of the students speaking in English is a stressful and uncomfortable activity. This finding is also supported by the data where 83% of the students reported that they *experienced difficulty attending to both fluency and accuracy when speaking English.*

The findings suggest that there are three major processes in oral production: conceptualisation in deciding what to say; formulation in translating the concepts into linguistics form (vocab, sentence, etc.) and articulation that involves recalling information and convey the message (Skehan 2009). Since the participants have not perfectly learned the target-language systems as well as they are unable to fulfil fluency and accuracy in their performance, the participants tend to experience problems with formulation and articulation.

Academic and conversational English skills

The participants' responses in terms of academic oral classroom activities are in line with previous studies on academic oral communication skills (e.g. Evans and Green 2007; Kim 2006). Table 3 shows that the students reported: *I feel difficulty participating in wholeclass English discussions* (60%). Even though group-based discussions are supposed to be less demanding than class-based discussions and presentations, most of the participants reported: *difficulty participating in small-group English discussions during class* (50%). Nevertheless, compared with these classroom activities, the participants lacked confidence about their ability to have on conversations on daily topics as they reported: *I am not good at joking and chatting in English* (80%).

The results also showed that having conversations in English could be challenging to Indonesian learners. This phenomenon occurs probably because English textbooks and classes in Indonesia usually

focus on academic English and lacks societal and daily life functions.

Negative effect

There is a recognition in the literature that learning and using a second language canbe anxiety-provoking, and anxiety is most often associated with speaking the target language (Horwitz 2008). According to Hortwitz many students feel anxious about language learning, and those with higher level of anxiety tend to perform poorly in their classes. The results show that 83% of the participants reported *worrying about grammar when speaking English* and that 70% reported *experiencing anxiety when speaking English*. The findings also reveal that more than half of the participants reported the *experience of keeping silent in* class because they are not confident in speaking English (60%). This fact indicates that language ability often leads to students' silence in a language class (Gan 2009; 2007).

Interestingly, the finding show that 23% of the participants reported the experience of resisting opportunities to speak *English* indicating that Indonesian students are more optimistic and brave to speak in English.

Access to speaking opportunities

There is now an agreement that language learning is not just an individual process, but is also a social process. Learners acquire their language skills through direct participation where they can have performance opportunities. Therefore, access to the opportunities to use the target language is important for the development of their speaking skills. Three points in the questionnaire were aimed at eliciting the participants' feeling of how their environment allows them to use the English language actively. For example, the participants reported *lack of things to say when speaking English in class or outside class* and *lack of opportunities to speak English outside the class* (83% and 73% consecutively). These findings indicate that most of the participants lacked ideas and opportunities to use English actively in or outside class.

The availability of opportunities to speak English is inevitable as second or foreign language acquisition requires

sustained contact with the target language. The Conversation Theories in particular suggest that learners should participate in conversations to learn to speak a new language (Horwitz 2008). In other words, they need frequent events to speak actively (Swain 2005) as such opportunities will allow them to receive feedback from their opponents about their utterances and improve their linguistic mastery and eventually increase their performance quality in their English skills. The data reveal that the students lack opportunities to use conversational and spoken academic English.

In fact, there is a misconception that the performance is often determined mainly based on their written assignments (Evans and Green 2007) as if the linguistics skill they have in that writing will be automatically transferred into their speaking performance, either it is academic or conversational. Thus, the important issue in English language learning is that students need to develop a good awareness that only by active participation in real environment can develop their

knowledge of conversational English.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study highlight our understanding of the English speaking difficulties experienced by college students in Indonesia. Based on various theoretical perspectives, the difficulties experienced by the students are analysed in terms of linguistic insufficiency, oral language activities, conversational skills, and affordance of opportunities to use English in real communication. The data reveal that most students might suffer inadequate linguistic knowledge, negative effect of self-perception, and feeling of lack of confidence, which in fact worsen their motivation to learn.

Many of the Indonesian learners of English when speaking in English often experience a 'mother tongue to the target language' translation process. The issues emerging in this study hopefully will be useful not only to English language teachers in Indonesia, but also those overseas. The study suggests there is a lack of

opportunities to use English for active oral communication in and outside class. Therefore, it is necessary for the Indonesian students to have more experience of active methods of learning in which they can actively participate in authentic interactions.

Based on the discussion above, the educational institution in Indonesia should find ways to create an effective English language environment on campus. The university, for instance, can run extra-curricular activities using English such as podcast or short films in English, English camps, and English corner and other social events in English where students have adequate opportunities to speak actively. On the other hand, students are also expected to participate in international organization, especially with English-speaking countries, where they will have opportunities to interact fully in the target language environment.

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