

IDENTIFICATIONS OF DIFFICULTIES FACED BY MAHAKARYA ASIA UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SPEAKING ENGLISH

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Abstract: The aims of this research are to describe (1) linguistic factors that affect students' difficulty in speaking and (2) internal and external factors that are contributive to the difficulty in speaking English faced by second semester students who took speaking class. The type of the study was descriptive qualitative. The object of the research was second semester students who took speaking class. In this study, the researcher took 31 students as the respondents. The instruments of the research were questionnaire and interview. Technique and data analysis were identifying the difficulties encountered by the students in the speaking class, classifying those difficulties, presenting and analyzing the data in, and discussing. The study reported that difficulties in speaking English were classifiable as linguistic, internal, and external factors. The linguistic factors affecting speaking difficulties were the lack of sufficient masteries of required vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation and intonation. The internal factors hindering the learning of speaking were the detrimental over influence of the first language and the lack of either or both self-motivation and practice. The external factors were insufficient encouragement and driving force from lecturer, inadequate support from other fellow students, and problems

Keywords : Speaking; linguistic; external and internal factors

INTRODUCTION

As a social creature, human is heavily dependent on its communicatory ability. Of all other communicatory abilities, such as writing, listening, reading, and observing clues, speaking makes way to one of the tops (Saragih & Listyani., 2019, p. 74; Shteivi & Elghoul, 2022, p. 1293). Oral communication has been the most common means of communications for thousands of years. From simple request, pleasantry, to declaration of war, oral communication becomes the medium to carry out with a high degree of reliability.

One of the cores of oral communication is language (Riadil, 2020, p. 8). Without language, oral communication is nothing more than meaningless babbles. One language, by a series of historical events, happened to top other potential languages. The language-in-question is English. Combined with the fact that humans rely much on oral communication for various purposes, we

can say that English speaking is a skill that will prove to be helpful and essential (Fatimah et al., 2021, p. 2).

Being fully aware of the importance of mastering English speaking, which is an active skill (Widyasworo, 2019, p. 534), Mahakarya Asia University opened a class dedicated to sharpening the English speaking skill for its students.

Although careful consideration and planning for the class had been carried out meticulously, the reality check in the field revealed that students often encountered difficulties in learning and mastering English speaking skill. This pitiful occurrence was also acknowledged by Tuyen (2021, p. 1). Therefore, the writer tried to identify the difficulties in speaking English. There are some reasons why researcher did the research in speaking class. Firstly, although fairly active during the class, the students of speaking class rarely spoke actively to each other with the exception during the assignments. Secondly,

in relation to the first reason, some students of speaking class admitted they were afraid of speaking English (as also discussed in Sultana & Jamin's 2021 research (p. 17)), so that they were not active in speaking activity. One of the main problems faced by the students of speaking class was they lacked the mastery of the necessary English vocabulary (which tallies with Jaelani & Zabidi's research (2020, p. 45)) to establish and maintain oral communication. This deficiency brought about their failure to effectively engage the lecturers and their fellow students in oral communication. Accordingly, this failure ended up giving students the insufficient speaking skills instead of facilitating them to master the required speaking skills.

While it looks trivial and easy to master, as Indriyani (2020, p. 21) also admitted, in fact speaking skill is a language skill that needs to be learned and acquired properly. Proper mastery of speaking skill is an important indicator of success of the students, especially in learning English. Acquiring a proper speaking skill allows the students to communicate their ideas, either with the educators and fellow students or with foreign speakers to maintain good relations with others. Understandably, any factors impeding students' mastery of this essential skill should be quickly identified and solved. Some of the impeding factors discovered during the preliminary observation and research are students being embarrassed or doubtful, difficulty of understanding pertaining grammar, lack of vocabulary and background knowledge, and the habit of using the first language, Indonesian instead of the second language, English. This habit of conveying messages using the first language is also considered a problem in developing speaking by Gusviani et al. (2022, p. 64).

METHOD

The method used in this research was descriptive qualitative method. The object

of the research was 31 students who took English speaking class. The criterion of selection was the students' average scores during the three months of the class. Those whose average scores were lower than B (scores were ranged from E (lowest) to A (highest)) were requested to join the research. To collect the data, the researcher used questionnaires and interview. Data analysis was performed by a procedure consisting of identification, classification, presenting, and discussion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Research Finding

In accordance with the research conducted, the researcher tried to draw the result of the research in details. In this study, there was a problem discussed. It was difficulties in speaking English encountered by the students of the second semester in Mahakarya Asia University. Wishing to investigate what kinds of difficulties the students were experiencing during the speaking class, the researcher employed essential research instruments during observation in the form of questionnaire and interview. Meanwhile, in describing the result of the research, the researcher used the data obtained from those instruments.

a. The Linguistic Factors Influencing the Difficulties in Speaking English

The researcher discovered the linguistics factors influencing students in speaking English were pronunciation (research by Abadi & Tika (2021, p. 141) also supports this finding), vocabulary (as also discovered by Hajar & Rahman (2022, p. 31) and Zulfritri & Nurlaili (2020, p. 587)), grammar (which was previously discussed by Rullu & Daburan (2020, p. 12)), intonation (Salman, 2022, p. 231), and spelling.

b. Internal Factors in Influencing the Difficulties in Speaking English

Some second semester students of Mahakarya Asia had performance problems when speaking English. Some of the problems stemmed from internal factors, such as their activeness in speaking English, inner

motivation, and feeling afraid of making mistakes in speaking English. Those problems were also discussed in the research conducted by Thao and Nguyet (2020, p. 54). In addition, most of the participating students said that they found it difficult to properly speak English because they already relied too much on their first language, Indonesian, when communicating. Consequently, using a new language that needed to be learnt did not provide ease of communication.

c. External Factors Attributed to the Difficulties in Speaking English

The external factors triggering the difficulties in speaking English included the dominant use of Indonesian influence in the students' family environment and society in everyday communication. This normality in the society and family was unfortunately carried over by many students in the speaking class in which English should be the primary language of communication. Those students still, one way or another, used their mother tongue, and worse, subconsciously attracted others to revert to Indonesian whenever they found it difficult to proceed talking in English. The problems were from their external factors, such as passive demotivation from their family, school, and environment. Thus, it is not a surprise that most of the students said they rarely practiced with the teacher, their friends, and the native speakers. Rarely practicing their skill surely dulls the students' already limited speaking ability, as already shown in another research about speaking ability by Mahmudah et al. (2021, p. 1).

2. Discussion

The first research data was obtained through questionnaires. The questionnaires were then collected and data analyzed. Following the analysis of the data gathered through the questionnaires, the next instrument, interview, was conducted. The newly acquired data from the interview was used to reinforce facts discovered from the questionnaire data analysis. It was after the

analysis of the data collected through the instruments that the researcher decided to classify the factors that raise the roadblock toward the speaking performance by the students. The purpose of such a categorization was to enable easier observation of the problems. The three classifications of factors derailing the students' attempt for successful learning in speaking English, the linguistic factors (Franscy & Ramli, 2022, p. 1), internal factors, and external factors (Sagala, 2018, p. 205), will be discussed here.

a. Linguistic Factors

Talking about speaking problems should naturally involve the linguistic aspects of the language used in the speaking.

The researcher distributed questionnaires on the factors that negatively affect the students' performance in speaking English. Students were allowed to list several factors that they deemed responsible for their problems in speaking. The result is presented in the following.

- 1) 14 respondents declared that students' English speaking underperformance originated from insufficient skill of pronunciation and intonation.
- 2) Another group consisting of 26 respondents said they believed that the lack of vocabulary mastery was the culprit of the students' difficulties in speaking English.
- 3) The notion that speaking English was difficult without English grammar competency was echoed by 22 respondents.

Thus, the researcher concluded that, based on the result of the questionnaires described previously, the most three considerable linguistic factors responsible for the hampering of the students' English speaking production are pronunciation and intonation, vocabulary, and grammar.

Next, the researcher decided to get more data by conducting an interview with the students. Similar to the questionnaires, students were allowed to define up to three hindering factors. The interview, aside from confirming the analysis of the result of the

questionnaires, also provided the researcher with additional data which are presented in the following.

1) Having insufficient vocabulary was considered by all 31 respondents to be a strong discouragement and impediment to students' attempt to speak English.

2) Although students were encouraged to speak without thinking too much about grammatical rules, some still believed that correct usage of grammatical principles are vital to the conveyance of the oral messages. Such a view came from 19 students.

3) Inability to articulate correct pronunciation and intonation was a source of headache for 15 students. They complained that using wrong pronunciation and intonation would invite awkwardness and miscommunication if the conversations were not scripted.

Based on the results of interview, it can be stated that linguistic factors influencing the difficulties in speaking English were (1) the students found difficulties in selecting and pronouncing words, and to some extent, they found it difficult to use the correct words and expressions, (2) the students did not master the pertaining grammar and therefore they were unsure whether they would apply correct grammatical principles during the conversations, and (3) students needed to develop their pronunciation and intonation.

All students nodded in unison when they were asked whether they had already received English education years before the class. However, they still perceived their mastery as lacking. While their consideration might be a good thing, showing that they knew they needed to learn more, it also revealed a dark truth that an accumulation of years of studies did not always end up to required mastery.

b. Internal Factors

Internal factors are adverse personal elements coming from the students themselves that prevent them to perform well in speaking English. Based on the results of questionnaires, the difficulties in speaking

English related to internal factors are stated below.

1) An overwhelming number of 27 respondents, out of 31, strongly believed that the habitual routine of using the first language raised a difficulty in speaking English. The effects of relying on the first language for oral communications were twofold, students were heavily influenced by the rules of the first language and they tended to revert to the first language at the first sight of English-related problems.

2) 23 respondents said they strongly agreed that students' difficulties in speaking were because they needed self-motivation to speak English. Seven students even considered that ability to speak English was not important for them and learning it would only generated nothing but temporary problems. Those seven students argued that if they needed to request something using English, they could register the reliable service of modern, digital-age translators such as Google Translate. This underestimation of English mastery is not uncommon since previous research by Tambunsaribu & Galingging (2021, p. 31) also uncovered a somewhat similar result.

16 students believed that they might grow some necessary self-motivation if they could figure out the right way to learn speaking English more easily.

3) Meager English speaking practice with the lecturer, friends, as well as native speakers outside the class contributed to the students' inability to establish and maintain oral communication in English. This was the summary of the opinions of 23 respondents.

Rarely practicing English conversation with the family (less than an accumulated practice time of 15 minutes per month) was a common fact shared by all 31 respondents.

14 respondents even exposed information that they never talked in English with their families since they were children. Four students even reported that they were discouraged by the acts of the some members of their families who grinned or ridiculed them, or at least showed a funny expression, when those four students practiced English.

Interestingly, it was found out that 15 of the respondents stated that their families were eager to be involved in an English conversation. However, the initial enthusiasm quickly waned when they encountered difficulties, quickly got bored, or found it awkward to talk in a language other than Indonesian, resulting in the abandonment of English speaking practices in the future.

The results of the interview solidified the result of the interview, in which 30 and 23 respondents respectively believed the influence of the first language, as well as their reliance on the first language, are detrimental to their efforts of speaking English and they also needed to nurture stronger self-motivation to speak English. 15 students also admitted that their insufficiency of speaking practices with other people, including lecturers and fellow classmates might have a negative impact on their already limited English speaking skills. However, they did not have courage, inner motivation, or time to start training.

c. External Factors

Completing the classifications of the two previous factors, linguistic and internal factors, the researcher also needed to add another factor group, the external factors. The external factor defined here means an aspect, or the lack of it, that come from other people and its existence, or absence, negatively affects the English speaking performance of the students. Based on the results of questionnaires, the difficulties in speaking English related to internal factors are stated below.

1) 11 respondents affirmed that students' difficulties in speaking existed because they needed encouraging motivation from the lecturer. They felt that any act of encouragement, if properly conveyed, would help them alleviate their doubt and fear of speaking English. How the students perceived the importance of motivation from the lecturer confirmed the theory discussed in research performed by Sakka et al. (2022, p. 2). So far, students considered

encouragement, positive appreciation, and praises from the lecturer were helpful. However, sometimes the lecturer simply watched them when confusion and fear got the best of them, and this felt like an abandonment to them.

2) In addition to the motivation from the lecturer, students also needed support from their fellow classmates. The veracity of this claim was acknowledged by 19 respondents. Such support included encouragement when they were afraid of speaking and the absence of demotivation when they made mistakes.

3) Students also expected that the lecturer allowed them to have a more flexible and enjoyable learning experiences and instructional designs. There were 15 respondents who held this assumption.

The interview that followed did not produce a spark difference in result. The data from the interview show that

1) The majority of respondents, 25 out of 31, wished the lecturer to keep giving motivation and encouragement for them when they were in the state of discomfort. The encouragement and motivation offered by the lecturer helped some students to dispel their doubt and fear of talking. This might sound childish and responsible as they were all second semester students who should try to rely to themselves than positive drives from the lecturer. However, considering that many students were felt academically neglected during COVID-19 improper distance learning practices that pervaded in many parts of Indonesia, this phenomenon might be understandable.

2) Although they rarely practiced English outside the class due to absence of partners, 20 respondents showed their willingness to practice speaking English outside the class if conditions allowed them to. Partners they thought could accommodate them well were fellow classmates (voiced by 17 respondents), lecturers (selected by 15 respondents), and family members (brought out by eight respondents). Native speakers and people they were not familiar were not a popular choice, as these options were only acceptable to six

and five students respectively.

3. The interview delved deeper into the third external factor, the requirement for better learning experiences and instructional designs. The number of students who were agreeable to this point was 18, a slight improvement from those who mentioned it in the questionnaires.

When the researcher asked for students' feedback how they expected to enjoy a more pleasant learning experience, students unfortunately could not come into a definite recommendation. However, they said that due to a three-hour consecutive learning preceding the speaking class, they felt tired. Thus, the researcher concluded that the content of the learning material was not to blame and the lecturer should invest more heavily on the new interesting activities of the class that could accommodate their exhaustion after three-hour activities from classes taking place right before the speaking class.

For example, three students were not comfortable talking while standing in front of the class, hoping that they might still sit down during performance. One student revealed her wish that some assignments were to be given more time so she could make it better.

CONCLUSION

In the world where English is one of the most widely accepted languages of communication, being able to speak English is a skill to master. Mahakarya Asia University, in realization of such a fact, implied a policy in which its students were required to attend English speaking class. The English speaking class, by the time of this writing, was admitted by second semester students.

Some students ran into difficulties when learning English speaking. This was evident by their average scores which did not achieve the minimum of B in the grade range of A to E (in which A is the highest and E the lowest).

The students who did not attain a minimum average score of B after a learning period of three months were recruited as participants of this research. They would be asked what difficulties they faced in learning English speaking. The data was collected through questionnaires and interview.

With the data collection and analysis completed, the researcher thus classified the learning inhibiting factors into three major groups. The first factor was the linguistic aspect. This included the students' deficiencies of related language elements, especially pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar.

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