

# Students' Perceptions and Challenges in Improving Speaking Ability in Public and Private University

Wandi Syahfutra

*English Education Department  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau  
Pekanbaru, Indonesia  
wandisyahfutra@umri.ac.id*

Agung Prasetyo Wibowo

*English Education Department  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau  
Pekanbaru, Indonesia  
Agungprasetyo.w@umri.ac.id*

Ardiya

*English Education Department  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau  
Pekanbaru, Indonesia  
ardiya@umri.ac.id*

Prih Febtiningsih

*English Education Department  
Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau  
Pekanbaru, Indonesia  
prihfebtiningsih@umri.ac.id*

**Abstract**—Speaking is one of skills that difficult to master by students in Indonesia, little research has been done to investigate students' perceptions and challenges in improving speaking ability: the analysis study between English Education Department students. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this research selected learners' studying in private and public university as research respondents. The findings suggest that the main causes of speaking difficulties were affected by shyness, lack of vocabularies, and environment of learning; dealing with mistake and lecturers' reaction during English speaking performance. This study is beneficial to improve EFL learners to improve their speaking ability. It is important to lecturers identifying their students' speaking skill as a matter of applying a more effective learning strategy.

**Keywords**— *English students' perceptions and challenges, and speaking ability*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Since English has been considered as the first foreign language in Indonesia, speaking is one of the most essential skill to be mastered by English students through practice to communicate orally. The mastery of speaking skill is being a priority for second and foreign language learners. By speaking, we are able to know and easy to get some information that we need.

Teaching speaking approaches and methods are being research major focuses of language teaching. Although the lecturers have already given some different methods, course books, audios and videos are applied but some learners still have problems when they speak in a foreign language especially in public due to the fact that speaking is anxiety-provoking in nature, environment and friends' laughing effect.

However, although speaking has been included in educational plan for English teaching in collages and universities in the past year, the percentage of time devoted to activities in which students can communicate with each other in english remains small in the whole class.

Many English language learners have difficulty expressing their ideas in spoken language. They generally face problems using English for expressing ideas effectively. Then, they stop talking because they face

psychological obstacles or cannot find appropriate vocabulary and expressions. When anxiety is experienced by English Education students, the stakes are higher because they are prospective English teachers. In the teaching profession, they are required to have such confidence to show their skills in front of an audience: students. Therefore, anxiety can cause serious problem for a group of students. Despite the large number of studies conducted aimed at helping students mastering English, speaking is still a very difficult skill in language to be mastered.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 *Review of Related Theory*

#### 2.1.2 *English as Foreign Language in Indonesia*

Nowadays, it has been well perceived that many people speak English as the means of communication globally. With or without realizing, Gould and Rankin (2014) stated that English has been spreading all over the world and it is estimated that English is spoken within approximately 70 countries either as the second or official language. Given that, this remarkably percentage along with the history of British Empire, it is undeniable that the dominance of English is spoken not only within academic purpose, but it is also used in business, military, internet, and other worldwide development (*Ibid.*, 2014 p. 223).

Situated in southeast Asia, Indonesia is considered to have been adopting English as a foreign language since colonization. It's clearly evidenced through the history record that Dutch had colonialized Indonesia for 350 years, which impacted to the use of Dutch and Malay language as the means of communication amongst the native and colonialists (Lauder, 2008). However, Dutch was not entirely taught to the natives, due to a condition where selected Indonesians were given opportunity to study in the Dutch Schools. Cited in *ibid* (2008) according to Gregory, English was firstly taught at Indonesian schools to Indonesian (native) in 1914, it was initiated by the colonialists who established junior high schools, followed by senior high schools in 1918.

A closer look at drawbacks for Indonesian to adopt English as foreign language can be seen firstly by the

influence of national language, Bahasa Indonesia which affect the way people communicate in English. It is believed that speaking Bahasa Indonesia is one of the ways to maintain the country patriotism (Mappiasse and Sihes, 2014). Furthermore, the recognition of English as a foreign language in Indonesia was started through the government policy, formulated in the act of the Parliament in Government Guideline No. 28, 29/1990. This guideline approved English to be studied at school (*ibid.*, 2014). However, this subject is currently studied in high schools and higher education levels such as colleges and university only. Questioning in primary school, this subject used to be studied in such school and remaining optional subject due to low English teacher qualification. Yanik (2007) found that the English curriculum in high school is still not compatible to be applied and used for students and teachers in government school.

### 2.2 Skills in English: Speaking

Skills in studying English are generally comprised into four; speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Brown (1987) states that speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning involving the producer and receiver of information. The form and meaning of the information spoken is very contextual.

Speaking might include at least for speech production process. Related to the speech production processes, Carter and Nunan (2001:16) propose that speech production involves four major processes. They are (1) formulation, (2) conceptualization, (3) articulation, (4) and self-monitoring. This enable the speakers to self-correct for expression, grammar and pronunciation. *Formulation* referred to finding words and phrases to express the meaning, position them in suitable grammatical markers (like inflection, auxiliary, and article). Then, after formulator is *articulation*. The articulator organs are the motor control, such as; the lips, tongue, teeth, alveolar palate, velum, glottis, mouth cavity and breath. Self-monitoring is concerned with language users being able to identify and self-correct mistakes.

### 2.3 Improving Speaking Ability

To speak well, learners should know and must be mastered three areas of knowledge: 1) procedures that contains pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. On the assumption, students must use the true words with the correct pronunciation. 2) function which consist of transaction and interaction. In case, students are able to know that the message clarity is very crucial to build an understanding. 3) recognizing the social, cultural and norms (turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pauses between speaker, and the roles of the correspondent). On other hand to speak well, learners have to comprehend the micro skills of speaking like producing forms of words and phrases; convey a link and connect between even and communication such relation as idea, recent information, use special emphasize and body language to convey the meaning; and improve speaking strategies like set off keywords, rephrasing, appealing for help, etc.

### 2.4 Challenges Faced by University Students in improving speaking skill

Brown (1987) states that some learners have problems when speaking a foreign language especially in public due to the fact that speaking is anxiety-provoking in nature, with might lead the failure in communicating with the interlocutors, especially with native speakers. (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017:1) state that speaking skill is one of difficult aspects of language learning. Many language learners find difficult to express their thoughts effectively in spoken language.

Many of English foreign language learners still get difficult to master speaking skill although some studies purposed help students to master it, (Nazara, 2011:2). On other hand, although speaking has been included in educational plan for English teaching in collages and universities in the past year, the percentage of time devoted to activities in which students can communicate with each other in english remains small in the whole class, (Liao, 2009:1).

### 2.5 Review of Related Finding

Based on the research don't by Nazara (2011) entitles "Students' Perception on EFL Speaking Skill Development", she concluded her research by summarizing some findings as follows:

1. All respondents agreed that speaking is very important and they should master it with all the necessities. Although the lecturer provided them with the delightful materials and grant chance to practice speaking, they still required longer time to do practice, sometimes some of participants avoid speaking by cause of lecturers' fear and shyness of friends' laughing.
2. Some students figure it were sometimes out scolded by their lecturers for speaking incorrectly, but some of them do not think so. These findings implied that the learners need empowering motivation, support, psychological training, assistance and counselling to remove their fearful by cause of laughing of their classmate and criticizing by lecturers. The lecturers also have to find more friendly wise to do correction of their students' error.

## III. RESEARCH METHOD

This study was designed to explore the differences of students' speaking anxiety where qualitative descriptive was deployed. Describing a qualitative approach as "a systematic subjective approach used to describe life experiences and situations to give meaning" (Burns and Grove, 2009). As emphasized that the type of study involving people as research subjects. In other words, it is a typical of human-oriented research, given that it is recommended to use qualitative descriptive (Atkins and Wallace, 2012). Qualitative research prospects to investigate problems and detailed perspectives on certain aspects (Creswell, 2014). In addition, qualitative research mentions identifiability,

confidentiality and individual privacy aspects. This means participants in this research will be anonymous without mentioning personal data (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

### 1. Data Collection

Because the design of this study was qualitative, the researchers proposed interviews as a method of data collection. Interviews were conducted because they involve a process of interaction between researchers and research participants, which aims to find information or find out the experiences of participants on research problems (Arthur, 2012). Compared to other types, qualitative research using interviews allows researchers to explore further for answering as a way of digging information into more complex and comprehensive topics. The respondents of this study were students of the English Language Education Program at either private or state university in Riau Province, the participants' identities were hidden during the transcription and interview. It is then labeling them with S1, S2, S3, and etc is beneficial for the researchers to do transcribing and rooting the answer.

The researcher used convenience sampling in selecting participants in the interview process. Convenience sampling method according to Cohen *et al.* that recruited participants were taken from the nearest environment, where they could be accessed and ready to become participants according to their time and willingness. Along with the interview as an instrument for collecting data, it shows that there are many types of interviews in qualitative research, such as in-depth interviews, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), curriculum vitae, and semi-structured interviews. Among the types of interviews, researchers chose semi-structured interviews in collecting data. Semi-structured interviews allow participants to speak freely using their own language patterns, questions in interviews are suggested to be public so participants can provide many possible answers (Silverman, 2008).

### 2. Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is described as a reflection, reaction and process of interaction between researchers and decontextual data that has interpretations in social gatherings. Decontextual data are those chosen by the researcher, whether to present important points related to the research question, or to repeat the entire interview. After the interview process, transcription is needed to find out the meaning behind the interview. Transcript or transcription is the core content in finding out the meaning behind an interview. To some extent, transcription can be understood as two concepts that are useful in providing a paradigm for researchers in data analysis. The concepts are 'naturalization' and 'denaturalization' transcription (Oliver *et al.*, 2008). In the previous approach, transcription was carried out by quoting all interviews; details or information available. On the other hand, denaturalized transcription is a complete and reliable concept. This transcription is in accordance with the context of qualitative research, which has a tendency towards contextual meaning and perception. In transcribing, the researcher must listen to it several times to ensure that the

information is a true story from the interview. The researcher also chooses features that are relevant to the research question and records changes in participants' tones and voices. The researcher used thematic analysis to analyze the data contents. Thematic analysis is a method used by researchers to organize data in detail (Braun and Clarke, 2006). There are two different thematic analysis approaches, namely inductive thematic analysis and theoretical thematic analysis. What distinguishes these two methods is that the first uses the concept of code and themes, while the second is rooted in the theoretical and analytical interests of the researchers (Flick, 2008). In this study, researchers used theoretical thematic analysis in which there were several sections within the framework of the research question that explained in each research variable.

## IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To analyze the data, each of subdivision is divided into several points to answer research questions: students' perceptions and challenges in speaking, solution to improve students' speaking ability, and environment that supports students to improve their speaking ability.

### 1. Students' perceptions and challenges in speaking

#### 1.1 Students' perceptions and challenges in speaking in public university students

During the interview, the researchers found two general factors which contributed to speaking ability in public university students as follow.

S1 states that

*"I always feel worry, if I was given chance to speak in front of the class by the lecturer".*

Whilst other students emphasized one particular point of view that the most striking factor which contributed to speaking performance was related to the idea that would be delivered.

*"Lack of vocabularies was one of my problems when I want to speak in English ..."*

*"Sometimes I feel the environment don not support me in speaking."*

#### 1.2 Students' perceptions and challenges in speaking in private university students

The main factors of speaking perceptions and challenges in private university were found to be low self-confidence which includes afraid of making mistakes. Another student also emphasized that:

*".... I am afraid when I use wrong grammar in speaking...."*

*".... I am afraid my friend's lough of me when I do mistake in speaking."*

Last respondent gave a note that

*"It is better if lecturers give feedback after not during the speaking performance. it makes me ashamed and lost my ideas,"*

From the results above, it can be highlighted that there are some differences of speaking factors exhibited by the students in public and private university. The major causes of speaking at public university were primarily affected by the nervousness and idea delivery. However, students in private university claimed that their major cause is rooted

from self-confidence; considering mistakes and lecturers' attitude during English speaking performance.

## 2. Solution to improve students' speaking ability

From these findings, it can be inferred that the main solutions that students in both universities are associated with preparation before speaking is begun. It can be by having practice with their peers or the ones who they can trust and give good feedback. As a result, they can reduce their problems in speaking and focus on what they want to talk. This finding can be correlated with the study in Vitasari *et al* (2010) that English speaking environment is essential and becomes a vital part, contributing to the reduction of speaking anxiety. The study reveals that the more students practice their English in their daily life, the easier they produce speaking once the performance is needed. Furthermore, Woodrow (2013) supports the finding by showing a correlation between speaking anxiety with habits and environment. It is stated that the conception of improving speaking performance especially those learning English as beginners is encouraged to the more frequent practice within their supporting environment. The study found this becomes a daily routine that they repeat on daily basis and this has resulted to the betterment of English speaking performance, in which the level of anxiety of students is decreased.

## V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There are some differences in speaking perceptions and challenges exhibited by students in private and public university. It is found that speaking skill factors that students in private university clarified were linked with self-confidence, considering mistakes and lecturers' fair during English speaking performance, whilst the perceptions perceived by students in public university were nervousness and organizing their vocabulary.

On the other hand, this study found that one similar point exhibited by the students in both universities. They put a priority on preparation before speaking is started, also to the supporting environment which could help them in practicing their speaking.

Prior to the result of the study, it is therefore best to propose some implications for the further research. This study is beneficial in enriching literature in the scope of English education study program, especially in the country of Indonesia and others adopting English as foreign language. However, for the further research, a new method is better much to be implemented and highly recommended as a solution to improve students' speaking skill.

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