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## STUDENTS' VIEWS ON EFL SPEAKING PROBLEMS

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the problems encountered by students in EFL speaking context. *In order to ascertain the problems faced by students in learning this skill, qualitative study design undertaken by using purposive sampling. In collecting the data, the writers interviewed the students. To strengthen the result of data from interview, the writers administrated a number of questionnaires to students in relation to the problems of speaking. The collected data were analyzed by presenting them in the form of narration and following three steps proposed by Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2013). The research finding shows that all students face problems in speaking. The most problems that they faced in learning speaking skill are lack of vocabulary, poor pronunciation, less confidence to speak and afraid of making errors while speaking.*

**Keywords:** *qualitative study, speaking problem, views.*

### INTRODUCTION

Learning speaking skill in EFL or ESL context is quite essential because mastering of speaking skill is the single most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language and the success of which is measured in terms of the ability to carry out conversation in language (Nunan, 1991, p. 39). In dealing with the goal of learning speaking as a foreign language, Flohr and Peasler (2006, in Maulia, 2013, p. 2) argue that the focus in learning a foreign language is on communicative activities and expressive abilities and the goal is to become a fluent speaker. It means that the mastery of speaking skill for EFL/ESL learners is very important because the learners are considered have succeeded in learning foreign language if he/she is able to

communicate well within the target language. Because of its importance in learning foreign language, Shumin (2002, p. 104) alludes that speaking is an aspect that needs special attention and instruction in EFL teaching. In addition, Burnkart (1998) emphasizes the important language skill needs to be controlled and assessed related to learning achievement is the mastery of speaking skill. Nevertheless, the mastery of speaking skill for most EFL learners is still difficult. For this reason, Hinkel (2005, p. 485) argues that speaking is the most complex and difficult skill to master. Moreover, Heriansyah (2012, p. 28) attests that for most foreign language learners, speaking in target language is not an easy thing to undertake because learning to speak a foreign language requires more than knowing its grammatical and semantic rules. From the two standpoints above, it indicates that teaching and learning L2 speaking in EFL context is quite challenging for English learners and teachers, for instance, in Indonesia, which the status of English as a foreign language that it is not used in daily communication, but it is only used either in classroom or school environment. Consequently, talking in English has not become a habitual action for most EFL learners because they still prefer to use their mother tongue instead of target language.

Pertaining to the problems encountered by the EFL learners in speaking, there were several previous research findings had been conducted by various researchers. For instances, the research by Heriansyah (2012, p. 28), Maulia (2013, p. 3) and Febriyanti (2009, in Mutia 2014, p. 3). In general, can we therefore conclude that the students encounter several problems in learning speaking, skill such as no ideas about what to say, lack of vocabulary bank, tend to keep silent, poor pronunciation, not confident to speak, and afraid of making mistakes. From what the writers found in the field during internship regarding the above problems faced by the students in learning speaking skill at SMPN 6 Banda Aceh, it indicates explicitly that there is a discrepancy between the reality in the field and the expectation of national curriculum in relation to teaching and learning speaking skill. For the reason that based on School-Based Curriculum (2006), the purpose of teaching speaking is that how the students are expected to be able to express and comprehend the ideas in simple transactional and interpersonal conversation to interact with nearest environment. Referring to the above elaborations in relation to the problems that the researchers found in learning speaking skill at SMPN 6 Banda Aceh and what the expectation of school-based curriculum (KTSP 2006) in relation to teaching speaking in Indonesian EFL context, the writers are intrigued in carrying out a research regarding the problems encountered by the secondary students of SMPN 6 Banda Aceh in learning speaking skill. This study is expected to be the desiderata and provide a new research findings related to the problems encountered by the EFL learners in learning speaking skill. Besides, it is hoped the findings of this study will strengthen and develop various theories that deal with the speaking problems in learning English particularly in EFL context.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Importance of Teaching and Learning Speaking in an EFL Context**

Nowadays, along with the strengthening position of English as a language for international communication, the teaching and learning of speaking skill has become increasingly pivotal in the English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) context. The teaching and learning of speaking skill is also important due to the large number of students who want to study English in order to be able to use English for communicative purposes. As stated by Crystal (1997), English speaking mastery has its function as the main gate to get a better job, especially in multinational companies have motivated a great number of people around the world to learn English as a second language or and as a foreign language in order to be able to speak in it. It can be assumed that by mastering English speaking skill, there are lots of opportunities to become an employer who has a better occupation especially the occupation which involved international relationship. In addition, Richards and Renandya (2002, p. 201) reveal that a large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking. Furthermore, students of second/foreign language education programs are considered successful if they can communicate effectively in the target language (Riggenbach & Lazaraton, 1991). In terms of this matter, speaking is a priority for the ESL/EFL learners in order to be able to communicate well in the target language and precisely they should have maximum language exposure in order to develop their mastery in English speaking proficiency. As stated by Bunkart (1998), learning achievement in the target language can be assessed based on the mastery of speaking skill and it is more important than the ability of reading or writing skill.

### **Teaching and Learning Speaking Skill in Indonesian EFL Context**

English speaking is a most essential skill in learning a second or foreign language. In accordance with teaching and learning speaking skill in Indonesian EFL context, according to School-Based Curriculum (2006), the purpose of teaching and learning speaking is that how the students are expected to be able to express and comprehend the ideas in simple transactional and interpersonal conversation to interact with nearest environment. As one of the central elements of communication, speaking skill needs special attention and instruction in an EFL context like in Indonesia. For the teacher, helping learners speak English fluently and appropriately needs carefully prepared instruction, for example determining learning tasks, activities and materials. Also a lot of practices either facilitated by the teachers in the classroom or independently performed by the learners outside the classroom due to minimal exposure to the target language and contact with native speakers in the context.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Method**

This study used qualitative approach descriptively. As stated by Ary (2006, p. 24), qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena from the perspective of the human participants in the study. In line with this, Seliger and

Shohamy (1989, p. 118) allude that descriptive research involves a collection of techniques used to specify, delineate, or describe naturally occurring phenomena without experimental manipulation. Based on the two above standpoints, qualitative study focuses on occurring phenomena without giving treatment toward the respondents. Since the design of this study, this research is intended to describe the problems of speaking according to students' view in learning speaking skill. In addition, this study is not intended to generalize a wider context, but it only intends for the respondents who become the participants in this study.

**Participants**

The participants of this research were the 15 second grade students of SMPN 6 Banda Aceh at class VIII-3. They were purposively selected as the respondents of this study based on the following considerations, (1) from the writers' field experience during his internship in this school in which he found there were still many students got the problems in learning speaking skill, (2) from the document analysis that the writers gathered from the English teacher showed there were listed the students' name who got low score in speaking skill, (3) in addition, from the preliminary study that the writers conducted through interview with the English teacher. She said that many students in class VIII-3 still got problems in learning speaking compared to other classes. Furthermore, she added that 15 out of 28 students in this class had low performance in speaking.

**Instrumentation**

Ary, et al. (2010, p. 442) point out that qualitative researcher may also use written documents or other artifacts to gain an understanding of the phenomenon under study. This study employed interview and questionnaire as the research instrument. In addition, the interview consists of three interview guidelines namely:

- Q1. Do you encounter any difficulties in learning speaking skill?
- Q2. If yes, can you mention what difficulties do you encounter in learning speaking skill?
- Q3. Beside those above difficulties, do you encounter another difficulty in learning speaking skill?

To support the data from interview, the writers also distributed a number of questionnaires that consist 9 questionnaire items. The writers used close-ended questionnaire that provided two alternative responses; 'yes' and 'no'. The example of the questionnaire items are as follows:

**Table 1.** Questionnaire on the difficulties in speaking.

<i>Complete the statements below by putting a tickle mark (✓) into the provided column! The difficulties that I encounter in learning speaking skill are:</i>			
<i>No.</i>	<i>Difficulties</i>	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
1	Lack of vocabulary.		
2	Nervous to speak.		
3	Poor pronunciation		
4	Afraid of being laughed by friends when making mistakes.		
5	Not using the correct intonation while speaking.		
6	Reluctant to speak.		

Table 1 continued...

7	Low motivation to speak English fluently.		
8	Difficult to use the words in appropriate context.		
9	Not confident to speak.		

### Data Collection

There were several stages that the writers carried on to collect the data. The writers asked three questions to the students related to the problems encountered by them in learning speaking skill. The writers interviewed 15 students who had the low performance in speaking based on the teacher's recommendation. In doing interview, the writers used the interview guide and the interview itself conducted in Indonesian. The voice recorder was the tool in receiving the more valid data. Meanwhile in collecting the data from questionnaire, the students were needed to complete the questionnaire items by putting a tickle mark into small-column provided. The questionnaires are designed in Indonesian, this is because the writers want all of the respondents understand well about the statements in each item.

### Data Analysis

In analyzing the data, the writers used several steps as follows. Data analysis is the process of systematically and arranging the interview transcript, field notes, and other instruments that are accumulated to increase our understanding of them and to enable us to present what you have discovered to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Regarding the data obtained from the results of interview, the writers designed it into interview transcript and they were translated into English, then the writers presented in the form of narration. Meanwhile the data related to the results questionnaire, they were analyzed by using the procedures analysis as proposed by Miles and Huberman, and Saldana (2013) that consists of three steps namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Results of Interviews

In relation to the result of interview, the following extracts are the representative of interview results that the writers conducted with the respondents. The extracts (E) are as follows:

E1: *"I have some difficulties in learning speaking skill such as not confident to speak, afraid of being laughed by my friends when making mistakes. I also have a problem with English grammar and my pronunciation is still poor, that is why I could not arrange a good sentence when speaking. In addition, I have limited vocabulary; therefore, I am difficult to express my ideas in English".* (HMR)

E2: *"The first difficulty that I encountered in learning speaking is inadequate vocabulary to carry out a conversation in English, and I often get nervous when presenting the result of assignment because I am afraid of making mistakes like verbalizing English words in the wrong way. Besides, my mastery of grammar is not good, so I am difficult to string up a sentence to speak".* (ADM)

From the two above interview transcripts, it can be concluded that they are having a slightly different perspectives of speaking problems. HMR has a major problem with confidence in speaking while ADM is harder on inadequate vocabulary to undertake a conversation. Furthermore, both of them are typically encountering the same difficulties in learning speaking skill.

Here are another two excerpts from the interview results:

E3: *"The difficulties that I faced in learning speaking skill namely: my vocabulary mastery is still limited to undertake a conversation in English, I have no bravery to speak due to my pronunciation is poor and afraid of making errors especially in front of the class, In addition, I am also not accustomed to speak in English".* (RZ)

E4: *"My first difficulty in speaking is limited vocabulary so that is why I could not speak, and sometimes I got nervous especially in presenting group work in front of the class. Besides, I am also afraid of making errors because my friends usually give me a laugh".* (MRA)

From another two representatives of above interview transcript, RZ has divergent difficulty from the previous respondents. He has no bravery to speak English due to the problems which have mentioned in the transcript; meanwhile MRA is more having a problem tendency to nervousness. Generally, almost all students had the same difficulty in learning speaking skill.

The following part will be presented the recapitulation of the kinds of difficulties based on students' perceptions as shown in Table 2 as follows:

**Table 2.** The recapitulation kinds of difficulties according to students' perceptions.

No.	Kinds of difficulties
1	Lack of vocabulary.
2	Poor pronunciation.
3	Nervous to speak.
4	Afraid of making errors.
5	Not confident to speak.
6	Lack of grammar knowledge.
7	Not used to speak in English.
8	Difficult to express words and sentences.
9	Reluctant to speak.
10	Difficult to pronounce English words.
11	Not being brave to speak.
12	Afraid of being laughed by friends.

### The Results of Questionnaire

In order to obtain the additional data about the students' problems in speaking, the writers distributed a set of questionnaire items. In the following table 2 will be presented the results of questionnaire given to 15 students.

**Table 2.** The result of questionnaire and the number of students' response for each item.

No.	Items in the Questionnaire	Number of students' responses for each item	
		Yes	No
	<i>The difficulties that I faced when speaking are:</i>		
1	Lack of vocabulary.	13	2
2	Nervous to speak.	11	4
3	Poor pronunciation.	12	3
4	Afraid of being laughed by friends when making mistakes.	7	8
5	Not using the correct intonation while speaking.	6	9
6	Reluctant to speak.	10	5
7	Low motivation to speak English fluently.	4	11
8	Difficult to use the words in appropriate context.	10	5
9	Not confident to speak.	11	4

From the result of questionnaire above, the following part will be presented the explanation for each item. Based on the questionnaire item number 1, it appears that almost all students or thirteen students agree with the statement given, which means only two students disagree. This significant difference between the number of the students who agree and disagree has proven that lack of vocabulary is the major problem encountered by students in learning speaking skill.

From the questionnaire item number 2, it shows that there are eleven students confess that they are nervous to speak especially in front of the class. On the other hand, there are four students who have no difficulty on it. Therefore, it is concluded that most of students still have difficulty in terms of being nervous to speak.

According to the questionnaire item number 3, almost all students or twelve students admit that they cannot verbalize English words correctly. While there are only three students who have ability in pronouncing English words smoothly. But overall, the result indicates that majority of the students have the difficulty in English pronunciation.

Based on the questionnaire item number 4, it can be seen that there are almost have a same number of students who agree and disagree about the statement given. Precisely, there are seven students confess that they are afraid of being laughed by friends when making errors in speaking especially when carrying out a presentation in front of the class. Meanwhile, there are eight students assume that they do not face this difficulty. Based on the result, there is a slightly interstitial between the numbers of students who face the problem with the students who do not. The writers then conclude that afraid of being laughed by friends when making errors is a minor issue for the students in speaking English.

Related to the questionnaire item number 5, six students say that they usually verbalize incorrect intonation while speaking. Whereas, there are nine students think that they speak with correct intonation. In nutshell, this can be ascribed as a minor issue in students' speaking problems.

Regarding the questionnaire item no 6, there are merely five students admit that they are not reluctant to speak. But there are another ten students encounter this problem. There is a large discrepancy between the numbers of students who

face the difficulty with the students who do not. It can be assumed that this is the major problem of the students' problems in speaking.

Pertaining to the questionnaire item number 7, the surprising fact that there are eleven students have desire to speak English eloquently. While there are only four students are not passionate about being able to speak English. Therefore, it can be summed up that the numbers of the students who disagree with the statement given are larger than the students who agree with. So, this is not a major issue in the students' speaking problem.

In dealing with the questionnaire item number 8, it clearly gives us the students' view toward the statement. There are ten students state that they are difficult to use the words in appropriate context, meanwhile there are five students who do not face this problem. Therefore, a majority of students still have difficulty in using the words in appropriate context.

Lastly, based on the questionnaire item number 9, there are eleven students feel not confident to speak and for the rest, there are 4 students have confidence in speaking. Thus, not confident to speak can be categorized as a major difficulty in students' speaking problems in which the result shows us a big disparity between students who agree with the statement given and students who do not.

## **DISCUSSION**

Generally, from what the writers found from the results of interview, the writers found that there are twelve difficulties that the students encountered in learning speaking skill. Meanwhile, from the result of questionnaire, the writers found that the students still have the same difficulty in learning speaking skill. However, there are three other difficulties that the writers found from the result of questionnaire which are not found from the result of interview. The difficulties are 'not using the correct intonation while speaking', 'low motivation to speak English fluently', and 'difficult to use the words in appropriate context'.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research result and discussion, it can be concluded that the students of SMPN 6 Banda Aceh encountered some problems in learning speaking. In fact, there were 12 difficulties faced by students in learning speaking found in this research. The problems that mostly faced by students were lack of vocabulary, poor pronunciation, nervous to speak, afraid of making errors, and not confident to speak.

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