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Exploring Challenges Faced By Efl Vocational Students In Speaking And How They Cope With It: A Descriptive Case Study

Audry Adiananta^{1✉}, Iwan Ridwan², Evi Karlina Ambarwati³

Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris, Universitas Singaperbangsa Karawang

Email: adianantaudry@gmail.com^{1✉}

Abstrak

Kemampuan berbicara merupakan salah satu kemampuan yang sulit dikuasai oleh siswa, terutama bagi siswa EFL (English for Foreign Language) dengan berbagai tantangan yang harus dihadapi. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui apa saja kendala yang dihadapi siswa ketika mempelajari kemampuan berbicara dan bagaimana cara mereka menghadapi tantangan yang dihadapi. Desain penelitian case study akan diterapkan dalam penelitian ini dengan melibatkan lima orang siswa kelas 10 SMK di daerah Karawang sebagai partisipan dalam penelitian ini. Open-ended questionnaire dan wawancara akan digunakan sebagai instrumen. Berdasarkan data yang diperoleh, tantangan terbesar yang dihadapi oleh siswa berasal dari kurangnya rasa percaya diri dimana 4 siswa menyatakan bahwa mereka mengalaminya. Sementara itu, strategi yang paling banyak digunakan untuk menghadapi masalah berbicara adalah dengan menggunakan teknologi sebagai alat bantu belajar.

Kata Kunci: *EFL, kemampuan berbicara, SMK, strategi, tantangan berbicara*

Abstract

Speaking ability is one of the skills that is difficult for students to master, especially for EFL (English for Foreign Language) students with various challenges that must be faced. The purpose of this study is to find out what the obstacles faced by students are when mastering speaking skills and how they deal with the challenges they faced. Descriptive case study research design will be applied in this study by involving five students from 10th grade of vocational high school in the Karawang area as participants in this study. Open-ended questionnaires and interview will be used to collect data in this study. Based on the data, biggest challenges faced by students comes from lack of confidence which 4 students stated that they faced it. Meanwhile, the most used strategy they applied to face speaking problems by using technology as learning aid.

Keyword: *Challenges, EFL, speaking, strategy, vocational students*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a tool used in communicating with other people (Nilufar Kadamovna, 2021). In communicating, speaking ability is the most dominant ability of the four basic English skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing). Basically, to be able to mastering a language, someone must master the four basic skills well (Allo & Priawan, 2019). The ability to speak in this case is a very important ability to learn. This is in line with Ur (1991) as cited in Allo & Priawan (2019) which states that among the four skills in English (speaking, listening, writing and reading), speaking ability is basically the most important ability; someone who masters a language is called a speaker of that language, it is as if speaking is the scope of all these basic abilities.

For Indonesian people as an *English for Foreign Language* or EFL learners, of course this raises various problems and challenges, especially for students in mastering English, specifically in speaking skills. Not only because in terms of language use, other challenge is because speaking skills require complex abilities, not just conveying ideas orally (Abrar et al., 2018). There are various kinds of speaking challenges that students face, starting from the students themselves and from outside the students. Abrar et al. (2018) in their research tried to group various challenges commonly faced by students in speaking into 4 themes, namely Psychological Factors (attitude, anxiety, and lack of motivation), Language Barriers (pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, grammar), Learning Environment (peers, teachers, topic of speaking modules), Practicing The Language (self-practice, peer-practice, practicing with media, and maintain positive motivation).

In dealing with problems when learning speaking skills in English, teachers and students must work together to find solutions to problems faced by students. Instead of just providing input, the teachers would be better off if they took part in helping to reduce the learning barriers that arise by using various appropriate learning strategies according to student problems (Maulidia Handayani & Rizkiani, 2019). Learning strategy can be said as a technique or activity that is expected to help students increase self-confidence and generate learning motivation in students to make it easier for students to learn something and understand the language being studied with high enthusiasm (Eka Pertiwi et al., 2020). For students themselves, the strategy used depends on what problems they face in learning speaking skills. Therefore, this study will not only investigate the problems they face during their speaking learning, but also how students overcome their challenges in it. So, the aims of this study will cover two things, revealing what things make EFL vocational students find it difficult to master English speaking skills and also how they deal with these challenges. Hence, this research is expected to be a problem solver for students who have

difficulties in learning to speak English and also for teachers who still have difficulty in determining the right strategy in teaching speaking skills to students.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is qualitative research. Qualitative research involves using an interpretive and subjective approach to collecting and analyzing data, with a focus on comprehending human experiences and behaviors in their authentic environments (Cresswell, 2018). This research applied a descriptive case study research design. Stake (1995) as cited in Patnaik & Pandey (2019) defines case study research as the study of specificity in exploring and understanding a case with its various complexities in various activities. According to Burns (2003), descriptive case study aims to present an accurate representation of a situation in its natural state. The research conducted in one of the vocational high schools majoring in hospitality in Karawang involved five participants of tenth grade. To gather the data, preliminary survey using open-ended questionnaire was used and followed by in-depth interview which adapted by Price (1991) with the same participants. In analyzing the data, the researcher adapted the thematic data analysis from Braun & Clarke (2006) which consists of six stages including familiarize the data, generating initial codes, determine the theme, review the theme, defining and naming theme and making analysis report.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Challenges faced by EFL vocational students in learning English speaking skills

Based on the data that have been analysed, the researcher found that the challenges experienced by students came from several categories. Moreover, referring to Abrar et al. (2018), the researcher tries to classify the problems experienced by students based on four categories, namely psychological factors, language barriers, students' learning environment and practicing the language.

a. Psychological Factor

Based on research data, there are several problems experienced by students in learning English speaking skill based on students' psychology perspective. First, students feel they still lack of confidence when speaking English. This is supported by statements in the open-ended questionnaire which students fill out such as:

"The main problem is, I'm still lack of confidence..." (P4)

"The problem I faced when I was practicing was not being confident" (P5)

Furthermore, other problems that students often experience when they speaking

English based on the psychological factors of students is feeling nervous when speaking. This was expressed by the participants in their questionnaire such as:

"I feel nervous when I have to speak English..." (P5)

"I feel nervous, but I try my best to try to speak in English" (P4)

Apart from being nervous, lack of self-confidence is also caused by other factors that influence them when learning speaking skills, this factor is because participants feel afraid if they make mistakes while speaking. This is as confirmed in the statements of the participants in the questionnaire and interview, such as:

"... I feel less confident and afraid of being wrong when I'm speaking English"
(P3)

"... I'm afraid of wrong pronunciation" (P5)

"What I feel when I'm learning English is sometimes I'm afraid I'll pronounce it wrong and I'm afraid when translating a word (by my own knowledge) is wrong, it's different from its true meaning." (P1)

The last source of students' problems in learning speaking skills related to students' psychology is because of shyness. This was conveyed by P4 that he felt embarrassed if he had to speak a foreign language because of his lack of confidence.

"... sometimes I feel embarrassed to speak a foreign language..." (P4)

b. Language barrier

Next is the language barrier. Language barrier includes any problems students experience in learning speaking skills that come from the language being studied itself. Based on student statements in questionnaires and interviews, there are several problems stemming from this factor. The first is in terms of vocabulary mastery. As an important part of a sentence, vocabulary mastery is a basic thing that needs to be learned in language. However, in the context of mastering speaking skills, in fact students still feel there are obstacles in mastering this ability in terms of vocabulary. This is as expressed by P4 where he still finds it difficult to understand the meaning of a word or sentence.

"... And the last problem is that I sometimes find it difficult to translate every word and sentence." (P4)

Furthermore, there are problems experienced by students are related to language structure or grammar. The use of the appropriate language structure or grammar can affect the meaning of a sentence that is spoken. Based on the data obtained, the participants admitted that they encountered obstacles in speaking because of language grammar as experienced by P3.

"... and I'm afraid that I will expressing it wrong, because I don't understand grammar well" (P3)

In addition to being afraid of mispronouncing their sentences, other participants admitted that sometimes they were still confused about how to convey their ideas because of their limited command of language. This was expressed in the following statement

"... sometimes I also understand when the teacher is speaking English but I don't know how to answer..." (P2)

Finally, the barrier that students experience in learning speaking skills related to the language side is in the term of pronunciation. Pronunciation is the most common obstacle experienced by participants in learning this skill. This is because speaking ability is an oral ability that will definitely emphasize the pronunciation of the words. This is as expressed by several participants as follows

"... the second problem is the difficulty in pronunciation, as we know that English has some sentences that are quite difficult (to pronounce)" (P4).

"I'm not being used to pronouncing English, so when I'm in speaking process, I was stuttered" (P3)

c. Learning environment

The third influential factor in inhibiting the mastery of speaking skills came from the student's learning environment. This includes the parties involved in the learning process as well as the tools used in the teaching and learning process. In terms of this perspective, based on the data obtained, participants' learning partners are one of the factors that influence the mastery of speaking skills. This means the reaction and response from others and from the teacher during the learning process. Many of the participants admitted that they were afraid of the response from their environment such as classmates, interlocutors or even teachers if they made mistakes. Participants admitted that they were afraid that they would embarrass themselves in front of their friends if they made a mistake, as stated by P5.

"(Other people's judgment) has an effect, sometimes if for example if I'm teased by other people, I will become more embarrassed" (P5).

d. Practicing the language

The last category of challenges faced by students when learning speaking skills is in terms of language practice itself. This category contains various obstacles experienced by students during the practice of the target language regarding students' learning motivation towards the skills learned, direct practice with

interlocutors or other things.

Based on the data obtained, there are several factors that become student obstacles based on this category. The first is in terms of direct practice with interlocutors. Their inhibition in mastering their speaking skills can also be due to their lack of direct practice. This was revealed in interviews with participants regarding how often they practiced speaking and most answered that they were still lacking in terms of direct practice both in the school environment and outside of school activity.

"rarely practice, if in class maybe it's like a presentation. maybe the speaking practice is only once or twice a week" (P3)

Furthermore, one of the participants in the questionnaire admitted that the obstacles he experienced in trying to master speaking skills were due to her difficulty in finding partners with whom she could communicate in English.

"It's a little difficult for me to find friends or anyone who I can speak English with on a daily basis" (P2).

In addition, the obstacle came from the motivation to learn speaking skills from the students on their own. Some participants still do not have high motivation to master speaking skills. In interviews regarding efforts to improve speaking skills, some participants were still lacking in showing interest in improving speaking skills.

"not yet (want to improve speaking ability). maybe later in the next grade." (P4)
"rarely (practice speaking English). because I don't really want to speak English yet" (P5)

2. EFL vocational students strategy to deal with the challenges they encounter when learning English speaking skills

a. Psychological factor

As an important factor in successful learning, psychological factors play an important role in helping students reduce barriers in learning speaking skills. In this case, there are several ways that participants usually do in their teaching and learning process. According to the data, the first way that students reduce their challenges in learning speaking skill is by trying to increase their confidence as expressed by participant in their questionnaires.

"When facing obstacles in learning speaking skills, I try to be more confident" (P3)

Besides increasing their confidence, participants also used other strategies such as trying to accept criticism from others. Accepting criticism or feedback will also slowly improve the ability to learn something, because later students will learn from the

experiences they have gone through before, as described by P4 in his/her questionnaire.

"I will also accept criticism from various parties, because I think their criticism is my motivation to improve the quality of my English learning." (P4)

Moreover, the method used by participants in dealing with learning challenges in speaking skills related to student psychology is to fight negative thoughts that arise such as shyness. This is in accordance with what was conveyed by P5 in the questionnaire.

"I usually deal with it by fighting the shyness that arises..." (P5)

While the last strategy used by other participants in trying to reduce their challenges related to psychological factors is to try to improve their learning focus in the classroom by paying more attention to the teacher during teaching and learning activities or during practice, such as P3.

"(to deal with the obstacles I face) I try to focus more on learning in class..." (P3)

b. Language barrier

Furthermore, students' strategies are related to what they do to overcome challenges in terms of the language they learn. There are several things that participants usually do related to this problem, the first is by trying to improve their vocabulary mastery skills. Participants admitted that they tried to overcome their obstacles by trying to learn new vocabulary that they had not mastered and then looking for its meaning as P2 did.

"Every time I found a sentence that I don't understand, I write it down in a notebook and then translate it using a dictionary" (P2).

Furthermore, the next strategy is to combine several language skills in learning speaking skills. This is a method that is widely used by participants when learning. Because as we know that the skills of one and the other are interrelated. They use this way both in class and outside the classroom in daily life. For example, P4 in their questionnaires, learned to improve their mastery of English by reading to acquire new vocabulary.

"I cope by reading and listening to some English words and then learning the new vocabulary." (P4)

Besides reading skills, participants used listening skills in order to mastering the learning skill. As the counterpart of speaking ability, listening ability is one of the effective ways to reduce the challenges to learning speaking ability because they can learn from the examples they have heard. In her/his interview, P3 admitted that she

preferred to learn by hearing others speak and practicing it her/himself.

"For the practice itself, I improve it by learning from others and then practicing it myself" (P3).

As the main part of speaking skill, learning how to pronounce a word is certainly an important thing to do in learning speaking skill. This is also what the P4 in the questionnaire did.

"I try harder to learn English pronunciation" (P4)

Finally, based on the questionnaire data, the strategy that students usually do to reduce barriers in learning speaking skills is to try to speak using their own language. This was applied by P5.

"I usually try to speak in my own language to deal with the challenges" (P5)

c. Learning environment

The next strategy is seen from the student's environmental factors. There are several ways they usually use related to this factor. The first strategy is with the help of friends or teachers. In this case, participants admitted that having the right partner or good teacher can reduce their learning obstacles in the future. One of the participants, P3, in the questionnaire revealed that he/she wants to improving his/her speaking skills by finding an appropriate friends that has the same interest in learning English.

"To improve my speaking ability, I will probably find a friend who is in the same frequency as me where we both learn English and can be asked to communicate in English on a daily basis" (P3)

Meanwhile, in the interviews some participants revealed how the response of their learning environment affected their study. For example, when they were speaking, and they made a mistake in a word, the teacher or friend gave a positive response in the form of giving a more appropriate word.

"They response are justifying, if I'm wrong they correct the wrong word. so there is actually a positive response from outside." (P1)

Although technically this is not the strategy they use, according to the researcher, the response from outside the student will greatly affect the learning progress made by the student. As well as getting a good response from outside, the student's learning process will also have progress by considering every input he got before.

Meanwhile, another way to overcome obstacles in learning English speaking skills is to take English lessons. This is as stated by P2.

"I also intend to take English lessons later to improve my English skills" (P2)

d. Practicing the language

The last category in the strategies used by students is in terms of practicing the speaking skills of the language learned. In this category, the first thing expressed based on the data is to continue practicing this skill. This is as revealed by one of the participants in the questionnaire.

"I try to practice more to speak English all the time." (P3)

In addition to continuously practicing this skill, based on the interviews conducted, the problems experienced by some students stemmed from a lack of motivation in learning this skill, therefore, some students admitted that they wanted to try to increase their motivation to learn based on every feedback they received in this skill.

"In my opinion (other people's feedback) is really important, because it can be used as a reference spirit for me, so I can improve in the future what I should be like." (P2)

Another thing that is usually done by students in learning speaking skills is by utilizing existing technology. As learners in the modern era, participants utilized various other learning media beyond school learning such as videos as they expressed in their questionnaire.

"I download fondi games to get to know outsiders and usually they like to activate the mic so I can chat with them using daily English, and also I change the language on my cellphone to English, I also usually watch English movies / videos such as storytelling on YouTube and then every time I find a sentence that I don't understand I write it down in a notebook after that I translate it using a dictionary" (P2).

DISCUSSION

1. Challenges faced by EFL vocational students in learning English speaking skills

a. Psychological factor

According to Bishop & Snowling (2004) as cited in Riadil (2020b) Psychological disorders are problems that sometimes conflict with mental or physical health. This kind of disorder can have an adverse impact on students' speaking performance. Based on the results of the results presented earlier, from this category, the biggest challenge faced by students is that they still lack self-confidence (N=4). McIntyre, et al. (1998) in Arifin (2017) argued that self-confidence significantly contributes to a learner's willingness to communicate in a foreign language, so this factor will be crucial in the process of learning this skill.

b. Language barrier

According to Abrar et al. (2018) The language barrier is the highest wall that students must overcome in mastering speaking skills. The use of correct language structure is crucial for students' oral proficiency (Saunders & O'Brien (2006) as cited in Amoah & Yeboah (2021)). As the basis of speaking, the pronunciation of a word is the most common problem experienced by students from the language barrier category. A total of four participants admitted that they felt difficulties in pronunciation ranging from not knowing how to pronounce it to doubting how to pronounce certain words in this research.

c. Learning environment

As stated by Penny Tang (1997) in Riadil (2020b) that the challenges of being afraid of making mistakes and being criticized are problems that many students have experienced. In terms of the learning environment, the problem found in this study is the fear of judgment from others. For many students, they are still focused on what others will say if they try to speak. Based on research conducted by Riadil (2020a) related to this issue, students are afraid of speaking English because they are too focused on their grammar structure, vocabulary and pronunciation. They were worried that if they spoke English, other students would criticize their performance.

d. Practicing the language

As a skill that is applied to daily life, speaking ability will be influenced by how often students apply this skill in their lives. However, based on the results obtained, most of the participants admitted that the problem of this category is precisely because of their lack of practice both in class and outside the classroom (N=4). Alaraj (2017) in his research found that his participants still felt that the lack of language practice hindered their ability to master speaking skills. So that when they are asked to use English in conversation, what many of them use is still their mother tongue.

2. EFL vocational students' strategy to deal with the challenges they encounter when learning English speaking skills

a. Psychological factor

Based on the research findings, the main problem experienced by students in this category is the lack of self-confidence. Therefore, most of the students have their own strategies to increase their confidence such as not caring too much about their surroundings. Sihera (2009) in Arifin (2017) stated that to increase students' confidence there are several ways that can be done such as; teachers must be able to gain students' trust in order to form a positive mindset of students, establish routines that can be controlled by students, encourage positive reinforcement such as giving praise

to students' hard work, prevent perceptions of only 'right' or 'wrong' by educating them on how they can regulate their own behaviour with confidence in the environment, encourage students to be themselves, and express their own perspectives.

b. Language barrier

Furthermore, when based on the problems in terms of language, the majority of students applied strategies by combining several basic language skills (N=3). In fact, Bozorgian (2012) in Leong & Ahmadi (2017) has examined the relationship between one basic skill and another, namely between listening skills and speaking skills. Based on his research, the higher the score of listening skills, the better the mastery of speaking skills. This indicates how important the role of other skills is in the development of speaking skills. This strategy is also one part of students' strategies in improving speaking skills in terms of strengthening vocabulary mastery.

c. Learning environment

As an important part of the students' learning environment, supportive peers and teachers will make it easier for students in the learning process. In the category of students' learning environment, based on the findings presented in the previous section, their influence is in fact also an antidote to the challenges they face in the process of learning speaking skills. For example, the role of teachers was shared by participants in the study conducted by Ratnasari (2020) in which the participant admitted to reducing the problem by asking the teacher for feedback on language structure or grammar. Abrar et al. (2018) In his research, he found that students prefer to prepare themselves by practicing speaking on their own because it is more flexible and can be done whenever and wherever they are.

d. Practicing the language

Finally, in the practicing the language category, the utilization of technology is the most common strategy that students apply in an attempt to reduce the challenges they encounter when learning speaking skills (N=5). The use of technology here certainly involves various media application platforms that support speaking skills in video or audio. In addition to the use of media, the utilization of technology is also used to improve vocabulary skills, by using reading materials from online articles or other texts, students can find out the meaning of words that they did not know before by using online translation as done by participants in the research conducted by Abrar et al. (2018) and Ratnasari (2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the challenges that students encounter in the process of mastering speaking skills, almost all students admitted that lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes were the most challenges faced by many students, making these two obstacles the biggest challenges they faced while learning speaking skills and the most used strategies by students is the application of technology in learning to reduce the challenges of learning speaking skills. Finally, teachers and students must work together to reduce any obstacles that exist in the speaking classroom, in order to achieve learning goals.

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