ORAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY: OBSTACLES AND SOLUTION FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ON MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF SURAKARTA

Muamaroh

English Department, FKIP-UMS
Jalan A. Yani, Tromol Pos I, Pabelan, Surakarta
Email: muamarohmaftuhin@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The objectives of this study are to describe the obstacles in oral English proficiency and to describe the ways in overcoming the obstacles. The respondents were university students of English Department of Teacher Training and Education of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta Indonesia. The samples consist of 31 male students and 42 female students. The instruments used to collect were questionnaire, in depth interview and class observation. This study used qualitative descriptive analysis. The results showed that obstacles that came from cognitive factors were the lack of vocabularies, grammar mastery, and pronunciation problems. From affective factors were anxiety, fear, shame, and lack of confidence. The obstacles in speaking English came from the students' negative perception that speaking English was difficult, and the students' laziness, they rarely practiced speaking English and the environment was not conducive. The solutions to solve the problems in practicing speaking English, for male and female students were improving vocabularies regularly, practicing speaking English independently, listening Western songs, watching English movies, practicing speaking English with each other or foreigners, reading English novels, English newspapers or English magazines, taking English course, and writing diary. The findings contribute to an understanding of obstacles and solutions of male and female students in speaking English in Indonesian context.

Keywords: oral English proficiency, obstacle.

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penelitian ini untuk memaparkan hambatan-hambatan dalam menguasai kemahiran berbahasa Inggris secara lisan dan memaparkan cara-cara mengatasi permasalahan tersebut. Responden dalam penelitian ini adalah mahasiswa Jurusan Bahasa Inggris, Fakultas Keguruan dan Ilmu Pendidikan, Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta. Sampel terdiri dari 31 mahasiswa laki-laki dan 42 mahasiswa perempuan. Instrumen untuk mengumpulkan data berupa kueisoner, wawancara mendalam dan observasi kelas. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa hambatan-hambatan faktor kognisi berupa penguasaan kosakata, penguasaan gramatikal dan permasalahan pengucapan. Dari aspek afektif, hambatan-

hambatan berupa kecemasan, ketakutan, sifat malu dan kurang percaya diri. Hambatan berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris disebabkan persepsi negatif mahasiswa bahwa bahasa Inggris sulit dan kemalasan mahasiswa. Mereka jarang berlatih berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris dan lingkungan tak kondusif. Solusi atas permasalahan tersebut adalah mahasiswa laki-laki dan perempuan mengembangkan koasakata secara teratur, berlatih berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris secara bebas, mendengarkan lagu-lagu Barat, melihat film-film bahasa Inggris, berlatih dalam bahasa Inggris dengan orang lain dan orang asing, membaca novel, koran dan majalah bahasa Inggris, mengikuti kursus bahasa Inggris dan menulis buku harian dalam bahasa Inggris. Temuan-temuan tersebut dapat memberikan kontribusi terhadap pemahaman hambatan dan solusi mahasiswa laki-laki dan perempuan untuk berbicara dalam bahasa Inggris menurut konteks Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *tantangan, kemampuan bahasa Inggris lisan.*

1. Introduction

Speaking English is still a problem among Indonesian university students, although they had completed at least 6 years of English language studies before entering the university but they still got difficulties in speaking English. Some Indonesians are very poor in speaking English; it is because the goal of English teaching in secondary school in Indonesia is the acquisition of communicative competence with an emphasis on reading skill, and not speaking (Huda, 1999 in Fauziati 2002). English language competency is one of the basic competencies which should be acquired by a university graduate in order to enter international market and survive in the global competition (Riyandari, 2004). To do this speaking is, perhaps, the most important language skill a student should acquire when learning English (Rusdi, 2003). Many job vacancies in international as well as in national level required interview in English, therefore speaking English skill is very important for university students. Study by Sembiring (2003) found that Indonesian students have communicative problems in using their English.

Speaking English skill is very useful and important to interact in international level, since its function as international language. Students need to have communicative competence.

According to Harmer (2000: 14) communicative competence involves not just language competence (grammar, vocabulary, etc) but also knowledge of how language is used appropriately and how language is organized as discourse. Spoken language production, learning to talk in the foreign language, is often considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of language learning for the teacher to help the students with (Brown and Jule, 1983: 25). Listening and reading abilities develop much more quickly than speaking and writing and the ability to speak the second language fluently requires the longest period of growth (NCLRC, 2004). In language using situation, the speaker has to have interaction skill. This skill involves making decision about communication such as what to say, how to say it, and whether to develop it, in accordance with one's intentions, while maintaining the desired relations with others (Bygate, 1987: 6).

Speaking is as a complex and multilevel skills (Bygate, 2002; Madsen, 1983:147). Speakers need to use their knowledge of the language and activate their ability in the real constraints. British linguist J.R. Firth viewed Language as interactive and interpersonal; it is "a way of behaving and making others behave" (quoted by Berns, 1984a in Brown, 2007: 223). When someone attempts to achieve a

communicative purpose, he has to choose which of these language forms to use; there are a number of variables which govern our choice: setting, participants, gender, channel and topic (Harmer, 2001: 24). Firstly, language learners need to recognize that speaking involves three areas of knowledge (NCLRC, 2004). They are mechanics (pronunciation, grammar, and pronunciation): using the right words in the right order with the correct pronunciation. Secondly they have to know when clarity of message is essential (transaction/information exchange) and when precise understanding is not required (interaction/relationship building). Finally, they have to understand how to take into account who is speaking to whom, in what circumstances, about what, and for what reason.

Foreign language learning process involves both cognitive and affective factors. Success in speaking seems to be more strongly related to affect than success in writing skills (Mihaljevic' Djigunovic, 2006: 19). Personal and affective variables were related to speaking (Mizera, 2006) Affective factors impact on developing skill in foreign language learning (Imura, 2007). Affective factors are interrelated with second language learning (Ming, 2007). According to Bygate (1987: 14) in speaking context, speakers have less time to plan, organize and execute their message, they often exploring their phrasing and their meaning as they speak. There are four common features of spoken language: firstly, it is easier for speakers to improvise if they use less complex syntax. Secondly, speakers abbreviate the message and produce 'incomplete' sentences or clauses omitting unnecessary elements where possible which is called 'ellipses. Thirdly, it is easier for speakers to produce their message if they use fixed conventional phrases. Fourthly, it is inevitable that they will use devices to gain to speak.

In speaking English, students do not only study how to make sentences correctly but also they have to produce them and adapt them to the circumstances (Bygate, 1987:4). Second language acquisition learners need to practice what they have learnt to communicate in social interaction. Therefore spoken communication becomes important for them. According to Markus (2008) the reasons for the great value of spoken communication are as follows: (1) there is great support of spoken language by institution, whether in politics, business or in the private sphere(2) speaking can be pragmatically more precise than writing. Spoken language can be understood from expression of speaker. The types of interaction, such as the use of illocutionary potential of speech acts, personal involvement, irony, can be more flexibly expressed in speech than in writing.

Speaking capability needs to be practiced and it needs some preparations. Graham (1997: 69) stated that speaking as a production skill appears from the comments made by students to involve similar strategies to those employed in writing, including planning what to say, selecting what to say, perhaps by using formulaic phrases and a degree of translation. It is ideal that in speaking class, students get huge opportunities to practice among their friends and even with their teachers.

In general, most of Indonesian universities students still have difficulties in speaking English. The students do not have sufficient time to practice speaking English in the class. A study by Martani (1996) found that some of weaknesses of the English language curriculum in Indonesia were insufficient time for practicing speaking English in class, too much lecturing as teaching methods and teacher-oriented approach. Speaking is still problem among Indonesian students.

The gender perspective in this study focused on male and female students' beliefs and opinions about obstacles and solutions they have taken in overcoming their problems in speaking English. It is essential to know because language learning covers not only cognitive but also af-

fective aspects. Male and female students might have different point of view in facing the obstacles which inhibit them in speaking English. As a result they have different solutions in overcoming the problems they face.

2. Research Method

The participants of the study were students of English Department of Teacher Training and Education of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta (UMS), Central Java, Indonesia. Based on the results of midterm oral assessment, it was found that 31 male and 42 female students failed the speaking midterm test. They were considered to have obstacles in speaking, therefore these students were chosen as participants for this study.

The instruments to gather data used questionnaires, interview, and class observation. This study used semi open questionnaire which distributed to all students. Semi open questionnaires were chosen to get more data from participants. There were 10 questions. Each item had some options. They might choose more than one option for every item of the questions based on their own experience as well as their belief during class activities. Every question had options and space for the students to write their own opinions. The participants might choose more than one option. Participants felt free to write any reasons that made it difficult to speak English and solutions to overcome their problems in speaking English. All the answers from questionnaires then counted, percentage analysed quantitatively based on male and female students' answers. Semi structured interviews were used which held outside class time. To gather more detail data from participants, Indonesian was used during interview. Because of limited time available, only 20 participants got interviewed randomly among the whole participants. Class observation was used to monitor students' participation while they participated in class activities.

All the results from questionnaires were analysed quantitatively to draw final conclusions which present in table below. The results from interviews and class observation during class activities were described qualitatively using a thematic analysis focus on identifiable themes and patterns of living and/or behaviour (Aronson, 1994). The themes and patterns which consisted of the obstacles, causes and the ways to overcome the problems in speaking English taken by male and female students. To have clear description of the findings all data gathered from all instruments were grouped based on cognitive, affective, psychomotor domain and also external factor.

3. Findings and Discussion
3.1 The findings

This research is carried out to describe the obstacles in oral English proficiency and to describe the ways to overcome the obstacles in speaking English for university students. The findings are described below.

3.1.1 The obstacles in oral English proficiency

Based on the cognitive domain, the obstacles faced by male students were 77% lack of vocabulary, whereas female students were 67%. Language students need to learn the lexis of the language. They need to learn what words mean and how they are used (Harmer, 2000: 23). Vocabulary acquisition is a crucial, and in some senses, the central component in successful foreign language acquisition (Beglar and Hunt, 2005). Focusing learners' attention on the high-frequency words of the language gives a very good return for learning effort. The learners have to have the ability to combine with others words, the ability to help define other words, the ability to replace other words. Clearly the 2000 high-frequency words of English should receive attention first because without these it is not possible to use English in any normal way (Nation and Newton, 1997: 238-2009). The participants said:

4

When you speak or my friends speak English I understand, but I do not know what I have to speak, I am so confused (M.1). When the teacher or foreigner speaks I understand, but when she asks me to speak, I am confused my vocabularies are limited. My vocabularies are only in my head, I cannot use it to speak. (F.10)

There are about 32% of male students and 31 % of female students who lack of English grammar mastery. Grammar is still big problem among Indonesian students. Knowledge of grammar is essential for competent users of a language, it is clearly necessary for students (Harmer, 2000: 22).

I am afraid of speaking English because the English grammar is complicated, between present, past and future is different (M.10).

I always forget to change the verb when suddenly I change the story from present to past or the contrary (F15).

There are 23% of male students and 33% of female students who lack of English pronunciation mastery. With regard to pronunciation, words that are difficult to pronounce are usually difficult to learn (Rodgers, 1969; Ellis and Beaton, 1993 cited in Nation, 2006). The teacher should make sure that students can always be understood to say what they want to say. They will need good pronunciation for this, though they may not need to have perfect accents. The teaching of pronunciation gives students communicative efficiency. In order to develop communicative efficiency in pronunciation the students need to understand how sounds are made and how stress is used**.** (Harmer, 2000:22). The participant said:

English is difficult since between oral and written is different. I don't know

when 'g' is pronounced 'g' or 'j'. I am confused to pronounce "bargain and margin (M.12).

I am ashamed that my friend will laugh me if I pronounce wrong word; therefore I do not want to speak (F.30)

The findings from affective domain indicate that the factors which inhibited male students in speaking English were anxiety (55%), fear (16%), shame (16%), and lack of self confidence (6%), and for female students were anxiety (79%), fear (29%), shame (26%), and 7% lack of self confident. Spielberger (1983 see in Macintyre et al, 1998: 549) considers anything that increases state anxiety will reduce one's self-confidence and therefore one's willingness to communicate. Confidence allows students to develop what Jeffry and Peterson (1983 in Clark, 1989; 237) term "desire to communicate". Motivation affected self-confidence in L2 communication which led to willingness to communicate in a second language (Yashima, 2002;58). According to Krashen, there are three kinds of affective or attitudinal variables related to second language acquisition: motivation, self confidence, and anxiety. (Richards and Rodgers, 2007:183)

Really I want to speak, but I am so nervous and afraid that my friend will laugh at me. I am afraid my pronunciation is wrong (M.16).
When the teacher gives me homework to retell story, I prepare the night before, but when the class comes, I am so nervous and then I loss all my English words, I can't say anything to speak among friends (F.22).

With respect to the external factor, it was found that the environment was not conducive 23% for male and 12% for female students. The students' negative perception for male stu-

dents in speaking English was the first cause which made them passive. They felt that speaking English was very difficult (10%), difficult (84 %) and easy (6%). On the other hand, for female students, it was found that speaking English was very difficult (17%), difficult (81 %) and easy (2%). When the students have negative perception about studying English, they could not enjoy studying speaking. The negative thinking influenced students in joining all class activities. They had a bit burden in speaking English. They did not have motivation to join the class actively though it is a very important aspect of speaking. Lennon (1993: 41) cited in Graham (1997: 96) stated 'Motivation in learning a foreign language is the most important single factor influencing continuing development in oral proficiency'. A study by Adelaide Heyde (1979) cited in Brown (2007:155) about the effects of the three levels of self –esteem on performance of an oral production task, she found that all three levels of self esteem correlated positively with performance on the oral production measure, with the highest correlation occurring between task-esteem and performance on oral measures.

It was also found that the students rarely practiced speaking English and students' laziness inhibited them to speak English. 19% male students and 26% female students rarely practiced speaking English and 35% male and 7% female students were lazy to practice speaking English.

I want to speak English but I have no friends to speak English. In the class I am ashamed because my speaking is still bad (F.30).

3.1.2 Ways to Overcome the Obstacles in Speaking English.

It was found that 71% male and 67% female students improved vocabularies regularly by writing new words that they did not understand from their readings and wrote them in their own books and gave the meaning of difficult words. Vocabulary learning was an important part of language learning (Nation and Moir, 2002). 26% male and 45% female students practiced speaking individually. They did this because they did not have a partner to practice their English. By practicing speaking individually they can listen their own voice. It is the way to encourage themselves to speak English. 23% male and 17%, they used to listen English songs. Songs are useful for "freeing the speech muscles and evoking positive emotions (Freeman, 2000;78). Song provides students with a focused listening activity where they have an opportunity to use their knowledge in both grammar and phonology of English (Yoo, 2002). This activity could improve their listening skill and knew how to pronounce words correctly. 19% male and 17% female students watched English movie. CCTV helped English as a second language (ESL) students general comprehension, vocabulary acquisition and listening comprehension (Huang and Eskey, 2000). Multimedia, the computer based delivery of video, audio, written text, graphics and the integration of these media may prove to be useful tool for second language learning (Brett, 1995). 10% male and 12% female students practiced speaking with foreigners. This activity was to improve their bravery to speak. 6% male and 7% female students read English novels, 2% male and 1% female students took an English course, and 1% male and female students wrote diary in English. Based on the class observation, the participants of this study tended to avoid participating in practising English during class activities, when opportunities were offered to them. When they were offered to speak individually, they were so nervous. They were comfortable and tried to speak when they were in group.

3.2 Discussion

The obstacles faced by male and females students in speaking English are from cogni-

tive, affective and psychomotor as well as from external factors. From cognitive factors, students lack of English vocabularies, the problem of English grammar and English pronunciation; while affective factors are anxiety, fear, shame, lack of self confident and laziness. From psychomotor factor is that they rarely practice speaking English; while external factors involve the environment and students' perception in speaking English. The obstacles in speaking English can be best described in the following table 01.

Table 1.

No		Causes and obstacles	Male	Female
1	Cognitive	Lack of vocabularies	77%	67%
		grammar problems	32%	31%
		Pronunciation	23%	33%
2	Affective	Anxiety	55%	79%
		Fear	16%	29%
		Shame	16%	26%
		Lack of self confident	6%	7%
		Laziness	35%	7%
3	Psychomotor	Rarely practice speaking English	19%	26%
4	Extern	The environment was not conducive	23%	12%
		Students' perception that speaking English was difficult	84%	81%

There are some ways done by students in overcoming the problems in speaking English. Male and female students have different ways to overcome the problems. The solution can be described in table 02.

Table 2.

No	The solutions	Male	Female
1	improving vocabularies	71%	67%
2	Practicing speaking individually	26%	45%
3	Listening English songs	23%	17%
4	Watching English movies	19%	17%
5	Practicing speaking with others or foreigners	10%	12%
6	Reading novel or short stories	6%	7%
7	Taking English course	2%	1%
8	Writing diary	-	1%

4. Conclusion

With regards to cognitive factors, it showed that male and female students have got the most problems in mastering English vocabularies. Male students had higher percentage in this case. The next was pronunciation and the percentage of grammar mastery between male and female students were almost the same. With respect to affective factors, both male and females students state that anxiety was the most problem for them to speak English. Female students got higher percentage in affective factors than male students. As a result, they rarely practice speaking English if it was compared with male student.

The solution to the problems for both male and female students is to improve vocabularies. Learning words is hard work, and anything that makes it easier is an advantage for students (Meara, 2005). These findings were very valuable for the English teachers in deciding language strategies for male and female students in practising speaking English during class activities.

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