

**Difficulties in Speaking English among the First Year Students of
English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta**

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ABSTRACT: Difficulties in speaking English specifically for the first year students have become a problem that is sustainable. Seeing that phenomenon, this study aimed to see the difficulties in speaking English among the first year students of English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta. In this research there are two research questions namely ‘what are the difficulties faced by the first year students of English Department in speaking English?’ and ‘what factors cause the difficulties in speaking English among the first year students of English Department?’ This research adopted a qualitative approach that selected a place at EED UMY and selected three students batch 2016 as the participants of this study. The participants were chosen through recommendation from every lecturer that taught the course. Regarding the difficulties in speaking English, this study revealed four difficulties, difficulty in pronouncing English words, lack of vocabulary, lack of self-confident, and confusion of using grammar. Second, the factors that affected the difficulties in speaking English were lack of knowledge, lack of practicing, the attention of the audience, environment, accent or mother tongue, different writing or spelling, and the last lack of motivation.

Keywords: Speaking English, difficulties, factors, qualitative descriptive

Background of the Research

Speaking English is considered as an important language skill and fundamental to human communication. Many people around the world use English to communicate each other. Being able to speak English, people can interact with others without obstacles. In addition, people speak English to upgrade themselves to survive in the globalization era. According to Al-Sibai (2004), we a student live at a time where the ability to speak English fluently has become a must, especially those who want to advance in certain fields of human endeavor.

Although speaking is considered a main language skill that students should improve, this does not mean it is simple to master. Therefore, students need to be encouraged to master this skill. According to Zhang (2009), speaking remains the most difficult skill to master for the majority of English learners, and they are still incompetent in communicating orally in English.

Based on the researcher's experience, there are many difficulties that students of English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta face when speaking English. Student has own difficulties in speaking English, such as difficult to pronounce English words, fear of committing mistake, difficult to understand different in syntax, and confused in transferring language (from native language to English and vice versa). From the explanation above, the researcher is interested to know:

1. What are the difficulties faced by the first year students' of English Education Department of UMY in speaking English?
2. What factors causing the difficulties in speaking English among the first year students' of English Education Department of UMY?

Research Design

This study used qualitative as research method. It is to help the researcher to reach her aim for the study, which is to reveal the difficulties in speaking English among the first year students of English Department. “If the research objective is exploring the phenomenon under study, then it is recommended to use qualitative methods” (Khan, 2014, p.300). The researcher believes that this study will obtain deeper and more detailed understandings about a phenomenon, which are the difficulties in speaking English and the problems causes difficulties in speaking among first year students. Therefore, using qualitative is appropriate for this study.

Setting and Participants of the Study

The setting of this study was at English Education Department (EED) of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY) and the participants for this study were three first year students of EED UMY batch 2016.

Finding and Discussion

1. Difficulties in Speaking English among the First Year Students English Education Department of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta

After conducting interviews to the participants, the researcher found that they faced similar difficulties in speaking English in terms of pronouncing English words and vocabulary mastery. These following findings below are the difficulties in speaking by first year students at the EED of UMY.

Difficulties in pronouncing English words. The first finding was difficulties in pronouncing English words. The participants got difficulties in pronouncing English words during speaking English activities. It was shown from a statement of participant

three that “in speaking activities, the problem was in pronunciation” (P3.1). According to Hetrakul (1995), the problem which is often faced by the students in speaking is about pronunciation. They felt difficult to pronounce certain words. In English, pronunciation and spelling are different. For example, ‘o’ sometimes could be pronounced “a” like in “on” and “a” just like in “our”. Therefore, the students did not easily recognize the pronunciation.

Lack of vocabulary mastery. All of the participants that the researcher interviewed were lack of vocabulary mastery. Vocabulary is an essential part of speaking. Due to lack of vocabulary, students cannot express their ideas in sentences. It was proven by the statements of the participants. Participant three asserted that “sometimes I was nervous to speak because I lack vocabulary” (P3.6). Lack of vocabulary is one of the difficulties faced by all participants. Based on Shahzadi, et al. (2014), the students could not also express themselves well or adequately because they lack adequate and appropriate vocabulary. Although the students had slightly different experiences in speaking, they told that lack made them being scary.

Low self-confidence. One of the difficulties commonly faced by students was having low self-confidence. This could be seen from the participants’ statements. Participant one stated that “the difficulty in speaking was having confidence” (P1.1), and participant two asserted that “the difficulty in discussion is a lack of confidence” (P2.4). It proved that lack of confidence became one of the difficulties in speaking. Low self-confidence was a crucial factor that affected students’ difficulties because confidence could support students to reach their goals (Gruber, 2010). This also supported by Shahzadi, et al. (2014), the students feel fearful to speak English in front of other people

because they lack of confidence. Fear and worry are a part feeling that are similar. Being fearful refers to ‘frightened or worried about something’.

Difficulties in grammar use. This difficulty was faced by participant one and participant two. Both participants had difficulties in grammar use especially in direct or spontaneous time. Participant one stated “for example, when I forgot one of my speeches, I replaced with my own words that are not in line with the grammar. After that, I can be fluent again” (P1.9). It was added by participant one who stated “practically, I did not know whether my grammar was wrong or right” (P1.11). Moreover, it was followed by participant two who asserted that “speaking is spontaneous, and it makes me confused (in using grammar)” (P2.8). It was in line with Shatz and Wilkinson (2010) who stated that there are some of the common grammar problems faced by English language learners such as the misuse of preposition, articles, past tense, and the third person singular. Based on the difficulties in grammar use, both participants faced the same problem in use grammar, but the case they faced was different.

2. Factors Affecting Students’ Difficulties in Speaking English

From the data, the researcher found seven factors leading to the difficulties in speaking English faced by the first year students of the EED of UMY. The difficulties faced by students are explained in each factor. Here are the factors affecting students’ difficulties in speaking English.

Lack of vocabulary knowledge. Knowledge is an important aspect in study so that the students should enrich their knowledge. The knowledge that should be increased by students is in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Some of difficulties that happened because of a lack of knowledge were stated by participant one. He told

“the factor (lack of vocabulary) was because we lacked vocabulary knowledge” (P1.14). The lack of knowledge could also be caused by less reading, and it made students become less knowledge. It happened to participant two who explained factors affecting lack of vocabulary. “I am not reading enough” (P2.16). Based on the explanation, the students faced difficulties especially in vocabulary because they are lack of knowledge.

Lack of practice. Practice regularly could improve students’ skills. Practice was needed by students to increase their skills in learning activities such as speaking activities. Many difficulties were found due to lack of students of practice. The first was lack of vocabulary because the students lacked practice. Participant two stated that “the main reason (lack of vocabulary) was because of lack of practicing” (P2.14). The explanation above described that practice affected the vocabulary. If the students practice continuously, the vocabulary will improve. On the other hand, if the students lack practice to memorize, they will forget those words.

The second one was that lack of practice influenced the difficulties in using grammar. Participant one stated that “In my opinion, it was because of lack of practice. For example, I can still think about grammar directly when writing, but it was so hard to arrange grammar in my mind when speaking” (P1.16). Based on the explanation, the difficulties in speaking were affected by many factors. One of them was lack of practice that affected lack of vocabulary and using grammar.

The attention of audiences. Audiences are another influential factor in speaking. It was proven by participant two who stated “I became nervous when people in front of me paid attention to me” (P2.25). The audiences were not only the students but also the teacher. The teacher also became the factor affecting the difficulty in speaking as

participant two stated that “The lecturer assessed what we said in a question and answer session” (P2.27). Audiences became a factor affecting students’ self-confidence, and it was a kind of difficulties in speaking English faced by students.

Environment. Environment was a factor that affects individuals. Students also learned from environment because it also helped them to develop their skills. Participant one stated “I am not from an environment that habitually uses English as my language so that I cannot obtain vocabulary from the environment. If my environment used English as a language, I would certainly know a lot” (P1.15). It also happened to participant three that an environment in where he previously occupied did not use English. He told that “My base was not in English (environment) so that I only know few vocabularies” (P3.7). Thus, from the explanation of participant one and participant three, environment really takes an important role in enriching vocabulary that will lead to students’ confidence in speaking.

Accent and mother tongue. An accent is the way in which people in a particular area, country, or social group pronounce words. Mother tongue is the first language that you learn when you are an infant, rather than a language learned at school or as an adult. Sometimes an accent happens because of the mother tongue, which sometimes makes difficulties in speaking English. An accent is attached to each individual and it is usually difficult to change an accent on an individual. It was supported statement from participant three that “because I am Javanese, my accent affects my English accent (P3.8). Indirectly, participant three stated the most comfortable accent to use is the accent of mother tongue. Finally, when all or a number of learners share the same mother-tongue, they tend to use it because it is easier for them (Tuan & Mai, 2015).

Different spelling. The Indonesian language has different spelling of alphabet from the English language. It troubles the students in pronouncing. It was stated by participant two that “The Indonesian language is clear to be heard while the English language sometimes sounds unclear. In the Indonesian language, the spelling and pronunciation are the same, but English language is inconsistent. Sometimes “o” can be read as “a” while in Indonesian language “a” still pronounced as “a”, “baca” just read by “baca”. In English language the spelling and pronunciation are different” (P2.20). From the statement of participant two, the difference of spelling of words from pronunciation makes a difficulty in pronouncing. This difficulty was one of the difficulties in speaking English faced by students. Based on Goldsmith (1995) as cited in Pallawa (2013), each language is a structurally different system. In English language and Indonesia Language have different structural systems. It was proven based on explanation above explained that the spelling and the pronunciation were different.

Lack of motivation. Motivation is very influential for the students. Less motivation can affect them to be undesirable. It happened to participant one who stated “we were usually less confident because we lacked to force (motivate) ourselves. If we wanted to gain something, we have to force ourselves” (P1.12). It means that motivation is needed to gain something, such as having self-confidence. Less motivation will impact on the low self-confidence. Low self-confidence was known as a difficulty in speaking English faced by students. Talked about motivation, based on Lai (2011) motivation refers to reasons that underlie behavior that is characterized by willingness and volition. Motivation appeared from the student’s desire and influenced the thing that students did.

Student with lack of motivation mean that student did not interest, pleasure or enjoy made the student's confident were decrease.

Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is to see whether or not the research findings answer the research questions. This research tried to find out difficulties faced by the first year students' of the EED of UMY in speaking English and factors which cause the difficulties in speaking English among the first year students' of the EED of UMY. The data showed that many difficulties and factors caused in speaking English.

Based on discussion, factors and difficulties affected each other. Each factor can cause several difficulties, or a difficulty can be affected by a number of factors. The difficulty in pronouncing English words was affected by accent, mother tongue, and different spelling. The second one lack of vocabulary was affected by lack of vocabulary knowledge and practicing. The third, low self-confidence was affected by the attention of audience and lack of motivation. The last, the difficulty in grammar use was affected by lack of practicing. On the other hand, one factor also affected two difficulties that lack of practicing affected vocabulary mastery and the use of grammar. Moreover, the factors only affected one difficulty, such as; lack vocabulary of knowledge and environment affected lack of vocabulary, accent or mother tongue and different spelling affected the difficulty in pronouncing English word, and the last the attention of audience and lack of motivation affected low self-confidence.

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