

## SPEAKING PERFORMANCE AND PROBLEMS FACED BY ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENTS AT A UNIVERSITY IN SOUTH SUMATERA

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**Abstract:** The objectives of this study were to discover the students' speaking performance, speaking problems, and factors associated with the problems. The participants were the university students of an English education program in South Sumatera. To collect the data, speaking performance test, questionnaire, and open-ended questions were used. The findings showed that 42% of the participants did well and 58% did not perform well in the speaking test. The speaking problems were categorized as affected-related problems (self-confidence and anxiety), socially related problems (difficulties to find opportunities to learn English and comprehension in speaking class), and linguistically related problems (fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation). The factors causing the speaking problems are lack of general knowledge, lack of speaking practice, fear of mistake, lack of words usage and grammar practice, low motivation, low participation, reading laziness, shyness, less dictionary usage, nervousness, fear of criticism, and unfamiliar words pronunciation. The data were calculated using Chi-Square Association with p-value (603.508) which is greater than the critical value (70.003). Therefore, there is a significant association between the speaking problems and the factors causing the problems.

**Keywords:** *causes of problems; speaking performance; speaking problems*

### INTRODUCTION

There are four language skills that students learn in language education namely listening, speaking, writing, and reading. They must master the four skills in order to have good proficiency of the language. Among the four language skills, speaking usually becomes the most preferred language skill that is used to see whether someone has succeeded in learning a language or not. That is why most students make good speaking performance their ultimate goal in language learning (Richards & Rendaya, 2002, Rao, 2019). Moreover, it is also widely known that in almost any language settings,

speaking is the most frequently used language skill (Trialoka, V.S, Puspita, H., Sabarrudin, S., 2017. Abdl El Fattah, 2006). Furthermore, Rao (2018) argues that speaking serves a dominant role in a foreign or second language acquisition. Speaking is usually focused by teachers in order to promote students' good speaking skill as speaking is useful for developing people's networking, personality, and characters. Supriyadi (2005) adds that students will get social and professional advantages if they can use the language orally such as opportunities for students exchange, fast graduation,

scholarships, international employment, and further education.

Related to the importance of mastering English speaking skill, however, students tend to face many difficulties in speaking. Shen and Chiu (2019) in their study reported that difficulties in speaking English faced by students were psychological problems (e.g. nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence), linguistic problems (e.g. insufficient vocabulary, grammar, expressions, insufficient sentences organization, etc), and environmental problems (e.g. lack of learning context for English conversation).

Afshar & Asakereh (2016) explain that the major problems faced by the students in speaking English could be divided into affective-related problems, socially-related problems, and linguistically-related problems. The affective-related problems include attitude, self-confidence, motivation, anxiety, duration of the exposure to the language, classroom conditions, environment, family background, and students and teachers' competencies. The socially-related problems include comprehension to practice English outside the classroom, and comprehension in speaking class. The linguistically-related problems include vocabulary, fluency, grammar, and pronunciation. Students tend to have affective-related problems in speaking due to some reasons, for instance anxiety, low confidence, and nervousness. They will likely speak slowly and less fluently as they hope not to make mistakes. They are also shy to speak in the classroom and like to make frequent pauses while speaking. They always try to avoid speaking by answering the questions from their lecturers with a yes, or a no answer only. In socially-related problems, students usually have difficulties comprehending conversation when speaking outside of their classroom. The English speaking activities are always over as soon as they finish the class. They use mother tongue or local dialect to speak with their friends and family. In addition, students also face linguistic problems due to their personal reasons such as laziness to reading book and rare practice to speak at home.

Certainly, achieving fluency in oral communication is everyone's dream and motivation of most students in learning a language (Ihsan, 2016). It is not easy. Students are not only demanded to use grammar correctly, having good pronunciation and abundant vocabulary, but they

also have to know how to use the language appropriately. Alyan (2013) found that communication problems occur because students encounter a word they do not understand, a form of word they do not know how to use, or find that they are unable to express their intended meaning. Other problems that appear in student's speaking are lack of self-confidence and anxiety. They might be confronted with certain feelings that usually affect them when speaking English such as unconfident, shy, anxious, nervous, and worried. These for sure are big problems for the students. Lawtie (2004s) states that speech difficulties can be affected by a person's emotional state. Speech is often clearer when a person is feeling confident and relaxed, and this is one of the most important factors to consider when communicating with people who have speech problems.

The students who major in English at this study program are highly motivated to be able to speak English fluently and accurately. There are speaking courses the must take and English is the medium of communication that the teachers and students use. Thus, they are highly exposed to actual practice of speaking. However, there are no current studies at the study program on the speaking conditions of the students. Therefore, the objectives of this study were to discover the students' speaking performance, speaking problems, and factors associated with the problems.

## **METHOD**

This was a survey study. The participants of this study were the fifth semester students of an English education study program at a university in South Sumatera consisting of 67 students.

In order to get the data of the students' speaking performance, a speaking test was given. The SOLOM (Student Oral Language Observation Matrix) was used to score the test. This instrument was developed by California State Department of Education. There are 5 items to be assessed: Comprehension, Fluency, Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Grammar. This test has 1-5 scoring system with the maximum score is 25.

A questionnaire was also used to find the students problems in speaking. It was adapted from Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching 2016. The questionnaire consists of ten questions divided into three aspects: affective-related difficulties, socially-related difficulties, and

linguistically-related difficulties. It uses 5-Likert scale: Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). Open ended questions consisting of 18 structured questions were also used to find support the data from the questionnaire. The result of validity test showed that the level of difficulty of the speaking test was in moderate category, and for the level of the appropriateness, all topics were categorized appropriate. Furthermore, the results of reliability test showed that that the Pearson Product Moment p-value is 0.913. Therefore, the test was reliable because its reliability was higher than 0.70.

The speaking test was a 3 minute monologue test. The test was scored using SOLOM rubric (Student Oral Language Observation Matrix). The rubric had five indicators in speaking that needed to be analyzed. They were comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Every indicator was scored from one to five and calculated with the maximum score 25 and the minimum score is 4. The scores were converted to numeric score by multiplying the total score with 4 to make the maximum score 100. It is then categorized as excellent, good, fair, poor, and very poor. The data from the open ended questions were grouped and described. Chi-Square Association Test was used to find out whether or not there was a significant association between two variables.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *The results of the speaking test*

The results of the speaking test showed that there were 2 students out of 67 or 3% who got the score between 86 and 100. There were 26 students out of 67 or 39% who got the score between 71 and 85. There were 35 students out of 67 or 52% who got the score between 56 and 70. There were 4 students out of 67 students or 6% who got between 40 and 55.



Chart 1. *Speaking test results*

### *The results of the questionnaire*

The questionnaire was given to the 39 students who got the speaking score below 71. It has three categories namely affected-related difficulties, socially-related difficulties. For the first category, there were 29 students or 74% who agreed that they have problems in self-confidence and there were 26 students or 67%, who agreed that they have anxiety when speaking. In socially-related difficulties, there are two kinds of difficulties which are students' comprehension to find opportunities to learn English and students' comprehension in speaking class. There were 20 students or 51%, who agreed that they don't have comprehension to find opportunities to learn English, and there were 12 students or 31%, who agreed that they have no comprehension in their speaking class.

In linguistically-related difficulties, there were four difficulties namely vocabulary, fluency, grammar, and pronunciation. There were 23 students or 59% agreed that they do not have enough vocabulary, 31 students or 79%, who agreed that they are not fluent enough in speaking, 30 students or 77% who agreed that they do not have sufficient grammar knowledge, and 21 students or 54% who agreed that they have poor pronunciation. The result of the questionnaire is shown in the chart 2 below.

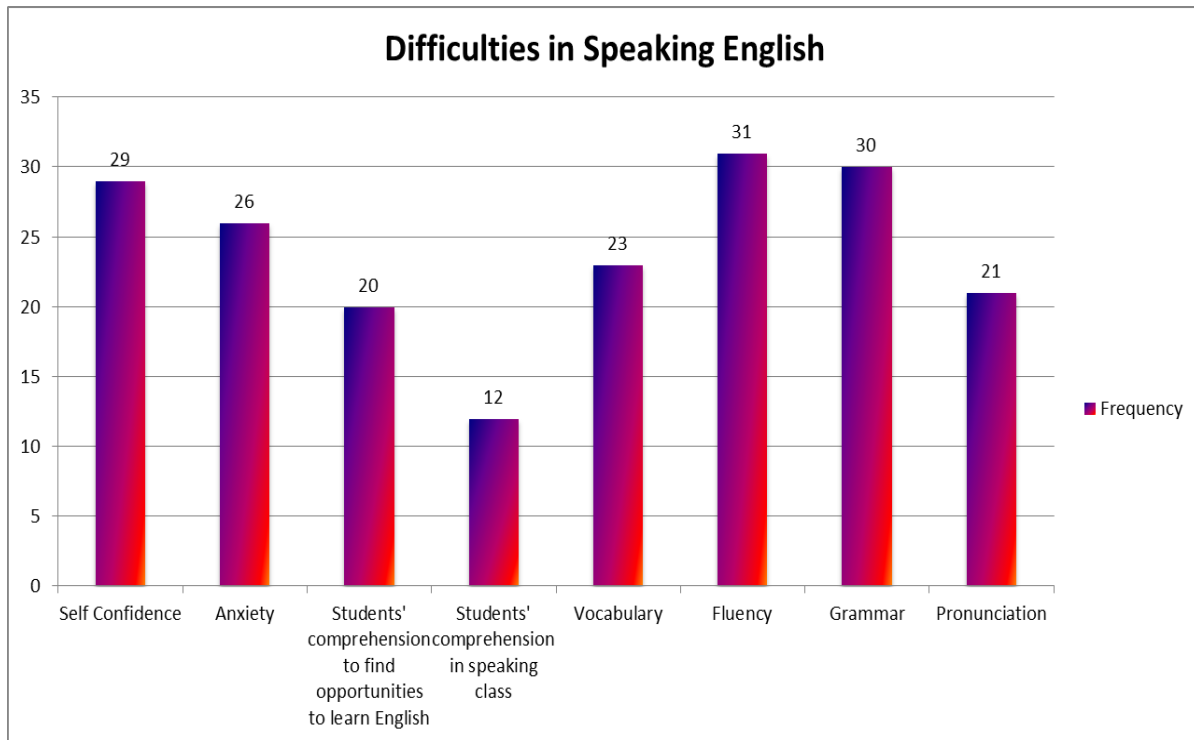


Chart 2. The questionnaire results

*The results of the open-ended questions*

The open ended questions consisted of 18 questions to find out the difficulties and the factors of difficulties. For example student number 15 was asked why the student was having no confidence in speaking, and the answer is “*Hm I think I feel ... nervous but my knowledge about the topic that influence my speaking not very well.*” from the answer of student number 15, it means the factors that make the difficulties in self-confidence are nervous and the lack of knowledge. However, the lack of knowledge is also the factor of poor in grammar as the answer of the question “*why do you think your grammar is poor?*” is “*and hmm my competence in grammar not really good.*” Therefore, one factor belongs to many of difficulties thus the responses are higher than the total number of the students. Furthermore, there are five additional factors of difficulties that were found from the open ended questions result, which are nervousness, hard courses, lack of general knowledge, less of dictionary usage, and reading laziness. There are 33 responses of shyness, 67 responses for fear of mistake, 24 responses for fear of criticism, 42 responses for lack of grammatical usage practice, 48 responses for lack of unfamiliar words pronunciation practice by seeing the dictionary, 60 responses for low participation, 67

responses for low motivation, 55 responses for lack of new words usage and memorization, 22 responses for lack of speaking practice, 32 responses for nervousness, 50 responses for the hard courses, 59 responses for lack of general knowledge, 32 responses for less of dictionary usage, and 41 responses for reading laziness.

Table 1. The open ended questions results of the association between difficulties and factors of difficulties in speaking

No	Factors	Freq.
1	Shyness	33
2	Fear of Mistake	67
3	Fear of Criticism	24
4	Low Participation	42
5	Low Motivation	48
6	Less of New Words Usage and Memorization	60
7	Lack of Speaking Practice	22
8	Lack of Grammatical Usage Pratices	55
9	Lack of Unfamiliar Words Pronunciation Practice by seeing the dictionary	22
10	Nervousness	32
11	Hard courses	50
12	Lack of General Knowledge	59
13	Less of Dictionary Usage	32

No	Factors	Freq.
14	Reading Laziness	41

In order to find out the significant association between the difficulties and the factors of

difficulties in speaking, the Chi-Square Association Test was done. The result of the Chi-Square Association Test is shown in the table 2 below.

No	C D	S	FoM	FoC	LP	LM	RMU NW	RPS	RPGU	RPPUW	N	TCH	LGK	ROD	LtR
		1	SC	20.762	2.0197	4.72494	2.66573	1.686	0.0186	1.0823	2.5029	0.75592	9.3247	3.47551	0.02083
2	A	0.2597	62.2412	17.1119	3.3143	0.12356	0.0646	7.2504	0.0131	1.0543	4.3098	4.258076	2.12705	3.90015	4.9971
3	SCO	2.0352	1.14761	1.48018	15.8607	5.51244	1.9707	8.7846	0.5713	0.09384	0.5338	3.0837	0.00183	1.97357	2.5286
4	SCS	0.4236	0.2328	3.34802	6.43647	1.63025	0.0474	0.0204	1.7579	1.39485	1.4407	0.1363	4.85619	4.46402	5.7195
5	V	5.185	3.02417	2.03611	0.3875	4.07222	40.636	1.9423	8.6417	3.45668	5.0279	0.438524	0.38429	19.7782	24.481
6	F	6.889	2.92818	0.47599	2.37898	0.03621	1.19	3.3982	2.8105	1.38366	0.4049	12.6539	4.06615	0.02414	3.7195
7	G	5.8634	5.40649	0.37485	0.03871	1.45994	10.661	0.5366	33.998	3.90896	5.6858	13.90879	1.10546	5.68576	8.1708
8	Pn	0.5399	2.19613	0.07665	0.01534	0.00383	2.7373	0.2582	5.5727	52.0453	0.476	5.066079	0.41116	29.3659	0.8201
<b>Total</b>		41.958	79.1963	29.6286	31.0977	14.5245	57.326	23.273	55.868	64.0935	27.204	43.02088	12.973	68.575	54.771
<b>p-value</b>		603.5085164													

Picture 1. Screenshot of the result of chi-square association test

Most of the students did not perform well in the speaking test which indicated that the speaking performance of the fifth semester students is still considered low. The results also showed that they still have problems in speaking. Nation and Newton (2009) stated that time pressure, planning, the quality of performance, and the amount of support may affect speaking performance. Baker and Westrup (2003) support it by saying that it is very difficult for learners when they are asked to tell things in a foreign language because they have little opinions about what to say. It means that when students are given a speaking test with limited time preparation for them to think about the topic, it will make them under pressured which cause their speaking performance low. However, that is not the only cause why the students not performed well in the speaking test. Some of the students in the open ended questions also said that they were not having confidence in speaking, have anxiety, lack of vocabulary, and grammar.

According to Mahripah (2014), EFL learners' speaking performance is affected by some linguistic components of language like phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and semantics, and according to Bashir, Azeem, and Dogar (2011) the speaking performance is pertinent to some personality constructs such as anxiety, inhibition, and also risk taking. Furthermore, extreme anxiety may lead to despondence

The most difficulty that is faced by the students is self-confidence and anxiety. Liu and Jackson (2014) reported that L2 speaking anxiety was a major factor that hindered students' willingness to communicate and led to their reticence in class. Their speaking anxiety was due to insufficient oral English communication practice, insufficient linguistic mastery for efficient idea expressions, and poor English proficiency.

Tanveer (2007) indicated that the act of the learners' feeling of stress and anxiety cause them to stop their language learning and performance

abilities. To solve this problem is by strengthening the emotional building between the lecturers and the students. This emotional bond will then comfort the students that they will not be alone while facing their difficulties. The lecturer plays an important role towards the students' emotional development (Harganauer, Hascher, and Volet, 2015). The anxiety aspect can be solved by motivating the students more as extrinsic motivation plays an important role towards the students' ability in speaking (Bekai and Harkouss, 2018). Students also tend to stop speaking English after they finish their class due to several reasons such as socio-cultural, peer pressure, cultural communication patterns, and so on (Shvidko, 2012). Most of the students also think that their speaking class is not supporting them enough to learn speaking as sometimes the lecturer does not give enough chance for students to speak up.

Another problems were linguistically-related difficulties such as fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. According to Al-Roud (2016), the linguistically-related difficulties are the most difficulties faced by the university students. Evans and Green (2007) also examined the language difficulties experienced by the students at a Hong Kong university. The results showed that the students' difficulties centered on the academic speaking such as grammar, fluency, and pronunciation. The students said that they are lack of basic knowledge and do not participate well in their classroom either. Tuan and Mai (2015) added that inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low participation, and mother-tongue use are the problems why students have difficulties in linguistic aspects.

The results of the open ended questions showed that there are five more factors causing the speaking problems. They are nervousness, difficult course, lack of general knowledge, rarely open dictionary, and laziness to read. Scrivener (2011) and Hosni (2014) stated that sometimes, students cannot show their full knowledge when speaking, since they might be afraid of being laughed at when making mistakes or sounding ridiculous. However, fear of making mistake is not only the factor causing the anxiety. The students also said that the factor causing the low self-confidence was because of the fear of making mistake. Logically, there must be association between the difficulties and the factors of difficulties as the factors contributed to

the existence of these difficulties (Hosni, 2014). Based on the Chi-Square Association Test that was done before, the p-value is (603.508), and the critical value of 91 df is (70.003). Therefore, as the p-value (603.508) is greater than the critical value (70.003), it means there is significant association between the difficulties in speaking and the factors of difficulties.

## **CONCLUSION**

To summarize, the major problems faced by the students in speaking English were divided into affective-related problems, socially-related problems, and linguistically-related problems. The affective-related problems include attitude, self-confidence, motivation, anxiety, duration of the exposure to the language, classroom conditions, environment, family background, and students and teachers' competencies. The socially-related problems include comprehension to practice English outside the classroom, and comprehension in speaking class. The linguistically-related problems include vocabulary, fluency, grammar, and pronunciation. Students tend to have affective-related problems in speaking due to some reasons, for instance anxiety, low confidence, and nervousness. The factors causing the speaking problems are lack of general knowledge, lack of speaking practice, fear of mistake, lack of words usage and grammar practice, low motivation, low participation, reading laziness, shyness, less dictionary usage, nervousness, fear of criticism, and unfamiliar words pronunciation. The data were calculated using Chi-Square Association with p-value (603.508) which is greater than the critical value (70.003). Therefore, there is a significant association between the speaking problems and the factors causing the problems.

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