

Students' Speaking Obstacles in the Fourth Semester of English Education Study Program

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine students' speaking obstacles and how they overcome them in the fourth semester of the English language study program. One lecturer and twenty students were taken as research subjects in the fourth semester. This study uses a descriptive qualitative method for collecting and analyzing data. This research is conducted by providing observations and interviews as an instrument. The results of the study show that several obstacles faced by students are divided into two factors, namely internal factors and external factors. In terms of internal factors, there are seven obstacles faced by students in learning to speak such as lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low participation, low self-confidence, and mother tongue use. External factors are divided into two categories: environment and lecturer's personality. Students enhance their speaking skills through various methods, including joining an English club or course, forming groups for practice or discussion, learning on social media, listening to English songs and podcasts, and watching movies.

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INTRODUCTION

English consists of four competencies that learners must master: speaking, reading, writing, and listening. Nunan (1995) in Leong and Ahmadi (2017:34) stated that "learning the speaking skill is the most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language, and success is measured based on the ability to perform a conversation in the language." Speaking contains sounds to convey meaning so that interactions can occur. It means that speaking is



an interactive communication process connecting ideas between speakers and interlocutors with a specific goal. Most English language students excel at writing, listening, and reading but struggle with speaking. Richard and Renandya (2002:204) said that foreign language learners find it particularly challenging to speak a language because reasonable oral communication demands appropriate language use in social situations. In addition to verbal communication, diverse interactions entail paralinguistic speech components, including pitch, stress, and intonation. Having good speaking skills is the primary purpose of most people who learn a language; they will remain silent without knowledge of the language. Speaking is a person's ability to express ideas and thoughts by using words that involve other people in conveying that information. Richards and Renandya (2002:201) stated that speaking is used for different purposes and requires different skills for each purpose. For example, in casual conversation, speaking is to interact with people, build relationships, or participate in the harmless chatter that occupies most of the time spent with friends. According to Tarigan (1990:3-4) in Amanda and Harpain (2017:2), speaking as a language skill is developed in childhood and generated through listening skills, at which point speaking skills are learned. Chaney & Burk (1998) in Saputra (2019:2) state that speaking is a process of constructing and sharing meaning through verbal and nonverbal symbols in various contexts.

The research aims to discover the students' speaking obstacles and how they overcome them. In teaching English, many problems students face become obstacles to developing language skills in the English language. According to Djamarah (2011:235) in Widyasworo (2019:534), "difficulties in learning is a condition in which students cannot study well due to some threat, obstacle, or disturbance of learning." Juhana (2012:101) said that some psychological factors students encounter when speaking are fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation.

Azizah (2016:10), in her research, found that the factors that make it difficult for students to speak English are:

- 1) Internal Factors: Factors that make it difficult for students to speak English include a limited vocabulary due to students' neglecting to read the school's provided dictionary and viewing learning new words as unnecessary. They need more motivation to learn new words outside their field of study. Students prefer to speak in their native language over English.
- 2) External Factors: Another factor that makes it difficult for students to speak English is the need for more opportunities to practice with teachers. The way the teacher teaches the students in the English class also makes it difficult for them to speak English because the teacher uses the Indonesian language in the English class. They only have two hours of weekly lessons, which is insufficient for students to learn and practice their English skills.

Based on Harmer (2007:348–352), some of the activities that can be done in the speaking class are as follows:



- a. Acting from a script. Students may be asked to act out scenes from plays or textbooks, and the results may be filmed. Students often act out their written dialogues.
 - 1) Play scripts: When students are working on a play or screenplay, it is essential to treat it as an actual performance. We must help them go through the scripts as if we were theater directors, pointing out the correct stress, intonation, and pacing.
 - 2) Acting out dialogues: When choosing who to come forward, be careful not to pick the shyest student first. We should strive to create an appropriate, supportive atmosphere in the classroom. Students should be given time to rehearse the dialogue before they are asked to act it out.
- b. Communication games. There are many communication games, all aimed at helping students become fluent as quickly as possible. Two special categories are:
 - 1) Information gap games. Many games rely on information gaps: Students need to talk to their partners to solve puzzles, draw pictures (explain and draw), put objects in them to determine the correct order (description and placement), or find similarities and differences in the photos.
 - 2) TV and radio games: As the examples below show, incorporating radio and TV games into the classroom is often a good practice for fluency. In twenty Questions' the chairman thinks of an object and tells the team that the object is either an animal, a plant, a mineral, or a combination of two or three.
- c. discussion. Discussions range from highly formal, whole-group staged events to informal small-group interactions.
 - 1) Buzz groups: these can be used for various discussions. For example, we suggest that students predict the content of the text they read or talk about their reactions to it after they have read it. Let's discuss what should be included in a news broadcast or talk about the right music for a wedding or party.
 - 2) Instant comment: Another way to train students to respond fluently and immediately is to insert "instant comment" mini-activities into lessons. This activity involves showing pictures or introducing topics at each lesson stage and asking students to say the first thing that comes to mind.
 - 3) Formal debates: students prepare arguments in favor of or against various propositions in formal debates. When the discussion starts, those who are appointed as "panel speakers" produce well-rehearsed "writing-like" arguments, whereas others, the audience, pitch in as the debate progresses with their own (less scripted) thoughts on the subject.
 - 4) Unplanned discussion: some discussions occur during class; they need to be prepared for by the teacher, but if encouraged, they can provide some of the most enjoyable and productive conversations in a language class. Their success will depend upon our ability to prompt and inspire and change our attitude toward errors and mistakes



- from one minute to the next. On the other hand, pre-planned discussions depend on how students approach each task for success.
- 5) Reaching a consensus: one of the best ways to stimulate discussion is to provide activities that force students to reach a decision or agreement, often due to choosing specific options.
 - d. Prepared talks. A popular type of activity is a "prepared talk," where a student presents on a topic of their choice. Such conversations are not intended to be informal, spontaneous conversations; because they are prepared, they are more "writing-like" than this. However, students should speak from notes rather than a script.
 - e. Questionnaires. Questionnaires are helpful because, by being pre-planned, they ensure that both the questioner and respondent have something to say to each other. Depending on how tightly they are designed, they can facilitate the natural use of certain repetitive language patterns and thus be situated in the middle of our communication continuum.
 - f. Simulation and role-play. Many students derive significant benefits from simulation and role-play. Students simulate a real-life encounter (a business meeting, an interview, or a conversation in an airplane cabin, a hotel foyer, a shop, or a cafeteria) just as they would in the real world. They can play the simulation as themselves or take on the role of a completely different character and express thoughts and feelings they do not necessarily share.

In previous research conducted by Makhsun (2020), the results show two factors involved in obstacles to learning to speak: internal and external. In terms of internal factors, the students face six obstacles in learning to speak: their mother tongue, lack of motivation, fear of mistakes, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence. External factors are divided into four categories: an unsupportive environment, limited learning time, too many students in one class, and different class behaviors. Therefore, two research questions are addressed. The first question is to determine the students' speaking obstacles. The second question is how they overcome speaking obstacles in the fourth semester of the English language education study program.

RESEARCH METHOD

The design of this research used the descriptive-qualitative method. Qualitative research is an approach to investigating and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups attach to social or human issues. The research process included emerging questions and procedures, data generally collected from the participant's environment, data analysis built inductively from details of common problems, and the researcher's interpretation of the meaning of the data (Creswell, 2018:41). The researcher took 20 students by using purposive sampling.

The collected data was obtained from the result of the observation and interview. Observation was done to obtain field notes for more detailed information about the teaching



and learning process. In the interview, the researcher prepared several questions and asked the students and the lecturer to answer them to get information about the students' obstacles when speaking English. The interview in this research aimed to determine students' barriers to speaking English in the fourth semester of the English study program.

Miles and Huberman (1994:10) state that qualitative data analysis consists of "three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification." Miles and Huberman (1994:10) state that qualitative data analysis consists of "*three concurrent flows of activity: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification*"

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Observation Results

First observation. During the teaching and learning, the lecturer greeted, asked about the student's condition, and checked attendance. The lecturer then explained the material prepared in a PowerPoint presentation. Afterward, the lecturer gave students several questions to answer and held discussions in class. They were asked to describe their inspiration and reasons for studying a foreign language. In this discussion, the researcher can see and analyze students' language skills based on their performance in class. Most students need a lot of time to answer questions given by the lecturer, and only a few can answer them immediately. They cannot respond directly because their vocabulary is limited, so they will use Google Translate to interpret their answers in English. Students are afraid and anxious when asked to express their opinions regarding learning; they are less enthusiastic about conveying something in English, so some are just silent when learning. Likewise, their pronunciation and grammar could have been better; they often mispronounced words and were unsure what to use, so when speaking, they could not use appropriate grammar or tense in their sentences. If they do not know what to say next, they will mix it with their mother tongue so that in class, students use Indonesian or their mother tongue more than English.

Second observation. The lecturer displayed videos, texts, and images, and then the students found out what information was there and explained it again. Students became more enthusiastic if they answered and guessed at the same time as their friends, but if they were pointed at by the lecturer one by one or came forward in front of the class to answer, they would be confused and shy, then say that they did not have the answer yet. Only a few who sat in the front chairs always participated and could directly provide answers. Students lacked vocabulary, so they always used their mother tongue. They overthought grammar and hesitated whenever they said a word because they were afraid to make a mistake.

2. Interview Results

a. The students' speaking obstacles in the fourth semester of the English language education study program

1) Internal Factors

a) Lack of Vocabulary and Grammar

The main problems experienced by students were vocabulary and grammar. Nearly all, or eighteen respondents, said vocabulary was their main obstacle in speaking English, and ten people also mentioned grammar as a problem they faced.

"I am weak in grammar, and I often forget the vocabulary I want to use, which is the main obstacle I feel." (respondent 6).

b) Speaking Anxiety and Fear of Making Mistakes

Fourteen respondents said speaking anxiety was their problem, and eight people said they were afraid of making mistakes in speaking English. When students were asked to stand in front of the class and try speaking in English, it was evident that they struggled with their anxiety about making errors. Students need to take the time to come in front of the class and are hesitant to attempt speaking in English because they are worried about making mistakes when explaining.

"Feeling anxious and afraid is what I have felt most often from semesters one to four. I still feel this because when I speak English in front of my friends, even though I'm already familiar with them, I still feel anxiety and fear, which is hard to get rid of, but the process must be done slowly. It's from fear of saying the wrong thing, fear of the wrong pronunciation, or something that hasn't even happened yet, but we have already thought about it because of the anxiety that makes us afraid to speak English." (respondent 9).

c) Low Participation and Low Self Confidence

Students have low motivation to express something in English because they always feel less confident and afraid when they make a mistake, so they observe and remain silent during the learning process. Thirteen respondents had low participation in class, and five people said they had problems with low self-confidence.

"I'm not the type of student who is always active in talking, asking questions, or making statements in class because of my lack of self-confidence, so I don't actively talk in class, but I just observe." (respondent 9).

"I'm not very active in talking, asking, or making statements because I'm afraid that when I speak or ask, I will make a mistake and make my friends laugh at me, so I prefer to remain silent." (respondent 15).

d) Mother Tongue Use

The researcher found that fourteen respondents said they used their mother tongue more often in teaching and learning. They rarely use English because of their limited vocabulary, so they mostly use their mother tongue or Indonesian.

"more Indonesian and a little English because of the lack of vocabulary in English"
(respondent 4).

"I rarely use English. The reason is that I lack confidence in my vocabulary, which I feel is still lacking, so I mostly use my mother tongue." (respondent 13).

2) External Factors

a) Environment

In the interview results, all respondents said the environment had an influence on their speaking, and thirteen people had an environment that did not support or help them improve their speaking skills, so they found it challenging to learn to speak because they did not have friends or people they could practice with.

"in my opinion, the environment plays a vital role in improving English, especially for speaking, where we directly interact in our daily lives, so if we are faced with an environment that uses more English, the process of improving or learning English will improve a little more, which is where the environment has an influence. Sometimes we feel lacking, but it also influences us because of the environment." (respondent 6)

"yes, because in an environment that uses a lot of English, I can practice with those who are already fluent in speaking, but in my environment, it is still very rare, and almost no one speaks fluent English. Even in the campus environment, we rarely practice speaking English together." (respondent 12)

b. Lecturer's Personality

The result of the interviews was that fourteen students said there were still lecturers whose way of teaching and delivery did not arouse students' enthusiasm for learning, so they felt bored and remained silent during the teaching and learning process.

"the lecturer's personality influences students' enthusiasm for learning because, from what I have experienced, there is a lecturer who has an exciting personality, not too relaxed, not too tense, just neutral, so we as students also enjoy studying with him, but there are also lecturers whose personalities are weak. The way they speak is also gentle, so we, as students, sometimes get sleepy easily, but we still try to listen to what the lecturer is explaining." (respondent 9)

"Some lecturers don't invite students to talk, making the class feel boring. However, others are fun and enthusiastic about learning. The personality of the lecturer significantly affects learning. Some lecturers who like teaching don't raise

enthusiasm, making the class feel boring. When they ask questions, students may feel unenthusiastic. Conversely, lecturers who encourage students to share ideas, share stories, and share experiences can increase confidence and enthusiasm when studying in class.” (respondent 17).

a. How the students overcome their speaking obstacles in the fourth semester of the English Language Education Study program

The results of observations and interviews with students showed that most students still have difficulties speaking English, so here are some solutions for overcoming the obstacles.

”to overcome this, I think it’s enough to study, or now there are also courses opening, like at GSI, ETC, where we can register. The learning is like on campus, but we catch it more quickly because many children register there from elementary, middle, and high school to college. To overcome is to learn, so we must be enthusiastic about learning.” (respondent 19).

Besides that, some students use social media, listen to music, and watch movie to improve their speaking skills.

”The strategy used is always to practice English, even if it is not with the person we are talking to. We can also use social media to practice speaking English, either online or offline.” (respondent 8).

”the strategy is to continue to practice using English songs; I write the lyrics and look for the meaning to add new vocabulary and practice how to pronounce the words.” (respondent 11).

”My strategy is to watch English-language films. I look for films that I like and watch them, then I make notes to write down the words I just heard to add to my vocabulary.” (respondent 12).

Discussion

The discussion is based on the presented findings covering the students' difficulties in speaking English and the solutions to overcome the challenges.

1. The students' speaking obstacles

The research findings show two significant points of students' speaking obstacles. They are from internal and external factors. From internal factors, students' speaking obstacles can be classified as lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low participation, low self-confidence, and mother tongue use. External factors include environment and lecturer behavior.

Students felt that lack of vocabulary was one of the most significant factors that impede them from speaking fluently. This problem is also mentioned by Richards and Renandya (2002) that vocabulary is a crucial aspect of language proficiency, influencing learners' speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. Results revealed students need time to say



something; they spend too much time thinking about good grammar when speaking because they are afraid of making grammatical mistakes, similar to the finding by Rahayu et al. (2020), who stated that students recognized that their fear of incorrect grammar made it difficult for them to converse in English. Students take too long to come forward because they want to make sure to make mistakes when explaining in front of the class. A study by Juhana (2012) also revealed similar findings where students explained that their fear of being laughed at was the reason behind their fear of making mistakes, and students stated that they were anxious when speaking and worried that what they said would be incorrect. Students do not want to talk because of low self-confidence; they fear being the center of attention because of their poor speaking skills, so they are unwilling to express anything in English. This statement is consistent with Juhana's (2012) findings that students saw a lack of confidence as a barrier to their ability to communicate in English class. Even in the classroom, students primarily use their mother tongue to talk with their lecturer and friends, so they are hampered when speaking because of their limited vocabulary, making it challenging to construct coherent sentences and pronounce words correctly. These findings are supported by Ur's (1996) statement that learners often struggle with speaking, with low or uneven participation and only one participant speaking at a time. Some dominate, while others struggle, and sharing the same mother tongue makes it easier because it feels unnatural to talk in a foreign language. The environment plays a vital role in influencing students' speaking, which can negatively or positively impact students. According to Gan (2012), as cited in Makhsun (2020), who said that one of the things that prevents students from learning and using speech is their surrounding environment. The lecturer's personality greatly influences students' enthusiasm for learning in class because if the lecturer's way of teaching is too severe, it makes students tense, and they don't enjoy the learning being delivered. Callahan (1966), as cited in Dost and Hafshejani (2017), stated that a teacher has an enviable teaching personality if their personality fosters and maintains a classroom or learning atmosphere where students are motivated to study and feel happy.

2. How the students overcome their speaking obstacles

The students had different solutions to overcome their speaking difficulties. The interview results show some ways to solve the difficulty in speaking English among the students. Students would watch Western movies, listen to English songs, and memorize the film's or song's vocabulary. When students watch a Western movie, they will make notes to write down the words in the film to learn them and add new vocabulary. Harmer (2001) highlights the benefits of using movies in teaching and learning, such as allowing students to see language-in-use through expressions, gestures, and other visual clues, enabling them to comprehend the general meaning of the language used. Students who listen to an English song will write lyrics, explore meanings to expand their vocabulary, and practice pronunciation. According to Brewster (2002), as cited in Nurvia (2016), songs can serve as a media



introduction to new languages, improving pronunciation, increasing motivation, and strengthening memories. Students will form groups to discuss; the purpose is to add new vocabulary by sharing their existing knowledge, and they will also use social media to overcome their difficulties. Another solution was for students to join an English club or course, especially speaking, because in the English club or course, students will talk only in English, which will train them in speaking. Overall, these strategies aim to enhance students' English language skills.

CONCLUSSION

Based on the research findings, the researcher found students' obstacles in speaking English and their strategies to overcome them.

1. The obstacles faced by students in the fourth semester of the English language education study program are divided into two factors, namely internal factors and external factors. In terms of internal factors, there are seven obstacles faced by students in learning to speak, such as lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, low participation, low self-confidence, and mother tongue use. External factors are divided into two categories: Environment and lecturer's personality.
2. The students in the fourth semester of the English language education study program had strategies to overcome their speaking obstacles in English speaking lessons. Students enhance their speaking skills through various methods, including joining an English club or course, forming groups for practice or discussion, learning on social media, listening to English songs and podcasts, and watching movies.

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