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A narrative inquiry: EFL student obstacles in speaking English

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ABSTRACT: During the last decades, experience has become a new object of research. Specifically in this study, experience was used to find out the factors that caused 3 EFL students to have difficulty speaking and how to overcome the difficulties faced by 3 EFL students. The population of this study was 3 Student of Nurul Jadid University.The purpose of this study are to determine the factors that hindered the students of English education and to know how students overcome the speaking obstacle.In order to conduct studies and understand individual life experiences, narrative research was chosen as the research design, which was considered appropriate for exploring experiences. The results of the analysis showed that the three students had difficulty in speaking It was found that the 3 students often experienced obstacles when speaking such as inhibition, lack of topical knowledge, low participation and mother tongue. Some of the activities carried out to overcome these obstacles are writing the main ideas that will be conveyed, practicing speech and intonation before speaking or getting used to speaking English with friends.

KEYWORDS: Speaking, EFL student, narrative inquiry

Introduction

English is used by millions of people all over the world. In Indonesia, English is considered as a foreign language that has been taught from elementary school up to the university. In education aspect, the students hopefully to be able to speak English fluently in order that they can compete in the technology development. Speaking is one of the important skills in language learning besides listening, writing and reading (Arung & Jumardin, 2016).

In the development of learning strategies, a research approach called "narrative inquiry" has also developed. This narrative approach aims to collect human experiences or stories (Clandinin, 2019). Especially in learning, this approach is used to find out student difficulties and things that make it easier for students to learn, in addition, this approach can also be used to explore the experience of a teacher in teaching (Clandinin et al., 2017). For example in learning a foreign language, a student has difficulty in pronouncing English words, a student has difficulty in writing with English spelling or a student can easily understand English text, and a student is fluent in speaking English. These phenomena can be investigated with a narrative approach to find out the things behind the student's condition personally. Specifically in this study, the researcher tried to dig deeper into some students about the strategies used in learning English speaking.

In learning English, especially speaking, students are expected to be able to speak well, both during the learning process and outside the learning process. However, speaking English for students majoring in English education at Nurul Jadid University is not without problems. In general, students majoring in English at Nurul Jadid University still have difficulties in

conveying their ideas or thoughts, this is because students are not used to using English in class, students also lack confidence because students are depressed by their pronunciation and accent, sometimes students also feel anxious fear of making mistakes when speaking English and being laughed at by friends.

To improve speaking skills, English language education students are required to be able to speak using English both in class and practice outside the classroom. However, today there are still many students of English Education at Nurul Jadid University who are not confident in speaking in English. Meanwhile, the output of graduates is that students must be able to use English.

Based on observations at Nurul Jadid University on 2 and 8 semester, the most striking thing that interested researchers was the ability of one of the students in the class, where each class had different abilities in speaking. This is what makes researchers interested in studying more about the experiences of these students in speaking English.

To provide further explanation about the condition of Nurul Jadid University students, especially in developing speaking, the researcher tried to elaborate and dig deeper into the data related to student experience which was the focus of the research to obtain data about the learning experience and development of these students' speaking. Thus, attention must be paid to teaching speaking learning to study the speaking learning strategies used by students who are selected by the researcher based on the conditions they arrange.

Definition of speaking

It is obvious that speaking is the key means of human communication. It enables people to express their feelings, opinions and to communicate with other people in the world. There are many experts defining “speaking” as follows:

The term speaking literally means talking to other individuals. It, in a broader context, is an interactive process in the oral mode to express thoughts, opinions, and ideas, which involves more than just articulating words through an oral cavity. According to Chaney and Burk (1998), speaking is “the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols, in a variety of contexts” (p.13). Brown (1994), and Burns and Joyce (1997) separately conclude that speaking is an interactive process between speakers and hearers, which involves producing, receiving, and processing information .

Problem in speaking

Students have their own difficulties in learning the language.Especially in learning a foreign language, improving speaking skills is not easy for students. The following are the problems of speaking skill

a. Inhibition

Inhibition is the first problem that students encounter in class. When they want to say something in the classroom they are sometimes inhibited. They are worried about making mistakes and fearful of criticism. They are ashamed of the other students’ attention towards themselves. Littlewood (2007) expressed that a language classroom can also create inhibitions and apprehension for the students.

b. lack of topical knowledge

The second problem is that learners complain that they cannot remember anything to say and they do not have any motivation to express themselves. This is supported by Rivers (1968) who thinks that learners often have nothing to say probably because their teachers had selected a topic that is not appropriate for them or they do have enough information about it. Baker and Westrup (2003) also supports the above idea and stated that it is very difficult for learners to answer when their teachers ask them to tell things in a foreign language because they have little opinions about what to say, which vocabulary to apply, or how to use grammar accurately.

c. Low participation

In a class with a large number of students, each student will have very little time for talking because just one student talks at a time and the other students try to hear him/her. In the speaking class, some learners dominate the whole class while others talk very little or never speak.

d. Mother-Tongue

The last problem related to the speaking ability is that when some learners share the same mother-tongue, they try to use it in the speaking class because it is very easy for them (Tuan & Mai, 2015). According to Harmer (1991), there are some reasons why learners use mother-tongue in their speaking classes. The first reason is that when teachers ask their learners to talk about a topic that they do not have enough knowledge, they will try to use their language. The second reason is that the application of mother-tongue is very natural for learners to use. If teachers do not urge their learners to talk in English, learners will automatically use their first language to explain something to their classmates. The final reason refers to the fact that if teachers regularly use their learners' mother language, their learners will feel comfortable to do so in their speaking class.

Brown (2007) stated in his book entitled "Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach To Language Pedagogy" that there are eight cases in which speaking is difficult, they are: clustering, redundancy, reduced form, performance variable, colloquial language, rate of delivery, stress, rhythm, and intonation, and the last is interaction.

Factors affect the speaking performance

Two main factors that affect the speaking performance of students in speaking activities, especially in English, are linguistic and non-linguistic. Linguistic factors include vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Meanwhile, nonlinguistic factors include self-confidence, anxiety, and mastery of the topic. Difficulties faced by students in speaking performance (Amrullah et al., 2021).

a) Linguistic factors

1) Grammar

Grammar was an element of language that presents the pattern of language. Thornbury (2006) explained that grammatical structure was crucial in language learning but it did not took up that grammar should be the starting point of learning. It means that grammar is not the only one of language component that need to be mastered by the students. In the development of communicative competence, students do not to be worry about grammatical mistakes that are made. Avoiding misconception of students, teachers need to encourage students to think of how language is used in communication without being isolated in the language structure. Additionally, Harmer (2006) points out that grammar is not only eventually focused on syntax but also how to put the language form in the way of communication.

2) Vocabulary

Students will be working with words to produce sentences. Cook (1996) highlights that vocabulary is amount of words that has meaning. Students need vocabulary to produce language (Darling-Hammond & Cook-Harvey, 2018). It is determining that vocabularies are supporting factors for language users both in receiving and producing language. Thornbury (2006) points out that gradually students are emphasized to activate new vocabulary and structures more freely and to integrate them into the language production.

3) Pronunciation

Pronunciation is the important part in oral communication to produce accurate information and meaningful communication Kelly (2000). Students with mispronounce a range of phonemes can be extremely difficult for the listener to interpret the speaker means. It is determining factors for language users both in receiving and producing language. It is essential for students to possess pronunciation ability as much as possible

to support them communicate using target language. Students' difficulty in pronouncing the words will affect their performance. They could not say something to other people when they afraid in mispronouncing the words.

b) Non linguistic factor

1) Self Confident

It is commonly understood that students' lack of confidence usually occurs when students realize that their conversation partners have not understood them, or when they do not understand other speakers. In this situation, they would rather keep silent while others do talking showing that the students are lack of confidence to communicate. In response to this, Tsui cited in Nunan (1999) points out that student who lack of confidence about themselves and their English necessarily suffer from communication apprehension. That shows that building students' confidence is an important part of teachers' focus of attention. This means that the teacher should also learn from both theories and practical experience on how to build the students' confidence.

2) Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of tension, apprehension and nervousness associated with the situation of learning a foreign language (Horwitz et al cited in Nascente, 2001). Furthermore, Nascente writes that, among other affective variables, anxiety stands out as one of the main blocking factors for effective language learning. In other words, anxiety influences students in learning language. Therefore, paying attention to this factor of learning should also be taken into consideration.

The fact that anxiety can affect students' learning is also shared by other researchers like Horwitz (1991) as cited in Sylvia and Tiono (2004). He believes that anxiety about speaking a certain language can affect students' performance. It can influence the quality of oral language production and make individuals appear less fluent than they really are. This explanation suggests that teachers should make an attempt to create a learning atmosphere which gives students more comfortable situations in their learning activity.

3) Lack of Topical Knowledge

The last factor is that learners complain that they cannot remember anything to say and they do not have any motivation to express themselves. This is supported by Rivers (1968) who thinks that learners often have nothing to say probably because their teachers had selected a topic that is not appropriate for them or they do have enough information about it. Baker and Westrup (2003) also supports the above idea and stated that it is very difficult for learners to answer when their teachers ask them to tell things in a foreign language because they have little opinions about what to say, which vocabulary to apply, or how to use grammar accurately.

Strategy to overcame the obstacle

There were some strategies that can be used by students to solve their speaking obstacle:

a. Students write out the outline of speech

According to Sellnow (2005), developing a speech outline using key word in a small paper can help the speaker speak extemporaneously. By writing an outline it can make students focus on the speech and they remember the topic by seeing the clue in the outline .

b. Students practice their speech

Practicing in front of the mirror is one of the best ways to reduce fear in public speaking (Kirst, 2017). Great public speakers, at the beginning of their careers, have tried it at least once in their life. They have said that if we can face ourselves while speaking, we can face thousands of other people. Because the fear we are having is within ourselves. So, the speakers can face their

self, they would not be afraid to face a lot of other people undeniably.

c. Self- awareness

According to Rozakis (1999) the speakers should learn a self- knowledge to know their communication styles, including strength and 14 weaknesses, and use that to increase anxiety. Always try to speak up in the class. Speaking up in the class with the teacher and learning from the pros helps a lot to build up confidence and evaluate ourselves. Always try to stand up and communicate with the teacher so students gain a solution to overcome the fear.

d. Use the pauses to release the stress

Pauses help the speakers do a better articulating because it forces the speaker to focus on breathing and relax (Moore, 2011). To be relaxed and patient and calm, the speaker counts the seats to keep the adrenaline flow go slower. Also, pausing frequently, while giving a speech will help the speaker relaxes and chooses the correct words, without sounding awkward. It can make the speaker focus and concentrate. So, the speaker can produce a good speech.

e. Student record their speech

According to Moore (2011) recording the speech can help speakers to know what their weaknesses are in managing time for the speech overtime . Whenever possible, the speaker can record the presentations and speeches. It can improve speaking skills dramatically by watching it later, and then working on improving in areas that did not go well.

Research methods

This research uses a qualitative research method, which is to describe a complete picture or situation as objectively as possible, according to the actual data and facts without any manipulation or other treatment. Qualitative research is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written/oral words from other people/observable behavior (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study uses a narrative inquiry approach where the researcher tries to find out the story or experience of the respondent in learning English vocabulary which will then be retold by the researcher with prisoners and an adjusted time sequence without changing the overall content of the respondent's experience.

In this study, researchers carried out research stages according to Cresswell to conduct narrative research (Creswell et al., 2007).The research steps are described as follows:

Step 1: Identify a phenomenon to explore

Step 2: Select one or more participants to study

Step 3: Collect student stories

Step 4: Retell or retell the individual's story

Step 5: Collaborate with participating storytellers

Step 6: Report findings about participants' experiences

Step 7: Validate the report’s accuracy.

Research findings and discussion

Some factor that hindered student in speaking

The told stories Within this section, Stories told in this section, I retell the stories shared by the participants about the participants' experiences of speaking English at Nurul Jadid University. Narratives from each participant - including their past experiences in learning English, and experiences of speaking in both classroom and university settings.

Vita story: some of the factors she experienced while speaking English

It started when he started attending a language program when he was in high school, which made it mandatory to speak English every day, so he began to confidently appear in front of many people using English.Then a year later he left the English program so he never spoke English again and then continued studying at the English education study program to develop the English language he had left a few years ago. *(Because it's been a long time since I haven't spoken English, usually I will feel afraid of making a wrong pronunciation, I have lost my*

confidence because I haven't spoken English in a long time).

Putri Story: some of the factors she experienced while speaking English

Putri does not have a good background in speaking English she only ever took tutoring in grades 3-6 elementary school after that she never attended English classes, she found it very difficult to speak English because when she was in middle school and high school English was only taught 1 twice a week but when he chose to enter the English education study program he was determined to learn English even though he experienced many factors that hindered him from speaking. *(sometimes I feel anxious when presenting in front of classmates, I'm afraid of being criticized by the lecturer and laughed at by classmates if I make a mistake so I choose to limit what I will convey).*

Wardah story: some of the factors she experienced while speaking English

Wardah has a pretty good ability in learning, but she doesn't have a good background in English because she never studied intensely or took English lessons so she experienced several factors that hindered her speaking, which she did, usually self-taught through social media, such as YouTube and articles. *(usually I am often confused about the things that I will convey because of the limited vocabulary that I know so that it takes up a lot of time to open a dictionary or google translate).*

Student strategy in overcoming the obstacle

Based on the finding result, it was shown that all respondents write out the outline of speech to improve the speaking skill. They write out the outline of speech to make students focus on the speech and they remember the topic by seeing the clue in the outline. And also all respondents practice their speech to improve the speaking skill. They prictice their speech either in front of the mirror or in front of the friend.

Conclusion

This study aims to determine the factors that hinder students in speaking. In addition, this study also explains how students overcome obstacles in speaking. Based on the research objectives, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. In this study it was found that the 3 students often experienced some factor that hinderedn them such as lack of self-confidence, feeling embarrassed, afraid of being laughed at by their friends and criticism from lecturers, sometimes students also did not have many opportunities to practice speaking because of the large number of students.
2. This study describes how students overcome these problems, among others by practicing what will be presented in front of the mirror or friends and practicing intonation pronunciation and writing important things that will be presented..

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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