PROCEEDING

International Conference on Learning and Education (ICLE)

Volume 1, 2022

icle
STKIP PGRI PACITAN

Kampus
Merdeka
INDONESIA JAYA

30th
Dies Natalis
STKIP PGRI

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LEARNING AND EDUCATION (1ST ICLE) STKIP PGRI PACITAN 2022

Theme:
"The Demand for Innovation and Connectivity in Education"

Host:
Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat
STKIP PGRI Pacitan

Published By:
Lembaga Penelitian dan Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat Press STKIP PGRI Pacitan
(LPPM Press STKIP PGRI Pacitan)
Jalan Cut Nyak Dien No 4A Ploso Pacitan

Editor: Afid Burhanuddin [et.al]
Volume 1, 2022

Proceedings can be accessed:
http://icle.stkippacitan.ac.id

PROCEEDING
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LEARNING AND EDUCATION
Volume 1, 2022

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FACTORS AFFECTING STUDENTS' SPEAKING FLUENCY

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the possible factors influencing the speaking fluency of the students in the English Education Study Program of STKIP PGRI Pacitan. This study also aimed to give some recommended suggestions for both students and lecturers in conducting a speaking class. The descriptive quantitative method was implemented in this research. The subjects of this study were students of the English Education Study Program of STKIP PGRI Pacitan, semester 7, 2021/2022 academic year. The data were gathered through an e-questionnaire and depth analysis of students' speaking recording tasks. In the step of data analysis, this study conducted an inductive analysis covering organizing the data by noticing students' speaking performance and arranging the description of questionnaires responses. The results for the research question displayed the students' five problems in speaking fluency, namely hesitation to speak, inappropriate pauses, nothing to say, limited expressions, and difficulty in replying to partners, which ranged from the biggest to the smallest one. More importantly, based on the results of data analysis, the factors leading to these problems were also revealed. The performance factor was recognized as the key one to most of the participants, followed by a lack of speaking practices. The group of affective factors, especially the fear of making mistakes, had certain effects on several students in their English speaking, followed by confidence. Then, a few numbers of them were affected by error correction factors that had certain effects on students' English speaking fluency.

Keywords: *speaking fluency, factors affecting, students of English Education Study Program, STKIP PGRI Pacitan.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Language skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Therefore, it can be understood that language learning focuses more on language performance than just having knowledge of the language, namely in the form of performance using language in certain contexts in accordance with the communicative function of language (Abidin et al, 2015).

In learning a second or foreign language, speaking is the most important aspect. This success can be measured through students' skills in conducting conversations and interacting verbally in the language (Nunan, 2000). Speaking is the act of using language orally. Humans, as social beings, always use language in communicating with each other in social life. So it can be concluded that speaking is part of language skills, therefore students are required and trained to have good speaking skills.

It is true in making good communication one must not only speak accurately but also fluently, in order to deliver the core of the meaning intended by the speaker. The accuracy of speaking can be used as the starting point, which can lead one to speak fluently. However, it must be noted down that the demand for fluency in speaking itself is a major problem for learners of foreign

languages. In other words, speaking fluently and confidently in a variety of situations is an important goal of any language learning.

However, for foreign language learners, fluency comes as a new problem to overcome. Currently, the students live at a time where the ability to speak English fluently has become necessary. Fluency in speaking is known as the natural ability to speak spontaneously, quickly, and comprehensibly with few numbers of errors that may distract the listener from the speaker's message, while accuracy is focusing on the elements of phonology, grammar, and discourse in spoken output.

These problems are also faced by undergraduate students when they have to conduct English-speaking activities. Some of them still experience difficulties especially related to their fluency. They still need a lot of assistance to be able to speak well. Thus, this research aims to describe students' fluency in speaking English and find out to what extent the factors affect the students' English speaking fluency so that the lecturer could develop suitable learning materials as well as the appropriate teaching methods for developing students' English speaking fluency in the classroom.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. English Speaking Skills

Language is a tool for communicating, including activities to express ideas, and to know other people's ideas as well. Communication occurs, where there is speech. Without speech, we cannot communicate with each other. Therefore, speaking skill is very important for any language learner. People use language in a variety of situations, such as at work. People should speak correctly and effectively in order to communicate well with one another. Speaking inappropriately results in misunderstandings and problems in communication.

There are several aspects that must be considered in carrying out good and effective oral communication. All of these aspects are important elements that support success in achieving communication goals. Based on expert explanations about speaking skills, researchers can describe the components of speaking in each theory as Hormailis (2003) states that there are four aspects below that have a major influence on speaking skills, namely, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and smoothness.

For foreign English learners, speaking is part of the language skills that must be mastered. Therefore, students are required and trained to have good speaking skills. However, increasing the confidence to speak to students as foreign language learners is quite difficult, so it takes time and certain strategies in teaching and guiding students. Lecturers need to create an atmosphere that allows students to practice directly using spoken language. Lecturers must also actively involve students in various activities such as telling, describing, informing, explaining, reviewing, designing, and a number of other oral activities.

2.2. Speaking Fluency

Speaking is the activity of reproducing words orally. This means that there is a process of exchanging ideas between the speaker and the listener. Therefore, it is important to have another component in speaking skills, namely fluency. Fluency is the skill to use language spontaneously and confidently and without pauses and doubts. Fluency plays a crucial role in achieving the purpose of communication in conversation (G. Shahini and F. Shahamirian, 2017).

Students learning a language are considered to be successful if they can communicate effectively by using the language they learn. Hadfiels (1996) said that speaking is a kind of bridge for learners between the classroom and the world outside. This means that practicing speaking fluency both in the classroom and outside of the classroom to get the real context, situation, and sensation in communicating the language being learned may build the quality of speaking. Having good speaking fluency makes someone's English performance much better and sounds smoother, more natural, and more impressive to listeners. It also provides more effective communication

due to the absence of speech disturbances. In line with what Koponen said in Luoma (2004) that fluency is about the flow, smoothness, the rhythm of speech, the length of utterances, the connection of ideas, the absence of long pauses and even the absence of disturbing signals of hesitation. Furthermore, Stockdale (2009) stated that fluency occurs when someone speaks a foreign language as a native speaker with the fewest pauses of silence, full pauses, self-correction, false starts, and hesitations. Thus, fluency becomes inevitably crucial to be developed while the students learn English speaking skills and fluency put more attention to meaningful communication development as noted in the fluency-oriented approach (Kumar, 2013)

2.3. Problems of Speaking Fluency

Generally, the problem dealing with fluency was faced when the learners speak to others, the students tried to make the hearers understand what they want to say. The students tended to hesitate and be fragmentary while speaking because they have problems retrieving the lexical items, encoding the grammatical form of their message, and correcting their own output. This condition makes the students speak hesitantly and fragmented, which means that the frequency of pause filler such as "well", "mm", "ee" and also the production of disfluency such as repetition, repair, restarts, and also prolongation will last during their talk activities.

Regarding speaking fluency meant obtaining the naturalness and the smoothness of the speech like the native speaker, but there are still many students who lack fluency in speaking. The fact is that while speaking, the student's speech is always filled with many long pauses, a lot of repetitions, errors, hesitations, and also nervousness. In terms of disfluency, Shipley and McAfee (2004) categorize two kinds of disfluency that can be the indicator to decide fluency levels; they are disfluency disorder and normal disfluency. Disfluency disorder is a kind of disfluency category that is mainly related to the weakness or problem of the speaker's physical condition related to speech production. The second category of disfluency is normal or typical disfluency. It is a kind of disfluency that is not related to somebody's physical condition. As the matter of fact, it is related to somebody's weakness in the mastery of a foreign language. The example of this is the disfluency found in English as a foreign language learner who does not have any physical problem related to speech production.

The habit of using their mother tongue when they could not find appropriate English words is the other term that affected students' speaking fluency. This phenomenon is defined as pause fillers that usually occurred when they tried to express complex ideas but they have limited vocabulary. The other term that affected speaking fluency is the high frequency of silent pauses produced by students. The more silent pause produced means as the more fragmented and hesitant the speech was delivered.

2.4. Factors Affecting Speaking Fluency

Several researches reveal some factors affecting the problems of fluency in speaking. Shahini (2017) stated in their article that there were nine factors affecting English speaking fluency, namely linguistic factors, psycholinguistics factors, age, sociolinguistic factors, bilingualism, individual differences or personality, developmental factors, the frequency of the input, and exposure.

Wang (2014) stated that various kinds of factors influencing speaking fluency are cognitive factors, linguistic factors, and affective factors.

a. Cognitive factors

The speaking process includes conceptualization, formulation, and articulation (Levelt, 2007). Conceptualization is concerned with the kinds of information selected to express meaning. Formulation refers to the ability of the speaker to choose the use of proper words with appropriate grammatical. Formulation deals with the speaker's ability to select proper words of grammatical structures. Articulation was speech articulatory organs articulated by the speaker. These three processes occur simultaneously, and because of that sometimes students make mistakes in face-to-face communication. Therefore, students speaking skills can be replaced by

"hesitations, false-starts, grammatical inaccuracies, and limited vocabulary (Hughes, 2002)." Briefly, fluency and accuracy of students' English speaking can be influenced. But the human mind can not focus on these three processes at once because they do have not enough capacity processors (Skehan & Foster, 1999).

b. Linguistic factors

A learner's oral proficiency has to use appropriate language forms (Saunders & O'Brien, 2006). Some components of linguistic factors including pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary are very important to consider by students. They also have to focus on the situation of conversation time. As supported by Harmer, (2002) speaking not only need the knowledge of how to produce the form of language but also when, why, and what way to result in the words.

c. Affective factors

Some kinds of affective factors related to native language learning are emotions, self-esteem, empathy, anxiety, attitude, and motivation. "Speaking a foreign language in public, especially in front of native speakers, is often anxiety-provoking. Sometimes, extreme anxiety occurs when English foreign language learners become tongue-tied or lost for words in an unexpected situation, which often leads to discouragement and a general sense of failure. Unlike children, adults are concerned with how they are judged by others.

d. Automation

A good environment might support students to speak actively, correctly and fluently. Nguyen (2015) pointed out that "fluency also derives from automation. If students are exposed to an English environment such as teachers speaking English all the time, English tapes, English books and newspapers for them to use, they can pick up the language naturally and unconsciously". Moreover, he stated that if teachers regularly put students under increased time pressure, students can definitely automatize to acquire fluency in their speaking. Derwing (2017) cited Schmidt's viewpoint, "oral fluency, interpreted here is as an automatic procedural skill on the part of the speaker".

3. METHOD

The qualitative approach was used in this research. This research was carried out on students in the seventh semester of the English Education Study Program STKIP PGRI Pacitan. In order to achieve the research purposes, this research was conducted in three steps involving collecting the data and data analysis, discussion, and conclusion. The data were gathered through an e-questionnaire from the students, recordings of students speaking tasks, and document analysis of students' speaking learning results. Google Forms were used as the platform for the e-questionnaire. The questions in the e-questionnaire were about some problems with students speaking fluency, the possible factors affecting students' speaking fluency, the performance condition of students' speaking class, their speaking environment, as well as their attitude toward learning speaking. In analyzing data, the researcher conducted an inductive analysis covering organizing the data by noticing the samples of students' speaking and arranging the description of observation, and questionnaires data.

4. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The results of the research are summarized as follows:

From the perspectives of the students, the result showed some problems in speaking fluency activities the students were facing.
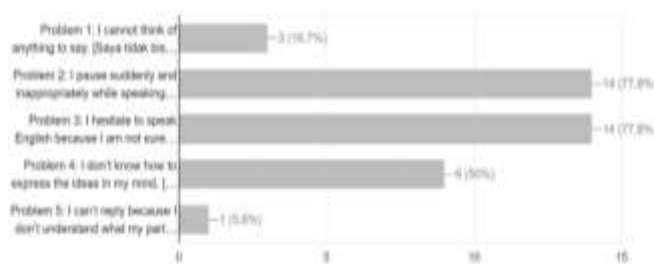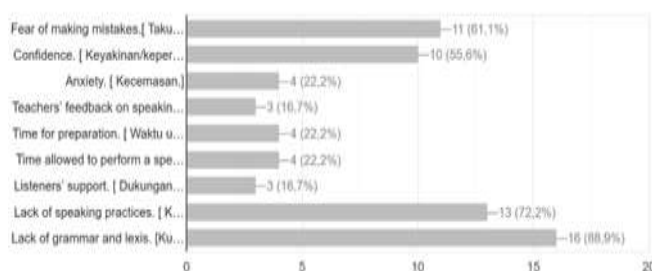
Figure 1. Students' problems in speaking fluency

It can be seen from Figure 1 that most of the students (77,8%) felt hesitant to speak English in their English classes and they pause suddenly and inappropriately while speaking English. They hesitated to speak English because they were not sure whether they used English appropriately or not. 50% of students stated that they could not express the ideas in their minds in English speaking lessons. Meanwhile, just a little under a half (16,7%) revealed that they could not think of anything to say, and only a small number of the students (5.6%) could not reply because they do not understand what their partners are saying in the conversation.

However, the results shown in Figure 1 lead the researcher to find the causes of the students' problems in speaking English. It is illustrated in figure 2.

Figure 2 Factors affecting students' English speaking

Performance

Dealing with the causes of their problems in speaking fluency, the result showed that more than half of students (61,1%) were still afraid of making mistakes, and 55,6% of them faced the problem of confidence, which resulted in their hesitation and inappropriate pauses when they speak in class. Nevertheless, the biggest percentage of the factors that affected the students' speaking fluency is a linguistic factor, especially lack of grammar and lexis (88,9%), followed by their lack of speaking practice (72,2%). Meanwhile, under half of the students (22,2%) revealed that anxiety, time for preparation, and time allowed to perform a speaking task are the next factors affecting their speaking fluency, and only a small number of students (16,7%) stated that teachers' feedback on speaking activity and listeners' support as the other factors affecting their speaking fluency performance.

The result showed that based on students' perception, linguistic factors namely lack of grammar and lexis as the key factor influencing students' performance in speaking fluency, it seems that students thought that to be good at speaking they should be good at grammar and vocabulary mastery. Baker and Westrup (2003) also support the results shown in Figure 2 and state that it is very difficult for learners to speak something fluently in English when they have few ideas about what to say, which vocabulary to apply, or how to use grammar accurately. Thinking too much and worrying about grammar and lexis in the speaking process can be a barrier to their fluency. This is related to the results shown in figure 1 that students felt hesitant to speak English in their English classes and they pause suddenly and inappropriately while speaking English.

The high percentage of the factor lack of speaking practice can be easily inferred to be the cause leading to the speaking problem the students suffered, namely they might pause inappropriately in their speaking sequences or chunks of language, Figure 1. It was also supported by the following diagram which showed that the students rarely join any English club or group outside the classroom.

Figure 3 Students' frequency in joining English club

Schmidt (1992) pointed out that if the speed process was repeated automatically by English learners daily, their fluency in speaking would achieve. Nguyen (2015) also stated that "fluency derives from automation". Zhang et al. (2004) claimed in their study that chances to speak English and the speaking environment were presented as the prominent factors influencing Chinese students' oral fluency. Therefore, if the students do not practice speaking English regularly, they definitely cannot speak fluently. The fact that students were currently in a limited English speaking environment outside the classroom might explain the students' difficulties in willingness to express their ideas in English without hesitation or inappropriate pauses

The affective factors, especially "fear of making mistakes", was found out as the main cause of making the students hesitate to produce language orally. In line with the finding, Yurong and Nan (2008) confirmed that affective factors determined the production of oral English in their study about the effects of affective factors on students' English oral fluency. In addition, Wu and Lin (2014) agreed that too much anxiety led to a low willingness to communicate. In the long run it would have bad effects on learners' achievement in a second language classroom.

The other factor that affected the students' fluency in speaking is the feedback on the students' errors during speaking class.
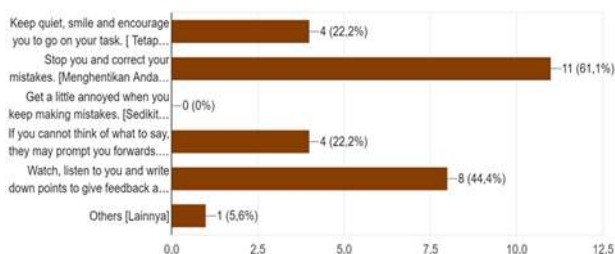

Figure 4 Lecturer's feedback on students' errors in speaking

Figure 4 showed that the lecturer stop directly and correct students' mistakes. On the other hand, sometimes, saved their noted comments and delivered them after the students' performance. It explained that this strategy of correcting mistakes could help to maintain students' speaking without disturbing their performance or even making them lose face.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Fluency in speaking English is an important goal for any English language learner. Accordingly, understanding the problems related to fluency and the factors causing these problems would contribute to assisting learners to reach this goal. The results for the research question displayed the students' five problems in oral fluency, namely hesitation to speak, inappropriate pauses, nothing to say, limited expressions, and difficulty in replying to partners, which ranged from the biggest to the smallest one. More importantly, based on the results of data analysis, the factors leading to these

problems were also revealed. The performance factors were recognized as the key ones by most of the participants. Then, it was followed by automation and the group of affective factors, especially the fear of making mistakes, a few numbers of them were affected by error correction factors that had certain effects on students' English speaking fluency.

Some recommendations could be made for both the lecturers and the students. For lecturers, they should first help their students overcome inhibition and hesitation by providing helpful and positive feedback when the students make mistakes so that the students are not fearful of making mistakes and the flow of the students' speaking is not destroyed. Secondly, it is necessary to create an English speaking environment in which the students have a habit of using English mostly inside and outside class.

For the students, practice speaking English as much as possible and actively participate in speaking activities in class regularly to overcome the fear of making mistakes as well as to increase their confidence in speaking. Students should also join speaking clubs to get more opportunities in speaking English to boost their speaking fluency.

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