

A PRELIMINARY STUDY: STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF EFL SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract

Speaking has emerged as a significant issue, particularly among the students at IKIP Siliwangi. Students who are enrolled in English education programs struggle to communicate effectively in the classroom using English. Therefore, the research investigates the students' perceptions of EFL speaking skills. The study utilizes a qualitative method with descriptive qualitative as the research design. The participants consist of 40 students enrolled at one of the universities in Bandung, west Java. The students are currently in their third semester, pursuing a major in the English education study program. Questionnaires, observations, and interviews were used to acquire the data. Questionnaires covered three parts: speaking method, media, and teacher's activities, while the interview was carried out with a total of nine students. Subsequently, the data were analyzed qualitatively. Based on the findings, three things are discussed: The first is that the students prefer interesting topics for presentation when they learn speaking subjects. Interesting topic of presentation can trigger their motivation to talk. The second is the students also like handouts as guidelines for speaking subjects. The last is the teacher, who is expected to be a facilitator and motivator in the classroom. Overall, the students expect that lecturers can help them by providing them with interesting topics and handouts to trigger them to talk about speaking subjects.

Keywords – *Students' Perception, EFL, Speaking*

Introduction

English is classified as an English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia; hence, it is only taught in a formal context, such as at schools and universities. Four essential skills should be learned, including speaking (Sadiku, 2015). The teaching of speaking skills holds significant relevance and should be incorporated throughout all educational levels, including the university. Experts in the field have examined speaking abilities. According to Kovalska & Kovalova (2021), speaking is a commonly employed approach in communicatively oriented

classrooms for students to enhance their language proficiency. In addition, Jatmiko (2017) says that speaking is an essential element of human existence, functioning as a method to express thoughts and emotions to others to achieve desired results. In other words, Speaking is a crucial skill and a tool for effectively communicating with others.

Speaking is used to interact with each other. According to Brown (2013), speaking as interaction suggests that speaking aims to maintain a social connection and communicate with two or more individuals. Speaking is a social tool for relationship building,

knowledge sharing, and communication (Fulcher, 2004, as cited in Oktavia & Lestari, 2022). Speaking skills are also beneficial for students during the educational process in the classroom as they help develop their confidence (Sari et al., 2021). Therefore, teachers should help the students have good speaking skills since it enhances students' ability to engage in meaningful conversation and connect with others in society.

Instructing students to acquire proficiency in a foreign language, especially speaking, involves facilitating the acquisition of distinct interactional and communication competencies. This is because speaking occurs synchronously, necessitating the development of specific skills (Meinawati et al., 2020). Thornbury (2005) also defines fluency in English as producing natural English with no pauses or hesitation. However, the students still face speaking problems, such as fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, etc. This aligns with Sadiku (2015), who states that speaking encompasses various aspects of language acquisition, including word pronunciation, word recognition, meaning comprehension, and adherence to grammar rules; it can be difficult for students to access all these processes proficiently. So, learning to speak can be

challenging for students because it involves many factors, namely internal and external factors.

Speaking has become a crucial problem, including for the students who take English education major at IKIP Siliwangi. There are three subjects: Speaking for a general communication course, which students learn in the first semester. Then, speaking in a professional context course is learned in the second semester. The last, speaking for academic purposes, is learned in the third semester. Students learn speaking subjects three semesters in a row, but they still face some challenges when speaking English in the classroom, even though they are in an English education study program. This aligns with Heriansyah (2012); at the university level, a limited number of students can effectively speak in English and respond to their lecturer's inquiries. The majority of individuals tend to remain silent. Students may also encounter many emotions that can influence their English speaking proficiency, including a lack of confidence, insecurity, unease, anxiousness, and concern (Fitriani et al., 2015). Those internal factors influence the way the students speak English in the classroom. Students also have different characteristics, and the teachers should know how to handle them. Nevertheless,

external factors such as the teacher's role, media, and method can affect students' speaking performances.

Teachers must determine the appropriate teaching methods, strategies, and media choices to achieve learning goals. According to Cole (2008), as cited in Purwaningsih et al. (2020), the teacher's responsibility is to devise and implement a proficient approach to cater to pupils' requirements to communicate in the target language, English. Strategy is used to help the students to achieve learning goals. Anjaniputra (2013) supports the idea that students exhibit positive receptiveness to the instructional methodology, which effectively enhances their oral communication skills. Consequently, speaking is subject to numerous influences, and students may hold positive or negative attitudes toward learning.

Understanding the students' perception of learning English can guide meeting their needs. Students' perception refers to the student's feelings and interpretation of learning, and perception is a crucial thing that the teacher has to know from students. It is supported by (Lindawati et al., 2022) that the investigation of students' perception in the learning process holds significant importance. Some experts

have already researched the student's perceptions (Andriani et al., 2019; Oktavia & Lestari, 2022; Uswatunisa & Anastasia, 2022). The concept of student perception in the context of learning pertains to the viewpoint or interpretation of students on a particular aspect that is relevant or applicable during the execution of an educational activity. Schacter (2022), as cited in Andriani et al. (2019), states that perception refers to the cognitive process of arranging, recognizing, and comprehending sensory data to represent and understand the given information or the surroundings. Therefore, it is very important to look into how students think about learning because it affects how they understand essential things during classroom activities. Need analysis is used to know the overview process and the information well.

This research would like to know the students' perception of EFL Speaking Skills at IKIP Siliwangi, West Java. This research is a preliminary study, and the result can guide further research.

Methodology

The research employs qualitative research with descriptive qualitative research as a research design. According

to Creswell (2015), qualitative research aims to investigate a topic and comprehensively comprehend a central phenomenon. The qualitative descriptive methods employed in this study aim to capture and depict the response and development of learning (Sadiku, 2015). This method is utilized to ascertain the participants' perception of teaching speaking. The research participants are 40 students from one of the universities in Bandung. The students are in the third semester, and their major is the English education study program. The students learn the last speaking course, speaking for academic purposes. At the end of the course, the students are expected to present in the academic setting. Therefore, the research focuses on

The data were obtained from questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The questionnaire was taken from Pepe (2016), as cited in Mutaat (2002). The questionnaire consists of three parts: speaking method, media, and teacher's speaking activities. Every part has five numbers of statement. For methods or activities, the students are asked about their prefer of subjects. The speaking media aspect has five statements, they are speaking one by one, group work, interesting topic when speaking, having discussion with interesting topic, and presentation on

interesting topic. In using media, there are four statements related to video presentation before speaking, simple handout, a topic before speaking, and a language laboratory. Then, the speaking activities aspect has four statements about the teacher who speaks English well, helps the students to speak well, doesn't criticize the students directly, and provides an interesting topic to speak. The questionnaire included a Likert scale comprising four response options: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and highly agree. The Likert scale was employed to assess the students' measurement of the teaching methodology, media usage, and the teacher's involvement in facilitating speaking skills.

The observation was taken from (Sadiku, 2015), focusing on the pedagogical activities and knowledge acquisition within the classroom setting. Observation was conducted to know the situation in the classroom. According to Fraenkel et al. (2012) and Creswell (2012) explain that an observer would do an observation to observe the class. The first researcher was the nonparticipant observer who observed the class without interacting. The observer recorded the interaction between the lecturer and the students. She wrote about what the teacher does and what the students do.

The observer conducted observation three times. Before conducting the observation, she asked permission from the lecturer. The result of her observation can add more information and support other instruments, such as questionnaires and interview.

The interview data was utilized to corroborate the findings obtained from the questionnaire and observation. A semi-structured interview was administered to obtain comprehensive qualitative data regarding students' attitudes towards speaking English. The interview was conducted with nine learners whose thoughts were also inquired about. The students were chosen based on their score rate among high, medium, and low score. It was conducted to get more information about the students' perception of speaking course subject. The interview was conducted after observation, and the researchers recorded and transcribed the interview.

Observation, questionnaire, and interview were analyzed using triangulation data to determine the similarities and differences between the data. The results of these three instruments will be presented in the findings and discussion parts, which will be discussed below.

Findings and Discussions

This part consists of two parts: findings and discussions.

Findings

The findings examine the students' perspective on the instructional strategy, the media used, and the teacher's position within the classroom. Here is a detailed explanation.

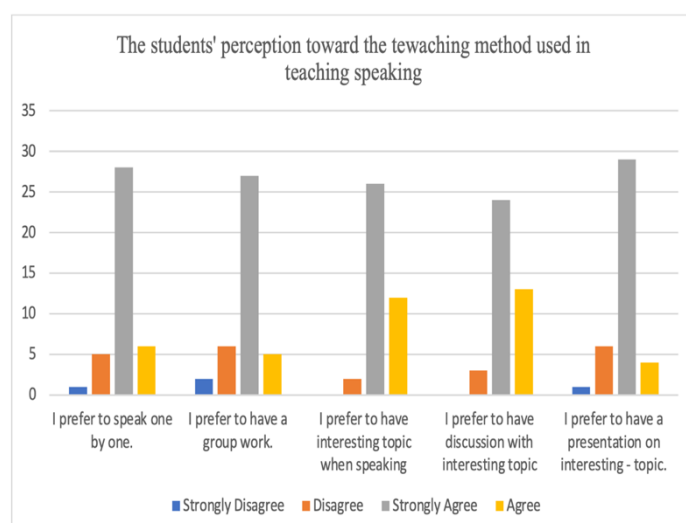


Figure 1: The student's perception of the teaching method

The data illustrates that students prefer engaging in discussions focused on presentations in interesting-topic, speaking one by one, group work, exciting topics, and group work. The result reveals that 72.5 % of students preferred a presentation on an exciting topic. 70 % of students agreed that they prefer to talk individually. It means that they want to have the opportunity to speak up in the classroom. Then, 67.5% of students answered that they prefer to

have group work. They want to have collaborative work in a group setting. 65 % of the students said they like to discuss an interesting topic. Students need to study engaging materials. 60 % of students preferred discussion on exciting topics. In sum, 72.5% of students agreed that they prefer a presentation on an exciting topic. It means that an interesting topic is the main factor for learning to speak.

Presentation on interesting topics can stimulate curiosity and encourage the students to learn. Interesting subjects can serve as a foundation for lecturers to employ presentation strategies in academic speaking. Providing an interesting presentation topic can help the students develop their skills. When lecturers are attempting to utilize effective communication strategies in academic speaking, fascinating topics serve as a solid foundation for them to do this. Education professionals have the ability to successfully grab and keep the attention of their students during the presentation by selecting topics that are both relevant and compelling.

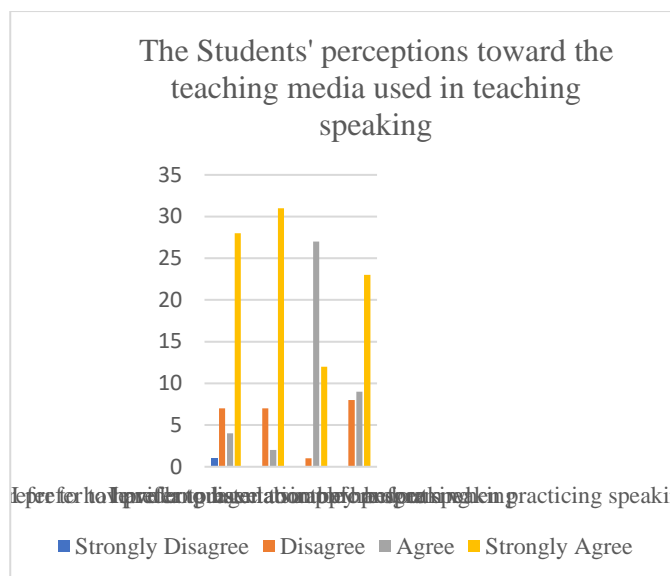


Figure 2: The student's perception of the teaching media

The figure shows that 70 % of students prefer video presentations during speaking activities. The students want to learn by using video. Then, 77.5% of students agree that they prefer simple handouts. The students explained in the interview that they do not have booklets or course books in speaking subjects.

Most students, precisely 67.5%, preferred listening to a topic before engaging in speaking activities. In other words, the students want to have an explanation at the beginning of the lesson, and then they speak. 57.5% of students said they prefer a language laboratory when speaking. The students need a video presentation before speaking, a topic, and a language laboratory for practicing speaking. To summarize, the majority of students prefer to have handouts in the

classroom. This result can be a reflection of the teacher to implement teaching media based on the students' preferences. Teachers will have complete materials from the beginning to the end.

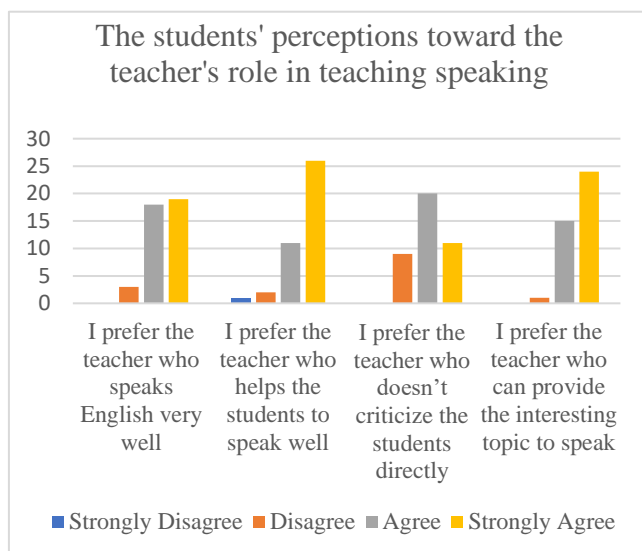


Figure 3: The student's perception of the teacher's role

The data shows that 47.5% of students strongly agree that they want teachers who can speak English well. 65 % of students responded strongly agree that the students prefer a teacher who helps the students to communicate well. 50 % of students answered they like that the teacher does not criticize the students directly. 60 % of students agreed that the students prefer the teacher to provide an interesting topic. It is integrated with the first part about exciting issues and becomes the key point in learning to speak. Therefore, it is possible to draw the conclusion that students would rather

choose teachers who are able to assist them in speaking English well as opposed to lecturers whose English is powerful.

Discussions

Based on the findings, there are three things are discussed, they are:

The first is an interesting topic. It can be shown from the questionnaire results that the students' highest answer is an interesting topic. Additionally, it validates the notion held by certain experts on the significance of selecting an interesting topic that allows students to engage in practice and exchange ideas (Ur, 2012, as cited in Mutaat, 2002). The students want to practice using interesting topics when they have presentations in the classroom. This is in line with the observation in classroom; the lecturer did not provide various topics. When the lecturer did not provide the interesting topic, the student's motivation and engagement would not be good. The students were not interested in learning and would not pay attention to the teaching and learning process in the classroom. In the absence of interesting topic, the class may become monotonous, and the students' motivation would be low. The disengagement led to the students' involvement in the classroom. Most of

the students were not active in the classroom, and they tended to be silent. They were not interested in the topic. So, previous factors can influence the students' perception when they were learning speaking subject. Besides, the result of the interview supports this. Here is the excerpt from the interview.

S1: I want to have an interesting English topic and conversation with each other, not just listen to one person talk. It would be nice if one class did it. Even though we were majoring in English, I rarely heard my friend speak English. This, in my opinion, prevents us from being fluent in language.

S5: *Topik yang menarik*, sometimes the topic is not interesting. The teacher should provide the student with an exciting topic and give the right example of speaking English for the student.

S9: *Materinya kurang suka, jadi kurang interaktif dikelas dan kebanyakan yang bicara hanya beberapa orang* (I don't like the material, so it is less interactive in class and mostly only a few people talk).

According to interview result, it can be said that the lecturer should provide interesting topic as trigger to increase the students' motivation to learn to speak in the classroom. Interesting topic can give

chance the students to speak, and it can develop the students critical thinking skill and exploring their creativity. An interesting topic can make a good atmosphere classroom, and can be a place of discovery when lecturers choose topics that interest students. As a result, the three instruments, which are questionnaires, interviews, and observations, demonstrate that fascinating topics are a very essential component based on the perceptions of the students.

The second is the handout. The questionnaire shows that the students prefer a handout in speaking subjects. The students need handout as a guideline in learning. Some experts mention that handout or course book is essential, and one of them is Chou. Chou (2010) asserts that teachers who use a course book may also experience greater ease in their teaching. The lecturer did not have a handout on this subject.

Based on the observation, the lecturer only gave a topic outline for each meeting, and the materials were taken randomly from the internet based on the syllabus of speaking subjects. The absence of a handout from the lecturer might pose considerable difficulties for students in comprehending the lecture and remembering important information. Handouts are vital

resources that provide students with guidance, presenting a well-organized framework and emphasising key concepts. Providing handout is needed for the students to review the materials and it will facilitate better learning outcome. It will facilitate a methodical review of the subject delivered, covering it comprehensively from beginning to end. This interview's result confirms this. Below is the excerpt from the interview.

S4: Because I am a visual, I am more enthusiastic to learn and quickly understand PPT or handout, too.

S6: *Tidak ada buku ajar yang digunakan di mata kuliah ini.* (No textbook is used in this course).

S7: *Ga ada handout, jadi ga ada pegangan pada mata kuliah ini. Materinya diberikan selembat setiap pertemuan* (There is no handout, so no guideline, The material is given a sheet at each meeting).

Based on the interview, the students need handout when they learn speaking for academic purposes subject. Handouts are essential for students to fully comprehend the content, despite the fact that it is already included in the syllabus. It is quite rare for students to check the syllabus every meeting. Having handouts facilitates an in-depth

review of the topic. Students who do not have handouts may experience feelings of disengagement and it can be unsupported in their educational endeavours.

Handout is a vital as complement to teach and assist students in efficiently grasping and remembering the subject. The three measures, namely questionnaires, interviews, and observations, indicate that delivering handouts is crucial for enhancing student learning.

The last is the teacher's role. The students prefer a teacher who facilitates effective communication among students. They desire the chance to express themselves verbally in the classroom. The teacher's role has become essential in enhancing students' abilities. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to speak up in the school. It is supported by Harmer (2001) that the teacher's role can be a facilitator and motivator for students, too. Having a big class can be challenging for students because of limited time. It can be seen from the observation, the lecturer taught 40 students with various speaking skill from low, medium, and high. Giving lecture was the most dominant strategy and only some students who involved in teaching and learning process in the

classroom. It means that lecturer has not fully implemented as facilitator and motivator. The result of the interview affirms this. Here are extracts from the interview teacher.

S2: The teacher has an essential role in the class to motivate students. The teacher should encourage students so they feel confident to speak English more.

S4: *Membantu siswa yang belum bisa berbicara Bahasa Inggris.* (Helping students who cannot speak English)

S7: *Diberikan kesempatan untuk mahasiswa yang belum bisa berbicara bahasa Inggris dikelas, dan banyak praktek latihan berbicara dikelas.* (There are opportunities for students who cannot speak English in class, and lots of speaking practice in class).

From the interview, it can be concluded that lecturer plays a vital role in supporting teaching and learning process in the classroom. The lecturer can trigger the students' motivation and the students have a good confidence when they speak in the classroom. He also facilitates opportunities for students to develop their own ability. Helping the students who are not really good in speaking by providing a various strategy for them, such as work in a pair, group, or media. It means that the lecturer can

create a supportive environment where the students can achieve their full potential ability. The three measurements, specifically questionnaires, interviews, and observations, demonstrate that the teacher's involvement is crucial in supporting the successful learning of students.

Conclusion

Based on the evidence, it may be inferred there are three factors related to students' perception of speaking English: interesting topic, handouts, and teacher's role. Firstly, students prefer interesting topics, and engaging classroom presentations. It means interesting topic can help the students to practice and speak English well. The students also choose presentation as media for lecturer to help and explain the students' interest.

Secondly, teachers lack various matters and lack of handouts in speaking. Offering fascinating topics and informative materials can effectively enhance students' oral proficiency in the classroom. The lack of a variety of resources and the failure to provide sufficient handouts are two of the most common issues that teachers confront in speaking classes. So, providing handout as supplementary

materials are needed to provide accessible information to students in learning speaking for academic purposes. In addition, teachers' duties play a crucial role in influencing students' speaking performance. Teachers have many important roles such as motivator, facilitator, assessor, etc. Teachers maximize students' ability to be braver in expressing their opinions. Teachers also can encourage the student's motivation in the class to make them more confident to talk.

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