STUDENTS' VOICE: EFL SPEAKING PROBLEMS ON ENGLISH DAY PROGRAM AT ONE SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN INDONESIA

Noprival[1]

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the problems of speaking English encountered by students on English day at one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia. The data were collected through demographic profiles and semi-structure in-depth interviews with senior high school students. The demographic data were analyzed descriptively while the interview data were transcribed and analyzed line by line to generate and develop codes and themes. Five salient themes that emerged in this research were (1) inadequate vocabulary knowledge, (1) grammar as a stumbling block, (3) fear of negative response from others, (4) low self-esteem to speak in English, and (5) feeling anxious to speak in English. Suggestions and implications are also discussed.

Key words: English day, speaking problems, Indonesian students

Introduction

Teaching-learning English in a multilingual country is a big challenge. Since the foreign language is learned by students after getting their local and national language. Moreover, the exposure of English is not common practice on daily basis. Correspondingly, Indonesia has many local languages in which each part of regions all over archipelago has different languages. Even though Indonesia is as a non-speaking country, the role of English is unavoidable to open global insight as well as used as a medium of international communication. By considering the importance of English, as acknowledged in educational curriculum of Indonesia, it has been one of compulsory subjects taught since junior high school; in point of fact many elementary schools implement it as a subject (depending upon school policy). Despite English is a mandatory school subject, in reality many senior high school students still cannot speak in English, whereas they have been learning English for many years. There are some possibilities of this point. Firstly, the time allocated is limited for this subject. Secondly, teaching English through Indonesian language is done by at some schools. Another important reason, it is not used as a medium of instruction for other subjects. That is why the degree of English use is not so frequently in education field. Based on the problems stated, one of senior high schools in Indonesia takes a real action to reinforce practicing English by implementing a language policy. The program is English day, which is a must of using English (speaking) as means of daily communication in certain day among students, teachers, and administrators. Unfortunately, although this program has been designed well to make students become familiar with English practice, but there are some students not taking part actively during this program.

For English language learners, speaking is one of the most important skills that they need to be developed (Tinjaca & Contreras, 2008) because it is the ability to interact with other people and involves wide range of skills (Hadfield & Hadfield, 2012). Also, Harmer (2007) gives his outlook concerning speaking, he declares that a good spoken communication is not only having the ability of language features knowledge, but also the ability to process information. On account of demand on both language features and social processing, not all students are able to practice the language orally.

The problems of speaking English has become has become the focus of several previous studies. (Liu, 2007; Tsiplakides &Keramida, 2009; Gan, 2012; Bilal, Tariq,Rasyid, Adnan & Abbas, 2013; Kalanzadeh, Mahnegar, Hassannejad, & Bakhtiarvand, 2013; Zhiping&Paramasivam, 2013; Al Hosni, 2014; Öztürk&Gürbüz, 2014; Mukminin, Sutarno, Arif, Noprival, & Maimunah, 2015). Even though the previous studies have addressed the problems of speaking English faced by students, but not much research specifically focusing on the problems of speaking on English day implemented by schools in Indonesia. This study is important because it is exploring the experiences of Indonesian students' problems in speaking English as well as an evaluation of English day program applied by one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia.

Methods

Design of the study

The purpose of this paper was to report some of findings from the qualitative interview data on the problems of speaking English encountered by students on English day at one senior high in Jambi, Indonesia.

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Marshall and Rossman (1999, p. 33) declared that the aim of doing a qualitative study was historically "to explore, explain, or describe the phenomenon of interest" and a case study is one of the five qualitative traditions (Cresswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Moreover, a qualitative case study was 'an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Yin 1984 in Nunan 2010). In this study, I used a qualitative case study tradition as the research strategy to help describing the sources of speaking difficulties.

Research site, access, sampling procedures, and participants

I conducted current research at one senior high school in Jambi province, Sumatra Island, Indonesia. To get access to research site, I personally approached the English teacher, then after fulfilling some procedures I obtained permission formally from the principal. In this study, a purposeful sampling with a convenience case strategy was used. According to Merriam (1998) purposive sampling emphasizes on a criterion-based selection of information rich cases from which a researcher can discover, understand, and gain more insight on crucial issues for the study. In conducting this research, I chose 5 participants. They were (pseudonyms) **M1** (The twelfth grade of natural science student), **M2** (The twelfth grade of natural science student), **M3** (the eleventh grade of social science student), **M4** (the eleventh grade of social science student) and **M5** (the eleventh grade of social science student). The names of people, places, and research site were concealed through the use of pseudonyms in order to protect the rights of participants.

Data collection and analysis

In this study, data were collected through demographic profiles and semi-structured interview guided by an interview protocol. As it was not easy to interview each participant due to his or her reluctance or limited time. Each interview lasted between 20 and 30 minutes. Whereas, the language used during the interview was Indonesian language.

For the analysis of the data, the demographic data were analyzed descriptively in which every participant's information was described. Then, the interview data were transcribed and analyzed line by line to generate and develop codes, themes, or categories from all participants. The next step, I translated the data into English. In this article, I just presented the English version.

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the problems of speaking English faced by students on English day at one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia. I organized analysis and discussion around participants' voices, feelings, and thoughts on related to topic discussed. An analysis of the interview data revealed that five major themes were concerning students' problems in speaking English, including (1) inadequate vocabulary knowledge, (2) grammar as a stumbling block, (3) fear of negative response from others, (4) low self-esteem to speak in English, and (5) feeling anxious to speak in English (Table 1).

Table 1. Themes of the problems of speaking English faced by students

No	Themes
1	Inadequate vocabulary knowledge
2	Grammar as a stumbling block
3	Fear of negative response from others
4	Low self-esteem to speak in English
5	Feeling anxious to speak in English

Inadequate vocabulary knowledge

To communicate a language, it definitely needs a number of vocabularies as medium to transfer a message to recipient. Similarly, in spoken English communication, vocabulary is the main key to get involved in the conversation. In this study, the participants reported that the participants had a low speaking ability. It was due to lack vocabulary. For example,

> I have lack of vocabulary. (M2)
>
> [I am] absolutely poor in vocabulary, because if we are still lack of vocabulary, it is difficult to engage in the conversation. (M3)
>
> I think, vocabulary is a major issue. (M4)

The data indicated that vocabulary was one of barrier faced by the participants in speaking English on English day. Even, one of participants admitted that vocabulary was a major problem. By realizing the weakness on vocabulary knowledge, it made them silent during the program.

Grammar as a stumbling block

The main purpose of spoken communication is to transfer either thought or information among those who engage in

the conversation. Grammar is one of language elements in practicing communicative skill. In this study, the participants admitted that they had difficulty in speaking English on English day by reason of lack of grammar knowledge. The following statements proved the finding,

> We do not know about the tenses and part of them as well, sir. (M2)
>
> Because there are so many words and yeah….also grammar used in speaking. (M4)
>
> I do not understand English well, exactly grammar**.** (M5)

The examples of excerpts above showed that grammar was a stumbling block of practicing English on English Day. Grammar seemed to make participants too cautious before speaking. In other words, too much focus on using appropriate grammar (accuracy) in speaking makes students inactive to speak in English. Basically, as far as turn-taking run and understand each others, it is acceptable in the oral communication, including on English day.

Fear of negative response from others

The students' perception toward the implementation of English day would reflect how the program runs. The positive response will support the English day atmosphere. It make students encouraged to practice English, conversely the negative response will make students demotivated to take part actively on English Day. The following source of speaking problem encountered by participants was fear of negative responses from other students. They reported,

> English day is beyond our expectation. So if I speak English here, my friend…how to say it…..like mocking. (M1)
>
> [I speak] Indonesian language too. As….. I stated before sir. Many friends of mine mocked me when I make mistake. Absolutely being shy to be teased sir. Probably I am no longer enthusiastic to speak in English. (M2)
>
> Sometimes we start to speak English. If I make mistake even only one word, it would be teased or mocked. (M5)

The data indicated that negative response from others could lose participants' motivation to practice English on English day. The participants acknowledged that they were fear once their mistake was noticed. If it happened, the others would tease and mock by others, consequently the participants were shy. This reason resulted that practicing English on English day was frightening.

Low self-esteem to speak in English

The courageousness to convey what language has been learned is essentially needed for foreign language learner. In the same way, English language learner needs to practice English confidently, to foster the language proficiency itself. However, what I have found in this study, the participants had low self-esteem to speak in English. As stated in the following statements,

> My friends also speak Indonesian. The students who usually speak English only certain people. Yeah…the smart ones. (M2)
>
> Being afraid of making mistake. That is why I have low self-esteem. (M3)
>
> I am shy because my English is not too good. (M4)
>
> In my mind, English make me dazed when I practice it. My friends insult me arrogant [as well]. (M5)

The data indicated that low confidence made participants unwilling to speak in English on English day. In particular, the problems were in the forms of being dazed, shy, and afraid to speak in English. Also, the participants felt inferior to speak English with those who had better English ability. Those sorts of reason discouraged the participants to speak in English.

Feeling anxious to speak in English

Good English knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc) cannot assure that students will never come across any problems to speak English, as it involves interaction among interlocutors, including psychological readiness. Like those whose is good in writing might be not good in speaking and vice versa. In this study, the participant frankly stated that they felt nervous to speak English on English day. They reflected,

> Being nervous, because I pronounce [English words] inappropriately. I feel inferior to speak English with the smart ones. (M3)
>
> Certainly, being nervous because we realize that our [English] ability is not so good as the teacher. (M4)
>
> Being anxious. I got sensation of pulse especially [speaking in English] with the teachers. (M5)

The data indicated that feeling anxious was one of causes that influenced participants not to speak in English on English day. For the reasons, they had their

own reason why they got so. Like pronouncing English words inappropriately, feeling inferior with those considered having better English proficiency, and hesitating to speak English with the teachers.

Discussion

Since English is as a subject teaching during the class merely, the chance of practicing English is restricted. To increase the exposure of English in the school atmosphere, the language policy has been applied by one senior high school in Jambi, Indonesia. But, the problem in implementing English day needs to be evaluated in order to get a better outcome. In this current study, I found the source of speaking problems encountered by students, which were described and interpreted from participants' personal reflections and perspectives. There were five major problems related to students' problem in using English on English day, including 1) inadequate vocabulary knowledge, 2) grammar as a stumbling block, 3) fear of negative response from others, 4) low self-esteem to speak in English, and 5) feeling anxious to speak in English.

The first theme emerged that vocabulary was one of factors why participants not to speak English on English day. The finding of the study is consistent with what Gan (2012) found that students would rather make silence than speak English on account of lack of vocabulary. Therefore, the role of English teachers is very essential to encourage students to speak, as Harmer (2007) suggested that the teachers should supply the use of a number common lexical phrases, especially in the performance of certain language functions, like vocabularies used in greeting, agreeing, introducing, and another situation in which vocabularies are frequently practiced.

My research also revealed that the participants were lack of grammar knowledge. This finding corresponds with the previous study done by Priyanto (2013) stated that there is a significant correlation between students' grammar competence and their speaking fluency. Additionally, a study by Gan (2012) indicated that students having grammar problem, they would experience a stumbling block in speaking. In Indonesia, most English teachers seem keen of implementing grammar based learning even though they know that the curriculum expects that students are able to develop speaking skill which is not only accurate but also fluent.

Another influential source of English speaking problems on English day reported by the participants in this study was fear of negative response from others. What I found is consistent with the findings of previous studies that found fear of negative evaluation from others (Tsiplakides&Keramida, 2009; Zhiping&Paramasivam, 2013; Mukminin, Sutarno, Arif, Noprival, & Maimunah; 2015). Fear of negative evaluation from others has resulted in participants in this study being silent during English day both inside and outside the classroom. Particularly, they were afraid of making mistake in speaking English.

In addition, based on participants' report, it is stated that low self-esteem to speak in English was one of findings in this study with regard to speaking problems experienced by students on English day. Furthermore, this finding is relevant with what other previous researchers (Kalanzadeh, Mahnegar, Hassannejad, & Bakhtiarvand; 2013) found. They stated that there is a correlation between self-esteem and students' verbal performance, those who have high self-esteem will practice a good English communication and vice versa. To put that another way, the English language ability and self-confidence are intertwined each other.

Lastly, the participants in this study reported that they felt anxious to speak in English on English day. These findings are consistent with the previous studies that speaking English as one of the strong and major sources of language anxiety (Liu, 2007; Öztürk&Gürbüz, 2014). In this study, the participants seemed to underestimate their own ability and they perceived that they would be under attack in the program (English day). Also, they perceived that they were less competent than other students in their school, which might result from the view that speaking English was viewed something beyond their habit.

The five major themes related to Indonesian senior high school students' English speaking problems that I found in my study are much intertwined each other. However, the findings of this study should be considered in the view of some limitations. Despite the fact this study will potentially contribute the sort of evidence necessary for providing supports for students in terms of speaking problems on English day, participants may not be representative of all Indonesian students studying at school in which English day is implemented. There may be differences of English speaking problems experienced by Indonesian students from one school to other school. Future research may include a larger sample of Indonesian students from different schools.

Conclusions and Implications

The findings from this study contribute to our understanding of the problems of speaking English at one senior high school in Jambi. They have emerged specific sources of barrier encountered by students. It confirmed that participants as students in a non-English speaking school experienced a variety of speaking challenges as well. By noticing sorts of main issue, it might help to discuss possible solution as an evaluation of the program. The five major themes related to Indonesian senior high school students' English speaking problems that I found in my study have a quantity of implications either for students or English teachers.

The participants whose are lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge should get special reinforcement. It can be done by English teachers. The teachers should facilitate by providing various teaching methods, approaches, strategies, and techniques. More importantly, the teachers need to motivate students to speak in English by telling that the use of perfect grammar is not too mandatory and it can be improved by practicing the language continuously.

Also, as the participants feel fear and anxious to speak in English, verbal harassment like mocking or bullying is strictly prohibited during English day. The policy makers like principal or teacher taking responsibility in this program should formulate and implement regulation firmly. Another important thing, in overcoming the problem of English day, it has to involve other stockholder, like counselor who can help those who have low-self esteem in speaking English.

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