

## Factors affecting students' speaking performance at High Schools in Malang

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### **Abstract**

*The main aim of teaching and learning English language is to help learners to be able to use it effectively and accurately in communication. However, to help students improve their speaking skills, it is necessary to find the appropriate ways to help them overcome their problems.. Moreover, teachers should be informed of these factors that affect their students' speaking performance so that they can deal with these factors to help the students improve their speaking performance. So this study aimed at investigating the factors that may affect students' speaking performance and the problems that the students at High Schools in Malang encounter when they learn to speak English. The sample consisted of 27 participants. Twenty one students and six teachers. Two questionnaires were distributed to participants to state the problems they face in speaking classes and to reveal their opinions towards the factors that affect learning speaking skill. An interview was conducted with teachers. Analysis of the data indicated that students encounter several problems in speaking and different factors that affect their learning the skill, such as psychological and linguistic factors.*

**Key Words:** *competence, performance, motivation, factors.*

### **Introduction**

Speaking is considered as one of the most important skills that people need for communicating in any other foreign language. Because English language has been used universally for all types of communication, for this reason English speaking skill should be taught and developed along with the other skills so that communication achievement can be enhanced with native speakers and non-native speakers of English (Boonkit, K.2010). The main aim of teaching language is to help learners to be able to use English effectively and accurately in communication (Davies & Pearse, 2000). However, this skill is neglected in our schools so students can not get any chance either in the class room or outside to speak English, consequently not all language learners after many years studying English can communicate fluently and accurately so that they can express their ideas and knowledge in English because

they lack necessary knowledge. There are many factors that may affect students' speaking performance, for example, Time allowed to perform a speaking task ;Time for preparation; Motivation to speak;Topical knowledge; Confidence, and Feedback during speaking activities. When conducting a study to investigate the factors that may influence students' performance in speaking skill, it should be taken into account the cultural and influences relevant to learning speaking skill. However, students come to school from different backgrounds and therefore having different levels of exposure and practice in the use of English language. For example, students who study in an ESL context are completely different than who study in an EFL context. The former may be more successful in English learning because they may have more exposure or practice in the use of English at home. On the other hand, the latter may have less exposure or practice in English. Due to these factors the findings of a study that is conducted in an ESL context cannot be generalized in an EFL context. Although the previous study was conducted in the same area but in different context (ESL), we feel the need for further research to fill the gap by investigating to what extent may these factors and problems influence the performance of learning speaking skill in an EFL context.

To help students improve their speaking skills, it is necessary to find ways to help them overcome their problems. Moreover, teachers should be aware of these factors that affect their students' speaking performance so that they can deal with these factors to help the students improve their speaking performance. So this study intends to address the problems that the students encounter when they learn to speak English and the factors that affect their speaking performance. In addition, in order to achieve these objectives, this study will be conducted quantitatively and two questionnaires will be distributed among (21) students and (6) teachers of high school students in Malang. However, this paper will respond to the following questions : 1. What are the problems that the students at High Schools in Malang encounter when they learn to speak English? 2. What are the factors that affect their speaking performance?

### Literature Review

Learning and teaching process aims to develop certain skills. According to the Common European Framework, these are divided into productive and receptive. Receptive skills comprise reading and listening. Whereas, productive skills consist of speaking and writing. Speaking skill is significant because it allows students to perform several activities such as oral presentations and everyday conversations. Socheath, M. (2010), defines speaking as “ a productive skill that requires students/ learners to produce words or language or to express ideas orally. It is used to communicate between one to another by speech or saying”. Bygate (1987), argues, “Speaking skill is the ability in using oral language to explore ideas, intentions, thoughts and feelings to other people as a way to make the message clearly delivered and well understood by the hearer.” Thus, speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing ; receiving and processing information. Its form and meaning is dependent on the context in which it occurs including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical

environment and the purpose of speaking. Nevertheless, some studies suggest that there are several speaking problems that students may encounter when speaking English in class or outside. These are: excessive use of mother tongue during lessons; lack of interaction among learners inside and outside the classroom; inhibition; lack of topical knowledge; shyness; fear of being humiliated, and lack of vocabulary (Urrutia, & Vega .2010, Ferrari & Palladino.2007, Boonkit,2010). First, unlike other skills, speaking requires some degree of real-time exposure to audience. Students are often inhibited about trying to say something in foreign language in the classroom: worried about mistakes or simply shy of the attention that their speech attract. A study conducted by Nascente (2001), considers anxiety as an affective variable and one of the main factors that may mostly affect language learning process. Secondly, even students are not inhibited, they complain that they cannot think of anything to say: they have no motive to express themselves beyond the guilty feeling that they should be speaking. Rivers (1968), states that students may have nothing to express about, may be due to the topic chosen by the teacher, which is not suitable for them or they may have no idea about it. However, It is difficult for some students to respond when they are asked to talk about a topic in English which they have little to say about or what kind of vocabulary or grammar to use (Baker & Westrup, 2003). In line with this issue , the findings of a study conducted by Lukitasari (2003), reveal that students should master the three elements of speaking namely vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in order to have good speaking performance. Furthermore, due to the importance of vocabulary as the building block of every language, it is considered to be very necessary for EFL students. However, according to Nation, (2001, p. 129) cited in Derakhshan, Khalili & Beheshti (2016), if the amount of vocabulary is limited, students cannot put the “receptive vocabulary knowledge into productive use”.

Another problem in speaking class is that participation is low or uneven. Only one participant can talk at a time if he or she is to be heard; and in large group this means each one will have only very little talking time. This problem is compounded of some learners to dominate, while others speak very little or not at all.

Finally, mother tongue is regarded as one of the causes of students' low performance in speaking. It is easier for the students to use their mother tongue in their class because it looks naturally. Therefore, most of the students are not disciplined in using the target language in the learning process. Harmer (1991) states that if students are asked to discuss a specific topic and they are unable to express their ideas they shift to their mother tongue.

In line with this issue , Fema, (2003) cited in Umar & Usman ( 2014) , stated that learners often use their mother tongue in all their interactions and communications , and English is less used.

In addition, speaking performance process is affected by some factors. In order to help students overcome problems in learning speaking, teachers should figure out the factors that may affect students' speaking performance. The factors that are suggested by Hoang & Ngoc (2015), include performance conditions (time pressure, planning, standard of performance and amount of support), affective factors (such as motivation, confidence and anxiety), listening ability and feedback during speaking activities can affect Students' speaking performance. First, *Performance conditions*: Students perform a speaking task under a variety of conditions. They believe that performance conditions can affect speaking performance. However, the four types of performance conditions that Nation & Newton (2009), suggest are different conditions which they think that can affect speaking performance. These conditions include time pressure; planning; the standard of performance, and the amount of support. Second: *Affective factors*: Oxford (1990), suggests that one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure is probably influenced by the affective side of the learner. In addition, Krashen (1982), states that different affective variables that are related to success in second language acquisition in research over the last decade have been confirmed. However, just three of them were examined. These are: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety.

Third, *Listening ability*: listening and speaking are related to each other, in that students are not able to reply if they cannot understand what is said to them. When talking much, it is the norm that participants in conversation keep constantly exchanging roles of speaker and hearer. However, developing speaking skills cannot be achieved unless listening skills are developed (Doff, 1998) cited in Leong & Ahmadi (2017). Therefore, students must understand the speech first in order to make a successful conversation.

Fourth, *Topical knowledge*: Bachman & Palmer (1996), state that topical knowledge is the knowledge structures in long-term memory that speakers have which is usually of relevant topical information. The information that topical knowledge provides enables learners to use language with reference to the world in which they live. However, those who have such knowledge can speak well rather than those who haven't. Consequently topical knowledge has effects on speaking performance. Finally, *Feedback during speaking activities*: feedback is a natural part of language that we use to clarify the meaning of what we say, and to help students understand what we mean. The way teachers give their students corrective feedback is very important because feedback whether it is positive or negative is meant to encourage the students and also to help them develop their proficiency in the foreign language. If teachers correct students mistakes while speaking, the conversational flow as well as the purpose of the speaking activity will be destroyed (Harmer, 1991). If students are corrected all the time, they can find this very demotivating and become afraid to speak. Baker & Westrup (2003), suggest that the teachers should always correct the students' mistakes positively and with encouragement.

The main aim of teaching language is to help learners to be able to use it effectively and accurately in communication. Not all language learners can communicate fluently and accurately in order to express their ideas and knowledge in English because they lack necessary knowledge and communicative competence.

The term communicative competence is defined by Saleh (2013), as “Linguistically, it refers to the speaker’s ability to use the appropriate language in the right context for the right purpose”. Nunan (1999), states that in order to speak in another language, learners need linguistic competence, an adequate vocabulary and mastery of syntax. However, since linguistic competence is not sufficient for anyone who wants to communicate competently in the target language, speakers need communicative competence which includes not only linguistic competence but also a range of other sociolinguistic and conversational skills that may help them know how and when to communicate. According to Johnson (1995), communicative competence is very necessary for second language students to participate in and learn from their classroom experience. In addition, Canale (1983, 1984) cited in Bagarić & Djigunović (2007), suggest four components of communicative competence: linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Strategic competence: it relates to the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may make students be able to overcome difficulties when they experience communication breakdowns, like when learners need to convey messages which they cannot express them effectively due to some linguistic barriers. Discourse competence: helps students to be able to combine language structures into different types of cohesive texts, for example: giving a political speech or saying poetry. Sociolinguistic competence: students should be competent in the sociocultural code of language, such as politeness and style in a given situation. For example: It is important to have a knowledge that may help learners to communicate properly and politely with people in different cultural backgrounds. For students it would be very important to help them learn how to behave well and how to speak politely with their teachers and as well with others in order to avoid confusion and embarrassment. Linguistic competence: in this aspect learners should learn how to deal with grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, knowledge of sounds, and the formation of words.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims at answering the following two questions:

1. What are the problems that EFL students encounter when they learn to speak English?
2. What are the factors that affect their speaking performance?

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Quantitative Study**

The researcher chose this method because the aim of this research was to investigate some of the factors affecting students' speaking performance at High Schools in Malang.

**Participants**

The participants of this study were a total of (27), 21 students and 6 teachers at Kepala Madrasah Aliyah Negeri 3 Malang. All were of Indonesian nationality and native speakers of Indonesia Bahasa. The data relating to the participants is summarised in Table 1 below. All students aged between (15&17). The teachers' length of experience ranged from six years to over 15 years. The majority of the students are females, as were more than half of the teacher group (4).

*Table No, 1 : Summary of subject demographic*

Nationality	Students			Teachers		
	Indonesian	No.	%	Indonesian	No.	%
<b>Gender and age</b>	<b>Male age: (15-17)</b>	4	19,04	<b>Male age: (36-44 )</b>	2	33,33
<b>experience</b>	2-4 years	1	4.76	6-10 years	=	=
	More than 7 years	3	14.28	More than 16 years	2	33,33
<b>Gender and age</b>	<b>Female: (15-17)</b>	17	80.95	<b>Female (31-35 )</b>	1	4.76
				(36-44)	3	14.28
<b>experience</b>	2-4 years	=	=	6-10 years	3	14.28
	5-7 years	1	4.76	11-15 years	1	4.76
	More than 7 years	16	76.19	More than 16 years	=	=
<b>First language</b>	Indonesian					

**Instrument**

The research instruments employed to collect data for this study were two questionnaires and an interview. One questionnaire was designed for teachers of English in order to share their experience in investigating the factors that affect students' speaking skills, and to reveal their ideas towards the effect of those factors on their students' speaking in class. And the other was designed for students in order to shed light on the factors that may influence their speaking in class. Besides one interview was addressed to just one teacher of the same school. The interview was conducted to gain further information about factors that prevent students from speaking . Both questionnaires were designed in English language.

**Procedure for conducting the questionnaire survey**

First, after designing the questionnaires, the researcher contacted the target school where he intended to conduct the study in order to meet the head of the school. After meeting the principle , he was asked for a prove from the researcher's university . Second, he got the prove then the questionnaires were distributed to both teachers and students. The researcher explained clearly the purposes of administering the questionnaires which were to find out the students' speaking

skill problems; the factors affecting their performance and to find out the ways to improve the students' speaking skills. Since there is no sufficient teachers in the target school to participate in this study, our population consists of just 6 teachers of English .On the same day, the questionnaires were distributed to 6 teachers of English, and 21students. Finally,the completed questionnaires were collected.

### Data analysis procedure

The quantitative data derived from the questionnaires were analyzed using Excel program. In order to answer the two research questions, the descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages were used.Grouping the similar responses, and counting frequencies.

### Results

The data of this research were collected from 21 students and 6 teachers at Kepala Madrasah Aliyah Negeri. The objective of this research was to discuss the factors affecting students' English speaking performance in higher school students in Malang. The data were collected by two different means, which are questionnaires and interview. Referring to the results obtained from the questionnaire and the interview, it seems that the students' English speaking performance is negatively affected .

### *What are the factors that affect their speaking performance?*

*Table No2: factors affecting students' speaking performance*

Factors affecting students' speaking performance		F	%
1	Time for preparation	6	100
2	Pressure to perform well	3	50
3	Listeners' support	2	33,,33
4	Motivation to speak	6	100
5	confidence	4	66,66
6	Anxiety	3	50
7	Topical knowledge	4	66,66
8	Listening ability	2	33,33
9	Time allowed to perform a speaking activity	3	50

The data analyzed revealed that all of the teachers 100% agreed that time for preparation & motivation affected students' speaking performance. Whereas, more than half of the teachers 66% viewed that topical knowledge and confidence had a negative influence on students' performance . Followed by 50% of them thought that time allowed to perform a speaking task as well as pressure to perform well and anxiety also affected students' performance. The remain

number of teachers 33% believed that students' performance was affected by listening ability and listeners' support.

*Table No3: factors affecting students' speaking performance*

Factors affecting students' speaking performance		F	%
1	Time for preparation	12	57.14
2	Pressure to perform well	7	33.33
3	Listeners' support	9	42.85
4	Motivation to speak	12	57.14
5	confidence	15	71.42
6	Anxiety	7	33.33
7	Topical knowledge	12	57.14
8	Listening ability	9	42.85

When asking students about the factors that may affect their speaking performance, 71% of them stated that confidence was the most frequent factor that affected their performance, but less than this percentage 57% assured that motivation as well as time for preparation and topical knowledge affected their performance, followed by 40% of students thought that listening ability & listeners' support considered as one of the factors that affected their performance. On the contrary, just a small number of the students 33% considered anxiety and pressure to perform well considered as an affecting factor on their performance.

In summary, the results revealed that students' speaking performance is affected by different factors. For example, it is clear that the majority of teachers agreed that the most frequent difficulties that affected their performance were time for preparation and motivation. Moreover, teachers said that confidence and topical knowledge are also more important factors affected their performance. Besides to those ones there are three factors of the same degree affected students' performance, they are time allowed; pressure to perform well and anxiety. Last, the less influenced factors considered by teachers are listening ability and listeners' support.

The results that obtained from students' questionnaire were different from those obtained from teachers' questionnaire. Students' most affected factor is confidence followed by motivation and topical knowledge. Furthermore, students stated that listening ability and listener's support have more influence on their performance. Finally, they agreed that the least influenced factors are pressure to perform well and anxiety.

***What are the problems that the students at high schools in Malang encounter when they learn speaking?***

The teachers' data is analysed and results are tabulated under frequencies and percentages are calculated for analyses.

*Table No4: students' speaking problems*

Students' speaking problems		F	%
1	They are worried about making mistakes	6	100
2	They use Indonesian	4	66.66
3	They are fearful of criticism or losing face	2	33.33
4	They speak very little or not at all	1	16,66
5	They cannot think of anything to say	=	=
6	They have no motivation to express themselves	=	=
7	They are shy	4	66.66

When asking the teachers about the problems that their students may face, we can notice that all the teachers 100% confirmed that their students are worried about making mistakes. More than half of teachers 66.66% indicated that using mother tongue and feeling shy are also problems that prevent students from speaking English in class. Teachers also agreed 33.33% that their students are fearful of criticism or losing face during speaking. Just one teacher 16.66% thought that students speak very little or not at all. Finally, teachers said that two factors have less influence on students' performance: lack of motivation and students cannot think of anything to say.

*Table No5: students' speaking problems*

Students' speaking problems		F	%
1	You use Indonesian	5	23.80
2	You speak very little or not at all.	5	23.80
3	You have no motivation to express yourselves.	3	14,28
4	You cannot think of anything to say.	10	47.61
5	You are worried about making mistakes.	20	95.23
6	You are fearful of criticism or losing face.	5	23.80
7	You are shy.	7	33.33

By asking students about the problems that may encounter in speaking classes, the majority of them 95.23% showed their agreement that the most problem was being worried about making mistakes. Meanwhile they stated that they cannot think of anything to say is also a big problem they face 47.61%. Less than half of students 33.33% said that they feel shy when they want to speak English. In addition, they declared that they face more problems 23.80% such as using Indonesian language and speaking very little or not at all and fearful of criticism or losing face. Just 14% of the total number of students declared that motivation is one of the problems that they may face in speaking classes.

In summary, by comparing both results, it is obvious that there is a consistency between teachers and students about the most effective factor that may influence students' performance, which is students are worried about making mistakes. In addition, teachers thought that the most next effective factors are students using their L1 and being shy when speaking, whereas students said that they cannot think of anything to say is the most next effective factor. Teachers indicated that students encounter more factors such as they are fearful of criticism or losing face and they speak very little. On the other hand students think that they face different factors that affect their performance in speaking such as, being shy and using their first language; feeling fearful of criticism and speaking very little. Finally, students declared that the less influencing factor that affected their performance is the lack of motivation.

## **Discussion**

This study investigated the types of factors that may affect students' speaking performance. However, there are three main factors that influence students' performance, psychological factors; linguistic factors and contextual factors (Juhana, 2012). In this study students encountered mostly two types of factors: psychological and linguistics factors.

### **The factors that affect students' speaking performance**

Relating to the first question the results revealed that students encounter a variety of factors that affect their speaking performance. The most affecting problems are time for preparation; motivation and lack of confidence. In regard with motivation, Nunan (1999) stated that motivation is a significant factor that it may affect students' reluctance to speak in English, and also it is a key consideration in determining the preparedness of learners to speak. In response to the issue of motivation, Babu (2010) cited in Mazouzi & Kaouli (2013), thinks that lack of motivation in learning leads to students' hesitation to speak English in the classroom or in front of other people. Aggouni (2015), argues that motivation is a major determining factor for achieving successful learning in general. Moreover, he confirms that motivation is a

psychological process that varies from one student to another. However, a student may acquire the language faster than his peers in the same class if he/she is motivated enough. In this study, the researcher thinks that students feel they cannot speak English well.

In addition, lack of confidence usually occurs when students note that their speech is not understandable by others. Moreover, it occurs due to the low ability in speaking English (He & Chen, 2010). The next other important factors that had negative influence are topical knowledge; time allowed to perform a speaking task as well as feel anxiety about different things, such as feel anxious about tests, speaking in class, competition with others, and communicating with native speakers and experiencing cultural differences (Ehrman, 1996). Pressure to perform well and anxiety: regarding the anxiety, studies confirm that students won't be able to speak English if they feel tension, apprehension and nervousness, so anxiety stands out as one of the main blocking factors for effective language learning (Nascente, 2001). It can be attributed that to students' low ability in speaking language. In support of those views, a study conducted by Marwan (2007), reveals that anxiety caused by some factors such as lack of confidence, lack of preparation and fear of failing the class. Park & Lee (2005), figure out that language learning and performance abilities are impeded if students are stressed and anxious. The same finding is shared with Tanveer (2007), he states that "the higher the anxiety, the lower the performance".

Finally, it is recognized that the least affecting problems are listening ability and listeners' support. On contrary, according to the data collected from teachers in both the questionnaire and the interview, lack of motivation and students cannot think of anything to say are not affected factors. In addition, the results of a previous study conducted by Tuan & Mai (2015), indicated that students had no motivation to use English to express themselves. However they may attribute that to students' low proficiency in English language. However, they can pass exams easily but they find it difficult to use English to communicate.

### **The problems that High School Students in Malang encounter when learning speaking skill.**

The findings of the questionnaires revealed that students encounter many types of problems. The results from both teachers' questionnaire and students' questionnaire showed that the most affecting problem that students face is worried about making mistakes. Kurtus (2001), states that the main cause of making mistakes is that students are afraid to be seen foolish and silly by their classmates and they think that people may laugh at them if they mispronounce some words. In support of Kurtus' point of view Aftat (2008), revealed that fear of making mistakes is linked to the issue of correction and negative evaluation. The next most affecting problems using mother tongue and feeling shy. In line with this issue, Baldwin (2011), further considers

speaking in front of students in class is a phobia that students face and feeling shy leads to forgetting what they intend to say in speaking. Regarding using mother tongue, Harmer (1991), states that if students are asked to discuss a specific topic and they are unable to express their ideas they shift to their mother tongue. In this aspect students using their L1 indicates that they have nothing to say or because they feel fearful of criticism, therefore they shift to their mother tongue. Furthermore, students declared that they lack motivation to speak well. Teachers always think that lack of motivation is the main cause of students' failure in learning or speaking in another language. Therefore, Zua (2008), argues in favor of motivation that it is an inner energy which will enhance students' interest of study. Furthermore, Khan.M (2014), expected attitude and motivation are strong factors behind the attainment of English language proficiency.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

This study investigated the factors that may affect EFL students' speaking performance and the problems they experience in speaking classes. From the result of both the questionnaire and the interview, the following conclusion can be established: it is noticed that students experience several factors such as psychological and linguistic factors. The psychological factors include students are worried about making mistakes and feel shy; lack of motivation and confidence, whereas the linguistic factors include using their mother tongue which is a result of lack of vocabulary and incorrect pronunciation.

### **Limitation of the study**

This study has some limitations which should be illustrated. First, the sample size is just 27 participants. This suggests that with such sample size it may be unwise to generalise such results. Second, the interview should be done different times in order to obtain better data. Last, this study did not determine and analyse the influences of demographic information such as, age, sex, years of learning English.

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