



An Investigation of English Department Students' Speaking Difficulties on Online Learning During Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the difficulties of 2019 English Department students of UNP (Universitas Negeri Padang) that learn English speaking through online learning during COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher chose English department students' year 2019 as the sample and the total is 45 students. In collecting the data, the researcher used questionnaire and speaking test. Results of analysis showed that vocabulary (93.3%) and fluency (93.3%) were the predominant problem that causes their difficulty in speaking English. The problem of technology (91.75%) such as no strong and stable signal, insufficient facilities, limited knowledge on using the application and limited money to buy the internet quota also seriously worsened their performance in speaking English and increased their low participation (73.3%). The findings suggest pedagogical implications for promoting the students' speaking English and provide the good internet facilities and other networking support systems if online learning will be applied in the future.

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INTRODUCTION

One subject that is crucial for students in the English Department to master is speaking ability. This skill involves creating and communicating meaning in a range of circumstances by using both verbal and nonverbal symbols, Chaney (1998). Moreover, Chastain in Castillo (2007) states that speaking is a productive skill which involves many components, such as vocabulary, grammar, fluency, comprehension, and pronunciation. While, Richard (2002) also said that it is a very complex task and not an easy one for EFL students, who have not enough opportunities to use it

outside the classroom. So, the availability of practices is a must for them during the learning process.

One of the concepts of teaching speaking, according to Nunan (2003), is to give students opportunity to communicate through group or pair projects while limiting teacher discussion. Activities like pair and group work provide students more opportunities to talk in the target language during the course. Nunan (2003) described the speaking class interaction model as consisting of a teacher start, student response, teacher evaluation of that response, and little instructor discussion.

Unfortunately, during the pandemic of Corona Virus Diseases 2019 (Covid-19), what Nunan proposed cannot be applied properly, because all classes have been changed into online class, due to the high risk to run normal class during this pandemic. This situation has been done under the decree no 9 of April, 3, 2020 of the Ministry of Health that declare the implementation of Social Distancing on a Large Scale (PSBB) for the Acceleration of the Covid-19 Management. The government closes learning activities in educational institution such as school and university. And, the direct impact to the speaking class is the decrease of interaction among lecturer and students, due to some technological problems such as internet access, electricity, and computer or smart phone the students have.

This online learning does not effective in teaching speaking, because the speaking class type of interaction must be in the form of lecturer-student and student-student interaction. Moreover, learning to speak also requires some models of speaking from the lecturer that involves personal approach between lecturer and students. To solve this inconvenient situation, the lecturer occupy some instruments, like video conferences, or voice note, as a way to solve physical distancing and internet problems. Therefore, learning speaking become not optimal and the students feel they have difficulties in speaking English, especially in pronouncing the words because lack of models from the lecturer.

Regarding this condition, English Department students' of Universitas Negeri Padang are assumed to face the same problems in learning speaking during this online learning. Based on the informal interview that researcher did with some of the 2019 English department student', there are some problems that they faced during online learning. Most of the students feel that they are unable to speak correctly, unable to pronounce the words properly, and lack of cultural understanding on the context of the conversation. This situation occurs due to limited access of internet and some technological problems. Based on this situation, the researcher wants to know their speaking difficulties as an impact of online learning in pandemic COVID-19 in order to help them solving their speaking problems.

METHOD

The research design is descriptive research, because this research is designed to capture the situation as actually happens and describes a population, situation, or phenomenon that is being studied. It focuses on answering the how and what

questions as a research problem, rather than the why. The data were presented in numerical form and analyzed by using simple statistical method, and narrative interpretation.

The target audience for this study is English Department students in the class of 2019 who are majoring in English and have taken a speaking course online. There are 155 students in the entire population. Following that, a sample was obtained using cluster random sampling. Nine students from each class made up the sample, which consisted of 45 total students.

The instrument is the questionnaire and the speaking test. The questionnaire is used to know the linguistic and non-linguistic aspects of speaking difficulties faced by the students during the online learning. The indicators of the questionnaire are comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and pronunciation (linguistic aspects) and technology and interaction (non-linguistic). Speaking test in which the respondents are asked to describe or explain the topic given by the researcher. The topic is giving opinion about learning process during pandemic.

The analysis focussed on the items that were marked as agree or disagree in order to examine the students' difficulty speaking English. The general patterns of the pupils' speaking difficulties were determined for each measurement using a percentage. Based on the elements involved in each issue, such as the language factors and non-linguistic factors, the challenges each student displayed were recognized and analyzed. Brown Oral Proficiency was used to examine the data from the speaking test. The researcher determined the most significant contributing reason to speaking issues from the data with the largest percentage, and based on the results of their speaking test, provided additional explanation for linguistic difficulties. Pie charts and tables were used to display the results.

Table 1. The level of students' speaking ability by Brown

Test score	Level of ability
24-25	Excellent
21-23	Very good
16-20	Good
11-15	Average
4-10	Poor
1-5	Very poor

Adapted from Brown (2004)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION*Research Finding (tentative)***Table 1. The Linguistic Factors of English speaking difficulties**

No	Linguistic factors	Agree	Disagree
1	Grammar	60.3%	39.7%
2	Vocabulary	93.3%	6.7%
3	Comprehension	90%	10%
4	Fluency	93.3%	6.7%
5	Pronunciation	83.3%	16.7%

Table 4.1 presents the linguistic factors of students' speaking difficulties. It is showed that grammar as one of linguistic factor for students' speaking difficulties (60.3%). The problems came from their insufficient understanding on tenses, preposition and class of words. In vocabulary (93.3%), the most problems came from their confusion in using the proper words when uttering their thought and idea. Then, the high percentage on comprehension problem (90%) came from their low understanding on what the people were talking about. While, in fluency (93.3%) their problems were seen from the use of repeated words, stuttering, and hesitant. In pronunciation (83.3%) the problems occurred when they cannot distinguish words with the same pronunciation, and incorrect intonation.

Table 2. Non-linguistic Factors for English speaking difficulties

No	Non-linguistic factors	Agree	Disagree
1.	Inhibition	68.3%	31.7%
2.	Nothing to say	66.7%	33.3%
3.	Low participation	73.3%	26.7%
4.	Mother tongue use	68.8%	31.2%

No	Non-linguistic factors	Agree	Disagree
1.	Technology	91.75%	8.25%
2.	Interaction	86.64%	13.36%

Table 4.4. Technological Factors for English speaking difficulties

Diagram 1. The English Department students' difficulties in speaking English

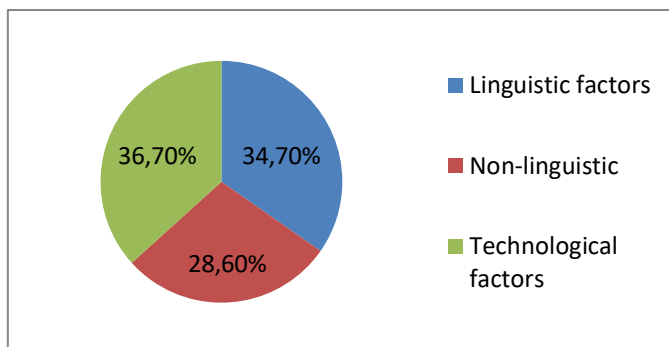


Diagram 1. conclusively present the difficulties of the 2019 English Department students experienced in speaking English during online learning in Covid-19 pandemic. Generally speaking, technological factors were considered by 36.70% of respondents as being the main obstacle keeping them from speaking English, followed by linguistic problems (34.70%) and non-linguistic ones (28.60%). In general, there was no clear distinction between the three causes of the students' speaking difficulties. In contrast to other students, a relatively large number of those who admitted experiencing trouble speaking English while learning online cited technological concerns. The biggest barrier to communicating during online learning for the students seems to be technological.

Discussion

Technological factors appeared as the main difficulty in speaking English during online learning, in which a majority of the students agreed that technology problem (91.75%) contributed to the speaking difficulties, followed by interaction problem (86.64%). This finding corroborates Angus et al's (2004) claim that certain families lack access to educational resources like computers and the internet. If all school-age children remain at home and just one computer is offered to the household, the lack of facilities issue could become more urgent. While, lack of human interaction in which the absence of a lecturer and an inability to discuss with their peers, made the students get upset. Moreover, this finding is in line with Dharwan (2020) who found that speaking learning process did not optimal during online learning because lack of personal/physical attention and less interaction that

made students become lazy to practice. While Salleh (2020) showed by his research that online learning has a detrimental effect on students' academic achievement because they lack self-discipline, face-to-face interaction, and feedback from instructors. No matter how beneficial online learning may be, a student may find it too limited and require a physical location where they can get solutions to their issues and practice using actual resources (Gamelearn, 2019).

The technological factors above increased the linguistic difficulties such as grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, and pronunciation. The majority of students thought that limited vocabulary and fluency were the main causes of linguistic challenges (93,3%) were their predominant difficulty in English speaking, followed by difficulty in comprehension (90%), inaccurate pronunciation (83,3%), and insufficient grammar (83,3%). These findings were supported by the result of their speaking test. The students' vocabulary was on between 2 and 3 (the score is 2.5) similar with their fluency (the score is 2.4). Their comprehension ability, pronunciation and grammar were also under 3 (the score is 2.7, 2.8 and 2.6). Those results support Brown (2004) and Harris' (1974) description that if the speaker scores below or near 3 they can be categorized into average and will cause them difficult to speak. It was similar with According to Baker and Westrup's (2003) findings, many students have difficulty to answer when their lecturers urge them to speak in English because they lack understanding of appropriate syntax and vocabulary. Moreover, this linguistic difficulty was also correlated with Gunning (2002) and Heriansyah (2012), which stated that limited knowledge of vocabulary will be the biggest concern of language learning and students' poor pronunciation was also one kind of speaking difficulty.

These linguistic factors then caused the students' non-linguistic factors such as inhibition, low participation, nothing to say, and mother tongue use. Majority students responded that mother tongue use (68.8%) occurred during online learning, not only in arranging the sentences being spoken but also when they delivered the speech. This condition has big correlation to their insufficient vocabulary. Then, during online learning, they are unable to speak English due to anxiety, mistake-aversion, and lack of confidence (68.3%). These results were in line with those of MacIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, and Noel (1998), who discussed the impacts of learners' oral performance on their self-confidence and emphasized that learners' readiness to communicate was influenced in part by their self-confidence. The findings concur with those of Park and Lee (2005), who looked at the connections between oral performance, self-confidence, and anxiety in L2 learners. Additionally, the majority of students (90%) expressed their frustration with not being understood or being misinterpreted during oral practice in online learning, which may be the root of their psychological barrier to speaking English. One reason can be that they felt frightened by technological issues like a poor internet signal at the time.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study indicated that most of the 2019 students of English department considered that technological factors as the main barrier in speaking English during online learning in Covid-19 pandemic. For the students, vocabulary

(93.3%) and fluency (93.3%) were the predominant problem that causes their difficulty in speaking English. The problem of technology (91.75%) such as no strong and stable signal, insufficient facilities, limited knowledge on using the application and limited money to buy the internet quota also seriously worsened their performance in speaking English and increased their low participation (73.3%).

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