



A STUDY ON FACTORS AFFECTING OF ENGLISH-MAJORED STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN THEIR SPEAKING PERFORMANCE

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Abstract:

The purpose of the current study is to discover the factors that cause English-majored students' difficulties in their speaking performance. To facilitate this investigation, the researcher recruited a group of 30 English-majored students who study English as a foreign language. Furthermore, the instrument of this study utilized the questionnaire method as the tool of data collection. Moreover, the participants were asked questions focusing on a series of 27 items put into the three categories of difficulties in speaking performance. These difficulties are related to linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors. The results of the analysis showed that the English-majored students had more difficulty in the psychological factor than the other factors, namely, linguistic and environmental factors. Similarly, most of the students had difficulties related to the linguistic factor such as a lack of vocabulary knowledge to orally produce ideas and arguments about many topics encountered. Meanwhile, in terms of the psychological factor, the students revealed that the difficulty they faced is their low self-confidence. Finally, the result also confessed that they lack the environment for practicing speaking outside the classroom which is seen as an environmental factor.

Keywords: linguistic factor, psychological factor, environmental factor, difficulties, English-majored students

1. Introduction

Afebri and Muhsin (2019) pointed out that three difficulties in learning to speak are affective, linguistic, and performance conditions, but it is actually the most difficult factors are pronunciation, grammar, listening, and even confidence. Similarly, Riadil (2020) claimed that factors that can adversely affect a student's speech are linguistic problems such as low grammar knowledge, limited vocabulary, and poor pronunciation. While, students' psychological problems are seen as a loss of self-confidence, insecurity, and nervousness.

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At present, the researcher is trying to narrow down the scope by looking for factors affecting English-majored students' difficulties in their speaking performance. Moreover, many of the English-majored students have been seen to have an obstacle in seeking an effective communicative approach to speak English better. Furthermore, they have been unable to master English speaking skills due to several reasons. Firstly, they are not able to have an opportunity to practice English speaking every single day. Secondly, they face certain problems that prevent them from using English orally such as lack of grammar knowledge, pronunciation, and vocabulary, and they can also be affected by other factors namely psychological, linguistic, and environmental factors. This study would like to achieve one objective. Therefore, it is to find out what factors can be seen as the most influential ones that cause these students' difficulty to speak in English. The factors to be investigated are psychological, linguistic, and environmental factors. The result of this study can be beneficial for foreign language teachers as they are able to seek suitable for teaching methods of speaking skills based on this result. Similarly, it also helps students recognize such problems to enhance their speaking ability when they are speaking, and from there they can take appropriate future actions to overcome them. In order to be able to reach the goal, this study just focuses on answering the following question:

- What common linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors cause English-majored students' difficulties in their speaking performance?

2. Literature review

2.1. Definitions of speaking

Speaking is one of the most important of the four language skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). Moreover, speaking is seen as a tool to communicate and convey information with others to achieve certain goals or to express their viewpoints. In addition, Kristi (2016) said that speaking has been well-described in a number of applications involving speaking when the process involves both delivering and sending a message between 1st speaker and the 2nd speaker. Furthermore, Ariyanti (2016) said that:

“Speaking is one of the core components in English language proficiency which is extremely important to acquire by students. To acquire this skill, students need a special ability rather than only mastering a language in terms of grammatical terms or semantic rules”. (p.92)

Similarly, according to Efrizal (2012), speaking plays a huge role in people's interactions with each other. Speaking is the oral expression of opinions and messages.

2.2. Related studies

Fitriani, et al. (2015) made an investigation on “A study on student's English-speaking problems in speaking performance”. This study aims to identify the problems affecting

the student' speaking implementation of the English Education Study Program of FKIP Tanjungpura University Pontianak. The instruments used in this study applied a questionnaire and an observational method for data collection. The participants were 30 students of the third semester students who take Speaking for Academic Presentation Class. The results of this study showed that linguistics problems are problems related to students' grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation problems. While the psychological problems are the students' problems regarding their lack of self-confidence and anxiety.

Sayuri (2016) also conducted a study to find problems in speaking faced by the fourth semester students of the English Department at Mulawarman University. The instruments of this study used a speaking test and a questionnaire. The sample of this research consists of 24 students in the fourth semester. The results of this study uncovered that the students faced some problems related to pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary in their speaking tests. Furthermore, the questionnaire also showed additional findings where students faced other problems, namely not having self-confidence, shyness to speak, being afraid of making mistakes, feeling nervous, and having nothing to say. Next, there are some factors resulting in students' problems in speaking English. They were found to read less, have low participation, less practice English both inside and outside the classroom, and be unable to apply grammar rules while speaking.

Ming-yueh and Tzu-yen (2019) also carried out a study on "EFL learners' English-speaking difficulties and strategy use". This study purposed to explore the factors that caused the EFL learners' English-speaking difficulties and then investigated the successful learners' strategy used to improve their English-speaking performance. The study used a five-level Likert-scale questionnaire as an instrument. The participants of this research were conducted to anonymously investigate 148 EFL sophomore and junior English majors in Taiwan. The results of the analysis showed that (a) psychological problems (e.g. nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence) were the primary reason for English speaking difficulties, followed by linguistic problems (e.g. insufficient vocabulary), and environmental problems (e.g. lack of learning context for English conversation); (b) a majority of successful learners tended to use various speaking strategies to improve their English speaking performance and particularly focused on linguistic accuracy by repeatedly practicing the pitch, pronunciation, and intonation. Furthermore, most of them seized the chances to practice speaking English, such as joining English social activities or participating in English speech contests etc. They also used body language (e.g. facial expressions, eye contact, and gestures) for better communication. The findings suggest pedagogical implications for promoting the EFL learners' speaking English.

Amoah and Yeboah (2021) carried out a study "The speaking difficulties of Chinese EFL learners and their motivation towards speaking the English language". They attempted to find what factors affect the speaking ability of Chinese EFL students as well as explored students' motivation. The researchers used two main instruments namely a questionnaire and an online interview. The participants included 75 non-English-

majored students of Nanjing Teach University. The results of this study showed that Chinese EFL learners have more speaking problems that are related to psychological factors like anxiety, fear of mistakes, unwillingness, and fear of negative evaluation than linguistic factors such as lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, insufficient knowledge of grammar rules, reading and oral presentation. Moreover, this study explored the motivation levels affected by instrumental motivation.

Trinh and Pham (2021) did a study on Challenges in Speaking Classrooms among Non-English Majors. This study aims to investigate some difficulties that students faced in speaking classrooms. The instruments of this study were a questionnaire and an interview. The participants of this study were a group of 57 participants at Tra Vinh University. The results from the questionnaire revealed that non-English majors encountered more linguistic difficulties than psychological ones. Also, students' psychological problems identified includes: pressure to perform well, being overpowered by more competent students, fear of making mistakes in front of the class and fear of criticism or losing face. The linguistic difficulties are lacking vocabulary and topical knowledge, being incapable of arranging ideas logically, insufficient sentence formation skills and inappropriate vocabulary. The findings from the interview also showed that learners encountered more linguistic difficulties.

3. Methodology

3.1. The participants

Based on the objective of the study, which attempts to investigate the factors affecting English-majored students' difficulties in speaking performance. The participants of this study were a group of 30 English-majored students who study English as a foreign language at university. Moreover, they have studied their speaking skills for 2 periods a week and they all were voluntary for the survey, and their age ranges from 18 to 20.

3.2. Research instruments

In order to collect the data for the main research question of the study, the author used a questionnaire consisting of three sections with 27 items. The first section is that ten items concentrate on the difficulties with speaking performance related to the linguistic factor. Similarly, the second sections ten items focus on the difficulties of speaking performance in terms of the psychological factor. The last section is the seven items emphasis on the difficulties in speaking performance related to the environmental factor. The content of these questions was adapted from Hamad and Seyyedi (2020). The questionnaire was designed by applying a five-point Likert- scale ranging from 1 to 5, which means (1: Strongly disagree, 2: Disagree, 3: Neutral, 4: Agree, 5: Strongly agree). To check the reliability of the student's answers to the survey, the researcher lent support from the Statistic Package for Social Sciences – Version 22 (SPSS). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the questionnaire was 0.893, which means that the reliability of the questionnaire was high. Therefore, the questionnaire was considered reliable. The result of the reliability

has been reported in the instrument and the alpha coefficient of the questionnaire is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Reliability statistics of the questionnaire

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.893	27

3.3. Research procedures

Due to Covid 19, the researcher might not engage face to face with students in the formal class to carry out the survey so the questionnaire had to be administered online. Firstly, the researcher had to ask an English teachers' permission to come to her/his online class to conduct the survey during the recess in their afternoon class session. After, the participants were given information about the purpose of the research, the questionnaires were delivered to the participants Via Google form. Then, the researcher clearly explained the purpose of conducting this survey which was to seek their difficulties in speaking performance. In addition, the participants were informed that they would be free to withdraw from the study at any time if they wished. Fortunately, all the participants of this class who responded to the questionnaire completed consent forms and it took approximately 25 minutes. Finally, the researcher collected all these answers on Via Google form for analysis afterwards.

3.4. Data processing method

The data was collected from the questionnaire exported to Microsoft Excel. Then, the data collected from the questionnaire was analyzed by using the software SPSS version 22. Similarly, the researcher looked for the reliability of the survey responses and run descriptive statistics.

4. Findings

To answer the research question, the researcher would like to present the results gained from the descriptive statistics for the questionnaire results, which are divided into the three following categories such as linguistic factor, psychological factor, and environmental factor. As illustrated in Table 2 for the first section about the Linguistic factors, the mean score and standard deviation of each item can be shown below.

Table 2: Difficulties related to the Linguistic factor

No	Items	N	Mix	Max	Mean	Std. D
1	My vocabulary knowledge is not sufficient enough to orally produce ideas and arguments about any topic.	30	3.00	5.00	4.1667	.83391
2	My pronunciation is not good enough which causes difficulty in my speaking.	30	2.00	5.00	3.2000	.71438
3	I do not have enough grammar knowledge which leads to a lack of accuracy in my speaking.	30	2.00	5.00	3.3333	.84418
4	I find it difficult to build sentences, I know the grammar but I can't put it into sentences.	30	1.00	5.00	3.3333	.95893
5	I have some phonological, syntactic, and morphological complexities that make me unable to express and articulate ideas easily.	30	2.00	5.00	3.4333	.89763
6	My English conversation skill tends to be poor	30	2.00	5.00	3.3667	.88992
7	I cannot choose appropriate words to express my ideas.	30	2.00	5.00	3.3333	.88409
8	I do not have enough knowledge of phrases and collocations.	30	2.00	5.00	3.3000	.95231
9	I sometimes use incorrect intonation and stress.	30	2.00	5.00	3.1333	.93710
10	The main cause of my difficulty in speaking English is fluency.	30	1.00	5.00	3.1667	.91287
	Overall mean	30	0.95	5.0	3,37	0,82

As can be seen in Table 2, the mean values of this set of items range from 3.13 to 4.16, respectively and the standard deviations range from 0.714 to 0.958. Moreover, the majority of the participants have difficulty with item 1 “My vocabulary knowledge is not sufficient enough to orally produce ideas and arguments about any topic” making up M= 4.1667, SD=.83391. This mean score was considerably higher than the mean scores of the other nine items. Furthermore, ten out of nine items obtained a mean score of over 3, meaning the students face average difficulties in the linguistic factor while speaking English. However, item 9, “I sometimes use incorrect intonation and stress.” accounted for M = 3.1333, SD= .93710. This mean score was seen as the lowest mean score compared to those of the other items.

After the analysis of the results of the mean scores of the 10 items related to the difficulties of the linguistic factor in speaking performance, the researcher would like to illustrate the result of the second section related to the psychological factor in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Difficulties related to the psychological factor

No	Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. D
11	I cannot speak well in the classroom because my self-confidence is low	30	2.00	5.00	4.3000	.83666
12	I am afraid of making mistakes in speaking English.	30	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.81368
13	I am confused about the ideas of the speaking activities	30	2.00	5.00	3.7000	.74971
14	I feel shy when speaking English in front of other students.	30	2.00	5.00	3.5667	.77385
15	I am lack of motivation to speak English	30	2.00	5.00	3.5333	.86037
16	I feel embarrassed when speaking English.	30	2.00	5.00	3.4333	.81720
17	I am afraid that my classmates and instructors will not understand what I try to convey.	30	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.81368
18	I am afraid of being laughed at when speaking English	30	3.00	5.00	3.7667	.77385
19	I take pressure during presentations in the classroom.	30	1.00	5.00	3.6667	.92227
20	I fear of receiving criticism from others while speaking.	30	2.00	5.00	3.4667	.86037
	Overall mean	30	2.0	5.0	3,66	0.82

As can be clearly seen in Table 3, the mean values of this set of items range from 3.43 to 4.3, respectively and the standard deviations range from 0.74 to 0.92. Moreover, the mean scores of the problems related to the psychological factor as follows: item 11, "I cannot speak well in the classroom because my self-confidence is low", accounted for the mean score of 4.3 with its standardization of 0.83, showing the highest compared to the other items in total, while nine out of ten items obtained the neutral response on a five-point Likert scale. However, the mean score of item 16, "I feel embarrassed when speaking English." took up the mean score of 3.43 and its standardization of 0.81, which was seen as the lowest in this category.

Similarly, Table 4 illustrates the result of the items that the participants have faced related to the environmental factor in their speaking performance.

Table 4: Difficulties related to the environmental factor

No	Items	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. D
21	I have difficulty finding opportunities to practice speaking outside the classroom	30	2.00	5.00	3.7667	.77385
22	The environment does not support us to speak English frequently	30	2.00	5.00	3.6333	.88992
23	There is limited exposure to English spoken in class. The time of our speaking classes is not appropriate.	30	2.00	5.00	3.5333	.89955
24	There is no cooperation spirit among my classmates in speaking classes.	30	2.00	5.00	3.4000	.93218
25	The class is so noisy, so I find it difficulties to concentrate	30	2.00	5.00	3.6333	.88992
26	Our classes are overcrowded	30	2.00	5.00	3.7333	.78492
27	My family does not encourage and support me to speak English	30	2.00	5.00	3.7333	.73968
	Overall mean	30	2.0	5.0	3,63	0.84

As can be seen in Table 4, the mean score of the difficulties related to environmental factor is as follows: item 21, "I have difficulty finding opportunities to practice speaking outside the classroom", took up $M= 3.766$, $SD= 0.773$. This mean score was considerably higher than the mean scores of the other six items. However, item 24, "There is no cooperation spirit among my classmates in speaking classes", made up the mean score of 3.4 and its standardization of 0.93. This mean score was the lowest compared to those of the other items. Moreover, all of the items gained a neutral response on a five-point Likert scale.

Then, the average mean scores of the factor that affect English-majored students in speaking performance are shown in Table 5 below.

Table 5: The difficulties of factors in compare

	N	Mean score	Std. Deviation
Students' linguistic factor	30	3,37	0,82
Students' psychological factor	30	3,66	0,82
Students' environmental factor	30	3,63	0,84

Table 5 illustrates the overall mean score of factors affecting the English majored students' difficulties in their speaking performance. As can be seen from the table, the mean score of the psychological factor is higher than those of the other factors ($M=3.66$, $SD=0.82$). The second position was about the environmental factor, which accounted for ($M = 3.63$, $SD= 0.84$). The last position belonged to the linguistic factor, which took up ($M = 3.37$, $SD= 0.82$) respectively.

5. Discussion

Based on the results of the findings above, the linguistic factor was found to be the most influential factor causing students' difficulty in speaking performance. This was seen from item 1: "My vocabulary knowledge is not sufficient enough to orally produce ideas and arguments about any topic." It means that the students are not able to master vocabulary. This result is in accordance with the study conducted by Amoah and Yeboah (2021), Ming-yueh and Tzu-yen (2019), and Trinh and Pham (2021), who purposed to analyze students' difficulties with the linguistic factor. They found that lacking vocabulary and topical knowledge influenced the students' speaking ability.

In terms of the psychological factor, the students discovered that students have more difficulty related to the psychological factor as found in item 11, "Self-confidence is low". It means that they are not able to prepare the text to speak so they faced difficulty in their speaking performance. This result is similar to that of the study carried out by Riadil (2020), Ming-yueh and Tzu-yen (2019), Sayuri (2016), and Fitriani, et al. (2015), who found that the students have problems like lack of confidence while speaking in English.

With regard to the environmental factor, the students confessed that they faced difficulty caused by the environmental factor as seen in Item 21. They have difficulty finding opportunities to practice speaking outside the classroom. It means that they are unable to spend time practicing speaking English as most of their time must spend in

their classroom. This result of this study was dissimilar to Ming-yueh and Tzu-yen (2019), who found that a lack of learning context for English conversation made the students difficult to use their English orally.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion above, it was concluded that most of the participants faced the psychological factor ($M=3.66$), which is considerably higher than the two other factors such as the linguistic factor ($M=3.63$) and the environmental factor ($M=3.37$). In general, the difficulties that the students in this study faced in their speaking performance were related to all these three categories. They were related to linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors. Each category has different difficulties. The students' most challenge in speaking English related to the linguistic factor was a lack of vocabulary. Meanwhile, the students' difficulty related to the psychological factor was a lack of confidence. Moreover, when talking about the environmental factor the students encountered difficulty in finding opportunities to practice speaking outside their classroom.

7. Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher suggests some recommendations for both teachers and students.

For teachers, they should help generate a conducive environment that will help make students confident to communicate in English. Moreover, the teachers should provide their students with effective methods so that their students can enhance their speaking skills.

For students, they have to improve their speaking skills in several ways. For example, they can enlarge their vocabulary load, learn more grammar rules for application, and practice more pronunciation in both segmental and super segmental levels through English films and books. Moreover, the students should take notes of new words and review them regularly every single day. Secondly, they need to set up their free time when they can to practice speaking English with their friends. Finally, due to the limitation of this study, the study only explored factors that cause students' difficulties in their speaking performance, so future researchers should seek possible solutions for students to overcome these factors.

Conflict of interest statement

The author declares no conflict of interests

About the Author

Mai Hung Dong graduated in English Studies at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam. He has a Bachelor's degree in English Studies.

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