

Contributing Factors to Students' English Speaking Performance at Universitas Klabat

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Abstract

This study aimed to know what factors contributed to the English speaking performance of students at Universitas Klabat, Manado, Indonesia, during the 2015/2016 year of study. Thirty-six variables were adapted from three different questionnaires and converted into a new questionnaire. This study used exploratory analysis with principal factor extraction; four attributes were extracted, with 26 remaining variables. The participants in this study were 108 students majoring in English, specifically those who were taking a Speaking and Listening class. The four attributes that contributed to students' English speaking performance were environment, peers, teacher, and related technology. The environmental was the factor that contributed the most to their speaking performance, while the least variance was explained by the technology used. Gender did not have a significant influence on English speaking performance. A one-way Anova test showed that only one factor was significantly related to English speaking performance ($F(3,104) = 2.948, p = 0.036$). The four attributes explained 60.76 percent of the total variance in students' English performance.

Keywords: *English speaking performance, environmental factor, peer factor, teacher factor, technology usage factor*

Introduction

Confidence in English spoken language is a necessity. Speaking skills are the most important of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), because people who know a language are usually referred to as speakers of that language. The ability to speak skillfully provides the speaker with several distinct advantages. The major goal of all English language teaching should be to give learners the ability to use English effectively and accurately in communication (Davies & Pearse, 1998). However, many studies have shown that language learners, after studying English for many years, cannot communicate fluently and accurately.

The date of December 31, 2015 marked the economic integration by 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which is also referred to as the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC); this development made the need for advanced speaking skills in English even greater. Some ASEAN countries made greater efforts to improve their English language skills at schools and education centers in anticipation of the AEC (Stroupe & Kimura, 2015).

Developing speaking skills is not an easy task or an overnight process for many Southeast Asian countries. Even Asian countries where English is learnt as a foreign language find difficulties. Brown as cited in Murcia (2001) mentioned a number of features that interact to make speaking a challenging language skill. First, fluent speech contains reduced forms, such as contractions, vowel reduction, and elision, so that learners who are not exposed to or who do not get sufficient practice with reduced speech will retain their rather formal-sounding full forms. Sawir (2005), who conducted research on international students from Asia who studied in Australia, found that these international students faced serious learning difficulties and lacked confidence in speaking and taking a proactive role in classrooms because of misconceptions about language use and its role in learning.

Some Southeast Asian countries possess similar challenges or problems in improving their speaking skills. Aside from very limited exposure to the English language, other factors also hinder the advancement of this skill. In Laos, which was colonized by the French for a long period and where English has been taught as a second or foreign language in some schools and tertiary institutions, it

was found that the English proficiency level of Lao students was still far from satisfactory. This low proficiency level was caused by several factors. The top three were a lack of English background knowledge, English teachers who were not well trained and could not speak well or influence the interests of the students, and students' lack of confidence in using the language because they were afraid and ashamed when they made mistakes (Souriyavongsa et al., 2013).

Nguyen and Tran (2015) conducted a study about learning English at the University of Thu Dau Mot in Vietnam. They found that the common problems affecting student's speaking performance were that students spoke very little or not at all in speaking classes, they often used Vietnamese, they had no motivation to express themselves using English, and they were fearful of criticism or losing face when making mistakes.

Other countries also face similar problems in developing English speaking skills. A study was conducted by Tanveer (2007) of the factors that caused language anxiety for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners who wished to improve their speaking skills. He found that Arab EFL learners preferred to use Arabic rather than English for communication both inside and outside the classroom, they lacked target language exposure as spoken by native speakers, and there were weaknesses in their language learning context, together with a lack of personal motivation.

Wahba (1998, p. 32) summarized the problems encountered by Egyptian learners: "Egyptian students face certain problems related to pronunciation. Some of these problems are related to stress, other are related to intonation. However, most of these problems can be attributed to the differences in pronunciation between English and Arabic."

In Indonesia, although English is perceived to be a foreign language, the teaching of English started a long time ago. A variety of teaching methodologies have been used in Indonesia to achieve English competency, but the results are always far from perfect. Speaking English is known as the most important and difficult skill for Indonesian students. Many learners express their inability, and sometimes even acknowledge their failure, to learn to speak a foreign language. These learners may be good at mastering other skills, but when it comes to learning to speak another language, they claim to have a 'mental block' against it (Liauw, 2013).

Literature Review

Environment Attribute: The idea that the social environment plays a major part in an individual's cognitive and affective development was modeled by Bronfenbrenner (1979), who stated that the individual's environment can be represented as a set of concentric interactive layers. Their continuous interaction with each other and with the individual defines the possible routes of development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) described the social environment with concentric circles positioning the individual in the center of the system. With this structure, she modeled not only the factors of the social environment that affect the child, but also the strength of these influences.

Social environmental factors determine an individual's socio-psychological perspective, and hence cannot be overlooked (Subbhuraam & Ananthasayanam, 2010). These authors further indicated that the social aspects of language acquisition culminated in differences in language development and use among learners from different social classes. Kovacs (2011) stated that the interrelationship of the social environment and the individual represents a vital input in a child's maturation process. According to Kovacs' model, there are only two circles in the social environment. In the most influential circle, which is closest to the individual, is the immediate family and a child's peers; the next circle comprises the extended family, school, and neighbors.

Social learning theories can be broadly understood as a social behavioral approach that emphasizes the reciprocal interaction among cognitive, behavioral, and environmental determinants of human behavior (Bandura, 1977). The social learning theory advanced by Bandura (1978) maintains that specific behaviors resulting from social learning vary from culture to culture, but the acquisition of these behaviors appears to be constantly determined by the process of identification and imitation.

Akers and Silverman (2004) stated that social learning theory links attitudes and values to the influence of general and specific definitions. General definitions would include broad beliefs about conforming behavior that is influenced principally through conventional norms, as well as religious and moral values. Social learning takes place when we learn from observing the behavior of others, and the environmental outcomes of their behavior. Social learning is, in the sense, indirect. It occurs by observing others. For this reason, it is sometimes called observational learning or vicarious learning (Sternberg & Williams, 2002).

Scott (2007) mentioned that social support comes from a network or ties or our daily interactions with significant persons. This support refers to the involvement of significant persons in one's life that can promote academic performance. Social support also includes the involvement of significant others and "occurs when the significant other in a person's life provide a natural context or cues for the occurrence of the target behavior or when they naturally provide reinforcing consequences for the occurrence of the target behavior" (p. 408). It is similar to Aikens and Barbarin's (2008) assertion that social support relationships include parent-child, teacher-child, and peer-peer interactions. The nature and quality of interactions with important adults are important to children's academic and social emotional development.

Peers: Another significant support in the learning of children comes from what is called "friends or peers." As children venture around the community where they live, they acquire the natural support that comes from friends or peers. Then what part do peers play in the language learning of students?

According to Santrock (2006), one of the most important functions of the peer group is to provide a source of information and comparison about the world outside of the family. Good peer relations might be necessary for normal development (Howes & Tonyan, 2000). This is in line with Zirpoli's (2005) comments that peers act as sources that are more credible when it comes to the social context support network associated with learning. This is because peers are more involved in rehearsing new skills in training sessions, and can model appropriate behavior outside these training sessions. In addition, Jordan, and Porath (2006) stated that social skills, such as turn taking, giving compliments, sharing, impulse control and empathy, are needed and important for both healthy social development and academic achievement.

In one study, poor peer relations in childhood were associated with dropping out of school and delinquent behavior in adolescents. By contrast, harmonious peer relations among adolescents have been related to positive mental health at midlife (Santrock, 2006). In line with this, Savin-Williams and Bendt (1990) mentioned that children with poor peer relations are known to experience low self-esteem, depression, poor school achievement, high dropout rates, and delinquent behavior.

In the language development of a child, the term *peer* refers to a child of equal age or maturity. Children are at greatest risk of developing academic problems and antisocial behaviors when they have poor peer relations. Peers also have an influence on how much children value achievement, how much they study, how well they perform in school, and which classes they take. High-achieving students tend to associate with peers who value success in school (Meece, 1997).

Peer support should be considered essential to language learners because students spend considerable time together learning the language, and encounter similar language-learning challenges. Learners may receive support from their classmates not only in the form of friendship, but also in ways that facilitate learning. Peer support has greater reciprocity because peers share equal status (Wentzel, 1994).

Teachers: Another significant support for language learner, which might be called certified support, comes from the teacher. The social and emotional contexts of schooling have powerful influences on student learning, and teachers' understand the social and emotional development and may design supportive, caring classroom environments (Jordan & Porath, 2006).

Jan, Wen, Oi-Man, and Linda (2009) indicated that students who experienced an accepting and warm relationship with their teachers are more motivated and capable of compliance with teachers'

expectations and classroom rules. Thus, increased engagement in activities can lead to greater achievement. Grant and Basye (2014) emphasized that schools which engage students promote a sense of belonging, provide personalizing instruction, and create a supportive, caring social environment.

Teacher preparation and professional development programs need to be designed to support the deeper content, performance, and language demands expected of students. Consequently, the content, quality and delivery of professional learning opportunities will need to support teachers' deeper understanding of content and mastery of instructional strategies in order to assist all students' attain more rigorous standards (Santos, Darling, & Cheuk, 2012). Teacher support refers to students' perceptions that their teacher cares about and will help them. Measures of teacher support typically refer to emotional or personal support, involving perceptions that the teacher likes and cares about the student as an individual. Santos et al. (2012) further held that when students feel supported emotionally by their teacher, they are likely to engage more fully in their academic work, including expending effort, asking for help, and using self-regulated learning strategies.

Technology Use: Advances in information and communication technologies have brought about exciting opportunities for fundamental changes in education. Nowadays, these advances have opened up more innovative ways of thinking about how we learn, teach, and acquire knowledge. Technology, especially modern information and communication technology, holds great potential for significantly improving second language learning (Chapelle, 2001). In line with this, Kumar and Tameling (2008) stated that rapid advances in the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have simultaneously been seen to offer new opportunities for enhancing the quality and effectiveness of language teaching and learning.

Ubaidullah, Mahadi, and Ching (2013) found that in an intentional learning environment, as in second/foreign language learning, most students have less motivation and willingness to practice and speak in the intended language. Therefore, in teaching second/foreign language, the use of an effective method such as technology utilization is highly recommended for better learning outcomes. The advancement of new gadgets paves the way for utilization of easy-to-use technology in language learning. At the same time, teachers also need to be equipped with knowledge on how to utilize supportive language learning gadgets.

According to Kelso (2010), technology not only provides access to information and increases collaboration opportunities, but also enables specialized learning, which assists English language learners to excel in a 21st-century education environment. Technology-based use of an English learner program can provide a less threatening environment for language learning. For example, when English learners practice pronunciation on their own with the aid of an audio sample, the stress and anxiety associated with recitation in front of the class is entirely avoided. Kelso also stated that the best programs for English learners meaningfully engage students at their own pace. This creates a safe environment for the students to practice, to have failures and successes, and to learn how to master both oral and written aspects of the English language.

Stroupe and Kimura (2015) stated that, in comparison with ASEAN giants Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines, Indonesians still lack English speaking skills. These problems seem to occur in almost all levels of formal education systems in Indonesia. Universitas Klabat (UNKLAB) is not exempted. In East Indonesia, UNKLAB has been known well as a bilingual campus, and the university has tried – as much as possible – to promote the use of spoken English language in the community.

Study Objectives

Based on the aforementioned thoughts, this study aimed to investigate:

1. Factors that contribute to students' English speaking performance at UNKLAB.
2. Total variance of these factors to students' English speaking performance.
3. Relationship between factors that contribute to students' English speaking performance as influenced by gender and their length of study at the University.

Research Questions

Through this study, the researcher endeavored to answer the following questions:

1. What factors contribute to students' English speaking performance at UNKLAB?
2. How strong are the factors contributing to students' English speaking performance?
3. Are these factors related to students' gender and the length of study in the University?

Methodology

Participants: The participants of this study consisted of four different levels of English majors who were taking a Speaking and Listening class. The sample of 108 was comprised of 31 males and 77 females who enrolled in the second semester of the 2015/2016 academic year.

Design: This study used a quantitative approach. Factor analysis design was used to group variables into factors in order to reduce a large number of related variables to a more manageable number (Pallant, 2007). Twenty-five items were adapted from an instrument developed by Kovacs (2011) to measure environmental, peer, and teacher variables. Eleven items for technology were adapted from Ismail, Almekhlafi, and Al-Mekhlafy (2010). These 36 items were converted into a questionnaire, and its reliability and construct validity was tested. Seventy-six questionnaires were distributed in a pilot study. Using Cronbach's alpha test of reliability, the coefficient of reliability was 0.86. Ten items were removed due to the Item-Reminder Coefficient being lower than 0.30.

The questionnaires were distributed to the English major students; a convenience sampling method was employed. All questionnaire were found valid for further analysis. To answer the first and second research questions, exploratory factor analysis was used, while to answer the third research question, Independent-Sample t-test and a one-way Anova test was used.

Results

What were the factors contributing to the students' English speaking performance? How strong were the factors contributing to their English speaking performance? Exploratory factor analysis with principal factor extraction using the Varimax rotation method was performed on the 26 variables that were converted into the questionnaire. Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin's (KMO) overall measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) was 0.807 and Barlett's Test of Sphericity value was significant (value 0.000). This means that it was acceptable, since it was greater than 0.50; Barlett's test was significant, as it was smaller than 0.05. Two items were removed due to low a MSA, leaving 24 items for analysis.

Four attributes were extracted, which explained 60.76 percent of the variance contributing to the students' English speaking performance. As shown in Table 1, the variable with the highest variance involved environmental issues (27.27%), while technology usage accounted for the least variance (8.36%).

Table 1. Contribution of Four Factors to Students' English Speaking Performance

Factors/Variables	Variance (% explained)	Cumulative (%)
Environment	27.27	27.27
Peers	15.81	43.08
Teachers	9.32	52.40
Environment	8.36	60.76

Loading variables for factors are shown in Table 2. Variables were ordered and grouped by size and loading to the facilities interpretation. Two variables were removed due to a lower factor loading than 0.45 (Kountur and Hieu, 2013). As shown in Table 2, the first three items under the environment variable have the highest loading under Factor 1. Thus, this indicates that support and influence from the environment are needed.

"I mingle with my friends who speak English" ($r = 0.744$) gained the highest loading for Factor 2. Practicing the English language with friends was another variable contributing to English speaking

performance. “I improve my speaking from my teacher who used English as medium of instruction in my classes” ($r = 0.854$) was the highest loading for Factor 3. This means that the more proficiency a teacher’s use of the English language in their teaching, the more impact they will have upon the students. “Technology usage assists me in making English language learning more interesting and enjoyable” ($r = 0.828$) was the highest loading for Factor 4.

Table 2. Factor Pattern Loadings after Varimax Rotation

Factors/Attributes	Loading			
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4
Environment				
My environment is glad to see the development of my English language	0.836	0.307	0.089	0.078
My environment gladly supports my development of my English skills	0.778	0.292	0.143	0.155
My environment likes to promote learning English	0.777	-0.110	0.110	-0.058
My environment likes those colleagues who develop their English skills	0.693	-0.061	0.144	0.129
My environment is glad to see my efforts to develop my English language skills	0.628	0.486	0.059	0.077
Peers				
I mingle with my friends who speak English	0.112	0.744	0.149	-0.034
I am inspired by my friends who watch movies in English to develop their English language skills	0.105	0.567	-0.064	0.008
It improves my English language when my friends talk to me in English	0.184	0.545	0.032	0.163
It encourages me knowing that my friends find English language skills advantageous in life	0.363	0.527	0.035	0.033
Teachers				
I improve my speaking from my teacher who used English as medium of instruction in the classes	0.058	0.351	0.854	0.158
My teachers speaks/spoke English well	0.173	0.005	0.766	0.124
My English teacher enjoys/enjoyed the fact that using the English language is becoming a part of my life	-0.023	0.081	0.717	0.263
My English teacher emphasizes/ emphasized the importance of English language skills in the job market today	-0.030	0.286	0.705	0.222
My English teacher emphasizes/ emphasized the importance of English language skills in my line of work	0.056	0.128	0.603	0.072
My English teacher likes/liked it when I use English more and more on a daily basis	0.099	0.028	0.581	0.083
Technology				
Technology assists me in making English language learning interesting and enjoyable	0.091	0.073	0.106	0.828
My English language proficiency level improves as a result of using technology	0.079	0.041	0.082	0.784
Technology assists in abandoning the traditional approaches and developing more interactive ways in acquiring English language	0.098	0.309	0.241	0.725
Technology helps me in integrating different English language skill	0.120	-0.011	0.102	0.676

Are those factors related to students’ gender and length of study at UNKLAB? An independent-samples t-test was used to compare means score of factors contributing to students’ English speaking performance at UNKLAB. No significant different was shown between male and female students—Table 3, ($t(106) = -1.638$, $p = 0.201$).

Table 3. Group Statistics and Independent Sample Test Group Statistics

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Factor	Male	31	3.845	0.810	0.145
	Female	77	4.101	0.675	0.077

Independent Samples Test for Factor (Gender)

Levene's Statistic								95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	MD	SED		Lower	Lower
Assume equal variances	1.66	0.201	-1.68	106	0.095	-0.256	0.152	-0.558	
Assume unequal variances			-1.56	47.66	0.126	-0.256	0.164	-0.587	

A one-way Anova test was used to examine the relationship between the four attributes and the length of study at university. It was found that only one factor (environment) was significant—($F(3,104) = 2.948$, $p = 0.036$). Post hoc comparison, using Duncan test, indicated that only in relation to environment was there a difference between groups relating to the length of study at the university. This involved the first and second year students ($M = 3.460$ and $M = 4.171$). The three other attributes bore no relation to the speaking performance and the length of study at the university.

Discussion

The three questions delivering the highest loading were factors relating to the environment, which we have interpreted as constituting the biggest factor contributing to students' English speaking performance. This indicate that social support from the environment plays a big role in students' English speaking performance. This finding is consistent with the study of Mahripah (2014), who stated that environmental and family background plays a vital role in the EFL learning process, and specifically on how the EFL learners perform orally.

Another important variable that contributed to students' speaking performance was the peer factor. This is consistent with (Wentzel, 1994), who stated that peer support should be considered essential for language learners. This is because students spend considerable time together learning the language, and encounter similar language learning challenges. Learners may receive support from their classmates not only in the form of friendship, but also in other ways that facilitate learning. Peer support has greater reciprocity because peers share equal status. In line with the aforementioned idea, Fetsco and McClure (2005) stated that friends provide cognitive resources to help each other acquire knowledge and problem-solving skills, as well as develop communication skills, cooperation behaviors, and methods for accessing and entering groups.

Teachers, not surprisingly, are another variable that contribute to students' English speaking performance. The English teacher sets the tone for learning activities (Quist, 2000). As Tuan and Mai (2015) found, teacher feedback during speaking activities affects students' speaking performance.

The results of the study showed the effectiveness of technology in education, and how it assists in developing students' English communication skills and knowledge, thus contributing to their English speaking performance. This in line with the findings of Wernet, Ollige, and Delicath (2000), who found that technology use in education is becoming an increasingly important part of higher and professional education. This was also supported by Lam and Lawrence (2002), who said that technology not only gave learners the opportunity to control their own learning processes, but also provided them with ready access to a vast amount of information over which a teacher had no power or control. Crystal

(2004) also mentioned that technology offered all students opportunities to learn in ways not previously possible. The four variables that contributed to students' English speaking performance seem not to be related to gender and the length of study at university.

Conclusion

This study aimed to find out the variables contributing to students' English speaking performance at Universitas Klabat. The research findings showed that four variables contributed to students' English speaking performance — viz. environment, peers, teachers and technology. The findings also showed that the percentage of variance accounted for by these attributes, after Varimax rotation, was 60.76 percent. Gender played no part in explaining students' English speaking performance at UNKLAB. A one-way Anova test was performed examining the relationship between the four variables and the length of study at university. Only the environment variable was significantly related to English speaking performance ($F(3,104) = 2.948, p = 0.036$).

Recommendation

Many variables contribute to students' English speaking performance. Identifying these is of tremendous importance so that learners as well as teachers can take appropriate ways to improve speaking ability. The variables highlighted in this study accounted for 60.76 percent of the variance, which means that many variables still need to be found to enable speaking performance to improve. A similar study could be undertaken to identify other variables using a bigger sample and new question items.

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