

Public Speaking: Several Essential Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Oral communication in front of an audience is known as public speaking, a combination of speaking skills and the art of speaking. Speaking in front of an audience involves more than just getting your point out; it also involves considering how well it will be received and accepted into the hearts of the audience. Learning public speaking has its own challenges. The purpose of this study is to identify the challenges faced by students in learning public speaking. It is a descriptive qualitative study with 13 participants from an English Language Education Study Program in Surabaya. Purposive sampling was used to obtain the participants. Two instruments are needed to collect data in this study: a questionnaire and an interview. The results of the study show that the challenges faced by students, in general, include two things, namely internal and external challenges. Internal challenges include psychological conditions, language competence (vocabulary mastery, fluency, and pronunciation), and topical knowledge, while external challenges are performance conditions and learning environment.

Keyword: public speaking, challenges

ABSTRAK

Berbicara di depan umum adalah jenis komunikasi lisan di hadapan banyak orang yang merupakan kombinasi dari kemampuan berbicara dan seni berbicara. Berbicara di hadapan banyak orang tidak hanya sekedar mengungkapkan pesan semata, tetapi juga berfokus bagaimana pesan yang diungkapkan bisa dipahami dan meresap ke lubuk hati orang yang diajak berbicara. Pembelajaran berbicara di depan umum mempunyai tantangan tersendiri. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengidentifikasi tantangan-tantangan yang dihadapi mahasiswa dalam pembelajaran berbicara di depan umum. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian deskriptif kualitatif dengan 13 partisipan dari salah satu program studi pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Surabaya yang diambil secara purposive sampling. Instrumen yang diperlukan untuk memperoleh data dalam riset ini ada dua, antara lain kuesioner dan wawancara. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan tantangan yang dihadapi mahasiswa secara umum meliputi dua hal yaitu tantangan internal dan eksternal. Tantangan

internal yang mencakup kondisi psikologis, kompetensi bahasa (penguasaan kosakata, kelancaran, dan pengucapan), dan pemahaman topik, sedangkan tantangan eksternal adalah tingkat kinerja dan lingkungan belajar.

Kata kunci: berbicara di depan umum, tantangan

Introduction

One of the soft skills that is very important today is the ability to speak in public. Public speaking is a form of oral communication in front of a large audience which is a combination of the art of speaking and the ability to speak in public. The ability to speak in public is one of the keys to success now and in the future, especially with the rapid advancement of science and technology lately. People with good speaking skills can communicate their thoughts and ideas well to others. With the help of today's fast-paced technology, they can convey ideas, thoughts, and solutions to a problem virtually without meeting face to face. With good speaking skills, what they convey can be understood correctly and effectively. It is the ability to speak in public at a high level, utilizing technological developments accurately and concisely to convey ideas (Prambadi, 2021).

Students need the ability to speak in public to improve themselves. The ability to speak in public will make it easier for students to convey their ideas and thoughts to the public. Public speaking requires two main components: speaking techniques and conveying messages correctly (Mufanti et al., 2016). Speaking in front of an audience involves more than just getting your point out; it also involves considering how well it will be received and entered into the hearts of the interlocutor/audience (Asriandhini et al., 2020). Speaking is necessary because one of the goals of learning English is to be able to use the language. One way to use language is the ability to communicate verbally, which is also a tool for communicating with others (Wardani, 2018).

Based on the observation made during public speaking class, most students of the English education study program at one university in Surabaya faced several difficulties in performing public speaking. It becomes a challenge for them to be solved. That is why it is essential to identify what kind of challenges faced by the students in studying public speaking so that they can formulate several solutions to solve the problems.

Public speaking is expected to benefit students because it will increase their personal and social values in interactions, improve academic quality and, most importantly, benefit their future careers. By practicing speaking, they can build confidence when conveying their thoughts or opinions. In addition, academic activities often involve students in presentations and group discussions; in this case, the ability to speak must be properly mastered (Yee et al., 2014).

Method

This research is a descriptive study conducted using a qualitative approach to understand the challenges faced by English Language Education Study Program students in studying Public Speaking in depth. Following the characteristics of qualitative descriptive study (Ary et al., 2014), these challenges were explored from the students' perspective.

This study involved 13 English Language Education Study Program students at a university who took the Public Speaking course in the even semester of the 2020/2021. The students were chosen purposively as research subjects because, at the beginning of the semester, they did not have excellent speaking skills but had high enthusiasm to improve their speaking skills.

Two research instruments were used in this study. The first one was an unstructured questionnaire given to students via Google Form to collect data about the challenges they face. This questionnaire contained some open questions that students with detailed explanations must answer. The second one was a semi-structured interview to obtain in-depth information based on the answers they wrote in the questionnaire. This interview contained several main questions regarding challenges in learning Public Speaking. Several supporting questions were asked to students based on the answers to these questions. Because, at that time, it was still a pandemic, remote interviews were conducted via the WhatsApp application. Interview transcripts were kept in Microsoft Word files for analysis.

The qualitative data generated from the two instruments above were analysed using the procedure suggested by Ary et al. (2014), namely (1) familiarizing and organizing, (2) coding and reducing, and (3) interpreting and representing. The data were arranged in tables with specific categories to be analysed.

Results

From two research instruments, namely a questionnaire and an interview, the challenges faced by students include two things, namely internal and external challenges. Internal challenges include psychological conditions, language competence, and topical knowledge.

Psychological conditions might include feelings of anxiety or shame, low self-esteem, lack of ambition, and fear of making errors. Some respondents said that their most significant challenges were a lack of self-confidence and fear and anxiety when speaking in public. The following are some of the responses from students:

A: The other is how we deliver our speech to our audiences (by using gestures, facial expression, intonation, and how our speech can influence them, etc.), and my biggest challenge is my confidence. I learnt that speaking is not that scary as long as we enjoy doing that.

B: The first is a lack of mastered vocabulary and low self-confidence with a sense of nervousness.

The capacity of speakers to grasp linguistic elements is a component of language competence. Fluency, intonation, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and other elements are among them. Several respondents said that their biggest challenge was their need for more vocabulary. The following are some opinions from students:

A: The first is a lack of mastered vocabulary.

B: The challenge that I experience when speaking English is a lack of vocabulary.

C: I think I'm still lack at my vocabulary knowledge, I need to learn and know more of it.

D: The challenge is when we have to multiply and memorize vocabulary, dare to speak to everyone.

The second aspect of language competence that is a challenge for students is fluency in speaking. They felt less fluent when speaking and often needed to find the right words. Following are the responses of some students regarding fluency:

A: When I speak English I tend to be less fluent and often stop for a moment while speaking to think of what the next word will be.

B: Not fluent in speaking because of thinking about what to say first and lack of vocabulary.

C: The way how to speak fluently.

D: I think there are challenges, for example How to speak to others without note, how to speak fluently.

Furthermore, from the aspect of language competence, the challenge for students is pronunciation. They felt many things still needed to be corrected in pronunciation. Here are some student responses:

A: Most of it is the pronunciation. Sometimes I also have a difficulty at choosing the right word to speak.

B: In my opinion challenges in speaking English are pronunciation and comprehension.

C: The way how to speak fluency and pronunciation.

The speaker's understanding of facts pertaining to a pertinent issue is referred to as topical knowledge. When learners are knowledgeable about a subject, they may use language to discuss the environment in which they live. Some respondents felt that they needed help finding topics and needed help understanding the topics they were going to present. Following are some of the responses from students:

A: We need to understand and the presented topic first before presenting it, and sometimes it's a little bit hard to understand the topic since we don't know much about it before. We also need to improve our speaking so that the audiences can understand our speech in presentation.

B: In my opinion challenges in speaking English are pronunciation and comprehension.

C: The challenging thing in the Public Speaking Class is when looking for interesting topics for presentations.

The external challenges include performance conditions and the learning environment. The settings under which the students completed their speaking tasks led them to feel that the conditions may have an impact on their performance. Time restrictions, planning, performance standards, and the level of assistance are four different categories of performance conditions. The challenge related to the performance condition was that students found it easier to speak with text. They needed more preparation. They also needed help in how to convey the material and answer questions related to the material. The following are some student responses:

A: I think there are challenges, for example how to speak to others without note, how to speak fluently and how to speak with right words.

B: The other is how we deliver our speech to our audiences (by using gestures, facial expression, intonation, and how our speech can influence them, etc.).

C: The challenging thing in the Public Speaking Class is when looking for interesting topics for presentations, speaking in public, and answering questions during presentations.

Since English is the primary language of communication, a positive language learning environment may be very beneficial. Studying offline or online also affects student understanding. One of the challenges faced by students was learning, which was still carried out online. Some students thought online learning was ineffective for public speaking classes. The following are responses from students:

A: If we are talking about challenges in this pandemic era, I think the challenge is how we (as students) accept the material by online learning.

Discussion

The challenges faced by students include two things, namely internal and external challenges. Internal challenges include psychological conditions, language competence, and topical knowledge, while external challenges include performance conditions and learning environment. Some respondents said that their most significant challenges were a lack of self-confidence and fear and anxiety when speaking in public. Students are typically prevented from speaking by psychological conditions such as nervousness or embarrassment, lack of self-confidence, enthusiasm, and fear of errors. (Burns and Joyce, as cited in Nunan, 1991; Schwartz, 2005; & Thornbury, 2005).

In this study, some respondents said that their biggest challenge was their need for more vocabulary, which made it difficult for them to express their ideas. The second aspect of language competence that was a challenge for students was fluency in speaking. They felt less fluent when speaking and often paused to find the right words. Furthermore, from the aspect of language competence, the challenge for students was pronunciation. They felt many things still needed to be corrected in pronunciation. The perfect language system permits speakers to generate and comprehend an infinite number of statements in their native tongue while also being able to discriminate between grammatical and non-grammatical phrases. Language competence includes the ability of speakers to master linguistic aspects when communicating (Chomsky, 1965).

The third internal challenge is topical knowledge. Some respondents felt that they needed help finding topics and needed help understanding the topics they were going to present. Understanding the topic is the speaker's knowledge of the relevant topic. (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, as cited in Tuan & Mai, 2015).

Next are the external challenges, which include performance conditions and the learning environment. Students found it easier to speak with text. They needed more preparation. They also had difficulties in how to convey the material and answer questions related to the material. Nation and Newton (as cited in Tuan & Mai, 2015) said that Students practice speaking exercises in a variety of settings, and they hold the view that the performance setting can influence speaking effectiveness.

Studying offline or online also affects student understanding. One of the challenges faced by students was learning, which was still carried out online. Students consider that online learning is not effective enough for public speaking classes. Minghe and Yuan (2013) said that the requirement for a positive learning environment is an external factor that influences

speaking ability. Since English is the language of communication, a favorable language environment may successfully encourage learning.

Conclusion

The challenges faced by students include two things, namely internal and external challenges. Internal challenges include psychological conditions, language competence (vocabulary mastery, fluency, and pronunciation), and topical knowledge, while external challenges are performance conditions and learning environment. Students who want to learn public speaking must pay more attention to these essential challenges.

The number of participants in this study is expected to be added to obtain more valid and reliable data. In addition, participants are not only taken from one study program. However, they can be taken from several or many existing study programs so that the data obtained can be more varied.

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