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Vocational College Students' Common Errors in EFL Speaking Performance

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Abstract

This research aims to find out the common errors made by students studying at one of the vocational colleges in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The students' opinions on their experiences of learning English, particularly in speaking, were also explored. This qualitative-quantitative research design was conducted by collecting some recordings of the students' speaking performance, and distributing questionnaires on the process of teaching and learning EFL to be filled in by the participants. In the analysis, the data from the recordings were coded, transcribed, described and displayed in accordance with the students' error items. Meanwhile, the analysis of the questionnaire employed a simple percentage calculation. From the speaking performance, the students in the speaking class produced two types of common errors, i.e. pronunciation and grammar errors. The common errors in their English pronunciation vary between the vowel and the consonant. The errors in vowel production were produced the most. Meanwhile, 70% of the students made errors in grammar on language tense and some on plural morphemes. From the questionnaire, it was revealed that even though the students tried to speak English well, all of them were aware and agreed that they made grammatical errors when speaking English.

Keywords: Error(s), speaking English, vocational college, students' difficulties.

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1. INTRODUCTION

It has been debated for decades that Indonesian students face a number of problems in learning English. This circumstance directs teachers to identify the problems and the difficulty of the EFL students in the learning process. As a matter of fact, teaching materials, teaching methods, syllabus, textbook(s) and even curriculum are continuously being developed and revised based on the students' needs. Therefore, it is expected that both teachers and students to play their roles effectively in the classroom in order to develop students' capabilities in mastering English.

Then again, most EFL learners face several problems to achieve the target language properly, including problems of English vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, or understanding the language structure. [Hadijah \(2014\)](#) reported that pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension are the main problems for 130 college students in Samarinda, Indonesia, in enhancing the speaking skill. She also stated that the major problem faced by the students is grammar, followed by pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. On the other hand, [Nakhlah \(2016\)](#) illustrated that fear, shyness, anxiety, and lack of confidence are the aspects of students to inhibit the development of their oral ability. In other words, personal reasons also affect the students' skill ([Tokoz-Goktepe, 2014](#)). Another study by [Kayum \(2015\)](#) also analyzed errors in oral language performance. It was found that teachers play an important role in the process of language accuracy and fluency of the students. Even though teachers need to correct students' errors during their speaking practices, it is essential that they also consider the students' needs. Instead of correcting all errors, teachers should give students chances to do self-correction as well.

Responding to the explanation above, this present study was conducted in the speaking class of a vocational college in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. In college, the students are obliged to take three English courses during their study at the college. The teaching-learning instruction through these subjects which consist of language structure, reading, speaking, and writing are expected to guide them to have good skills in the language. Nevertheless, English oral performance was found to be the toughest for the students' to deal with.

To find ways on improving the students' speaking performance, therefore, this research was conducted to initially find out the students' errors in speaking performance including error analysis of pronunciation, structure, vocabulary, and fluency. Moreover, the students' opinions on their experiences of learning English, particularly in speaking, were also explored. It is expected that the results of this research can be a stepping stone for the lecturers at the college, and in other colleges, to find better strategies in teaching speaking to their students in the EFL context. By identifying the errors and mistakes and having the students to recognize them for improvement, therefore these communication and involvement in the language process can help students to better acquire EFL.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Errors in language learning can be easily seen during students' language skill classroom practices. However, being corrected on the errors properly by the teachers has been an issue in language teaching. To enhance students' ability, errors must be arranged, corrected and evaluated ([Hoxha, 2015](#)). She also stressed that the teacher

should recognize the concepts, process, and strategies to perform an effective way of error correction. Additionally, [Maicusi et al. \(2000\)](#) noted that errors have been beneficial for teachers to improve their skill while evaluating students' language competence. While teachers are correcting students, it is believed that they are being kept motivated. They are responsible to help students in correcting the errors they produced and making the students aware of the errors they do for further improvement.

Although errors during the learning process are one of the students' problems, it is explained that there are several factors affecting students' foreign language performances. According to [Tuan and Mai \(2015\)](#), speaking performances might be affected by performance conditions (such as time pressure, planning, the standard of performance and amount of support), affective factors (such as motivation, confidence, and anxiety), listening ability and feedback during speaking activities. [Haidara \(2016\)](#) also observed that psychological obstacles such as the lack of confidence, being anxious, being nervous, being worried, feeling shy, and feeling frustrated have an important role in oral language practice. Therefore, in language acquisition, not only should students comprehend their problems while speaking English, but the teachers should also be good mediators for students to analyze and solve learning problems.

For students to acquire language fluently and accurately, their errors or mistakes need to be corrected. Furthermore, it is perceived that each student has his or her own problems in language learning. Particularly in speaking, students need to practice and practice, but most of the time they cannot recognize their errors or mistakes. It is also acknowledged by [Erdoğan \(2005\)](#) that analysis of learner language has become an essential need to propose solutions regarding different aspects of language learning problems. Consequently, the teachers should be able to analyze error(s) or mistake(s) students created in order to construct effective teaching-learning situations.

One of the ways to examine students' language errors or mistakes is through error analysis. According to [Al-Khresheh \(2016\)](#), error analysis has an essential role in investigating, identifying, and describing students' errors and their causes. In addition, [Rashid \(2015\)](#) conducted a project on Kurdish EFL students to investigate the errors or mistakes produced by the students during English language learning. By identifying the errors and mistakes and having the students to recognize them for improvement, therefore this communication and involvement in the language process can help students to better acquire EFL.

3. METHODS

This qualitative-quantitative study was designed to find students' errors during their speaking performance. The subjects of this study were the participants in the speaking class studying in the second year at Politeknik Aceh, a vocational school in Banda Aceh, Indonesia. The classes in the Accountancy Department were chosen because they have more English lessons than the other departments. The number of students in the two classes was 25, mostly aged between 18-20 years old.

To assess the students' speaking performance, each of the students was required to record his/her personal speaking activity in at least three minutes. The audios involving the students' oral tasks were then sent to the researchers via email. The researchers provided a transcription for each recording. After recording, the students were also requested to fill in a questionnaire. This questionnaire is adapted from [Gan \(2013\)](#). The questionnaire inquired about their opinions on their experiences of

learning English, particularly in speaking, with items that required 'yes' or 'no' answers.

After the data were collected, the audio scripts and questionnaires were analyzed. The analysis includes the process of data condensation, data display, and verifying conclusion (Miles et al., 2014). Firstly, the data from the recordings and transcriptions were selected and condensed. Secondly, the condensed data were categorized based on errors in pronunciation and grammar. Thirdly, the data were described and concluded. Meanwhile, the data from the questionnaires were calculated with a simple percentage formula to investigate their opinions on their experiences of learning English, particularly in speaking.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Students' Common Error(s)

It is assured that each language has no similar linguistics structure. Various experiences of language learning in speaking class are particularly encountered by the students. From the research findings, there are several common errors produced by the students in the speaking class. All of the errors found were divided into two types, namely pronunciation and grammar errors. Based on the analysis of data, it was found that the common errors encountered in their English speaking performance were pronunciation. The total number of students' pronunciation errors during their speaking performance was 103 errors, and 90 errors in grammar.

4.1.1 Students' pronunciation errors

The number of pronunciation errors varies from the production of vowels to consonants, with the number of pronunciation errors higher in vowel productions compared to consonants. From 25 students, it was found that there were 77 vowel pronunciation errors produced during their speaking performance. Most of the students put some inaccurate articulations at /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /u:/, /ə/, /əʊ/, /ɜ/, /ʌ/, /ɔ/, and /eə/. Furthermore, based on the topic required for the students to speak, it was found that the word 'childhood' /tʃaɪldhʊd/ is the one with the most error produced in its pronunciation.

Meanwhile, there are 26 errors in the pronunciation of consonants. The majority of the students tend to eliminate /s/ on the words such as 'sometime' for 'sometimes' /'sʌmtaɪmz/ and 'always' for 'always' /'ɔ:lweɪz/. On the contrary, some students prefer to add the /s/ sounds after words such as 'goods' for 'good' /gʊd/. Meanwhile, the pronunciation /-ed/ in the English words were also erroneously uttered. It clearly indicates that the students cannot differ how to stress -ed and how it is not sound in the past tense of some words, such as saying (E refers to excerpts from data):

- E1 /hæpinid/ was pronounced for the word 'happened' /'hæpənd/
- E2 /walket/ was pronounced for the word 'walked' /wɔkt/
- E3 /taɪrət/ was pronounced for the word 'tired' /'taɪəd/,
- E4 /ararvəd/ was pronounced for the word 'arrived' /ə'raɪvd/
- E5 /jusəd/ was pronounced for the word 'used' /ju:zd/
- E6 /'ɪndʒərəd/ was pronounced for the word 'injured' /'ɪndʒəd/

The mistakes above show that they had little knowledge of how to pronounce the words properly. This can be due to the lack of exposure and practice given to the students for speaking in class, or from the teachers themselves, who did not inform them on the correct way of pronouncing certain word forms. Nevertheless, the literature notes that many Indonesian students are not able to produce intelligible English words because many of the English words are pronounced differently from their spelling (Achmad & Yusuf, 2014). This is also the case of many EFL learners around the world, where idiosyncrasies of the English pronunciation is due to the improper inference from the spelling (Wells, 2008).

4.1.2 Students' grammatical errors

Furthermore, according to the analysis of data, there are a total of 90 occurrences of students' errors in grammar use. Each of the participants indicated varied errors of language structure including tense, plural morpheme, and first language interference as shown in Figure 1.

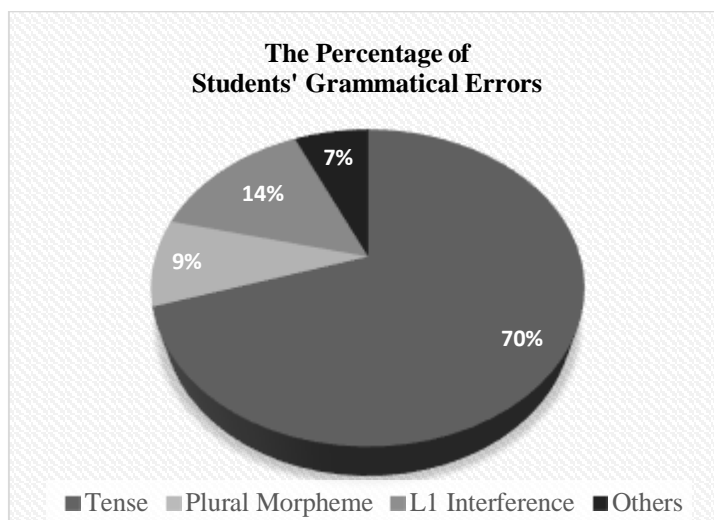


Figure 1. Percentage of students' grammatical errors.

The largest number of errors produced by the students were in English tenses. It indicates that the students tend to use the simple verb without paying attention to the tense agreement. Even though, the topic spoken was about their childhood (to be told in the past tense), the students kept making mistakes or errors, especially in the use of tenses in their speaking. For example, in E1 (E refers to excerpts from data, and the corrected version is in brackets):

E7 Every day, I was to go to school at 7 o'clock. [Every day, I went to school at 7 o'clock.]

From the sentence, the student tends to express the language without realizing the use of the correct tense or verb usage. In the meantime, there is also a tendency for most students to use the verb -ing in incorrect ways, such as:

E8 I can telling about my childhood. [I can tell (you) about my childhood.]

E9 I riding the bicycle. [I rode the bicycle.]

The data above show that there is less comprehension of the verb-ing application. The students were unconscious of saying the words during their speaking performances. Although the meaning of the language is correct, the language rules are still erroneous.

On the other hand, most of the students had no concern about the changes in verbs based on time. The data below clearly describes the students' errors in the use of past tense verbs. Expressing past time is done by supplying the past simple verb form in English, but the students did not pay attention to their use of the verbs in the past tense.

E10 I go with my friend in the morning. [I went with my friend in the morning.]

E11 I get up... [I got up...]

Not only did the students produce some errors in the verbal sentence, but they also made errors in the nominal one. Even though the errors seem trivial, they are still linguistic errors. The excerpts below represent some of the fallacy of language performance in the speaking assignment:

E12 ...at that time Im seven year old... [...that time, I was seven years old...]

E13 When I am eight year old... [When I was eight years old.]

E14 My junior high school is in Lapang... [My junior high school was in Lapang...]

E15 ...that is tsunami disaster... [that was (the) tsunami disaster...]

E16 When Im in elementary school... [When I was in (the) elementary school...]

From the excerpts above, it can be seen that most students were unaware of the use of 'be' in the past time. E12-E16 were the students' stories about their past activities during their childhood. Although the orders of the words are right, they used 'be' in the present time. Despite they were asked to tell their stories in the past (i.e. childhood years), thus most students spoke in the simple present tense. One of the reasons for the students to do so is perhaps due to the L1 interference. In Indonesian, there are no tenses such as in English and verbs do not change in form according to time. As [Safrida and Kasim \(2016\)](#) found that the students' mother tongue interference or known as intra-lingual interference is the students' main cause of producing errors during the target language practice. In their study, the students showed the highest error types found in omission problems involving omission of auxiliaries, prepositions, articles, irregular past tense, inflections, and subjects.

Besides the errors in language structure found in this study, the errors of plural noun were also prevalent. The data indicated the students mostly constructed their speaking with inappropriate plural morphemes. The samples below show that the use of plural nouns is still confusing to the students.

E17 I used to climb the trees with some friend. [I used to climb the trees with some friends.]

E18 My hobby are football and basketball...I get three winner... [My hobbies are football and basketball... I got three wins...]

E19 When I was 15 year old... [When I was 15 years old...]

E20 When I was a child, I have many experience... [When I was a child, I had many experiences...]

E21 There were a snake... [There was a snake...]

E22 ...to the terrace of my house at the height 3 meter... [...to the terrace of my house at the height (of) 3 meters...]

Based on the data above, it is demonstrated that the students did not well perceive the agreement of subjects and verbs. While the student in E17 said 'trees' in the plural

form, but he forgot to add ‘-s’ to the noun ‘friend’. From E18-E21, the students practiced the fallacious plural nouns unintentionally. Furthermore, in E22, the student attempted to apply the correct tense in his sentence but did not focus on the singular or plural rules of English. The researchers of this study noticed that the students have enough comprehension of plural morphemes in theory, however, failed to apply them in their speaking practice.

Syarifuddin (2015, p. 64), who conducted research on Thai students’ speaking English, also found that the students omitted ‘-s’ in plural words owing to their habits in their L1. The students clarified that there was no addition of ‘-s’ to express the plural noun in their language. This is similar to the case in the Indonesian language that also do not have the addition of ‘-s’ to plural forms. In another case, Ting et al. (2010) conducted a research on the students who had less English proficiency and collected 126 oral interactions. It was found that the participants’ errors were not only in the plural forms of nouns but also in preposition, article, subject-verb agreement and tense. This finding is also similar to Widianingsih and Gulö (2016).

4.2 Students’ Opinions on Speaking English

Table 1 shows the students’ opinions on their experiences of learning English, particularly in speaking. The items in the questionnaire focus on their habit, motivation, and problems in learning English.

Table 1. Students’ opinions on their experiences of learning English, particularly in speaking.

No	Statements	Answer	Total	Percentage
1	I am nervous and shy while I’m speaking English.	Yes	21	84%
		No	4	16%
2	I speak very little or not at all.	Yes	18	72%
		No	7	28%
3	I have no motivation to express my English.	Yes	9	36%
		No	16	64%
4	I am worried about making mistakes.	Yes	18	72%
		No	7	28%
5	I encounter pronunciation problems when speaking English.	Yes	23	92%
		No	2	8%
6	I worry about grammar when speaking English.	Yes	24	96%
		No	1	4%
7	I make grammatical errors when speaking English.	Yes	25	100%
		No	0	0%
8	I am not good at using complex structures when speaking English.	Yes	23	92%
		No	2	8%
9	I get stuck with grammar or vocabulary when speaking English to my teachers.	Yes	23	92%
		No	2	8%
10	I avoid using difficult words and structures when speaking English.	Yes	22	88%
		No	3	12%
11	I feel a lack of opportunities to speak English outside of class.	Yes	18	72%
		No	7	28%
12	I keep silent in class because of a lack of confidence in speaking English.	Yes	14	56%
		No	11	44%

Based on Table 1, it shows that four students or 16% of them believed that they had great confidence in speaking, and 84% of them agreed that they were nervous and shy in speaking. These were due to some reasons, such as afraid of making mistakes

or errors because they rarely practiced speaking English. Four of the students answered that they like to speak English, but could not speak it fluently.

In relation to the data above, Saputra (2018) agreed that during the learning instruction, the students have problems such as their nervousness or anxiety during the practice. In his study, he solved his students' anxiety problems by using a teaching technique well-known as communicative language teaching. The findings showed that the technique is effective to decrease nervousness during students' speaking performance. Meanwhile, Indrianty (2016) suggested that teachers should always encourage students in speaking. She also added there are some reasons which cause anxiety during oral language performance, they are such as lack of vocabulary, lack of preparation, being afraid of making mistakes, and being afraid of being laughed at by peers.

Going back to the questionnaire, statement number 12 associates with students' behavior owing to confidence. It is argued that 56% of respondents chose 'yes' with keeping silent in class because of their lack of confidence in speaking English. A number of 11 students (44%) tried to be talkative in the class; they were aware that they lack oral language ability and so they felt that they needed to be active in the classroom.

During practice, most of the students (72%) confessed that they spoke very little or even they did not speak at all. In fact, a large number of students (64%) had a high level of motivation to express their ideas in English. As some students thought that they were in the learning process, so it was common to make mistakes (38%). Meanwhile, the majority of the students (72%) were worried about making mistakes. Most of them said that they were worried about making mistakes and this made them shy, no confidence, and was anxious about being laughed at by peers.

Statements number 4 and 6 is about grammar anxiety during speaking. It was found that 96% of students did not speak freely due to grammar concerns. All of them (100%) did not deny that they made grammatical errors while they were speaking English. It can be caused by the complex structures of English that made it difficult to understand for most students due to the different language systems between Indonesian and English. Again, being aware of grammar used in the language being learned that is different from their first language can make students feel reluctant to practice their skill. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to notice students' beliefs on grammar instruction so that they can find effective and efficient methods in the classroom to teach grammar (Sopin, 2015).

Statement number 9 concerns with getting stuck with grammar or vocabulary when speaking English to teachers. The data show that 92% of students were not good at using complex structures when speaking English. Only two students (8%) disputed that they did not get stuck with grammar or vocabulary when speaking English to their teachers. On the contrary, most students (88%) concurred that they avoided using difficult words and structures when speaking English. Finally, more than half of the students (72%) felt that they had a lack of opportunities to speak English outside of the class.

5. CONCLUSION

The students in the speaking class produced two types of common errors, i.e. pronunciation and grammar errors. The common errors in their English pronunciation

vary between the productions of vowels to consonants. While speaking, most of the students put some inaccurate articulations at /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /u:/, /ə/, /əʊ/, /ɜ/, /ʌ/, /ɔ/, and /eə/. On the other hand, pronunciation errors of the consonants usually happen when the students say words with ‘-ed’ endings. Meanwhile, the students’ grammatical errors vary from the use of incorrect tenses and incorrect plural morphemes.

The questionnaire reveals that the major factor influencing the students’ language performance is their lack of confidence. Despite the students’ pronounced anxiety on the use of grammar when speaking English, all of them were aware of making grammatical errors. Additionally, their low level of motivation is because a majority of the students feel the lack of opportunities to speak English outside of class. Consequently, it is evident that learning to speak English fluently is interfered by their difficulties due to habits, motivation, and problems in English learning experiences.

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