

Original Research Article

What Makes High-Achiever Students Hard to Improve Their Speaking Skill?

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ABSTRACT

Speaking problems do not only happen to low achiever students. High-achiever students with high average score (above 90) also still have speaking problems. This makes the researcher find it important to investigate what factors that make them still get difficulties in speaking. This research is a descriptive study. The subjects include 9 high-achiever students majoring in English Department that have been selected from University of Brawijaya, State University of Malang, and Kanjuruhan University. The data have been collected by using questionnaire, interview guide, and observation sheet. The findings show that the most hampering factor in relation to teaching and learning activities is too many assignments given. Next, in terms of teaching and learning materials, the highest hampering factor is the level of difficulty of the materials which are too high. Also, the most hampering factor related to lecturers' personalities is that the lecturer is too serious in handling the class. Moreover, lack of English usage is the next highest hampering factor about the use of English as a medium of instruction in class. Also, lack of feedback given to high-achiever students is the most hampering factor of their speaking skill. The findings indicate that preliminary study and need analysis are needed in order to help lecturers teach high-achiever students more effectively which can result in helping them overcome their speaking problems and improve their speaking skill.

Keywords: hampering factors; speaking skill; high-achiever students

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1. Introduction

In relation with English skill, Widiati & Cahyono (2006) define that foreign language learners can be categorized into successful learners if they can communicate that foreign language effectively. Therefore, it can be said that the determining parameter of if a learner has a good English skill can be observed from their fluency in using verbal English communication. Thus, the success of English learners is more often seen from their speaking skill than the other three skills (listening, writing, and reading). Grounding by that fact, this research was focused on discussing the language skill, namely verbal English speaking skill.

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Oxford (1990) states that speaking in English is a scary thing to do for mostly students. That can be caused by the lack of vocabulary and fear of making mistake in terms of grammar that lead them to feel less confident to speak in English.

Speaking problems of nonnative speakers of English have been previously investigated by previous researchers (Park & Lee, 2005; Hamad, 2012; Mazaozi, 2013). Park & Lee (2005) says that lack of speaking practice has become the main problem why speaking is hard for students. Next, Hamad (2012) states that many students who are nonnative speakers of English have difficulties in conveying messages fluently. This is because most of them hard get what to say and how to say it in English. Supporting with what Hamad (2012) has found, Mazaozi (2013) says that many students feel afraid of making mistakes in language aspects. He further states that lack of speaking partner also has become their problems in improving their speaking skill.

Even though there have been several studies concerning speaking problems of nonnative speakers of English, there is still a need to analyze what factors that have caused them face those difficulties during English learning particularly for improving their speaking skill. More importantly, what previous studies have shown is about speaking problems faced by students, but the researchers do not specifically present what really happen to low achiever students and high achiever ones during their speaking learning process.

Referring to this gap, the present study intends to investigate what factors that have made high achiever students face speaking problems. The criteria in determining the categories of high-achiever students are based on the lecturers' recommendations regarding to their daily speaking performance and the researcher's observation results based on three aspects: (1) The verbal ability in delivering idea fluently, (2) the use of appropriate vocabulary, and (3) the fewer grammatical mistakes in speaking. The lecturers' recommendations are then obtained in the form of the students' daily score that is more than 90 and the description of their skill. The researcher's observation results also affirm the recommendations given by the lecturers.

Based on the preliminary study that has been done by the researcher to the English department students with good level of English skill (High-achievers), there are some problems on the English speaking skill that they are encountering. The first problem is related to the language structure. The other most-often-encountered problem is related to the lack of idea. Furthermore, the pronunciation aspect is also still one of the problems in conveying ideas orally. The importance of active English skill and the existence of problems in relation

with speaking activity in English have made the researcher interested to conduct a research regarding the hampering factors that are even still experienced by the high-achiever students that make them difficult to improve their English speaking skill.

Having known the existing speaking problems faced by high-achiever students, there is a need to analyze further what factors have caused them face those problems. Again, the purpose of this study is then to investigate what hampering factors that make them face the difficulties in improving their speaking skill. The findings are expected to give empirical data for EFL teachers to design more appropriate and effective teaching methods to help students improve their speaking skill.

2. Methods

This research is a descriptive qualitative research because the main data are in the form of description and explanation of hampering factors of students' English speaking skill. The subject of this research consists of 9 high-achiever students of English department from three universities in Malang namely University of Brawijaya, State University of Malang, and University of Kanjuruhan that have been selected through observation and the result of interview with the lecturers for English speaking course. The data analysis of this research was done by analyzing the findings descriptively concerned with the hampering factors of English speaking skill improvement. The questionnaire results of those 9 students hereafter would be presented in the form of graphics and exposed consecutively start from the highest to the lowest percentage of hampering factors. .

3. Findings and Discussion

In connection with the factors of teaching and learning activities in class, there are some aspects influencing why students experienced difficulty to speak in English. Figure 1 shows that the main reason is because there are too many assignments given by the lecturers, that is about 33.3%. In this case, the assignments do not only cover about speaking, but also reading, listening, writing, even the other assignments that have no relation with English. Certainly, this makes the students' time for practicing their speaking skill become shorter and limited. Thought and effort even had to be divided. The next reason with the percentage of 22.2% was precisely the opposite of the previous reason, stating that the lack of assignment given by lecturers could also influence the students' speaking skill. In this case, the students thought that the assignments given by their lecturers are medium that could help them

improve their speaking skill outside of school activities. Moreover, the lack of the use of instructional media also could be one of the reasons why students experience difficulties in English speaking. And there is 22.2% of percentage acquisition reached for this reason. Then, the fourth and fifth reasons with the same percentage of 11.1% are due to the lack of practice (practicing to speak in English) and no innovation.

The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from Teaching and Learning Activities Aspect

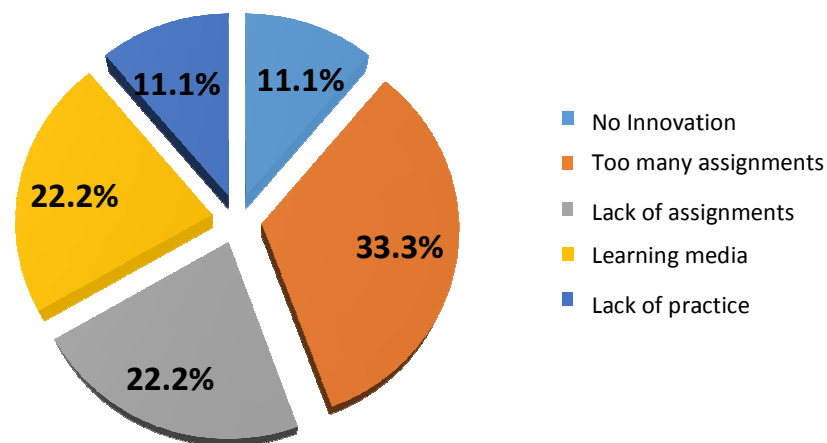


Figure 1. The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from Teaching and Learning Activities Aspect

Afterwards, regarding to the aspect of lecturing materials, there are some factors causing the students experience difficulties to speak in English as seen on Figure 2. The first hampering factor with the percentage of 55.6% (5 students) is because the materials that are too hard. The material difficulty makes the students less able to comprehend what should be delivered and how to deliver it in English orally. Furthermore, the materials that are too easy also become the second reason why students cannot develop their English speaking skill maximally. This could be concluded by having 22.2% of percentage acquisition (2 students). When the materials taught are too easy, the students tend to underestimate and give less effort for their speaking performance. Additionally, there is nothing new that they could get to improve their speaking skill. Then, in the third and fourth places with the same percentage of 11.1%, there are the incompatibility between the material and what the students needed, and

no innovation. In this matter, the material incompatibility happens when the materials given by the lecturers are different from the students' expectation and needs.

The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from the Material Aspect

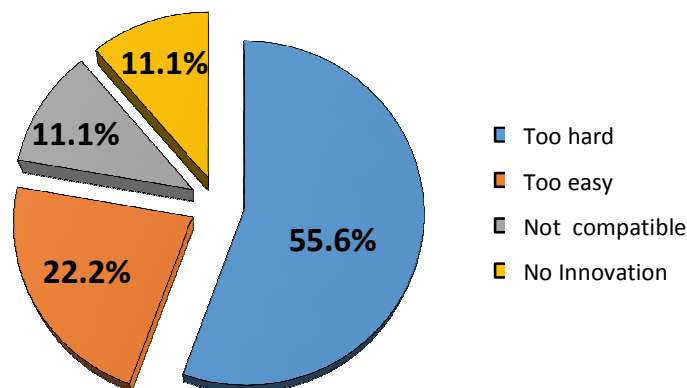


Figure 2. The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from the Material Aspect

Related to the lecturers' personalities, there are some factors causing the students experience difficulty to speak in English as shown on Figure 3. In the first place with the percentage of 66.7% (6 students), it is stated that one of the factors is because the lecturers are too serious in handling the class so that the atmosphere of the class becomes frightening. That is what has made the students reluctant to actively speak in English. The moody lecturers also become the aspect that make the students less able to practice their speaking maximally because they feel less comfortable when the lecturers behave differently in the class meeting (11.1%). Then, in the third and fourth places still with the same percentage acquisition of 11.1%, there are lecturers who behave undisciplined and often make make-up class. These often make the students become lazy to attend the class.

The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from the Lecturers' Personalities Aspect

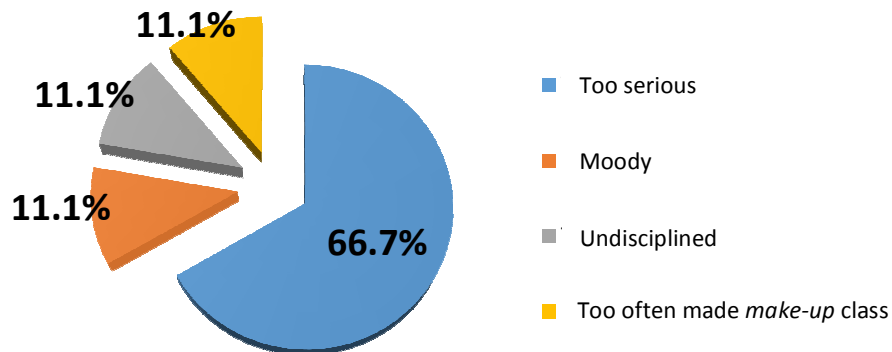


Figure 3. The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from the Lecturers' Personalities Aspect

Regarding to the aspect of the use of English as medium of communication during the teaching and learning processes, Figure 4 shows that the lack of the use of English in class is in the first place (88.9%) as the hampering factor of English speaking skill. In other words, English is rarely used for communication with fellow students and lecturers. The students state that their lecturers are more often to use Indonesian and Javanese language than English in giving explanation and instruction so that they get less opportunity to listen and practice using English for communicating during the teaching and learning processes. And the rest percentage of 11.1% is related to the language structure or grammar. The use of English in class is much related to the students' ability in organizing the language structure when communicating.

The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from the Aspect of the Use of English

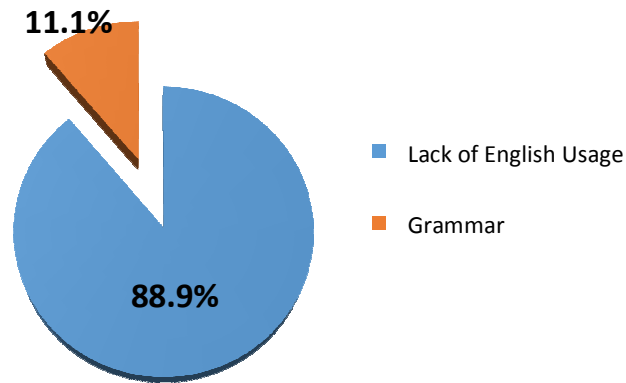


Figure 4. The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from the Aspect of the Use of English

In relation with feedback given to the students, Figure 5 shows that the highest hampering factor with the percentage of 55.6% is the lack of feedback after speaking activities. Then the second and third places with the same percentage (22.2%) are feedback substance that focuses too much on the grammar and the feedback given is somehow unclear

The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from the Feedback Aspect

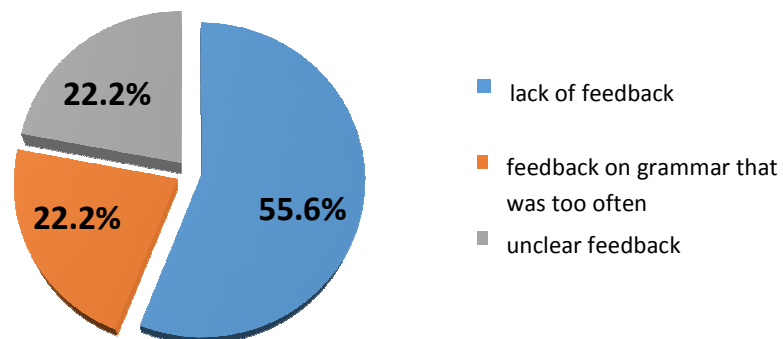


Figure 5. The Hampering Factors of Speaking Skill from the Feedback Aspect

The research result shows that the highest hampering factor related to the aspect of teaching and learning activities in class is there are too many assignments given. The result of interview with the involved students shows that the excessive assignments which do not only cover about speaking, but also reading, listening and writing have made the students less concerned on the assignment of speaking. That lack of focus has made the students less prepared for what would be presented for their speaking performance. This is less compatible with the result of the research conducted by Hamad (2012) in which he does not find the fact that the large number of assignments could make the students' speaking skill less improved. However, this research result has discovered an additional hampering factor of high-achiever students' speaking skill that has not yet been found by the earlier researcher namely Hamad (2012). By knowing this additional hampering factor of high –achiever students' speaking skill, assignments that are appropriate with the students' capacity and the purpose of teaching and learning activities are expected to be given by the lecturers so that the students are able to improve their English performance.

Meanwhile, the highest hampering factor regarding the teaching and learning materials is the level of difficulty of the materials discussed that is too high which makes the students felt reluctant to actively participate in speaking activities in class. The materials that are too hard for the high-achiever students have made them less comprehend and practice on what has been taught in class. Evidently, this does not only affect on their participation that is less active in class but also their confidence when speaking in class.

Furthermore, the highest hampering factor related to the aspect of lecturers' personalities is that the lecturers are too serious in handling the class. A lecturer who is less able to make the atmosphere of class become pleasant will influence the students' study results. This has been supported by the result of research done by Anugerahwati & Saukah (2010) on Profile of Exemplary Teachers. From the four competences that must be owned by a teacher (personal, social, pedagogical, and professional competences), personal competence is on the highest rank as the important competence that must be owned by an English teacher/lecturer/instructor. This competence covers the lecturers' personalities that could positively influence the teaching and learning processes in class. This could be seen from the lecturers' behaviors such as being friendly, not emotional, and helpful whenever their students encountered difficulty and not moody.

Moreover, regarding to the aspect on the use of English as medium of instruction during the teaching and learning process, it is found out that the lack of English exposure during the teaching and learning processes becomes the main causal factor that has made the students less able to improve their speaking skill. The lack of English usage, either for explaining the materials or communicating with lecturer or among friends, made the high-achiever students get less opportunity to practice in using English during the teaching and learning process. This is in line with Krashen (1985) who explains that comprehensible input and English exposure are very important in the processes of language teaching and learning. When the students got fewer examples or modeling of language use and rarely practice to speak up in class, they would experience difficulty to speak in English fluently. This is because the more often the students use English to communicate without fear of making mistake, the more fluent their English speaking skill will be.

The next highest hampering factor related to the feedback given to the students is the lack of feedback given to the high-achiever students. The interview result with the lecturers shows that the lack of feedback given is because the lecturers thought that the high-achiever students did not make too many mistakes that needed more feedback. However, the fact shows that the students hope to get more feedback regarding to their speaking performance so that they could keep improving their speaking skill. The lack of feedback given has made them get less additional knowledge or tips related to the speaking performance that they have done. When the lecturers gave feedback more often only to the students who have lower speaking skill than them, it would make them think that the given feedback has been mastered. That is why the high-achiever students hope that their lecturers could give meaningful feedback to their speaking performance because they think that they also still have speaking problems and want to get more feedback so that they could keep on trying to increase their speaking skill.

4. Conclusions

The hampering factors of English speaking skill improvement faced by the high-achiever students include the aspects of teaching and learning activities, materials, lecturers' personalities, the use of English as the intermediate language, and also feedback. The highest hampering factor regarding to the aspect of teaching and learning activities is there are too many assignments given that are not only concerned on the speaking skill but also the other English skills (reading, writing, listening). Moreover, the highest hampering factor related to

the aspect of learning materials is the difficulty level of the materials which is too high. Meanwhile, the lecturers' personality that is too serious also becomes one of the hampering factors of high-achiever students in developing their speaking skill. The lack of English usage in class could also hamper the students' speaking skill improvement. And from the aspect of feedback, the highest hampering factor is the lack of feedback given by the lecturers related to the students' performance. Having presented the result of this research, preliminary study and need analysis need to be done to help lecturers in mapping and conducting appropriate activities for speaking skills to assist them in improving their English speaking skill.

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