

## Analyzing Students' Perception of Speaking Problems and Mispronunciation At English Department UIGM

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### Abstract

*This research aimed to identify the problems of speaking of sixth semester students of English Department UIGM based on their opinion, to reveal kinds of speaking activities that sixth semester students of English Department UIGM hope to be included in speaking courses, and to reveal how many mispronunciation errors that they made during the interview. The type of this research was descriptive research. The participants of the research were the four sixth semester students of English Department UIGM. The instrument used was interview. The result of the analysis showed that the participants have problems in speaking which are divided into two major problems; psychological and linguistic problems. The psychological problems include feeling nervous and being afraid to speak in English in front of the class. The second major problem is linguistic problems, which include problems in speaking aspects like pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. The participants suggested four activities that they hope to be included in speaking courses; singing, English speaking day, speaking with native speaker, and being an international event volunteer. The last, the participants mispronounced 30 English words which consists of vowels (/a/, /ə/, /e/, and /æ/), consonants (/f/, /k/, /θ/, and /v/) and diphthongs (/aʊ/ and /ɪə/).*

**Keywords :** *Students' Perception, Speaking, Mispronunciation, English*

### Abstrak

*Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi berbagai masalah dalam berbicara yang dihadapi oleh mahasiswi-mahasiswi semester enam Program Studi Bahasa Inggris UIGM berdasarkan opini mereka, untuk mengungkap macam-macam aktivitas berbicara yang mereka harap dapat disertakan dalam mata kuliah speaking, dan untuk mengungkap berapa banyak kesalahan pengucapan yang mereka buat selama wawancara. Jenis penelitian ini adalah penelitian kualitatif. Partisipan-partisipan dari penelitian ini adalah empat mahasiswi semester enam Program Studi Bahasa Inggris UIGM. Instrumen yang digunakan adalah wawancara. Hasil dari analisa menunjukkan bahwa para partisipan memiliki masalah dalam berbicara yang terbagi dalam 2 macam inti masalah; masalah-masalah psikologis dan masalah-masalah kebahasaan. Masalah-masalah psikologis meliputi perasaan gugup dan takut untuk berbicara menggunakan bahasa Inggris di depan kelas. Masalah kedua adalah masalah-masalah kebahasaan, yang meliputi masalah dalam unsur-unsur berbicara seperti pengucapan, tata bahasa, dan kosakata. Para partisipan menyarankan empat aktivitas yang mereka harap dapat disertakan dalam mata kuliah speaking; menyanyi, hari berbahasa Inggris, bercakap-cakap dengan penutur asli bahasa Inggris, dan menjadi panitia acara internasional. Terakhir, para partisipan keliru dalam mengucapkan 30 kata berbahasa Inggris yang mengandung huruf vokal (/a/, /ə/, /e/, and /æ/), konsonan (/f/, /k/, /θ/, and /v/) dan diftong (/aʊ/ and /ɪə/).*

**Kata kunci :** *Persepsi Mahasiswa, Berbicara, Kesalahan Pengucapan, Bahasa Inggris*

## 1. Introduction

In learning English, especially as a foreign language, there are four skills, one of them is speaking. Nazara (2011) stated that along the history of EFL teaching and learning, most people think that speaking is the most essential skill to be mastered. In addition, she said that there are several reasons why people think that speaking is the most essential skill to be mastered. First, speaking has been the major focus on language teaching and research. Second, many speaking course books, audios, videos, etc are continuously published. The last reason why people think that speaking is the most essential skill to be mastered is that speaking ability is used to measure how far learners know a language (p. 29). Moreover, in Indonesia job seekers sometimes should be able to speak English communicatively.

There are number of speaking aspects. Riggenbach (1998) stated that pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency are the main aspects of speaking (p. 55). Pronunciation means how a word can be pronounced. Vocabulary is any words in particular language (in this context, English). Grammar is structure of a language which contains combination of linguistic units such as words and tenses. The last is fluency, which means the smoothness of speaking.

If we need to be able to speak in English fluently and correctly, we need to master these 4 aspects of speaking skill. In my opinion, the most important aspect of speaking is pronunciation, because even though a speaker has good vocabulary, grammar, and fluency, if she or he cannot pronounce a word, then the listener may not understand what he or she is talking about. Gilakjani (2012) mentioned that understandable pronunciation is one of the basic requirements of learners' competence and it is also one of the most important features of language instruction. Bad pronunciation promotes to great difficulties in language learning (p. 120). If learners know how to pronounce English words, learners will have a better understanding of native speakers and improves their ability to communicate easily and effectively.

According to Burns (2003) even where learners produce minor inaccuracies in vocabulary and grammar, they are more likely to communicate effectively when they have good pronunciation and intonation (p. 5). Therefore, sentences may sound weird if someone else do serious errors in pronunciation, for example, A and B is having conversation on the phone, then A asks B "Hey B, what are you doing now?", then B answers "I am trying to hit a bug. Yuck! It is so disgusting!" When B pronounces bug as /bæg/ instead /bag/.

Unfortunately, even though university students already knew those aspects of speaking skill, they still have problem in speaking English. A study which was conducted by Nazara (2011) at English Teaching Study Program UKI Jakarta revealed that there are two factors which caused problems when those university students are trying to speak. The first problem is because they do not have enough time to practice, and the second, some

university students avoided speaking due to their fear of lecturers' "scolding" and classmates' laughing (p. 28).

The students avoid speaking is a result of the anxiety or fear of making incorrect statement which can be called speaking anxiety. "... Speaking anxiety is one of the most prominent factors that has a debilitating influence on the oral performance of students learning English whether as a second language or a foreign Language" (Salem & Dyar, 2014, p. 170). Speaking anxiety is the impact of someone who was ever scolded or laughed at by someone when they made incorrect statement. When someone makes incorrect statements, it is better for us to give suggestions or try to correct him or her rather than to scold or laugh at them.

Another research which was conducted by Yates and Wahid (2013) in Australia showed that those students who took EAP (English for Academic Purposes) also have several problems in speaking. First problem, they received little instruction in speaking skills in course. Second problem, the society who thinks that students' first language would affect the students in communicating with the Australian, because it would be a serious threat for them who already made maximum efforts to interact with the Australian whom first language is English. Lastly, most of them who have made their individual efforts to break out of these limitations failed and were often hindered by time constraints imposed by their academic lives or their financial situation as students (p. 1047). From the research done by Nazara and Wahid and Yates, it can be concluded that the factors which caused the university students' speaking problems are the environment (their friends, teachers, and society), time, financial situations, and their first language.

For my research study, the researcher identified the speaking problems of sixth semester students of English Department UIGM and possible reasons for these problems based on their opinion. Firstly, in the interview the researcher asked the participants to tell their experience in learning English. After that, the researcher interviewed those students to reveal possible reasons and kinds of speaking activities that they hope to be included in speaking courses. Later, from the transcripts of these interviews, the researcher counted number of mispronunciation errors that the participants made during the interviews.

There were three reasons why the researcher chose this topic. First, speaking is one of English skills which is very important for every person who wants to be able to speak English communicatively. As a lingua franca, English enables them to communicate across culture. Second reason of choosing this topic is because the dean, chief, and lecturers of English Department UIGM have a plan to create such a good English atmosphere in English Department UIGM, where the students should talk in English during the teaching and learning process and when they are talking to each other or to the lecturers in university area. But it is impossible if the students still have problems in speaking.

The last reason why the researcher chose the topic for my research study, because when these students want to join English competition such as speech contest, debating competition, etc that require them to speak, or when they graduate from UIGM, then they apply for a job, they will be asked to do an interview in English. Their speaking problems will become obstacles which will make them fail.

Based on Fitriani, Apriliaswati, and Wardah's study (2015) at Tanjungpura University, Pontianak, the most dominant problem faced by the third semester students of English Education Program is psychological problems; lack of self-confidence (20.11%) and anxiety (21.27%). The next problem faced by the third semester students of English Education Program is linguistic problems; grammar (22.16%), vocabulary (20.19%), and pronunciation (16.25%) (p. 1).

The previous study which is done by Fitriani et al. (2015) already proved that university students in Indonesia have some problems in speaking, those are grammar, anxiety, vocabulary, self-confidence, and pronunciation, but there is no solution of how to increase the students' speaking ability. In this study, the researcher would not only identifying kinds of problem in speaking, but the researcher also revealed kinds of speaking activities that sixth semester students of English Department UIGM hope to be included in speaking courses in order to improve their speaking skill. With this study, researcher hopes that there will be solutions to handle these students' speaking problems.

The problems of the study were formulated as follows: (1) What kinds of speaking problems that they experience when they speak English? (2) What kinds of speaking activities that sixth semester students of English Department UIGM hope to be included in speaking courses? And (3) How many mispronunciation errors that they made during the interview?

## A. Literature Review

### 1. Speaking

In learning English, there are four skills that should be mastered, and one of them is speaking. There are a lot of definitions of the word "speaking" that have been suggested by the researchers in language learning. According to Febriyanti (2011) "Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information" (p. 2). When we speak, we arrange words appropriately to convey information to our listener so that they understand what we are talking about. On the other hand, Anggraini (2014) said that "as productive skill, speaking becomes a measurement whether learners have mastered English or not" (p. 36). It means that speaking is not only used to communicate, but it is also used to measure how good a person in learning English. In other words, through speaking, we will know how good the development of an English learner's skill.

### 2. Speaking Aspects

There are numbers of speaking aspects. Experts have their own opinion about speaking aspects. According to Nunan (2015) speaking aspects are fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, and grammar (p. 96 - 129). In his book, Nunan also talks about a part of pronunciation, suprasegmentals, and its aspects. Different from Nunan, Mazouzi (2013) argued that aspects of speaking skill are fluency and accuracy. Later on, he divided accuracy into grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. On the other hand, Heaton (1990) mentioned that accuracy (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar), fluency, and comprehensibility are aspects of speaking skill. Nevertheless, this study focused more on pronunciation. This aspect will be discussed as follows.

#### a. Pronunciation

In general, pronunciation means how a word can be pronounced. According to Yusmita & Angraini (2017) "before learning speaking skill, English language learners are recommended to learn pronunciation because it is the fundamental basic for both teachers and students who want to master speaking in English language. People can speak English better if they master pronunciation" (p. 14). A person with good pronunciation can communicate effectively with others because the others can understand what the speaker is talking about easily. There are 2 main aspects of pronunciation, suprasegmental and segmental. In his book, *Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages: An Introduction*, Nunan (2015) argued that suprasegmental divided into stress, rhythm, and intonation (p. 96). Word "stress" literary means pressure or tension. We stress a syllable by saying it louder. Second aspect of pronunciation is segmental. According to Yates (2002), segmental aspects consist of individual sounds (also known as the sound system) and gestures (p. 4). In individual sounds, we will meet phonetic symbols. Yates (2002) added that there are four types of phonetic symbols, those are consonants, vowels: long and short vowels, diphthongs, and triphthongs. Consonants consist of /g/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/, /dʒ/, /l/, /ɒ/, /θ/, /j/, /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /ð/, /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /ʒ/, /h/, /m/, /n/, /w/, and /r/. Vowels divided into short vowels and long vowels. Short vowels consist of /ʌ/, /ə/, /e/, /ɪ/, /i/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/, /ʊ/, and /æ/. Long vowels consist of /ɑ:/, /ɜ:/, /i:/, /ɔ:/, and /u:/. Diphthongs consist of /aɪ/, /aʊ/, /eɪ/, /əʊ/, /ɪə/, /ɔɪ/, and /ʊə/. Triphthongs consist of /ʌɪə/ and /aʊə/ (p. 5).

#### 3. Intelligibility

One of requirements of an effective communication is understandable speech. Another one is that the listener should able to identify the speaker's speech. In linguistic, it is called intelligibility. Munro & Derwing (2011) defined intelligibility as "... the degree of a listener's actual comprehension of an utterance" (p. 479). It means that intelligibility refers to the listener's ability to understand what the speaker is talking about. In other words, it refers to the match between the intention of the speaker and the understanding of the listener.

#### 4. Speaking in EFL Classrooms

“Learning speaking skills is very challenging for students in FL contexts, because they have very few opportunities to use the target language outside the classroom” (Bailey, 2003, p. 54). In countries where the people use English as foreign language like Indonesia, not so many people use English to communicate. People use to communicate with their mother tongue or first language. Meanwhile, Febriyanti (2011) emphasized that in EFL classroom, students often keep using their native language in English course (p. 8). In their communication, some student combines English words with Bahasa or traditional language because they sometimes do not know the English words of things that they are going to talk about.

#### 5. Problems in Speaking

Students who learn English, especially in EFL context, may have problems in the English skills, especially speaking. Abbaspour (2016) argued that “Learners of English as a foreign language, in countries where English is not widely spoken outside the classroom [ ] have difficulty in developing oral proficiency because they lack exposure to the language, and experience using it” (p. 144). Students who have lack of reading habit may feel strange to a particular topic when they are studying English, which cause the students to have nothing to say on particular topic. According to Nurhayati, Djatmika, Santosa, and Wiratno (2016) “there are seven problems as EFL learners’ impediments which are caused by Indonesian Influence in developing speaking skill in learning English; those are the misuse of tenses, verb, agreement, word order, wrong chosen word, redundancy-reduction, and phonological difficulty” (p. 210).

#### 6. The Importance of Speaking

Speaking is the most important skill because if learners want to communicate easily and effectively with other people, they should have good English speaking ability. Speaking is the most important skill because it is one of the abilities that are needed to perform a conversation. According to Oxford Royale Academy (2014) in university, students will find themselves in a variety of social situations with different kinds of people, both local people and foreign people. Based on this statement, university students should have more than just the abilities to do daily conversations. University students should master excellent speaking skill that can be used in every kind of situations.

In my opinion, speaking is very important, especially for English Department UIGM students, because it enables them to communicate across culture, since English is an international language and lingua franca. Another reason is that being able to speak English is the most important requirement for those who want to join English competition such as speech contest, debating competition, etc that require them to speak English. The capability of speaking English may allow them to be volunteers in international events such as ASIAN Games and SEA Games.

#### 7. Previous Study about Speaking Problems

Goktepe’s study (2013) revealed that “...the students mostly experienced problems in speaking English affectively through personal factors including: insufficient language and content knowledge, limited contact with English outside the classroom, and the misdirected methods and materials used in the classroom” (p. 1875). Goktepe's study talk about internal (personal) factors of speaking problems, but it does not provide students' opinion and feedback about their speaking problems and the speaking activity.

Based on a study that was conducted by Sayuri (2016) at English Department of Mulawarman University, the students faced some problems related to pronunciation, fluency, grammar, and vocabulary. Her study 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 problems of speaking to the students, firstly less of reading habit, uneven participation and English practice both inside and outside the classroom, and confusion on applying grammar rules (p. 1). Same as Goktepe’s study, Sayuri’s study also reported that students have limited exposure with English in their life. Not only psychological, Sayuri also revealed students’ linguistic problems in speaking. Nevertheless, it does not provide students' opinion and feedback about their speaking problems and the speaking activity.

Motivation is another factor that might block English learners’ ability in speaking which was mentioned by Syuryanto (2011), “this might be caused by the idea that English in Indonesia is a foreign language which is not used in daily communication” (p. 68). Different from other studies, Syuryanto in his study revealed another factor that cause speaking problem is motivation, which is an external factor. He added that another factor of speaking problem is that the status of English as a foreign language in Indonesia makes it rarely used in Indonesia. Same as other studies, it does not provide students' opinion and feedback about their speaking problems and the speaking activity.

In conclusion, those studies revealed that Indonesian who learn English as foreign language may have problems in speaking, both linguistics and psychological problems, but there is no solution of how to increase the students’ speaking ability. In this study, as the researcher, I did not only identify kinds of problem in speaking, but I also would like to reveal kinds of speaking activities that sixth semester students of English Department UIGM hope to be included in speaking courses in order to improve their speaking skill.

#### *B. Methodology*

In conducting the study, the researcher used a qualitative approach. Hande (2014) said that qualitative analysis helps researchers in the in-depth analysis of participants’ responses, feelings, and perceptions (p. 337). Qualitative analysis has enabled the researcher to

analyze common problems in speaking of those students and reveal possible reasons of speaking problems and kinds of speaking activities that they hope to be included in speaking courses. The research has been conducted at Indo Global Mandiri University. In selecting the participants, the researcher chose purposeful sampling technique. According to Wallen and Fraenkle (2009) researchers "... use their judgment to select a sample that they believe, based on prior information, will provide the data they need" (p. 100). There were three criteria for choosing the participants: They (1) should be fulltime students, (2) have already taken all of the speaking courses, and (3) were not in the last semester. There will be four participants from sixth semester students of English Department UIGM in this study. Participants' demographic information is provided in the table below.

**Table 1. Participants' Demographic Data**

Participants	Age	Gender	Semester	Experience in Learning English
Lilik	22	Female	6	- English Club
Fitri	20	Female	6	- English Course - English Competition
Rina	21	Female	6	- English Course
Melati	22	Female	6	- International Event Volunteer

In order to listen to each participant more carefully and also to check the participants' pronunciation, the researcher interviewed English Department UIGM students individually by using one-on-one interviews. Creswell (2012) mentioned that "One-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably" (p. 218). The interviews were recorded. The questions of the interviews were open-ended questions, which "... can be used with greater confidence, particular questions of special interest or value can be pursued in depth, follow-up questions can be asked, and items that are unclear can be explained" (Wallen & Fraenkl, 2009, p. 12). For the interview, the researcher made six questions by herself.

In analyzing the data, the researcher followed Merriam's (2009) steps; transcribing the data, managing the data (coding and making themes), and interpreting the data (p. 169-170). Also, the researcher used Holiday's (2010) thematic approach in this research.

## 2. Results

### A. Participants' Speaking Problems

As EFL learners, we may have problems in developing English skill, especially speaking skill. Problems in grammar and vocabulary or other speaking aspects are called linguistic problem. Meanwhile,

anxiety and unwillingness are examples of psychological problem. Sentürk (2012) said that "since students do not know a variety of vocabulary items or all grammar topics, they are not self-confident. They do not want to participate in the lesson as they think that they will not be able to express themselves well" (p. 299). Based on the findings, there are two kinds of speaking problems that the participants experience when they speak in English, those are psychological problem and linguistic problem. The psychological problems that they have is speaking anxiety. They often felt nervous and afraid to speak in front of the class. The linguistic problem that they have consists of problems in pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and grammar.

### B. Suggested - Speaking Activities

Lecturers' perception may not always the same as the students' perception. Kocaman & Balcioglu (2013) argued that from the open ended question section, the students' perceptions clearly indicated that they do not prefer lecture type classes, instead of interactive, entertaining and cooperative tasks in their learning process" (p. 2470). Similar to Kocaman & Balcioglu's participants, students who participated in this research also prefer active and enjoyable activities. Based on the interview, there are four kinds of speaking activities that they hope to be included in speaking courses; Singing, English speaking day, Speaking with native speaker, and ASIAN GAMES Volunteer.

### C. Participants' Mispronunciation Errors

In the previous study, Pallawa (2013) stated that phonetic features ".../s/ is sometimes pronounced as /z/ in English, and /a/ is also sometimes pronounced as /æ, ə, e / [by Indonesian]." He added that "27 people or 90% of the total respondents had difficulty in eliminating the suppression remedy Javanese accent when they speak in English. This can occur because of differences due to the way it produces the sound of Phonetics" (p. 26). The errors occurred caused by phonological system of our first language differ to English. The researcher found that all of them had problem in pronouncing /ʃ/ as in "English". Three participants also found it hard to pronounce /k/ in the end of a word, right after /n/, as in "think". Two participants found it hard to pronounce /ə/ as in "think", "third", and "month. Then /æ/ as in "Arabic" and "satisfying" was hard to be pronounced by two participants. Some of them often forgot how to pronounce abbreviation in English. Not only that, they also mispronounced other words. Those words will be listed in a table below.

**Table 2. List of Mispronunciation Words**

	Participants Name			
	Lilik	Fitri	Rina	Melati
Mispronounced Words	English	think	English	English
	JHS	English	month	because
	ECC	ELC	presentation	house
	third	nervous	think	vocabulary
	etc.		inconsistent	everyone

	think		satisfying	think
	everything		as	Arabic
	was		fluent	presentation
	own			power
	nervous			nervous
	communicate			correct
	voice			foreigners
	word			very
	rhythm			volunteer

### Conclusion, Future Research Direction, and Recommendation

Based on the data findings, the conclusion was drawn in some points. First, although some of the participants have already enjoyed speaking in front of the class, they argued that they have problems in speaking English. The problems were divided into two major problems; psychological problems and linguistic problems. The psychological problems included feeling nervous and being afraid to speak in English in front of the class. Another major problem was linguistic problems which include problems in speaking aspects like pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

Second, the participants suggested 4 activities that they hope to be included in speaking courses. They thought that these activities are able to make them and other students speak communicatively. These activities include singing, English speaking day, speaking with native speaker, and being an international event volunteer. They believe that through singing, they can improve aspects of speaking, such as pronunciation.

The last, these participants did some mistakes in pronouncing English words. All of them pronounced /ʃ/ in "English" as /s/. They also mispronounced some words as listed in Table 4.2. In conclusion, they mispronounced 30 English words which consists of vowels (/a/, /ə/, /e/, and /æ/), consonants (/ʃ/, /k/, /θ/, and /v/) and diphthongs (/aʊ/ and /ɪə/).

From the results of this study, the researcher has some directions for further research. First, the further researcher should choose more participants at least from two different semesters. It will provide more information for the future research. Moreover, the further researcher might make comparison between the different semester students also. Second, interview was the only instrument that the researcher used in this research. For future research, the researcher suggests that research may be conducted with some instruments, such as observation, questionnaire, etc, so it will give the further researcher different kinds of data, which may allow he or she to gain more information to prove that the problem really happens to the participants. The last direction is that the future research should focus only on one topic instead of using two topic like this current research so that the further researcher could discuss one focus comprehensively.

Based on the findings of this study, here are some recommendations for English department lecturers, universities, and English department students. Since lecturers' perception might not always the same as the

students', teaching and learning process in the class should not be lecturer-centered. Lecturers should ask and hear their students' perception about the speaking courses. Then, the lecturers need to consider and decide what kind of activities that should be taught to their students. Lecturers should motivate their students so that the students are enthusiastic and excited about learning speaking. Next, the teachers should correct the students who has error in pronunciation in exact time in order to keep students' confidence still up. In this case, universities also have big contribution since their commitments in their students' success. The universities should facilitate the students by inviting a native speaker or providing any other activities in developing their English speaking skill. The researcher has suggestions for the students who want to speak English fluently and clearly. First, try to watch western movie. It is not only entertaining and interesting, but it can help us in expanding our vocabulary and improving our pronunciation. Try to imitate the actors or the actress' speech can help us to improve our pronunciation. Also, make a list of unfamiliar words that you have heard from the movie, and look find the meaning in dictionary to expand your vocabulary.

The second is listening to western songs. As we know that most of the people may listen to a song repeatedly because they think that the song reflects their feelings at that time or they love the song because it is catchy. Like watching Western movie, listening to a song help us in expanding our vocabulary and improving our pronunciation by singing to it and trying to find the meaning of the song.

The last, students can improve their pronunciation by open up a dictionary. When the students read something in English and find unfamiliar words, they do not know how to pronounce the words. Dictionary like Oxford Learner's Pocket Dictionary provides phonetic symbols of every listed words. It can help the students to find out how to pronounce unfamiliar words. The key to use this tips is that the students should understand how to pronounce each phonetic symbol so that they can produce correct pronunciation of a word. This tips is the classic one but it may be the best one.

Other than that, university students should not be shy to express their opinion or idea, such as saying "yes" to everything that they like or saying "no" to everything that they hate. In the class, students also should be brave to give their suggestions which may be useful for themselves and the teaching and learning process itself.

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