

UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' OBSTACLES IN SPEAKING ENGLISH

Ulfah Irani Z^{1*}, Rita Zahara², Riyan Maulana³

^{1,2,3} STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh
Banda Aceh, Indonesia

Email: ulfahirani@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims at giving information about the students' obstacles in speaking English. In this research, the writer applied a descriptive qualitative research. In this study, the writer used purposive sampling. The writer used questionnaire in collecting the data. In order to obtain the data for this study, the writer shared the questionnaires for students at STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh, English for TOEFL preparation class with 15 students. The results of the study indicated that the students faced internal factors, unconfident and motivated during speaking English, the students faced topical knowledge difficulties in speaking performance, and the students' external constraints affected them to speak English.

Keywords: university-student, speaking, obstacles, English

1. Introduction

English has become an international language used to communicate between people around the world (McKay, 2012). English is considered the most important language in business, diplomacy, science and profession. It is used not only for social communication but also for educational purposes. To meet the demand for English, Indonesia has made English a compulsory subject from primary school to university. Most universities around the world use English as their main subject or language of instruction. As a result, people are forced to learn English to cope with globalized community interaction.

Learning English requires students to master certain skills, including speaking, listening, writing and reading (Syakur, et.al, 2020). In the context of improving oral language skills, it is hoped that the use of materials, methods, techniques and activities will encourage students to actively use communication in real situations. Many years ago, until now, the English language curriculum in colleges and universities included conversational language. In the whole class, the proportion of activities in which students communicate with each other in English is still very low (Mohammed, 2018). Speaking is the skill that students are most valued for in real life (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020). It is an important part of everyday interaction, and often a person's first impression is based on their fluency and ability to understand. Speaking also the one skill that should be master by university students in passing test of English as foreign language (Goltum & Octaviani, 2022). Success in speaking is measured by the ability to engage in dialogue in an interactive and effective process of meaning construction involving the generation, reception and processing of information (Clark, et.al., 2019).

Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teacher to prepare students as much as possible to speak English in the real world outside the classroom and exam room. Learning to speak English fluently and accurately is always a daunting task for students of English as a foreign language. Due to limited speaking abilities and the impact of misunderstandings, some students are reluctant to express their opinions in class; some people seem reserved and uncomfortable and rarely ask questions they don't understand (Roever & Kasper, 2018). In other words, 'under the influence of confusion, students tend to be quieter and less expressive.' added that some of the problems students often face are that they rarely ask questions even if they don't understand what the teacher is teaching, and that they rarely express their opinions. Lack of oral skills hinders students' ability to cooperate with teachers and classmates in oral lessons. In addition, the use of the mother tongue in oral English lessons can also provide oral language for other problems of students.

In the speaking classroom, the lecturer and the students have significant roles in the process of teaching and learning. These elements (lecturer and students) constantly interact one another in which the lecturer and the students are as the main subjects. In speaking class, the lecturer is not allowed to dominate the class where he/she keeps talking or giving more questions. Each element has as much to contribute as very other participant in determining the direction and outcome of the interaction. Speaking is considered as the most difficult skill to be mastered by the students. In speaking, the students have to apply their knowledge of the language when they converse with others. However, it becomes a complicated process to the students because they have limited vocabularies and grammar knowledge.

Based on the students' experience during studying English from junior high school up to university level, the students face great problems during speaking English. The students sometimes cannot understand and comprehend what the lecturer has spoken, that why the students keep silent during learning processes. The students feel confused to catch the meaning of the words. In reality, many language learners find it difficult to express themselves in spoken language in the target language. Each student has their own problems during speaking English as a foreign language, especially for students at STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh. It is necessary to find ways to help them overcome their problems. Therefore, the writer interests to study the phenomenon of these problems during speaking class and factors that affect their speaking performance. Based on the background above, the problems of this study are:

1. What are the students' internal constraints in speaking English?
2. What are the students' external constraints in speaking English?

2. Methodology

In this research, the writer applied a descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative research is a research in which the results are described in written words and the researchers can use questions to guide the evaluation of the processes, example principles and flowcharts are provided to assist authors and reviewers through the study design and review process. (Anderson, 2019; Levitt, et.al, 2017). Furthermore, the aims of descriptive qualitative research are to describe process, strategies involved in analyzing and interpreting data. This research was conducted at STMIK

Indonesia Banda Aceh. This university is located at Jeulingke, Darussalam, Banda Aceh. The research instruments of data collection for this study was questionnaire.

This technique was designed to identify the problems and factors affecting students during speaking English. The writer conducted a questionnaire for students to find out the information related to their problems during learning speaking.

2.1 Population and Sample

The subjects of this research were the students at English for TOEFL preparation class. In this study, the writer used purposive sampling; it means that the selected samples were suitably chosen in order to answer the problem formulation of the study. The subjects were all students (15 students) in this class.

2.2 Research Procedure

In this research procedure, the writer used questionnaire in collecting the data. In order to obtain the data for this study, the writer shared the questionnaires for students at STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh. The writer has already prepared the questionnaire sheets and consulted them to the experts. The questionnaire is designed for an investigation into the problems and factors affecting students' speaking performance at STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh. The questionnaire consists of thirteen questions, which divided into two parts. Part I is the demographic information of the subject, part II is factors affecting students' speaking performance and speaking problems. After the questionnaires were designed, the writer asked the experts for their comments on the questionnaire to validate it. Then the questionnaire was revised. Oral instructions and explanations were given in detail to the students by the writer before they answered the questionnaire to avoid any misunderstanding. Then, completed questionnaires were collected.

2.3 Data Processing

To process the data in a qualitative research, the writer used statistical formula. In analyzing the data of questionnaires, the writer used percentage formula, as follows:

$$P = F/N \times 100 \%$$

Where:

P = percentage

N = Number of students

F= Frequency

100= constant

2.4 Data Analyzing Technique

Data analysis in qualitative research was process of categorizing, describing and synthesizing. In this study, the writer used describing to present the data finding and synthesizing the collected data through observation, writer's notes, and questionnaires for the students. The writer selected, simplified, and organized the data and reduced them. It was done in order to make it easier for the writer to understand, interpret and make sense out of the data information.

The writer collected all data gathered from the study on the basis of their classification of the research questions which was used the qualitative data procedure

by describing in words. This analysis also applied considering something such as the experience of sudden idea, the limited memory of the writer, and the like. It also gave contribution to the researcher to analyze data step by step. After the data collected totally, and then the procedures to analyze the data were determined. The study employed three main procedures to analyze the data included data collection, data reduction and data display. The next step was data reduction. It was done to discard irrelevant data and to include the relevant data. Then, data display which contained the data analysis that was happening in the natural setting enable the writer to draw a temporary conclusion. Finally, after temporary conclusion has been achieved, the writer referred back to the data collection, data reduction, and data display. Final conclusion was attained after temporary conclusion analyzed. In order to get the result of data, the writer analyzed the observation and questionnaire as follow:

1. The Analysis of Observation

The writer did observation during three meetings. Observation was conducted to find the information by observing the real situation of teaching and learning speaking in the classroom. In this observation, the writer focused on speaking activities and problems faced by students during speaking in the class.

2. The Analysis of Questionnaire

The qualitative data derived from the questionnaires were analyzed into chart, table, and diagram. In order to answer the two research questions, the descriptive statistics of frequencies and percentages were used. To know students' opinion on their problems in speaking, in the fourth meeting, the writer contributed questionnaire to be answered by the students. Then, the data from questionnaire were collected, grouped, displayed, and analyzed for better result and conclusion.

3. The Results of Study

Based on the data finding, the writer concluded the demographic information of the subjects based on their gender, age and durations of English learning, as follow.

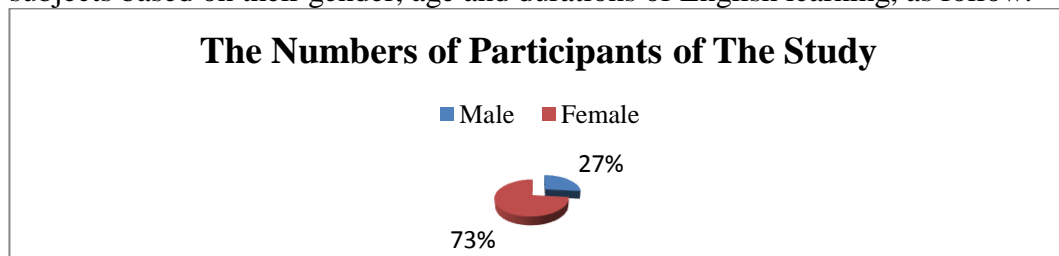


Chart 3.1 The Numbers of Participants of The Study

Based on the chart above, the writer described the total of the participants was fifteen (15) students, with the contribution; eleven (11) female students, and four (4) male students. The writer also classified them into their age as below.

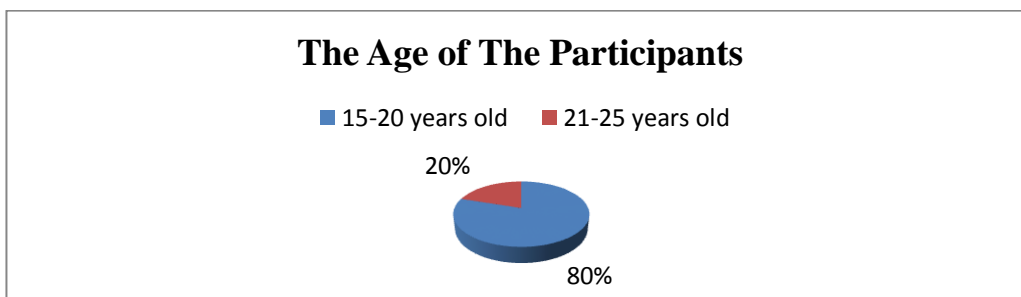


Chart 3.2 The Age of the Participants

The chart above described that the majority of students were 15-20 years old and the rest were 21-25 years old. This means that the students were in their productive age, so it is seen easy for them to learn the foreign language, especially English.

The findings also showed that the students have been learning English more than one year. The detail can be seen on the table below.

Table 3.1 How long have the students been learning English

| Question Number | Options | F | Percentage |
|-----------------|-------------------|----|------------|
| 3 | Under 1 year | - | - |
| | 2-4 years | 7 | 47% |
| | 5-7 years | 3 | 20% |
| | More than 7 years | 5 | 33% |
| Total | | 15 | 100% |

The findings showed that seven (7) students or 47% have been learning English for 2-4 years, 3 students or 20% have learning English for 5-7 years, and five (5) students or 33% have learning English for more than 7 years. No one has learning English under one year. It means that the students were familiar with English.

3.2 The Internal Factors of Speaking Performance

The affective internal constraint variables in speaking English influenced by three categories as personality, motivation, and language knowledge constraints. The tables below described the students' personality constraints that influenced their speaking ability.

Table 3.2 Personality Constraints

| Question Number | Options | F | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|----|------------|
| 4 | Fear of mistakes | 7 | 46.67 % |
| | Losing face | - | - |
| | Critism | - | - |
| | Shyness/anxiety | 8 | 53.33% |
| Total | | 15 | 100% |

There are seven (7) students or 46.67% stated that they were fear of making mistakes during speaking English, eight (8) students or 53.33% feels shy to speak English. It means that most of the students had no confidence to speak English.

Furthermore, the students stated that they have nothing to say during speaking class. The table below described the constraints why they said nothing during speaking class.

Table 3.3 Lack of Subject Matter Constraints

| Question Number | Options | F | Percentage |
|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------|----|------------|
| 5 | Problems in finding motivation to speak | 1 | 6.67% |
| | Problems in formulating opinions/relevant comments | 14 | 93.33% |
| Total | | 15 | 100% |

The table above showed that 14 students or (93.33%) of the students had problems in formulating opinions/relevant comments, 1 student or (6, 67%) of the students stated that they had problems in finding motivation to speak. It means that most of the students had no idea in formulating opinions/relevant comments.

Table 3.4 The Low Participations Problems of Students In Speaking English

| Question Number | Options | F | Percentage |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------------|
| 6 | Tendency of some learners to dominate in group | 7 | 46.67% |
| | The weak learners do not get opportunities in the presence of the strong ones | 8 | 53.33% |
| Total | | 15 | 100% |

Based on the table above, we knew that 7(seven) students or 46.67% felt tendency of some learners to dominate in group, while 8(eight) students or 53.33% of the students felt that they did not get opportunities in presence of the strong ones. It means that speaking class still need better atmosphere and the same opportunities for the qualified and unqualified students in speaking English.

In addition, based on the study findings shown that most of the students still actively use their mother tongue in daily activities. The table below described the result.

Table 3.5 The Students' Mother Tongue Use

| Question Number | Options | F | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------|----|------------|
| 7 | Indonesian | 12 | 80 % |
| | Acehnese | 3 | 20% |
| Total | | 15 | 100% |

The table showed that most of the students (12 students) or 80% of them use Indonesian, while 3 (three) students or 20 % use Acehnese. It means that the mother language still give the contribution in daily communication, adopted the patterns of the language, so that they influenced the effectiveness use of English.

Beside, the personality constraints, the students still faced the motivation problems such as integrative motivation and instrumental motivation as below.

Table 3.6 The Students' Integrative Motivation Constraints

| Question Number | Options | F | Percentage |
|-----------------|---------------------------|----|------------|
| 8 | Undesire to speak English | 8 | 53.33 % |
| | Willing to speak English | 7 | 46.67% |
| Total | | 15 | 100% |

Based on the table above, the result described that most of the students (8 students) or 53.33% of students felt undesire to speak English and 7 (seven) students or 46.67 % of them stated that they were unwilling to speak English. It means that the most of the students still had little motivation in speaking English.

Moreover, the students' instrumental motivation problems still gave the effects for students motivation and perception toward speaking English as mention below.

Table 3.7 The Students' Instrumental Motivation Constraints

| Question Number | Options | F | Percentage |
|-----------------|--------------------------------------|----|------------|
| 9 | Does not have future career | - | - |
| | Cannot raise better status | 9 | 60% |
| | Does not achieve good academic score | 6 | 40% |
| Total | | 15 | 100% |

Based on the table above, the result described that most of the students (9 students) or 60% of students were unbelieving that they could raise better status, while 6 (six) students or 40% did not achieve good academic score. In short, these motivation constraints made students have negative attitude toward English and have less motivation in speaking.

In spite of some internal factors influence the students to speak English, there were some topical knowledge difficulties by students in speaking can be seen from the chart below.

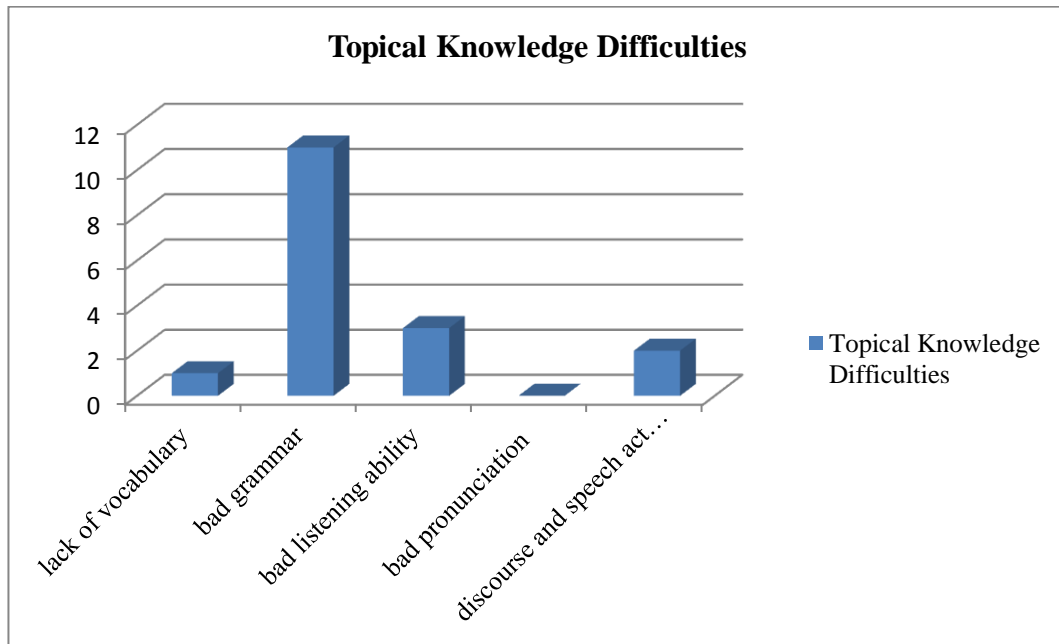


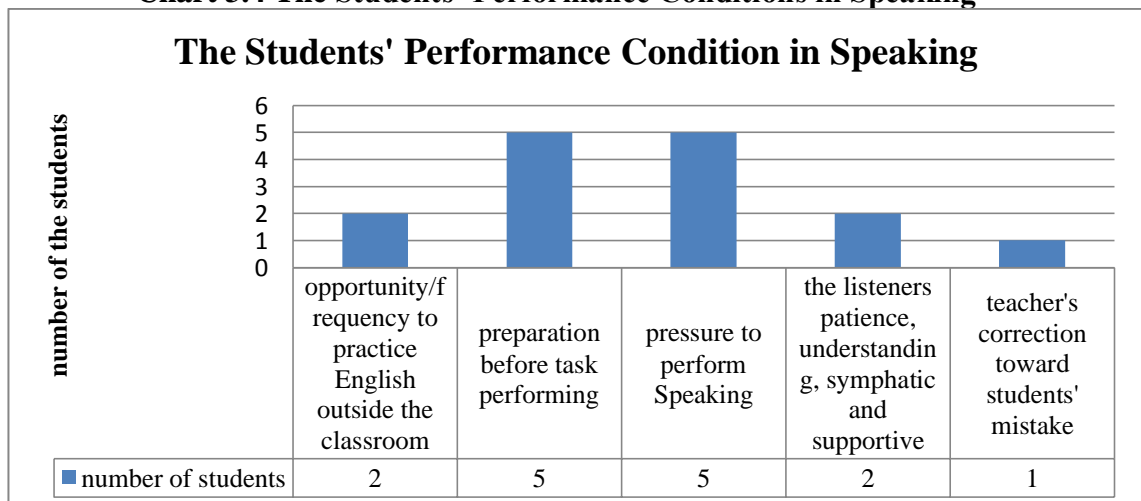
Chart 3.3 Topical Knowledge Difficulties Faced by Students in Speaking Class

The chart above described that 6 (six) students or 40% argued that they have bad grammar, 40% (six students) have bad listening ability, while two students (13.33%) have difficulties in discourse and speech act, and one student had bad pronunciation /phonology. In short, it showed that students' speaking skill is connected to other language skills.

1. The External Factors Influenced the Students in Speaking

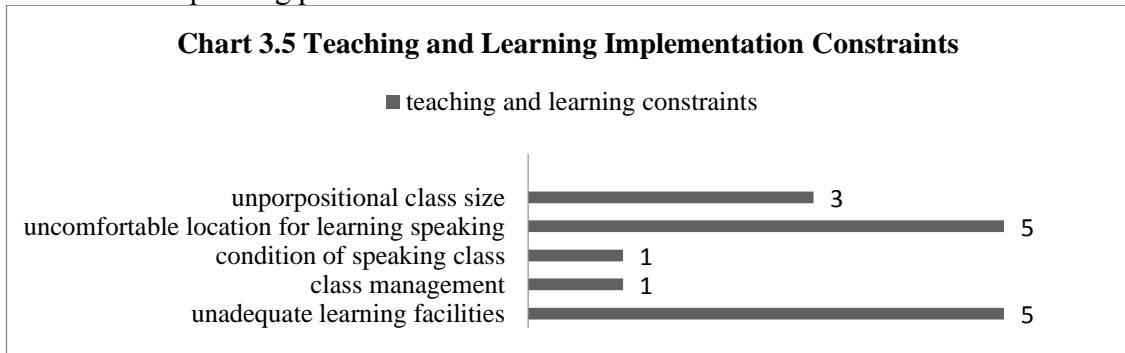
Beside internal factors, there are also external factors affecting students to speak English such as performance condition, environment constraints, teaching and learning implementation as below.

Chart 3.4 The Students' Performance Conditions in Speaking



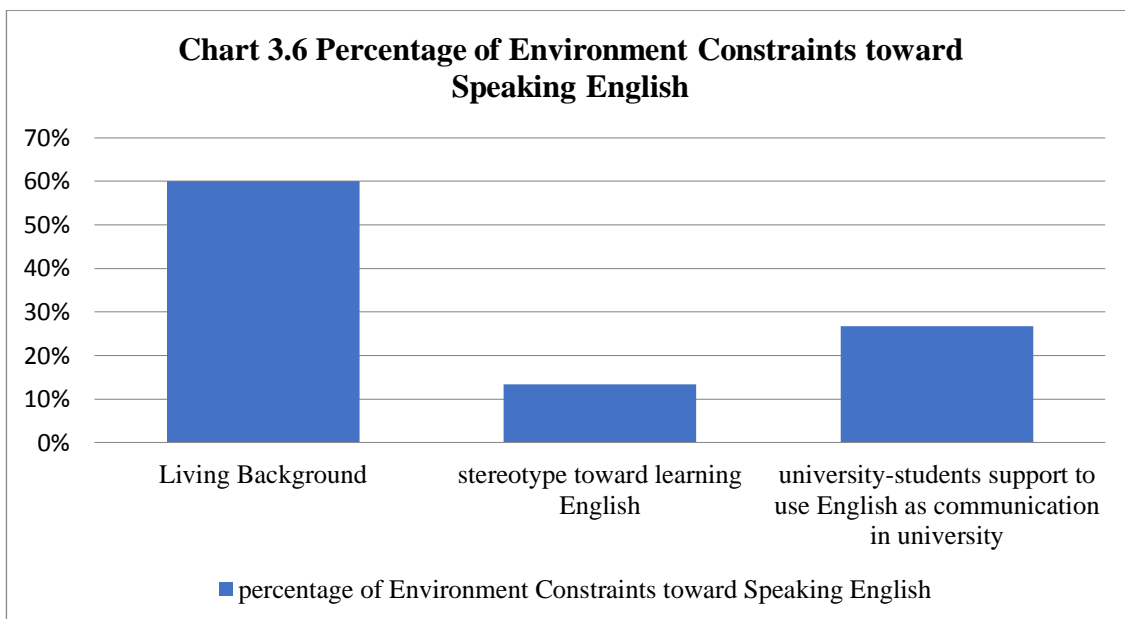
The chart above described that 33.33% of students or five students felt pressure to perform speaking and less preparation before task performing, while 13.33% or 2 students felt less frequency to practice English, less listeners' support, and the rest 6.67% or one student worried about teacher's correction toward their mistake. It means that speaking class atmosphere needed improved.

Furthermore, teaching and learning implementation also has contribution for the students' speaking performance as below.



The chart above showed that 33.33% or five students stated that the constraints they faced during teaching and learning speaking were uncomfortable location for speaking class and anadequate speaking facilities, 20% or three students stated that class size was not proporsional , and 6.67% or each one students argued that the speaking class management was poor. It means that the students need more facilities and good atmosphere during speaking class.

In addition, the environment also gave contribution toward the students' capability to speak English. The chart below described the result on it.



The diagram above described that living background paid contribution toward the positive or negative perception toward speaking English. About 9 (nine) students or 60% of students argued that living background supported them to speak English, while 4 (four) students or 26.67% agreed that university environment had contribution to support them using English actively in daily communication in university. In addition, some people/citizen still have a negative stereotype toward people who speak English in daily life.

4. Discussion

From the result analysis of data and answer of research questions, the writer could discuss that the students have internal and external factors during speaking English. With the regard to the questionnaire, the results indicated that there were a variety of internal and external factors that affect the students' speaking performance. The internal constraints include personality problems (inhibitions, nothing to say, low participants, mother tongue use), motivation problems (integrative and instrumental motivation) and language knowledge constraints. The most of the students argued that they were shy/anxiety and undesire to speak English. The majority of the students also said that the weak learners didn't get opportunity in the presence of the strong ones and they were also unconfident to raise better status for their future. The students also had lack of topical knowledge mastering such as bad grammar and listening ability.

Furthermore, the external constraints faced by students in speaking English include the environment, teaching and learning implementation, and performance condition. The students reported that the important external factors influenced the students in speaking were environmental constraints (living background, university support, and stereotype toward speaking English), teaching and learning implementation constraints (unproporsional class size, uncomfortable location in learning English, class management, and unadequate learning facilities), and performance condition (pressure to perform well, time for preparation, listeners' support, frequency to practice English outside the classroom, and teacher's correction toward students' mistake).

The results of this study show that students' oral English performance is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors (Rajitha & Alamelu, 2020). These factors can be roughly divided into internal constraints, i.e. constraints from the students themselves, and external constraints, i.e. constraints from the environment and the education system. Internal constraints that affect students' oral performance include personality problems, motivational problems, and language proficiency limitations.

The results show that many students feel overwhelmed when speaking English, feel that they have nothing to say or lack confidence (Basöz & Erten, 2019). This can lead to shyness and anxiety, hindering their willingness to communicate in English. Motivation is another key factor, with both synthetic motivation (desire to assimilate into the target language culture) and instrumental motivation (learning English for practical purposes) playing an important role in a learner's oral performance. Language knowledge restrictions (such as poor grammar and hearing capacity) are also stated is an internal factor that affects the ability of the speech (Melani, et.al, 2020).

These discoveries show that improving student language skills is important to improve oral performance. On the other hand, external constraints refer to factors that affect oral English proficiency beyond students' control. Environmental constraints, including living conditions and university support, play an important role. Students from backgrounds where English is not widely spoken may face additional challenges in language practice and learning (Adger, et.al, 2018). In addition, some societal stereotypes about speaking English may affect students' confidence in using the language (Dovcin, 2020). The limitations imposed on the teaching and learning process also have a significant impact on students' oral performance. Problems such as large class sizes, uncomfortable learning spaces and inadequate learning spaces can hinder effective language learning and practice. These results emphasize the importance of creating a conducive learning environment to improve oral language skills (Walker &Graham, 2021).

Performance conditions, such as pressure to perform well and limited preparation time, were identified as external constraints affecting students' speaking ability. In addition, audience support and the frequency of practicing English outside the classroom are important in building students' speaking competence (Hobson & Maxwell, 2017).

Several strategies can be considered to address the challenges identified in this study. First, language teachers should focus on improving students' language skills, especially grammar and listening skills. Motivation can be boosted by including engaging and relevant content in the curriculum and emphasizing the practical benefits of English language skills. Creating a positive and supportive learning environment is essential to overcoming external limitations. Reducing class sizes, improving classrooms, and choosing a comfortable study location can help ensure a better language learning experience. University support and initiatives to change stereotypes about the use of English can also have a positive impact on students' confidence and willingness to speak. In addition, it is also beneficial to give students more opportunities to practice English outside the classroom. Language clubs, conversation partners and language exchange programs can encourage students to use English in real-life situations, improving their speaking skills.

It is important to note that the results of this study may extend beyond the specific context in which it was conducted. Conducting similar studies in different cultural and educational environments can help identify commonalities and differences in factors that influence students' oral performance. In addition, longitudinal studies that track students' progress over time may provide greater insight into the development of oral language skills.

5. Conclusion

Based on the description of data which have been discussed and analyzed in the previous chapter. The results of the study indicated that the students faced some internal factors such as:

1. The students did not have positive attitude toward speaking English. The students feeling unconfident and motivated during speaking English.
2. The students' internal factors affected them to speak English such as (1) they worry about making mistakes; (2) shyness/anxiety; (3) they could not think of anything to say/formulating opinions/relevant comments; (4) tendency of

some learners to dominate in group; (5) the weak learners do not get opportunities in the presence of the strong ones, (6) they used Indonesian instead of English; (7) they were undesired to speak English and unwilling to speak English; (8) they also had less confidence and worried about their future career, achieved good academic score, and could not raise better status. Furthermore, the students faced topical knowledge difficulties in speaking performance as follow (1) bad grammar; (2) bad listening ability; (3) lack of vocabulary; (4) discourse and speech act knowledge problems and (5) bad pronunciation.

3. The students' external constraints affected them to speak English include environment constraints (living background, university and students support, and stereotype toward English), teaching and learning constraints (inadequate learning facilities, class management, uncomfortable location for learning speaking, condition of speaking class, and unproportionally class size). In addition, the performance condition that influenced the students in speaking English such as (1) frequency of practice speaking outside the classroom; (2) plenty of time; (3) preparation before speaking task; (4) pressure to perform speaking; and (5) the listeners' attitude.

6. Suggestions

Based on the results of the study, some suggestions were made for teacher and students at STMIK Indonesia Banda Aceh.

1. The students should first understand the importance of speaking skill. Their awareness of their studies may result in their motivation of learning.
2. The students should not be shy to participate and communicative in speaking class.
3. The students should practice speaking English outside the classroom more often by doing the speaking tasks with their classmates, joining speaking club where they can use English to communicate and speaking on their own in front of a mirror.
4. The students should use English in the class instead of Indonesian to make it a habit.
5. As for teacher, she/he should first improve the performance condition by giving their students time preparation for speaking task, teaching the students how to use mind map to generate ideas and giving the students enough time to perform their task;
6. The teacher helps the students overcome inhibition and shyness by having friendly, helpful, and cooperative behaviors to make students feel comfortable when speaking in class, reminding students not to worry about making mistakes and giving them clear instructions and sufficient guidance.
7. The teacher should decide carefully when and how to correct the students' mistakes so that the students are not fearful of making mistakes and the flow of students' conversation is not destroyed.

References

- Adger, C. T., Snow, C. E., & Christian, D. (Eds.). (2018). What teachers need to know about language (Vol. 2). Multilingual Matters.
- Anderson, R. (2019). Intuitive inquiry: Inviting transformation and breakthrough insights in qualitative research. *Qualitative Psychology*, 6(3), 312.
- Basöz, T., & Erten, I. H. (2019). A Qualitative Inquiry into the Factors Influencing EFL Learners' In-Class Willingness to Communicate in English. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 13(1), 1-18.
- Dovchin, S. (2020). The psychological damages of linguistic racism and international students in Australia. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 23(7), 804-818.
- Gultom, S., & Oktaviani, L. (2022). The Correlation Between Students 'self-Esteem and Their English Proficiency Test Result. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 3(2), 52-57.
- Hobson, A. J., & Maxwell, B. (2017). Supporting and inhibiting the well-being of early career secondary school teachers: Extending self-determination theory. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(1), 168-191.
- Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative psychology*, 4(1), 2.
- Mandasari, B., & Aminatun, D. (2020). Improving Students' speaking Performance Through Vlog. *English Education: Journal of English Teaching and Research*, 5(2), 136-142.
- Melani, B. Z., Roberts, S., & Taylor, J. (2020). Social emotional learning practices in learning English as a second language. *Journal of English Learner Education*, 10(1), 3.
- Mohammed, M. H. (2018). Challenges of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) by non-native learners. *International Journal of Social Science and Economic Research*, 3(4), 1381-1400.
- Rajitha, K., & Alamelu, C. (2020). A study of factors affecting and causing speaking anxiety. *Procedia Computer Science*, 172, 1053-1058.
- Roever, C., & Kasper, G. (2018). Speaking in turns and sequences: Interactional competence as a target construct in testing speaking. *Language testing*, 35(3), 331-355.
- Syakur, A., Zainuddin, H. M., & Hasan, M. A. (2020). Needs analysis English for specific purposes (esp) for vocational pharmacy students. *Budapest International Research and Critics in Linguistics and Education (BirLE) Journal*, 3(2), 724-733.
- Walker, S., & Graham, L. (2021). At risk students and teacher-student relationships: student characteristics, attitudes to school and classroom climate. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(8), 896-913.