

# The Speaking Competence of EFL Students at an Indonesian Suburb Vocational School

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## Abstract

This study aimed to assess speaking ability of the vocational school EFL students. The study involved 108 students of the Accounting Department at a vocational school in the suburban area of Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province, Indonesia. In this study, convenience sampling was used. The data were collected using document of student speaking scores elicited from transactional speaking formative assessments. The scores of students' speaking competence in the test were classified to determine their level of competence. The data were analysed using the descriptive statistic and visualized in charts. Therefore, the average, percentage and frequency distribution of the students' scores were obtained. The results have shown that students' speaking ability of 67 students or 62% reached an average of 83.61, falling to category "Good". In addition, there were 6 students or 5,6% who could achieve very good level. Then, there were 34 students or 31,5% who could reach average level. In other words, the technique implemented in the speaking assessment showed good result. With regard to the finding, it was recommended that it should be good motivation and challenge for the English teachers to encourage the students to be more confident in speaking English and provide them with more opportunity to practise extensively outside the classroom.

**Keywords:** Speaking competence; EFL students; vocational school.

In English Language Teaching (ELT), the final purpose of the teaching-learning process is that the students are able to communicate using the language. Speaking ability is one of the skills that must be mastered. Speaking skills are very significant competences for all of the students who wish to learn English as their provisions. It is important because English can improve their career, business, build confidence levels, get better

job opportunities, attend in debates or group discussion, deliver presentation, and the others (Rao, 2019).

Additionally, Speaking is such a competency that is required in performing a dialogue, so it becomes the most essential skill. English speaking is challenging due to a lot of significant components that should be understood such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Otherwise students should have at least sufficient of speaking competence when they would like to speak in English easily and effectively with others (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Speaking skills considered to be the most crucial skills especially in the academic field, because they were the one of skills effected for communication in any language (Namaziandost, Shatalebi, & Nasri, 2019; Altun, 2020). Without a doubt, speaking is the most significant skill among all of the four skills to communicate well in the global era (Rao, 2019).

Another key thing to remember is the components of speaking skill. According to Vanderkevent (1990) in Kurniati, Eliwarti and Novitri (2015) there are three components in speaking:

#### 1. The Speakers

Speakers are people who produce the sound. They are useful as the tool to express opinion or feelings to the hearer. So, if there are no speakers, the opinion or the feelings will not be stated.

#### 2. The Listeners

Listeners are people who receive or get the speaker's opinion or feeling. If there are no listeners, speakers will express their opinion by writing.

#### 3. The Utterances

The utterances are words or sentences, which are produced by the speakers to state the opinion. If there is no utterance, both of the speakers and the listeners will use sign. According to Harris (1969) there are five components of speaking skill concerned with comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency.

##### 1. Comprehension

It describes how well students understand a language completely and how they are accustomed to the situation, facts, and so forth. Comprehension helps them to improve their understanding dealing with a piece of writing or someone's speech, and then answer question. It refers to the ability of understanding the speakers' intension and general meaning.

##### 2. Grammar

It is a study on how words and their component parts combine to form sentences, structural relationship in language. Grammar is the set of logical and structural rules that determine the composition of sentences, phrases, and words in any language.

##### 3. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is what we learn in order to understand how to select suitable word for a context used in communication. According to Samad, Bustari and Ahmad (2017) vocabulary functions as beneficial role that can explain any objects, actions, and ideas, so knowing vocabulary well will clearly show someone's ability in understanding language.

##### 4. Pronunciation

According to Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 429) Pronunciation is "the way a certain sound or sounds are produced. Unlike articulation, which refers to the actual production of speech sounds in the mouth, pronunciation stresses more the way sounds are perceived by the hearer ... and often relates the spoken word to its written form."

##### 5. Fluency

The definition of fluency is "in second and foreign language teaching, fluency describes a level of proficiency in communication, which includes the ability to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary, and grammar, and the ability to produce continuous speech without causing comprehension difficulties or breakdown of communication." (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 204). In other words, fluency means the competence to speak the language smoothly, effectively, and simply (Maulidar, Gani, & Samad, 2019)

Language functions should also be applied in teaching and learning speaking. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 214) stated "Language functions are often described as categories of behaviour; e.g. requests, apologies, complaints, offers, compliments.". Beare (2018) added "A language function explains why someone says something." It means that when someone

would like to say something, he or she should consider the appropriate expressions to be used. Language functions require certain grammar, for example: giving instructions, guessing, expressing wishes, persuading, and so on.

All things considered encourage the objectives of ELT in Kurikulum 2013 (the curriculum 2013). The general objective of learning English for Vocational Schools as the curriculum included is to enable the students have communicative competence in English in order to support their major skills. This case refers to meet the requirements when they already have a job or continue to the university. It is very beneficial for students who are able to communicate in English if they are in the environment which insists them to communicate in English. Briefly, communicative competence in English is the ability to comprehend and produce spoken and written language. This means students have to be able to practice some skills in English which are integrated in four skills; they are listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

English basic competence of vocational school provides some interpersonal and instructional materials other than texts, thus students need to be involved actively in speaking activities. In this case, teachers have to create a good atmosphere and implement a proper method and technique for their speaking class. Since the English competencies of vocational school based on the Curriculum 2013 are administered to enable them learn and practice the transactional and interpersonal expressions orally.

Suwartono and Nitiasih (2020) have proved that "Teaching communication strategies in spoken English communication (Speaking) was able to help improve student communicative competence and better teaching and learning practice also has a role in creating good atmosphere in the class, such as cheerfulness and learning enthusiasm, which was getting better." Ubaedillah (2019) added that the most significant to be conducted in

teaching learning activities is the teacher can employ the appropriate approach, design, and procedures to manage and create the class lively.

As the preparation of ELT, it is a routine for the teachers to manage and create a lesson plan before coming to the class. Having a good lesson plan depends on some criteria such as the objectives, the method of teaching, the assessments, etc. In the same way, teachers will plan some goals for their speaking class, and one of the goals is the students are able to communicate in English with certain expressions. Therefore, teachers will consider designing the best types of speaking class to develop the students' speaking competence.

However, some studies have revealed that speaking becomes the most challenging skills for EFL students. Pollard (2008, p. 34) in Kurniati, Eliwarti and Novitri (2015) stated that speaking was one of the most difficult aspects for students to master. The reason are they do not have enough exposure to English (environmental factor), infrequent English-speaking practice in daily life (they usually use their mother tongue instead of English to communicate), and feeling shy and lazy to learn English (Al-Eiadeh et al., 2016). As a matter of fact, most EFL students of vocational schools, especially those who are from the suburb, do not have much confidence to speak. Kurniati, Eliwarti and Novitri (2015) added that a lot of students failed to speak with native speakers clearly because they hardly knew the expressions to state their feeling or ideas and the way to say it. Miss communication often occurs unless the students understand and comprehend the use of expressions and the elements in speaking. As a result, it decreases the mistakes and they are able to speak with native or non- native speakers well.

Another factor that influences EFL students in performing their speaking task is they do not have many chances to practice outside the class extensively (Wulandari, 2019). According to Hamer in Ubaedillah (2019) "There are three main reasons for getting

students to speak in the classroom. Those are chances to practice real-life speaking in the safety of the classroom, trying to use any or all of the language they know, and having opportunities to activate the various elements of language.” Moreover, they do not make serious efforts to speak English outside the class and Asilestari (2016) stated their mother tongue extremely dominates their daily communication.

Experts proposed some applicable techniques for speaking class. Brown (2003) stated “speaking is a productive skill that can be directly and empirically observed, those observations are invariably coloured by the accuracy and effectiveness of a test taker’s listening skill, which necessarily compromises the reliability and the validity of an oral production test.” It means that listening activities as the receptive skills affect the speaking competence as the productive skills which is able to be assessed by observing the elements of speaking like pronunciation, intonation, fluency, accuracy, and so forth.

Derakhshan, Khalili and Baheshti (2016) added “as the production skill, speaking is included in two main categories: accuracy and fluency.” Accuracy consists of using vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation through some activities, fluency take into account. In production skill, speaking ability take place without time limit environment and in interaction skill, there is a negotiation between learners. Both skills help learners to improve their speaking ability easier. It is obvious that speaking competence depends on the students’ listening and reading skills. The receptive skills encourage them to build their vocabulary, understand grammar, get right pronunciation and have accuracy. Those can be acquired from some listening activities such as filling gaps of words, choosing best responses, and reading activities like error recognition, incomplete sentences, reading comprehension text, and so forth.

According to Celce-Murica (2001) in Derakhshan, Khalili and Baheshti (2016) “the

evidence showed that listening and reading can improve speaking skill because reading can affect both fluency and accuracy of expression in their speaking.” Listening constitutes the first experience in learning a language because students at least can imitate a word, a phrase or a sentence after listening to speech with proper pronunciation. Then by reading, students will build and increase their vocabulary, also understand more about the grammar. It means that listening and reading will influence how the students express their spoken language, whether they speak fluently and accurately or not. Additionally, Celce-Murica (2001) in Derakhshan, Khalili and Baheshti (2016) said “Learning to speak needs a lot of practice; besides, learners should use short dialogue, and questions and answers.” EFL students cannot speak English well without practicing regularly (Asilestari, 2016; Al-Eiadeh et al., 2016).

Meanwhile, there are some types of speaking performance that can help students to improve speaking skill (Brown, 2003, pp. 141-142).

#### 1. Imitation

This type of speaking performance is students should be able to imitate just like a parrot. Teachers focus only on their pronunciation (phonetic level of oral production) as the performance criteria.

#### 2. Intensive

This type of speaking is designed to demonstrate competence for grammatical, phrasal, lexical, or phonological relationships for instance directed response tasks, reading aloud, and sentence or dialogue completion.

#### 3. Responsive

These tasks include interaction and test comprehension in which the students will be given a stimulus as a spoken prompt. The type of speaking is short conversation greetings, simple request and comments, and the like.

#### 4. Interactive

There are two forms of interactive speaking; transactional and interpersonal. Transactional has the function to exchange specific information, whereas interpersonal

aims to maintain social relationship. Speaking can be practicality complex due to the casual register and the use of sociolinguistics conventions. Because students need to understand about sociolinguistics too in addition to linguistic competence like pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary (Sutjiati, Ningsih & Budiwaty, 2017).

For example:

Transactional Dialogue

Dona : Excuse me, could you tell

me : where the hospital is?

Mary : Of course, on the Main Street.

Interpersonal Dialogue

Lia : Hi Roy, how's life?

Roy : Fine, and you?

Lia : Not bad.

#### 5. Extensive

These tasks include speeches, oral presentations, and storytelling. It is formal and has very limited oral interaction from listeners (Brown, 2003, pp. 141-142).

According to many theories, speaking competence can be developed by games, role play, interviewed (Brown, 2003). Some techniques to improve students' speaking skill are following:

##### 1. Role-play

Role-play is very well-known pedagogical activity in communicative teaching language class (Hussain, 2017). The advantages of using this technique such as the students are free to be creative to express, students can map what they are going to say, and it can decrease students' anxieties (Brown, 2003, p.174). Some recent studies were conducted to reveal that this technique was able to improve the students' speaking competence. Mariati and Fauzan (2019) revealed role-play enhanced their students' English linguistics aspect for speaking skill and it became the factors of students speaking improvement.

##### 2. Videos

One of the most popular media nowadays is video. This media can be utilized to improve students' speaking skills. Wulandari (2019) said "Using video recordings, students

can observe their own performance making it possible to do self-reflection which will lead to students' autonomy".

##### 3. Simulation

As highlighted by Vitasmoro (2017) simulation is almost identical with role-plays. Simulations are more elaborated because students can bring items to the class to show the real situation. According to Harmer (2001) both simulation and role plays can encourage the students due to increasing self-confidence of hesitant students.

##### 4. Game

There are some variety of games that directly involve speaking skills such as "Tinker toy" game, Crossword puzzles, Information gab grids, and City Maps (Brown, 2003, p. 175).

##### 5. Interview

The technique is "The teacher and the student sit down in a direct face to face exchange and proceed through a protocol questions and directives." (Brown, 2003, p.167). The parameter to be scored is the accuracy of pronunciation and/or grammar, fluency, vocabulary usage, etc.

##### 6. Storytelling

One of the techniques that can improve the speaking competence is storytelling. It is an activity which students are asked to retell a story after they have read or listened by using their own words or comprehension (Akhyak and Indrawan, 2013; Zuhriyah, 2017).

This research is going to show the students' speaking competence of State Vocational School 1 of Banyumas which is located in the suburb area of Banyumas in Central Java Province, Indonesia. It aims to answer the research question on "How is the speaking competence of Accounting Department students of State Vocational School 1 Banyumas in the academic year 2019/2020?"

## Method

This survey used descriptive statistic to analyse the data of the students' scores of speaking competence through situation based

task. The task was included into interactive speaking in a role play. Based on Brown (2003) “Interactive includes tasks that involve relatively long stretches of interactive discourse (interviews, role play, discussions, game).”

This research was chosen to know the students’ speaking competence in using transactional expressions through situation-based task. It was suitable as one of the techniques for the speaking assessment, thus the students felt comfortable to express their ideas with their classmates. Moreover, the main point was that they are encouraged to speak in the conversation.

The population of this study was the students of State Vocational School 1 of Banyumas. The total population was 108 students. The researchers used convenience sampling technique to select the samples. Convenience sampling constitutes an accidental sampling which is utilized due to the availability and the accessibility of the sample at the time (Gay, Airasian, 2000, p.137; Cohen, Manion & Marison, 2011, p.155-156). In this case, the population obtained at that time were the students of Accounting Department so the result was based solely on the sample of the population.

The data was collected using the document of students’ score. According to Suwartono (2014) it is a common thing for an intitution to prepare a document intentionally as a record which purposed to be a research. From the data of this study, it could be acquired the students’ speaking competence. The students’ individual scores of the test were computed using the following formula:

$$SA = \frac{P + I + F + G + A}{5}$$

SA = Speaking Ability Score  
 P = Pronunciation  
 I = Intonation  
 F = Fluency  
 G = Grammar  
 A = Accuracy

The scores were elicited from the

speaking formative assessment of transactional basic competence through situation based task. After that the data were analysed by descriptive statistic. Using this analysis, it was obtained the average, percentage and frequency distribution of the students’ scores.

The score of students’ speaking competence in the test were classified to determine their level of the ability. Therefore, the classification is designed as seen in Table 1.

Meanwhile, the scores were also influenced by the minimum passing grade criteria (KKM) so the teachers gave the lowest score closed to the minimum criteria. In this case, the level of ability adapted from Harris was changed for the first level into very good and the test score into the other ranges. They were presented in the findings.

**Table 1.** The Level of Ability Adapted from Harris (1969)

No.	Test Score	Level of Ability
1	80 - 100	Excellent
2	60 - 79	Good
3	50 - 59	Average
4	0 - 49	Poor

**Results and Discussion**

The result of this study was used to answer how the speaking competence of Accounting Department students of State Vocational School 1 of Banyumas in the academic year 2019/2020 was. It was presented and displayed based on the question of the study as well. After analysing the data of speaking scores, it was shown that the average of speaking ability from the population was 83. The result is described in a chart presented in Figure 1.

Table 2 shows the result of speaking ability of Accounting Department students of State Vocational School 1 of Banyumas in the academic year 2019/2020.

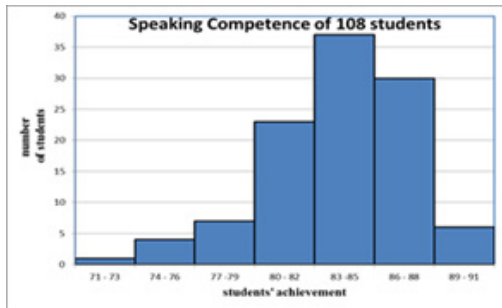


Figure 1. Students' Speaking Competence

Table 2. The Level of Students' Speaking Competence

No	Test Score	Level of Ability	Fre-quency	Percent-age
1	71 - 73	Poor	1	0,93%
2	74 - 76		4	
3	77 - 79	Average	7	31,5%
4	80 - 82		23	
5	83 - 85	Good	37	62%
6	86 - 88		30	
7	89 - 91	Very Good	6	5,6%

Speaking as a productive skill can be a measuring rod whether the main purpose of ELT is achieved or not. Through speaking activities, teachers will recognize how the students pronounce words, produce right intonation, or express their ideas with proper sentences. According to Harmer (2001) "good speaking activities can and should be highly motivating". The students will obtain extraordinary satisfaction if they all fully involve in the activity which has been set by teachers properly with numbers of speaking tasks like role-playing, discussion, problem-solving (Oradee, 2012), and so forth. Those activities are intrinsically enjoyable for the students and according to Boonkit(2010) it is an effective strategy to maximize the speaking confidence thus minimize the anxiety.

As a matter of fact a lot of students usually do not have much confident to speak due to some cases such as little understanding about linguistic competence of the target language, the limitation of vocabulary (Maulidar, Gani &

Samad, 2019), the domination of their mother tongue, less understanding on transactional expressions in English, feeling terrified and ashamed to make mistake. By using some techniques and practising a lot, certainly students will feel more confident to speak in English therefore it can help them to improve their competence in speaking.

Harris (1969) proposed that comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency are the components of speaking skill. The students' speaking scores as the data of this study were elicited from the components of speaking skill which is used as the speaking competence rubric of the speaking formative assessment through situation based task. Thus the data analyzed could represent the students' speaking competence of the Accounting Department.

Based on the finding on Table 2, it indicated that the students' average score was 83,61. There were 6 students who could achieve very good level. It was also supported by the data that there were 67 students or 62% who could achieve good level. Then, there were 34 students or 31,5% who could reach average level. However, there was only 1 student who was in poor level. In addition, the average of students' speaking ability level was in good level. With regard to the finding, the technique implemented (situation based task with role-play) in the speaking assessment showed good result. Harmer (2001) also explained that role-play activities brought the students in the imaginary situation which placed them in a different situation and act accordingly. Certainly students could create their dialogue based on the situation given and get a kind of rehearsal before they acted.

Moreover, it was normally happened when we found some EFL students belong to very good level of speaking competence in the Accounting Department. It is because year by year in the Accounting Department always obtains good interest from the society. As a matter of fact, the students of Junior High School with high scores of National

Examination (including English) will choose the program. So, the Accounting Department usually accepts students with good input competence. Some of them did not have much problem in speaking activity for certain language function.

### Conclusion

There were 108 students participated in this research. It was found that 6 students were in very good level of speaking ability, 67 (62%) students were in good level of speaking ability, 34 (31.5%) students were in average level of speaking ability and there was 1 student in poor level of speaking ability. The score of poor level of ability was 71 due to the minimum passing grade criteria was 75. Otherwise, the score of very good level ability was 90 and it was the highest score for the speaking test. As we know that speaking assessment is a part of skill assessment, so the teachers place the highest score as 90.

Based on the finding above, it can be concluded that the EFL students of Accounting Department of State Vocational School 1 of Banyumas in the academic year 2019/2020 have had good level of speaking competence in average. Hopefully, they also have good competence in English generally.

### Limitation

The research finding implies the speaking competence of the Accounting Department students reached an average of 83.61, falling to category "Good". Unfortunately the sample is only from one study program so it was not strong to represent all the students of state vocational 1 of Banyumas as the population in this study.

### Recommendation

Having this achievement, the researchers recommend that it should be a good motivation and challenge for the English teachers to encourage the students to be more confident in speaking English and provide them more chance to practise outside the classroom

extensively. Consequently, a language teacher will be the significant role as the model for the students. Suwartono (2007) stated "teacher's part in foreign language learning is obviously central and teachers even 'become vital-an important source of language input.'" In this context, teachers are expected to serve as a good linguistic model for the students as well (Hussain, 2018). Additionally, the teachers have to be aware that they must always speak with the language in teaching-learning (Gudu, 2015). Suwartono (2007) added that "there is no reason for teachers of EFL not to speak in the language they teach to their students."

For further study, it is suggested to collect the data not only from the Accounting Department but also from the other Departments at the school in order to get representing sample of the whole population. It is better to conduct the research with cluster random sampling due to the wide population.

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