

## Teacher's Difficulties in Teaching Oral Communication Skills in Indonesia: A Comparative Literature Review

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### Abstract

While oral communication skills is considered as an indicator of foreign language proficiency, in Indonesia, these skills seems to receive minium attention. As a result, the learning outcomes, still far from satisfying. According to the literatures, teacher's still encountered difficulties in teaching speaking and listening and hesitance to utilized English language in the classroom. This present study aimed to present comparative literature review of research studies related to teacher's difficulties in teaching oral communication skills. First the study explains about communicative competence and listening model. Second, this study demonstrates the condition of oral communciation teaching in Indonesia and its relationship to the teachers' competence. Thirdly, this study explore other Asian contexts. These contexts are compared and contrasted, thus some similarities and differences are highlighted. Finally, some practical implications and suggestions for further researches are offered.

**Keywords:** oral communciation skills, pronunciation teaching, teacher's difficulties, listening skill

### INTRODUCTION

Recent curriculum changes in Indonesia have highlighted a greater emphasis on communicative aspects in language teaching and learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2016). Yet, the learning outcomes are still far from satisfying. Existing research findings showed that only a small number of graduates are able to communicate intelligibly in English (Lie, 2007). Official data from Ministry of Education in 2017 also revealed that English is the only subject in the national exam for which students' average score decreased from 64.05 in 2016 to 57.51 in 2017.

Investigations into the reasons for the learners' poor communication competence outcomes in different contexts, including Indonesia, have identified different influential factors. For instance, time constraint and large class sizes were reported to be major contributing factors that hindered teachers' efforts to provide opportunities for students' practice with speaking skills in the classrooms (Ariatna, 2016). In many contexts, teachers

were found to avoid using English or teaching speaking skill due to their lack of confidence in their own proficiency and teaching knowledge (Littlewood, 2006; Lie, 2007; Sulisty, 2016). These studies have also reported that lack of training for teachers might be the main cause of this insufficient confidence.

This finding above seems to reflect the current situation in Indonesia. In a study of primary school teachers in Sulawesi Island, for example, it was found that the majority of these teachers had never attended college for teacher training programs (Rahman, Hamra, & Noni, 2013). Coming from such training background, Indonesian teachers are predicted to encounter even greater difficulties in teaching.

Understanding teachers and the practical problems they are dealing with in teaching should, therefore, provide important foundations for any recommendations for improving the effectiveness of teaching speaking skills to students in this context. However, this understanding is now missing from the literature; thus, good identification of gap.

This research has two a two-fold purpose. First, it aims to provide in-depth review, from the teachers' perspective, about problems and factors that prevent Indonesian teachers from focusing on oral communication teaching. Second, on the basis of these factors, the study makes recommendations to the teachers, institutions, and the government of Indonesia on necessary adjustments or improvements so that the intended goals of the innovated curriculum could be realised and achieved in teaching practice. The study is centred on three following questions.

- a. What challenges do Indonesian EFL teachers encounter in teaching oral communication skills in secondary school level?
- b. What possible causes contribute to these challenges?
- c. What are the suggested solutions for teachers in overcoming these challenges?

## **METHOD**

This current study utilized qualitative approach in which a narrative literature reviewed designed is employed. In a literature review reserach, the design is different than others since the data are obtained from other published literature (Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006). The researcher also analysed similar contexts to Indonesia where oral communication has been a challenge for the teachers and identify which from that context can be applied to Indonesia English teaching pedagogy. It is also necessary to note that the researchers do not intend to exhibit criticism of on literature review . It is deemed as to present them in comparative ways

to show the similarities and differences. The rationale is to create a link and a holistic view among studies for the purpose of reinterpretation or interconnection (Baumeister & Leary, 1997).

Websen and Watson (2002) proposed a structured approach to determine the relevant literature and other sources for the literature review. In order to do so, a number of procedures are pursued. First, ERIC and Google Scholar were used to access journal articles, book chapters, articles, and other academic papers. Only peer-reviewed articles were considered as eligible. The time published was also limited in recent ten years. The keywords entries of “issues in teaching speaking”, “issues in teaching listening”, “challenges in teaching oral communication skills in Asian context”, “teaching speaking and listening in Indonesia” were used. Second, to get clearer references in Indonesian context, the researcher accessed database “TEFLIN Journal” and “Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics”. These two journals database are Indonesian reputed journals. Third, references list written in the reviewed articles were searched by accessing Google Scholar and ERIC.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Communicative Competence and Speaking**

Communicative competence can be defined as an individual ability to use language effectively in actual communication (Hymes in Goh and Burns, 2012). This ability is both knowledge and specific skills in using the language. Furthermore, Canale and Swales (1980) develop the communicative competence into four components: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Another scholar, Johnson (1981) also summarized that a competence language speaker is not only be able to understand the grammatical knowledge, his utterance must be appropriate. The speaker has to aware about the relationship between interlocutors, the setting, topic, linguistic context, etc.

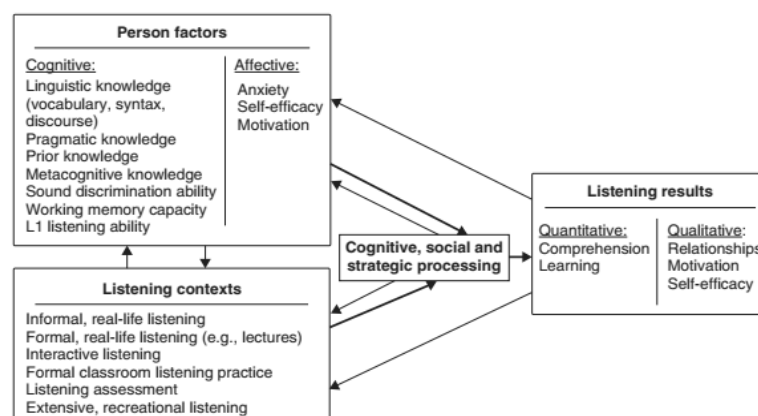
These definitions above leads to one major implication that grammatical aspect is an important feature of speaking however having this only aspect is not sufficient. The learners have to be able to use speech efficiently, to be aware about what language is appropriate and acceptable to their listeners and to consider the relationship between themselves and the participants because it influences the message is conveyed (Goh and Burns, 2012). In other words, speaking is a combination of multiple skills because it involves of doing multiple things at the same time.

Furthermore, in the classroom practice this concept should be understood by the teachers. Speaking lesson should not only be seen as an opportunity for learners to practice their speaking skill but also as structured and planned lesson so they can expand their linguistic knowledge which is included grammatical knowledge, phonological knowledge, lexical knowledge, and discourse knowledge. This knowledge should be emphasized in designing a lesson because teachers should plan the activities that are authentic and realistic.

### ***Listening skill***

Listening is a skill that enables learners to receive and engaged with language input however compare to other language skills, the learners are rarely taught how to acquire this skill although they might have this activities in the classroom (Larry and Goh, 2011). Majorly listening activity in the classroom are focus on the outcome of the listening. The learners are asked to repeat the information they have heard or explain the meaning of expression or information they have heard. Consequently, if they cannot grasp the idea they feel anxious and the level can increase if they have to give the respond to the listening passage appropriately.

There are several factors that can influence the listening success. According to Imhof and Janusik in Goh and Larry (2011), listening is an integrated system which individual factors and listening context have an impact to the quality of processing and listening results (comprehension, learning, or motivation). Similarly, the result can affect the factors in the listening process and listeners' further efforts at processing the input as explained in the figure below.



**Figure 4.1. Systems Model of Listening**  
Adapted from Imhof & Janusik, 2006

Figure 1. Model of listening

### ***Obstacles to teaching listening comprehension***

It is quite surprising that listening comprehension does not obtain greater emphasize in many language classes whereas, previous scholars carried out two major obstacles to teaching listening effectively (Horwitz, 2008). Firstly, is the difference between classroom and real-world listening. In an EFL context, to design a lesson that resemble authentic speech is problematic. Listening materials and experiences in the classroom generally often differ from the authentic speech that the learners will encounter in the community of target language. Natural speech is characterized by having pausing, dropping the word ending (I am going to become I am gonna), an interruption between interlocutors. This leads to many language learners often find it more challenging to listen to natural speech rather than clearly speech without interruption from the beginning to end.

Secondly, teachers also encounter confusion about what kind of materials and speech to present to the students. If the listening activity is focused only hear clearly and careful speech, the learners are likely have a great difficulties when they talk to native speakers or when they watching English movies. For instance, study in Saudi Arabia revealed that lack of listening strategies is one of the challenges in teaching listening (Assafeh, Al-Shaboul, Zuraiq, & Alshboul, 2011; Arafat, 2012). One possible reason is because many teachers are encounter difficulties of how to teach listening systematically and appropriately. Furthermore, most teachers also assume that this skill is automatically acquired by the learners as they learn to speak English

### **The Condition of English Language Teaching in Indonesia**

A well balanced language course should consist of four equal strands which is meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development (Nation & Newton, 2008). In Indonesia context, English curriculum has experienced significant changes, from traditional and grammar-based approach to communicative approach. However, in the classroom practice there is a tendency not to balance the four strands; in fact some skills are neglected such as oral communication skills. Consequently, the number of students' who are able to communicate in English intelligibly is still limited although they have been studying English for years (Lie, 2007).

Previous researches have been conducted to find out the possible factors which contribute to this learning outcome. Two common factors from the findings are the limited

time of English lessons and large class size (Bradford, 2007; Yulia, 2013; Ariatna, 2016). Thus, having more than thirty students in one class and two or three hours per week of English lesson, conducting speaking activity might be problematic. In addition, some teachers' are responsible to teach more than one class with different levels which might cause the possibility of having oral communication practice in the classroom even smaller.

Another factor comes from the students' motivation in to communicate English. In the context of English as foreign language (EFL), the learning goal is focused only to pass the National standardized test (reading and listening) or to access the knowledge in the higher education level. As a result, the need to be able to communicate in English might not be a priority unless it aims as daily communication as in an English as Second Language (ESL) context. In addition, to some part of Indonesia especially in rural areas, the motivation to getting education is still become an issue let alone for learning English due socio-economic factor (Yulia, 2013).

In contrast, several researches also revealed that students' motivation in speaking English is considerably high whereas it was not fulfilled due to ineffective and disengaging classroom activities (Lamb, 2007; Lamb, 2010). Students felt anxious and pressure because the tasks required them to perform spontaneously within limited time. They also kept silent because of lack prior knowledge of the topic and are afraid of making mistake. The learning activities were usually teacher-dominated where teacher was mainly talking and having repetition and drills as the main activities (Mattarrima & Hamdan, 2011). In addition, the research also reveals that the teacher during the classroom practice are overuse first language in teaching, some of them are found only use English to open and close the class (Mustofa, 2001).

In the instruction of teaching oral communication skills, it was also found that pronunciation is the field that has been neglected. The teaching of English pronunciation has an insufficient portion and it leads to the ample of mispronunciation and affect the flow and intelligibility of the speech (Moedjito and Harumi, 2008). In addition, EFL teachers in Indonesia experiences limited interaction with English speaking people or native speakers. In addition, in perceiving learners mispronunciation, they are rely only the lecturer or references they have gained in the university however very few of them addressing the problems of Indonesia learners in real communicative situations (Moedjito and Harumi, 2008).

From the several studies above, it can be concluded that the classroom activity and teacher oral proficiency in the target language is significant factors both for teaching effectiveness and students' learning. Although the role of English is not necessarily to

communicate daily but the teachers are model for the students' in language learning and it involves telling and explaining the activities and controlling their behaviour.

***The realm of English teacher competence in Indonesia***

For many years researches have indicated that to develop students' communicative competence, they have to be given the opportunity to interact with both teachers and their classmates in the target language. In Indonesia context, the studies reveal that teacher-centred and textbook driven are still favourable method by the teachers (Suryati, 2015). Teacher typically dominated the interaction such as explain the grammatical rules and new vocabulary where students supposed to be silent and listening to the teachers. There is evidence that the over-emphasis on IRF pattern, display questions and extended teacher turns does not promote the development of students' communicative competence (Suryati, 2015).

In addition, although curriculum of Indonesia experience tremendous modification, the learners' competence to communicate in English is still below expectation. One of the examples is the negative washback effect of the standardized test (Ujian Nasional) to the classroom teaching. In Indonesia, it is usually common for teachers to spend one to two months focusing on preparing the students for materials that are going to be tested in multiple choices items.

It was also found that majorly the teachers still use traditional classroom approach with audio-lingual method. Although this study have been done several years ago, the finding still relevant to the Indonesia context. The activities are dominated by drilling and practicing the students with the dialogue and role play (Mattarima & Hamdan, 2011). The teachers also frequently use their first language (Bahasa Indonesia) to discuss the topic in the textbook and the main reason is because their inadequate command of English. This also affirms by the study which indicates that even at the university level, the lecturers have not reached a well-developed level of language use (Dardjowidjojo, 2003). In conclusion, these studies suggest that there is an urgency to reconstruct the teacher-student interaction which is more facilitative to enhance students' oral communicative competence.

Recently the ministry of Education and Culture in Indonesia design a national assessment for teacher namely teaching certification program. This program aims to increase the professional and pedagogical competence of the teachers in relation to the subject that they teach in the classroom. However a study in high schools in one of province in Indonesia indicates that the training did not adequately develop teachers' skill and knowledge about English (Wati, 2011). A study conducted to 55 English teachers in one of remote district in

Indonesia indicated the needs of improving their English especially oral communication skills. This need is also supported with the fact that they also did not feel confidence in teaching English themselves and afraid of questions asked by their students. The training was also lack of contextual issue or problems which are only allow the mandated teaching and learning English materials are being used in the classroom.

Similarly, a study by Yuwono (2010) in East Java Province also indicates that there is an immediate need of preparing English teacher to master the language skills (listening, reading, speaking, and writing). The high school graduates from this province are still unable to speak in English properly due to the minimum exposure of English in the classroom. Since Java is the most developed island in Indonesia, it is likely in other provinces especially remote places the condition can be more challenging. This finding seems to affirm the previous research conducted by Wati (2011).

The teachers in the studies above also consider themselves as government employee rather than professional educator. One of the major causes is due to the mandated curriculum that force and limit the teachers' creativity in the classroom. While, the teachers have a high willingness in developing their professional career as an English teacher and in improving their communication skills in English, the support from the government especially the training program majorly focus only on administration materials.

In brief, from the discussion above, the condition of teachers in Indonesia is problematic still now. Although the government formulates and modify new curriculum and mandated teacher certification program, in reality the competence of English teachers in Indonesia are still need to be improved.

From the condition of ELT and English teachers' competence in Indonesia, the main challenges of oral communication teaching in Indonesia can be summarized as follow:

a. Minimum of vocabulary learning

Vocabulary competence is a part of L2 competence. In other words, someone who has high competence in communicating in L2 is associated with sufficient vocabulary knowledge. CLT is the dominant approach in the second language pedagogy however it still found that the teachers still encounter difficulties in creating communicative activities in their language classroom while at the same time focus on vocabulary teaching. Some teachers also found that neglected this area of teaching as the learners will picked up as part of the process of L2 learning (Ivone, 2015). However, this approach has a minimum result in vocabulary teaching. The reason is the incidental learning takes time and in reality there is time limitation



in learning L2. Furthermore, there was also evidence that speaking was not automatically transferable from speakers' L1 to L2. Although the students' with good grammar and vocabulary of English, they still encounter difficulties in performing oral communication skills (Pam & Sim, 2017).

**b. Anxiety**

Anxiety can both happen in speaking and listening skills. If there was a gap between listeners and the speakers, the communication breaks down takes place. Speaking is the aspect of second or foreign language learning most often associated with anxiety. Not only happened at students, it is also reported that in ELT literature that the non-native teachers of English as ESL or EFL may also be anxious about speaking and may avoid conversational activities and communicative teaching methods. Furthermore, in listening, the cause majorly comes from fast speech, the use of slang, or speak with heavy accent. In particular situation such as in an standardized English test, the anxiety may arise from the instruction of the test for example the students is allowed to listen only once.

**c. Pronunciation problems (segmental and suprasegmental features)**

This area of English language teaching is problematic, some teachers tend to take it for granted as the learners will try to carry the pronunciation along the learning process meanwhile the others believe that they do not acquire sufficient knowledge about this field. Suprasegmental are the features in pronunciation which is believed contribute to the intelligibility in spoken English and convey meaning and impression of the speaker. However, this area receives minimal attention as the teachers have difficulties in designing the lessons for example in selecting the model prior to production practice and monotonous activity such as drilling or teacher talk format ( Suwartono, 2014).

***The condition of oral communication teaching in other Asian context***

A study in two Chinese populations also indicates several obstacles in oral communication. The greatest challenge is in grammar and vocabulary competence where they encounter difficulties in processing the speech. They tend to first compose their thoughts in their first language and formulate it in English. As a result, they feel less confident about their ability in maintaining conversation or leading a class discussion. For conversational English is even more challenging because the textbooks generally focus on academic type of English with minimum social function in the students' daily lives (Gan, 2013).

Furthermore, access to speaking opportunities is also limited. In an EFL context, communicative approach was increasingly used as an approach however in reality the

curriculum tend to focus on grammar and reading, and national examination (Pop & Sim, 2017). Moreover, in Asian countries, the learners characterized by having a restrained in the English classroom due to fear of public failure, fear of making mistake, and lack of confidence, low English proficiency, inability to keep up with native-speakers, disorientation, etc. This leads to the result that to some learners speaking English to their peers is more challenging rather than speaking to native speaker due to afraid of being despised (Savasci, 2013).

Similarly in Malaysia, it was also found that the students did not know how to construct English sentences due to limited vocabulary. They think in their mother tongue and translate word by word in English. It was found that they code switching between their first and the target language in order to ensure the produce of correct message.

In Iran although listening and speaking skills are included in the syllabus, there was no place for pronunciation teaching in every level of education in Iran. In China, some teachers in Taiwan argue that English pronunciation might not be useful at all due to few tests would require students to show their abilities in pronunciation. Thus, it becomes evidence that teaching EFL pronunciation has no place in the syllabus, material and classroom (Shemsadra, 2011).

### **Oral Communication Skills and International Education**

There is a significant increase of international students' studying in developed and English speaking countries for example Australia, America, United Kingdom, etc. This number is dominated by Asian countries where English roles as a Foreign Language for example Indonesia. However, a study conducted in one of Australian University shows that language barrier is the greatest factor affecting their success in study and to communicate properly with their Australia classmates.

The ability to listen to oral lecturer, discussion, or classroom presentation is one of the skills that should be acquired in the university. In Indonesia, since the goals of language learning does not have more emphasize in oral communication, the students might encounter difficulties in adjusting themselves in academically and socially with English language culture. A research by Wong (2004) found that many international students experienced difficulties to adjust themselves into the academic environment in Australia. It is because they are accustomed to the teacher-centred style and dictation from the teacher. This

condition is also similar to Indonesia context where the classroom activity mainly focuses on teacher talking and student listening to explanation.

Briefly, it can be states that oral communication need more emphasize in the classroom in Indonesia context. The importance of communication not only helps the learners to be able speak English fluently but also to support their academic achievement in western academic environment.

### **Suggested Teaching Activities**

Realizing oral communication skills is a key element in language proficiency and how globalized world nowadays, this study intend to offer three solutions that teachers may apply in their classroom. First of all, maximizing vocabulary learning in the classroom. In the traditional classroom practice, one of the popular techniques to teach vocabulary is by translating into learners' L1 and memorizing. Widiанти and Cahyono (2008) states that the teacher rarely teaching vocabulary explicitly and systematically. It usually arises from a student who did not understand what the meanings of the words are or because the teacher thinks it is important vocabulary to learn. In other words, there is a need to modify the vocabulary teaching into more communicative.

Second is incorporating pronunciation practice in the classroom. It has been mentioned that pronunciation has a major impact to the oral communication skills however it seems that this portion has minimum attention in the classroom. Although the goal of second language learning in Indonesia is to prepare the students' for standardized test or university entrance examination, the ability to communicate intelligibility is also important. For example, when they have to pursue postgraduate degree overseas, the communication is one of the skills that they should acquire. The teachers need to provide a model of the target language and an encourage students' to practice outside of the classroom with conversational type activity (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, & Briner, 2010).

Lastly, implementing extensive listening activity in the classroom. This activity can be defined as the students should listen to considerable amount and variety of enjoyable texts to build their-listening comprehension skills ( Schmidt, 2016). It has similar principle to extensive reading which are quantity, comprehensibility, learner-centeredness, meaning-oriented, and accountability ( Mayora, 2017). From the study, it indicates that EL can increase the amount of exposure to spoken English and reduce feeling of anxiety experience

compare to intensive listening. The teachers can utilize podcast, TED talks, and online audio or video in the classroom.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the study, it is clear that in Indonesia, oral communication skills is still become an obstacles still now. Some contributing factors to this fact comes from he time constraint, large class size, students' motivation, and teachers' competences. Focusing on teachers' competence, the study evidently showed the teachers' need sufficient and sustainable training on teaching oral communication skills so they can shifted their teaching to be more communicative. Changing curriculum does not guarantee the teachers easily apply it the classroom let alone the better outcomes of communicative language skills.

Furthermore, there is a need to emphasized these skills more in the classroom so that the learners can utilize them in the future. The teachers' might implement the suggested teaching activities into the classroom by incorporating pronunciation practice and extensive listening and maximizing vocabulary learning rather than just translate them from L1 to L2.

Finally for future research, it is recommended to employ another research design for example case study or survey to get an overview and in-depth study about this study. The study focusing on oral communciation in Indonesia context is limited and not as much explored compare to other language skills, say, reading and writing.

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