

**WHAT DO OUR STUDENTS WANT?  
A CASE STUDY OF EFL SPEAKING STUDENTS' VIEW  
OF ACTIVITIES IN SPEAKING CLASSROOM**

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**Abstract**

Students' beliefs or perspectives have been essential inputs for reflection and improvement of the teaching and learning of English. Knowing their interest and what they want will lead to a better and effective teaching and learning process. Thus, this case study attempted to find out the students' view of activities in the speaking classroom. Students' perspective and ideas toward activities, teachers' role and students' interest in topic and materials in speaking classroom are identified. To achieve this objective, 12 students were involved. The data were obtained through the interviews with the students who took speaking class. The interview was conducted by using focus group interview. Findings revealed that most of communicative activities such as drama, role play, storytelling, group works, dialogue, etc should be applied in speaking classroom. The involvement of teacher in speaking activities was also crucial, most of the students stated that teacher should make rule and always keep the target of the activities. In addition, teachers should always provide feedback and motivation, and also perform punishment and rewards practice. Results also indicated that in order to be able to speak and think more creative, students suggested authentic materials and familiar but also challenging topics should be provided. Moreover, topic such as current issues, tourism, lifestyle and history were also chosen by them as topics they are interested to learn.

**Keywords:** *view, EFL students, speaking, activities*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This study is an effort to gain a better understanding of what students want and how their views of activities that can help them improve their speaking ability in the speaking classroom. The main goal of this study is not to solve the problem but more to engage in understanding the students' needs and interests in some activities of promoting their speaking ability.

As broadly known, mastering speaking ability is one of the key factors to be successful in learning a foreign language. Generally, however, it is not only the purpose of learning itself but speaking is more related to communication in English in social and professional context.

A lot of researches have been conducted on speaking skills, but students still face a lot of problem in communicating and expressing ideas. Previous researches had been conducted on how to teach speaking through memorization of conversation. Those researches however, still cannot deal with students' problem in speaking. The latest researches have been shifted to conduct speaking classroom based on communicative principle as the goal of speaking itself is to improve students' communicative skills. Yet, those researches still cannot contribute much on helping students to improve their speaking skills. The problems supposed to be triggered by several factors. Teachers in this case, should adhere on the goal of the speaking classroom, and also understand the students' ISSN 2355-004X

problems and their proficiency. Sometimes communicative activities in the classroom are not suitable with the students' proficiency but teachers insist on applying those activities in order to make their students become active in the classroom. However, being active in the classroom sometimes does not reflect that students improve their speaking skills.

As suggested by Kayi (2006), there are some points that teachers should understand in teaching speaking. One of them is teacher should understand the meaning of teaching speaking itself. Teacher must aware that speaking classroom should be able to help students in producing the English speech sounds and sound pattern, Using word and sentence stress, intonation patterns and the rhythm of the second language, able to select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter, and also able to organize their thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence. Kayi also added that students should be able to use language as a means of expressing values and judgments (2006).

Nunan (2003) as cited in Kayi (2006) noted that using the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses, which is called as fluency should also be taught to students. In addition, Partal-torres (2012, p.2) stated that some factors that can help students improve their oral skills are "the relevance of working communicative activities in class, appropriate to learners' needs; the significant role of the teacher as a guide to lead students

towards their autonomy; and, finally, the use of proper criteria in assessment, as well as feedback”.

Moreover, in teaching speaking teacher should also pay attention to students’ speaking performance, because there are some factors can contribute to students speaking performance such as “performance conditions (time pressure, planning, standard of performance and amount of support), affective factors (such as motivation, confidence and anxiety), listening ability and feedback during speaking activities” (Tuan & Mai, 2015, p.9). One study conducted by Tsou (2005) showed that the implementation of instruction in oral classroom participation proved that it can improve students’ oral participation in the class. This kind of instruction can be applied in a classroom where English is as foreign language. Moreover Oradee (2012) revealed that discussion, problem-Solving, and role playing significantly increase students’ speaking skills.

Therefore, based on some research findings aforementioned above, this study would like to find out the activities that the teacher can apply in speaking classroom in order to enhance students’ speaking ability by listening to students’ perspectives.

## **METHODS**

In order to achieve a better understanding of how students in our speaking class view and respond to the activities in the speaking classroom, we conducted semi structured interviews individually and face-to-

face. We were guided by the following three research questions:

1. What kinds of activities do students think will help them improve their speaking ability?
2. What should the lecturers do to help the students engage in those activities?
3. What kinds of topics and materials are students interested to learn in their speaking classroom?

### *a. Participants*

We chose 12 students from fourth semester of English Education Department of STKIP Bina Bangsa Getsempena to do interview and all of them are from speaking class. The majority of the students are between the ages of 19-20 years old.

### *b. Data Collection and Analysis*

The research design of this study is qualitative study by using semi structured interview. We employed qualitative research to explore our research questions because it could give more rich and deep data (Cresswell, 2008, Punaji, 2010, Ary, et al, 2010) for our concern is to gain various students’ opinion and belief from in own words. The interview was conducted through focus group. Focus group interviews “allow group dynamics and help the researcher capture shared lived experiences, accessing elements that other methods may not be able to reach” (Liamputtong, 2011, p. 4). Moreover, the number of the participant matched the maximum number of the focus group participant as it is suggested by Ary, et al (2010) and Krueger and Casey (2000) that the Focus groups typically consist of 6 to 12

people. The sample of the study is purposive because we wanted to gain an insight of speaking classroom phenomenon. Transcripts were read thoroughly and common themes and perceptions were highlighted. In our first phase, the transcripts were read, and coded for initial reactions. The second phase, which Ary, et al (2010) labels the categorical phase, we label the categories that involve students' view on activities conducted in the speaking classroom, what the teachers should do in the class, and also what the students like to study in the class. Finally, in the third phase, the thematic phase of coding, three major themes emerged that we believe represent participants' views.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

During the final phase of coding, we identified various point of views related to some previous activities that make the students talk out of the topics given and some suggestion made by them related to those activities and how those activities should be employed in the classroom.

Our findings from the results of students' interview are discussed according to three thematic issues related to activities as mentioned below.

### **1. EFL activities**

Many students in the speaking class that we interviewed responded enthusiastically toward the questions related to the activities that can help them improve their speaking ability. Ten students said that more group works activities would help them cope with their confidence. Comparing to individual

performance, small group activities encouraged them to do seriously on the task assigned by the teacher.

Most of the students agreed that dividing students in the group would lead them to talk on different topics, even sometimes it leads to more communicative and active situation. Even though, sometimes they talked about their personal problems. This is because the teacher was not with the group for the entire activities. Other students said they would like to be seated in pair or sometimes individual, because they have more chances to speak and got immediate responses from their partner. This is contrary to Harmer (1985) who stresses that group work is an attractive idea to increase the amount of students' talking time. The rest of the class agreed about having fun activities sometimes like role play and games. They assumed those activities would lead to more interactive classroom and they can have more chances to work together with their friends. Further, Using media such as watching short animation video and then retell the story also help them to speak.

Looking through students' answers, the students in the speaking class have problems with anxiety and shy when they have to speak in the classroom, it can be inferred from their response that group work and pairing activities can help them build their confidence. Moreover, students have problems with lack of vocabularies when they speak, thus the students suggest that another activity like vocabulary building can cope their problem. Overall, students in the speaking

classroom noted that letting them to speak in the group can boost their speaking ability because peer support and assessment do help them.

## 2. Teaching and methodologies

The involvement of the teachers in the classroom would give the students learning experiences. Their responses to the questions what the teachers should do to help them improve their speaking ability were the teachers' task to give them some motivation and feedbacks anytime they are assigned to speak. They said the teachers' proficiency in speaking English encouraged them to speak more enthusiastically. Before assigning them to talk, most of the students suggested that the teachers initially should introduce them about the topic and provide a model of speaking for them.

The students suggest that teachers should provide them rule related to activities conducted in the classroom. They stated that giving them punishment to speak in front of the class when they come late is a good punishment and also teachers should reward them when they do well in the classroom. Besides, some students revealed that teachers should not underestimate the students, thus she/he should pay more attention to students character and their differences. They stated that when they feel motivated and appraised by the teachers, they would try more to speak. On contrary, teachers' negative view on them will hinder them to participate in speaking activities.

Almost half of the students in the class affirmed that the teachers should give more opportunities for them to talk every day, because some of them declared that classroom is the only place for them to speak English freely. Besides, they were not comfortable to speak in English outside of the classroom for they got experience that other people judged them as arrogant people and lose their identity. The whole class agreed that the speaking class should have fun atmosphere. Thus, it made them comfortable.

Further, they emphasized that the teachers should give more variety of activities, thus, they become more interested to study. Monotonous activities and teaching strategies would make the class boring.

## 3. Topics and materials

Regarding the topics and materials that motivated to learn, the students responded that the topics and materials given to them should be interesting based on students' perspective. They said if the topics or materials were not interesting, it also hindered them to talk. They become less motivated to talk and got involve in the classroom activities. Moreover, they asserted that the teachers should provide clear information on the topics and materials, so that they have good understanding and can let them to give more ideas to talk. However, as Richard (2008) stated that primarily, learners may depend on familiar topics to get by. However, they also need practice in introducing new topics into conversation to move beyond this stage. In this case, teachers should provide a

wide range of materials. This is in line with Hatch (1978) emphasizes that second language learners need a wide range of topics at their disposal in order to manage talk as interaction.

Concerning on this, around ten students stated that current issues on TV or newspapers would give more authentic learning experience for them. They said it also boosted them to talk more. In addition, other familiar but challenging topics such as lifestyle, tourism and history could make them think more creative and talk more. Overall, most of the students emphasized that teachers should provide topic or materials based on students' interest and needs to improve their speaking ability.

### **CONCLUSION**

As an important part of language learning either as English as second or foreign language, teaching speaking is crucial. The success of learners in communicating in the

target language is depicted by effective teaching process. Therefore, it is significant that language teachers focus on teaching speaking meaningfully by providing communicative activities not always based on teachers' interest but also eliciting what students want too. Listening to students' needs and views will lead to more contributive participation of students in the classroom. It is of course will not diminish teachers' role because students need teachers play a big part on their success.

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