

## **The Gap between English Competence & Performance (Performance: The Learners` Speaking Ability)**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this study is to investigate the factors influence the lack of performance of English speaking in contrast the students have English competence (Grammar and vocabulary) in terms of English as a foreign language. In this case study, the writer studied the Indonesian students in State Islamic University Jakarta as they learn English as a foreign language for more than seven years. The questioners as the collecting data method is given to the 200 respondents include the internal factors (English competence, motivation, anxiety, confidence,) and the external factor includes the environment. The major finding of this study is that 43% of respondents confess that they feel shy, 53% unconfident and nervous to speak in English. They worry to make mistake in speaking though they know the English Grammar and vocabulary. Moreover, the lack of motivation to create the English condition is another factor too for the learners. Sometimes they don't have friends to talk. Then, the environment does not support them for speaking English and improving their language production. Hopefully, this study finding will give contribution for foreign language teachers, especially teachers of teaching english as a foreign language (TEFL) to be aware about the significance of motivation and environment in foreign language learning to prevent the gap between the language competence and performance.

**Key words:** Language competence and performance, speaking skill, TEFL, confidence

### **Introduction**

English as a foreign language in many countries, and it becomes a compulsory subject taught in formal school from the lowest level to university level. Even though English is a foreign language, teaching English as a language in school to university must be congruent with the function of language itself that whatever language, a language is means of communication that is not only used in written form only, but also oral performance communicatively and contextually.

Unfortunately, there are still widely found that teaching English as a foreign language much and over focuses on the English Grammar and vocabulary teaching. It seems that the structure and English component become the most important competence for learning. The application of conventional method of teaching makes gap between the competence and performance because of imbalance of teaching English component and skills, especially productive skills.

As the writes own experience, since junior high school she learn English mostly use Grammar translation method that is so old time used and it is still widely and conventionally used in the classroom activities at present. As result, there are a lot of student are smart in Grammar but their speaking skill is not improved. When they find a chance to speak English, they don't get use to do it even they have learnt English as a foreign language for more than seven years. Learning

English that focuses on the ability to answer the passage questions, translating the difficult vocabulary strengthen their competence of brain, but the speaking practice which is very limited makes their speaking performance is stiff. As result, the students are unconfident, shy, and not really motivated to learn English.

Concerning the fact happens in Indonesia relates to teaching English as a foreign language that the students speaking skills is still left behind comparing to the competence, the writer encourage to do the simple research to know the factors makes the students` performance, especially speaking skills in not really well progressed. Finally, the writer conducts the research with title “*The Gap between English Competence and Performance*”. The writer hope this research can contribute a new idea for English teacher to have more attention to their students in learning English as a foreign language.

## Literature Review

### A. TEFL: how TEFL is treated

Jerry G. Gebhard (2006) stated in *Teaching English as a Foreign or Second Language* book that teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) is set in more than one level of study. TEFL settings/EFL teachings include public school, private school, and university language program. Indeed, in recent years, the trend has offered English as a foreign language to be taught from the younger to the younger students or from the lowest level of study to the highest levels.

Although state school TEFL in many parts of the benefits indirectly from the lively professional activities outline above, research and development tended to focus on postschool rather than in-school needs in contrast to the ESL context, in which a great deal of useful school work was done (see *Language Across the Curriculum*). While TEFL in the 1970s and 1980s was great advances in the identification and use of the particular language form and function needed in a given higher education course and occupation (see *Language for Specific Purpose: Pedagogy; need analysis*). No comparable energy was devoted to the development of a rational for EFL as school subject. When adults have current language needs that are analyzable and imminent need that are predictable, the EFL learners in the school usually has neither; the younger the learners the TEFL becomes TENOR (The child having “No Obvious Reason” for studying English) and the more important are one`s educational aim in teaching the language (Bernard Spolsky, 1999: 562).

The research is done is Indonesia as one of the country treat English as a Foreign language that for the 2004-2005 academic year, there were 7,553,086 and 3,402,615 students at the junior high school and senior high school levels respectively (Ditjen PMPTK, 2006). Since English is compulsory at the junior high and senior high school levels, there are almost 11,000,000 young people studying English annually through formal education. The student population is so diverse that any centralized curriculum would not be able to meet the needs (Anita Lie, 2007).

Unfortunately the language function as the means of communication can be reached well as the English competence become popular focused competence taught in schools. The impact is that the learners while they learn English as a foreign language for more than seven years and when they are in university level, they are forced to face the world change to use English

communicatively. Because the learning experience that focuses on the teaching grammar and vocabulary as the basic competence and imbalance of improving performance, in this case is “speaking ability”, finally it happens the gap between English competence and performance among English learners in Indonesia.

## **B. The Gap between English Competence & Performance**

### **1. Language Competence**

Language competence is a term which includes the linguistics or grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistics competence and what might be called as textual competence (Manitoba, 2009). Language competence refers to the knowledge of a language, cognitive aspect in learning a language, and of course the ability to use that language to produce meaningful production and language performance. Competence is used to describe the learner’s capacity to produce a language (Vaclav Hemerka 2009: 15)

Language performance can be realized by the meaningful of the students’ classroom activities, assignment and task as the implementation and application of language competence (knowledge) they have as a result of learning the language grammatical rule, structure and vocabulary.

The target of having language competence is to be able in producing the correct utterance, meaningful spoken language, and well-performance language structure.

Concerning English is a worldwide used international language, especially as a foreign language in countries, good English competence from learning activities, of course, is aimed to be used as one of the communication medium bridges the cross cultural people whose English is not as their native language. Learning English as a foreign language is not merely simple learning the vocabulary, structure or the grammar only, however, more than just cognitive intelligence. Additionally, it must be a very fatal mistake in some countries where English is taught in school in order the students has good English competence for passing the English exam and doing such English text exercise and ignoring other skills which explore the performance of English as a language. The conventional practical English teaching as a foreign language which focuses on the cognitive aspect and emphasizes the reading skill is still widely implemented, giving the proof that grammar translation method is still existing. Witnessing and undergoing English as a foreign language is taught focuses on the cognitive intelligence or the competence only, the writer think that there should be done a research about the impact of this reality. The assumption that there will be a gap between English competence and performance will be happened if the English teaching is focused on the language competence and lack of performance practice for the students.

If the reality tells that English competence becomes the main goal of English teaching and learning with lack of special attention of English performance, in this term is specified for speaking skills, it would approximate the language theory refers to the structural view (Jack C. Richards, and Theodore S. Rodgers 1992: 17) that language is a system of structurally related element of coding of meaning. The target language learning is seen to be the mastery of element of this system which is generally defined in terms of phonological units (e.g., phonemes), grammatical units (e.g., clauses, phrases, and sentences), grammatical operations (e.g., adding,

shifting, joining, or transforming element) and lexical items (e.g., function words and structures words) (Jack Richard, 1992: 17). Chomsky's competence theory/linguistics theory deals primarily with abstract grammatical knowledge/ability the speaker possesses that enable them to produce the grammatically correct sentences in language (Jack R. Richard 1992: 70). Chomsky's theory of transformational grammar proposed that fundamental theories of language derived from innate aspect of the mind and the students learn underlie "competence". These theories underlie the teaching English as a foreign language focuses on the structure and grammar as the essential competence which students should master first.

## **2. Language Performance**

De Kort and Leerdam, as quoted in Scha, performance denotes the production of actual utterances as a result of certain psychological processes (Vaclav Hemerka 2009: 15). A very important thing in teaching English as a foreign language is that understanding well what actually the function of a language and what a language is in order to balance the students competence and performance that language. Language is the system of speech sound by which human being communicate with one another (Paul Roberts 1958: 18). Language is means of communication, language is a system for the expression of meaning, and language is viewed as a vehicle for communicating meaning and messages (Jack C. Richards, and Theodore S. Rodgers 1992: 130). These theory underlie that language is not limited in knowing the language itself, but also it is needed the ability to use communicatively and meaningful. To strengthen this, then, Hymes's theory proposed an idea which bridges the competence and performance that communicative competence was a definition what the speakers need to know in order to be communicatively competent in speech community.

Jack C. Richards and Theodore S. Rodgers in their book *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, a language is viewed as a vehicle for communicating meaning and messages. It results the knowledge about the rules and form of a language and the ability to verbalize this knowledge. Learning is undergone by students by formal teaching in the school.

## **3. The Gap between English Competence and Speaking Performance**

The gap between English competence and performance by students can happen because of some reasons. The writer specified the performance in this paper is "the speaking skill".

*The first reason* is the implementation of a conventional and traditional language teaching method that focuses the learning and teaching to grammar and structure aspect. This method of teaching is known as grammar translation method that still widely used in some countries. Just try to imagine if the students learn English emphasized the grammar, they are asked to make correct sentences-well structure, analyze them. The students learn English as a foreign language for years started from learning simple vocabularies, memorize them, and then pronounce them. After that, in higher level of education they are introduced by English grammar and they are asked to do English paper test about grammar.

*The second reason*, the skills taught in school are not balance learned and practiced. The teaching and learning in school still widely focuses on the reading comprehension that the students are asked to read, understand it, and then answer the questions. Almost of the class activities is about grammar and text activity. The listening section activity and speaking are rarely practiced. This reason shows that the traditional teaching system is still applied and it affects the students` mastery in learning English as a foreign language. The English competence that is much priority master by the students and is spent so much time are not well balanced with speaking practice to improve oral production and communicative performance. Even though the speaking skill is taught in school or university, but time allocation is not prevalent. Speaking skills is also tested and taken score by teachers. Unfortunately based on the writer experience, the English learning that emphasize the cognitive aspect or competence, the affective aspect does not really get great and maximum attention. As result, when performing speaking skill in the class, the performance is not as good as the grammar competence which is mastered by the students because of the lack of practice.

The reality happens in teaching and learning of English as a foreign language in some school for years even in Elementary school, Junior and Senior High School give impact to the English proficiency in university level that the grammar and vocabulary as the learners` English competence is passively used for speaking in practice and real world. As result, when the learners in university level must face the condition to have English proficiency and they must be able to speak English as a foreign language and international language, they are not used to do that. It seems that there are some affective filters when the students want to speak English or making performance. Those affective filters hypothesis that Krashen sees the learners` emotional state or attitude are (Jack C. Richards, and Theodore S. Rodgers 1992: 133);

1. *Motivation*

Learners with high motivation generally do better.

2. *Self-confidence*

Learners with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to be more successful.

3. *Anxiety*

Low personal anxiety and low classroom anxiety are more conducive to learning new language. The affective filter hypothesis states that acquirers with a low affective filter seek and receive more input, interact with confidence.

### **C. Major Factors Affect Language Performance**

Classroom activities are limited of time, while classroom learning focuses on the cognitive aspect of English; the real performance is shown outside the classroom. Zimmerman and Risemberg (1997) propose six major component of academic self-management or self-regulation in learning (Myron H Dembo and Helena Seli, 2008; 10). Those components become factors can affect the learners` progress and development of learning; affect the learners` speaking performance.

1. *Motivation*

Dempo and Helena Seli (2008) write motivation as the internal processes gives behavior its energy and direction. These internal processes include goals, beliefs, perception, and expectation. The major difference between successful and less successful learners is that the successful

learners know how to motivate themselves and control their motivation. This theory can be adapted in learning a language that to be able to use English as a foreign language the students must have motivation to practice and apply the theory of grammar in meaningful context of communication. The internal process of achievement to be able to master and use a language successfully is the essential of motivation. English learners will be successful in learning English when they try to push themselves up to develop the theory of English grammar into the real use and function in communication because motivation they have will encourage them to deal with their objectives they want to reach in learning a foreign language. Whatever condition and difficult situation even it the learning class activity, if the learners have motivation and ambition to improve their English performance, of course they will do many thing more and greater outside the classroom. There are many ways in showing the motivation to master a foreign language, and not showing that the conventional and theoretical learning method used in the class become a limit. One of the ways shows the motivation work is that concentrate the things can improve personal potential, making good English environmental condition outside of box. Motivation will lead the great behavior to break the limitation and the distracters when they feel they want to be progress become successful English learners.

Most of the students want to speak English well; communicatively use in real life, unfortunately, the chance they have in the classroom to improve their performance is limited and focused to English Grammar over learning with traditional teaching. That reason should raise the motivation and make self commitment to do something they cannot do much in the classroom.

A number of motivational self-management techniques can be used to can be used to develop and maintain these important beliefs. The first is the goal setting, when the learners have a goal to be able to speak English well and communicatively. (Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1986), educational research indicates that high achievers report using goal setting more frequently and more consistently than low achievers ( Dempo & Seli, 2008: 12). When a foreign language learners attempt to attain the English learning goal; speaking proficiency, they will do the greater efforts and increase their confidence outside the classroom without any force and intervention from the teacher about the strict grammar rule.

For the first time of practicing speaking, (e.g. Butler, 1981; Ottens, 1991), the learners can find other friends to practice together and create the English learning environment outside the classroom. Moreover, more elaborate self talk training program are available to help individual controls anxiety, mood, and other emotional responses (Dempo & Seli, 2008: 12).

## 2. *Strategy of learning and Use of Time*

Learning strategy to improve speaking skill, the students can use cooperative learning or autonomous learning. Especially in large EFL classrooms, there are proactive students who are motivated to learn both independently and as a group. However, Nunan (2000). others are satisfied simply with the limited exposure that they get from the class and some of these students choose not to focus during the lessons. In a 1995 research project on learner agendas, it was suggested that "while the teacher is busily teaching one thing, the learner is often focused on something else (Andrew, 2008). The success using English as a foreign language in speaking communicatively as well as the mother tongue or second language depends on how the learners use their time to practice

outside the classroom and join with their friends. As the principle of learning a language that “practice makes perfect” is right.

### 3. *Social environment*

Social environment can be created by commitment of the learners to initiate the English learning environment to be a practice field of the learners. The commitment and the consistence of the learners to use English in speaking for some period frequently are needed and important. Social environment consist of some students practicing speaking and correct one another if there is grammar error or misunderstanding, other words, English Grammar and vocabulary can be corrected by speaking performance.

## Methodology

### *Instrument*

In this case study, the instrument used in collecting the data is questioners. The questioners consists of 25 questions include the question about how long the students have learnt English and grammar, whether they have good English grammar and vocabulary, whether their speaking is as good as their grammar and vocabulary knowledge, whether they can speak English well, their motivation in using English especially for speaking and communication, their feeling while they are asked to speak English. The other components of questioners are about internal and external factor influence the students` speaking ability (their performance).

### *Subjects*

The subjects are the university students in State Islamic Jakarta University, Indonesia. The samples are taken randomly. 200 students as the random samples are given the questioners. The samples are between the 3<sup>rd</sup> semester-7<sup>th</sup> semester students and they are assumed have already learnt English more than seven years. Those samples are randomly taken from different 10 faculty majors in State Islamic Jakarta University.

## Finding and Discussion

### *a. Question about English Competence (Grammar and Vocabulary)*

No.	Question	Choice of Answer	
		Yes	No
1.	You have learnt English since Junior High School till university	95.5%	4.5%
2.	You have learnt English Grammar more than 7 years	85%	15%
3.	English Grammar you are learning in university has been already taught in school before	70%	30%
4.	Teaching English grammar is much dominant to be taught in school that teaching productive skills	77%	23%
5.	Beside learning English Grammar, teaching reading and answering the reading passage question become the main learning objectives	81.5%	18.5%

6.	Passing the English exam is more important than speaking skill ability in the class.	87.5%	12.5%
7.	Translating the reading text from English to Indonesian is frequently done in the classroom than improving productive skills.	66.5%	33.5%
8.	Translating difficult vocabulary from textbook is more frequently done than performance of speaking skill in the classroom.	68%	32%
9.	You have many friends who like to practice English	31.5%	68.5%
10.	You agree that Grammar and vocabulary knowledge must be used in speaking performance.	91.5%	8.5%
11.	Your environment supports you to apply your English grammar to speaking skill.	24.5%	75.5%
12.	You agree that learning English Grammar and vocabulary should be practiced with speaking.	83.5%	16.5%
13.	You want to be able to speak English fluently	95%	5%
14.	Your English grammar competence is enough	62.5%	37.5%
15.	You need motivation to practice your speaking performance and Grammar	74%	26%

The data that collected from questioners shows that 95.5% university students in state Islamic Jakarta university have learnt English as foreign language since junior high school to university level, 85% of respondent have learnt English Grammar for more than seven years, so long time to learn consciously about competence of a language. Uniquely, the respondent experience said that in teaching English activities inside the classroom, 70 % of respondents learn English Grammar in university level that they have ever learnt it before, in school; Junior and Senior high school. Moreover, 81.5% of respondents confess by questioners answer that they learn English Grammar dominantly in the classroom and the teaching focuses on the answering the reading passage exercise grammatically correct, as result 87.5% respondent feels that the English learning focuses on the English exam and scoring, not to the speaking skills ability. The habit of learning English Grammar makes the environment 24% supports the students in improving their speaking performance. Greatly, most of respondents want to be able to speak English well reaches 95% and they agree that they need motivation to practice their English grammar to speaking performance by supporting from school and teachers. The complete data can be seen on the research finding table above.

*b. Question about Speaking Practice and Performance*

No.	Question	Answer			
		Always	Often	Seldom	Never
1.	You practice English as a foreign language outside the classroom	17%	13%	30%	40%
2.	Your English Grammar is practiced in your speaking skill	23%	10%	32%	35%
3.	You try to find partners or friends to talk in English	21%	22%	27%	30%



4.	You make English environment for English speaking practice	19%	28%	38%	15%
5.	You schedule your time to speak English	16%	18%	27%	39%

Concerning to the speaking practice and performance, the writes conclude that only 17% respondent practice English as a foreign language outside the classroom, because they get used to learn English on the Grammatical and vocabulary aspect, so the motivation to use English is lack and not facilitated well and 40% never do practice speaking and shows low internal motivation. Then, they confess that their English Grammar is not always practiced in speaking skills and limited in reading passage and text, only 17% practice their English Grammar competence to speaking performance. Only 21% respondents try to find partners and friend to practice English together and make conversation use English, and 31% never do it. Then the environment does not support them to practice English, then, only 19% respondent encourage to create English social environment that facilitate the members who have commitment to practice English speaking and do conversation in English.

c. *Question about motivation*

No.	Question	Answer			
		Always	Often	Seldom	Never
1.	You feel confident when you speak English	22%	18%	40%	20%
2.	You feel nervous while speaking English	30%	53%	4%	13%
3.	You are shy to speak English	32%	43%	5%	20%
4.	You need motivation to improve your speaking ability	30.5%	50.5%	11%	8%
5.	You have willingness to make English club to have friend to practice speaking.	26%	37%	12%	25%

The interesting finding from questioners that only 22% feel confident when they speak English in real life or even in the inside classroom, and 40% seldom feel confident. There 53% from 200 respondents feel nervous (often) while they are asked to speak English in front of many people, having little speaking practice in front of the class and speak English in real life when they are asked to use that foreign language. 43% respondents often feel shy when they are asked to speak English to other people, and only 20% confess that they never feel shy to speak English. Amazingly, 50% often need motivation to improve their English speaking skill, and 30% who always need motivation. It shows that motivation is very important, whether it internal or external motivation from other people, friend, and of course the English teachers.

The finding above shows that there must be needed balance between teaching English competence and performance as the application the competence that the English learners have. That competence will be useless if it is not supported by practice in order to the language can be used appropriately as means of communication among the people. Language is not only used for

written form as the application of grammar in reading passage only but also must be expressed by oral performance.

Attention of the external and internal factors influence the English learning achievement like motivation, environment, and methods of teaching English as a foreign language can prevent the gap between English competence and performance.

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