



EFL Students' Needs in Promoting English Speaking Skills at Lower Secondary Schools

Muhammad Israfil, Windy, Putri Kusuma Ningrum, Tri Wintolo Apoko*

Universitas Muhammadiyah Prof. DR. HAMKA, Indonesia

*Corresponding author's email: triwin_apoko@uhamka.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

EFL Students' needs for spoken English are considered important to fulfill, and the idea to capture what they need requires some ways and efforts so as to make them eager and keen on practicing English better. However, an analysis on needs environment is not much discussed and conducted for EFL students, mainly in lower secondary schools. Thus, the aim of this study is to examine the needs of EFL students in terms of enhancing their English-speaking skills in lower secondary schools. Three ninth-grade students from three distinct lower secondary schools located in Depok, West Java, Indonesia were the subjects of the research. This study employed a qualitative design with descriptive analysis, and the instrument used to collect the data was semi-structured interviews. The resulting data was analyzed with some steps such as reduction of data, data display, and data presentation. The results demonstrated that EFL students' English-speaking proficiency is influenced by a variety of needs, including necessities, lacks, and wants. Considering the significance of these needs in the enhancement of EFL students' English-speaking abilities, it is advisable that teachers of English should comprehend and employ efficient learning strategies and stimulating learning media that facilitate the progress of students' English-speaking capabilities.

Introduction

The term "English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education" pertains to the instructional process and acquisition of English language skills in countries where English is not the native tongue. The field of EFL education is widely recognized as a global phenomenon, encompassing a substantial number of individuals who engage in the study of English as either a second or foreign language (Garcés-Manzanera, 2021). EFL education is frequently used as a medium of interaction within the contexts of communication in international business, diplomacy, and scholarly pursuits. Moreover, it is essential for several students aspiring to study overseas or engage in advanced academic pursuits in English-speaking countries. The field of EFL education is complex, encompassing several approaches, methods, and techniques aimed at facilitating the teaching and acquisition of the English language. Additionally, this includes the examination of cultural and language variations,

alongside the requirements and objectives of learners (Awayed-Bishara, 2021). EFL education is a dynamic field that is constantly evolving to meet the changing needs of learners and the demands of the global economy.

The development of speaking proficiency holds significant importance in the field of EFL education, as it plays a vital role in both language acquisition and effective communication. English is a globally recognized language that holds important positions in diverse areas, including finance, medicine, technology, and education. The acquisition of English encompasses four primary skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In the context of global communication, speaking is considered by many as the most crucial skill among the other competencies. Language learners utilize a range of strategies, including cognitive, metacognitive, compensation, affective, social, and memory strategies, in order to improve their spoken proficiency. Proficiency in oral communication is necessary for learners in order to engage in effective conversations and effectively deliver their intended message. According to Nunan (1991), achieving a level of proficiency in speaking abilities is regarded as the most crucial element in the process of acquiring a foreign language (Segaran et al., 2021).

Effective oral communication abilities are of significant importance within the context of EFL education, particularly at the lower secondary school level. This phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that students at this particular stage of their education are in the process of honing their language skills, requiring numerous opportunities for oral practice to enhance both their fluency and accuracy. Speaking skills are required for students who want to study abroad or further their education in English-speaking countries. However, there are obstacles and gaps in present educational procedures concerning EFL speaking skills. One of the challenges is that there are limited opportunities for learners to practice speaking in the classroom. Many students are hesitant to speak in front of their peers, which can cause anxiety and a lack of confidence in their ability to communicate (Syahbani & Apoko, 2023). Another challenge is the curriculum's lack of emphasis on speaking abilities. Many EFL schools place a greater emphasis on reading and writing skills, leaving students unprepared for real-life communication circumstances (Namaziandost et al., 2019). To address these issues, a needs analysis is necessary to evaluate the needs of students in honing their English-speaking skills. A needs analysis can assist educators in determining the existing process of English-speaking skills in the curriculum, students' needs and difficulties, as well as students' needs and desires in learning speaking skills (Puspita & Rosnaningsih, 2019).

Needs analysis is defined in this study as a gradual process of gathering information about learners' needs, lacks, and wants, identified with learners' perspectives in order to meet their language learning needs. In the last few years, the results of research on English-speaking skills needs analysis indicate that it is very important to help students improve their English-speaking skills and create fun and stimulating English atmosphere (Abid, 2020; Lertchalermtipakoon et al., 2021; Monica, 2019). However, these studies have not revealed the English-speaking teaching approaches that students require the most. For instance, in the study by (Monica, 2019), a needs analysis was conducted on students who were learning English to find out what they thought was essential in learning English. The findings revealed

that students needed assistance with language skills such as choosing the right words, speaking clearly, and using proper grammar. However, these findings do not provide concrete clues as to what teaching methods are effective in meeting these students' needs. The absence of information regarding effective teaching methods makes it difficult for material developers and teachers to adequately fulfill the needs of learners. This limitation renders the research report insufficient. Regarding the relevant previous studies on needs analysis in promoting English-speaking skills among students, the primary research gap is the students' necessities, lacks, and wants on English speaking skill development.

Thus, this current study aims to determine students' needs through English-speaking practice using a needs analysis that includes necessities, lacks, and wants. The research question addressed to this study is: What are the students' needs that can promote EFL students' English-speaking ability in lower secondary schools?

Research Method

Participants of the study

This study employed purposive sampling to select a total of three participants, each representing the ninth grade and attending different schools in Depok, West Java, Indonesia. The participants were strategically chosen to provide diverse perspectives and insights. Specifically, the sample included one student from Junior High School No. 4 Depok, another from Yapemri Junior High School Depok, and the third one from Junior High School No. 3 Depok. By including participants from various schools, the study aimed to capture a range of experiences and perspectives, enriching the overall understanding of the research topic.

The method of the study

Qualitative research was used in this study. Everitt & Howell (2021) explained that Qualitative methods are frequently employed in evaluating programs as they effectively narrate the program's narrative through the capturing and conveying of participants' experiences in respond to the research question on their needs in English speaking ability. This study encompassed all the essential elements of a compelling narrative, detailing the events, individuals involved, and the resulting consequences. The primary aim of such studies was to compile information and generate meaningful findings. From a methodological standpoint, this method emphasized that the findings expressed a genuine interest in the stories, experiences, and perspectives of program participants beyond mere statistics on program entry, completion, and subsequent actions.

Instrument of the study

In this research, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method of data collection. The interview protocol comprised ten carefully crafted questions, encompassing diverse aspects such as Background Information, Abilities, Problems, Priorities, and Attitudes. These questions were designed to elicit comprehensive responses, providing a nuanced understanding of the participants' backgrounds, skills, challenges, priorities, and perspectives. In this study, each participant was provided 20-30 minutes to respond the questions.

Technique of data analysis

The data analysis methodology employed in this study is a thematic approach, strategically chosen to conduct a comprehensive exploration of student needs (Cohen et al., 2018). The first thing to do is by reading all the interview transcripts several times to understand the depth of students' responses to their needs for promoting their English-speaking skills. Generating initial codes is another step to do before grouping the codes into three themes: necessities, lacks, and wants. Regarding the necessities, the specific factors include classroom situation, learning techniques, classroom activities, activities outside classroom, digital-based learning applications. Lacks include students' unconfident behaviors, and wants cover feedback and compliments, better future career. In addition to the interview data to analyze, this study used a triangulation way to verify and enrich the data through classroom observation. Thus, after the collected data were condensed, the next steps were to display, and to present the data (Miles et al., 2014).

Findings

As researchers, we took the opportunity to conduct interviews with three Grade 9 students from different lower secondary schools, focusing on the students' needs for English speaking skills. We used a qualitative research approach in response to this research topic, which allowed us to gather in-depth insights. In conducting these interviews, we selected three students as the main research subjects, directing questions to them regarding their needs, lacks, and wants related to their English-speaking skills. As a result, the data gathered from these interviews provided the foundation of the study, providing an extensive overview of the students' perspectives and assisting in the formation of an understanding of EFL students' needs in polishing their speaking skills at the junior high school level. This qualitative approach allowed us to specify individual differences in students' experiences and needs.

Students' Necessities for English Language Skills Development

Related to EFL students' necessities for their English improvement, it was found some kinds of classroom situations that made them confident when speaking English. S1, S2, and S3 pointed out that they could be more confident when their teachers and friend were speaking English directly to them as the following responses are described below.

S1: "I feel more comfortable speaking in English when interacting directly with the teacher than when having to demonstrate my speaking skills in front of the whole class. This is due to my higher self-confidence when talking to the teacher, so that my speaking skills can be conveyed more smoothly. On the other hand, I feel reluctant to show my speaking skills to my friends in front of the class for fear of being perceived as trying too hard to show my skills. This shyness arises due to more intense attention from classmates, which in turn can inhibit I from expressing my English-speaking skills optimally."

S2: "I felt more confident when speaking English directly to the teacher. This atmosphere provides a sense of comfort and security, which makes me more focused and able to express my ideas clearly. Compared to speaking in front of the class which might make me feel a little tense, direct interaction with the teacher creates a more intimate and supportive environment. I was able to feel free to ask questions and discuss, which significantly increased my confidence level in communicating using English."

S3: "I feel confident when my friends also speak English. My friends and I, especially online friends, try to speak English in our conversations."

Dealing with the learning techniques they used to improve their vocabulary, S1 used digital games and some other applications. S2 tended to take parts in some English activities in which she could talk to more people for their English vocabulary. Meanwhile, S3 used the dictionary and watched English movies.

S1: "I adopt various techniques to expand my English vocabulary. One of the methods used is through the utilization of internet platforms, as well as playing international games, providing opportunities to interact with players from outside Indonesia using English. In addition, I also actively change the language settings on various applications used to operate in English. This step is taken as a concrete effort to improve vocabulary acquisition in English."

S2: "To increase my vocabulary mastery, I applied several techniques that proved effective. First, I actively participate in events or activities that allow me to interact in English with various people. Talking to a variety of people helps me get used to the use of new words in different contexts. In addition, I also have a habit of noting down new words that I come across and looking up their English translations. I make a list of them and try to memorize them, even using them in everyday conversation. This technique helps me consistently expand my English vocabulary."

S3: "My technique to increase my vocabulary is to read English books then look up the meaning of a word that I don't understand and write it down. In addition, I also watch movies using English subtitles if I can't interpret them, then I switch to Indonesian subtitles."

Another necessity required by EFL students could be types of classroom activities that encouraged them more comfortable to speak English. S1 viewed that playing games in the classroom had been effective to promote their speaking skills. S2 affirmatively said that exchanging and having the ideas or topics to discuss were good to do.

S1: "classroom games related to speaking activities create a supportive atmosphere, allowing me to feel comfortable to demonstrate my speaking skills. I successful engagement in these games not only builds confidence, but also enhance my active communication skills."

S2: "I feel most emboldened to speak up in class when the class atmosphere is grouped and English is used. When we are grouped, it creates a more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere to interact with classmates. The use of English in this group provides an opportunity to practice without too much pressure, so I am more confident to speak. The group class atmosphere provides a space for mutual support and motivation among group members. Exchanging ideas and discussing the subject matter in English created a positive and supportive environment for the development of my speaking skills. By doing so, I feel bolder to express my opinions and ideas without fear of harsh judgment, thus improving my overall communication skills in English."

S3: "Classroom activities that make me comfortable to speak is presentation. I prefer presentation in front of the class and in groups. The reason is because if I am alone, I am often confused about what to say, but if I am with friends, I can be helped to convey something and speak in English."

EFL students are believed to be able to improve their speaking skills by having some learning activities outside the classroom. However, S1 said that he did not have more time to practice English outside the class. Meanwhile, S2 and S3 thought that outside classroom is an effective way for them to learn to speak English such as attending the seminars, group discussions, and watching movies.

S1: "I admit that at present, I have not found many activities outside of class hours that support the improvement of speaking skills in English. Practices to develop English speaking skills are mostly limited to the classroom setting at school and when I attend English course."

S2: "Absolutely, I believe that out-of-class activities and social events are a very effective means of developing my speaking skills. Being involved in events that involve many people provides opportunities to communicate in various contexts. I try to actively participate in activities such as seminars, group meetings, or social events where I can talk to a variety of people."

S3: "In outside class the activities really help me in developing my English skills is by watching a movie because it can increase my English skill and I also feel entertained."

EFL students also need some applications or digital-based learning platforms to develop your English skills. S1 and S3 used Duolingo and some online games to practice speaking English. Yet, S2 tended to use social media such as Instagram to improve her English. The following describes their responses.

S1: "I relied on various platforms, such as Duolingo, various online games, and Discord, to hone my English skills. Although not regularly, I admit that I have utilized the Voice Channel on these platforms several times to practice and improve my English-speaking skills."

S2: "I have never used a dedicated platform to develop my English skills. However, I actively use social media such as Instagram as an informal means to improve my understanding of English. I often read and follow accounts that use English, both in written and visual form."

S3: "The platform that can help me to develop my English is the English music platform. besides that, I used to use Duolingo but now I rarely use it."

EFL students need to overcome their nervousness to anticipate performing their spoken English in the classroom. All the students (S1, S2, and S3) felt their fear and nerves when speaking English in front of the classmates, and they tried to be quiet, controlled their tensions, and asked for supports from their friends. It is described in the following responses.

S1: "I often feel nervous when I have to speak in English in front of the class. To overcome these nerves, I try to calm myself down by taking deep breaths, helping myself to control tension and increase comfort when speaking in front of classmates."

S2: "To overcome my nervousness when speaking in English, I often rely on support and encouragement from my friends. When I feel anxious or nervous, they provide positive and reassuring encouragement, which helps to ease my nerves."

S3: "The way I deal with my nervousness is by being quiet for a moment and being helped by my teacher to continue."

Students' Lacks towards Developing English Speaking Skills

To analyze EFL students' needs, their lacks were another factor that influenced the improvements of speaking skill in English. As it is mentioned in the previous section, lack is one thing that students have already had on the English competencies. It was found that there were some aspects that made EFL students not confident to speak English as described below. S1 and S2 said that he was not confident because of his poor vocabulary and weak understanding of grammar use. Meanwhile S3 pointed out that mispronunciation was becoming the most problem.

S1: "I can feel lack of confidence when demonstrating English language skills is due to a lack of vocabulary and a poor understanding of grammar rules. Often, I feel confused when attempting to speak in English, while trying to consider the appropriate use of tenses in conversation."

S2: "My confidence tends to drop when speaking in English, especially when I feel afraid of being criticized. This fear comes from worrying that I might make a mistake in word usage or grammar, which could be a source of criticism. In addition, when faced with listening, I also feel a drop in confidence. This is because many English words sound almost the same, making it difficult to differentiate. This sense of uncertainty often makes me hesitate and lack confidence in speaking, for fear of using the wrong word."

S3: "I don't feel confident to speak English because I am afraid of mispronouncing a word so that people don't understand what I am trying to say. Especially when asked a sudden question by the teacher in class. I often feel my confidence is reduced."

Students' Wants for English Speaking Skill Development

Wants are also the factor that can affect EFL students' spoken English. A want is something that is owned and achieved by students to show their English performances. Related to this, feedback from teachers or classmates could motivate EFL students to practice English. All the students (S1, S2, and S3) agreed that feedbacks and compliments, especially from their teachers could motivate them to speak English more.

S1: "Feedback and compliments play an important role in stimulating my motivation to learn English. This is because I feel valued when I get recognition from the teacher. Compliment is not only a form of appreciation for my achievements, but also a positive reinforcement that encourage I to continue to try and improve my English language skills. With constructive feedback and compliments given appropriately, I can feel more motivated and confident in facing the challenges of learning English."

S2: "Feedback from teachers or classmates has a very significant impact on my motivation to learn English. When I receive positive feedback, such as praise for my progress or bravery in speaking, it gives a huge boost to my motivation. Feeling recognized for my efforts and hard work not only boosts my self-confidence, but also creates a sense of pride in myself."

S3: "I feel that the feedback given by my teachers and classmates is very useful to increase my motivation and enthusiasm to continue to improve my English-speaking skills."

EFL students finally wanted English for their career in the future. Thus, they thought learning English could benefit for themselves. S1 and S3 viewed that English was important for a job in the future. S2 said that having a good command of English would make her continue her study for master program.

S1: "I hope that my English learning will bring benefits in the future, especially in the context of work. My awareness of the importance of English in this era is an additional motivation, given that this language is now a highly required skill in various fields of work."

S2: "I think learning English has huge benefits for my future, especially when it comes to higher education such as high school. English is often the language of instruction in many academic programs, and having the ability to master English opens the door to more information and learning opportunities."

S3: "The benefit of learning and developing my English skills for my future is to apply for a job because there are already a lot of jobs that require employees to be able to speak

English. Besides that, if I want to travel abroad, I don't worry about not understanding what to say."

Discussion

This study aims to investigate EFL students' needs in enhancing their English-speaking abilities. The findings from the interview data show that students in lower secondary school have a variety of requirements in order to improve their English-speaking competencies. The findings from the interviews shed light on particular domains in which students necessitate strategies to enhance their proficiency in the English language. The data unveiled a number of factors that were associated with the necessities, lacks, and wants expressed by the students. The students have identified several "needs" factors, which encompass situations where they can demonstrate their English-speaking ability, effective techniques to improve English language acquisition, supporting activities inside and outside the classroom, platforms used to improve speaking ability, and ways to overcome anxiety when speaking English. Conversely, the students expressed concerns regarding their "lacks" which pertained to elements that undermined their self-assurance, including weak vocabulary mastery, lack of grammatical understanding, fear of criticism and making mistakes, and anxiety about the pronunciation of English words. Moreover, in relation to the element of "wants," learners emphasized the significance of feedback in bolstering motivation to improve English-speaking skills, in addition to the advantages and their aspirations concerning future English language acquisition.

Students' Necessities for English Language Skills Development

From the responses in the previous section related to the situation bringing about students' confidence, the finding is in line with a study conducted by (Ihsan, 2020), who used the Presentation Practice Production method. There is a drilling step in this method in which students conduct paired conversations from teacher to teacher and from teacher to student, familiarizing them with speaking English through constant repetition. The study showed that the method was effective in improving students' confidence and English-speaking ability. In addition, another study conducted by (Puspita Sari et al., 2021) also mentioned that practicing speaking English with friends is one of the strategies students use to overcome difficulties in speaking English. By summarizing the findings of the two studies, it is illustrated that direct interaction between teachers and students or through speaking practice with friends, could make a positive contribution to the development of students' confidence in English-speaking skills.

In connection to the learning techniques, the respondents' answers as the findings of the current study is supported with a study conducted by (Dewi et al., 2017). The study confirmed that the use of communicative games as a teaching tool can significantly improve students' speaking skills. The presence of communicative games in learning not only provides excitement to students, but also increases their motivation, interest and confidence. Thus, the interview results support the finding that integrating learning strategies that

involve communicative aspects, such as games, can be an effective approach to enhance students' development in English speaking skills.

Dealing with the type of classroom, this finding is in accordance with the findings of a study conducted by (Burden, 2004), which asserts that anxiety often arises as an expression of a sense of incompetence. By understanding that concerns related to scrutiny, judgment, and comparison with others can trigger anxiety, teachers can take steps to reduce anxiety and create a supportive environment. Strategies such as pair work, group activities, and mutual support can be a means of creating a less competitive and more inclusive atmosphere. By eliminating the need for students to compare their performance competitively, teachers can not only reduce the negative impact, but also boost students' confidence, helping them to overcome anxiety arising from the expectation of failure.

Based on the findings of this study on the activities outside the classroom, the students revealed that one of the activities outside the classroom that really helped her in developing her English-speaking skills was watching English movies. This statement gets support from the findings of research conducted by (Dahl, 2019; Liando et al., 2018). The results of the study concluded that most respondents strongly believed that watching movies could more effectively improve their speaking skills than other media usually used in the classroom. Overall, respondents were of the opinion that English movies are a very effective tool for teaching speaking skills to students. The key points of this finding regarding the benefits of watching movies in the development of speaking skills are the students' belief that this activity can significantly improve their speaking skills in English.

The finding on the learning platforms used in improving English such as Duolingo and online games could be effective tools to improve English speaking skills is in line with the findings of a study by (Oktavia & Lestari, 2022) who explored the effectiveness of using the English Domino game in teaching speaking skills to EFL students. The results revealed that most students felt relaxed and confident when engaging in the English Domino game. They also showed high enthusiasm and motivation in taking part in the activity, especially when telling connected stories. This research highlights that this kind of game can be an interesting alternative in teaching English, particularly in contexts outside English-speaking countries, as an attempt to strengthen students' speaking skills.

Another finding on how students overcome the nervousness was also in line with a study by (Saarahwati, 2020), which stated that students should consider having the correct study companions to communicate with or establish support for each other. This method is seen to be helpful because it allows students to share their experiences and strategies with their learning partners. Humans, as social beings, require social relationships with other individuals. As a result, techniques involving social characteristics, such as cooperating with others, play a vital role in anxiety reduction. This demonstrates that social support, particularly from close friends and family, plays an important impact in lowering anxiety levels.

Students' Lacks Towards Developing English Speaking Skills

All EFL students highlighted that the decline in their confidence was mainly due to weaknesses in vocabulary acquisition and a lack of understanding of grammar. This finding

was supported by a study conducted by (Akbar et al., 2022) showed that English grammar rules can be a significant obstacle in achieving effective communication, particularly for students learning a foreign language. The study highlighted that most foreign language learners face external challenges, such as silent letters, difficult spellings, incorrect pronunciations, pronunciation variations due to complex spelling systems, pronunciation that matches spelling, and long words. Students experience high levels of difficulty, and English grammar rules are identified as a major hurdle in achieving effective communication.

Students' Wants for English Speaking Skill Development

Based on the responses from one of EFL students, feedback from teachers or classmates plays a crucial role in motivating students to continue learning. The results of a study conducted by (Chi, 2020) highlighted the findings that providing positive feedback, encouragement, and emphasizing success had a significant impact on students' participation in speaking English in class. Most of the respondents in this study stated that giving compliments for correct answers or good presentations is an effective strategy to improve students' readiness in speaking. These results illustrate that positive feedback and encouragement from teachers or classmates not only increase students' motivation, but also positively affect students' engagement in English speaking activities in the classroom.

In relation to the mastery of English has a significant positive impact on their future, EFL students in particular highlighted that good English proficiency could be an advantage when applying for jobs, given that many jobs require employees who were able to communicate in multiple languages. This view is reinforced by the research of (Ting et al., 2017), which stated that mastery of English was crucial in jobs involving customer service, frontline services, marketing, and in globally positioned companies. In this context, a lack of English proficiency could be a serious barrier to communicating effectively, suggesting that investing in English proficiency could open up wider opportunities in an increasingly globally connected job market.

Conclusion

Referring to the results and discussion, it was found that lower secondary school students need attention to various factors in order to improve their English-speaking skills. These factors include necessities, lacks, and wants. This finding highlights the complexity of the challenges students face in developing English-speaking skills. In line with these results, this study recommends various effective methods and approaches to assist students in achieving these goals. Among these recommendations, the use of group work instruments, direct interaction with the teacher, and the application of communicative games were identified as potential measures in improving students' speaking skills. These methods are designed to not only focus on the technical aspects of speaking, but also pay attention to engaging and relevant learning experiences for students. By integrating these methods in learning, it is expected that students can continue to develop their English-speaking skills continuously.

The results of this study have significant implications for the practice of ELT in schools. By identifying the specific needs, lacks, and wants among lower secondary school students

in promoting their English abilities, English teachers can adapt their teaching methods to better meet these requirements. The study also highlights the importance of creating opportunities for students to learn to speak in a supportive environment through interactive methods such as communication games and direct interactions between teachers and students to build confidence and skills. In addition, leveraging multimedia resources such as English films and educational platforms can further enhance learning experiences. However, this study is limited by relying on qualitative interviews, which may not fully capture the needs of larger populations. Further research with quantitative measures and a broader base of participants is required to verify these results and provide a more general understanding of effective methods of teaching for the development of English-speaking skills.

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