Exploring EFL Graduate Students' Perspectives and Strategies to Improve English Speaking Skills

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ABSTRACT
Even though Indonesian EFL learners have been studying English since elementary school, many may still consider speaking one of the most challenging language skills. Consequently, when they move to the advanced level, they are required to master more complex speaking skills. Indonesian EFL graduate students faced some problems during learning that can contribute to their speaking performance. Therefore, it is urgent for this study to investigate EFL graduate students' perspectives on their speaking challenges and strategies used to improve their speaking skills. This study used a qualitative method and a semi-structured interview to obtain deep insight into participants' perspectives. The participants were EFL graduate students who are taking an English Education Master's Program. Results showed that some factors influenced their speaking skills in an academic context, such as a lack of accurate pronunciation and lack of vocabulary knowledge and that they used effective speaking strategies for improving their ability in speaking. It is expected that the findings would assist EFL graduate students in uncovering their speaking challenges so that they could perform better when using their spoken English.
Keywords: EFL, English proficiency, speaking skills, speaking strategy

INTRODUCTION

Since English has become a global language and a primary source to communicate with other people globally, the importance of English cannot be underestimated or denied. Al-Roud (2016) stated that speaking is regarded as one of the four essential language skills that can lead to successful communication between people in this new era. Speaking skills play a vital role in English as a foreign language (EFL) to enable speakers to share knowledge and information with other people in the academic context (Rao, 2019). Leong and Ahmadi (2017) further supported that speaking skills are essential in EFL learning and Second Language (SLL) Learning. Riadil (2020) stated that the

English language is not only used for daily communication but is also used in the workplace, social, and higher education purposes. It indicated that EFL students had learned English since Elementary school, especially speaking skills, by mastering basic grammar, vocabulary, sentence structures, and pronunciation to support their daily conversation. However, when EFL students are at the university level, especially graduate students who have finished their study in the English Education Study Program and continue studying to the Master's program, their speaking skills are getting more complex and challenging. They not only acquire to speak in a casual context but also are demanded to speak in a more formal and academic context. Due to meeting the demand, EFL graduate students who continue their study to the master program, have to master English speaking skills well. However, during the process of learning to speak, EFL graduate students encounter serious problems in speaking. As graduate students who have completed their undergraduate English education program, they still feel difficulty in speaking.

Furthermore, Riadil (2020) commented that although Indonesian EFL learners have learned English in formal school for many years, they still cannot speak English fluently. Nazara (2011) further commented that even though speaking is regarded as the most challenging to master, EFL students feel motivated to improve their English-speaking abilities. At a university level, graduate students who finished their studies in the English Education Department still encounter some problems in speaking English. Some graduate students can speak English fluently and they can also give excellent responses to the lectures' questions. They can communicate fluently in English with their lecturers. However, graduate students who cannot speak English fluently might tend to give a little response, because they do not know what to say or what response they must give related to the lecturers' questions. Therefore, this is important for them to keep improving their English-speaking ability to achieve the success of learning. For this reason, Indonesian EFL graduate students are demanded to acquire and master speaking skills to help them communicate in the academic context.

Several previous studies have attempted to figure out some factors that inhibit EFL speaking performance in various learning contexts (Al Nakhalah, 2016; Goktope, 2014; Heriansyah, 2012; Lee, 2009; Shen & Chiu, 2019). To begin with, a study conducted by Al Nakhalah (2016) found that EFL undergraduate students face some difficulties in speaking. Most Gaza EFL undergraduate students encountered some problems such as anxiety, shyness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence. These results aligned with Goktope's (2014) findings, which revealed that speaking problems could be identified from two perspectives: the students and the teachers. He found that Turkish learners had limited grammar structure and vocabulary knowledge. From teachers' point of view, some teachers believe that students lack motivation and foreign language anxiety in speaking English. Students tend to feel anxious about being laughed in front of their classmates because of making mistakes in grammar and pronunciation. To improve students' ability, Marzuki, Alek, Farkhan, and Deni (2020) proposed that self-assessment has been extensively used by high school and college students, which helps them to evaluate their speaking performance.

In his study, Lee (2009) also investigated factors that influenced US graduate students' speaking performance in-class discussion. Lee's (2009) results showed that students' English proficiency, individual difference, and classroom atmosphere are factors that may influence US graduate students' speaking poor performance. This study involved six US graduate students in qualitative data through interviews. The result demonstrated that all the participants perceived a lack of English proficiency. They acknowledged that speaking is the most challenging skill to master while in the discussion group. Students' lack of English proficiency also affected their individual difference and attitude in the classroom environment. In parallel with the report of Shen and Chiu

(2019), the main factor that Taiwanese students encountered was a lack of linguistic competence in speaking skills. The results showed 156 Taiwanese junior students had difficulties responding to their teachers' questions because of poor vocabulary and grammar mastery. Heriansyah (2012) further explored some challenges and factors that the third semester of English students at Syiah Kuala Lumpur University encountered in learning speaking. This study used qualitative data through interviews. The results showed that students had some severe issues in speaking, such as lack of self-confidence, lack of vocabulary and grammar knowledge, and insufficient time to practice speaking. These factors lead the students to have poor performance in speaking.

To deal with students' challenges in speaking, some previous studies have investigated enhancing students' English-speaking skills using some effective strategies (Altun & Sabah, 2020; Dewi et al., 2017; Gani et al., 2015; Khan, 2013; Lingga et al., 2020; Lourdunathan & Menon, 2020). Gani et al. (2015) stated that using effective learning strategies could help students solve their language problems. For example, Gani et al. (2015) concluded that high-performance students tended to implement various simple strategies such as memorizing grammar patterns and vocabulary items. They tend to memorize the vocabulary and try to find them in the dictionary to know the pronunciation of the words. In contrast, low-performance students tend to take note of some unfamiliar vocabulary items and look up the dictionary later to find the exact meaning. This strategy may help the low-performance student to enrich their vocabulary knowledge. Asides from that, Dewi et al. (2017) further proposed that applying cognitive strategies such as practice, planning, memorization, and self-management can help students focus more on the learning process. Moreover, Lourdunathan and Menon (2020) claimed that group discussion and peer feedback could boost students' self-confidence in speaking. Students will be getting some feedback from their friends about their speaking performance. It might be effective to enhance their speaking ability.

Based on the reasons explained above, some problems may inhibit EFL graduate students' process of learning speaking in the EFL classroom. Most previous studies have presented significant challenges that EFL students encountered in learning speaking, namely fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation at the tertiary level. However, they have not explicitly explored the EFL graduate students' perspectives on speaking challenges at the Master's degree level. Therefore, the current study focused on analyzing graduate students' perspectives on speaking challenges that might contribute to their speaking performance and finding effective solutions to overcome their challenges in speaking. This study might identify the graduate students' perspectives on speaking problems and try to solve them to achieve better performance in academic speaking. This study involved graduate students who continued their studies in the English Education Master's Program of Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, for the following reasons. Firstly, EFL graduate students tend to encounter more complex English-speaking problems than undergraduate students. Secondly, it is worth investigating graduate students' speaking skills because they have previous exposure to speaking at the university level. Hence, to achieve the aims of this study, two research questions were formulated. First, what are the EFL graduate students' perspectives on their speaking challenges? Second, what strategies do the students use to improve their English-speaking skills?

METHODOLOGY

The current study employed qualitative data to answer the researchers' questions by interviewing some graduate students. This study intended to explore some factors that influence graduate students' speaking ability in the learning process. This study also addressed some effective speaking strategies to improve graduate students' ability in speaking. This present study used a qualitative method to obtain and gather a deeper understanding and information about the phenomenon. Lewis (2015) explained that qualitative research could be implemented to collect data through narrative research, ethnography, a phenomenon, and a case study perspective.

This study used a case study perspective to answer the research questions. Huwari (2019) explained that using a qualitative case study perspective enables researchers to gather in-depth insight into participants' perspectives and ideas. To ensure validity, a semi-structured interview was used to allow the interviewers to ask in-depth follow-up questions. In conducting a semi-structured interview, there were three stages, namely pre-interview, during the interview, and post-interview (Aung, Razak, & Nazry, 2021). In the pre-interview stage, the researchers used the zoom application to conduct an interview session. The zoom link was sent by the researchers to each participant through Whatsapp. At the beginning of the interview session, the researchers asked some warming-up questions about the participants' demographic information. It aims to help the participants feel more comfortable during the interview (Aung et al., 2021). Then, during the interview, the researchers used open-ended questions and interview guideline questions that permitted the researchers to explore the spontaneous matters concerning the participants' perspectives (Ryan, Coughlam, & Cronin, 2009). Ryan et al. (2009) claimed that the focus on conducting a semi-structured interview allows the participants to tell their own experiences and perspectives about the current phenomena rather than just answer a sequence of structured interview questions. This may enable the researchers to gather more profound and richer data rather than crosscheck the participants' responses. In the post-interview stage, all of the participants' responses were analyzed.

The present study was conducted in one of the private universities in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. This research was conducted in November 2021 based on the participants' time availability. This current study employed four graduate students of the English Language Education Master program of the academic year 2021. They continued their study in English Education Master's study program. The participants' range of age is between 21 and 36 years old. Moreover, the main criteria for involving the participants was that the participants were selected randomly. English Language Education Master's students were selected to participate in the study for some reasons. First, these four participants had had various experiences/exposure to learning English at the university level. Most of the students have been learning English intensively for more than six years. Second, they have sufficient proficiency in English speaking. It might help the researchers to identify some factors that influence their speaking ability.

Ethical consideration is crucial and essential for researchers before conducting research (Akaranga & Makau, 2016). The researchers gave all the participants a consent form before they involve in this research (Arifin, 2018). If the participants agree to involve in this study, they can simply put their signature in the consent form. However, if they do not want to participate in this study, they can just ignore it. All participants' data and information were anonymous (Akaranga & Makau, 2016).

There were some procedures in data collecting techniques to get more profound and comprehensive data: First, the researchers contacted the participants to give an online interview

consent form. All of the participants were filled up the consent form, which indicated that they were willing to participate. Second, the participants were inquired based on the interview guidelines with some questions about factors influencing their English proficiency in speaking English. The participants were interviewed individually. All the participants' answers and responses were recorded using the zoom application. The interviews took approximately 20 to 30 minutes using the Indonesian language, considering that all participants were native Indonesian speakers. Then, all the responses data were gathered and analyzed qualitatively. The results of the interviews were transcribed in Microsoft word to help the researchers to perform analysis. Furthermore, the researchers used coding to point out some specific information and to find some qualitative themes in the transcriptions. In addition, the interview results found that there were three qualitative themes to answer the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The interview results attempted to describe graduate students' point of view about some problems affecting their English speaking skills and their learning strategies to improve their speaking English skills. The researchers made the participants' names into pseudonyms, namely Ana, Yoga, Mega, and Jack.

Research Question 1: What are the EFL graduate students' perspectives on their speaking challenges?

In this section, the study portrayed three themes of problems that could contribute to learners' English-speaking ability that could be observed in Table 1.

Table 1. Emerging Themes of Problems

Theme 1	Lack of advanced vocabulary knowledge was attributed to their willingness to speak
Theme 2	Students' lack of accurate pronunciation impeded their academic speaking performance
Theme 3	Students' motivation increased their speaking performance

Theme 1. Lack of advanced vocabulary knowledge was attributed to their willingness to speak English

All the participants reported a lack of advanced vocabulary knowledge. They admitted that they have low vocabulary mastery, which could affect their speaking performance in the academic context. Ana, for example, commented:

"I realize one of my weaknesses in speaking is lack of vocabulary knowledge. I cannot speak English more fluently because I do not have a lot of vocabularies knowledge. Sometimes, I feel difficulty in explaining or describing something. For example, when I want to describe a phenomenon in the education field. [....] I feel so hard to explain it well. It influences my speaking performance. I know if I only describe something using some repetition words, the communication will not interest anymore. [......] I need to expand my vocabulary knowledge [....] to communicate

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well" [Ana]

Furthermore, Yoga, a student with a low speaking proficiency level, also mentioned that he could not speak English fluently and accurately because of low vocabulary mastery. As he reported, he could not express extensively and freely his ideas or thoughts when he gave a response to the lecturer. It affected his speaking performance in the classroom. Regarding this, he stated:

"[....] due to the lack of vocabulary mastery, I feel confused about how to give appropriate responses to my lecturers' questions. I tend to speak slowly and with some noticeable pauses in communicating with my lecturers. For example, when my lecturers want to hear my further explanations, but I cannot speak fluently, I decide to not continue the conversation. However, sometimes, I am willing to speak at length, though there are still many repetition words. [...] vocabulary is very important in communication." [Yoga].

From these statements, it can be shown that Anna and Yoga felt difficulty in speaking, which their challenges might affect their performance in oral communication. We also can see that Anna and Yoga tended to show themselves as incompetent speakers of English because they had insufficient advanced vocabulary knowledge. It showed that they tended to experience a lack of an opportunity to be involved in communication, leading them to have a low academic speaking performance. It could be seen from Ana and Yoga's point of view. They tended to speak slowly, and it affected the effectiveness of communication.

In contrast, Mega and jack, students with high speaking proficiency levels, commented that they found some problematic vocabularies. Even though they experienced a lack of advanced vocabulary knowledge, they kept trying to speak using English to share their thoughts, ideas, and opinions. They stated that unfamiliar vocabulary is just a part of the learning process, which could be solved by memorizing, drilling, and using the vocabularies frequently and consistently. They reported:

"Mastering advanced vocabularies is one of the important parts in language skills. It is not only important in reading, writing, and listening, but the vocabulary is also very important in speaking. To be honest, I keep finding vocabulary in an academic context. For example, when I talk about academic self-efficacy, I do not have much vocabulary about talk something related to academic self-efficacy. However, I try to find explain and describe based on the context to help the interlocutors to understand what I am saying. I encourage myself to think about the meaning of the new vocab based on the context [...]. It helps to speak more, though I still have some limitations in vocabulary [...]. [...] I will expand my vocabulary knowledge". [Mega]

"I found some advanced vocabularies [....]. However, I think it is normal when we learn about language. It does not matter if I do not know some academic vocabulary while I am speaking. It is because of a part of the language learning process. [...] as long as I keep trying to speak and use the opportunity to practice speaking, it helps me to enhance my English-speaking proficiency. [...] practice more is the key to help me expand my vocabulary knowledge". [Jack]

Mega and Jack added that they attempted to work on some solutions to improve their vocabulary knowledge to have high competence in speaking skills. They found that the importance

of vocabulary building knowledge, speed fluency, and grammatical accuracy knowledge substantially contribute to their speaking proficiency. Students who have limited vocabulary but they take in a significant part of involved in speaking activities, their vocabulary knowledge will be getting improved and better. They believe that keep practicing their English speaking proficiency could enhance their vocabulary mastery.

Theme 2. Students' lack of accurate pronunciation impeded their academic speaking performance

Three participants reported that their English proficiency in speaking needed to be improved. Yoga, Ana, and Jack, for example, were not confident enough with their pronunciation because they believed that their pronunciation was still poor. They stated:

"[…] One of my obstacles in speaking English is pronunciation. I could say that good pronunciation could help my friends quickly understand what I say. However, sometimes I keep mispronouncing some words such as focus, cough, director, etc. So, I feel inferior, and I no longer want to continue the conversation with my friends because I cannot pronounce some words correctly like my friends do […]" [Yoga]

"[…] I feel like speaking is the most challenging skill in English. I feel hesitant in pronouncing some words. I feel anxious if I mispronounce some words and my friends will be laughed at me […]." [Ana]

"Sometimes, I experience a lack of accurate pronunciation. For example, when I explain my project plan to my lecturers. In the process of explaining, I make frequent errors in pronunciation. However, mispronunciations are caused by a slip of the tongue, lack of focus, lack of self-confidence, and lack of background knowledge of some specific words" [Jack]

It is evident that lack of pronunciation became one of the main problems for Anna, Yoga, Jack, and Mega. They may feel afraid of talking and demotivated to express their opinion and ideas. For example, from Yoga's statement, he felt afraid of being laughed at by his friends because of mispronunciation. Yoga also experienced the same thing. He tended to stop the conversation because he did not master many vocabularies. Moreover, Jack added that besides having a problem with mispronunciation, he also experienced a lack of self-confidence, diction background knowledge, and focus. In addition, Anna also said that she had a limited range of lexical words to express her ideas or opinion. These problems can lead them to poor performance in speaking. As a result, they may have low proficiency in speaking.

Theme 3. Students' motivation increased their better performance in English

Even though all the participants had some speaking problems, they had high motivation to increase their speaking ability. All the participants said:

"[….] I know my speaking ability is not good, but I want to do my best. I learned every mistake that I made. If I do not know some vocabulary, I tried to find it out in the dictionary to help me keep speaking. Moreover, I do not know how to pronounce some words, I ask my friends to teach me how to pronounce them. I want to improve my English, especially in speaking." [Ana]

"[…] During my learning process, I found some problems like unfamiliar vocabulary or mispronouncing some words. However, I regarded it is not as a hindrance. I regarded it as a motivation to help me get better, better, and much better at speaking. […] because my job is as a teacher, I have to keep learning every day to help my students have a good quality of learning and ability in English." [Yoga]

[….] speaking is the major component in English. We use communication language to communicate with others. So, we must keep improving our speaking ability to socialize and support my future job as a lecturer or a teacher." [Mega]

"I think […] motivation is to upgrade and to update my ability in the English language. So, since speaking is a part of my English proficiency, I would make an effort to increase my capacity in speaking. [….] it relates directly to my future responsibility as a teacher who is required to speak understandably to the students." [Jack]

Based on all the participant's perspectives, they had a strong desire to learn and improve their speaking ability to achieve a high level of competence and performance in speaking English. Based on the interview, all the participants agree that motivation plays an essential role in helping them keep learning. They realized that speaking skill is one of the most essential parts to support their future jobs and performance in the English Foreign Language classroom. Based on the interview, all the participants stated clearly that they want to be English teachers or lecturers, which requires them to speak English well. They acknowledged that speaking is not easy to learn, but they have good motivation to keep learning to speak. For example, Jack and Mega stated that they keep increasing their speaking capacity to help them be excellent speakers of English.

Research Question 2: What strategies do the students use to improve their English-speaking skills?

All the participants agree that speaking strategies could improve their speaking ability. They admitted that some speaking strategies also could improve their vocabulary and pronunciation. It helps them to lead to the success of speaking performance. They commented:

"I usually use some online dictionaries such as Oxford and Cambridge online dictionary. [….] I always check the pronunciation of some specific words that contain some depth thongs. It helps me to manage my intonation and some word stress in speaking. I admit that using an online dictionary brings many advantages. […] some synonyms, definitions, and meanings of some words can be found in the online dictionary. […] I use that strategy to improve pronunciation and expand my vocabulary knowledge." [Jack]

Based on the interview, Jack shared that using online dictionaries, for example, Oxford and Cambridge online dictionaries, could give him many advantages. He explained that he always uses this strategy to improve his pronunciation and vocabulary. Whenever he found difficult words in reading or listening to music, he tried to look up the words in an online dictionary. By using this strategy, he believed it could make his speaking skills much better because he takes time to practice more.

"I tend to do something fun to improve my speaking ability. I love watching British Movies without English subtitles. So far, this strategy supports me to learn some new advanced vocabularies, especially British vocabulary. I love to imitate the British accent and pronunciation. I keep learning and, at the same time, improving. [...] leaning speaking costs time, effort, and energy. However, I love to do it." [Mega]

"The best strategy that I do right now is practice. Take time to practice more. I realize since I do practice more, my pronunciation is getting better, though there is still some mispronunciation that needs to be improved. I also do self-talk. I love talking in front of the mirror to see facial expressions, gestures, and body language while speaking. I think using body language while speaking can help me to be more confident. I can manage my intonation and the flow of speech during the conversation [....]." [Yoga] To improve my English language proficiency, I learn some new vocabulary by memorizing and drilling. I memorize some new vocabulary every day and try to drill it. To help me still memorize the new vocabularies, I always use it based on the actual context" [Ana]

Based on all the participants' points of view, speaking strategy is regarded as very crucial to help them improve their speaking ability. For example, Mega and Ana used other appropriate strategies to improve their speaking ability. The data showed that Mega loves watching British movies, which can help her learn pronunciation. She admitted that learning speaking took a lot of effort, time, and energy. However, she loved to do so because she wanted her speaking ability to enhance. At the same time, Ana used her time availability to practice speaking. She always does self-talk, practicing speaking in front of the mirror as if she has interlocutors. She admitted that this strategy works well. In addition, Ana also admitted that memorizing vocabulary is one of the suitable strategies for her to increase her knowledge in vocabulary. These strategies may lead Mega and Ana to achieve good performance in speaking.

DISCUSSION

Regarding the study findings above, EFL graduate students experience various problems when they attempt to deal with speaking skills in the graduate program context. The researchers concluded that two main problems affect EFL graduate students' perspectives on speaking. Those factors were lack of advanced vocabulary and lack of pronunciation in speaking. Lack of advanced vocabulary was the major problem contributing to graduate students' willingness to communicate and participate in class. Based on the result, it could be seen that the graduate students are reluctant to continue to prolong conversation because they have limited vocabulary to share their knowledge and ideas in a foreign language. They admitted this problem might lead to their low performance in speaking English. These findings strengthened the results of Afzal's (2019) quantitative study in Saudi Arabia. Afzal (2019) claimed that EFL students with low vocabulary knowledge encounter several problems that impede their English-speaking learning process. He also claimed that students feel difficulty expressing their ideas and discussing things in an EFL context without mastering vocabulary knowledge. This statement was enlightened by Saragih and Listyani (2021), who stated that students' problems in vocabulary frequently occur in the EFL classroom. To increase students' accuracy in terms of vocabulary, they can utilize synonyms or similar expressions in numerous contexts (Leong

& Ahmadi, 2017a). It may help students to use diction and expressions accurately.

Furthermore, the researchers also found that EFL graduate students encountered a lack of accurate pronunciation in English. One of the factors that students' mispronunciation is fear of making mistakes when pronouncing English words. They are afraid of being laughed at by their friends when they mispronounce some English words. They tend to feel hesitant to communicate in English because their speaking is not fluent as their friends. The findings of the study were supported by Leong and Ahmadi's (2017a) study, which claimed that students who are not able to convey their messages, ideas, or opinions fluently and accurately in English are because they have insufficient knowledge. To help them improve their pronunciation, Koran (2015) suggested that students have to practice and repeat words several times. Moreover, in his study, Hussain (2017) supported that teaching pronunciation can be done through imitation. Students are asked to imitate what their teachers pronounce. Teachers should have an excellent capability to teach pronunciation to give good examples to the EFL students. EFL students with good pronunciation tended to speak more fluently and confidently (Hosni, 2014).

Despite those speaking problems described above, the researchers concluded that motivation could still contribute positively to the EFL graduate students' speaking performance. Based on the findings of the study, all the participants admitted the reasons why they kept motivated in improving their English speaking that was because proficiency in speaking could support their performance in their future professions. The results of this study showed that motivation plays an essential role in their speaking process and speaking performance. This report of students having good motivation may be related to Khansir and Dehkordi's (2017) finding that motivation is the main factor that helps learners improve their English learning language, especially in speaking skills. Alizadeh (2016) stated that students with a good and strong desire to learn could communicate fluently effectively in a foreign language. However, students who do not desire to learn tend to have poor performance in English language learning (Alizadeh, 2016).

In addition, in order to improve EFL graduate students' speaking skills, the researchers found several a variety of speaking strategies. Those are drilling, memorizing, taking time to practice, and checking online dictionaries. These findings aligned with Gani et al. (2015), who concluded that to help themselves to achieve a higher level of speaking performance, students could use various simple strategies such as memorizing, drilling, self-talk to improve students' vocabulary building and their pronunciation. In parallel with Dewi et al. (2017), one of the cognitive strategies is to practice more to help us become familiar with English language features. Besides implementing those various speaking strategies, there are other strategies to help students improve their speaking ability. Lourdunathan and Menon (2020) claimed that group discussion and peer feedback could boost students' self-confidence in speaking. These appropriate strategies might be helpful for EFL graduate students to improve and develop their speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

This study examined major factors influencing EFL graduate students' speaking skills, focusing on the graduate students' perspectives on speaking challenges. The results showed that two factors influenced graduate students' speaking ability. First, a lack of accurate pronunciation can inhibit students' ability to speak English. Due to the lack of precise pronunciation, the EFL graduate students tended to feel anxious and shy while speaking English. They did not feel confident to express their thought and ideas freely. Second, another factor influencing students' poor speaking performance

was a lack of vocabulary. Some EFL graduate students have not mastered some academic vocabulary that they think those vocabularies are challenging to learn. However, another result showed even though they have some problems in speaking; they keep their motivation high to improve their speaking ability. They had good reasons for upgrading their ability to speak English well.

The implications of this study are as follows. First, the roles of teachers need to be strengthened in the classroom. Teachers need to increase and enhance students' vocabulary knowledge by using attractive and effective speaking strategies. Second, teachers should have good capacity in English language teaching because they have to become good role models in teaching EFL. Third, to increase students' pronunciation and vocabulary knowledge, teachers need to build students' prior knowledge to stimulate their critical thinking in speaking. Fourth, teachers can implement four stages proposed by Bashir et al. (2011), namely the pre-production stage, early production, intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency. These stages help students to improve their speaking ability.

This study contributes to other parties the following two points. First, this study enlightened EFL graduate students' point of view on speaking challenges in an Indonesian university context. It may be necessary for other researchers to explore further Indonesian EFL graduate students' speaking ability to assist them in improving their spoken English. Second, since this study involved graduate students as respondents, which previous studies had focused on, it could facilitate further research on such participants' settings in the future.

The study limitations are as follows: First, it involved a small population size. To make the findings more solid further studies are encouraged to collect a larger population. Second, this study excluded the investigation of the correlation between EFL graduate students' challenges in speaking and their speaking performance. Accordingly, future studies should examine such a correlation between the two variables.

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