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LANGUAGE BARRIERS IN VISITING LECTURER PROGRAM FOR NON ENGLISH SPEAKING STUDENTS

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Abstract

The increased use of video conference platforms provides opportunities to invite foreign lecturers to give lectures virtually. Despite of beneficial impacts, inviting foreign lecturers might bring challenges to students using English as a foreign language. Therefore, this study was aimed at examining challenges faced by non-English speaking students in attending visiting lecturer classes delivered in English and the potential strategy. The study was an exploratory study conducted in a university in Indonesia. The study involved 118 students from a Study Program taken from two courses. Data were collected through observation and questionnaire. Findings show that language became one of the most challenging barriers in understanding the materials, mostly due to speaking speed of the lecturers and the lack of vocabulary. The lecture summary provided by in-class lecturers could be an alternative to improve learning process. Findings also indicate that the visiting lecturer program could improve students' language proficiency, especially their vocabulary and listening comprehension. It concludes that visiting lecturer program has a potential to improve students' language proficiency. However, it is important to provide strategies to help students comprehend the material, such as allocating time for providing a brief summary of the lectures in the student first or second language.

Keywords: English as foreign language, English proficiency, guest lecture, non-English speaking students, visiting lecturer

Introduction

Education is one of the domains experiencing a dramatic shift into the online mode of transaction in the current Covid-19 pandemic (De, Pandey, & Pal, 2020). To deal with the current situation, educational institutions should face digital transformations and being challenged to select platforms and resources to support online education (Țurcanu, Siminiuc, & Bostan, 2020). In the difficult time, educational institutions were supported by large companies, such as Microsoft, Zoom, Google, and Slack to conduct the online learning (Țurcanu et al., 2020). From the beginning of the closure, universities, colleges, and schools around the world have shifted their classes into video conferencing platforms, such as Google Meet and Zoom (De et al., 2020). Therefore, there has been a significant surge of

the usage of language application, video conferencing tool, online learning software, and virtual tutoring since COVID-19 pandemic occurred (Xie & Siau, 2020). The familiarity and ease of utilizing technology, especially video conferencing platforms, has provided an opportunity to universities to invite foreign lecturers from different country to give lectures in the courses related to their expertise. The information and communication technology enables a faster response by supporting mass collaborations and large-scale participation across the state and national boundary (Yang et al., 2020). Thus, through the online meeting, the visiting lecturers could give online lecture from their home country. It shows that the access to the right technologies could help people harvest the advantages of online education to improve learning efficiency (Xie & Siau, 2020), one of those is a wider possibility to invite a foreign visiting lecturer to give a lecture virtually.

Inviting a guest into a classroom to give a lecture would give a different experience for students. The involvement of classroom visitors has long become a practice to enhance acquisition of learning and content delivery in education (Fulton, 2020). Inviting a guest with a suitable expertise would have benefits to the classroom, such as bringing relevance to the classroom and engaging in students in the learning process (Li & Guo, 2015), providing the opportunity to graduate students to link theories with practice (Alebaikan, 2016), and encouraging discussion and wider critical thinking for further embedding academic and professional concepts in learning design in the classroom (Fulton, 2020). In addition, the results of the survey conducted by (Nikolayeva, 2018) demonstrated the essential role of guest speaker presentations on the positive impact of students' motivation and their project.

There are various factors supporting the efficacy of teaching learning process in the classroom, one of them is language. Language is one of the vital vehicles used by teachers to deliver the lesson which enables students to participate in the lessons and communicate in the wider community in school (Cassar & Attard Tonna, 2019). The need to understand what other people convey is a basic necessity in communication (Cassar & Attard Tonna, 2019). Therefore, the inability to understand what a lecturer says in a foreign language, in this case English language, could be a problem to grasp the material and participate in the classroom interaction during the lecturing process. (Ryoo et al., 2020), in their research, identified that the language barrier was found as an inconvenience in visiting scholar program. The language barriers cover different aspects. The study of (Madkur, 2018) found that the barriers could be classified into three problems, including linguistic problem (lack of vocabularies), socio-cultural problem (no opportunity to practice English), and interpersonal problem (fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence). Moreover, difficulties in understanding lectures could be in form of cognitive challenges, where it is difficult for non-native speaker to process and produce messages in a foreign language (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017), the speed of the speakers speech, and their accents (Kuo, 2011).

During the pandemic, where the virtual classroom and the utilization of video conference platforms are familiar, the opportunity to invite lecturers and professors from different countries to give an online lecture has been widely open. In higher education, when distance learning is getting more popular, the student engagement is becoming a great challenge (Li & Guo, 2015). For this reason, a visiting lecturer program have a potential to engage in student and motivate their learning in the

classroom. Different studies show that inviting a guest into a classroom to teach have benefits for student learning. (Fulton, 2020) study showed that inviting e-guests from different regions offer learners an opportunity to learn from the experts they might not have access in the traditional classroom. According to (Li & Guo, 2015), a guest lecture has a potential to gain students' interests and involvement in the class as well as bringing relevance to the class. Furthermore, the study of (Nikolayeva, 2018) found that the survey results conducted in their study presented the importance of guest speaker presentations on the students' motivation. However, studies conducted related to student language difficulties in attending the class delivered in foreign language, in this case English language, and the intervention to improve their language skill in joining the class are limited. Therefore, this study was aimed at answering the following question: What are the students' major difficulties in joining visiting lecturer lectures and the possible strategy to bridge the barriers?

Method

Research Design

This study is an exploratory study. The exploratory study was conducted as the present research studied the new phenomena which required an in-depth analysis of the data found in the field.

Participants

The participants of the study were 118 Physical Education Teacher Education (PETE) for Elementary School students of a Public University in Indonesia who were joining visiting lecturer program from two different courses. The students spoke Indonesian language or Indonesia local language in their daily life. The participants were selected through a total sampling to gain a general depiction of the data. However, the data were only taken from the participants who were willing to participate in the study and those who gave agreement to the researcher to use their answers as the research data.

Research Instruments and Procedure

The instruments of the study were self-administered open-ended questionnaire and observation. The questionnaire was distributed from 13 October 2020 to 19 October 2020 to PETE for Elementary School students joining Visiting Lecturer Program. The questionnaire was distributed online through Google Form. The students completing the questionnaire came from two different courses, including Psychological and Sociological Aspects in Physical Education and Measurement and Evaluation in Physical Education Instruction. A lecture summary in Indonesia language was provided right after the class by in-class lecturers. The observation was conducted during the lecture. The visiting lecture program was conducted for eight meetings in each course. The visiting lecturer lectures were conducted online through an interactive virtual meeting (zoom). The lecturers were foreign lecturers from different countries and different universities speaking English. The invited lecturers were selected according to their expertise. The expertise was examined by considering their research background and record related to the offered courses. For example, the expert in sport psychology was invited to teach Psychological and Sociological Aspects in Physical Education

course. The in-class lecturers assisted the guest lecturer during the meeting. In the classroom, the guest lecturers gave the lectures, but the overall responsibility for the class remains in the hands of the classroom lecturers which is in line with the statement of (Tepper, 2016).

Research Analysis

The analysis of the study was conducted using descriptive statistics and an inductive analysis to answer the research aim, including the language barriers in joining visiting lecturer lectures and the possible strategy. The inductive analysis included three stages. The first stage of the data analysis process was categorizing and coding the data. The next stage was interpreting the data followed by drawing a general conclusion. In the categorizing and coding stage, the data were categorized into two sections, namely barriers and the possible strategy. Each section was then divided into subsections according to the obtained data. Each section and subsection were coded after the categorizing process was completed. The data were then calculated for their frequency and percentage followed by the interpretation stage. Lastly, the general conclusion was generated according to the interpretation of the data.

Data Cleaning and Selection

The questionnaire was distributed online to students from two courses conducting visiting lecturer programs. There were 127 respondents completing the questionnaire. The data cleaning process was conducted to assure that the data were complete, not duplicated, and the respondents permitted the researcher to use the data for research purposes. After the data cleaning and selection process, data from 118 participants could be processed for analysis. Data from 9 respondents were eliminated because the data cannot be further processed for analysis as the respondents did not allow the data to be used in the research or the data were incomplete or duplicated. Therefore, only data from 118 participants that were analysed in this study.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

The visiting lecturer program in the study was a visiting lecturer program designed for eight meetings by inviting foreign lecturers from the related expertise needed in the course. The finding shows that the majority of the students (84,6%) were interested in joining the program. Only a few of students (15,4%) who were not interested to join the program.

The study was conducted to find out challenges faced by students related to language in joining visiting lecturer program delivered in English and a possible strategy to improve their learning during the lecture. The result of the data analysis shows that language became the major barrier in attending the lecture compared to other challenges, including technical challenges. The data are shown in Figure 1.

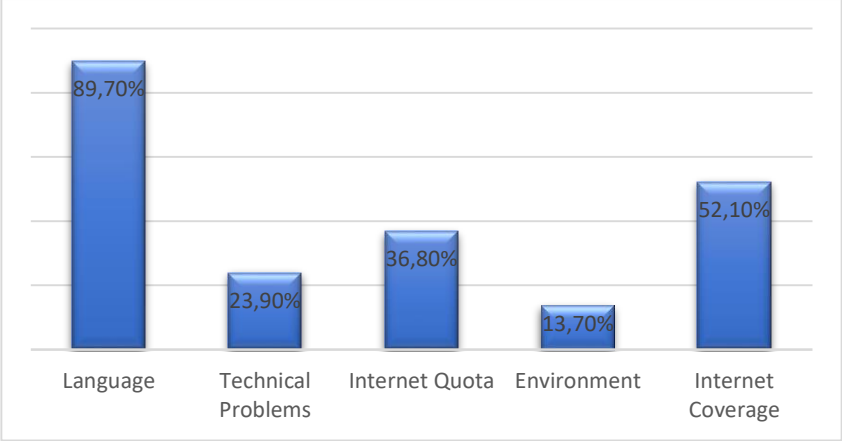


Figure 1. Barriers in Virtual Visiting Lecture Program

Meanwhile, the barriers in comprehending the material during the lectures involved six factors, including understanding general information, vocabulary, listening comprehension related to pronunciation, speaking speed, and misinterpretation of the speech. The main barrier faced by most students was the lack of vocabulary (64.7%), followed by the speaking speed of the lecturers (58.6%). The complete data are shown in Figure 2.

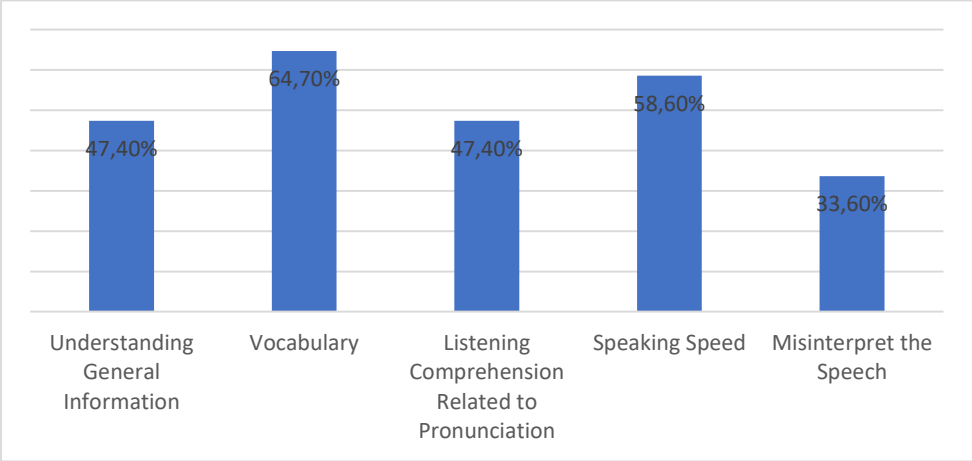


Figure 2. Language Barriers in Comprehending the Materials

To lessen the language barriers in comprehending the materials given, the lecturers then provided a summary of the lectures at the end of each session to clarify their understanding. Most of the students (94,9%) stated that this strategy helped them in comprehending the materials. In addition, most of them (88%) also reported that the inviting guest lecture program delivered in English language could improve their ability in understanding lectures delivered in English language. It was because the program could improve some aspects related to their English language proficiency, especially their familiarity with listening to English language (listening skills), stated by 72.5% of the students, and enriching their vocabulary (48,6%). The complete data are shown in Figure 3.

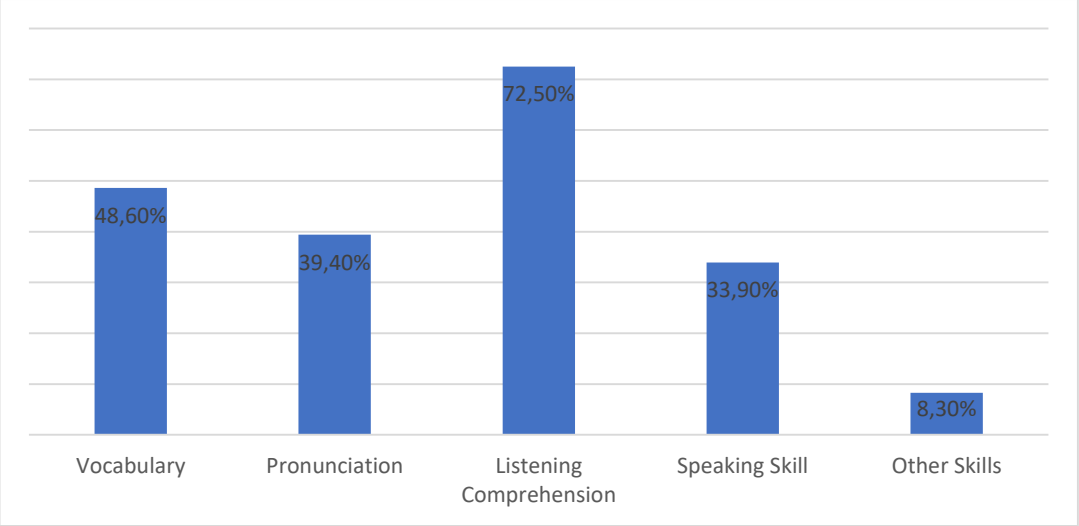


Figure 3. Student Perceptions on Their English Language Improvements

The result of the data analysis shows that language became the main barriers in attending the visiting lecturer lectures for non-English speaking students in higher education. Despite language as the main barrier of the program, the finding indicates that the program contributed positively to the improvement of the students' language proficiency. Further explanation is presented in discussion section.

Discussion

The intense visiting lecture program, conducted in eight meetings, was a new program conducted by the Study Program studied in this research. The finding of the study shows that the majority of the students were interested to join in visiting lecturer program provided by their Study Program. As stated by (Krogstie & Krogstie, 2018), in a course, guest lectures are often an inspiring and welcoming event, which has a potential to demonstrate the real-life relevance of the syllabus. It is also in line with (Nikolayeva, 2018) who states that the guest speaker presentation is influential for the student project and has a positive impact on their motivation. The high of student motivation and interest might be because guest lecturing has become a popular method to bring relevance to the classroom and engage in students which has the potential make student more involved and more interested in the class (Li & Guo, 2015).

However, providing a visiting lecture program also has challenges. Therefore, inviting a guest lecture into a classroom should be planned carefully. There are three issues to consider for a successful visiting lecturer program, starting from the lecturer selection, teaching strategy of the speaker, to the role of the course lecturer (Alebaikan, 2016). The findings of (Purnomolastu & Nabila, 2014) study showed that the competence of the invited lecturers are significantly related to student positive satisfactory. In the current study, the finding shows that the most challenging barriers in conducting the virtual visiting lecturer program was the language. It is in line with (Ryoo et al., 2020) that, in visiting scholar, the language barrier was identified as a disadvantage. Moreover, relevant to other program using foreign language, language will be an obstacle for those who lack of the language

used. As was found in the research of (Liu & Jiang, 2015), most interviewees recognized that the inconvenience in using the English language is the major challenge.

The finding of this study indicated that there were three major challenges related to the language, including vocabulary, speaking speed, and the ability in understanding the meaning. It is relevant to the research of (Kuo, 2011) who found that the speed of talk and accents were the aspects affecting the difficulties in understanding lectures. It is also in line with other studies that the major English language challenges faced by students were their listening comprehension and speaking (oral proficiency) (Kuo, 2011; Liu & Jiang, 2015) and vocabulary (Madkur, 2018). Understanding what the lecturer says during the lecture is the basic need to comprehend the materials, because the need to understand what a person says is fundamental (Cassar & Attard Tonna, 2019). Therefore, when the student could not understand what the lecturer said, it would be difficult for them to master the delivered learning content. This might be because the language barrier might be correlated with cognitive process. In the cognitive process, to comprehend a matter, a person firstly needs to understand the message conveyed by the speaker to process the meaning. Therefore, the challenge can make it difficult for non-natives to process and produce messages in a foreign language (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). Moreover, the students lack of vocabulary, understanding the meaning, and speaking speed might be because the students did not have an adequate exposure to English language and lack of opportunity to practice in their daily life.

The result of classroom observation shows that the students were less interactive during the lecture. It might be because of the language barrier they faced. Language barriers between newcomer English learners and teachers may lead to insuperable obstacles in building relationships (Flint, Dollar, & Stewart, 2018). It might manifest in withdrawal, communication avoidance, and code-switching (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017) due to the lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes (Madkur, 2018). Those communicative behaviors can have a considerable impact on their interpersonal communication which would affect both the relationship dimension and content dimension (Aichhorn & Puck, 2017). Their insufficient language proficiency might also limit their participation in class (Liu & Jiang, 2015) and pose academic challenges, including their communication with lecturers and classmates (Wu, Garza, & Guzman, 2015). Meanwhile, language and social interaction are vital for the maturation process and intercultural awareness and for enabling the adjustment to differences (Ventura, Mill, Mendes, de Brito, & Johnson, 2017).

The invited lecturers seemed to notice the student difficulties in participating in the lecture discussion. They tried to initiate discussion and give thinking time for students to give an answer in discussion. By the time, the students tried to be more interactive during the discussion session. It shows that engaging students in literacy activities would build relationship with the lecturers (Flint et al., 2018). In addition, it is also relevant to the research of (Haussler, Paavilainen, & Åstedt-Kurki, 2003) that teacher encouragement and challenge to speak up in class are important for students. Thus, in inviting a guest lecture, we should also consider their ability to engage with students (Fulton, 2020).

The invited lecturer encouragement seemed to help students in participating in classroom activities. To ensure that the students understood the lecture content,

a summary after the lecture was given by the in-class lecturer after the session delivered in Indonesia language, in each meeting for the total eight meetings. The finding shows that most of the students thought that it was helpful. It shows that the teacher role is even more essential when students are studying in a foreign language (Haussler et al., 2003). In addition, it is also relevant to (Tepper, 2016) statement that for the class, the overall responsibility still remains in the hands of the classroom professor.

At the end of the guest lecture program, the students perceived that the program could improve their English language, especially related to vocabulary enrichment (47,9%) and listening comprehension improvement (72,6%). The improvement might be because the students intensively gained exposure to English language. According to (Kozhevnikova, 2019), studies conducted by numerous scholars have proven that there is an evident correlation between language exposure and second language acquisition, which also involves vocabulary acquisition. The classroom can have a function as a formal and informal linguistic environment which would be beneficial for students (Kozhevnikova, 2019). In the present study, the exposure to English language and the linguistic environment were provided in the lecturing program involving visiting lecturers delivering the content in English language for eight meeting for each course. Thus, the students had an intensive exposure for at least eight weeks.

The student improvement was also perceived in their listening comprehension. It might also because of the exposure to the English language. According to the findings of the research conducted by (Zoubi, 2018), the statistical analysis concurred that there are positive relationships between language acquisition and exposure to English language in increasing the four language skills. Moreover, the improvement of student English language comprehension might intertwine with their vocabulary improvement (Alqahtani, 2015; Susanto, 2017). As stated by (Kozhevnikova, 2019), mastering wider vocabulary knowledge becomes an important step for acquiring a foreign language and becoming a proficient foreign language speaker.

Inviting a guest lecture into a classroom will have benefits for the students. Besides providing potential for enhancing student learning by bringing their expertise to the classroom (Fulton, 2020), other benefits might follow. In this research, other harvested benefits included the student improvements in their English language proficiency. It shows that the visiting lecture program delivered in English language for non-English speaking students could enhance the student specific English language proficiency, especially for enriching their vocabulary and improving their listening comprehension. It indicates that inviting foreign lecturers might not only enhance the student learning in the target course, but also improve their English language proficiency. However, this study only relied on the student perception. The study was not conducted in experimental design nor tested the significance of the difference of the improvement, hence the significance of the improvement perceived by the students cannot be generalized. For this reason, it is important for further research to analyse the significance of the improvement and to examine the effect of language barriers in attending the lectures on the student material comprehension.

Conclusion

Visiting lecturer program was perceived as an interesting program for the participants involved in the program. During the lectures, language became one of the most challenging barriers in joining visiting lecturer program delivered in English language for non-English speaking students. The barriers were mostly caused by the lack of vocabulary and the speed of the lecturer speaking. Giving a summary of the lecture in Indonesia language could be one of alternative to strengthen the student comprehension of the delivered materials. In addition, the visiting lecturer program seemed to have a beneficial impact on the student English language proficiency, especially for their vocabulary and their listening comprehension. However, it is important to consider strategies to clarify students' understanding related to the content delivered. One of those is by allocating a special time to give a brief summary of the lecture by in-class lecturers in students' first or second language.

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