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Speaking Issues Faced by Indonesian Students during Classroom Discussions in the US

I Putu Indra Kusuma

(indra.kusuma@undiksha.ac.id)

English Language & Education Department, Universitas Pendidikan Ganesha, Indonesia

Abstract

Without sufficient English-speaking skills, international students, including those from Indonesia, will face fundamental issues in their studies, especially in classroom discussions. A descriptive study was conducted to describe the issues faced by Indonesian students during classroom discussions in a mid-western US university. These issues were viewed from the perspective of internal factors such as linguistic knowledge, motivation, anxiety, and topic knowledge. Specifically, this study employed a convergent mixed-methods design. The 20 international students participating in this study were majoring in different disciplines and were selected using a purposive sampling technique. This study collected data using online questionnaires, consisting of 23 close-ended items, followed by semi-structured interviews with five willing participants. The quantitative data (online questionnaires) were put through a descriptive statistics analysis, while the qualitative data (semi-structured interviews) were studied using the content analysis technique. The findings showed that, in general, these Indonesian students had issues regarding correct grammar use and proper vocabulary choice during classroom discussions. They also experienced anxiety when participating in classroom discussions. Nevertheless, they did not have such issues in pronunciation, motivation, and topic knowledge. Based on the results mentioned above, possible implications for ESL/EFL are also discussed in this study.

1 Introduction

The pursuit for excellent education could be one of the reasons why most Asian students, including Indonesians, study abroad. Many Indonesian students envision seeking excellent education systems, learning processes, and professionalism in American universities. These students therefore hope to gain better insight and outcomes than their peers who study locally in their home universities.

Nevertheless, studying abroad may prove to be challenging as many problems may occur due to the differences that they have to face between their home country and their international study destination. As previous studies have investigated (e.g., Choudaha & Schulmann, 2014; Gebhard, 2012; McClure, 2007; Robertson et al., 2000; Sawir, 2005; Sawir et al., 2008), the differences include languages, socio-cultural background, economic challenges, and methods of teaching and learning.

An emerging area of research highlights the difficulties that many Asian students face in an English-speaking classroom. There have been a number of recent studies regarding the issue of language use in classroom discussion faced by Asian students (e.g., Abrar & Mukminin, 2016; Han, 2007; Kuo, 2011; Wong, 2004). As more and more Asian students are travelling abroad to English-speaking countries for their studies, it has and will continue to become an important point for ESL or EFL instructors in Asia to consider when preparing their students for overseas studies. Hence, it seems important to consider the case of Indonesian students in overseas universities.

In almost any university, classroom discussions are inevitable. This is particularly true for univer-sities in the US, where classroom discussions tend to be a requirement for passing certain university courses. In these classes, students are encouraged to actively share their knowledge and views rather than simply listening passively to the explanations of the lecturers. In addition, class participation is a common and widespread activity at the graduate level at American universities (Aubrey, 1991). Accordingly, Indonesian students studying in the US are expected to be actively involved in class-room discussions using English, a language that is treated as a foreign language in Indonesia. Other-wise, it would be difficult for them to succeed or perform well in their pursuit of higher education in American universities. Such Indonesian students should therefore become accustomed to and com-fortable with participating, during every classroom discussion in English, should they choose to study in the US.

Since speaking is the only way to participate in classroom discussions, students must have good oral skills and be able to verbalise their ideas and thoughts well. However, oral participation in English might not be easy for those who speak it as a foreign language, like in the case of Indonesian students. These challenges faced by foreign students in these contexts have prompted Kuo (2011) to study Asian students in the US as well as Abrar and Mukminin (2016) to study Indonesian students in the U.K. Both studies have revealed that international students seem to have some issues when participating in classroom discussions using English in overseas universities. A major reason why classroom discus-sions are not easy for many foreign students could be because the ability to speak in a foreign language during a classroom discussion is a multi-faceted competence, whose success depends on many factors. For example, a growing body of research has been conducted to show that speaking involves many internal aspects and components such as linguistic knowledge (Bohlhke, 2014; Brown, 2001), topic knowledge (Hinkel, 2006; Huang & Hung, 2018; Khabbazbashi, 2017), listening ability (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016; Kuo, 2011), motivation (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2013; Othman & Shuqair, 2013) and anxiety (Chiu et al., 2010; Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

Given that Indonesian students do not typically do well in these contexts, it is only natural for further research to be done to find out how Indonesian students fare during their studies at overseas universities, especially in classroom discussions. For the purpose of this study, Indonesian students were recruited as participants. Indonesian students share certain characteristics with other Asian stu-dents, as can be seen in studies about the similarities amongst Asian students (e.g., Lee, 2011; Li & Jia, 2006; Raymond & Choon, 2017; Wan, 2001). The findings of this study would contribute to understanding the study abroad experiences of Indonesian students, as a subset of Asian students, with the hope of producing a more complete view of the issues faced by Asian students in general.

A few researchers have previously conducted studies where Indonesian students are referred to as Asian students. For instance, in the studies about Indonesian students in the US and the U.K by Muk-minin and McMahon (2013), as well as Abrar and Mukminin (2016), language barriers that Indone-sian students faced in classroom discussion were also seen as a common issue for Asian students in those countries. These studies investigated issues in participating in classroom discussion viewed from external and internal aspects. Yet, those studies failed to provide more profound data regarding the speech component of the classroom participation, since both studies involved only a small number of participants with a main focus on qualitative data from interviews.

Furthermore, studies that give comprehensive and profound information by involving both quan-titative and qualitative data could not be identified. Such information will be necessary to add on to existing literature on speaking issues faced by international students, in particular, students from Asia. This present study therefore tries to fill those gaps by focusing on speaking issues in classroom dis-cussion faced by Indonesian students in the US, by involving a larger number of participants to obtain more reliable findings. Additionally, this study provides ample quantitative and qualitative data to derive thoughtful insights on the research topic.

This study is pivotal because Asian students, including Indonesians, are increasingly interested in continuing their studies at universities abroad. This study will also provide an exhaustive explanation of the factors that influence speech performance in which this information can contribute significantly to ESL / EFL literature. Moreover, this comprehensive information can be used as consideration for other prospective students, education agencies, schools/institutions in Asia to prepare prospective

students before continuing to study abroad. Thus, from the rationale mentioned above, this study therefore sought to investigate the following questions:

RQ1. Do the Indonesian students face any speaking issues related to linguistic knowledge during classroom discussions in the US?

RQ2. Do the Indonesian students face any speaking issues related to topic knowledge during classroom discussions in the US?

RQ3. Do the Indonesian students face any speaking issues related to motivation and anxiety during classroom discussions in the US?

2   Literature review

2.1   Classroom discussions

As a classroom activity, a discussion is a manifestation of oral communication to express ideas, opinions, or argumentation of a topic. Classroom discussions are a widespread activity found in American universities, despite questions being raised regarding its effectiveness (Kelly, 2007). Some classroom discussions are initiated by professors as an opening to a lesson, and sometimes it is the students themselves who may raise a question which would lead to a longer discussion. In general, classroom discussions are common and expected in any American classroom (Aubrey, 1991). Classroom discussions are also one of the best ways to enhance educational growth because international students can interact with others (Maeda, 2017) through the exchange of ideas, thoughts, and experiences. Thus, they have the potential to allow international students to offer alternative perspectives.

However, international students may experience many issues during classroom activities, and one of them is getting involved in the discussion (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016). Notably, there are many factors affecting classroom discussions such as language deficiency (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016), language status of the students (Griskell et al., 2020), anxiety towards the participation in the classroom discussion (Maeda, 2017), or because of cultural issues for students whose cultures do not encourage the asking of questions and taking part in a discussion (Karrupan & Barari, 2011). In general, these factors could very much impact the involvement of international students in the classroom discussion.

To date, some studies have investigated the participation of the students in classroom discussions in terms of using English as a means of communication (e.g., Abrar & Mukminin, 2016; Griskell et al., 2020; Mukminin & McMahon, 2013). Griskell et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study in which one of the purposes was to examine the differences between English-speaking monolingual students and bilingual students participating in classroom discussions. They studied 106 bilingual students and 98 English-only students and found that the monolingual students participated more actively than their bilingual counterparts when they had the same rate of fluency. Moreover, they also found that the bilingual students had fewer opportunities to participate in classroom discussion. Concerning how Indonesian students participate in classroom discussion, Mukminin and McMahon (2013) conducted a qualitative study of ten Indonesian doctoral students studying in the US. One of the findings was that these ten students were shy and passive when participating in classroom activities. They then claimed that the differences in cultures and lack of English seemed to be responsible for these issues. This discussion was continued by Abrar and Mukminin (2016), who studied eight Indonesian students who were studying in the U.K. in their qualitative study. They found that language barriers were also responsible for the passiveness when participating in classroom discussions. These studies above therefore lead to the notion that students who use English as a foreign language might have issues when participating in classroom discussions. The nature of these issues is worthy of further investigation.

2.2   Speaking components in classroom discussion

Since speaking involves various aspects and components, it is one of the most challenging skill to master (Harmer, 2007; Luoma, 2004). For instance, it is challenging for international students to be involved in classroom discussions by speaking in English due to many aspects.. According to scholars,

speech deals with multiple features, including linguistic, topic, motivation, and anxiety (Bohlhke, 2014; Brown, 2001; Chiu et al., 2010; Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2013; Hinkel, 2006; Huang & Hung, 2018; Khabbazbashi, 2017; Othman & Shuqair, 2013; Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

2.2.1   Linguistic knowledge

Excellent languagelinguistic knowledge helps international students to be proficient in classroom discussions (grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation). Importantly, grammar is a form of language that helps to draw meaning (Larsen-Freeman, 2014). According to Romer (2017), grammar is a fundamental component that affects speaking performance because it conveys meaning. With good grammar mastery, international students can easily convey ideas, thoughts, and meaning in classroom discussions. Furthermore, pronunciation uses pauses and intonation to produce the words, making it essential in speaking performance (Goodwin, 2014). It is also pivotal in speaking performance because it affects comprehensibility and intelligibility in communication (Wang, 2014). A mispronunciation may lead to failure to understand the message being delivered in classroom discussions. Vocabulary is a set of words that convey meaning and has a significant impact on communication (Zimmerman, 2014). The correct usage of words will allow students to deliver the message. Moreover, vocabulary acquisition is the basis for improving language learning (Supian & Asraf, 2019). It is an essential aspect of conveying messages in classroom discussions. Some studies have examined how far linguistic knowledge affects speaking performance (De Jong et al., 2012; Husnu, 2018; Wang, 2014). The results showed that having a great source of linguistic knowledge significantly affects speaking performance.

2.2.2   Topic knowledge

According to studies, speaking is affected by other aspects rather than just being limited to linguistic knowledge (Abrar & Mukminin, 2016; Hinkel, 2006; Huang & Hung, 2018; Khabbazbashi, 2017; Kuo, 2011). For instance, Hinkel (2006) established that topic, background knowledge, information, and context (or known as topic/topic knowledge) significantly affect speaking performance. Persons with low knowledge may not have meaningful communication. (Khabbazbashi 2017; Huang and Hung 2018). Different levels of knowledge affect students speaking performance differently.

2.2.3   Motivation and anxiety

Motivation is one of the success predictors of language learning (Dörnyei, 2003). It helps students improve their English for academic purposes in higher education (Li & Gong, 2019). Gardner and Lambert in 1959 popularized motivation and aptitude in Canada. This inspired studies on the relationship between motivation and second language acquisition (see Dörnyei 2010; Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009, 2011).

Many studies have specifically investigated the relationship between motivation and oral communication (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2013; Ochoa et al., 2016; Othman & Shuqair, 2013). The results showed that motivation affects students' oral performance. Therefore, in case international students have high levels of motivation, they can perform better in classroom discussions.

Anxiety is also inherent in language learning and exists in threefold, including trait, situation-specific, and state anxiety (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Spielberger, 1983). Situation-specific anxiety is closely related to oral communication. It refers to unpleasant conditions, such as worry, stress, and nervousness resulting from a specific situation, such as a classroom discussion. According to Dörnyei (2001), language classrooms are a face-threatening environment. This means classroom discussions may result in an unsafe environment and atmosphere for international students.

Horwitz et al. (1986) examined situation-specific anxiety in the second language learning and coined Foreign Language Anxiety (Henceforth, FLA). Though FLA is not specific to speaking skills, some of the three performance anxieties could be inherent in classroom discussions, such as communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. In communication apprehension, language

learners are afraid of communicating, making a speech, and participating in classroom discussions. Fear of negative evaluation is an apprehension of having a lousy evaluation or bad judgment. Therefore, FLA is relevant to oral communication and is inherent in classroom discussions.

Literature shows that anxiety has a relationship with language learners' low performance in speaking, especially in classroom discussion (Chiu et al., 2010; Karatas et al., 2016; Maeda, 2017; Toubot & Goh, 2018; Yan & Horwitz, 2008). Therefore, anxiety is central to the success and failure of students' performance in classroom discussions. Students with high anxiety often fail in participating in the discussion. However, those with low anxiety successfully participate in classroom discussions without much fear.

3   Research methods

3.1   Research design

This is a descriptive study conducted at one of the US universities in the Midwest area to describe the phenomenon of speaking issues faced by Indonesian students in classroom discussions. Particularly, this study used a convergent mixed-methods approach that allows the researcher to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to determine whether the data confirms or disconfirm each other (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

3.2   Participants

Indonesian students were sampled using the purposive sampling technique. Importantly, these students were recruited since many Indonesians were studying in the US, especially the Mid-western area. The inclusion criteria include (1) willingness to join the study, (2) studying in the US universities, and (3) have experienced US classroom situations for at least one semester. Afterward, 40 Indonesian students were approached to participate in this study by sending a message to the Indonesian student's community WhatsApp group with a link asking for their participation consent. After giving their consent, they were directed to fill an online questionnaire. Only 20 Indonesian students finally participated in this study (50% return rate). Five of them were willing to participate in the interviews while the rest refused for many reasons, such as they had never been involved in research as participants and had tasks to do first.

3.3   Data Collection & analysis

The objects explored in this study were the issues students face when while participating in classroom discussions, viewed from internal factors, such as linguistic knowledge, motivation, anxiety, and topic knowledge. The data was collected through an online questionnaire that consisted of 23 close-ended items and validated through expert judgments. The data from 23 close-ended questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the mean score (*M*) and standard deviation (*SD*). Moreover, the five willing participants were further interviewed by asking them five semi-structured questions related to the issues faced during the classroom discussion. The interviews were recorded using mobile phones and transcribed verbatim. The transcriptions were sent to these five participants for validation before data analysis. The qualitative data analysis technique implemented was content analysis. According to Krippendorff (2004), this is a qualitative technique for making valid inferences from texts analyzed using vivo coding by placing the actual spoken words into seven categories, including issues in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, topic knowledge, motivation, and anxiety. Furthermore, the quantitative data derived from descriptive statistics analysis were compared with those from interviews to confirm or disconfirm the speaking issues faced by Indonesian students in classroom discussion.

4   Findings

The demographic data (Figure 1) shows that there were 9 (45%) and 10 (55%) science and non-science students (55%) in this study. According to Figure 2, 14 participants (70%) had spent a year studying while 3 (15%) had less than a year studying in the US. Additionally, only 2 (10%) and 1 participant (5%) had spent 4 and 2 years studying in the US, respectively. Though studying different majors, the participants could be categorized into science (55%) and non-science (45%) categories.
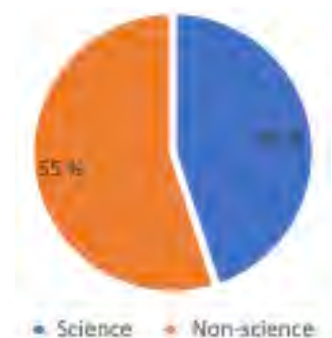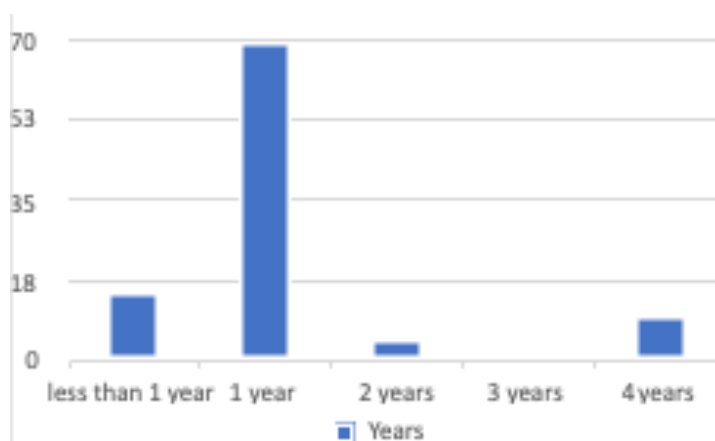

Fig. 1. Fields of the participants

Fig. 2. Years spent in the US

4.1   Linguistics knowledge (Grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation)

From the data analysis on the mean and standard deviation (Table 1), most students had issues in participating in class discussion, as shown by $M = 3.80$ (high).

Table 1. Summary of descriptive statistics

Indicators	Mean	SD	Category
Speaking skill mastery	2.85	0.67	Average
Having issues in participating in class discussion	3.80	0.62	High
English grammar mastery	2.80	0.62	Average
Difficulties to use correct grammar in class discussion	3.65	0.81	High
Grammar is the factor hindering participation in class discussion	3.60	0.99	High
vocabulary mastery	2.75	0.64	Average
Difficulties in choosing the right vocabulary in class discussion	3.50	0.61	High
Vocabulary becomes the factor preventing from talking in class discussion	3.50	1.00	High

Knowledge of English words' pronunciation.	3.00	0.56 Average
Difficulties uttering the right pronunciation of English words in class discussion.	3.15	0.67 Average
Pronunciation becomes the factor preventing from talking in class discussion.	2.95	0.60 Average
Motivation to get a high score in the course.	4.00	0.65 High
Motivation to participate in class discussion.	3.65	0.59 High
Likeness toward class discussion.	3.55	0.94 High
Likeness toward the topics in class discussion.	3.65	0.59 High
Feeling anxious about having a class discussion.	2.85	0.88 Average
Feeling anxious in every given opportunity to speak in class discussion.	3.55	0.89 High
Anxiety when speaking in class discussion.	3.50	1.00 High
Knowledge about topics in class discussion.	3.50	0.61 High
Relating topics being discussed with prior knowledge.	3.50	0.61 High
Issues relating to understanding the topic being discussed.	2.85	2.75 Average
Topics being discussed prevent the students from participating in class discussions.	2.70	0.73 Average

Most students had an average speaking ability, shown by $M = 2.85$. Students' grammar mastery was indicated by $M = 2.80$ (average). However, the findings showed that 14 out of 20 students had difficulties in using correct grammar in classroom discussion, marked by $M = 3.65$ (high). The participants were asked whether or not grammar prevented them from class discussion. The results showed that $M = 3.60$ (high) and 18 out of 20 students stated that grammar affected them. These findings were supported by the answers from the open-ended questions, where some participants had difficulties in finding the appropriate grammar to express their ideas in classroom discussion. Also, it took time to think and construct the ideas into proper sentences. However, a few participants did not have any grammar problems in constructing the utterances in classroom discussion. The sample excerpts are as follows.

Excerpt #1
"It is not easy to find the appropriate tenses to express my thoughts, especially those dealing with past events."

Excerpt #2
"I know some tenses, but it is not easy to construct sentences with the appropriate ones in a very short time. When I finally construct my sentences and ready to speak, the opportunity is taken by other students, or the professor already changed the topic."

Excerpt #3
"I do not have any problem with grammar. My professor and friends never complained about my speech."

According to Table 1, 11 out of 20 participants showed that vocabulary was a problem in classroom discussion, indicated by the $M = 3.50$ (high). The vocabulary mastery was shown by $M = 2.75$ (average). Furthermore, 11 out of 20 students stated that vocabulary prevented them from participating in class discussion, marked by $M = 3.50$ (high). To support the findings from open-ended responses, the participants stated that they had issues with choosing the appropriate vocabulary and technical terms for some topics. This situation prevented them from participating in classroom discussions. Conversely, 3 participants were not dealing with issues related to vocabulary in classroom discussion. The relevant excerpts are as follows.

Excerpt #4
"The terms used in my class are different from those used in my home country. I need time to find the appropriate ones when giving my ideas."

Excerpt #5

"Sometimes when nervous, I cannot find the appropriate words to state my opinion when talking in class. It seems that all the words I know disappear."

Excerpt #6
"I know many words in English. That is why I can participate easily in the discussion."

According to table 1, students had average difficulties in uttering the right pronunciation, indicated by $M = 3.15$ (average). Furthermore, pronunciation did not significantly affect them in classroom discussion, shown by $M = 2.95$ (average). Nevertheless, only 3 participants stated that they were afraid of mispronouncing the words. The rest were not afraid because friends and lecturers understood what they were saying. A few examples of quotes are presented below.

Excerpt #7
Excerpt #1
"I do not have any pronunciation issues because I know many sounds in English, apart from being familiar with American accents."

Excerpt #8
"I am sometimes afraid of mispronouncing a word. I had a bad experience with it. My classmates laughed when I wrongly pronounced a word."

4.2   Motivation and anxiety

Regarding motivation and anxiety, 12 out of 20 participants had high motivation for good scores, indicated by $M = 4$ (high). The motivation to participate in the class discussions was shown by $M = 3.65$ (high). However, 13 out of 20 students profoundly stated that they felt anxious in every opportunity to speak in classroom discussion, marked by $M = 3.55$ (high). Furthermore, the level of anxiety was high when they spoke during classroom discussions. Regarding the open-ended responses, some of the participants stated that they were afraid when they had opportunities to speak, fearing that they could not express their ideas fluently or their opinions were out of context. Sometimes these respondents preferred to keep silent. Sample excerpts related to anxiety are as follows.

Excerpt #9
"I often feel nervous in my classroom discussion even before I start to speak. I am afraid my professor asks me to give my opinions when we have classroom discussions."

Excerpt #10
"When I get a chance of uttering my opinion, I get nervous and cannot speak to the point. Sometimes I stop speaking before finishing my opinion."

4.3   Topic knowledge

Table 1 shows that all the participants knew the topics discussed, shown by $M = 3.50$ (high). However, 11 out of 20 students could relate the topics being discussed with their understanding as marked by $M = 3.50$ (high). Additionally, M was 2.70 (average) when they were asked whether the topics prevented them from participating in classroom discussions. The open-ended responses supported the findings that most of the participants did not have issues with topics discussed in classroom discussions. A few examples of excerpts are as follows.

Excerpt #11
"I know the topic well because I was dealing with it in my home country."

Excerpt #12
"I do not have any problem with the topics being discussed in the classroom because everything is in the book or articles given by the professor."

5   Discussion

It can be challenging for students to participate in class discussions, especially when using a different language. Inevitably, some issues might be inherent within the classroom discussion because of this phenomenon. Numerous studies have confirmed that language is a significant problem for most international students pursuing a degree (Abrar & Mukminin 2016; Hellsten & Presscot, 2004; Kuo, 2011; Mori 2000). The language use may become an obstacle for students in their studies since participation in English classroom discussions could be one of the requirements to excel in the course. Therefore, a profound view of these issues is necessary for further analysis.

The results showed that most of the students had trouble communicating in the classroom. Although TOEFL, IELTS, and other equivalent tests have been accepted at the university, they do not guarantee success in classroom discussion. Selvadurai (1991) stated that although international students were allowed to join universities using some equivalent English proficiency tests to prove their capability, they still had difficulties in understanding lectures, expressing ideas and other issues in academic activities. Therefore, there is no guarantee of success in universities' academic activities with high scores in TOEFL, IELTS, or other equivalent tests.

Speaking issues in classroom discussions often include the deficiency of grammar and vocabulary mastery. The comments made by participants also showed that they had difficulties picking the correct tenses, acceptable words in the classroom, and other basic terms, which stopped them from correctly using the vocabulary. This finding is in line with Abrar and Mukminin's (2016), which stated that Indonesian students in the U.K. also faced the same issues. The deficiency in grammar and vocabulary mastery of the students may have been influenced by the deficit of the language used in the classroom discussion. Baker and Westrup (2003) reported that many students faced difficulties in responding in a foreign language because of their unsureness in what to say, which vocabulary to use, or how to use the grammar correctly. Therefore, international students and English teachers should be aware of the issues related to grammar and vocabulary when studying abroad, especially when participating in classroom discussions.

Before arriving in the United States, international students should be aware that they need excellent language skills to bolster their academic performance, particularly during classroom discussions. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), speaking performance's success requires the ability to use the language properly. Similarly, Andrade (2006) delineated that English proficiency is the major success factor of international students' academic study. Therefore, there is a need to master language skills and be proficient in English because of difficulties in expressing opinions in class discussions. Eventually, students might end up preventing themselves from participating in the discussion or being reticent. Mukminin and McMahon (2013) established that Indonesian students in the US did not feel very confident in presenting ideas verbally and individually, something that might also happen to other Asian students. Presenting ideas verbally is a common issue faced by Asian students when studying in the US. Therefore, these situations might not benefit them in their studies in American universities.

To avoid all of these issues, especially dealing with speaking in classroom discussion, students should be well prepared. It can be tough to enter American universities and adjust to the education system and culture if students are not well prepared. English educators and students need to collaborate to improve linguistics knowledge for learners before studying abroad. According to Singh (2014), international students should be assisted to face academic challenges through training and preparation programs. Before applying to American universities, international students struggling with speaking issues should at least join preparation programs. These programs should cover speaking in academic situations, including speaking in classroom discussion and other related courses to prepare students entering the American education system.

Issues in participating in classroom discussion may be triggered by the lack of linguistic knowledge, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The issues could also be affected by other internal factors, such as low motivation and anxiety. Although Indonesian students stated that they did not have issues with motivation to study, they had anxiety in participating in classroom discussions. Littlewood (2007) asserted that a foreign language could easily create anxiety. To support

this claim, Dörnyei (2001) established that an unsafe environment is inherent in a classroom situation. Therefore, students may experience anxiety easily in classroom discussions. Furthermore, anxiety affects oral performance. Various studies show that high levels of anxiety negatively affect students' oral performance (Chiu et al., 2010; Karatas et al., 2016; Maeda, 2016; Toubot & Goh, 2018; Yan & Horwitz, 2008).

Some Indonesian students reported little problems with speech components, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. However, most of them still have problems in the classroom discussions because many claimed sources in the classroom induce anxiety (Effiong, 2016). Additionally, severe anxiety could affect people to think that they have bad grammar, vocabulary, and other linguistic knowledge. This finding is in line with Price's (1991), which showed that when students suffer severe anxiety, they become terrified and traumatized by the unsuccessful performance. This is because students may think that they have inadequate linguistic knowledge, even when this may not be the case. Owens et al. (2012) stated that severe anxiety can negatively affect working memory. Consequently, students might suddenly forget the appropriate grammar and vocabulary to use in communication during classroom discussions. Therefore, it is vital to recognize that anxiety could be the source of failure to participate in classroom discussions.

Indonesian students did not have any problem with the topics discussed in the classroom discussion. However, having good knowledge of the topic being discussed is essential. According to some studies, topic knowledge affects speaking performance (Hinkel, 2006; Huang & Hung, 2018; Khabbazbashi, 2017). Furthermore, a low mastery of topic knowledge might prevent students from participating in a classroom discussion because of not knowing what to say. Even when forcing themselves to talk, their opinions might be out of context and not well organized. Therefore, having good topic knowledge is vital for international students to successfully participate in classroom discussions.

6 Implications to ELT

The issues faced by Indonesian students can be used to illustrate how most Asians who treat English as a foreign language, deal with classroom discussion activities. In most cases, they deal with issues in grammar and vocabulary as a result of their deficiency in langauge knowledge. Furthermore, these issues should be considered for further English language learning. Educators need to focus on the teaching of vocabulary and grammar that can be commonly used in academic speaking and classroom discussion and overseas universities. Perhaps by focusing on these materials and teaching, students can be more prepared for some situations, such as academic communication and classroom discussion when continuing their education in English speaking countries.

The findings in this study should also alert the education institutions which prepare students before continuing with studies overseas. The education institutions should prepare students by building experiences of using linguistics and topic knowledge in academic speaking and classroom discussion. This may help Asian students to be well prepared before continuing overseas education activities, such as those in American Universities. The more well prepared they are, the more easier it will be for participation in classroom discussion activities.

Language anxiety is also a problem faced by Asian students when participating in classroom discussions. The existence of anxiety in language learning should be considered when preparing students before continuing studies overseas. Since anxiety has been confirmed as the determinant of failure in oral communication, English educators need to help students cope with it. They should teach students strategies to manage their anxiety, especially in academic English-speaking activities.

7 Conclusion and limitations

This study shows that speaking problems faced by Indonesian students in classroom discussion is mainly related to linguistic knowledge, including grammar and vocabulary. However, international students might feel anxious and forget all linguistic knowledge when talking in public. These problems could also be affecting other Asian students as they mostly share the same characteristics.

The findings in this study should be considered in view of some limitations. For instance, they cannot be generalized to all Asian students studying in the US since the participants involved were limited to only 20 Indonesians. Furthermore, this study was only conducted at one university in the US. Therefore, there is a need to use a larger dataset involving many Asian students from different countries and universities in the US. Moreover, some assumptions in this study need to be confirmed by exploring them further. Hopefully, this study can be replicated and extended.

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