

The Correlation between Students' Question Words Mastery and Their Speaking Ability in Asking Information

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Abstract: The research proposed to examine whether there was any significant correlation between students' question words mastery and their speaking ability due to the students' difficulty in asking information about someone' personal information. There were 28 students as the samples selected by using simple random sampling. This research used a quantitative approach which was presented in correlational research design. In collecting the data, the researcher used a test which consisted of a written and spoken test. The written test aimed to measure the students' question words mastery consisted of 27 questions. Meanwhile, in measuring the students' speaking ability, the students were asked to do a short dialogue with their peers asking and giving information about their family. Then, the data analysis was conducted based on the students' written and spoken test results and its correlation was measured. The result of the data analysis of the students' question words mastery and their speaking ability were fair proved by the mean scores of these were 69.6 and 70.8. Finally, the value of r_{obtained} was 0.608 which was higher than the value of r_{table} 0.374. In conclusion, there was a significant correlation between students' question words mastery and their speaking ability in asking information.

Keywords: Question words mastery, Speaking ability

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Introduction

As a global language, English is taught and learned in many countries over the world either in English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Then, English has become a compulsory subject since primary school to the tertiary school in some countries, including Indonesia. The reason why English has been included into Indonesian curriculum is that English as one of the most spoken languages nowadays would help Indonesian students to communicate globally with others from around the world. English is considered as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia where that means that English is not generally spoken in daily communication by the people. Therefore, it raises some challenges for Indonesian students to learn English effectively, especially when it comes to speaking where the students are expected to speak English fluently with the correct structures.

Speaking is one of language skills that is included to the productive skill, in which the students will not be able to produce the language if they do not have sufficient language input. In addition, according to Brown (2001), speaking skill is perceived as one of the most language skills needed in communication. Besides, to be successful in speaking English, a student is expected to be able to use grammar accurately, to use appropriate language depending on the target audience, to use proper vocabulary, and to be able to maintain the communication to create a successful interaction (Amelia et al., 2019). Meanwhile, as it was observed in EFL classroom, the challenges faced by the students in speaking English could be caused by the lack of grammatical competence, lack of vocabulary mastery, and the anxiety while speaking a foreign language. Thus, most of EFL students found that difficult to be able to speak fluently and grammatically correct in English. Since, whenever the students learn the grammar or tenses, they would start worrying about their sentences whether they speak it grammatically correct or not, then at the end it would stop them from communication. The challenges while speaking English have been always emerging in EFL students even though for speaking in daily topic, for instance talking about personal information.

In addition, there are three aspects of knowledge that should be involved in speaking of a language, namely 1) the knowledge of using the correct mechanics of language which consists of pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary; 2) the knowledge of being able to maintain the communication in terms of changing information and giving worth message for the interlocuter; 3) the knowledge of being able to apply pragmatic norms (knowing who is speaking to whom, in what context, about what, and why) (Sitepu & Indari, 2021). Those elements or knowledge should be mastered by the EFL students to perform a good English-speaking ability. Furthermore, there are five aspects to measure someone's speaking ability according to Brown (2001), there are: 1) comprehension which refers to the ability of creating an understable meaning to the interlocuter; 2) grammar is the use of proper language with a proper structure; 3) vocabulary is that a language learner needs sufficient vocabulary to communicate effectively; 4) pronunciation refers to the ability of pronouncing or spelling the words correctly and widely accepted; 5) fluency means that the language learner could speak without many pauses.

Besides, when it comes to interaction, there would be two people or more communicating by giving questions and information orderly. Since, English has its uniqueness in terms of the structure that is totally different from Indonesian structure, most of students perceived it more difficult to ask a question compared to answer or give the information in English. It is because the way Bahasa Indonesia and English in arranging a question sentence is different. Then, it makes the students get difficulty whenever they have to ask a question in English. In addition, in English, it is known that there are two kinds of question sentences, which are yes or no question and detailed-answer questions that use question words or WH-questions which consists of what, who, where, when, why, how, and so on.

In addition, teaching question words would help the students to improve their critical thinking as what it is required in the 21st century learners' characteristic. Since, creating a question sentence that is arranged well and understandable is not as easy as giving information when someone is being asked. It is because when the

students are required to give a question, they would need to link their prior knowledge, curiosity, and put all these into a meaningful question sentence. Furthermore, being able to give questions would play big role in improving the students' higher order thinking skills (Lee, 2015). Thus, to be able to give questions in English is highly important for the students.

Furthermore, EFL students were being asked about the literal meaning of each WH-questions, most of them would answer it correctly, in which, they students knew that *what* means *apa* in Bahasa, *when* means *kapan*, *who* means *siapa*, and so on. However, they still found it difficult whenever they have to create or arrange a complete question sentence which has gained all of the language elements that should be put there. Simultaneously with the research conducted by Silalahi (2017) on 60 university students as the participant. She did descriptive qualitative research and found out that the students still made mistakes in arranging question sentences in English by using WH-questions. The mistakes found were about choosing the right WH-questions to compose a question sentence, using the right article, verb, and an auxiliary verb, however, it was found that in terms of the meaningfulness of the question, the students were making little mistakes. In addition, she also found that most of EFL students are confused on using a particular question word especially on those which have similar meaning when those are translated into L1 as a result the students mixed up the use of each of the question word. For instance, the students were difficult to differentiate the use of *Who* and *Whom*, since those differences do not exist in Bahasa Indonesia.

The interference of mother tongue in learning L2 has always been an issue discussed in teaching English as a foreign language discussion. As what had been investigated by Kumar (2016) that most of Indian students made some errors due to the mother tongue interference that affected their L2 performance. Those students were repeating the same errors as using inappropriate question word, missing word, and putting the word order wrongly. This research result was in line with the study conducted by Sitepu and Indari (2021) focusing on the relationship of the students' WH-questions understanding and their speaking ability in expression of asking and giving opinion. They conducted study to the thirty-six of the eight-year students, and they found that there was significant correlation between those variables, namely the students' WH-questions understanding and their speaking ability in asking and giving opinions. Therefore, even though some people would agree that when someone is speaking English, the grammatical components do not really matter. However, it was proven that helping the students to improve their grammatical components understanding would highly affect the students' speaking ability becoming better.

Then, it was explained by Swan (1980) that the students would make some mistakes regarding to formulate a question sentence, especially by using WH-questions, namely 1) putting the order wrongly, for instance putting the subject after the main verb; 2) Omitting the auxiliary; 3) Overgeneralization the use of auxiliary verbs even when it is not needed. Therefore, it could be said that almost of EFL students faced challenges in creating a question sentence that led them to those mistakes. Furthermore, the existence of the auxiliary verbs in English is another challenge that has to be faced by Indonesian students in improving their WH-questions mastery, since such thing does not appear in Bahasa Indonesia structure.

Those situations also happened at one of senior high schools in Indonesia, where most of the students are able to answer the questions given orally, but they found it difficult if they had to express the question by using question words to maintain the communication, even for asking their friends' personal information. Even though, the students have learned how to talk and do introduction in English since they studied in elementary level, but if they had to ask someone about it, it was difficult for them. It might be caused by the lack of some aspects that are not mastered by the students to support their speaking ability as what has been stated earlier. Additionally, explaining the idea of the use question words in teaching English is useful for the students (Massytoh, 2021). Furthermore, if the students are being asked what they know about question words, they might know the meaning of *what, where, when, who, why, and how*, however if they are asked how to use those words properly in term of communication, they still found it difficult. It can happen because some words cannot be translated literally but it must be translated based on the context. For instance, "*What is your name?*" would have different meaning if the words in that sentence are translated word by word. Therefore, the students sometime get confused how to use the question words appropriately.

Previous study had been conducted by Massytoh (2021) related to the correlation between the students' mastery in using wh-questions and the students speaking ability at the junior high school level, and it showed that the students' mastery in using wh-question affected the students speaking ability. Other studies had also been conducted by Randong, and Marbun (2013) which was focused on the improvement of students' speaking ability through guided conversations. It was action research conducted to the students at junior high school. The result showed that by having a good grammar understanding, directly the students' speaking ability would increase especially for their accuracy and fluency. Both of those studies conducted at the junior high school level, however the current study conducted to the students at senior high school level which the assumption that the senior high school students' communication skill has developed to create a meaningful question sentence and apply their question words mastery to maintain the communication. In addition, the current study would focus on the ability of the students to ask questions in term of asking someone's personal information. Therefore, the current research was proposed under the title "*The Correlation Between the Students' Question Words Mastery and Their Speaking Ability in Asking Information*".

Research Questions

Based on the preliminary research conducted at one of senior high schools in Indonesia, the research questions were proposed as follows:

1. How are the students' mastery on using question words?
2. How are the students' speaking ability in term of asking information about someone' personal information?
3. Is there any significant correlation between the students' mastery on using question words and their speaking ability in asking information about someone' personal information?

Hypothesis

Ha: There is statistically significant correlation between the students' mastery on using question words and their speaking ability in asking information about someone' personal information.

Ho: There is no statistically significant correlation between the students' mastery on using question words and their speaking ability in asking information about someone' personal information.

Method

With regard to the research questions proposed earlier on seeking the students' question words mastery, the students' speaking ability in asking information about someone' personal information, and the correlation between the students' question words mastery and their speaking ability in asking information about someone' personal information, thus it was important to conduct a quantitative correlational research design. In addition, according to Gay (2009), the correlational study is used to measure the correlation between variables. In this study, it consists of two variables, namely the independent variable which is the students' WH-questions mastery (symbolized as variable X), and the dependent variable which is the students' speaking ability in asking someone' personal information (symbolized as variable Y). Furthermore, in the correlational study design, the researcher is trying to measure the degree of association between variables involved. Therefore, this study was aimed to find out the correlation between the students' mastery on using question words and their speaking ability in asking someone' personal information.

The participants of this research were the eleventh-grade students at one of state senior high school in Siak regency in which consisted of 281 students in total as the population of the study. Additionally, population is defined as all members that are eligible to participate in the study or it is defined as the group that the members have the similar characteristics. Then, from all members of population of the study, there were several members that were chosen as the samples of the study. As what has been stated by Ary (2016), sample is a set of data or group that was selected from the total number of the population by using method of sampling. Since, there were 281 students in total, then there were 28 students participated in this study chosen by using simple random sampling. It is because in determining the number of the sample in a study, if the total number of the population is less than 100 people/subjects then it is suggested to take all the members of the population as the study samples. However, if the total number of the population is more than 100, then it is allowed to take 10-15%. 20-25%, or more from the total number of the population as the study sample (Arikunto, 2015). Therefore, I took approximately 10% of the total population as the study samples. Since, in the correlational study, there would not be comparison among the participants, so the students were choosing by applying simple random sampling which meant all the students included in the population would have the same opportunity to be chosen as the samples of the study.

In addition, there were two tests applied to measure the students' question words mastery and their speaking

ability in asking information. The first test given was a written test aimed to find out the students' mastery of the use of question words. The written test given was focused on some aspects in constructing a question sentence, such as identifying each use of WH-questions, identifying the appropriate *be* across different tenses, identifying the appropriate *non-verb* complement for nominal sentence, identifying the appropriate auxiliary verb across different tenses, identifying the appropriate complement for the verbal sentence. The total number of the questions given were 27 questions in the form of multiple choices that had been validated by trying it out first. The second test given was a spoken test where the students were asked to do a peer-dialogue with their classmates asking information about their classmates' personal information. Before doing the dialogue, the students were told that they must gain information about their peers' personal information consisting of name, hobby, age, address, family, school, date of birth, and their food preference by using question words. The students would be recorded while doing the dialogue, then their speaking abilities would be assessed by the two raters. The students speaking ability would be assessed based on their comprehension, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and pronunciation.

- The Validity of the Test

As what has been mentioned earlier, before giving the test to the students, the test designed was tested to measure the degree of the validity and the reliability of the test. So, the results of the test would be valid which meant the test given measured as what it was supposed to measure. In determining, the degree of the validity of the test, I used SPSS 22.0 version to measure the validity coefficient (known as r_{counted}) of each item of the test. Later, the r_{observed} was compared to t_{table} coefficient with significance level (α) was 0.05 and degree of freedom (df) was $N - 2$. Furthermore, the item of the test would be considered valid if $r_{\text{observed}} > t_{\text{table}}$. Additionally, from the 35 items of questions designed as the instrument of measuring the students' mastery on using WH-questions, 27 items met the criteria of the validity test.

- The Reliability of the Test

Before giving the test to the students, the reliability test was needed to measure whether the test given was consistent and stable. Then, I conducted re-test reliability for the written test and inter-rater reliability for the spoken test to measure the reliability degree of each test. Then, the reliability coefficient (known as the alpha value) gained by calculating it using SPSS 22.0, it was gained 0.893 for the written test and 0.809 for the spoken test which meant those were higher than the minimum value of reliability degree referring to Cohen et al guidelines (2007) in which it should be at least 0.60 to be considered as reliable.

- The Data Analysis Technique

To analyze the data obtained in this study, it applied *Pearson Product Moment* correlation (Chee, 2013) analysis between the two variables involved. The *Pearson Product Moment* analysis could be only applied if the data

obtained was distributed normal and linear. Furthermore, to assist in analyzing the data, the SPSS 22.0 was used. Then, the correlation coefficient result from the SPSS would be interpreted by referring to the table below:

Table 1. Interpretation of the Correlation Coefficient

Interval of the Correlation Coefficient	Interpretation
0.800-1.000	Very high
0.600-0.799	High
0.400-0.599	High Enough
0.200-0.399	Low
0.000-0.199	Very low

Adopted from Arikunto (2015)

By referring to the table above, then it could be determined whether the correlation degree between those variables was high or low. Furthermore, to decide whether there was or there was no significant correlation, the critical values of *Pearson's* correlation with the degree of freedom (df) = $N - 2 = 26$ was if the $r_{\text{result}} > t_{\text{table}}$, so H_a hypothesis was accepted.

Results and Discussion

It was explained in the previous section that in collecting the data it consisted of two types, namely the written test for collecting the data on the students' mastery on using words, and the spoken test was used to collect the data on the students' speaking ability in asking about someone' personal information. The data were given to the students one by one, the each of test were be scored. From the data obtained, the mean score of each test were measured. The total scores of the students' mastery on using questions (X) were worth as 194, then it was divided by the total samples (28), and the mean score result was 69.6. meanwhile, for calculating the mean score for the students' speaking ability in asking information about someone' personal information, two scores given by two raters were calculated and divided, then the whole score obtained was 1982, and then divided by the total number of the students involved in this study (28), the result was worth as 70.8.

Furthermore, the classification testing of the students' mastery on using question words are divided into five level namely excellent, good, fair, less, and poor. Based on the statistical measurement, there was 1 student who got the lowest score which was in the interval 33-42, there was 1 student who was in the interval 43-52, there were 6 students who were in the interval 53-62, there were 4 students who were in the interval 63-72, there were 4 students in the interval 73-82, and there were 12 students in the interval 83-92 as the highest score that was obtained from the data collection in this study. From the 28 students joining this study as the sample, there were 22 students who succeeded the multiple-choice test on the students' mastery in using question words, and there were 6 students who failed the test.

Based on the results, some students were still found it difficult to differentiate the use of wh-questions, especially to the question words that have different meaning from Indonesian and English, such as choosing *What is your address?* or *where is your address?* Furthermore, the students were difficult in using proper auxiliary verb such as *is, are, do, or does* to complete a nominal or verbal question sentence. It is caused in Indonesian, auxiliary verb did not appear on its structure, so it made the students get confused about it.

In the 21st century, the students are expected to have a good communication skill to communicate each other, especially to communicate in English. Based on the spoken test given to the students, it found that some students had acquired a good English-speaking ability, but some of them had not owned it yet. It proved that senior high school students speaking ability span in various ways. Their habitual language learning affected their language skill as well. The one who often practiced and spoke in English would be easier to express his/her idea and feeling, including in term of asking information by using English question words. However, based on the scores given by two raters who assessed the students' speaking ability in asking information about someone's personal information, there were 6 intervals of the students' speaking ability in asking information about someone' personal information.

It was found that there 1 student who was in the interval 61-63, there were 4 students who were in the interval 64-66, there were 3 students who were in the interval 67-69, there were 12 students who were in the interval 70-72, there were 4 students who were in the interval 73-75, and there were 4 students who were in the interval 76-78. It could be considered that there were 24 students who categorized in fair level and 4 students who were categorized in the good level of speaking in asking information about someone' personal information. Furthermore, the students speaking ability had gained different score for each aspect of speaking assessment. Some of students gained high score in pronunciation aspect, or some of them did better in term of the fluency and vocabulary. It all was caused by their habitual in learning English, some students said that they liked listening to English song which helped them to improve their vocabulary mastery and pronunciation.

Based on the data analysis conducted, the result of data analysis showed that the correlation coefficient between variable X and variable Y was 0.608. Furthermore, the value of r_{table} acquired could be used to determine whether there was any significant connection between two variables. Additionally, it could be noticed that the $r_{observed}$ was 0.608 with a degree of significance of 1%, the score of the r_{table} obtained was 0.479; as a result, $r_{observed} > r_{table}$ (0.608 > 0.479).

In contrast, with a degree of significance of 5%, the score of the r_{table} obtained was 0.374; as a result, $r_{observed} > r_{table}$ (0.608 > 0.374); the findings demonstrated that there was a significant correlation between the students' mastery of question words and their speaking ability in asking information about someone's personal information and the level of correlation was strong based on Riduan's classification (2010) of the interpretation of correlation coefficient which it was stated that if the correlation coefficient interval was 0.60-0.799, that meant that the correlation level between both variables were strong.

Conclusion

To conclude the research conducted on examining the correlation between the students' question words mastery and their speaking ability in asking information about someone', especially asking about someone's personal information at the eleventh-grade students at one of state senior high schools in Indonesia. The mean score of the students' question words mastery was 69.6 and the mean score of the students' speaking ability in asking information was 70.8, in which it could be said that both mean scores of the two variables were not significant different.

The result of coefficient correlation was 0.608 with a degree of significance of 1%, and 5% meanwhile for the r_{table} obtained with the degree significance of 1% and 5% were 0.479 and 0.374. It could be concluded that $r_{observed} > r_{table}$ at both degree of significance of 1% and 5% and that meant that there was a significant correlation between the students' question words mastery and their speaking ability in asking information. Additionally, the level of correlation obtained was strong, since the coefficient correlation obtained was in the range of 0.60-799 which was classified into strong correlation.

Based on the research result, it could be concluded that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted, and the null hypothesis (H_o) was rejected. Thus, enhancing the students' question words mastery could affect the students' speaking ability. Therefore, it is suggested that English teachers could explain idea of the use of question words to enhance students' understanding about its structure as well as to avoid misunderstanding different context between Indonesian and English.

Recommendations

The present research consisted of 28 participants; therefore, the future research will need to be conducted with larger participants to get more comprehensive result. In addition, digging students' perceptions on formulating the WH-questions sentence would enrich the result of the research.

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