
DO GOOD WRITERS SPEAK BETTER? INVESTIGATION OF INDONESIAN EFL STUDENTS' SPEAKING ABILITY AND WRITING PROFICIENCY ACROSS COMPETENCE LEVELS

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the correlations between Indonesian EFL students' speaking ability and their writing proficiency at two levels: individually and across competence levels. It involved 74 undergraduate students majoring in English Language Teaching (ELT). They were taking Essay Writing course in the English Department of Universitas Negeri Malang (State University of Malang), East Java. The students were taught to write essays of five types: exemplification, comparison/contrast, classification, process analysis, and cause/effect analysis. However, in this study the students' writing proficiency was measured from the scores of their cause/effect analysis essays in particular. In the teaching and learning process, the students were made aware that they had to complete two tasks: writing a cause/ effect analysis essay on ELT topics and presenting their essays orally by using power point slides in front of the class. The students' essays and their presentation performances were rated by two raters after some practices to reach agreement in scoring. The results showed that there were positive correlations between Indonesian EFL students' speaking ability and their writing proficiency both individually or across competence levels. The findings suggest that the higher the students' writing proficiency scores, the higher their speaking ability scores; and the students' scores in speaking ability and writing proficiency were consistent across competence levels, meaning that the students who are at the top level remain to be at the top in the two productive skills.

Keywords: Indonesian EFL students, speaking ability, writing proficiency

INTRODUCTION

In order to use English for communication, students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are required to master the four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Based on the mode of communication, listening and speaking skills are needed for oral communication, while reading and writing skills are needed for written communication. While the four language skills are naturally used in an integrated way, the teaching of the four language skills are likely to be conducted discretely. This is especially the case in the English departments where the four language skills are taught as separate courses. For example, in the English Department of Universitas Negeri Malang, one of the prominent teacher training institutions in Indonesia, writing is taught in a series of three courses: *Paragraph Writing*, *Essay Writing*, and *Argumentative Writing*. Meanwhile, speaking is also taught in a series of three courses: *Speaking for Formal Interactions*, *Speaking for Informal Interaction*, and *Speaking for Academic Purposes* (Catalogue of the Department of English, 2015). As a result, classroom tasks and activities are likely to be

designed and taught exclusively for each of the four language skills.

The discrete teaching of the four language skills attracted the attention of EFL teachers and practitioners to design tasks and classroom activities which integrate the language skills. This is because research studies have shown the relation between the ability in one language skill to another. For example, Fatemi (2008) reported that reading and writing are two skills which are mutually reinforcing, meaning that if the students are good at reading, they are also proficient in writing. This is understandable because reading which is a receptive skill serves as a means to gain content and language input that can be used in writing, which is a productive skill. In fact the relation of languages skills was not only found between a receptive skill and a productive skill. HemmatNezhad, Jahandar and Khodabandehlou (2014) and Huy (2015) found that frequent practices in writing influence students' ability in speaking. More specifically, HemmatNezhad et al. revealed that writing helped students organize their thoughts to communicate effectively, while Huy (2015) suggested that students' good ability in writing enabled them to speak more effectively.

However, since writing and speaking are productive skills, little is known regarding the relationship of those two skills, especially in the context of EFL teaching in Indonesia. Normally the difficulty in speaking is attributed to a number of factors. For example, Gan (2012) stated that input-poor environment contributed to students' difficulty in speaking English. Spielberger (1983) mentioned that autonomic nervous system, a personality factor, was one of the major causes of students' inconvenience in oral performance. Other personality factors such as feeling tension, apprehension, nervousness, and excessive worry affected the students' speaking achievement especially during exam (Bashir, Azeem, & Dogar). Unlike the previous studies which have examined environmental and personality factors, this study focuses on the relationship between writing and speaking skills,

Based on the gaps of research in the relationship between EFL students' speaking ability and writing proficiency and whether their speaking ability and writing proficiency were consistently related across performance levels, the research questions are stated as follows:

- (1) Is there any correlation between the EFL students' speaking ability and their writing proficiency?
- (2) Is there any correlation between the EFL students' speaking ability and their writing across competence levels?

METHOD

This correlational study involved 74 undergraduate students who took *Essay Writing* course in the English Department of Universitas Negeri Malang, one of the leading universities in Indonesia. The students were from three classes: Class A (25 students), Class B (26 students), and Class C (23 students). The Essay Writing course aims to help students write essays of five types of development: exemplification, comparison and contrast, classification, process analysis, and cause/effect analysis essays. This research deals with the teaching of how to write cause/effect analysis essays in particular. *Refining Composition Skills: Rhetoric and Grammar* written by Smalley, Ruetten, and Kozirev's (2001) was used as the textbook from which the teaching materials were taken.

The teaching of how to write cause/effect analysis essays was divided into 2 stages: the writing stage and the speaking stage. First, they had to write a cause/effect analysis essay on topics related to English Language Teaching (ELT) and then they had to present

their essays in the form of power point presentation. Some of the students essays had the following titles: *The causes why ELT students get bored easily in grammar class; the effects of using digital/mobile phone dictionary for students; and the effects of extensive reading on improving students' reading comprehension.*

The students' scores in cause/effect analysis essays and their scores in presentations were used as the data of the study. A colleague and I scored the students' essays. Before scoring was done, we practiced in scoring some essays. Disagreement in the results of scoring were discussed. The students' essays were scored by using Jacobs, Zinkraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, and Hughey's (1981) "ESL Composition Profile." The profile can be used to mark the students' essays by considering five components of writing and their weightings: content (30), organization (20), vocabulary (20), language use (25), and mechanics (5). The maximum score possible for students' essays is 100. The instrument used for measuring the speaking performance was adapted from Napa Valley College' (n.d.) sample scoring rubrics for presentations. Unlike the original version of the instrument, in the adapted version, language use component was added because the instrument was at measuring the speaking performances of EFL learners. The instrument has some categories and weightings: content (40), organization (20), language use (20), and presentation style (20).

The students' scores in speaking ability and writing proficiency were correlated by using Statistical Package for Social Studies (SPSS) program. To find out the correlation of speaking ability and writing proficiency across competence level, the competence levels for courses offered at Universitas Negeri Malang were used. The competence levels of students' scores of speaking ability and writing proficiency are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Competence Levels of the Students' Scores

No	Scores	Value	Competence Level
1	85 – 100	A	Advanced
2	80 – 84	A-	Pre-advanced
3	75 – 78	B+	Post-intermediate
4	70 – 74	B	Intermediate
5	65 – 69	B-	Pre-intermediate

RESULTS

The presentation of the results begins with the results of the correlation of the students' speaking ability and their writing proficiency. Then students' speaking ability was related to their writing proficiency across competence groups.

Correlation between Speaking Ability and Writing Proficiency

Linear regression test was applied to know the correlation between speaking ability and writing proficiency. This is because it was believed that writing proficiency would affect speaking ability. Therefore, the distribution of the scores needed to be known before further analysis was conducted. For this purpose, one sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to know the score distribution. The result is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Test of one-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Speaking Ability and Writing Proficiency Scores

	Speaking Ability	Writing Proficiency
N	74	74
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	78.9865	79.2432
	6.97254	5.20750
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	1.194	.612
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.116	.848

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

Table 1 shows the scores of speaking ability and writing proficiency of the 74 students. The mean of speaking ability scores is 78.98, while the mean of writing proficiency is 79.24, with the difference .26. The statistical analysis results in Z 1.19 for speaking ability and Z .61 for writing proficiency. The result of p for both writing and speaking are more than .05, with speaking ability .12 and writing proficiency .84. This means that the scores of the students are distributed normally for the two productive skills. Further analysis was done to know the correlation coefficient of the speaking ability and writing proficiency. The result is shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Correlation between Students' Speaking Ability and Writing Proficiency

Model	r	r Square	Adjusted r Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Sig. (p)
1	.658a	.433	.425	5.28874	.00*

a. Predictors: (Constant), writing

b. Dependent Variable: speaking

* ($p \leq .05$)

Table 2 depicts that the correlation coefficient (r) is .658 with significance level .00. This means that there is a correlation between students' speaking ability and writing proficiency. Correlation coefficient (r) varies from -1 (perfect negative correlation) to 1 (perfect positive correlation). To interpret the coefficient correlation level in the present study, we use the range of $r = 0-0.2$ as no or very weak correlation, $r = 0.2-0.4$ as weak correlation, $r = 0.4-0.6$ as moderate correlation, $r = 0.6-0.8$ as strong correlation, and $r = 0.8-1.0$ as *very strong* to perfect correlation (Salkind, 2000). Thus, $r = .658$ means that there is strong (positive) correlation between speaking ability and writing proficiency. This suggests that if the students' writing proficiency is high, the students' speaking ability is also high. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .433$) shows that 43.3% of the variance of speaking ability scores can be explained by the writing proficiency scores. It implied that 43.3% of the total changes in students' speaking ability scores are determined by their writing proficiency scores.

Correlation between Speaking Ability and Writing Proficiency across Competence Levels

To answer the second research question, correlation was made across four competence: advanced, post-intermediate, intermediate, and pre-intermediate.

Accordingly, there were four means for speaking ability (i.e., 85.31; 70.38; 74.47, & 72.50) and four means for writing proficiency (i.e., 86.37; 79.93; 74.14, & 69.75) based on the competence levels, respectively. The result of one sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for the four groups is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Test of One-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Speaking Ability and Writing Proficiency Scores

	Speaking Ability	Writing Proficiency
N	4	4
Normal Parameters ^{a,b}	77.9150	77.5475
	5.971613	7.20937
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	.453	.364
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.986	.999

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

Table 4 depicts that the means across four proficiency levels for speaking ability (77.92) and writing proficiency (77.55). It also shows that means across proficiency levels are normally distributed. Table 5 shows the result of the computation of correlation coefficient of the speaking ability and writing proficiency across proficiency levels by using Pearson Product Moment.

Table 5. Correlation between Students' Speaking Ability and Writing Proficiency across Proficiency Levels

Variables	Means	Deviation standard	Correlation coefficient (r)	Significance
Speaking ability	77.92	5.7	.992	.004*
Writing proficiency	77.55	7.2		

* ($p \leq .05$)

It can be seen in Table 5 that the correlation coefficient (r) is .992 with significance level .004. Thus, there is a correlation between students' speaking ability and writing proficiency across proficiency levels. The correlation coefficient of .992 is considered to be very strong as it approaches 1, the perfect (positive) correlation (Salkind, 2000). The result shows that there is consistency in the way groups of students excel. Those who are at advanced level in writing proficiency remained to be at advanced levels in speaking ability.

DISCUSSION

The results of the study shows that there is a positive correlation between Indonesian EFL students speaking ability and their writing proficiency. This means that the ability is speaking in the form of power presentation is correlated with the practice in writing essays. This is relevant to the findings of research conducted by HemmatNezhad et al. (2014). They reported that students' frequent writing practices lead to betterment in their speaking ability. Writing and speaking as productive skills share the same nature of representing ideas and thoughts onto language, be it in the form of written or spoken discourse. Accordingly, writing is apt to make students better thinkers in which they elaborate their thoughts. It could in turn improve their speaking skill (El-Koumy, 1998). In writing which is a process of discovery, the writers are struggling to think, compose and put

their ideas together to meet the readers' expectation (Ismail, 2011). This process also happens in speaking which requires the speakers to formulate speech based on their thoughts to address the interlocutors.

The finding of the study is also relevant to a number of previous studies which examined the effect of writing programs on students' speaking ability or relationship between the two productive skills (e.g. Blake, 2009; Cumming, Kantor, Baba et al., 2005). Blake (2009) reported the result of providing writing exercises involving vocabulary and grammar practice. He then tested the students' speaking ability, Blake's study showed the impact of students' writing proficiency to their speaking ability in which oral fluency improvement is possible through a writing program. In addition, writing helps students develop their ability in using the language with precise vocabulary and accurate grammar use. Cumming et al. (2005) found that better writing proficiency was linked with accurate grammar use, longer responses, and complex syntactic construction. Thus, writing practices lead to students' speaking accuracy and fluency.

Some studies investigating the impact of dialog journal writing on EFL students' speaking also revealed that writing can improve students' oral production, speaking accuracy and fluency and encourage effective oral communication (Bagheri & Pourgharib, 2013; Rokni & Seifi, 2014). Writing which provides longer time to construct the sentences enables students to pay attention to their choices of vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, the students found it easier to speak after writing a draft in the form of their essays. This yielded high correlation between the students' proficiency in writing and their ability in speaking.

It can be stated that the more the students write their ideas in a written form, the easier they put their ideas into the spoken form. In short, the finding of this study examines the idea presentation process in writing as a practice for students in representing their ideas into spoken discourse.

CONCLUSION

This paper has revealed the relation between Indonesian EFL students' speaking ability and writing proficiency. In general, the result shows that there are strong correlation between Indonesian EFL students' speaking ability and their writing proficiency. This suggests that speaking activities which are preceded by writing activities help students produce speech with better accuracy and fluency for effective communication. The result of the study also shows the relation of speaking ability and writing proficiency not only took place among individual students, but also among students across competence levels. This implies that students of various competence levels who participated in the writing practices of the same materials and teaching and learning activities in the Essay Writing course are likely to improve their speaking ability at their respective competence levels. English teachers are expected to train the students to write well in order to help them speak in a more proficient way. This is especially important for the teaching of the two productive skills in the English department of universities in Indonesia, where writing and speaking courses are taught as separate courses. Additionally, further research might be conducted to investigate whether additional exercises in writing given to students of lower competence levels contribute to the transformation of their speaking ability to the higher competence levels.

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