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# Students' Rules and Practices: How to Speak English Fluently?

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**Abstract:** This study aims to investigate students' rules and practices in how they maintain speaking fluency. Six students were the participants in this research that met the criteria. They were interviewed individually as the part of qualitative approach in research by using digital tape recorder. In-depth investigation was aimed at searching their rules and practices in maintaining fluency in speaking. The findings show that the participants skipped grammar rules but not the English tenses in speaking. Vocabulary learning starts from understanding words and phrases in context. Translation occurred when they met unfamiliar topic. Movie is mentioned as the perfect English language input. Last, the internet is the useful media to self-expose into rich English environments; it is easy and cheap to access. It is expected that the research contribute to the English language learning, speaking fluency in particular.

**Keywords:** Speaking fluency, speaking rules, English language learning.

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## INTRODUCTION

Acquiring second or foreign language is many people dream in this world. English language is one of the popular languages that learned and taught either in formal or informal education. In Indonesia particularly, many people spend a lot of money merely to study English. They believe that being able to talk in English will bring benefits in life. One and the most obvious are for communicating with people around the globe. This will ease the international access and good for personal networking. Another is to get jobs easily because nowadays most companies require English proficiency regardless one's area of interests or professionalism. Thus, English has become the primary need for people to widen opportunities in work and life.

It is truism that speaking ability is the most prestigious skills in English language. Unlike other skills, when speaking in English, someone has to think fast, respond quickly, no hassle and little hesitation. This, sometimes, what make people consider speaking skill is more problematic and harder than other skills. Moreover, people seem to easily justify someone ability when they talk in English. Once you are unable or many pauses in communication, it is likely that you are not good at English. It will be different when you read or write in English that provides more time to arrange and develop good comprehension and composition. (Hirsch, 2003)

According to Sawir (2005) success in language acquisition is influenced by many interrelated factors. These include the social



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context of the learning, cultural beliefs about language learning, the status of the target language, and the processes of language learning itself. (August, Shanahan, & Escamilla, 2009); (Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003). Walqui (2006) argued for the importance of contextual factors in second language learning. Factors such as language (language distance, native language proficiency, and language attitude), learner (diverse needs and goals, role models, and support) and learning process (learning styles, motivation, and classroom interaction) need to be considered. This points to the importance of formal instruction and classroom practices in shaping learners second language learning (Masgoret & Gardner, 2003); (Mondada & Doehler, 2004); (Borg, 2003). However, while most students seem to lose efforts in English speaking ability, some students at State College of Higher College (STAIN) Curup show an outstanding performance. The researcher gave them TOEFL IBT test sample in speaking and they responded to the tasks and questions hastily. The students also maintained fluency in speaking with little mistakes. This fourth semester students can also talk about a topic longer and well structured. I am certain that the students have developed their own way of learning in improving speaking ability, fluency in particular.

The successful of language learning depends on many things. However, based on the researcher experience in teaching the students, she observed that it is likely classroom activities and interactions do not contribute much to the students' learning skills progress. The students do not show significant improvement throughout the teaching and learning process. The assumption is that, individual and independent learning seem to support more to students' successful language learning. In fact, the students have 90 minutes in a week from speaking class that will probably has a little effect on improving speaking ability.

In English study program at STAIN Curup, English skills are emphasized than any other subjects. Among the four skills, speaking in English looks noticeably weaker to other skills. Seeing this situation, the researcher found some students that are good at speaking in English. They are able to maintain fluency, less hesitation and risk-taker. Thus, a moment to communicate with them is a happy hour. These kind of students are hardly found at English study program. The researcher was interested in investigating how the students learn English language, how they improve their speaking skills and how they maintain fluency in communication. The researcher believes that the students have personal, independent and individual ways to improve their speaking skills. My aim was to understand the students' rules in improving their speaking skills; speaking fluency in particular. Therefore, this research intended to share the finding of this study to other students and teachers as an input to improve their learning and teaching speaking skills.

Based on the description in the identification of the problems, I came up with two research questions that needed further exploration. The research questions:

1. What rules do students apply to improve fluency in English speaking?
2. How do the students practice the rules in their learning contexts?

## METHOD

This research adopts the qualitative approach. As Mills & Gay (2015) defines 'qualitative research seeks to probe deeply into the research setting in order to obtain understandings about the way things are, why they are that way. It also involved collecting, arranging and interpreting non-numerical information. The data in this research was verbal responses that were taken from the interview. It focused on the natural setting of the students' individual contexts. The research was a case study in a sense that only investigating some students at fourth semester in English Department STAIN Curup. Case study is "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when

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the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident". The advantage of a case study is that it can gain in-depth data and more focus to small sample population. According to Neale, Thapa, & Boyce (2006) sates that case study provides much more detailed information than what is available through other methods", because it focuses on single person or group with the same bounded system. Besides, it allows one to present data collected from multiple methods (i.e., surveys, interviews, document review, and observation) to provide the complete story. In addition, it permits a researcher to reveal the way a multiplicity of factors have interacted to produce the unique character of the entity that is the subject of the study. Thus, case study is able to present detail data about particular subject where the uniqueness might occur.

**Participant Selection**

This study was carried out in STAIN Curup in English study program room. The participants were chosen through procedures as follow: First, all students at fourth semester were identified in class to examine their English speaking skills. Second, the students then tested through interviewing. Third, some students then were selected based on their performance in speaking ability; speaking fluency in particular.

**Data Collection and Instruments**

Each participant was interviewed individually in the classroom in STAIN Curup. The participants were asked to give response in relation to researcher interview guide about their rules and practices in improving speaking fluency. The interview guide was structured and open ended. During the interview session, the researcher sometimes randomly asks questions to maintain natural setting. To avoid disturbance like writing notes while interviewing, the researcher used digital voice recorder to help him. The voice recorder was also used for transcription and further analysis.

1. How do you put grammar rules in relation to speaking skills? (Don't study grammar)
2. How do you treat new vocabularies when starting to speak? (Start from phrase not vocabulary)
3. Do you always translate when you want to speak in English?
4. Do you listen and repeat English conversation? How this might help your speaking ability? (Listen and try to speak)
5. How do you expose yourself into English language? What is the best input that you use to improve your speaking skill? (correct materials)

**Data Analysis**

The data first transcribed and simplified into the analysis as I can identify the specific issues corresponding to the investigation. I also employed categorization or coding process. This process magnified the themes that occurred during the data analysis. In details, according to Tailor the following were some stages that I employed in analyzing the data:

a. Get to know data

The first thing was get to know the qualitative data. Actually, during the data collection, not all data were qualitative. Sometimes, the provided information did not add meaning at all. In this research, open-ended interview by using interview guide sometimes made the students answers came out from what the research needed. Even though it was qualitative data, sometimes it was not necessary to put in the analysis. In this research, I certainly realize that some students spoke topics that out of the boundaries that was the research questions. However, I strived to put the students responses kept on track. Sometimes, this caused difficulties due to limited time allocations.

b. Focus the analysis

The next step was focusing on the analysis to the research questions. Although qualitative research questions could change during the analysis, the key

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question will help where to get started. There are two common approaches to get the focus in analyzing. At first focus by topic, time or event and another way is focus by case, individual and group. The key words in this research were students' rules, speaking fluency and English language learning. Thus, I used these keywords as the analysis starting points.

c. Categorize information

The information in the data then categorized in to components such as ideas, concepts, behaviors, interaction, and incidents that be organized in to coherent categories. The focus of the categories depended on the purpose of the research. There were two categories found in this research namely:

1. Finding out students rules in language learning
2. Describing students practices in maintaining speaking fluency

d. Identify patterns and connection within and between categories.

After making categories of the data, the next step was identifying patterns and connection between those categories to find themes. The categories were identified from smaller part; within two categories, among categories, and the relationship of all categories. There were five patterns in this research that is:

1. Grammar is ignored but necessary
2. Phrases help and dictionary assist
3. Need Translation for particular aims
4. Movie is the best language input
5. Internet is my life

e. Interpretation

The last step was making interpretation of the themes. It should lead to researcher finding in his research because of data categorization. The result would be describing the purpose of the research questions. Sometimes, new finding which out of the research questions was found. Finally, I interpreted in area that the students offered in order to be fluent in speaking. Then, to what starting points the other students should step up to better in English language learning.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part, I divided into two: research findings and discussion. In the findings, I presented the result from interview that I got from six participants. The participants were highly selected based on the determined criteria. They were good and fluent at English speaking skills. Each participant was interviewed individually in the classroom to maintain privacy. The responses were recorded by using digital recorder and transcribed. In the discussion section, I tried to find the theme upon the correlation with my research questions. This explained in detail the analysis about the area of students' rules and practices in language learning, fluency in particular.

### Participant A

The first participant, when questioned about grammar, views that grammar has two sides in effect. First, it ensures the talk is understood by the opponents. She does not like to make mistakes in grammar because she doubts that grammatical mistakes will only create bog down in communication. She mentions a statement 'how can someone understand my talk if I use wrong grammar'. She is certain that accuracy in grammar is the former of successful communication. Second, grammar is also a problem when the target is fluency in speaking. She agrees that some grammatical rules put burden in her head; particularly the tenses. It is not very easy to transform tenses rules in communication, mainly when she has to think the present tense and the past tense at the same time. She also realizes that her first language affects the way she uses grammar in English. However, to maintain fluency, she admits that 'simple' grammar such as be, plural/ singular, auxiliaries are ignored because it does not really change meaning when mistakes occur.

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Moreover, she agrees that learning vocabularies should start from understanding phrase. She thinks that phrases have exact meaning that words sometimes do not have. Words meaning are multiple when it is inserted into different sentences. Thus, she prefers to memorize phrases to words in order to fast speaking. She mentions dictionary as the helper for 'emergency' unfamiliar words; guessing is her first strategy. Talking about language input, she usually watches western movies by closing the subtitle. Interestingly, she also watch Korean movie with English subtitle because she feels understand better the contextual use of English language through the movies. To get the English rich environment, she joins University English club (Elicos) which is held twice a week. Regular practice with the chosen friend is conducted in and out classrooms. Sometimes, when she has opportunities, having a small conversation with lecturers is also useful to improve speaking ability.

**Participant B**

Participant B has similar perspectives about rules in grammar. She agrees that grammar is important in communication. It helps speakers and opponents understand each other. 'Talking without grammar is like a journey without map' she says. However, generally speaking, by focusing on grammar accuracy she is sure that fluency is a dream. She tends to forget some grammatical rules when she is in a situation of spontaneous conversation. A thing that she cannot do is that mistakes in English tenses as she considers it as the significant point in all English language learning. In addition, vocabularies learning to her are not problematic. She studies phrases in a particular situation then memorize it for further use. Understanding phrases is better to understand contextual use of the language.

Besides, it is easily to remember because the consistency of the meaning. In choosing language input, she relies on western movies as the trusted source of English language. Despite her disregard toward friends' competences, she always compares what she gets from University with the movies. She admits that the situation at the Universities does not improve her speaking skills. Class is her only opportunity to practice speaking ability.

**Participant C**

Unlike the last two participants, C has her own view about grammar rules. Although she agrees that grammar slow down communication, she proposes context focus as the tip to maintain fluency in speaking. She says that when the ideas come across then nobody pays attention to grammar mistakes. Grammar rules are the ingredients and we as the speaker is the chef. It depends on us how to arrange vocabularies to create sentences to make others understand. Furthermore, before she starts talking, she usually translates into English. However, translation involves in the process of ideas arrangements and not words. A formal topic (academic) needs more time to think and translate because she realizes that her vocabularies are limited. When she is in an informal situation (with friends) and with familiar topics, translation is never committed. Movie is her best source to enrich language input. While watching movie, usually she is assisted with dictionary; open and close to get meaning. Practicing with friends, she thinks; help her to submerge into rich English situation. She never sets particular time to practice; spontaneous after class is preferable.

**Participant D**

Grammar rule is not her concern when she tries to speak in English. The most important thing is that she wants to ensure that the conversation goes smoothly. She states that when she communicates, nobody really pays attention to her grammatical mistakes. As long as the listener understand what she means, skipping some correct grammar is not a big deal. However, she does not like to make mistakes in English tenses because of her belief that tenses mean

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everything in English. Moreover, she gains vocabularies many from articles she reads. It is not exactly about phrases but she knows how to use words into appropriate context based on the readings. Translating from first language is sometime engaged in her head and she really does like it. Most often, she just gives a shot on what she wants to say. Later, she will find ways to make the conversation keep on the go. In addition, her main source of language input is from Internet. YouTube is mentioned as a reliable media to learn English. Usually, while watching video clip from YouTube, she directly imitates because she really loves it.

**Participant E**

Fluency is important but not everything in speaking she said. It means that she wishes to be fluent but does not want to make many mistakes. She tells about her experience when had an opportunity to talk with native speaker. At that time, she neglected English tenses and said thing in the past by using present tense. The native speaker got confused and eventually she focuses on tenses accuracy ever since. In addition, vocabulary to her is meaningless if she cannot use it in the appropriate context. When she knows unfamiliar vocabulary, she usually does not memorize it individually but applies the vocabulary either in writing or in speaking. She thinks that this method works best for her to improve her vocabularies. Talking with friends is also another way she implements to get rich English. Usually, her friends and she choose an easy topic to target fluency in speaking.

**Participant F**

This last participant has very different views about grammar in speaking fluency. She says that grammar accuracy in speaking does not bar her fluency bur it helps her confidence to speak. The more confident someone the more fluent he can speak. She thinks that grammar rule is not the problem but students anxiety and confidence is matter. Furthermore, when she meets new vocabulary, she usually tries to interpret the meaning before consulting to dictionary. She said that at this time, dictionary is the most reliable source of meaning accuracy. She often translates before speaking in English; she does it only if she has to. More formal and academic topic is her reason to translate before speaking. It is difficult topic so she needs time to think about the appropriate vocabularies, tenses and grammar. To dissolve into English language environment, she counts on social media. Join into chat room is her strategy to meet native speakers. Here, she finds the best opportunity to improve both vocabularies and grammar. She said that usually the native speakers correct her grammatical mistakes and suggest new vocabularies.

In this part of discussion, I restate my research objectives: finding what students rules in maintaining speaking fluency and describing how these rules applied in students daily activities. Throughout the findings from the interview, I found that most students' response is alike in the sense they are in the same semester, best friends and girls. This probably creates bias in the research, but I tried to minimize it by keeping individual courses. Besides, prior to the interview, the students were told that their privacy is kept confidential and no responses will reflect their grades at University. In this research, I scrutinized the findings in five themes:

1. Grammar is ignored but necessary

   Theories have suggested that to improve speaking fluency, language learner should not pay attention too much toward grammar rules. It will only create more time of processing thus slowing down as the consequence. A language learner will learn best by using the language in the real communication. Many recommend that grammar rules should be positioned as a guiding map and not as an instruction. However, the participants in this research seem do not totally agree with this concept. They think that grammar is important and

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contribute to speaking fluency. How someone can speak fluently if he is not sure how to arrange words into meaningful sentences without good grammar.

I think grammar support fluency because I think fluency cannot come without good grammar. How can others understand our talk if we use wrong grammar? If people don't understand then it is not fluency for me.

(Data source: Interview with participant A)

Grammatical rules for the participants are not a burden to maintain speaking fluency. In fact, it helps to improve both accuracy and fluency. However, the participants admitted that in communication they sometimes skipped grammar rules. They mentioned it as 'simple' grammar (plural/ singular, s/-es, be and auxiliaries) and 'hard grammar (Tenses of time). The last mentioned is usually stated as the burden in speaking fluency.

Actually, I really don't care about grammar when I talk because I think the most important thing is other speakers can understand what I mean. But, it is only for simple grammar I do that. For difficult grammar like tenses, I must make it right.

(Data source: Interview with participant C)

At this point, I conclude that grammar is not a ghost in speaking fluency. It has two states for both benefits and disadvantages. Good grammar maintains fluency because both speakers can understand the meaning. Thus, someone should understand those random vocabularies if it is not composed correctly into good grammar (good tenses). If no one understand how it is possible to maintain fluency in communication. However, skipping some grammatical rules also brings benefits for fluency. Therefore, to maintain fluency in speaking, language learner should be aware of which grammar rules are noticeably affect meaning and which one is fine for skipping. The knowledge will help speaking fluency for future efforts.

2. Phrases help, dictionary assist

Learning vocabularies from phrase is believed better than understanding single vocabulary. Phrase is useful when we want to speak 'automatic' English; less effort to think about what vocabularies are going to use when talking. For example, a phrase 'please come in' means asking someone to get into the room. It is easy to remember and use in conversation. In contrast, when we try to understand word per word then the meaning is not easy to interpret. In this concept, the participants start from phrase rather than words to understand vocabulary meaning. They said that lack of vocabulary is common problem in speaking. It is difficult to speak fluently if they have limited vocabulary; hesitation and pauses are the result. However, phrase is different in the sense that it is not a combination of words. It is interpreted as a single word with its own meaning and use.

Sometimes I feel stuck with my vocabulary and stop speaking. This time I don't think about fluency because my focus is to find the vocabulary. Usually I try everything by using my body language or first language to maintain the conversation. But phrase. I like phrase because it is easy and usually use in conversation. I feel it is just come out without thinking too much.

(Data source: Interview with participant D)

In addition, some participants still rely on dictionary to enrich their vocabularies. Although it looks the old method, dictionary is very useful as the trusted source of words meaning. The participants think that dictionary is the very first move to understand vocabulary. Next, they see the application of the vocabulary through phrase, simple sentence and complex sentence. It creates

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rehearsal to plant the vocabularies in mind; as a result, it will be automatically used in speaking.

3. Need Translation for Particular Aims

Translating from first language into target language is common in language learning. Most students do this at the beginning of learning especially in writing up paragraph. Nevertheless, doing translation in speaking is not good for fluency. It is because the process in the brain takes longer to compose first language to target language. The idea is to think in the target language and speak up. This is where fluency achieved. The participants admitted that they sometimes translate from their first language before start talking. They translate because the topic is unfamiliar. For example, topic about politics, science and engineering are beyond their knowledge. However, when they have daily conversation and light discussion about people, they never translate and talk spontaneously. A difficult topic does not block the participants from fluency but merely slow them down a little bit.

> It depends on the topic whether I translate or not. I don't really like about politics and science…that's why I don't know what I want to say. I have to think about idea first before I discuss with my friends.

(Data source: Interview with participant C)

> It is not about I can speak fluently or not… usually I never think too long if the topic is familiar to me. Translating is not the words or sentences but the idea. What make me longer and loose fluency is. I have to raise some ideas first before I can talk fluently.

(Data source: Interview with participant D)

4. Movie is the best language input

Language input is very crucial in language learning. It is also not only about the amount of input but also about the correct input. Some students sometimes get bad input (e.g. bad pronunciation) from the beginning of language learning. It usually continues over time and difficult to change. Thus, good language input is advised to be granted since in the first place to ensure better future learning. One of the reliable sources of 'original' language input is from movies. Many language learners love watching movies and take advantage from it. They can learn new vocabularies and know how to use it in the appropriate contexts. Usually movies are equipped with English subtitle. For the participants, movies are the primary source of language input. They watch, listen and imitate the actors to practice their English. They are certain by doing this method they can see the real example of real English.

> It does not mean that I don't trust my friends of my lecturer. Sometimes I find it just different and I always compare with movies. Eventually, I trust movies as the good English and use it in conversation. But I never correct my friends' mistakes because I am afraid they will argue with me.

(Data source: Interview with participant E)

5. Internet is my life

Nowadays, the students can have easy access into internet. No matter how isolated an area, internet connection is everywhere and cheap to purchase. This benefits both teachers and students in learning. The internet provides almost everything we need. Text, video and audio are feasible to all people around the world. The most popular today is about social media where everybody can introduce and know each other through internet. To submerge into rich English environment, the participants make use the Internet. They join the groups to meet and chat with native speakers from all around the world. This media helps them

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to see through the real usage of English language. In addition, internet also provides multimedia of learning. Audio and video is accessible by click away. For example, YouTube, as the popular video streaming program, presents thousands video collections. The participants can access through their Smartphone or laptop at ease. It has become participant daily need, as they feel lost when having no access toward Internet.

> When I chat with some friends from US, they usually encourage me to use English all the time. Although I don't feel confident but the native speakers always give feedback on my mistakes. Here, I can know how to use English in real situation. I get something that sometimes I cannot have in class.

(Data source: Interview with participant F)

> I feel crazy when I cannot access the internet for one day. Yes..I use it for social media but I also need YouTube. I think YouTube help me improve my English. The video in English I usually watch and repeat. Especially the pronunciation and vocabularies. I just can't live without it.

(Data source: Interview with participant D).

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The very first phenomena I wrote in background are about students' problems to maintain speaking fluency. Many students, in fact, wish to speak like native speakers; be fluent. However, there is so many problems that they cannot overcome. My assumption is that these students are capable but they just do not know how to make it happen. I found some students at English study program that are good at English; they are fluent speaker of English. The students were identified of having their own rules to maintain speaking fluency. They also committed the rules into daily practices. Throughout this research I found five themes that answered my research question: what rules the students applied and how they implemented it in maintaining fluency in speaking:

1. Grammar is ignored but necessary
2. Phrases help and dictionary assist
3. Need Translation for particular aims
4. Movie is the best language input
5. Internet is my life.

Based on the findings, I concluded that the participants in this research agreed that grammar slowed down the process of speaking. However, they notified that grammar is still important to make an understanding thus output in speaking fluency. To learn vocabulary, the participants preferred memorizing and practicing phrases to words group. Dictionary is also preferred, but it is just positioned as secondary way of vocabulary learning. Translation is normal for the participants because they need time to think about the unfamiliar topic. They need time to raise ideas but not to translate sentences. Watching movies was mentioned as the best tool for language input. The participants said that movie is the example of real English that the can trust. Finally, to submerge into rich English environment, the participants relied on the Internet. As this media is easily accessible and getting cheaper nowadays, the participants loved it. They exposed themselves through chat rooms and video streaming which is believed to improve their speaking fluency.

This research, definitely, beyond the expectation for its contribution toward English language learning. Speaking fluency in particular as I have raised it. However, I began the study by carefully identifying phenomena in my own institution and did the investigation based on the empirical approach. The findings are expected to contribute for my own students and the area of English language learning, particularly in improving speaking ability. Final statement, I do realize that during the research there were some limitations due to my limited capacity as a researcher. The participants in this research were all woman, in the same class

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and my own students. There is a probability of subjective perspectives in interview session. I suggest, for further research, try to see factors like genders, age and power distance as the components to deep investigation in the area of English language learning.

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