

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

This study is concerned with investigating the attitudes of fifty senior high school English teachers towards performance-based assessments on students' speaking skills and how they conduct performance-based assessments to assess students' speaking skills in the classroom. This chapter elaborates the background of the study, the research questions, the purposes of the study, the significances of the study, the scope of the study, and the clarification of the terms.

1.2. Background of the Study

The main purpose of English language teaching is to make students able to use the target language for communication (Torky, 2006; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In line, Riggenback and Lazaraton (1991) point out that students of second or foreign language education programs are considered successful if they can communicate effectively in the target language. To be able to communicate in English, students should have adequate speaking skill because speaking skill plays an essential role in communication. Then, Richards and Renandya (2002) state "A large percentage of the world's language learners study English in order to develop proficiency in speaking" (p. 121). Due to the significance of speaking skill, it becomes an essential part of the curriculum of English language teaching. As Luoma (2004) states "Speaking skills are an important part of the curriculum in language teaching, and this makes them an important object of assessment as well" (p. 1). Therefore, to develop students' speaking skills, there must be enough speaking tasks and activities as well as proper speaking assessments.

To promote more activities that engage students to speak actively in the classroom, communicative language teaching is applied. Communicative language teaching is practiced by English teachers in many countries, including in Indonesia. Since the aim of communicative language teaching is to develop students' communicative competence (Hughes, 2002), real-world situations should be emphasized in the process of language teaching and testing to encourage students to communicate with the target language (Canale and Swain, 1980). In Indonesia, the practice of communicative language teaching has been immersed in the 1994 Curriculum (Musthafa, 2001), Competence-Based Curriculum (Marcellino, 2008), School-Based Curriculum, and 2013 Curriculum (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013).

However, the practice of communicative language teaching is frequently not in line with the process of language testing and evaluation in most schools in Indonesia. Syahril (2007) argues that in Indonesia, standardized testing has long been the dominant feature of the education system. Standardized tests, which are conducted mainly for accountability purposes, do not provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their language skills and knowledge directly. So, standardized tests are not relevant to the purpose of communicative language teaching. Moreover, the results of standardized tests cannot be used to monitor student learning progress in the school curriculum throughout the year because commonly the tests are only carried out once or twice a year (O'Malley and Pierce, 1992). The semester examinations, entrance tests, and national examinations are usually in the form of multiple choice tests. Multiple-choice tests neither reflect the current theories of learning and cognition nor measure students' learning achievement based on the abilities that students actually need for their future success.

When students are facing a particular standardized test, they are required to pass certain passing grades to succeed in the test. As the result, students' success to pass the exams has become the focus for many elements in the secondary education in Indonesia at the present time (Syahril, 2007). The formal English tests

conducted in schools commonly focus on improving students' written skills, but rarely on students' oral skills (Rahmawati and Ertin, 2014). Despite some elements of spoken language, such as the use of expressions, are sometimes included in the multiple-choice tests, the result of the tests cannot be used to measure the level of students' speaking skills. It is difficult to measure students' language proficiency by using multiple-choice tests because multiple choice tests usually require students to recall what they have learned in the subject matter; but it does not make students demonstrate their skills (Brualdi and Amy, 1998; Roediger, 2005). Similarly, Brown and Abeywickrama (2010) state that decontextualized tests only make students use their knowledge in relation to grammar, phonetics, and vocabulary, but not their communicative competences. Besides that, such tests include lack of emphasis on real-world situations and lack of feedback given to students (Brown and Abeywickrama, 2010). Then, assessments should not be limited to paper and pencil tests, especially for speaking skill.

Performance-based assessment can help to fill this gap, because it not only makes students use and demonstrate their speaking skills, but also provides teachers with detailed information about the student needs in learning (Abedi, 2010). Unlike the traditional tests, in which students select one of the presented responses, a performance-based assessment requires students to perform a speaking task and generate their own responses. Performance-based assessments help teachers to get some useful information about the students' strengths and weaknesses, student needs, and what students know, which can be used by teachers to make decisions for the future instructions (VanTassel-Baska, 2013). Besides that, performance-based assessments help students to improve their language skills which are important for their success in real life (Darling-Hammond, 1994; Lim and Griffith, 2011).

Performance-based assessments play three main roles in the teaching and learning process (Norris, 2009). First, by using performance-based assessments, teachers can give some diagnostic feedbacks which help students to improve their learning. Feedback is important for students; so, they get some information about their strengths and weakness in learning. Second, performance-based assessments

allow teachers to make the summative decisions about the level of students' speaking skills. Lastly, performance-based assessments can increase students' learning awareness because it requires students to prepare and practice for their spoken performance.

Due to the advantages, performance-based assessments should be applied to assess students' language skills, especially the speaking skills. Unfortunately, assessing speaking is rather complex because speaking has some different dimensions which should be examined and assessed by teachers. Then, traditional test, which is more practical, is more frequently conducted by many teachers rather than performance-based assessments (Syahril, 2007).

There are some possible reasons why still many teachers are reluctant to apply performance-based assessments. First, lack of knowledge, experience, and competence on how to fairly assess the students' speaking performance can make teachers hesitant to apply the performance-based assessments (Tegamuni, 2012; Airasian, 1991). Conducting performance-based assessments requires teachers to have proper knowledge and experience to define the language proficiency that will be assessed, to avoid bias, and to attain validity. In line, (Aleksandrak, 2011) argues that the need of adequate knowledge to deliberate the appropriate elicitation technique and the form of assessment as well as to design and administer the test makes it difficult for teachers to conduct a proper speaking assessment. Second, English teachers' attitudes towards the performance-based assessments can influence teachers in choosing methods and instruments to assess the students' speaking skills (Chinda, 2014). Third, many teachers have problems related to facilities and personnel for testing, time, ability to design productive and relevant tasks, and consistency (Knight, 1992). A performance-based assessment is difficult to conduct when there are a large number of students because it takes at least one minute to assess a student's speaking performance. As the result, the process of speaking assessment usually spends a lot of time (Kitao and Kitao, 1996). Fourth, the standardized tests, which are still applied in Indonesia, make teachers devote most of their efforts and class time for preparing students to pass the formal examinations (Syahril, 2007). As the result, many teachers do not attempt to

conduct performance-based assessments because they emphasize the learning for preparing students to face the exams. Fifth, conducting a performance-based assessment, which meets the principles of validity, reliability, practicality, and authenticity, is difficult for many teachers; whereas, it is essential to conduct an assessment which meets these principles (Brown, 2001). When teachers did not pay much attention to the validity of a speaking test, the results of the tests could not portray the students' speaking skills. As the result, the students' speaking skills were not as good as their scores.

In spite of the challenges and barriers in conducting performance-based assessments in assessing students' speaking skills, English teachers should be encouraged to apply performance-based assessments to assess students' speaking skills because performance-based assessments can make students use and produce the target language directly while performing an authentic speaking task. When students are given opportunities to use and demonstrate their speaking skills, they will be motivated to develop their overall communicative competence. As Ur (1995) states that if speaking assessment is held properly, it will offer some positive washback effects on learning. The need for teachers who are equipped with adequate ability to prepare the measurement tools for assessing students' speaking has become an important issue in the English language teaching. English teachers are expected to not only have the knowledge and competence to conduct performance-based assessments which make students produce the target language, but also have positive attitudes towards the performance-based assessments. A number of previous studies, which focused on the advantages of performance-based assessments, have been done by researchers, such as by Baker and O'Neil (1996), O'Malley and Pierce (1996), and Wiggins (1993). Moreover, a number of studies showed that assessment requirements have a powerful influence on students' learning (Chang, 2006), but little is known about the beliefs of teachers concerning the performance-based assessments and how they justify the performance-based assessments that they carry out. Therefore, the researcher finds a gap to do a research on the attitudes of fifty senior high school English teachers towards performance-based assessments on students' speaking skills and how they carry out

performance-based assessments to assess students' speaking skills in the classrooms.

1.3. Research Questions

The research questions of this study are formulated as:

1. What is the senior high school English teachers' attitude towards performance-based assessments on students' speaking skills?
2. How do the senior high school English teachers conduct performance-based assessments to assess the students' speaking skills?

1.4. Purposes of the Study

In line with the research questions, this study is aimed to:

1. Find out the senior high school English teachers' attitude towards performance-based assessments on students' speaking skills.
2. Find out how the senior high school English teachers conduct performance based-assessments to assess the students' speaking skills.

1.5. Significances of the Study

This study is significant for three perspectives, namely theoretical, practical, and policy perspectives. They are described as follows:

1. Theoretically, the results of this study are expected to contribute to the theory of performance-based speaking assessment in the EFL teaching and learning process as well as to the theory of attitudes of English teachers towards performance-based speaking assessment.
2. Practically, this study will contribute to the development of speaking assessment in the ELT which can be applied by English teachers in the classroom. The result of this study will provide more information about how English teachers carry out performance-based assessments to assess the

students' speaking skills in the classroom and what problems that commonly occur in the performance-based speaking assessments.

3. In terms of policy, it is expected that the results of this study will contribute to the policy related to the curriculum development, especially the assessment system of the English language teaching (ELT) in the Indonesia educational system.

1.6. Scope of the Study

This study is a mixed-method study which deals with the attitudes of fifty senior high school English teachers towards performance based assessments on students' speaking skills and how they conduct the performance based assessments to assess students' speaking skills in the classroom.

Regarding the first research question, the scope of this study is limited to observing the English teachers' attitudes towards three points, including: English teachers' attitudes towards performance-based speaking assessments, English teachers' attitudes towards the advantages of performance-based speaking assessments, and English teachers' attitudes towards the principles of speaking tasks applied in performance-based speaking assessments.

Related to the second research question, this study is limited to observing how the English teachers carry out performance based assessments to assess the students' speaking skills in the classroom. The findings are categorized into four parts, namely: (1) the frequency and the schedules of the speaking assessments carried out by the English teachers; (2) the methods and instruments applied in the performance-based speaking assessments, (3) the characteristics of performance-based speaking assessments, and (4) the problems encountered in the performance-based speaking assessments.

The discussion about the methods and instruments applied in the performance-based speaking assessments covers two categories, namely: the English teachers' personal experiences in conducting performance-based speaking assessments and the practice of performance-based speaking assessments in the classroom by the purposive sampling teachers. Then, the findings about the practice

of performance-based speaking assessments in the classroom are divided into five parts: the types of performance-based assessments, the types and the formats of the speaking tasks, the rating scales, the rubrics, and other related documents and materials used by the purposive sampling teachers while conducting performance-based speaking assessments in the classroom. After that, the discussion about the characteristics of performance-based assessment relates to whether or not the performance-based speaking assessments carried out by the teachers meet the characteristics of a performance-based assessment as proposed by some experts. This point involves four characteristics, namely: (1) performance-based assessment should make the test takers perform certain meaningful and authentic tasks, (2) the performance is assessed and measured by using certain defined criteria (3) it makes students do certain tasks which call for the integration of language skills, and (4) both process and product are assessed. Lastly, the discussion about the problems encountered in the performance-based speaking assessment covers three points: problems caused by the teacher, the system, and the student factors.

1.7. Clarification of the Key Terms

The following are some of the terms which are used for this study and need the exact definitions to clarify:

1. Practice: A method, procedure, process, or rule used in a particular field or profession; a set of these regarded as standard. In this study, practice refers to the method, procedure, and process that the senior high school English teachers apply to assess the students' speaking skills in the classroom.
2. Speaking: An interactive process of constructing meaning involving producing, receiving, and processing information (Brown, 2001). In this study, speaking refers to the students' oral performance of using English to be assessed in the classroom.
3. Speaking assessment: Oral or spoken language assessment which is developed with the emphasis on getting information about the students' ability to speak in order to predict their success in real-life communication.

By getting the information, the students' language proficiency can be predicted and assessed.

4. Performance-based assessment: the measurement of skills or performance that reflect real-world situations and require students to develop their original responses explaining the processes followed in order to achieve the results (Yu, 2014). In this study, performance-based assessment refers to the assessment which requires the students to use and demonstrate their speaking skills to perform certain speaking tasks which are assessed directly by the teachers, based on certain criteria.
5. Attitudes: the predisposition of an individual to evaluate some symbol or object or aspect of his world in a favorable or unfavorable manner (Katz, 1960). In this study, attitudes refer to the tendency of the senior high school English teachers towards the application of performance based assessments on students' speaking skills.