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A FOCUS ON FLUENCY

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FLUENCY AS SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION

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ABSTRACT

This article is as a review of literature relating to the term of language fluency. The paper first presented the definitions of the term fluency. Then the paper provides rationale for not separating fluency from accuracy. In order to help readers learn more how to enhance their students' language fluency, the paper reviews case studies in the fields of speaking, reading and writing fluency. Listening skills is out of concern of this paper.

Keywords: Fluency, speaking fluency, reading fluency, writing fluency, and accuracy

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE TERM FLUENCY

The term fluency which is defined as the ability to use the language quickly and confidently without too much hesitations or too many unnatural pauses to cause barriers in communication (Bailey, 2003; Byrne, 1986), in the process of learning English as a foreign language has frequently occurred in the minds and thoughts of both teachers and students recently. In other words, fluency is an expectation for anyone who wish to be competent in a target language that they have spent their time and efforts to acquire it. According to Shahini and Shahamirian(2017), one of the major characteristics of communicative competence is fluency. Fluency is considered as an important indicator for progressing in language learning (Chambers, 1997) and it becomes one of the conditions which ensure the success in communication (Gorkaltseva, Gozhin, & Nagel, 2015).Grabe and Stoller (2011) claim that most native students of English can read fluently with good comprehension, but they would have difficulty in doing grammar exercises on their reading. On the other hand, many EFL students have little fluency, but considerable grammatical knowledge to do a test. In this case, EFL students do not need more grammatical knowledge but, their fluency. Therefore, EFL learners' speaking fluency needs to be the focus of attention in the EFL teaching contexts (Albino, 2017).

However, in countries where English is seen as a foreign language, training students how to communicate in English naturally and effectively is not primarily emphasized. According to Gorkaltseva, Gozhinand Nagel (2015), English in Russia, though being a compulsory subject at universities, was not actually taught for the sake of verbal discourse and fluency in using English was not the primary focused at universities. Most of students studied English just because it is required by the curriculum, not because of awareness of the practical purpose of language learning. In Japan, Reed (1997) explained her experiences of teaching English in a middle school and reported that English was a very important subject for very tough entrance exams each year. Most of the teachers at every level of education when training the students focused on vocabulary

and grammar instructions, not on how well the students could use the language; hence the students were not interested in learning how to speak and communicate in English. Similarly, in the Republic of Angola, Albino (2017) claimed that English language was taught mainly for the purpose of examinations. Although the students passed their exam, their oral communication was still a big problem to concern because they could not express their ideas fluently. In the context of Malaysia, Palpanadan, Salamand Ismail (2014) stated that Malaysian students were unable to attain acceptable English fluency even though they went through 11 years of learning English language. In Thailand, Geringer (2003) reported that 60% of the teachers at primary and secondary schools had knowledge of English below the syllabus that they were training students and only 3% of the teachers obtained reasonable level of English fluency. Accordingly, Noomura (2013) asserted that the students were passive learners; they were shy to speak English with their classmates. They lacked of opportunities to use English in their daily life. They lack of motivation and responsibilities for their own learning in the unchallenging English classrooms. At the University level, Suwanarak and Phothongsunan (2008) stated that half of the undergraduate students were unable to use English to communicate in the real situations due to the fact that they were poor in listening and speaking skills.

Similar problems of English incompetence also occurred in the Vietnamese context. Many teachers of English in Vietnam were employing traditional teaching methods which focused on the teaching grammar and vocabulary instead of communicative competence (Pham, 2005 cited in Kieu Hang Kim Anh, 2010). Therefore, many university graduates have been unemployed by enterprises because they could not use English language fluently. Huynh Diep Tram Anh (2018) reported that those students who obtained good English fluency would be highly evaluated and got high payment by the businesses. However, many students did not pay enough attention to improve their English competence. They did not consider the fluency of English language skills as an essential tool to progress their future career.

2 FLUENCY VS. ACCURACY

In the past, educators differentiate fluency from accuracy. Many previous studies have treated fluency and accuracy as separate components (Albino, 2017). Accuracy is considered as using correct forms where utterances do not contain errors affecting the phonological, syntactic, semantic or discourse features of a language (Byrne, 1986). In other words, people obtained a belief that the beginners of English learning needs to use English as a correct forms of grammar and structures. Otherwise, they would utter the incorrect language forms in the subsequent statements. This belief has lasted very long in the history of English language education. In such a way, many teachers of English wished their learners to be perfect right at the beginning of the training. They stopped students at any time to correct errors or mistakes that the students committed to. Consequently, the students were afraid of making mistakes or errors in their utterances, so they dared not produce their oral performances. This prevented students to enhance their fluency. However, Brigg (2016) asserts that fluency should come first. EFL students should develop the fluency skills of automaticity, speed and comprehension before accuracy.

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The teachers who believed in the accuracy development supposed that only those who produced correct pronunciation, syntax and semantics as native-like in their utterances would be comprehensible to the native speakers. This ideal perception is somehow acceptable, but researchers around the world have been debating its effectiveness. While Chandler (2003) claimed that correcting students' mistakes which focused on forms was a powerful way to results in a significant improvement in both accuracy and fluency, Truscott (1996) argued that grammar correction should not be the center of focus because it is ineffective, not helpful, and indeed sometimes has harmful effects. Supporting Truscott's claim, Bitchener, Young and Cameron (2005) found that providing feedback on students' surface issues, students may perform them with accuracy on one occasion but fail to do so on another. Furthermore, Liu and Hansen (2005) claim that the most helpful corrections for students those that address macroissues rather than local issues if we helped our students enhance their fluency. Richards (2005) points out that fluency is the use of naturally occurring language when a speaker engages and maintains in meaningful communication. This communication would be comprehensible and ongoing in spite of limitations in one's communicative competence. It does not mean that we ignore students' errors or mistakes when we provide feedback on their communications. Instead, local issues should be secondary concerns in order to improve students' fluency in their communications. Housen and Kuiken (2009) assert that fluency and accuracy are not independent of each other, but they are complementary. A balance between fluency and accuracy is most appropriate for those learners who want to improve and gain confidence with their English proficiency (Harmer, 1995).

3 RESEARCH STUDIES ON ENHANCING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE FLUENCY

3.1 Case studies to enhance students' speaking fluency

Fluency in speaking skills is seen as an important factor in the language learning development because it indicates the ability of the speaker's communication (Gorsuch, 2011). The ability of speaking fluency is often used to measure the success of a students who learn a foreign language. The primary purpose in communication is how to make the listeners understood what the speaker is trying to express. However, it is not an easy job for teachers to enhance students' fluency in communication.Followings are two case-studies to help students improve their speaking fluency.

In a context in Indonesia, Irianti and Muja (2017) conducted an action research employing communicative learning teaching (CLT) to help improve speaking fluency for 33 7th graders. The researchers used communicative approach to encourage students involved in speaking activities more often. Meaningful communications in real situations on the learning processes were used. The researchers used familiar topics for the students to get engaged in the speaking activities with the hypothesis that students could be more confident in their speech and they could use better strategies for communicative activities in oeder to enhance their speaking fluency. Data collection was from pre- vs. post-tests and interviews. The study found that the approach of CLT is a means to foster students think quickly and present their opinions at the same time which made students accustomed to expressing their ideas in English. In other words, the students

acutally improve their oral fluency. In addition, the students gained positive attitudes towards CLT approach in the speaking classrooms. They could learn how to use the language in the real situations outside the classrooms. Also, the CLT approach could provide students more chances to talk in the classroom while the teacher talked less.

In another context in Angola, Clarifying the needs to enhance EFL students' speaking fluency because they do not have opportunities to practice their English outside the classrooms, Albino (2017) conducted a case-study to assess how EFL ninth-grade students improved their speaking fluency in a task-based language teaching (TBLT) approach at a high school in Luanda, Republic of Angola. 40 students randomly selected from the 360 learners participated in the study. The students were first describing a picture to be recorded (pre-test). Then TBLT were employed to train the students. The students were divided into groups of fours to do the tasks in each lesson in terms of problem-solving activities. The course lasted for 8 weeks. Then the students were given another picture to describe for audio-recording (post-test). Picture-descriptions were used in this study in order that the students could felt at ease to express their feelings of what they saw and felt when looking at the pictures. In addition, using pictures to help students focus on real-world language. Data collection was from the audio-recorded picture descriptions and unstructured-interviews. The analysis included rapid speech production (word count), and then grammatical accuracy to make sure that not only did the learners improve their speaking fluency their comprehensibility.

The study found that students have made progress in the number of words they uttered before the teaching. Besides, when engaged in tasks, students tended to increase their grammatical accuracy, elaborating on their utterances, and developing interactional language. The study also found that employing TBLT approach to encourage students to speak, their anxiety would be reduced and, therefore, speak more fluently. In addition, it helped students enhance the strategies for maintaining the flow of discourse to develop their oral proficiency.

In short, the communicative language teaching approach or task-based language teaching are effective methods that the language teachers should employ to help enhance their students' speaking fluency.

3.2 Extensive reading to improve reading fluency

In reading comprehension classes, many EFL students read more slowly and with less confidence in English than in their first language. A possible reason for limited fluency in reading is that EFL students are often preoccupied with processes involving word-by-word decoding for pronunciation and meaning (Brigg, 2016). Once those students who focused on decoding rather than on comprehension lack of chances to promote their reading fluency. One of the best ways to improve students' reading fluency is to orient students to conduct extensive reading activities. According to Watkins (2018), Extensive reading (ER) has several defining characteristics which make it different to most reading that happens in ELT classrooms. Extensive reading can promote reading fluency by providing students with massive exposure to texts (Brigg, 2016). The reading texts should be simplified in order to be easy for the students to understand. Successful Extensive

Reading means that students read very easy and enjoyable books for pleasure to build their reading speed and reading fluency below their level of English (Fitzgerald, n.d.). An enjoyable and relaxing period of easily understood of extensive reading could promote growth of fluency in English (Brigg, 2016).

That is, ER should be an enjoyable experience, with learners free to select books they find interesting because the process of reading is considered as more important than the understanding of particular details (Watkins, 2018). The teacher is a facilitator to provide a selection of books at the appropriate language level. Too many unknown words or grammar forms on a page create problems which will slow down the natural movement of the eye and affect reading comprehension and understanding and hinder fluency. Different from intensive reading as 'reading to learn', Extensive Reading is 'Learning to Read'. When the students learn to read you are practicing the skill of reading for information and enjoying reading (Fitzgerald, n.d.). Fitzgerald added, in order for students to benefit from their Extensive Reading, they should read at an appropriate difficulty level and at a good speed (150-200 words per minute for a beginner). Research indicates that if the students know about 98% of the words on a page, they can read it quickly and with high levels of comprehension. This means they can read the text very quickly and it can help build reading speed and their natural reading ability'.

According to Watkins (2018), many previous studies show that the amount of reading engaged in correlates with improvements in reading fluency. Furthermore, learners who engage in ER tend to be more motivated students, and they become autonomous, which itself can have a powerful impact on motivation in the learning process. Besides, extensive reading activities help students improve their vocabulary with collocations and vocabulary in contexts which enhance their language skills (Pitts, White, & Krashen, 1989). Moreover, extensive reading also helps students develop their writing skills and grammatical structures as they learn in the reading texts (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989). Finally, Brigg (2016), Taguchi, Takayasu-Maassand Greta (2004) found that extensive reading is a good reading method to help improve students' not only reading comprehension but also reading fluency.

In order to see if extensive reading affects students' reading fluency and comprehension, Shiki (2011) conducted a study at Kwansei Gakuin University in Japan with 34 1st year non-English major students. The students were assigned to read graded readers (simplified books) from level 1 to 5 in the library. They were required to read 5 or more books outside the classroom during a 14-week semester. In order to get credits for the course, the students had to write reports on what books they had read; how many pages and what difficulty levels they read. Then they had to write a summary of each book and presented what parts of the book made them feel interested. All of the students took two different pre- and post-tests to measure their reading comprehension and their reading fluency. The study found that the activities of out-of-class extensive reading had positive effects on the students' reading speed. However, reading only 5 books during a semester did not actually havean effect on students' reading comprehension ability. The study suggests that extensive reading assignments could be for more books, not just five, for the students to conduct their reading activities. To confirm this suggestion, (Iwahori, 2008) conducted a study with 33

high school students who were requested to conduct extensive reading for 28 graded readers (simplified books) in only 7 weeks. The results of this study reveal that the extensive reading of 28 books during 7 weeks had positive effects on the students' both reading fluency and reading proficiency.

3.3 Case studies to enhance students' writing fluency

Writing is a complex skill that tests a person's ability to use a language and the ability to express ideas (Norrish, 1983) and requires a person to write not only coherently but effectively. Students are often reluctant to incorporate into writing activities in the classrooms because it is difficult for EFL students (Homstad & Thorson, 1996). According to Wang and Wen (2002), L2 writers obviously get stuck when writing in the target language because their mother tongue mainly affects the use of the second language. One of the ways to help L2 students enhance their writing kills is to assign them to do extensive writing (Homstad & Thorson). Extensive writing is defined as writing practices beyond the regular writing activities in the regular writing classrooms. The writing journal is a place in which students can explore various topics and means of expression to develop fluency by writing extensively without fear of the instructor's red pen (Pham Vu Phi Ho & Pham Ngoc Thuy Duong, 2015).

In order to see whether the extensive writing practices help enhance students' writing fluency, Pham Vu Phi Ho and Pham Ngoc Thuy Duong (2015) conducted a study at HCMC Open University with 115 first year students from Writing-1 classes for 15 weeks. The students were assigned to write 4 paragraphs during the course as normal curriculum. Apart from the 4 paragraphs, in order to encourage students to practice their writing skills, the instructor assigned the students to write journals every week. Each student had to compose about 5 writing journals every week. The topics for writing were selected by the students' own choice. The researcher/instructor asked them to use free writing styles in order that they could produce any writing on any topic for their journals. The researcher/instructor did not provide any feedback in terms of grammar mistakes or errors committed by the students in their writing based of Trustcott's (1996) suggestions that comments on local errors might not be effective to improve students' writing quality and student progress is enhanced by writing practice alone (Semke, 1984). The students wrote their journals in their notebooks. At the end of the course, they submitted their notebooks of writing journals to the instructor/researcher for data analysis. 115 notebooks were collected to tally the number of words of every journal. Each student composed 62 writing journals (M=62.24; SD=1.3) during the course with a total of 5,740 words. To investigate if the writing journals affect students' writing fluency in terms of length of writing (number of words), we compared the average length of the 10 first journals of each student to those of the 10 last journals out of 62 journals of 115 students. The purpose was to see if there was any difference of the students' writing fluency in terms of number of words.

The results of the study reveal that each journal from 1 to 10 were between 79 and 90 words while those of the 10 last journals were between 96 and 102 words. The t-test indicates that there was a statistically significant difference between the two set of journals. This indicates that the students' writing journals affect students' writing fluency in term the numbers of words in their

writing. In other words, the more the students composed their writing journals, the more fluent in writing skills they become.

According to Heder and King (2012), giving students extensive writing during the writing course will help students improve their confidence, speed, fluency and interest in learning English. Hyland (2002) suggests that writing instructors should let the students write and encourage them to write as much as possible. Also, Bacha (2002) suggests the writing lecturers should give the opportunities for students to practice writing regularly because the experience in writing practice was not only a very highly motivating basis for developing students' writing skills but also a valuable one for students in acquiring necessary academic research know-how. Luu Trong Tuan (2010) claims that the activities of writing journals are to foster learners' writing motivation and enhance their writing skills as well as to build a close bonding between teachers and learners. Furthermore, Homstad and Thorson (1996) confirm that weekly writing journals strengthen writing skills and may also enhance critical thinking and cultural interaction. As far as we know, "practice makes perfect". The writing journal activities may bring EFL students no longer frustrating and difficult attitudes towards writing a foreign language (Homstad & Thorson).

4 CONCLUSION

Today, fluency in language use is considered as a successful factor of students during the language learning processes. Fluency is not something separated from accuracy. A person who is seen as a fluent language user is the one who obtains communicative competence because major elements of fluency are speed of reading, accuracy, and appropriate expressions (Martinez, Roser, & Strecker, 1999). As educators, we need to find ways to help our students to enhance their language fluency as prerequisite requirements. Extensive reading activities could be used to help improve students' reading fluency and comprehension. Writing journal is one of the activities to enhance students' writing fluency, and communicative teaching approach could help improve students' oral performances. As a limitation, listening skill is not a concern to this article.

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