

INVESTIGATING PROBLEMS FACED BY STUDENTS IN SPEAKING ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the problems faced by students in speaking English, focusing on linguistic, psychological, and motivational challenges. Speaking is a crucial skill in English language learning, yet many students struggle due to limited vocabulary, difficulties in constructing sentences, and pronunciation issues. Psychological barriers such as lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and low motivation further hinder their speaking abilities. Using a descriptive qualitative design, data were collected through questionnaires distributed to 37 Grade 11 students and interviews with 5 selected participants from SMAN 1 Tarakan. The findings reveal that students' difficulties are multifaceted, encompassing linguistic issues and deeper psychological concerns, compounded by a lack of early exposure to English and disinterest in the subject. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach involving targeted practice, a supportive learning environment, bridging programs, and engaging teaching strategies to enhance students' speaking skills and motivation in learning English.

Keywords: *English Language Learning, Speaking Difficulties, Qualitative Research*

INTRODUCTION

Language is frequently taught and assessed in four areas: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. There are two kinds of skills: receptive and productive. Speaking is the practical manifestation of abstract systems. In other words, speaking is the physical manifestation of ideas, concepts, and assumptions that exist in the human schema (Guebba, 2021). It integrates abstract concepts into sounds and utterances that provide meaning. Speaking is one of four EFL language skills that students acquire at school.

Speaking is the ability to produce meaningful utterances/discourse orally to address other people and to be accurate in using grammar and vocabulary (Sadullaevna & Safarovna, 2020). Speaking is a process where two or more people engage in shared interactions (Badie, 2020). Learning to speak can improve students' ability to convey their thoughts or ideas. Furthermore, students will acquire understanding by learning to speak, as verbal communication is a common way to communicate with others. Currently, the entire globe has become a global village, with everybody talking in the same language, English. The English language is spoken all over the world, earning the status of global language (Dewi, 2016). English is regarded as the international language and is spoken all over the world, therefore it serves the goal of speaking

with individuals who are based in different areas, states, nations, and continents of the world (Rao, 2019).

We all know that education is an interactive process, and to receive knowledge, we need interaction. Since the language of instruction is English, speaking skills are very important for students. Suppose the students do not know how to use this language in the classroom. In this case, it is understandable that they will not feel comfortable or confident using English outside the classroom in daily conversation (Islam et al., 2022). Therefore, speaking skills are very important for students to practice and master. Speaking is regarded as the most crucial ability that must be thoroughly acquired when learning a new language among four essential language skills. The capacity to speak is also among the most important skills we develop since it enables us to interact with people and convey our feelings (Miranda & Wahyudin, 2023).

Now we can assume that speaking is one of the skills that have to be mastered by students in learning English. Speaking is an essential tool for communicating. In the classroom, improving the speaking abilities of students has always been a concern (Bahadorfar & Omidvar, 2014). But in the process of learning to speak English, students often encounter difficulties. Al Hosni (2014) said that, there are three major speaking difficulties encountered by the students and they are: *Linguistics Problems* (lack of vocabulary and students find it difficult to build a sentence), *Mother Tongue Use* (since the students struggle to construct sentences, they rely on their native language to express their ideas), and *Inhibition* (students are afraid of making mistakes in front of their peers). This is in line with Hamad, Metwally & Alfaruque (2019), they stated that, fear of making mistakes and lack of vocabulary as well as the inability to capture tone and intonation are big barriers for non-native speakers. Arifin (2017) said that, psychological concerns frequently have an impact on students' ability, willingness, and motivation to develop speaking skills. Lack of confidence, shyness, and anxiety are prevalent psychological concerns in the speaking classroom; therefore, students are nervous to speak English in class.

Students' difficulties in speaking English at the tenth grade of SMK N 2 Purworejo by Widyasworo (2019). Based on his analysis, the students' difficulties were identified through questionnaire analysis. Based on the analysis, it was found that students' difficulties in speaking English consist of linguistic and non-linguistic problems. The linguistic problems are vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Non-linguistic problems are inhibition, nothing to say, lack of participants, and mother tongue, anxiety, shyness, lack of confidence, and low motivation.

METHOD

a. Research Design

The researchers used a Descriptive Qualitative design in this study. Moleong (2010) said that, descriptive qualitative is research that explains to understand a phenomenon of the research subject, behavior, perception, motivation, action, and so on. For this reason, this study aims to identify the difficulties faced by students in learning English.

b. Research Subject

The population in this study were the 11th grade students of SMAN 1 Tarakan. The selection of research samples in this study was conducted using purposive sampling. According to Sugiyono (2013), purposive sampling is a sampling technique based on certain criteria.

c. Data Collection Instrument

In this study, researchers used interview and questionnaire to achieve the objectives of this study. The researchers distributed questionnaires to 37 Grade 11 students. Then, the researchers interviewed 5 students to gain a deeper understanding of the problems faced by the students.

d. Data Analysis

The data that has been collected using research instruments will then be analyzed using qualitative analysis. Qualitative is a research method used to understand and interpret social phenomena, behavior, and experiences without using numerical data. Qualitative analysis focuses on the meaning, concepts and characteristics, and description of the subject matter rather than quantifying it.

FINDINGS

The findings from the questionnaire revealed that speaking is the most challenging skill for students. The primary difficulties identified include limited vocabulary, difficulty in constructing sentences, and pronunciation issues. Many students admitted struggling to recall or know enough words to express their ideas, organize their thoughts into coherent sentences, and pronounce words correctly. These challenges indicate that students face significant barriers in their ability to communicate effectively in English.

The interviews further confirmed these findings and provided additional insights. Students consistently stated that speaking was the hardest skill to master, with similar issues in vocabulary, sentence construction, and pronunciation as those reported in the questionnaire. However, the interviews uncovered deeper challenges, such as a lack of confidence, which stems from their fear of making mistakes and speaking in front of others. Many students also expressed a sense of demotivation due to their lack of fluency, which they viewed as a major obstacle to improvement. Moreover, some students admitted that they did not enjoy English lessons, further diminishing their willingness to learn. Several students also revealed that they had not been exposed to English during elementary school, resulting in limited foundational knowledge, especially in vocabulary, which negatively impacts their ability to communicate.

DISCUSSION

These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of the problems faced by students in speaking English. Limited vocabulary and difficulties in constructing sentences and pronouncing words suggest that students need more targeted practice in these areas. The psychological barriers, such as a lack of confidence and motivation, point to the importance of creating a supportive learning environment and implementing confidence-building activities

like role plays and peer discussions. Additionally, the lack of exposure to English during elementary school indicates a need for remedial programs to fill the gaps in students' foundational knowledge. Finally, addressing students' disinterest in English lessons requires more engaging teaching strategies, such as incorporating pop culture and interactive digital tools, to foster a positive attitude toward learning English. A holistic approach that combines linguistic, psychological, and motivational support is essential to help students overcome these challenges and improve their speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified several significant challenges faced by students in speaking English. Based on the findings from both questionnaires and interviews, the primary difficulties include limited vocabulary, challenges in constructing sentences, and pronunciation issues. These linguistic problems hinder students' ability to communicate effectively and confidently in English. Furthermore, the study revealed that psychological factors, such as a lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and low motivation, further exacerbate these difficulties. Non-linguistic factors, including a lack of early exposure to English and disinterest in the subject, also contribute to the students' struggles.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. Enhancing students' vocabulary and pronunciation through targeted practice and integrating interactive activities can help improve their speaking skills. Moreover, creating a supportive and engaging learning environment is essential to reduce anxiety and build confidence. Programs that bridge gaps in foundational knowledge, especially for students with minimal early exposure to English, are equally crucial. Finally, incorporating innovative and culturally relevant teaching strategies, such as the use of pop culture and digital tools, can help increase students' interest and motivation in learning English.

By addressing these linguistic, psychological, and motivational barriers, educators can provide students with the tools and confidence they need to improve their speaking abilities and achieve greater success in mastering the English language.

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