

Students' Difficulties in Speaking English

**Jihan Fadhilah Salsabila,
Dodi Mulyadi**

Universitas Muhammadiyah Semarang, Indonesia
Institution Adress
jihanfadhilah254@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Speaking is an essential oral communication skill used to express ideas, emotions, or information to others. It is one of the most common forms of communication in daily life, whether in social interactions, education, or professional environments. The research was conducted using descriptive quantitative method with the target of 30 students from 2,4, and 6 semesters of English Education Program. Data was obtained by distributing questionnaires that had to be filled in by students as respondents. The result of this study show that students experience difficulties in speaking English. The difficulties experienced by students include limited vocabulary owned, low student understanding of grammar, lack of fluency when speaking English spontaneously. In addition, students also reported feeling anxious and insecure, especially when having to speak in formal or academic contexts. The daily environment that does not support the use of English exacerbates these conditions, resulting in low confidence and speaking ability. This study shows the need to improve English speaking in formal contexts and in the classroom. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that students read consistently, practice grammar and pronunciation regularly, and find friends to practice speaking with in order to improve fluency and confidence in speaking.

Keywords: students' difficulties, speaking, EFL.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is an essential oral communication skill used to express ideas, emotions, or information to others. It is one of the most common forms of communication in daily life, whether in social interactions, education, or professional environments. Speaking the

foreign language in order to share understandings with other people requires consideration to express details of the language (Hedge, 2003) Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (Pérez et al., 2017) Speaking requires individuals to respond directly, which makes it challenging for many students, especially those who struggle with limited vocabulary or uncertainty in grammar usage. This skill is not an easy thing because there are some language components as tools to master it. (Febria & Aimah, n.d.) The phenomenon that the researchers see now days, some students understand the English language very well, but then find it difficult and uncomfortable when they have to speak English.(Inayah et al., n.d.)

In this era of globalization, the ability to speak English well is essential. This skill is not only useful for academic purposes, but also opens up job opportunities and improves social interactions. Students who can speak English fluently have a greater chance of joining international programs or getting better jobs in various countries. Moreover, for English Education students, speaking skills are a crucial aspect that they will need in their professional careers, whether as teachers, translators or tour guides. Therefore, students in this field are required to have confidence in speaking English in order to have confidence in speaking English in order to teach or use it effectively in the future.

However, even though speaking English has so many benefits, many students still face various challenges that make it difficult for them to speak fluently and confidently. (Elentri Wahyuni & Kurniawati, n.d.). One of the main challenges is vocabulary limitation. Students often struggle to express their ideas due to a lack of adequate vocabulary. This causes them to hesitate when speaking, often stopping in the middle of a sentence or using the same word repeatedly. In addition, uncertainty in grammar is also a significant obstacle. Although college studied grammar academically, they often hesitate to apply it in spontaneous conversations for fear of making mistakes.

In addition, difficulty in pronunciation is also an obstacle in speaking English. Unlike other languages, English has pronunciation rules that are often inconsistent with spelling. For example, the words “though”, “tough”, and “through” have almost the same spelling pattern but are pronounced in different ways. This difficulty in pronunciation can cause students to feel less confident in speaking, especially if they are afraid of mispronouncing and not being understood by the other person.

Another challenge that students face is the lack of confidence

in speaking English. Many students feel anxious when speaking in English, especially in front of others. They worry that they will be criticized, ridiculed, or considered incompetent if they make a mistake. This anxiety often makes them choose to remain silent or avoid situations that require communication in English. In fact, speaking is a skill that can only develop through consistent practice. If students don't dare to speak, they will find it increasingly difficult to improve their skills.

In addition to individual factors, the lack of opportunities to practice speaking English is also one of the main causes why many students find speaking difficult. In many educational institutions, English teaching methods still focus on the four communication skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Among the four skills that should be mastered by the learners, speaking is considered one of the most important language abilities. (Aleksandrak, 2011) This limited environment that supports speaking practice causes students to be unaccustomed to using English in everyday life, so they feel unprepared when they have to speak in real situations.

To overcome these challenges, students need to implement various strategies to improve their speaking skills. Expanding their vocabulary through reading, watching English movies, and using language learning apps can help them build a stronger foundation in speaking. In addition, practicing active speaking, whether with friends, lectures, or even by recording yourself, can improve confidence and speaking fluency. Students are also advised to join English communities, such as English Clubs or discussion forums, to get more speaking opportunities in a supportive environment.

By understanding the challenges and applying the right strategies, English Education students can significantly improve their speaking skills. Speaking English is not just about mastering grammar and vocabulary, but also about courage, habit, and consistency in practicing.

In this study, we will discuss some of the main difficulties that students face in speaking English and the reasons behind these obstacles. This study will also highlight the importance of knowing these difficulties so that students can improve their confidence and speaking skills. In addition, students can also know and take steps to overcome these obstacles and build confidence.

METHOD

This research employed a descriptive quantitative method. The target of this research is English education students in semesters

2, 4, and 6, with a target of 30 students. Data was obtained through questionnaires utilizing a Likert scale. The instrument used was a validated questionnaire. The steps of this research include preparing specific instruments, then distributing questionnaires to respondents, collecting data and analyzing the collected data using descriptive statistics to determine the tendency of answers.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, researchers will discuss the results of the questionnaires that have been distributed to evaluate students' ability to speak English. Here it is divided into 2 indicators: Efforts in improving speaking skills, and obstacles faced when speaking English. The data was collected from several questions related to students' daily activities in speaking English and the obstacles they experience.

Efforts in Improving Speaking Skills

| Question | Strongly Disagree (%) | Disagree (%) | Neutral (%) | Agree (%) | Strongly Agree (%) |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 1. I try to apply grammar correctly when speaking English | 2.8% | 5.6% | 27.8% | 52.8% | 11.1% |
| 2. I routinely practice English pronunciation | 0% | 5.6% | 36.1% | 50% | 8.3% |
| 3. I participate in English discussions with others | 0% | 5.6% | 38.9% | 47.2% | 8.3% |
| 4. I actively look for opportunities to speak English outside the classroom | 2.8% | 2.8% | 33.3% | 52.8% | 8.3% |
| 5. I consistently read English materials to expand my vocabulary | 0% | 2.8% | 44.4% | 38.9% | 13.9% |

Table 1

The data in Table 1 shows that students have efforts to develop their speaking skills. As many as 52.8% of them try to apply good and correct grammar, not only that they also try to find opportunities to be able to speak English outside the classroom (52.8). To be able to communicate effectively, students should master grammar (Phuong, V N., 2019) Pronunciation is one of language element to be learnt as the foreign learners communication.(Nurjanah et al., n.d., 2019)From the aspect of pronunciation, only 8.3% strongly agree, and as many as 36.1% were neutral; this certainly shows that pronunciation practice has not become a strong habit. The problem that is often faced by students is about pronunciation (Baker & Burri, 2016). Participation in discussions has also not been optimized, with 38.9% of them being neutral.

Meanwhile, 52.8% of students agreed that they actively seek speaking opportunities outside class, of course, this will be very effective in helping students speak English. For example, interacting with friends and the surrounding environment. As many as 13.9% of students strongly agree that they regularly read English materials to expand their vocabulary. However, the high number of neutral responses on various statements shows that students lack consistent habits.

Student Challenges in Speaking English.

| Question | Strongly Disagree (%) | Disagree (%) | Neutral (%) | Agree (%) | Strongly Agree (%) |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------|--------------------|
| 6. I feel anxious when I have to speak English in formal or academic situations | 0% | 8.3% | 22.2% | 55.6% | 13.9% |
| 7. My daily environment does not support the use of English. | 8.3% | 16.7% | 41.7% | 30.6% | 2.8% |
| 8. I feel that my English vocabulary is limited when speaking | 2.8% | 5.6% | 33.3% | 47.2% | 11.1% |

| | | | | | |
|--|------|------|-------|-------|------|
| 9. I find it difficult to use correct grammar while speaking in English. | 2.8% | 2.8% | 33.3% | 52.8% | 8.3% |
| 10. I am not fluent when speaking English spontaneously | 0% | 8.3% | 41.7% | 41.7% | 8.3% |

Based on the data in table 2 shows that the majority of students experience various obstacles/challenges in speaking English. As many as 47.2% students agreed that they have a very limited vocabulary when speaking. This shows that they feel insecure about their vocabulary. Vocabulary learning is central to language acquisition, whether it is in the first, second, or foreign language (Celce and Murcia, 2001) The reason why vocabulary is important in learning a language is because when we speak of the vocabulary of the language, we primarily but not exclusively discuss the words of that language (McCarthy, 1990) Not only that, as many as 52.8% students also feel they have difficulty in using correct grammar when speaking. Even when speaking spontaneously 41.7% students feel that they are not fluent, and with the same percentage of students choosing neutral, it means that there is uncertainty in their ability to speak without preparation.

More than half of the total respondents 55.6% admitted to feeling anxious when they have to speak English formal or academic situations, meaning that they are still afraid or embarrassed if they make mistakes when speaking in class for example. This can illustrate that anxiety is a big challenge faced by students. Meanwhile, 41.7% students felt that their daily environment did not support the use of English and only 2.8% agreed. This shows that they cannot speak because their environment conditions do not facilitate or support, so they feel they cannot develop their English speaking skills.

The result of this study show that students have awareness and initiative to develop English speaking skills. Especially on the use of grammar and speaking opportunities outside the classroom. However, in other aspects such as pronunciation practice and participations still receive very little attention from students, only 8.3% students strongly agreed that they regularly practice. The results of this study are also similar to research conducted by (Salihun, 2019) which identified that students face difficulties in

speaking English, including psychological barriers such as shyness and lack of confidence, as well as linguistic barriers such as limited vocabulary and correct grammar usage.

In this study, the challenges faced by students include anxiety when speaking in formal or academic situations (55.6%). However, some students face obstacles in expanding their vocabulary, hindering their ability to communicate in English. (Ambar Nur Aisiyah et al., 2024) Researchers have found that students had difficulties in Learning English Speaking, namely, students had difficulties in memorizing vocabulary. (Dayansyah, 2024) It is evident that only 47.2% of students felt they had limited vocabulary, difficulty in using correct grammar and lack of fluency in speaking spontaneously. Not only that, environmental factors also play an important role, with 41.7% students feeling that the surrounding environment does not support the use of English daily. Research by (Kusumastuti & Utami, 2022) also found that students face problems in speaking English caused by psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation as well as linguistic factors such as limited grammar and vocabulary.

Overall, students have made efforts to improve their speaking skills, but psychological and linguistic barriers remain a major challenge. Therefore, a conducive learning approach and environment is needed to help students overcome English speaking barriers and improve their English-speaking skills.

CONCLUSION

Based on the study's results, it can be concluded that students have a strong desire to develop their English-speaking skills, particularly in using correct grammar, and also appreciate opportunities to speak outside the classroom. However, this has not been fully followed by consistent practice. In addition, students also face various challenges or obstacles in both psychological and linguistic aspects.

Therefore, students need to develop the habit of speaking English consistently, not only in class but also in everyday life. Students can also be more active in participating in activities to help increase their self-confidence in overcoming anxiety. Not only that, students also need to expand and increase their vocabulary and understand grammar. In this way, it is hoped that students' English-speaking skills

develop effectively and with more confidence.

This research contributes to the development of studies in the field of English language learning, especially in understanding obstacles to speaking English. These findings can be the basic for developing a speaking learning model according to student needs.

REFERENCES

- Aleksandrzak, M. (2011). Problems and challenges in teaching and learning speaking at advanced level. *Glottodidactica. An International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 37, 37–48. <https://doi.org/10.14746/gl.2011.37.3>
- Ambar Nur Aisiyah, A., Mulyadi, D., Budiastuti, R. E., Wijayatiningsih, T., & Singh, C. K. S. (2024). Enhancing vocabulary mastery in narrative text through wordwall game. *ETERNAL (English Teaching Journal)*, 15(2), 309–319. <https://doi.org/10.26877/eternal.v15i2.657>
- Baker, A., & Burri, M. (2016). Feedback on second language pronunciation: A case study of EAP teachers' beliefs and practices. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 41(6), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2016v41n6.1>
- Celce-Murcia, M. (2001). Teaching English as a second or foreign language (Third edition.). https://www.academia.edu/36244291/Celce_Murcia_ed_Teaching_English_as_a_Second_or_Foreign_Language_pdf
- Dayansyah, O. (2024). Students' difficulties in English speaking skill. *Journal of English Education and Linguistic*, 5.
- Elentri Wahyuni, M., & Kurniawati, T. (n.d.). *Analysis on students' interest in speaking skill*. <http://jiip.stkipyapisdompu.ac.id>
- Febria, H., & Aimah, S. (2016.). *Stimulating students" vocabulary and grammar in speaking using audio-video and picture*.
- Hedge, T. (2003). The practice of English language teaching. In *ELT Journal* (Vol. 57, Issue 4, pp. 401–405). <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/57.4.401>

- Inayah, R., Pd, S., Pd, M., Lisdawati, I., & Hum, M. (2005.). Exploring Students' difficulties in speaking English and their attitude in speaking English. *Journal ELT*. 8(1), 113-121.
- Kusumastuti, D., & Utami, E. R. (2022). Difficulties and factors of low achievers in speaking. *Journal of English Teaching, Literature, and Applied Linguistics*, 6(2).12-22.
- McCharty, Michael. (1990). *Vocabulary*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
<https://id.scribd.com/document/166487283/McCarthy1990-Vocabulary>
- Pengucapan, M. A., Melalui, S., Pidato Di Man, A., Sri, S., Nurjanah, E. L., Ifadah, M., & Mulyadi, D. (2018.). *Enhancing Students' Pronunciation Accuracy through Speechnotes Application at MAN 1 Semarang*.
<http://prosiding.unimus.ac.id>
- Phuong, VN., (2019). The relationship between grammar and speaking : Vietnamese EFL learners ' perceptions and difficulties[Unpublished master's thesis].Vietnam National University
- Pérez, A., Carreiras, M., & Duñabeitia, J. A. (2017). Brain-to-brain entrainment: EEG interbrain synchronization while speaking and listening. *Scientific Reports*, 7(1), 1–12.
<https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-04464-4>
- Salihun, S. (2019). *Students' problems in speaking skill at the second grade of mts hamzanwadi nw gelogor*.