

A Study on the difficulties in English Speaking by The Students of MI Al-Hikmah

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Abstract

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Speaking Problem, EFL
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This research aims to identify the difficulties students experience in speaking English. A qualitative descriptive method was used to investigate these challenges by distributing questionnaires and conducting interview sessions. The study was conducted at MI Al-Hikmah, with fifth-grade students as the research participants. To gather valuable data, 26 students were selected using purposive sampling. The findings revealed that students face several difficulties in learning to speak English, including challenges with understanding grammar, fluency, pronunciation, limited vocabulary, lack of self-confidence, shyness, anxiety, and lack of motivation. Additionally, it is implied that by addressing the root causes of these difficulties, such as fear and lack of motivation, teachers can help enhance students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

INTRODUCTION

It is reasonable to say that an increasing number of people have made English their main priority in their learning journey. There is a growing belief that this language plays a significant role in shaping future life opportunities and scientific achievements. Over time, significant shifts in foreign language instruction have been observed, and in recent decades, teachers and educators have focused extensively on research and development in this area. This highlights that developing English skills is a serious endeavor requiring strong commitment to help students reach their full potential, particularly in speaking. As English has become a global lingua franca, the ability to communicate effectively in spoken English is increasingly viewed as essential for both personal and professional success (Baccarani & Bonfanti, 2015). In today's interconnected world, speaking skills are not only important for academic achievement but also for navigating social and professional interactions. The ability to articulate ideas clearly and confidently in English opens doors to international collaboration, career advancement, and participation in global discourse (Spies & Xu, 2018).

For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, speaking is crucial because it serves as the primary means of communication with others. It is an essential skill that must be mastered by both EFL and second language learners

(Ibrahim & Hashim, 2021). Speaking English is now regarded as a fundamental necessity in the context of education, globalization, and intense international competition, rather than merely a desirable extra skill. However, the reality reveals that many Indonesian students still face significant challenges in improving their English-speaking abilities. The primary obstacles they encounter include a lack of real-world discussion opportunities, fear of speaking, and ineffective teaching strategies (Tika et al., 2021).

Although students have studied English for at least five years, this does not guarantee that they can effectively communicate in English (Uyun, 2018). This does not mean that they will be able to converse fluently, even if the curriculum is appropriately structured. Many students continue to face difficulties in improving their speaking skills. A lack of practice opportunities, communication anxiety, and less interactive learning strategies are some of the factors that hinder the development of these skills. These are some of the challenges observed in preliminary observations. This aligns with the findings from some researchers, who identify common issues students face when trying to acquire English speaking skills; they note that speaking anxiety (Akkakoson, 2016), lack of confidence (Nety & Nurhaeni, 2020), and limited direct experience in conversational settings (Al Hosni, 2014) are often the underlying causes of this inability. These issues create significant barriers to the process of effective English learning, particularly in speaking.

Related to speaking problems that students experience in the process of learning, there have been many research conducted by previous researcher, such as a study from Rahmaniah & Asbah (2019). They studied the difficulties encountered by non-English department students in speaking English. it was resulted that there are some factors contributing students' difficulties in speaking, they are: the grammar aspect, fluency aspect, pronunciation aspect, vocabulary aspect, and the last comprehension aspect. Another study was from (Rajendran et al., 2024). They investigated the source of students' English-speaking difficulties. The result revealed that there were five major sources of difficulties, namely: teachers' related problems, students' related problems, overcrowded classrooms, poor course material design and absence of internet access. There are some significant gaps between this research and the previous. The present study tried to highlight the difficulties students experience in elementary level. While the object of the two previous research was students from university level. However, the researcher became interested in conducting this study due to the challenges students face in speaking English. The aim of the research is to describe the common difficulties elementary students encounter when speaking English.

METHOD

This study used a qualitative descriptive method to investigate students' difficulties in speaking English by distributing questionnaires and conducting interview sessions. It provides a descriptive analysis, focusing on current events in a real-world setting and emphasizing the characteristics of human behavior. The study was conducted at MI Al-Hikmah, with fifth-grade students as the research participants. To gather valuable data, 26 students were selected using purposive sampling, which assumes that each individual's background and environment offer important insights into the data. The students were given a questionnaire consisting of sixteen statements related to grammar, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, lack of confidence, anxiety, shyness, and lack of motivation, adapted from Suari (2021) and utilizing a Likert scale. The data from the questionnaire were calculated manually using simple statistical calculations and interpreted descriptively. The results were then analyzed to identify common patterns related to students' difficulties in speaking English. These insights provided a clearer understanding of the challenges students face, particularly in areas such as grammar, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, lack of confidence, anxiety, shyness, and lack of motivation. After analyzing the questionnaire results, 12 students were selected to participate in the interview session. The selection was based on their questionnaire responses: three students with the most "strongly agree" answers, three with the most "agree" answers, three with the most "disagree" answers, and three with the most "strongly disagree" answers. The purpose of the interview was to corroborate and confirm the questionnaire results.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To answer the research problem, researcher used a questionnaire adapted from Suari (2021). In this questionnaire, there are several difficulties experienced by students in speaking English, including: grammar, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, lack of confidence, anxiety, shyness, and lack of motivation.

Grammar

The table below show the results of questionnaire data regarding students' difficulties in grammar, there are three statements on this indicator, the data results show:

Tabel 1. Data Percentage in Grammar

Statement	A	A	D	SD
Im afraid that the grammar that	8.5%	42.3%	19.2%	0%

I use is wrong when speaking English.				
I still speak English even though I haven't mastered grammar.	1.5%	65.4%	19.2%	3.8%
I don't understand tenses or grammar so it's difficult for me to speak English.	3.1%	34.6%	38.5%	3.8%

Based on the results of the table above, the first statement shows that the highest answer is agree with a percentage of 42.3%, and the answer strongly agree with a percentage of 38.5%, the answer disagree with a percentage of 19.2%, while the answer strongly disagree with a percentage of 0%. The high percentage of responses in the agree category indicates that most students are afraid of making mistakes with the grammar they use when speaking English. In addition, 38.5% of students responded strongly agreeing with this statement, this means that most students have a strong fear when they speak English grammar.

In the second statement the highest answer was agree, with a percentage of 65.4%, the answer strongly agreed with a percentage of 11.5%, the answer disagreed with a percentage of 19.2%, and the answer strongly disagreed with a percentage of 3.8. The high percentage of students who agree and strongly agree shows that the majority of students still speak English or feel comfortable when speaking English even though they have not fully mastered the grammar. This shows a good attitude towards the use of English, where students prioritize communication rather than grammatical perfection.

The results in the third statement show that the highest answer is disagree, with a percentage of 38.5%, the answer strongly agree with a percentage of 23.1%, the answer agree with a percentage of 34.6%, and the answer strongly disagree with a percentage of 3.8%. The highest percentage of responses is in the disagree with this statement. This indicates that a significant portion of the students feel that their lack of understanding of tenses or grammar does not necessarily make it difficult for them to speak English. Additionally, 3.8% of students strongly disagree with this statement, reinforcing that some students do not see their grammatical challenges as a major barrier to speaking English. However, a considerable number of students do agree with the statement. Specifically, 34.6% agree and 23.1% strongly agree, which means that 57.7% of students find that not understanding tenses or grammar makes speaking English difficult for them. This highlights a significant concern among over half of the students regarding

their grammatical comprehension and its impact on their ability to speak English confidently.

Referring to the results above, it shows that the students have difficulty in grammar, the students are afraid about the grammar they use incorrectly when speaking English, they also do not understand tenses or grammar so they have difficulty speaking English, even though some of them speak English even though you have not mastered the grammar yet. This is in line with the opinion from Damaiyanti (2021) many students find it difficult to answer when asked to speak in a foreign language by their teacher because they may not know how to use grammar correctly, do not know what to say, or even know what understanding to use.

Fluency

The table below shows the results of questionnaire data regarding students' difficulties in fluency, there is a statement on this indicator, the data results show:

Tabel 2. Data Percentage in Fluency

Statement	SA	S	D	D
I have difficulty speaking English because of my regional accent.	15.4%	53.8%	15.4%	15.4%

Based on the result of the table above, this statement shows that the highest answer is agree, with a percentage of 53.8%, while in the answer strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree with a

percentage of 15.4%. The highest percentage of responses is in the agree category, with 53.8% of students expressing this statement. This show that more than half of the students feel that their regional accent makes it difficult for them to speak English. This indicates a significant concern among students about the impact of their accent on their fluency and overall ability to communicate effectively in English.

Referring to the results above, the students experienced difficulties in speaking English fluently, this is in line with the statement from Hughes (2020) that speaking consists of five elements, namely pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and understanding. These five speaking elements are also included in the elements of English-speaking difficulties. The high number of agreeing answers to the statement that students have difficulty speaking English because of regional accents, indicates that students are experiencing serious difficulties in fluency.

Pronunciation

The table below show the results of questionnaire data regarding students' difficulties in pronunciation, there is a statement on this indicator, the data results show:

Tabel 3. Data Percentage in Pronunciation

Statement	SA	A	D	SD
I never speak English inside or outside the classroom because of difficulties in pronunciation.	11.5%	26.9%	38.5%	23.1%

Based on the result of the table above, this statement shows that the highest answer is disagree, with a percentage of 38.5, the agree answer with a percentage of 26.9%, the answer strongly disagree with percentage of 23.1% and the answer strongly agree with percentage of 11.5%. The highest percentage of responses is in the disagree category. This indicates that a significant portion of students do not feel that difficulties in pronunciation completely prevent them from speaking English inside or outside the classroom. However, a large number of students agreed with the statement. With a total of 26.9% answering agree and 11.5% strongly agree, meaning that 38.4% of students feel that pronunciation difficulties significantly hinder them from speaking English, both inside and outside the classroom. This shows great concern among some students regarding their pronunciation and its impact on their ability to communicate in English.

The students' difficulties in speaking English, especially pronunciation, is also strengthened by the expressions of the eighth-grade students obtained during interviews

Data 1

"Takut salah ngomong gitu. Kaya, gimana ya,,,,Misalnya, sleep jadi slap begitu" (responden 3) "Afraid of saying something wrong. Like, how about that... For example, sleep becomes slap like that" (respondent 3)

Referring to the results above, the students had difficulty in pronunciation. These results were also reinforced by the students' statements obtained during interviews that students had difficulty in pronunciation, they were afraid that what they said would be wrong so that the listeners would not hear it. This is in line with the statement from Fraser (2001) which states that in order for listeners to fully understand the actual message conveyed, speakers must use correct pronunciation along with the characteristics of intonation, articulation, rhythm, phrases, gestures, body language and eye contact. This is supported by Gilakjani (2011) saying that if speakers have unclear pronunciation, their speech may be difficult for listeners to understand. However, it is important

to note that pronunciation is a skill that can be developed over time with consistent practice and guidance. While initial challenges may arise, students can improve their clarity through focused exercises, exposure to native speakers, and corrective feedback (Foote et al., 2016).

Vocabulary

The table below show the results of questionnaire data regarding students' difficulties in vocabulary, there is a statements on this indicator, the data results show:

Tabel 4. Data Percentage in Vocabulary

Statement	SA	A	D	SD
I don't have much vocabulary in English.	19.2%	50%	23.1%	3.8%

Based on the result from the table above, this statement show that the highest answer is agree, with percentage of 50%, the answer disagree with percentage of 23.1%, the answer strongly agree with percentage of 19.2%, and the answer strongly disagree with percentage of 3.8%. This shows that half of the students feel that they lack vocabulary in English which can affect their ability to communicate effectively and confidently. In addition, 19.2% of students strongly agree with the statement, if combined 69.2%, it means that most students think that they do not have much vocabulary.

The results above show that students experience difficulties in vocabulary, they do not master much English vocabulary. This is in line with the statement from Tuan and Mai (2015) that many students find it difficult to answer when asked to speak in a foreign language by their teacher because they may not know how to use grammar correctly, do not know what to say, or even do not know how to speak in a foreign language. The high percentage of answers agreeing to the statement of not having a lot of vocabulary shows that this is one of the problems they face

The students' difficulties in speaking English, especially in vocabulary, is also strengthened by the expressions of the eighth-grade students obtained during interviews.

Data 2

"Mungkin saya belum terlalu mengetahui tentang banyak kosa kata. Lalu saya juga tidak percaya diri gitu kalau berbicara bahasa Inggris" (responden 2)

"Maybe I don't know much about a lot of vocabulary. Then I also don't have that confidence when speaking English" (respondent 2)

The same result was also obtained when interviewing one of the students that he had difficulty with vocabulary because he had not learned too much

English vocabulary. This is in line with the statement from Machfudi (2022) learners encounter communication difficulties when they come across unfamiliar vocabulary that they are unable to explain or that they are unsure of how to employ.

Lack of Confidence

The table below show the results of questionnaire data regarding students' difficulties in lack of confidence, there are a statement on this indicator, the data results show:

Tabel 5. Data Percentage in Lack of Confidence

Statement	SA	A	D	SD
I am not confident when I have to speak English in front of the class.	26.9%	57.7%	11.5%	3.8%
I am very confident when speaking in English in front of the class.	7.7%	34.6%	50%	7.7%

The result from table above, the first statement show that the highest answer is agree with percentage of 57.7%, the answer strongly agree with percentage of 26.9%, the answer disagree with percentage of 11.5%, and the answer strongly disagree with percentage 3.8%. The highest percentage of responses is in the agree category, this indicates that more than half of the students feel a lack of confidence when they have to speak English in front of the class. This suggests that public speaking in English is a significant source of anxiety for many students.

In the second statement show that the highest answer is disagree with percentage of 50%, the agree answer with percentage of 34.6%, and a percentage of 7.7% obtained from the answer strongly agree and strongly disagree. The highest percentage of responses was in the category of disagreeing with this statement. This shows that half of the students do not feel very confident when speaking English in front of the class, indicating a significant level of discomfort and lack of confidence among many students in this situation.

The students' difficulties in speaking English, especially in lack of confidence, is also strengthened by the expressions of the eighth-grade students obtained during interviews.

Data 3

"Mungkin saya malu terhadap teman-teman saya, karena mungkin teman-teman saya lebih jago atau lebih bisa di dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris dibandingkan Saya. kurangnya percaya diri juga" (responden 9)

"Maybe I'm embarrassed towards my friends, because maybe my friends are better or more able to speak English than me. lack of self-confidence too"

(respondent 9)

Referring to the results above, students experience difficulties due to lack of confidence, a high percentage of agree answers in the statement of lack of confidence when they speak in front of the class and a high percentage of answers disagree in the statement of being very confident when speaking in front of the class shows that they experience difficulties due to self-confidence, this is also reinforced by the statement of one of the eighth grade students obtained during an interview, that students lack confidence when speaking English. This is in line with Zakaria et al. (2019) statement that the challenges faced or felt by students during speeches can be broken down into linguistic or non-linguistic/psychological problems. This means that linguistic problems are related to language, while non-linguistic problems are related to problems that are not related to language. From the thinking above, it can be seen that students' speaking problems stem from a combination of linguistics and non- linguistics. Linguistic/psychological elements that make it difficult for them to interact verbally. Lack of understanding, pronunciation and mastery of grammar are examples of linguistic problems. Lack of confidence, anxiety, shame, lack of enthusiasm, and fear of making mistakes are examples of non- linguistic problems.

Anxiety

The table below show the results of questionnaire data regarding students' difficulties in anxiety, there are three statements on this indicator, the data results show:

Tabel 6. Data Percentage in Anxiety

Statement	SA	A	D	SD
I'm afraid of being scolded by the teacher when I speak English incorrectly	23.1%	61.5%	15.4%	0%
I'm afraid of being laughed at when I speak English.	26.9%	42.3%	26.9%	3.8%

Based on the result from table above, in the first statement show the highest answer is agree with percentage of 61.5%, the answer strongly agree with percentage of 23.1%, the answer disagree with percentage of 15.4%, and the answer strongly disagree with percentage of 0%. The highest percentage of responses is agree expressing this statement. This suggests that a significant majority of students fear being reprimanded by the teacher for making mistakes when speaking English. This fear likely contributes to their anxiety and reluctance to participate in speaking activities, as they might be overly concerned

about being judged or corrected harshly

Then in the second statement show the highest answer is agree with percentage of 42.3%, the answer strongly agree and disagree obtain percentage of 26%, and the answer strongly disagree with percentage of 3.8%. The highest percentage of responses is in the agree category, with 42.3% of students expressing this statement. This indicates that a significant portion of students fear being laughed at when they speak English, which can contribute to their anxiety and reluctance to participate in speaking activities. This fear likely stems from concerns about being judged or mocked by peers for making mistakes or having an accent.

Anxiety is another difficulty experienced by students in learning to speak English. The high percentage of agreeing answers to the statement, fear of being scolded by the teacher if they speak English incorrectly, shows that this is a problem for them. Referring to the results above that students experience anxiety in speaking English. Anxiety is one of the non-linguistic factors that hinders students

when speaking English. Lack of self-confidence, anxiety, shame, lack of enthusiasm, and fear of making mistakes are examples of non-linguistic problems (Zakaria et al., 2019)

Shyness

The table below show the results of questionnaire data regarding students' difficulties in anxiety, there is a statement on this indicator, the data results show;

Tabel 7. Data Percentage in Shyness

Statement	SA	A	D	SD
I am embarrassed when I have to speak English.	15.4%	53.8%	30.8%	0%

Based on the result from table above, the statement shows the highest answer is agree with percentage of 53.8%, the answer disagree with percentage of 30.8%, the answer strongly agree with percentage of 15.4%, and the answer strongly disagree obtain percentage of 0%. The highest percentage of responses is in the agree category, with 53.8% of students expressing this statement. This indicates that more than half of the students feel embarrassed when they have to speak English, which can significantly impact their willingness to participate in speaking activities and practice their language skills. This embarrassment likely stems from fears of making mistakes, being judged, or not being understood.

The students' difficulties in speaking English, especially shyness, is also strengthened by the expressions of the eighth-grade students obtained during interviews, namely;

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Data 4

“Takut salah, dan malu dengan teman-teman” (responden 1)

“Afraid of making mistakes and being embarrassed by friends”
(respondent 1)

Referring to the results of the questionnaire and interview above, many answer agreed with statement students are embarrassed when they have to speak English. This challenge makes students experience difficulty in speaking English. This is in line with the opinion of Ur (1996), that students' speaking difficulties are barriers, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and use of the mother tongue. Students often have difficulty saying something in English in class, such as worrying about making mistakes, afraid of being criticized, or embarrassed to withdraw from the conversation (Sato, 2003).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that students face a range of challenges in learning to speak English. These challenges include difficulties with understanding grammar, fluency, and pronunciation, as well as a limited vocabulary. Additionally, factors such as lack of confidence, shyness, anxiety, and a lack of motivation play significant roles in hindering students' speaking abilities. Addressing these issues through targeted teaching strategies, supportive classroom environments, and increased practice opportunities may help students overcome these obstacles and improve their speaking skills. Additionally, it is implied that overcoming these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that addresses both the cognitive and emotional aspects of language learning. While improving grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary is essential, providing a supportive environment that fosters confidence and reduces anxiety is equally important. Educators should focus on creating opportunities for students to practice speaking in a relaxed, encouraging setting, helping them build both their language skills and self-assurance. By addressing the root causes of students' difficulties, such as fear and lack of motivation, teachers can enhance their students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

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