Students' Problems in Learning Speaking Skills (A Case Study Atsma Negeri 1 Panyabungan Selatan)

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to identify the problems faced by students during the process of learning English speaking skills at SMA Negeri 1 Panyabungan Selatan and to find out why the problems students face become factors that hinder their English speaking ability at SMA Negeri 1 Panyabungan Selatan, specifically focusing on 12th-grade students in MIA II. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method, emphasizing the interpretation of events and the acquisition of real data to depict the actual conditions experienced by students. Primary data were collected through questionnaires and observations, focusing on the challenges students encounter in mastering English speaking skills, including low vocabulary mastery, grammatical barriers, pronunciation issues, shyness, nervousness, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, limited practice, the dominance of the mother tongue, and low motivation. This research was conducted over four sessions at SMA Negeri 1 Panyabungan Selatan, focusing on the MIA II class, involving 20 students, from August 30, 2024, to September 30, 2024. The findings reveal that the English-speaking skills of the 12th-grade MIA II students remain at a low level. While some students demonstrated better speaking skills, the majority struggled to express themselves in English. In-depth classroom and outside observations showed that most students were unable to convey their thoughts effectively in English. Several factors hinder students' ability to speak English effectively. A primary issue is low vocabulary mastery, which makes it difficult for students to form simple sentences and leads to struggles in finding the right words and uncertainty about pronunciation. Many students also lack a solid understanding of English grammar, resulting in frequent errors that disrupt communication and diminish their confidence. Difficulties with pronunciation further discourage participation in speaking activities due to fear of mistakes or ridicule. Additionally, limited practice, as students focus more on written tasks and rely heavily on their mother tongue in the classroom, reduces their opportunities to practice English. Lastly, low motivation affects their progress, as many students show little interest in improving their speaking skills or understanding the relevance of English proficiency. Collectively, these factors significantly limit their overall progress in speaking English fluently.

Kata Kunci: *Students Problems, Learning, Speaking Skills.*

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays learning English is crucial for a variety of reasons. Given that English is the most spoken language in the world today, its significance cannot be downplayed or overlooked. Because English is a second language in many nations, it is the most convenient way to interact with individuals from other countries about a wide range of topics, including politics, technology, economics, and society. English is the most widely used language in the world including in the world of education (Roinah, 2019).

English language skills have an important context from various points of view, such as learning, global communication, and the 4.0 era. In the 4.0 era, English is becoming an increasingly important global communication tool, especially in the fields of technology, business, and science. English language skills are also an important criterion in employee selection in many international companies. Thus, English language skills play a very important role in learning, global communication, and the 4.0 era and offer advantages in many areas of life. It is the language of science, aviation, computers, diplomacy, tourism, international communications, media, and the Internet. Beginning to learn English as a foreign language at a younger age benefits some areas of language skills, such as speaking (Dunakhir & Osman, 2023).

At an individual level, learning English improves personality, increases self-esteem, and increases job opportunities. It also equips you with the means to travel the world, communicate more successfully, and discover and absorb more of the cultures and nations you encounter. As a result, the English language has become even more important, and many nations now mandate that English be taught to their citizens in order to provide them with equal possibilities in the new global order (Norro, 2022).

The problems facing education today are, in fact, quite unpredictable and constantly evolving. Due to the rapidly changing social and economic landscape, employment opportunities, technological advancements, and emerging societal issues, education must set up young people to be ready for these and other challenges (Haleem et al., 2022)**.** As a result, in order to meet the difficulties and issues they will encounter in the classroom, instructors must improve their knowledge, abilities, and mindset. English is regarded as a foreign language in Indonesian. In the present Indonesian curriculum, English is also referred to as the target language that needs to be taught in schools. Therefore, students are expected to improve their ability to master English. English is very important to learn as preparation for the future. Not only the future of researchers or readers, but we are talking about the future of the Indonesian nation. Just as Indonesian is the language of unity in our country, English is also a unifying tool for humanity throughout the world. In this increasingly advanced era, the ability to read, write, listen, and speak in English is very much needed.

The conclusion is that English is an important language to learn, especially for the younger generation. Taking into account that English is a universal language with considerable worldwide importance. So it is not impossible that this language will continue to unify all countries in the future. English has become one of the media for us to win the global competition. Here the researcher will investigate the root of this problem and look for ways to build students' confidence in communicating orally. And for the last, the researcher will discuss the obstacles to expanding English vocabulary. Students often

feel limited in their ideas and emotions appropriately. By examining these problems, the researcher can identify potential solutions and strategies to enhance the learning experience.

METHODOLOGY

This research observed the phenomena that occurred so that it could be classified as a descriptive qualitative method. Descriptive qualitative studies were the least limited by a pre-existing theoretical or philosophical commitment among quantitative research (Lambert, 2012). The research setting was seen as the physical, social, and cultural site in which the researcher conducted the study. In this research, it took place at SMA Negeri 1 Panyabungan Selatan, located on JL. Willem Iskander NO. 1, Kelurahan Tanobato, KP. 22952, Kec. Panyabungan Selatan, Kab. Mandailing Natal. Then, this research took place in August-September for data collection. This research took 4 meetings to collect the data. The researcher managed time for effective research. The researcher chose the twelfth-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Panyabungan Selatan as the subject of this research, specifically the twelfth-grade students in class MIA II, involving 20 students. (Ramadhani & Hasibuan, 2022) stated that the subject of research was used to limit the subject of research as an object, thing, or person where the data for the research variable was inherent and at issue.

This study used data analysis techniques with an interactive model. This model consisted of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. In analyzing data, the researcher employed descriptive qualitative research. As we know, qualitative research is a type of research that does not use calculations (Dull & Reinhardt, 2014).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In terms of English language skills, researcher have explained that based on their findings during English language classes, teachers predominantly use the mother tongue. The teachers' statements indicate that this is merely an alternative way to help students understand what they are saying. According to researcher, this is a poor alternative for teachers to use the dominant mother tongue rather than the target language. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) explains that language acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to language input slightly above their current competence level (i+1). Therefore, the dominant use of Indonesian in English classes hinders students from receiving sufficient input in English.

However, students must get used to speaking in English. It is essential not only to speak in English but also to learn the language through listening, as speaking in English cannot be separated from listening. Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1983) emphasizes that language learning is facilitated through interaction. When students consistently hear others speaking in English, they will eventually attempt to speak in English as well. To speak a language, one must first listen. When they frequently hear others speaking, they will begin to speak themselves. Sometimes, speaking can be more than that, and then listening becomes challenging. Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) indicates that emotional factors, such as anxiety and motivation, can influence language acquisition. Many students experience high anxiety when speaking in English, highlighting the need for a supportive social environment. Creating a classroom culture that encourages risk-taking and values mistakes as part of the learning process can reduce student anxiety and foster more confident participation in speaking activities.

At times, students need to be compelled to speak in English. Although teachers have set rules requiring every student to speak in English while going to the restroom, if the rule is only enforced fifty percent of the time, it is ultimately ineffective. Students also need to push themselves to speak in English, as without pressure from teachers and themselves, they will struggle to develop strong English speaking skills. However, language must form a habit, and language is not always about theory; it is also about habit and practice. Willis's Task-Based Language Teaching (1996) advocates using meaningful tasks to enhance language skills. By incorporating tasks that require students to collaborate and communicate in English, teachers can provide authentic speaking opportunities and motivate students to actively use the language.

Based on researchers' observations, students find it difficult to speak in complete sentences. They often only respond with one or two words or phrases, which proves challenging for them. This is evident from their performance in speaking tests and also from the researchers' observations and questionnaires outside the classroom with them. Most students receive low scores in speaking tests base on document from their english teacher. However, all students possess a reasonable command of English. The number of students with a good command is limited, usually only two or three in each class. From several findings obtained through in-depth observations or interviews, researchers conclude that, in general, the speaking proficiency of students at SMAN 1 Panyabungan Selatan in English needs improvement and should be developed.

Researcher believe that if all components concerning the issues students face during speaking activities in English can be identified, it may be possible for teachers to think of better ways to address these issues promptly. According to Wulandari et al. (2016), speaking success is measured by an individual's ability to engage in conversation in the language. We acknowledge that there are many supporting factors influencing speaking instruction success and many hindering factors preventing it from running well. From this statement, researchers can demonstrate that an individual is considered proficient in speaking English if they can engage in conversation effectively. They must be able to communicate well with others using English.

Language is not just about mastering theory, but also about how someone can express their ideas to others through effective communication. Some students may excel in theory but not in speaking. According to Nunan (1991), several factors contribute to the ineffective process of learning to speak. This condition occurs among students at SMAN 1 Panyabungan Selatan. They are at a low level of English speaking ability, indicating that there are likely several issues related to this. Based on researchers' observations and interviews over approximately four weeks at SMAN 1 Panyabungan Selatan, most students made several errors during the process of speaking in English. What differentiates one student from another is the level of errors made. If there are several mistakes, there are also issues they face during the process of learning to speak in English, as previously explained.

Based on the research findings below, several issues students face when speaking English arise. One issue is related to the components of the English language. Four components of English according to Swary & Swary (2014), cited in Harris (1969: 81), are pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. Researchers explain that one of the issues in learning to speak English is not only mastering vocabulary but also other components in mastering the language. Vocabulary is the foundation of all English components; it is the most critical component of English. This is because how can they pronounce words correctly, how can they speak English grammatically and fluently if they lack understanding in their minds? When researchers find that students lack vocabulary, it automatically impacts their pronunciation, grammar, and fluency in speaking.

Additionally, embarrassment, fear of making mistakes, and nervousness also pose problems for students, hindering them from speaking in English. Based on researchers' observations and

interviews with several respondents, they also found that some students did not know how to pronounce words. They not only did not know English words, but they also did not know how to pronounce them correctly. They shared that they felt nervous when trying to speak in English. Sometimes they also feel embarrassed to express everything in English, as when they make mistakes, other students start to laugh at them. A similar statement was made by Ur (1991: 121) regarding student issues. According to her, one of the problems students face in speaking activities is the presence of barriers. Learners are often hindered when trying to express many things in a foreign language. This includes worries about making mistakes, fear of criticism or losing face, or simply feeling embarrassed. Another problem in learning to speak English, according to researchers, is based on in-depth observations and motivation interviews. Student motivation is low. Although they tell researchers that learning English is essential, the fact shows that their methods and motivation for learning, especially speaking English, need improvement. While it is true that most students have low motivation to learn to speak English, researchers also found that some students indeed possess not only good English skills but, more importantly, they also have good and high motivation to learn it. This is recognized through their engagement in the English learning process in class. They are always active in speaking, both in English and Indonesian. They are also always active in interacting with the teacher. However, this can actually become another issue in learning to speak English.

Students at SMA Negeri 1 Panyabungan Selatan face several factors hindering their English-speaking skills. Low vocabulary mastery is a primary issue, as the majority of students have a very limited vocabulary, making it difficult for them to form even simple sentences. This limitation leads to struggles in finding the right words and uncertainty about pronouncing unfamiliar words, resulting in hesitation to speak or avoidance of speaking altogether. Additionally, grammar poses a significant problem, as many students lack understanding of English grammar, leading to basic grammatical errors that create confusion and diminish their confidence. Frequent grammatical mistakes interrupt the flow of communication, making meaningful conversations challenging. Pronunciation problems also arise, with most students experiencing difficulties and repeating errors despite corrections. This uncertainty lowers their self-esteem and limits their willingness to participate in speaking exercises. Emotional barriers, such as embarrassment, nervousness, and fear of making mistakes, contribute to their reluctance to speak in English. Many students feel anxious about being laughed at or criticized, creating a mental block that prevents full engagement in speaking activities. Furthermore, a lack of confidence in their speaking abilities leads to hesitation or avoidance of speaking, even when they can communicate. Limited practice is another major problem, as students rarely engage in speaking activities, focusing more on written tasks or memorizing vocabulary rather than actively practicing speaking. The dominant use of their mother tongue during classroom activities restricts their opportunities to practice English, reducing the amount of time spent using the language. Lastly, low motivation significantly affects their progress, as many students lack interest in improving their speaking skills and do not see the relevance of becoming proficient in English. This results in passive behavior during speaking activities, limiting their overall progress in speaking English fluently.

CONCLUSION

The research conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Panyabungan Selatan, particularly in class XII MIA II, revealed significant challenges faced by students in learning English speaking skills. The findings indicate that students generally demonstrate low proficiency in English, primarily due to issues such as limited vocabulary mastery, poor grammar understanding, pronunciation difficulties, and emotional barriers such as shyness and fear of making mistakes. Although some students demonstrate higher proficiency in speaking English, the majority face difficulties. Those with better speaking abilities often exhibit greater motivation or receive external support, such as attending English courses. However, motivation and interest in the language also play a role, as not all students receive formal training.

Several factors hinder students' skills to speak English effectively. A primary issue is low vocabulary mastery; most students have a limited vocabulary, making it difficult for them to form even simple sentences. This limitation leads to struggles in finding the right words and uncertainty about pronunciation, causing hesitation or avoidance of speaking. Additionally, many students lack an understanding of English grammar, resulting in frequent errors that disrupt communication and lower their confidence. Pronunciation difficulties further hinder their willingness to participate in speaking activities, as many students fear making mistakes or being laughed at.

Moreover, limited practice contributes to their challenges, as students often focus more on written tasks rather than actively speaking English. The dominant use of their mother tongue in the classroom reduces their opportunities to practice English. Lastly, low motivation significantly affects their progress, as many students lack interest in improving their speaking skills and do not see the relevance of becoming proficient in English. These factors collectively limit their overall progress in speaking English fluently.

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