

Students' Perceptions on Difficulties in Learning English Speaking at One of Junior High Schools in Tasikmalaya

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Abstract

Speaking is the most important of the four skills. Speaking is an action that involves transmitting information while also expressing ideas and feelings. This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of the difficulties in learning English speaking at one Islamic junior high school in Tasikmalaya. A case study research design was used in this study, all students in Islamic junior high school filled the questionnaire and three students were chosen to be interviewed. Data analysis included data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. The findings of this study indicate that students have difficulties in speaking English, such as limited vocabulary and inability to use grammar. This study recommends that teachers provide more engaging learning activities that can encourage students' enthusiasm without causing anxiety. Aside from that, students must be motivated and practice speaking English frequently.

Keywords: Speaking English difficulties, English lessons, Student's perception, Students' challenges.

INTRODUCTION

English has become an international language that dominates various aspects of global life, from communication, business, technology, to education. According to Crystal (2003), English is considered a global language since it is spoken by millions of people worldwide, both as their first language and as a second or foreign language. However, English language learning in junior high schools often faces various challenges. These challenges can stem from students' internal factors, such as motivation, interest, and individual abilities, as well as external factors, such as teaching methods, curriculum, and learning environment (Kurniawan et al., 2022).

The environment at Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia has distinct qualities that might impact English language development. According to Cibro et al. (2023), Islamic boarding schools frequently have a strong religious orientation, and incorporating English language study into these institutions can generate both possibilities and challenges for students. Students' perceptions of English language learning play an important role in determining the success of the

learning process. According to Creswell (2012), perceptions provide meaningful insights into how students understand and respond to their learning experiences. By exploring students' perceptions, educators and organizations may develop more effective techniques and supportive learning environments.

Speaking refers to the ability to generate words in language practice. According to Harmer (2002) there are three reasons you should speak up: they desire to express something, have a communication goal, and choose a language from their language store. Speaking skills are the ability to express opinions, thoughts, and feelings verbally to others, either directly or indirectly. To communicate effectively in a language, people must master pronunciation, grammar, and word order (Kurniati, 2013). According to Zaher et al. (2006) the goal of recent English as a foreign language education is speaking achievement.

According to Brown (2004), speaking has five components, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. According to Heng, (2014), effective language lessons should focus on communicative ability, encouraging students to use language in relevant circumstances rather than merely memorizing rules. Nevertheless, many students still struggle to speak English confidently and fluently despite the structured nature of English classes. According to Laren et al. (2005), speaking English is one of the most difficult skills that students have to face. Thus, in addition to teaching language structures, English classes should foster a positive environment that eases speaking anxiety and promotes engagement in the learning process

Furthermore, based on the observation, several students had problems practicing speaking English. In each class, 40% of students were frightened about speaking English correctly, making mistakes, or lacking confidence. This issue was examined by low vocabulary knowledge, inadequate grammar, and a lack of confidence while practicing in front of the class. Another important finding from this observation was that around 60% of students were actively participating in class practice sessions and responding to teachers' questions. Some students were eager to respond and engage, while others were reluctant and anxious, afraid of making errors.

METHOD

In this study, the researcher used qualitative research, more specifically case study. A qualitative research study aims to describe and analyze a phenomenon, event, social activity, attitude, belief, perception, and individual thinking or groups (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

According to Yin (2009), cited in Creswell & Poth (2018), case study research is the type of research examines a case in a real-life, contemporary context or setting. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate students' perceptions of the difficulties in learning English speaking. It is intended to describe, analyse, and summarize various conditions related to the problem under investigation.

This study used purposive sampling to conduct this research. Berg (2009) states that purposive sampling is the selection of samples based on certain characteristics or criteria by using their special knowledge or expertise about several groups to select subjects that represent this population. The criteria participants in this research all grade, at one of the junior high schools in Tasikmalaya. The students filled out the questionnaire. In addition, three students were selected to be interviewed.

The data was gathered through questionnaire and interviews. Joshi et al. (2015) claim that a questionnaire is a data collection strategy that involves asking respondents a series of questions or the researcher's assertions and adjusting their responses to a Likert scale. The questionnaire was adapted from (Hasan et al., 2024). The interview is one of the most commonly used methods of collecting data (Rosaliza, 2015). The researcher employed semi-structured interviews, which consisted of a set of questions designed to elicit the necessary information. The interview was adapted from (Nada, 2022).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents research findings regarding students' perceptions of the difficulties they experience when learning to speak English. Data were obtained from questionnaires and interviews. Analysis focused on the aspects of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, and fluency. However, the results showed that grammar and vocabulary were significant challenges that affected students' speaking ability in English learning process.

According to the findings, the majority of students struggle with grammar, particularly in creating complete sentences and applying grammatical rules spontaneously during speaking activities. Students are sometimes terrified of making mistakes in front of the class. The table below explains student statistics that support this statement.

Table 1: I make a lot of grammar mistakes when speaking English.

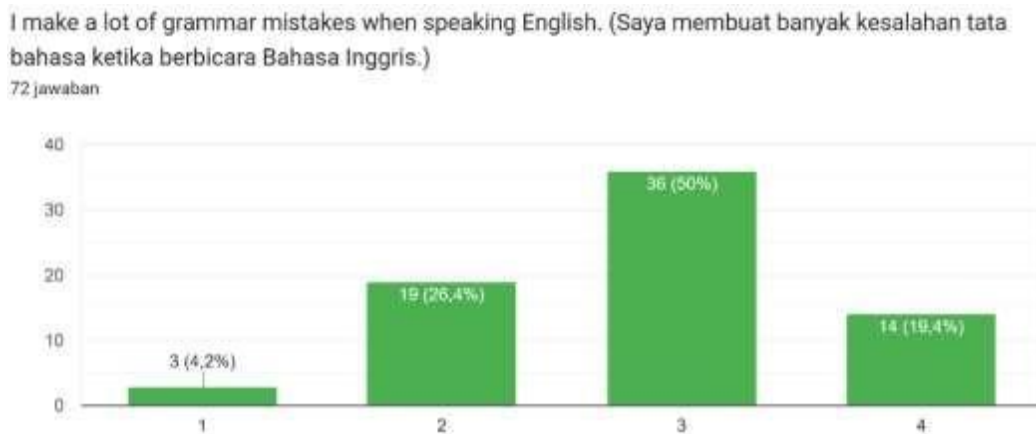


Table 1 presents a variety of student responses. 4,2% of students strongly disagree, while 26,4% disagree. However, 50% of students agree with the statement, and 19,4% strongly agree. The data indicate that the majority of students are aware of their difficulties with grammatical accuracy in communication. This problem is related to limited practice in speaking and a lack of confidence in applying grammar rules in conversations.

Table 2: I have difficulty constructing grammatically correct sentences when speaking English.

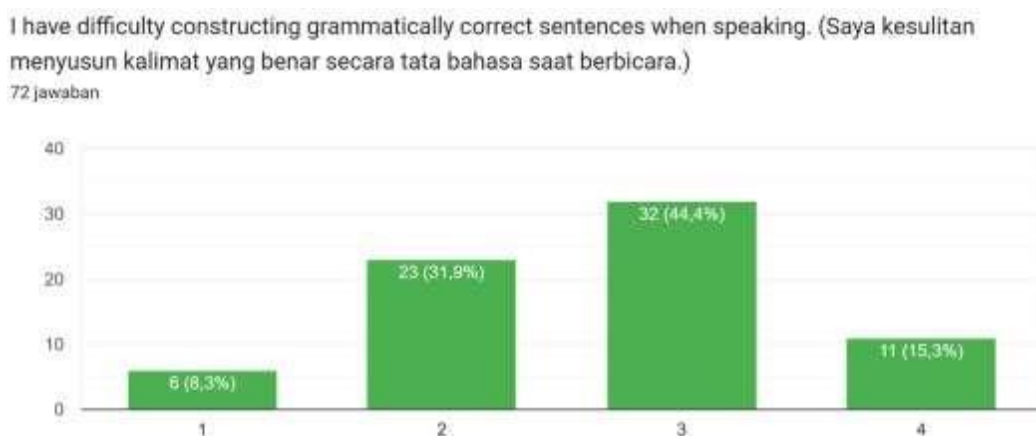


Table 2 shows various student replies. 8,3% of students strongly disagree, while 31,9% disagree. 44,4% of students agree with the statement, with 15,3% strongly agree. The findings

show that more than half of students had trouble formulating grammatically accurate phrases while speaking English. Teachers must increase students' capacity to generate accurate sentences verbally.

In addition, students have difficulties due to a lack of vocabulary knowledge. Many students responded that they frequently ran out of words while attempting to articulate their ideas, leaving them reluctant and lacking confidence in their ability to communicate in English. This difficulty has a substantial impact on students' fluency and speaking performance during the learning process. This explanation will be strengthened by the students' responses in the table below.

Table 3: I don't have enough vocabulary to express myself fluently.

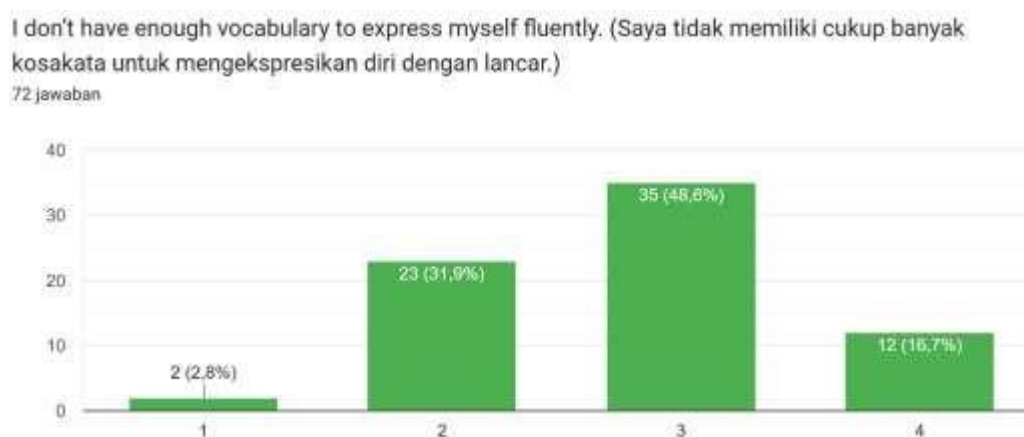


Table 3 shows a range of student responses. 2,8% of students strongly disagree, with 31,9% disagree. However, 48,6% of students agree with the statement, and 16,7% strongly agree. The data show that vocabulary knowledge is essential for students' speaking abilities. Students that lack vocabulary knowledge will struggle to articulate their viewpoints, thoughts, or concepts throughout English instruction.

Table 4: I cannot find specific words to speak.



Table 4 shows various student replies. 6,9% of students strongly disagree, while 29,2% disagree. 52,8% of students agree with the statement, with 11,1% strongly agree. This implies that many students have difficulty articulating their views in detail due to word choice. The difficulty in identifying precise words during speaking sessions results in inconsistency or confusion. This is why many students are cannot to speak English in front of class.

Furthermore, the research findings on students' perceptions of difficulties in learning English show two characteristics have a major impact on students' ability to speak English. Grammar and vocabulary are two factors that have a substantial impact on students' English proficiency and communication skills. The questionnaire contains student answer data, which supplements the explanations in the table. And in this section, students' interviews will strengthen and improve the discussion of these two topics.

The student's perspective on grammar revealed that grammar is the most challenging problem for students. Many students struggle with grammar while composing phrases. And student remarks indicate that their grammar is not yet fluent enough to master the subject. They also claimed that grammar is the most difficult subject to comprehend. For this grammar category, three students from all grades responded identically. Students' responses during the interview supported this explanation.

“Guru saya suka memberikan contoh buat kosa kata kata baru terus harus dipraktikan nya dikelas. Itu penting dan ngaruh untuk bisa bicara Bahasa Inggris lancar. Tapi kalo kosa kata

baru itu susah atau panjang kadang saya malas untuk coba ngucapinnya lagi sampai lupa cara ngucapinnya gimana” (7)

“Berlatih berbicara Bahasa Inggris itu seru pas dipakai di asrama. Namun kadang juga saya overthinking masalah grammar nya benar atau tidak. Karena belum fasih di grammar walaupun saya saat ini udah kelas 8 tapi masih belum percaya diri untuk grammar.” (8)

“Untuk bicara pakai Bahasa Inggris sih masih aman aja cuma memang kalo penyusunan kata atau kalimat pas ngucapin belum tau itu sudah terstruktur secara grammar atau belum.” (9)

This demonstrates that students feel grammar is a subject that is difficult to learn. They are still fearful and confused about utilizing proper and structured grammar, which causes them to overthink while attempting to communicate in English.

Meanwhile, in the vocabulary section of the interview, two students responded positively, stating that the teacher in class was extremely helpful in acquiring vocabulary. Their difficulty was frequently ashamed to express it. And one student stated that if the vocabulary was lengthy or complex, it was too hard to pronounce. Excerpts from student interviews will enhance this statement.

“Kalo berbicara Bahasa Inggris lancar itu bisa memudahkan pas belajar dikelas. Jadi lebih mengerti dan mengerjakan tugas gampang. Support dari guru kami sangat penting dan mempengaruhi pengetahuan kosa kata kita. Guru kami sering memberikan kosa kata baru dan harus menghafalkannya, mempraktikan dikelas. Tapi kadang kami malu untuk ngucapinya kalo depan kelas. Dan kadang kosa kata nya tidak terpakai jadi lupa cara ngucapinnya kalo kosa kata nya baru.” (7&8)

“Guru saya suka memberikan contoh buat kosa kata kata baru terus harus dipraktikan nya dikelas. Itu penting dan ngaruh untuk bisa bicara Bahasa Inggris lancar. Tapi kalo kosa kata baru itu susah atau panjang kadang saya malas untuk coba ngucapinnya lagi sampai lupa cara ngucapinnya gimana.” (9)

This highlights the significance of teachers' involvement in encouraging and inspiring students to broaden their vocabulary. Teachers should improve in incorporating a game part into their classes to encourage students to practice speaking English.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to investigate students' perceptions of difficulties in speaking English. According to the findings of this research, most students have difficulties speaking English in

class. Factors that affect students' difficulties are grammar and vocabulary knowledge. These factors impact students' ability to speak English during the learning process.

Regarding grammar, students indicated that they lacked command of grammar. They struggled to create sentences in English and comprehend grammatical rules. Students were worried about making errors when talking in English. One reason was that their grammar was not adaptable to spontaneous communication. Furthermore, due to vocabulary difficulties, students agreed they do not have a large vocabulary. This factor has a significant influence on their ability to speak English. Students' ability to communicate in English will improve as their vocabulary grows. Regardless, a limited vocabulary might make speaking English challenging. Students will feel uneasy when speaking English in class, and they may grow concerned if they notice their classmates speaking more fluently.

Moreover, regarding the findings of the study, some recommendations are suggested. For the teacher, the researcher suggest that the teacher should encourage students to express their opinions. This is critical for boosting students' interest in English language learning, particularly speaking. And the teacher should manage the class to ensure that all of the processes for teaching and learning to speak are followed, as well as finding a comfortable class for the students, since this will affect their motivation to learn to speak English.

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