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**THE DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING ENGLISH ON FIRST GRADE STUDENTS' AT  
SMAN 4 KOTA SERANG**

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**ABSTRACT**

It is undeniable that learning to speak is an important skill in the English language. It is a fact that Indonesian students find it challenging to speak English. Both linguistic and non-linguistic factors may be to blame. Finding out why students have trouble speaking English and the reasons behind those difficulties were the goals of the study. A descriptive qualitative method research design was used. Students in SMAN 4 Kota Serang's tenth grade served as the study's subjects. The study results present that the tenth-grade students at SMAN 4 Kota Serang were having obstacles in speaking English. Three language-related issues were found when speaking English: poor pronunciation, insufficient vocabulary, and poor of grammar. The personal problems of the students involved two challenges; nervousness and lack of confidence. The reason why students struggled with speaking English was that they were fear of making a mistake.

**Keywords :** *English, Difficulties, Speaking.*

## INTRODUCTION

English is used all over the world. English has become popular worldwide. People frequently use English as their first language when speaking to each other with people from various countries, languages, and culture. English is spoken by more than two billion people, according to Crystal (2008). This indicates that knowing how to speak English is crucial for us in this day of globalization.

Speaking is essential for EFL students because it's a means of interpersonal communication. For EFL or ESL, speaking is a crucial skill to acquire (Rao, 2019). Proficiency in spoken English serves two purposes for academics: first, EFL students, can study abroad; second, EFL students, such as ESL students, can present in front of peers in the classroom. The particular reasons of becoming proficient in speaking English for EFL or ESL learners is to improve their employment prospect in multinational corporations. The importance of mastering the English language cannot be overstated.

For Indonesian students, speaking English is challenging since their mother tongue is not English. They have studied English since they were little, but they are still unable to speak English fluently. Even though they understand what people say when they use English, they still have obstacles to pronounce the words correctly. Indonesian students' proficiency in English is low. According to the English Proficiency Index report, the Netherlands has the highest score of 625 (very good) in the world for English proficiency, this year. With a score of 453, which is considered low, Indonesia was placed 15th in the Asian region and 74th overall.

The difficulties in speaking English may be attributed to both linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Heriansyah (2012) stated that insufficient vocabulary, confusion on what they are going to say, and insecurity of speaking English, fear of making a mistake and anxiety of being laughed at by friends. Followed by Al Hosni (2014), learners are incapable of speaking English due to insufficient mastery of vocabulary, and fear of making a mistake in front of their buddies makes them insecure.

Recent research indicates that students struggle with speaking English. Through her research, Siti Salihun (2019) demonstrated that students' fear of having nothing to say, inconsistent and low involvement and also speaking with their mother tongue are among the obstacles that students face when speaking English. English speaking difficulties were caused by cognitive and individuality traits. Paramudhita (2015) also demonstrated that students' nervousness, fear of being made fun of by others, and ignorance of grammatical patterns were the main causes of their speaking difficulties.

Some students in the first-grade of SMAN 4 Kota Serang had difficulties in speaking English. The researchers presenting the result of this study on students' difficulties in speaking English. With this result, the researchers would like to seek: (1) What are the difficulties among the first-grade students at SMAN 4 Kota Serang in speaking English? and (2) what are the factors of the difficulty in speaking English among first-grade students at SMAN 4 Kota Serang?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Nature of Speaking**

Speaking, along with hearing, reading, and writing, is one of the core abilities required to acquire a foreign language. Efrizal (2012: 127) contends that speaking serves as a means to convey ideas and messages orally, facilitating real communication among students. This underscores the significance of speaking as a mode of conveying messages between individuals. According to Ulviana (2001: 7), speaking involves activities through which humans endeavor to articulate thoughts, emotions, opinions, and exchange information through verbal expressions in communication.

This implies that speaking serves as a means for human beings to communicate messages and viewpoints to others. Brown (2007: 237) asserts that speaking entails social interactions within interactive language functions, placing particular importance on how information is conveyed rather than the content itself. This encompasses the use of body language, gestures, eye contact, physical proximity, and other nonverbal cues. This perspective emphasizes that speaking is not solely reliant on oral language, but also incorporates various nonverbal forms of communication in expressing messages or thoughts.

Thornbury (2005: 9) highlights how speaking is a sensory-rich activity that involves paralinguistic components that affect the flow of conversation, such as body language, eye contact, facial emotions, pauses, tempo, and pitch change. This suggests that speaking includes nonverbal cues like eye contact, head gestures, and hand movements in addition to spoken words.

### **2. Difficulties in Speaking**

There are various traits that can make speaking difficult. Hosni (2014: 26) identifies three primary difficulties faced by students: inhibition, dependence on one's mother tongue, and linguistic difficulties.

#### **1. Linguistic Difficulties**

Students frequently struggle to find the right words when trying to speak in English, which is indicative of a limited vocabulary, according to observational data. This is supported by student interviews, where one student mentioned, "We want to speak but we don't know the words."

#### **2. Mother Tongue Use**

This issue is closely related to linguistic difficulties. During observations, it was noted that students tend to switch to Arabic when discussing task instructions. When asked about this in interviews students explained that they didn't know how to express their ideas in English, hence resorting to their mother tongue. Inadequate vocabulary and weak sentence construction skills are identified as the reasons for this.

### 3. Inhibition

Classroom observations revealed low levels of student participation, largely due to the aforementioned factors. Student expressed apprehension about making mistakes in front of their peers as a reason for their reticence.

Juhana (2012: 64) claims that students in English-speaking classes face obstacles due to language issues such as a limited vocabulary, a poor grasp of grammatical structures, and improper pronunciation. Numerous studies indicate that these factors make it more difficult for students to participate in speaking exercises during class.

Amwazir (2013: 2) highlights a number of problems with students' sense of self-efficacy in speaking classes. First of all, students often hesitate to speak up in class because they are afraid of being made fun of by their peers. Due to the fact that English is a foreign language with distinct rules for spoken and written forms, they also lack confidence when practising in a speaking class. Furthermore, because they might be called upon by the lecturer, students may be reluctant to sit in the front of the class. Fearful of being asked questions they are unable to answer in English, they frequently opt to sit in the corners.

Furthermore, students may hesitate to pronounce words in English, and some struggle with fluent English speech. As a result, they may resort to using their native language when speaking English, making it challenging to effectively communicate their thoughts orally. This highlights the importance of self-belief in one's ability to use a language effectively, as cognitive functioning is closely linked to how individuals perceive their capabilities.

### 2. 3 Factor that Cause Difficulties in Speaking English Skill

Difficulty in mastering the skill of speaking English can be attributed to various factors as noted by experts in the field. Zhang (2009:91) asserts that, according to his observations, speaking remains the most challenging aspect for the majority of English learners, leading to their incompetence in oral communication.

Ur (1996:121) identifies several factors contributing to the challenges in speaking English. These factors include inhibition, where students are hesitant due to fear of making mistakes, criticism, or shyness, often resulting in lack of motivation to express themselves. Additionally, low or uneven participation and the use of mother tongue further contribute to the difficulties.

Brown highlights certain characteristics of spoken language that can either facilitate or hinder oral performance. Clustering, repetition, reduced form, performance variables, informal language, pace of delivery, stress, rhythm, intonation, and interaction are a few of these. In summary, the researcher comes to the conclusion that learners' intonation, stress levels, inhibition when using their mother tongue, and other related factors are the main causes of their difficulties when speaking English.

## **METHOD**

### **3.1 Research Method**

Based on the qualitative descriptive research method, this study was carried out. Qualitative descriptive theory, according to Sugiono (2015), assumes that behavior and outcome are related; nevertheless, this approach only allow you to make assumptions about problems and provide descriptions of them. Using this approach, the researchers were able to pinpoint the students' problems speaking English as well as determine the root causes of those problems.

### **3.2 Setting and Subject**

This research was carried out at Public Senior High School 4 Serang, on Jalan Raya Banten, Kasemen, Kec. Kasemen, in the City of Serang, in the Province of Banten. The Students' with the lowest English grades were the focus of the research. They were 12 kids from SMAN 4 Kota Serang's second grade.

### **3.3 Technique of Collecting the Data**

Two techniques were used by the researchers to gather the data. The initial strategy was observation. The researchers sat in on the lesson and examined the students' learning activities. The researchers observed in the classroom around four times. Interview was the second method that the researchers employed. The researchers conducted semi-structured and in-person interviews. To minimize confrontation with the pupils, Bahasa Indonesia was utilized throughout the interview. Each students was questioned for around 15 minutes.

### **3.4 Technique of Analyzing the Data**

The data in this study will be analyzed using the descriptive qualitative analysis technique. There were multiple actions. Data reduction comes first. Data reduction is the process of condensing, identifying, or picking the key points that are most crucial for research, concentrating in the most important information from field notes and interview transcripts, classifying the data into units, synthesizing, and organizing into patterns (Sugiono, 2019). Data reduction would continue until the study's conclusion. Findings are the primary focus of qualitative research.

The second step is to present data. The second component in data analysis is data presentation. Miles and Huberman (2002), stated that in order to facilitate conclusion drawing and action, the result is organized, condensed of collection of data. It entails condensing the information and presenting it in a streamlined, ordered way in order to draw conclusion faster.

Reaching a conclusion is the third step. Verification and conclusion are the task of this data analysis phase. The researchers gathered and examined data that was valid, consistent, and sufficient. The researchers read the complete interview transcript and report their field experience. The researchers draw conclusions from their field notes and interview transcripts. After evaluating and presenting the data, the researchers draw conclusions about the data.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Observation Result

This research started from October 2023. Based on the observations, it was determined that a significant number of students struggle to achieve proficient pronunciation when speaking English due to a fear of making errors in pronouncing words. When the students see that their pronunciation is incorrect, they deliberately lower the volume of their voice. Occasionally, students may make mistakes when asked to remember and repeat what teacher has said. Because there is a difference between pronunciation and spelling in English, they make mistakes when pronouncing every word that teacher instructs.

The researchers discovered that the students had a lack in their vocabulary. Due of their limited vocabulary, they are unable to engage in practice sessions with their friend. The teacher provided them with a set of vocabulary words to commit to memory. They only memorized the terminology, but they did not apply it in the real situation of chatting using English to their friends. Due to a student's lack of vocabulary their practices, the vocabulary will be forgotten.

A majority of students were reported to have a low degree of grammar competency. Students frequently have challenges in applying grammatical rules when speaking, particularly in areas such as singular form and third-person verb usage, where they tend to make errors. For example, in the past tense, the verb "to do" was not used when the subject was "I" or "they". During English conversation, the student struggled to properly structure sentences according to grammar norms. Several students demonstrated a lack in grammatical skills during a practice dialogue in front of the class, as they made numerous grammar mistakes. The students have not yet acquired proficiency in grammar, including tenses, single and plural forms, and other related concepts. Consequently, they have apprehension about making grammatical errors when speaking English. For instance, the letter "s" was not employed for the third person.

### 3.2 Interview Result

The students were interviewed face to face. Following the conclusion of instructional and educational activities, researchers conducted interviews with participants in their spare time. According to the findings of this interview, students think that their fluency in English are poor. When attempting to speak English, they experience anxiety regarding their pronunciation. They claimed that pronouncing English words is challenging. One individual expressed their belief that their pronunciation skills are low and they find it challenging to accurately articulate English words and sentences due to the perceived difficulty of English pronunciation. Conversely, the other student expressed their struggle with English pronunciation, attributing it to the disparity between written and spoken English.

Some of them confirmed the allegation, "In my perspective, mastering pronunciation in the English language is quite challenging. At times, I find myself confused when attempting to articulate English words due to the disparity between pronunciation and written form". The difficulty in my English speaking arises from my fear of mispronunciation, which may result in

ridicule from my peers. Based on those responses, students may have found struggle to communicate using English language due to a low ability in pronunciation.

The researchers discovered that the students had a lack in their vocabulary. One student expressed their struggle in conversing in English with their friends due to a limited vocabulary. Memorizing English vocabulary can be challenging. Another student expressed their struggle with English speaking, citing a limited English vocabulary as the primary obstacle. Based on the previous remark, the researchers have concluded that students have some struggle with communicating in English because of a low vocabulary and insufficient practice in learning words.

Insufficient understanding of grammar was identified as a challenge encountered by students when speaking English. One individual expressed, "I find grammar to be quite challenging, particularly when it comes to verbs that require the addition of s or es. Additionally, I am concerned about the accuracy of my grammar". Meanwhile, another student expressed, "I struggle with grammar as I sometimes find it challenging to effectively organize words while speaking English". It can be inferred that some student found each struggle in communicate using English due to a lack of grammatical expertise.

Credibility is a crucial element in English speaking. If students possess a strong sense of self-assurance while speaking English, they will persist in their efforts to speak the language to the best of their ability, even if their speaking skills are low. However, after conducting interviews with participants, it showed students perceive its speaking level using English language to be inadequate. Subsequently, students saw a decline in their self-assurance when it came to conversing in English in the presence of their peers, since they perceived themselves as lacking proficiency in the language.

One individual expressed their lack of self-confidence in conversing using English among friends due to fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed. The other students expressed their lack of self-confidence in speaking English in presence of the class, attributing it to their perceived inadequacy in English language proficiency. Similarly, to the rest, a student expressed their lack of confidence in speaking English due to their poor command of the language. They expressed fear of being ridiculed by their peers when attempting to speak English. At times, my lack of confidence hinders my ability to speak English proficiently. Based on these statements, it can be deduced that some students found its struggle to conversing with English due to a low level of confidence. They are terrified of failure while conversing in with their friend and fear being ridiculed by them.

According to the students' interviews, the researchers discovered that certain students had shyness when communicating in English. A student expressed experiencing social anxiety when conversing in English with their friend and also while speaking English in front of class, resulting in difficulty expressing themselves in the language. Another concern that the students encountered while conversing in English related to feelings of anxiety. The majority of the participants examined by the researchers expressed experiencing significant anxiety when asked

to step forward and speak in front of both their friends and the teacher. A student expressed their anxiety about conversing using English language in front of class, fearing that their utterances may be incorrect. The researchers additionally discovered that the students exhibited significant anxiety while conversing in English.

Experiencing nervousness may lead to the potential loss of verbal expression within one's thoughts. One student expressed feeling anxious about conversing using English language in front of class due to fear of being ridiculed by their friends. This fear of ridicule causes them to become even more apprehensive, leading to a blank mind and difficulty in conversing with English language. According to the interview, the researchers deduced that some participants faced difficulty in conversing English language due to their shyness and nervousness.

The researchers discovered that student's difficulty in speaking English stemmed from their fear of making blunders and faults. The majority students said that fear of failure was underlying factor behind students challenges in conversing English. One student expressed their reluctance to speaking English among their classmates due to a fear of making pronunciation errors. Her classmate expressed a fear of failure while conversing in English, which hinders their ability to communicate effectively. The outcome of this interview is evident how some participants rarely speak English due to their fear of making mistakes while speaking.

The study's goal was to ascertain that the students had English language proficiency issues. The linguistics and personality problems of the students were the two perspectives from which the researchers approached the topic. There were three challenges that students had when speaking English as part of their language difficulty. Three things were missing from the text: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

The initial results showed that mispronunciation was the main cause of the learners trouble speaking English. Speaking English requires practice with pronunciation. When we communicate clearly, other student will be able to comprehend what we are saying when we converse or interact with one another. It can be exceedingly challenging for a speaker of a different linguistic community to understand someone who consistently mispronounces different phonemes (Gerhard, 2000).. Because English pronunciation and writing differ, the majority of students had difficulty pronouncing English words correctly, according to the study' findings. According to an interview with student, she stated: "I think it's really hard to pronounce words in the English language; sometimes I get confused because writing and pronunciation are two different things.

Pronunciation is a barrier to my English speech because i worry that i'm pronouncing things incorrectly, sister. After that, my friend will make fun of me (Interview October 26, 2023). The researchers concluded from the aforementioned students struggle with pronunciation when speaking English. The majority of students, according to the researchers, are terrified to pronounce words incorrectly in English because, based on the results of their previous interviews with students, they said that speaking English was challenging because they were confused about the differences between how to write and pronounce English word.



The second discovery was that a deficiency in vocabulary was causing learners problems when speaking English. As stated by Kamil and Hiebert (2005), words and their meanings can be founded in a person's vocabulary. Students who are still studying are unable to speak much since they have not yet mastered vocabulary. Some students find it challenging to communicate their ideas to their friends due to lack of language. A similar conclusion was reached by Heriansyah (2012), who discovered that students' struggles with speaking English were partly caused by lack of vocabulary. The researchers discovered that the majority of students lacked vocabulary based on their observations. Students' conversations with their friends demonstrate this, and when the researchers attempted to find out about the issues the students were facing, they appeared to think before responding and used a limited vocabulary.

The third finding was that students' difficulties speaking English are partly caused by poor grammar. In order to provide discourse, it was building grammar. To put it another way, grammar is required for communication (Nunan, 1999). The study of grammar focuses on sentence structure. Students will never be able to speak English fluently if they do not understand the rules of grammar and how to construct well-structured sentences. Students no longer learn structure one step at a time, which made grammar more challenging (Murcia, 2001). Grammar was an issue for some of the students who were interviewed. "I have trouble with the grammar, sister. Sometimes I don't know how to arrange words well when speaking English" one of the students stated in an interview" (Interview, October 26, 2023). Based on the results of the aforementioned interview, the researchers have concluded that students struggle with English grammar and lack proficiency in sentence construction.

Two challenges with speaking English were identified by the student in their personality problem. Confidence was the first. It's crucial to have confidence when speaking English. A student who exudes confidence can converse with others. Nunan (1999) asserts that students who are self-conscious about their English inevitably experience communication anxiety. Students may experience negative effects if they felt insecure in front of the class. Based on their observations, the researchers discovered that many SMAN 4 Serang first-grade students lacked confidence when practicing speaking in front of the class. This is demonstrated by bashful facial expression, unconfident body language, rapid head and foot movements, and playfulness with objects like skirts or pen. Due to their perception that their English is poor and that they are not proficient speakers, students lost confidence. Students' poor English-speaking proficiency is the primary source of their lack of confidence (He & Chen, 2009). Many students in this situation believe that their English is poor and that they are unable to speak it fluently.

The second was anxiety and shyness. Many people experience shyness and nervousness at some point when they are expected to speak English in class. This suggests that having trouble speaking English could be caused by shyness. In order to support the students in giving their best oral presentations in the classroom, it is crucial to pay attention to this aspect as well. According to Sayuti (2016), most students are apprehensive about speaking the language because they believe they will make mistakes. In the line with Fauzan's (2014) assertion that some students

experience anxiety due to construct criticism from their teachers, as well as a fear of making mistakes.

Due to their shyness and inability to express themselves in public, students frequently felt uncomfortable speaking in English (Brown, 2003). According to an interview with a first-grade students at SMAN 4 Kota Serang, she state "I experienced feelings and anxiety when I had speak English in front of my teacher and friend. I'm hesitant to speak in English because I worry I'll messed up (Interview, October 26 2023) in keeping with this, Baldwin (2011) states that one of the more prevalent phobias that students experience is speaking in front of a large group of people in a classroom or forum. They experience feelings of shyness and nervousness, which cause them to lose their train of thought or think they will forget what to say.

Based on the findings of the interviews, the researchers discovered that students' fear of making mistakes was the root of their problems when speaking English. This is consistent with Harmer's (2001) assertion that all students will err when attempting to write or even speak in English. Many students worry that when they speak English, they will make mistakes. Similar research findings were discovered by Heriansyah (2012), who concluded that students' difficulties speaking English are a result of their fear of making mistakes. Based on the previously provided explanation, the researchers deducted that speaking English poorly was caused by a fear of making a mistake.

## **CONCLUSION**

It can be inferred from the study's findings that the SMAN 4 Serang first-grade students struggled with speaking English. The results of the observation and interview that the researchers had conducted demonstrated it. It can be divided into two categories: the linguistic and personality problems that students face. There were three challenges that students encountered when speaking English as part of their linguistic problem. These included poor grammar, poor vocabulary, and poor pronunciation. Two challenges with speaking English were present in the students' personality problem. They were nervous, shy, and lacking in confidence. The researchers discovered that students' fear of making mistakes was the root of their difficulties when speaking English.

The researchers would also like to make some recommendations for the readers and students of this study as well as for future research. First and foremost, students need to more practice speaking and pronouncing words correctly. Beside, gain confidence, and express themselves in English. In order for them to speak correctly, they must also learn the English language's structure through grammar studies. Second, in order to validate the results of this study, future researchers will need to conduct a similar study with a large sample size and a higher level of English proficiency among the students.

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