

The Investigation of The Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Difficulties in EFL Classroom at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights the importance of understanding students' speaking difficulties in order to improve the quality of English language teaching, particularly in junior high school. Many students still face problems in expressing their ideas orally, even when they understand the material. These difficulties indicate that speaking is not only influenced by linguistic ability but also by emotional and cognitive factors. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the types of students' speaking difficulties and the factors affecting those difficulties in class VII-B SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The data were collected through classroom observation, interviews with one teacher and three students, and documentation. The analysis was conducted using qualitative data analysis techniques, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The study was supported by two main theories, namely Humanistic Learning Theory and Cognitive Theory, to explain both emotional and mental aspects of speaking difficulties. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources and techniques. The findings revealed that students experienced several speaking difficulties, including fear of making mistakes, difficulty in speaking in front of the class, hesitation when speaking, limited vocabulary, and difficulties in grammar and pronunciation. These difficulties were influenced by psychological factors, linguistic factors, cognitive factors, and external factors. These factors were interconnected and contributed to students' low speaking performance. The study concludes that students' speaking difficulties are complex and influenced by multiple factors that must be addressed simultaneously.

Keywords: *Speaking Skill, Speaking Difficulties, Factors Speaking Difficulties*

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INTRODUCTION

English is one of the most important international languages used in communication, education, technology, and tourism (Afebri & Muhsin, 2019). In learning English, students are expected to master four language skills, namely listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking is often considered the most difficult skill for students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Speaking requires students to combine vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension at the same time during communication. Because of this complexity, many students still experience difficulties when speaking English, especially junior high school students who have limited opportunities to practice English in their daily life.

Speaking is an active skill that allows students to express their ideas, opinions, and feelings directly through communication (Adriani Putri et al., 2020). Good speaking skill is important because it helps students interact clearly and effectively with other people. In speaking activities, students are not only required to produce correct sentences, but they also need to communicate meaning fluently and confidently. According to previous studies, important aspects in speaking include pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, and interaction. These aspects are interconnected and influence students' speaking performance during classroom activities. However, many students still have difficulties mastering these speaking aspects completely.

Based on preliminary observation conducted at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar, many students in class VII-B still experienced problems when speaking English in the classroom. Some students were afraid of making mistakes when answering questions or speaking in front of the class. Several students looked nervous, avoided eye contact, and preferred to remain silent during speaking activities. Other students also showed hesitation because they lacked vocabulary and had difficulties arranging correct grammar while speaking. In addition, some students spoke very slowly and paused frequently because they needed more time to think about vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure at the same time. These conditions showed that students still experienced speaking difficulties in English classroom activities.

Students' speaking difficulties are influenced by several interconnected factors. One important factor is psychological factors, such as fear, anxiety, nervousness, and lack of confidence. Many students feel afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at by their classmates. These emotional conditions make students reluctant to participate actively during speaking activities. When students feel anxious or uncomfortable, they usually hesitate to speak and become less confident in expressing their ideas. As a result, students' fluency and interaction during speaking activities are affected negatively.

Another factor influencing students' speaking difficulties is linguistic factors. Linguistic factors are related to students' mastery of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Ahmad Radenan & Hasnah, 2025). Many students still have limited vocabulary, so they cannot express their ideas clearly in English. Some students also make grammatical mistakes and pronounce English words incorrectly during speaking activities. These linguistic problems make students less confident and afraid to speak because they worry about producing incorrect sentences. Consequently, students become passive and avoid speaking English during classroom interaction.

Cognitive factors also influence students' speaking difficulties (Agung Prasojo et al., 2023). Speaking English requires students to think quickly about ideas, vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation simultaneously. Some students have difficulty organizing their thoughts and responding spontaneously

during speaking activities. This condition creates cognitive pressure that makes students nervous and hesitant when speaking English. In many cases, students understand the material but cannot express their ideas fluently because they need more time to process the language mentally.

In addition, external factors also contribute to students' speaking difficulties (Ahmad et al., 2022). Limited opportunities to practice speaking English inside and outside the classroom make students less familiar with using English actively. The classroom atmosphere and teaching methods can also influence students' participation during speaking activities. Students may become more passive if the classroom environment feels too tense or if they are afraid of receiving negative feedback from others. Therefore, students need a supportive and comfortable learning environment to improve their speaking confidence and participation.

This study focuses on analyzing students' speaking difficulties and the factors affecting speaking difficulties in EFL classrooms at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar, especially in class VII-B. This study aims to identify the speaking difficulties experienced by students and analyze the psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and external factors influencing those difficulties. The findings of this study are expected to help teachers understand students' speaking problems better and create more supportive speaking activities in the classroom. In addition, this study is expected to encourage students to become more confident and active in speaking English during learning activities.

Research Questions

Based on the preliminary observation conducted at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar, especially in class VII-B, many students still experienced difficulties in speaking English during classroom activities. Although students had learned English at school, many of them still had problems in expressing ideas, answering questions, and participating actively in speaking activities. Several students looked nervous, hesitant, and lacked confidence when speaking English in front of the class. Some students also tended to remain silent because they were afraid of making mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary use. In addition, students had limited opportunities to practice speaking English actively both inside and outside the classroom, which affected their fluency and interaction skills during speaking activities. These conditions indicate that speaking difficulties are still commonly experienced by students in EFL classrooms. Therefore, it is important to identify the factors that influence students' speaking difficulties in order to help students improve their speaking ability more effectively.

The research problems in this study focus on two main points.

1. What speaking difficulties are experienced by students in the EFL classroom at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar?
2. What factors affect students' speaking difficulties in the EFL classroom at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar?

These research problems become the basis for analyzing students' speaking conditions, identifying the factors influencing their difficulties, and understanding how psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and external factors affect students during speaking activities. Through this study, the researcher expects to provide useful information that can help teachers create more supportive and interactive speaking activities in the classroom.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The method used in this study was qualitative descriptive research. This method was used to analyze students' speaking difficulties and the factors affecting speaking difficulties in the EFL classroom at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar. Qualitative descriptive research helped the researcher understand students' speaking problems through direct observation, interviews, and classroom interaction during English learning activities. The study focused on identifying students' speaking difficulties related to pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, confidence, and classroom participation during speaking activities.

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar, especially in class VII-B. The researcher chose this class because many students still experienced difficulties in speaking English during classroom activities. During the research process, the researcher observed students' speaking performance and interaction in the classroom. The classroom activities focused on speaking practice, including answering questions, expressing opinions, classroom discussion, and oral interaction between students and the teacher. The learning activities emphasized students' active participation during speaking practice in the EFL classroom.

Data Collection Technique

The data in this study were collected through several techniques to ensure that the information obtained was accurate and comprehensive. First, classroom observation was conducted to identify students' speaking difficulties during English learning activities. The researcher observed students' participation, interaction, confidence, pronunciation, fluency, and responses during speaking activities in the classroom. During the observation process, the researcher also recorded students' behavior, such as nervousness, hesitation, silence, and fear when speaking English in front of the class.

Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with several students and the English teacher to obtain deeper information about students' speaking difficulties and the factors influencing those difficulties. The interviews were conducted to understand students' experiences, feelings, and problems during speaking activities. Students explained several difficulties such as fear of making mistakes, lack of vocabulary, pronunciation problems, nervousness, and lack of confidence while speaking English. The English teacher also provided information about students' classroom participation, speaking performance, and learning situations during English lessons.

Third, documentation was used to support the data obtained from observation and interviews. The documentation included field notes, classroom activity records, learning materials, and notes related to students' speaking activities during the research process. Documentation was important to provide additional evidence about students' speaking performance and classroom interaction during English learning activities.

Data Analysis Technique

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative descriptive analysis. The results from observation, interviews, and documentation were categorized based on several themes related to students' speaking difficulties and the factors affecting those difficulties. The findings were classified into psychological factors, linguistic factors, cognitive factors, and external factors influencing students during

speaking activities. Each finding was analyzed and compared with students' classroom conditions during English learning activities to identify how the factors affected students' speaking performance.

The analysis was used to draw conclusions about students' speaking difficulties and the factors influencing those difficulties in the EFL classroom. Through this analysis, the researcher was able to explain the causes of students' speaking problems and identify several conditions affecting students' confidence, fluency, vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, and classroom participation during speaking activities.

Location, Time, and Duration

This study was conducted at SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar, especially in class VII-B, as one of the classes observed during the English learning process. The selection of this location was based on the classroom conditions where many students still experienced difficulties in speaking English during classroom interaction. The classroom environment and speaking activities became the main focus of the research process.

The study was conducted during the academic year of 2025 according to the classroom learning schedule and participants' availability. Observation and interviews were carried out during English learning activities, especially during speaking practice sessions in the classroom. The duration of the study was adjusted to the classroom schedule to ensure that the researcher could obtain complete and valid information related to students' speaking difficulties and the factors affecting those difficulties during the research process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Students' Speaking Difficulties

Based on the observations and interviews conducted, it can be seen that some aspects of speaking performance are displayed by students in class VII-B of SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar. Speaking difficulties not only stem from the students' language proficiency but also from their emotional state and thinking processes while doing the speaking tasks. In general, the students do comprehend the lesson and listen to the explanations made by the teacher well. However, once they are required to share their opinions verbally, they encounter obstacles which hinder their effective and confident speech delivery. Consequently, it can be concluded that speaking cannot be considered as an easy task since it involves knowledge, emotion, and thought altogether.

a) Accuracy (Grammar and Pronunciation)

The first problem that arises in this research is accuracy, which refers to the students' proficiency in grammar and pronunciation. According to the results, there was a high level of inaccurate sentences made by students during the process of oral communication in English. Such problems include errors in grammar and incorrect pronunciation of the words used in sentences. It indicates that students are not aware of some basic principles of English syntax and phonetics. Thus, the speaking skills become ineffective.

Interview Data:

- Student 2 (S3): "Grammar and pronunciation are difficult for me."

Observation Data:

- "She go to school yesterday" → incorrect grammar

- “He don’t like English” → incorrect auxiliary
 - Mispronunciation: “vegetable”, “comfortable”
- b) Fluency (Difficulty in Speaking in Front of the Class)

Another important feature that can be identified in this research is fluency, particularly during oral communication tasks, which require students to express themselves before the whole class. The fact is that many students cannot communicate easily and consistently despite their understanding of the issue. On the contrary, they often deliver their speeches slowly, pausing frequently or answering questions with brief replies. It means that students cannot demonstrate fluidity in their communication process.

Interview Data:

- Student 2 (S3): “I feel afraid when speaking in front of the class.”
- Student 3 (S4): “I feel very nervous when speaking English.”

Observation Data:

- Students paused frequently (“eee...”, “mmm...”)
- Students produced short sentences: “My hobby... eee... playing... game...”
- Students rushed speech to finish quickly
- Students avoided eye contact and looked down

- c) Comprehensibility (Clarity of Message)

Another significant element found in this study is that of comprehensibility, which involves the capacity of students to be able to communicate their thoughts to make them understood. From the results obtained from this study, it is found that most students experience problems when trying to convey clear and concise messages through spoken communication. Although they have their ideas, they are unable to arrange them into coherent messages. Consequently, their messages become incomprehensible to listeners.

Interview Data:

- Student 3 (S4): “It is difficult to make sentences.”

Observation Data:

- “Yesterday... I... go... friend...” → unclear meaning
- “I like... eee... because... good...” → incomplete explanation

- d) Vocabulary Use

The importance of vocabulary can also be considered, since it plays an important role in affecting speaking among students. The results indicate that vocabulary has been found low among the students, making it difficult for them to express themselves. Though the student might know about the topic well, they find it hard to communicate on the same since they lack the relevant vocabulary. Therefore, the ability of the student to develop the flow of thoughts becomes challenging.

Interview Data:

- Student 1 (S2): “I don’t know many English words.”
- Student 3 (S4): “I ask my friend or stay silent when I don’t know the words.”

Observation Data:

- Students switched to Indonesian: “I go to... apa itu... market”
- Students stopped speaking mid-sentence
- Students repeated simple words frequently

e) Interaction (Participation and Response)

Another factor that was noted in this research relates to interaction, meaning how students participate in speaking activities and respond to them. The results obtained suggest that most students tend to be passive learners who are reluctant to engage in any interactions in the classroom setting. Students seldom speak out on their own and mostly respond only after they are asked by their teacher to do so. Therefore, one can see that students are uninvolved in their speaking activities.

Interview Data:

- Student 1 (S2): "I am afraid of making mistakes, so I don't want to speak."

Observation Data:

- Students remained silent when asked questions
- Students avoided eye contact and looked down
- Students depended on friends to answer
- Some students laughed at peers' mistakes

Factors Affecting Students' Speaking Difficulties

As can be derived from the results obtained in this study, there are a number of interrelated factors that affect students' speaking. These factors are associated directly with such characteristics of speaking as accuracy, fluency, comprehensibility, vocabulary, and interaction that have been analyzed in the previous chapter. Each factor plays a different role; however, collectively, they make it challenging for students to express themselves effectively. Often, the students' struggles with speaking are not just linked with their insufficient knowledge of the language, but also with emotional and cognitive factors, as well as the teaching environment.

a) Psychological Factors (Affecting Fluency and Interaction)

Psychological factors have a significant part to play in affecting fluency and participation among students during oral communication (Alahmad, 2020). Factors such as fear, anxiety, nervousness, and lack of emotional preparedness while speaking English make a big difference here. Students get scared and pressurized when they are expected to communicate something in English, particularly in front of their peers in class. Such an emotional state affects their confidence, and hence they hesitate to speak or say anything at all. The key element of learning under the theory of Humanistic Learning is that of emotion. If students do not feel secure and safe, their engagement will be reduced (Amanda, 2024). Negative emotions like fear will prevent students from thinking coherently and articulating their thoughts fluently. Hence, a secure and non-intimidating classroom atmosphere must prevail in order to make students more fluent communicators and encourage their participation. When students feel appreciated, they will speak up and participate in the learning process.

To overcome these psychological problems, the teacher should create a more supportive, comfortable, and non-threatening classroom environment. One practical strategy is to begin speaking activities through pair work or small-group discussions before asking students to speak individually in front of the class. This approach can reduce students' anxiety because they practice first with close friends in a less stressful situation. The teacher should also provide positive reinforcement, encouragement, and appreciation for every speaking attempt, even when students still make mistakes. Instead of directly criticizing errors, the teacher can correct students politely and focus first on building their confidence. In

addition, teachers can use familiar and interesting topics related to students' daily life so students feel more comfortable expressing their ideas. Simple activities such as daily conversations, short dialogues, or speaking games can also help students become more relaxed and confident in using English. When students feel emotionally safe and supported, they are more likely to participate actively and gradually overcome their fear of speaking.

b) Linguistic Factors (Affecting Fluency and Vocabulary Use)

The linguistic factors imply students' proficiency in different aspects of language like vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Candraloka & Rosdiana, 2019). They have a direct impact on the accuracy of students' sentence formation. The current research has found out that many students were lacking in vocabulary and grammar. Due to this, students could not convey their thoughts in a proper way. In relation to the Cognitive Approach, linguistic problems exist because the language acquisition process of students is incomplete (Ahmad Radenan & Hasnah, 2025). This means that the students have not fully acquired the knowledge of grammatical rules and the vocabulary needed to speak. This creates heavy cognitive burden since the students need to concentrate on language rules while speaking. It is therefore imperative to enhance vocabulary and grammatical proficiency.

To solve these linguistic problems, the teacher should provide more structured and consistent language support before conducting speaking activities. For vocabulary problems, the teacher can introduce important vocabulary related to the speaking topic before the activity begins. Students can also be encouraged to keep a simple vocabulary notebook containing new words, meanings, and example sentences to help them remember vocabulary more easily. Activities such as vocabulary games, picture descriptions, flashcards, and repetition exercises can make vocabulary learning more interesting and interactive. To improve grammar, the teacher can provide simple sentence patterns and commonly used expressions that students can directly apply during speaking practice. Grammar explanations should be practical and connected to speaking situations instead of focusing too much on complicated rules. For pronunciation improvement, the teacher can use repetition drills, English songs, videos, and listening activities so students become more familiar with correct pronunciation. Pronunciation practice in groups is also useful because students can practice together without feeling embarrassed. Furthermore, the teacher should emphasize communication and fluency first rather than grammatical perfection so students feel more confident expressing their ideas. Through continuous practice and supportive feedback, students' linguistic ability can gradually improve over time.

c) Cognitive Factors (Affecting Comprehensibility)

The cognitive aspects pertain to the mental processing of the students as far as the organizing and presentation of their ideas are concerned (Alahmad, 2020). The act of speaking involves the thinking and structuring of ideas into coherent sentences. In this case, it was observed that many of the students failed to organize their ideas properly, thus, rendering them incomprehensible. In light of Cognitive Theory, this problem arises because of high cognitive load in speaking. The students are required to conduct several processes simultaneously, such as coming up with new ideas, choosing the right words, and constructing sentences. If their cognitive load is restricted, they will not be able to carry out these processes effectively,

which results in pauses and confusing language (Lestari et al., 2025). Hence, cognitive development is necessary for improving speaking skills among students.

To reduce students' cognitive burden, the teacher should simplify speaking tasks and provide more guidance before students begin speaking. One practical strategy is to give brainstorming activities, guiding questions, or simple speaking outlines to help students organize their ideas more clearly. Students can also be allowed to prepare short notes or keywords before speaking so they do not need to think about everything spontaneously. In addition, the teacher should begin with short and simple speaking tasks before moving to more complex activities. Using familiar topics related to students' daily experiences can also make speaking easier because students already have ideas to express. Repeated speaking practice is important because it helps students become more automatic in processing language. Pair and group speaking activities can further reduce pressure because students have time to think together before speaking individually. The teacher should also provide enough waiting time after asking questions so students do not feel rushed while thinking. Through gradual and consistent practice, students' cognitive processing ability in speaking can develop more effectively.

d) External Factors

External variables are the external elements that are not related to the students, such as the classroom atmosphere, reactions from peers, and chances of speaking (Dong, 2022). These external variables play a major role in the frequency and comfort of speaking on part of the students. In this research, it was seen that the students did not have many chances of practicing speaking and there was no conducive classroom atmosphere. Humanistic Learning Theory emphasizes that creating an enabling environment is necessary for the process of learning (Lauri, 2017). Students must be assured of being treated with respect and safety, so that they can take an active part in class activities. If the enabling environment does not exist, then the students feel anxious and reluctant to speak. In addition, lack of practice also influences the cognitive aspect of the students' development because they cannot become fluent and automatic. Thus, the importance of external factors cannot be underestimated.

To address these external factors, the teacher should provide more interactive and communicative speaking activities in every lesson. Activities such as role plays, pair conversations, interviews, storytelling, discussions, and presentations can give students more opportunities to practice speaking in meaningful situations. The teacher should ensure that all students participate, not only the more active students. Classroom rules should also be established to create a respectful and supportive learning atmosphere, such as prohibiting students from laughing at their friends' mistakes. Positive peer support is important because students feel more comfortable speaking when they know they will not be judged negatively. In addition, the teacher can gradually increase the use of simple English expressions during classroom activities so students become more familiar with hearing and using English naturally. Short daily speaking routines, greetings, or classroom instructions in English can help students practice consistently. By increasing speaking exposure and creating a positive classroom environment, students can develop greater confidence, fluency, and motivation to speak English actively.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented in Chapter IV, it can be concluded that students in class VII-B of SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar experienced several specific problems in speaking English. The main difficulties found in this study included fear of making mistakes, difficulty in speaking in front of the class, hesitation while speaking, limited vocabulary mastery, incorrect grammar, poor pronunciation, and low fluency. These problems showed that many students still struggled to express their ideas clearly, confidently, and fluently in English. The findings also indicated that speaking ability is not only related to students' knowledge of vocabulary and grammar, but also closely connected to their emotional condition, confidence, and readiness to communicate. During speaking activities, many students became nervous, silent, or hesitant because they were afraid of making mistakes and being judged by their classmates. Therefore, speaking difficulties experienced by students can be seen as a combination of linguistic weakness and emotional barriers that affect their classroom participation.

Furthermore, this study revealed that students' speaking difficulties were influenced by several interconnected factors, namely psychological, linguistic, cognitive, and external factors. Psychological factors such as fear, anxiety, shyness, and low confidence reduced students' willingness to speak English actively. Linguistic factors, including limited vocabulary, difficulties in grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and accuracy, made students unable to produce spoken language effectively. Cognitive factors also affected students' speaking performance because students needed extra time to organize ideas, process language, and construct sentences while speaking. In addition, external factors such as limited speaking practice opportunities and less supportive classroom conditions also contributed to students' difficulties in speaking English. These findings support the relevance of Humanistic Learning Theory and Cognitive Theory, which explain that speaking performance is strongly influenced by both emotional and mental processes. However, this study also had several limitations. The research was conducted within a limited period of time and only focused on one class, namely class VII-B of SMP Negeri 12 Denpasar. Therefore, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all students or schools with different characteristics and learning conditions.

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