
Vocational High School Students' Challenges in Practicing English Speaking Skills

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Abstract

The article overview discussed Indonesian students' challenges in learning English as their second language. Even though English has been added to the school curriculum here in Indonesia from an early age, in reality, there are still many students that have difficulty when learning all the aspects of English skills, especially the speaking aspect. This research aim is to explain students' experiences of their challenges when practicing English speaking skills. By using qualitative methods and a narrative inquiry approach, the data in this study will be collected through short interviews with third-grade students of Vocational high school. The results of the study stated that the challenges faced by students came from various internal and external factors. The conclusion states that even though they have known English since early school, high school students still face difficulties in practicing English speaking skills. This study will explain in detail each influencing factor based on the experiences of these students.

Keywords: Speaking Skills; English Learning Difficulties; Challenges in English Speaking Skills

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1. INTRODUCTION

Teaching an English subject in a Vocational school requires more particular subjects than the ordinary public school. Vocational high school is a level of education that prioritizes students learning at certain aspects and self-development which focus on technology, science, health, and the arts. The main orientation of vocational high Schools graduates is to work or to be entrepreneurs independently based on their major (Aisah, 2021). The students who graduate from vocational high school are prepared to enter the workforce early. Therefore they need to gain aspects which help them to compete in the era of globalization and improve their quality as human resources. One central aspect needed to increase is the ability to communicate in English. As we know, learning English in vocational high schools and regular high schools is different. English in Vocational High School belongs to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which is described as an approach to language teaching which aims to unify the needs of particular learners (Mulyah, 2021). Not only that, they are also prepared to compete in the business world. As we know, English is a foreign language for students in Indonesia. Students face various challenges in learning, one of which is the aspect of speaking skills. Vocabulary enables someone to collect some of the important words from smaller lexical units and obtain a similar level of vocabulary knowledge in a simpler and adjustable manner. People can guess the meaning of unfamiliar words and whether or not the words have suffixes or prefixes. Moreover, the words they found could be progressive, possessive, past tense, or present. In fact, suffixes and prefixes change the meaning of the words.

There are still many students who face various challenges when learning English as their second language, especially in improving their

speaking skills. Communicating in English is an important skill required in the global atmosphere, we can exchange information with others by communicating, it requires our speaking skills. Unlike the other three aspects, speaking skills are more difficult to learn. Andriani et al., (2020) reported that there are five speaking skill components such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. According to Pérez, Carreiras, and Duñabeitia (2017) "Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information". It is enticing to study vocabulary. It can explain the shapes that are presented by present fabric. Quoted by (Bauer, 2012) it have some meaning that linguistics is deal with knowledge to language whereas a significant role for branches of it is own such as phonetic, phonology, morphology, syntax, pragmatic, and semantic. In morphology, fabric is the subdivision of linguistics that is related to the form and shape. Hence, morphology is the study of morpheme, which means the smallest meaningful element of words that can be identified (Hamka, 2014). It also that morphology is a knowledge about learning morphemes (Aronoff, Mark and Fudeman, 2011).

It is challenging for students in Indonesia to master English speaking skills because English is the foreign language to them. This obstacle is influenced by several factors, both internal and external factors faced by students while studying. There is also an influence such as on the psychological side or the EFL students' linguistic knowledge. For this reason, the study is aimed to find out what factors are a challenge for vocational high school students in practicing their English communication skills.

To overcome the problem of students' difficulties in speaking English, several studies have been carried out to find out the factors of

these difficulties. Hapsari (2018) in the study, the researcher interviewed vocational high school students as selected participants to find out the obstacles experienced by students while practicing their English speaking skills at school. A finding was found that students' difficulties came from the students, the environment and the language. Second, the study about the English learning difficulties faced by Taiwanese vocational and technological university freshmen by Chang (2019). Chang investigated three people who agree that the main problem in Taiwanese vocational university student's English learning is the teaching materials. The researcher discovered the 3 factors of the student's difficulty in learning English are motivation, environment and instruction. Among the three it is known that instruction is the most influential factor in a student's English learning, since the teaching style can create a classroom environment and affects students' motivation. Third, similar to the previous study about students' difficulties in learning English conducted by Handini et al., 2021. This research was conducted by asking students to practice their English speaking skills by introducing themselves in English. After that, students will be asked about any difficulties they experience when they want to practice speaking English. Therefore, the researchers concluded that the students' had difficulty with the selected participants speaking is a lack of vocabulary, they cannot produce words correctly, and there are not confident. As in the discussion above, it can be seen that in fact there are many challenges for students in Indonesia in learning English as a second language, many of which are experienced by students at the high school level. Especially vocational high school students, who are prepared to go directly to the job market, it will be more helpful if they can communicate in a foreign language to compete in the world of work.

From several preliminary studies, all researchers only focused on finding out the challenges experienced by students in learning English speaking skills. Therefore, this research has an in-depth study of these problems. Such as, what are the vocational students' challenges in learning to communicate in English in the classroom?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English has been studied by students in Indonesia as a foreign language since early in school. There are several important aspects of learning English, including reading, listening, writing and speaking. In addition, linguistics has three main components; vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation.

In connection to the topic of this study, there are three main issues, namely: Speaking skills, English learning difficulties and challenges in English speaking skills.

2.1 Speaking Skills

Speaking is a productive skill in oral mode. Learning to speak a foreign language seems the most important skill because those who can speak the language are referred to as the speaker of that language stated Ale (2022). Through speaking we can convey the contents of our thoughts, and even exchange information with strangers. This can increase a person's value by understanding a foreign language, thus having broad insight. Through speaking, one can do many things. One of them is sharing information that can provide broad insight for every listener.

In this process, they have to acquire all the four basic skills of the language. Such as, listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are passive skills or receptive skills, whereas, speaking and writing are active skills or productive skills (Rao, 2019). Of the four

aspects of language skills, 'speaking' is the productive aspect. Not only memorized the text, a person can be said to master the language when they can speak fluently in their foreign language and also understand what they want to convey. This will be difficult for foreigners to learn how to speak English as their second language. Ale (2022) concludes that, there are several ability to speak in a foreign language consists of the following components such as Articulation and production of sounds and sounds sequence, production of stress and intonation patterns, grammar, vocabulary, communicative competence (grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence), connected speech, and phatic communion.

Speaking skills are the most essential skills for all the learners who wish to learn English to enhance their career, improve business, build confidence levels, get better job opportunities, make public speeches, attend interviews, participate in debates and group discussions, give presentations and so on. In the present modern world, everything is linked with speaking skills, said Rao (2019).

2.2 English Learning Difficulties

As students in Indonesia, English is the foreign language they learn. Accordingly, they will find various difficulties when trying to master English in everyday life. As Fatin (2021) stated, two main aspects that cause students' difficulties in practicing English speaking skills are linguistic and psychological. Where the linguistics problems are the problems related to students' grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation problems. While the psychological problems are the students' problems regarding fear of mistake, shyness, anxiety, lack of self confidence and lack of motivation.

According to Wulandari et al., (2020), students have difficulty in English learning because of the lack of potential in learning achievement. This is

also due to the lack of students' basic knowledge of English concepts, so they have difficulty learning English as a second language. In addition, learning difficulties can be influenced by internal factors and external factors. Internal factors consist of psychophysical and psychological. External factors consist of family, environment, institution and community. These factors not only affect students who have low learning abilities, but those who have expertise in learning something also sometimes find it difficult to learn English.

2.3 Challenge in English Speaking Skills

English language skills consist of 4 main aspects, namely reading, listening, writing, and speaking. The students must learn these four skills to master a language. In this case, Indonesian students have difficulty in learning English speaking skills. Almost the same as the challenges faced when learning English, in the aspect of ordinary speaking skills, there are two influencing factors. Internal and external factors. One of the internal factors that occurs is, because English is not the mother tongue of native Indonesian students, they find it difficult because they are not familiar with words in English. Ying (2021) stated that Learners have difficulty expressing themselves because they are tentative, hesitant and fearful of making mistakes. This includes external factors where students have low self-confidence, and are afraid of making mistakes when speaking in English.

In addition, there are external factors that can influence. One of them is that students lack information and practice less. They often lack adequate vocabulary and practice, making it difficult for them to converse fluently in English (Syafiq et al., 2021). Deprivation of language content causes the learners to be anxious as they are unable to speak. Even if they have anything to say, they are unable to do so because they are afraid of making grammatical mistakes and being laughed at by their peers

(Meinawati et al., 2020). There are still several other things that are a factor in the difficulty of students in learning their English speaking skills.

3. METHODS

The approach of this research is qualitative. The researcher thinks that the qualitative research design is very suitable because the researcher wants to explain in detail the students' experiences of the problems being discussed, so that it can make it easier for other individuals or groups to study it in the future. According to Anggito et al., (2018:08) Qualitative research is the collection of data in a natural setting with the intention of interpreting phenomena that occur, where the researcher is the key instrument.

Narrative inquiry method is used in this study. As stated by Ford (2020), Narrative inquiry is a type of qualitative research focused on human stories. By using a narrative inquiry approach, such as describing event by event, then narrowing and focusing the discussion. Such as determine questions from the topic of research problems, then look for students who experience problems according to the research topic and collect information from their experiences through interviews and then analyze and retell the results of the research.

Data were obtained from several third grade students of a vocational high school in Karawang. Data was collected through direct interviews with participants. Five students will be selected to be interviewed, based on the level of their activity during the observation process in the classroom by the researcher. Observation is a systematic description of events, behaviors, and artifacts (Mirhosseini, 2020). Interviews will be conducted one by one with students, and under the supervision of the English teacher concerned. The interview questions

consist of several semi-structured questions which will later answer the problems on the main topic of this research.

4. FINDING

4.1 What are the vocational students' challenges in learning to communicate in English in the classroom?

The following are the obstacles experienced by third-grade vocational high school students in practicing speaking English in class, it is known that there are two influencing factors, namely internal and external factors. The findings were obtained from the results of interviews with related participants, as follows:

4.1.1 Internal Factors

Internal factor is an influence that comes from the individual himself. These factors can be psychological, self-motivated, and the level of students' ability to understand learning.

a. Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the factors experienced by students when practicing speaking in English. Some of them feel anxious or afraid that they will make mistakes, either in terms of pronunciation or in choosing the wrong words. This then affects the low level of student confidence to be able to stand out.

"It's a shame, miss. If I can't do it, or make a mistake, my friends are going to talk about it behind my back."

Participant 3.

"Because there are so many people in the class, they'll look at me . Then if I make a mistake, my friends will make fun of it."

Participant 5.

b. Lack of Motivation

Motivation is a process that describes the intensity of individuals in achieving their goals. In terms of learning, a student is said to have a high motivation to learn when they choose to continue to deepen the knowledge they get at school. From the data obtained, it is known that there are two out of five students who have low motivation in learning to practice speaking in English.

"I am too lazy to study at home, most of the time I only discuss the material at school with the teacher."

Participant 2.

"I don't have the motivation to study at home, so I just learn it at school."

Participant 5.

c. Lack of Vocabulary and Grammar

Another factor experienced by students is the lack of knowledge about vocabulary and grammar which is difficult to understand, so they are sometimes confused in expressing what they want to say because of difficulties in word selection and other grammatical rules.

"The most difficult thing for me is that it is too hard to understand the theory like tenses, and the grammar is like that."

Participant 4.

"It is difficult to express the words, as well as not mastering the language, grammar."

Participant 5.

d. Pronunciation

Pronunciation is another factor experienced by students when practicing speaking in English. The way of pronunciation in English has its own characteristics, which are certainly different from some pronunciations in Indonesian as the mother tongue of the participants. As Simarmata & Pardede (2018) stated that “The students’ pronounce all of the words by using English as the second language, but their mother tongue still carried away their pronunciation.” The participant said that this was one of the difficulties they experienced when practicing communicating in English.

“That's all, from the pronunciation there is a standard. For example, I have to say it like this, so it's hard because I like to forget that.”

Participant 3.

“I'm afraid of being misunderstood in mispronouncing a word, difficult word selection.”

Participant 1.

4.1.2 External Factors

While factors that come from outside students (external factors) include factors related to the learning process which includes teachers, learning quality, learning instruments or facilities in the form of hardware and software as well as the environment, both social and natural environments (Nani & Evinna, 2019). In the learning process itself, of course every student has external factors that influence them. One of the closest is the surrounding environment, it can come from friends, teachers and even family.

a. Unsupportive Environment

Being in a broad scope, a student can be influenced by various things. One of them is the environment that is less supportive, this can come from the circle of friends at school or family and people around the house. Being surrounded by people with low interest in learning English becomes an influence on participants, so they feel a lack of support from those around them.

"Yes, maybe, if we can't speak English or make mistakes, others will talk about it behind our backs. So, our friends don't give us motivation either."

Participant 3.

"Environment, the majority rarely speak English so I'm not motivated sometimes."

Participant 5.

b. Difficult to Find Study Partner

Some participants stated that they had difficulty finding practice partners because the majority of their friends and people around them were also not very interested in learning English.

"When I'm with my friends, we rarely talk about English, because they are not interested. We usually talk in Indonesian. So they don't motivate me to learn English, it's hard to find friends to practice with."

Participant 4.

"Because of that environment, people around me are not used to communicating in English so I have a hard time finding friends to practice with."

Participant 1.

5. DISCUSSION

The interview session was answered based on their personal experience about what factors influence their obstacles in communicating using English. Even though they have studied it since early school, it turns out that the participants are still having troubles, which are influenced by two factors, they're internal and external factors. This is in accordance with the results of research conducted by Wulandari et al., in 2020, which stated that it is true that there are several challenges experienced by students in learning English and these influences come from internal and external factors.

For internal factors, the findings in the interview results categorize the internal factors in the obstacles experienced by students when practicing communicating using English: anxiety, low motivation, lack of knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, and the last is difficulty in pronunciation.

Anxiety, the feeling of anxiety experienced by students is a feeling of being afraid to make mistakes when speaking or saying something in English. This then will also affect the level of confidence of students in speaking or communicating practice. Similar to the results of research from Hapsari (2018) which states that Anxiety also became the problem faced by the participants. Some of them felt nervous or afraid to make mistakes when learning English. Anxiety usually became the barrier for the students to learn English. Students could feel anxiety in almost all their English skills.

Lack of motivation, Motivation is a process that describes the intensity of individuals in achieving their goals. Each participant has a variety of learning motivations. There are those who are motivated to learn in various ways, such as using digital applications, or learning through things they like, such as listening to music in English, for

example. The same results were presented by Chang (2019) in his research, stating that everyone has different motivations and is related to their natural talents.

Lack of vocabulary and grammar. Like other languages, English also had rules or grammar in its use. As a foreign language, of course, Indonesian students must also understand the used of grammar so that they could use it fluently in practice. This then becomes a challenge for the participants, some of them had a low level of understanding so it's not easy to remember and learn grammar or vocabulary in English. As in Hapsari research (2018), the results stated that the lack of vocabulary knowledge and mastery of grammar is one of the factors for students in learning English.

Pronunciation issue is another factor experienced by students when practicing speaking in English. The way of pronunciation in English has its own characteristics, which are certainly different from some pronunciations in Indonesian as the mother tongue of the participants. According to Fatin (2021) which states that poor pronunciation is one of the linguistic factors owned by students and affects their English communication skills.

And the external factor comes from an unsupportive environment and it's hard to find friends to study with. Being in a broad scope, a student can be influenced by various things. One of them is the environment that is less supportive, this can come from the circle of friends at school or family and people around the house. Being surrounded by people with low interest in learning English becomes an influence on participants, so they feel a lack of support from those around them.

6. CONCLUSION

The researcher concluded that the participants had studied English since early school, but they still felt less confident and experienced some difficulties in practicing speaking English. Then based on the finding about what challenges are experienced by students in the practice of communicating English in class, including internal and external factors. The dominant internal factor is the students' lack of understanding in grammar and vocabulary, poor pronunciation, followed by low self-confidence caused by feelings of anxiety that they will make mistakes when practicing speaking. And another factor is the low motivation of students, who have no interest in learning English outside of school, or doing self-study at home. The external factor experienced by almost all participants was a less supportive learning environment both at school and outside of school. People around who have low interest in English, often underestimate the participants who want to practice. In summary, some of the variables in this study regarding learning constraints and strategies can be investigated more deeply by other researchers, besides that, the teacher's strategy variable in overcoming students' learning difficulties in English can also be added.

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