

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' PROBLEMS IN SPEAKING ACTIVITY AT SMAN 1 NARMADA

¹Rahmad Ramdani, ²Muhamad Suhaili, ³Sudirman

¹English Student, Faculty of Culture, Management and Business, Mandalika University of Education. Indonesia

²English Lecturer, Faculty of Culture, Management and Business, Mandalika University of Education. Indonesia

³English Lecturer, Faculty of Culture, Management and Business, Mandalika University of Education. Indonesia

Corresponding Author Email: rahmadrahh@gmail.com

ABSTRACTS	ARTICLE INFO
This study investigated the problems encountered by students in English speaking activities at SMAN 1 Narmada. The research aimed to identify the major speaking problems experienced by students and to explore the factors contributing to those difficulties during classroom speaking activities. A qualitative descriptive research design was employed in this study. The participants consisted of tenth-grade students of SMAN 1 Narmada selected through purposive sampling, along with the English teacher as a supporting informant. Data were collected through classroom observations, oral speaking tests, semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and documentation, and were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings revealed that students experienced six major problems in speaking activities, namely limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited grammar mastery, and low fluency. Among these problems, limited vocabulary and lack of confidence emerged as the most dominant factors affecting students' speaking performance. The findings also showed that students' speaking difficulties were influenced by both linguistic factors, including vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency, and psychological factors, such as speaking anxiety and low self-confidence. Overall, the findings indicate that improving students' speaking competence requires more communicative teaching practices, regular opportunities for speaking practice, and a supportive classroom environment that encourages students to communicate confidently in English.	Article History: Received: 23th July 2026 Revised: 27th July 2026 Published: July 2026 Keywords: <i>Speaking Activities, Speaking Problems, EFL Students, Qualitative Descriptive Research, English Speaking Competence.</i>

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential language skills in mastering English as a Foreign Language (EFL) because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and information effectively in real-life situations. Richards (2018) states that speaking proficiency is often regarded as the primary indicator of language learning success since learners are generally evaluated based on their ability to communicate orally. However, speaking is also considered one of the most challenging skills because it requires learners to simultaneously apply grammatical knowledge, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency during communication (Goh & Burns, 2018). Consequently, many EFL learners experience difficulties in expressing their ideas confidently and accurately, particularly in classroom

speaking activities. Derakhshan et al. (2021) further explain that limited language exposure and the lack of a supportive speaking environment are among the major factors that hinder students' speaking development.

At SMAN 1 Narmada, preliminary observations conducted by the researcher revealed that many students encounter significant difficulties when participating in English speaking activities. Although the curriculum encourages students to communicate actively in English, most students tend to remain silent or rely on their mother tongue, namely Indonesian or Sasak, during classroom interactions. These difficulties include limited vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, grammatical errors, lack of confidence, speaking anxiety, and fear of making mistakes, which are consistent with the findings of Riadil (2020). These problems indicate that students require more effective instructional support to improve their speaking ability. One possible solution is the implementation of a communicative approach combined with appropriate speaking assessment and interactive classroom techniques. Through communicative language teaching, teachers can create meaningful learning situations that encourage active participation, increase interaction between teachers and students, monitor students' speaking progress through continuous assessment, and provide constructive feedback on learning outcomes. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the problems encountered by students in speaking activities at SMAN 1 Narmada and to identify the factors contributing to these difficulties in order to provide useful insights for improving English speaking instruction in EFL classrooms.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the researcher applies a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the linguistic and psychological problems encountered by students during English speaking activities. This approach enables the researcher to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the factors that influence students' speaking performance in the classroom. The study focuses on describing the real conditions experienced by students during speaking activities without manipulating any variables. This research was conducted at SMAN 1 Narmada during the 2025/2026 academic year. The primary subjects of the study were tenth-grade students who experienced difficulties in English speaking activities. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select participants who demonstrated the most significant speaking problems. To support the data collection process, several supporting instruments were employed, including an observation checklist, a semi-structured interview guide, an oral speaking test, a questionnaire, and documentation. The observation checklist was designed to record students' participation, speaking performance, and classroom interactions systematically. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions to explore students' perceptions of the factors affecting their speaking ability. The oral speaking test was administered to identify students' speaking proficiency, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency, while the questionnaire was used to obtain supporting information regarding students' attitudes and perceived difficulties in speaking English. Documentation, including photographs, field notes, and audio recordings, was also utilized to strengthen the credibility of the collected data. The collected data were analyzed using the Interactive Model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of three interconnected stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

RESEARCH FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that the tenth-grade students at SMAN 1 Narmada experienced various difficulties when participating in English speaking activities. During classroom observations, the researcher found that many students were reluctant to speak English in front of the class. Most participants appeared nervous, hesitant, and lacked confidence when responding to the teacher's questions or performing speaking tasks. Based on the observation and interview data, six major speaking problems were identified, namely lack of vocabulary, poor pronunciation, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited grammar mastery, and low fluency.

The first problem identified in this study is **lack of vocabulary**. Most participants reported that they did not possess sufficient English vocabulary to express their ideas during speaking activities. As a result, they frequently paused in the middle of conversations, mixed Indonesian with English, or remained silent because they were unable to find appropriate words. One participant, Hamdan Asburi from class XE6, explained, *"I want to speak English, but sometimes I do not know the meaning of the words, so I stop speaking."* Another student stated, *"I only know simple vocabulary, so it is difficult to make long sentences."* These findings indicate that limited vocabulary significantly affects students' ability to communicate effectively in English and limits their participation in classroom speaking activities.

The second problem is **poor pronunciation**. Observation data showed that many students mispronounced common English words because English pronunciation differs considerably from Indonesian pronunciation. Several students admitted that although they knew the meaning of certain words, they were uncertain about how to pronounce them correctly. The English teacher, Mrs. Baiq Ayu, explained, *"Students often have problems with pronunciation because they rarely practice speaking English outside the classroom."* One student similarly stated, *"Sometimes I know the word, but I do not know how to pronounce it correctly."* These findings suggest that insufficient pronunciation practice negatively influences students' speaking performance and reduces their confidence during oral communication.

The third problem identified is **lack of confidence**. The findings demonstrated that many students felt shy, nervous, and uncomfortable when speaking English in front of their classmates. During classroom observations, students often avoided eye contact, spoke in very low voices, or refused to perform speaking tasks when requested by the teacher. One participant explained, *"I feel nervous when my friends listen to me speaking English,"* while another stated, *"I am afraid that my friends will laugh at me if I speak incorrectly."* These responses indicate that low self-confidence is one of the major psychological barriers preventing students from actively participating in speaking activities.

The fourth problem is **fear of making mistakes**. Interview data revealed that many students were afraid of making grammatical, pronunciation, or vocabulary errors while speaking English. Consequently, they preferred to remain silent or provide only very short responses rather than risk making mistakes. The English teacher stated, *"Students are afraid of making mistakes because they think English is difficult."* Similarly, one student explained, *"I am afraid of speaking because my grammar is not good."* These findings indicate that fear

of making mistakes significantly reduces students' willingness to practice speaking English in the classroom.

The fifth problem identified is **limited grammar mastery**. Observation and interview data showed that many students experienced difficulties constructing grammatically correct sentences during speaking activities. They frequently translated sentences directly from Indonesian into English, resulting in incorrect sentence structures and inappropriate tense usage. One participant stated, *"I am confused about using tenses when speaking,"* while another explained, *"Grammar is difficult, so I often make mistakes."* These findings suggest that inadequate grammatical knowledge remains one of the principal barriers affecting students' oral communication.

The final problem identified in this study is **low fluency**. Many students spoke slowly and frequently paused because they needed additional time to recall vocabulary and organize grammatical structures before expressing their ideas. During classroom observations, the researcher found that students often hesitated before responding to questions and produced fragmented speech. One student explained, *"I need time to think before speaking English,"* while another stated, *"I often stop because I am confused about what to say next."* These findings indicate that limited speaking practice contributes to students' low level of fluency and prevents them from communicating smoothly in English.

Factors Contributing to Students' Speaking Problems

Based on the observation and interview findings, the researcher identified several factors contributing to students' speaking difficulties. The most dominant factors include limited vocabulary knowledge, inadequate pronunciation practice, weak grammatical competence, low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and insufficient opportunities to practice speaking English both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, the findings indicate that students rarely use English in their daily communication and have limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments. Consequently, they become anxious and reluctant to participate actively in classroom speaking activities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' speaking problems are influenced by both linguistic and psychological factors. Linguistic factors include vocabulary limitations, pronunciation difficulties, grammar problems, and low fluency, while psychological factors consist of lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. These findings suggest that improving students' speaking ability requires not only strengthening their language competence but also creating a supportive classroom environment that encourages frequent speaking practice, reduces anxiety, and increases students' confidence in using English for communication.

The findings indicate that tenth-grade students at SMAN 1 Narmada experienced six major problems in speaking activities, namely lack of vocabulary, poor pronunciation, low confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited grammar mastery, and low fluency. Among these problems, lack of vocabulary emerged as the most dominant obstacle. Most students reported that they were unable to express their ideas effectively because they did not possess sufficient English vocabulary. Consequently, they frequently paused while speaking, mixed Indonesian with English, or remained silent during classroom speaking activities. This finding supports the view that vocabulary is a fundamental component of communicative

competence because it enables learners to convey meaning accurately and effectively. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, students encounter difficulties in participating actively in oral communication.

The second major problem identified in this study is poor pronunciation. The findings revealed that students rarely practiced speaking English outside the classroom, resulting in inaccurate pronunciation and hesitation during speaking activities. The differences between English and Indonesian sound systems further contributed to students' pronunciation difficulties. These findings are consistent with Goh and Burns (2018), who argue that pronunciation is an essential element of speaking proficiency and requires continuous practice to achieve intelligible communication. Limited exposure to authentic spoken English prevents learners from developing accurate pronunciation and natural speech patterns.

The findings also revealed that psychological factors played a significant role in influencing students' speaking performance. Many participants admitted that they lacked confidence and were afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in front of their classmates. Fear of negative evaluation caused students to become passive and reluctant to participate in classroom speaking activities. They were concerned that incorrect pronunciation, grammar, or vocabulary use would lead to criticism or ridicule from their peers. These findings support Derakhshan et al. (2021), who emphasize that speaking anxiety and low self-confidence are among the most influential psychological barriers affecting EFL learners' oral performance. A supportive classroom atmosphere is therefore essential to encourage students to participate more confidently in speaking activities.

Another important finding concerns students' limited grammar mastery. Many participants experienced difficulty constructing grammatically correct sentences, particularly in using appropriate tenses and sentence structures. As a result, students frequently hesitated before speaking because they needed additional time to formulate their responses. Grammar limitations also reduced students' confidence in expressing their ideas, as they feared producing incorrect utterances. Furthermore, the study found that many students demonstrated low speaking fluency because they lacked sufficient opportunities to practice English regularly. Frequent pauses, repetition, and slow speech production indicated that students were still struggling to integrate vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation simultaneously during communication.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students' speaking difficulties are influenced by both linguistic and psychological factors. Linguistic factors include limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, inadequate grammar mastery, and low fluency, whereas psychological factors involve lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes. These findings are consistent with previous studies reporting that EFL learners commonly encounter speaking problems due to insufficient language competence and psychological barriers that reduce their willingness to communicate. The results suggest that English teachers should provide more communicative speaking activities, increase students' exposure to authentic English, enrich vocabulary learning, and create a supportive classroom environment that encourages students to practice speaking without fear of making mistakes.

The findings also revealed several challenges faced by the English teacher in teaching speaking activities at SMAN 1 Narmada. The teacher explained that students'

limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and low fluency made it difficult to conduct communicative speaking lessons effectively. Many students were reluctant to participate in oral activities because they lacked confidence and were afraid of making mistakes. Consequently, classroom interaction was often dominated by only a few active students, while the majority remained passive throughout the lesson.

These findings indicate that teaching speaking in an EFL classroom requires not only appropriate instructional strategies but also continuous encouragement to build students' confidence and willingness to communicate. Teachers need to create interactive learning environments that provide frequent speaking opportunities, constructive feedback, and supportive classroom interactions. By addressing both linguistic and psychological barriers simultaneously, students are expected to participate more actively in speaking activities and gradually improve their English speaking competence.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study indicate that the tenth-grade students at SMAN 1 Narmada experienced various problems in English speaking activities, including limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited grammar mastery, and low fluency, with limited vocabulary and lack of confidence emerging as the most dominant factors affecting their speaking performance. The results of classroom observations and interviews revealed that these difficulties were influenced by both linguistic factors, such as inadequate vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, grammatical limitations, and low fluency, and psychological factors, including speaking anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence. Furthermore, students rarely practiced speaking English outside the classroom, resulting in limited exposure to authentic language use and fewer opportunities to develop their oral communication skills. Overall, the findings suggest that students' speaking competence can be improved by increasing opportunities for regular speaking practice, strengthening vocabulary and grammar instruction, and creating a supportive and communicative classroom environment that encourages students to participate actively and confidently in English speaking activities.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abrar, M., et al. (2020). Psychological barriers in English speaking: A case study of Indonesian EFL learners. *Journal of Language and Education*.
- Ahmed, S. (2018). Linguistic competence as a fundamental requirement for successful oral communication. *International Journal of English Linguistics*.
- Al-Roud, A. (2020). The integration of fluency and accuracy in effective speaking. *Journal of English Language Teaching*.
- Alina, et al. (2015). *The five aspects of speaking skills: A comprehensive guide*. Mataram: Undikma Press.
- Defrioka, A. (2016). Lawtie's perspective on fundamental human communication. *Journal of English Teaching*.
- Derakhshan, A., et al. (2021). Common problems in speaking activities: Lack of exposure and supportive environment. *Educational Review*.

- Goh, C. C., & Burns, A. (2018). *Teaching speaking: A holistic approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Hardianti. (2021). *The primary causes of students' reluctance to speak in Indonesian EFL classrooms*. Unpublished Thesis.
- Hidayah. (2017). *O'Malley and Pierce's negotiation of meaning in speaking*. Jakarta: Language Education Journal.
- Ilham. (2020). *Brown's types of speaking performance*. English Education Journal.
- Laila. (2022). *Cognitive overload in linguistic problems of EFL learners*. International Journal of Education.
- Muklas. (2017). *Lado's theory on the ability to express ideas and report acts*. Journal of Linguistics.
- Mulya. (2016). *Mead and Rubin's interactive process of speaking*. Mataram University Press.
- Pratama, A., & Mykhailova, O. (2023). *Digital and hybrid learning problematics: Decreased physical interaction in post-pandemic era*. Journal of Digital Education.
- Rao, P. S. (2020). *The importance of speaking skills in English classrooms*. Academic Journal of English Studies.
- Richards, J. C. (2018). *Teaching English speaking in the 21st century*. Cambridge University Press.
- Syafriyadin, et al. (2020). *Anxiety and confidence: Psychological factors in spontaneous speaking activities*. Journal of Applied Linguistics.
- Tuan, N. H., & Mai, T. N. (2022). *Pragmatic competence and social aspects of speaking*. EFL Research Journal.
- Wastiti. (2022). *Challenges in rural areas: Limited exposure to authentic English materials*. Unpublished Research Paper.