

Problems Faced by Rural Area Students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah in Learning English Speaking

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the process of acquiring English speaking skills, emphasizing the indispensable role of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in facilitating effective communication between speakers and listeners. Acknowledging the critical need for learners to command these core components of the English language, this research specifically targets students residing in rural locales. Utilizing a qualitative methodology, the investigation centred on eighth-grade students from a Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah, chosen via convenience sampling. Data were garnered through observations, interviews, and questionnaires, revealing that issues related to practical application of skills were more pronounced than theoretical knowledge gaps. Notably, the findings indicate that a lack of confidence significantly impedes skill development, with 80% of challenges linked to this factor, compared to 72% associated with knowledge deficiencies in language production. In light of these insights, the research underscores the paramount problem of inadequate skill factors among students. Consequently, it advocates for English teachers to exhibit superior pedagogical competence, highlighting the necessity for educators to deploy effective teaching methodologies within the instructional framework.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the realm of English language learning, mastery of four core skills—speaking, writing, listening, and reading—is imperative. The interconnectedness of these skills suggests that holistic practice can significantly enhance learning strategies and outcomes, particularly in speaking, which many learners prioritize (Usman et al., 2023). Recognizing the importance of speaking skills, this study underscores their role in facilitating communication and meaning-making through verbal and non-verbal symbols across various contexts, enabling global communication (Andi & Arafah, 2017; Richards & Renandya, 2002; Scrivener, 1994; Normawati, Nugrahaeni, Manggolo, & Susanto, 2023; Brown, 2007).

Acquiring a language and attaining communication proficiency necessitate mastery of four pivotal skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these, speaking is often regarded as the most crucial, as it fundamentally facilitates the transmission of ideas and knowledge (Ur, 1996; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Shteiwi & Hamuda, 2016; Anugrah, 2022). The terminology "speakers" of a language further highlights the centrality of speaking in language competency. This skill is not merely about verbalizing words; it involves fluency, the coherent delivery of ideas, and the initiation of dialogues. Moreover, speaking entails the synthesis and articulation of thoughts through both verbal and non-verbal cues across various contexts, thus enabling effective idea exchange.

In the context of the 2013 English curriculum in Indonesia, Purnomo (2018) suggests that the curriculum's implementation seeks to foster individuals who are creative, innovative, and productive. This aim is pursued by nurturing affective skills, attitudes, and an integrated knowledge base among Indonesians. Despite the challenges inherent in the curriculum's complexity, it presents opportunities for enhancing teaching and learning methodologies. Thus, speaking emerges as a pivotal skill in educational settings, as it encapsulates the ability to express and share knowledge effectively, affirming its significance in comprehensive language acquisition and pedagogical practices.

This research describes the problem faced by students in learning to speak and communicate effectively in rural areas of central Sulawesi. This problem can be categorized into two factors, namely knowledge and skill factors. The knowledge factors include the limited of students' understanding in aspects of learning speaking, as well as their lack of vocabulary and pronunciation. The skill factors, on the other hand, encompass a lack of confidence, achievement motivation, and willingness to speak due to shyness or reluctance (Usman, 2017). Furthermore, this research examined the cause of this problem such as inhibition, environmental factors, and the influence of the mother tongue.

Recent studies by Cabaltica & Arcala (2021), Jaya et al. (2022), Soreh et al. (2022), and Ayu (2018) have identified several challenges faced by students in learning English speaking skills, including grammatical inaccuracies, insufficient practice, limited opportunities for engagement, and nervousness. Complementing these findings, Yuniasti (2021) observed that students' difficulties are rooted in both linguistic and psychological domains, notably in pronunciation and the fear of making mistakes, coupled with anxiety. This study introduces a novel approach by examining the specific problems and their causes in learning English speaking skills, guided by the theoretical frameworks of Thornbury (2005) and Ur (1991). Thornbury's theory is utilized to outline the speaking-related difficulties, whereas Ur's theory provides insight into the contributing factors. The objective of this research is to bridge the existing knowledge gap through a comprehensive analysis of the challenges in acquiring speaking proficiency, aiming to offer grounded solutions. This approach underscores the necessity for further research to delve into these complexities and develop effective strategies for overcoming the barriers to English language acquisition.

This study is propelled by two pivotal research questions aimed at elucidating the obstacles encountered by eighth-grade students at a Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah in acquiring English speaking proficiency: (1) What are the specific challenges faced by these students in learning to speak English? and (2) What are the underlying causes of these challenges? Identifying and understanding these issues is critical to addressing the pedagogical needs of the students and enhancing the effectiveness of English language instruction in similar educational settings. The investigation categorizes the problems into two main areas: knowledge and skill factors. Knowledge factors encompass essential linguistic components such as vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar, which constitute the foundational knowledge required for language acquisition. Skill factors, conversely, involve practical aspects of language use, including confidence levels, which significantly affect fluency and the ability to communicate effectively in English. Through this research framework, the study aims to thoroughly analyze the problems and their causative factors that impede English-speaking learning among students at the specified institution. This endeavor seeks not only to catalogue the challenges but also to contribute to the development of targeted interventions that can ameliorate these issues, thereby supporting students in their journey toward English-speaking proficiency.

2. METHODS

In this investigation, the research adopted a qualitative methodology aimed at providing an in-depth exploration of the educational environment. The study utilized a case study design, a methodological approach within ethnographic research that focuses on a single entity, whether it be an individual, group, organization, or program. As articulated by Mills & Gay (2016), this design is particularly suited for inquiries that prioritize qualitative questions and seek to understand the underlying processes. The case study approach is advantageous for revealing the nuances of the research context and assessing the implementation extent of specific educational programs or innovations.

The choice of qualitative case study methodology aligns with the research's objective to uncover the multifaceted problems and causative factors affecting students' English speaking skills. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks proposed by Thornbury (2005) and Ur (1991), the study endeavors to categorize the observed speaking-related issues and their underlying causes. Thornbury's (2005) theory assists in identifying the speaking challenges, while Ur's (1991) framework aids in elucidating the factors contributing to these difficulties. This methodological and theoretical synergy is instrumental in bridging the existing knowledge gap, underscoring the need for further exploration in this academic domain.

In collecting the data, triangulation of method was utilized. Instead of describing the facts about a social phenomenon, this type of triangulation aims to enhance knowledge of the investigated object. The stages are observation, interview, and questionnaire. The following are descriptions of these instruments:

2.1 Observation

Observation aims to collect data, where the investigation team examines the research circumstances. This method is appropriately applied in studies focused on the teaching-learning process, student activity, and potential issues. This research applied this technique to understand the procedure of learning and teaching speaking, carried out in three sessions and problems, and the causing factors.

2.2 Interviews

Interviews are effective methods to understand individuals' opinions or emotions regarding a particular matter. Stainback (1988) stated that interviews furnish the writer with a means to attain a more profound comprehension of how students construe a circumstance or phenomenon that cannot be obtained through mere observation. Therefore, interviews are essentially a dialogue between two individuals, wherein the interviewer asks questions to acquire a more profound understanding through observation. A teacher interview was conducted to augment the data from observation and delve deeper into the causes of the challenges students face when teaching and learning English speaking.

2.3 Questionnaire

This research used a questionnaire as an instrument. The investigation team specifically utilized closed questionnaires which, according to Arikunto (2010), consist of questions respondents can answer directly. The question structures employed multiple-choice options, where respondents were given a set of choices and are required to select one. Typical choices can make analysis easier and offer logical groupings for contrasting respondents of different types. The questionnaire was administered to students in order to complement the data obtained from observation and interviews.

Qualitative analysis was used to analyze the data obtained from the interviews and questionnaires. This consisted of three processes namely data reduction, display, and conclusion. These steps were adapted from Male (2016) and explained as follows:

2.3.1 Data reduction

Data reduction is the method of setting, concentrating, streamlining, condensing, and converting the data in transcriptions or written-up field notes. This process is an ongoing one throughout any qualitative research project and continues even after fieldwork up to the conclusive report is prepared. As a form of analysis, data reduction refines, categorizes, concentrates, discards, and arranges data in a manner that enables drawing and verifying conclusions.

2.3.2 Data display

Data display is a stage of organizing and presenting information in a compressed form to facilitate conclusion drawing and action. This can be achieved through various means such as matrices, graphs, charts, and networks. All of these tools are created to compile structured data into a compact and easily accessible format, enabling analysts to effortlessly access the information and either draw valid conclusions or proceed to the subsequent stage of analysis.

2.3.3 Conclusions are confirmed as the analyst proceeds.

Verification can take the form of a momentary second thought that occurs to the analyst while writing, prompting a brief return to the field notes. Alternatively, it may involve extensive discussions and reviews among colleagues to establish "inter-subjective consensus," or significant efforts to reproduce a finding in another dataset.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 The Students' Problems in Learning Speaking

The researchers operated the observation checklist and distributed a questionnaire to identify problems that students face when learning to speak. As stated by Thornbury (2005), the difficulties found by students can be categorized into two main areas, namely knowledge factors and skill factors. In terms of knowledge factors, students may lack understanding of aspects of pronunciation, and vocabulary. As for skill factors, they may experience low confidence, motivation, or shyness, all of which can inhibit fluency.

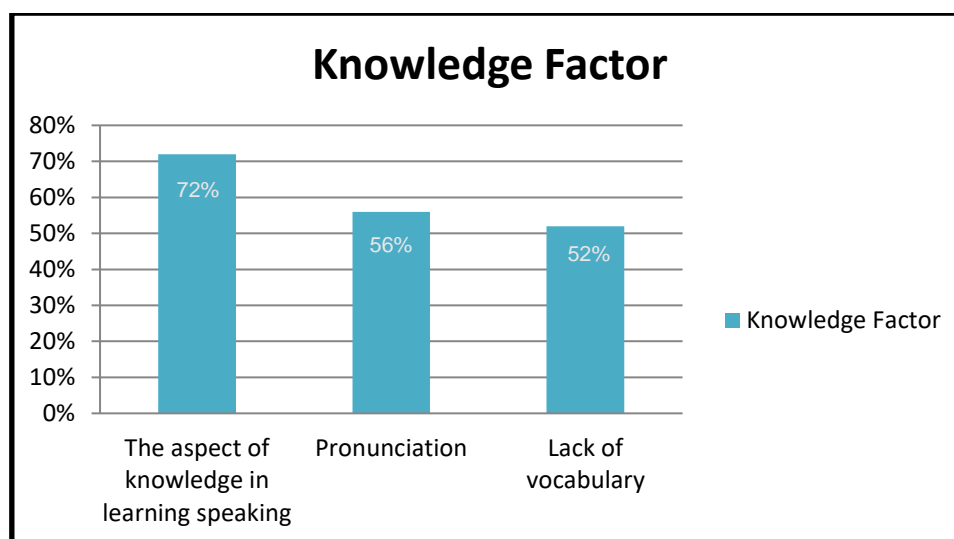


Figure1. Percentage of Knowledge Factor

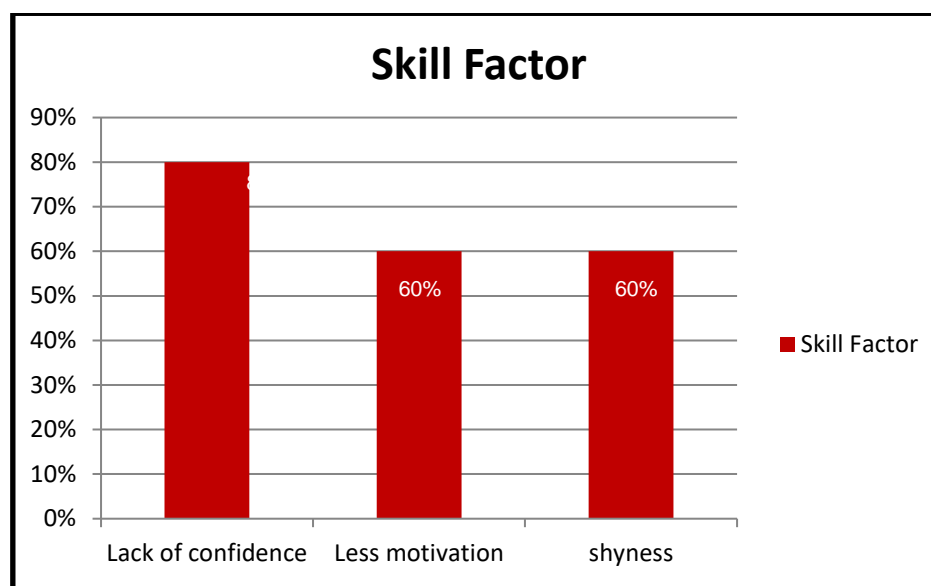


Figure 2. Percentage of Skill Factor

The observation and the questionnaire responses generate conclusions on the difficulties faced as follow:

1. The majority of students lacked knowledge of the language skills necessary for speech production when learning to speak. In detail, it is about 72% they lacked of Grammar knowledge.
2. The students lacked vocabulary which made it difficult for them to speak English. It was about 52%.
3. They were not good at pronunciation, making it difficult to pronounce words correctly when speaking. Based on the figure 1, it was about 56%.
4. The students lacked confidence. Based on Figure 1 it is about 80% the students who were less confidence.
5. They lacked the motivation to learn how to speak English. It is 60%
6. The students felt shy to speak English. It is equal to less motivation (60%).

The research findings corroborate the theoretical propositions regarding the multifaceted challenges encountered by students in learning to speak English. Despite the hurdles in mastering speaking skills, the identified problems resonated with those delineated in the theoretical underpinnings. Upon comprehensive analysis and synthesis of the study's outcomes, the research team posited enhancements to teaching methodologies to better support language acquisition.

Effective learning of speaking skills necessitates not only a firm grasp of grammar and a rich lexicon but also proficiency in pronunciation and engagement with dynamic teaching methodologies. Such pedagogical strategies are essential for sparking student interest and facilitating the construction of coherent sentences with accurate pronunciation. Hence, the researchers advocate for a holistic approach to teaching English speaking, encompassing a thorough understanding of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and the adoption of innovative and captivating teaching styles. This holistic strategy aims to cultivate students' interest in learning and their ability to articulate thoughts clearly and correctly in English.

Speaking instruction and learning were thought to be below their potential. In using the theory from the expert as a guide, the teacher did not implement all of the procedures. According to Brown (2007), there are specific guidelines for training speaking such as Pre teaching by getting students

interested in the task, setting up initial pair work and giving them five to ten minutes to discuss, add or adjust the list of suggestions, facilitating the setup of groups, giving them a twenty-minute time limit for the planning task, and finally presiding over the report-back session where each group makes its recommendations. It is also helpful in providing posters to aid the groups in presenting their ideas.

This study sought to explore the obstacles encountered by students at a Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah in developing English speaking skills, guided by the theoretical framework proposed by Thornbury (2005). Through a combination of observations, administered questionnaires, and interviews, the research aimed to identify the root causes of the students' struggles with speaking English. Observational data revealed deviations from Brown's (2007) recommended teaching steps for speaking skills, with certain activities, such as post-activity evaluations, being consistently omitted. This lack of feedback and goal clarification may have contributed to the students' confusion and limited progress. Despite the teacher's adherence to many of the outlined steps, the absence of crucial components, attributed to time constraints, hindered the effectiveness of the teaching approach.

The students demonstrated challenges in achieving conversational fluency, primarily due to limited vocabulary and incorrect pronunciation. This was further compounded by insufficient practice opportunities, with engagements largely restricted to teacher-initiated interactions. Consequently, the students' speaking abilities remained below the expected standards.

Questionnaire responses and further analysis aligned with findings from previous studies (Ratnasari, 2020; Jaya et al., 2022), underscoring the students' difficulties with key language aspects, including vocabulary and pronunciation. These challenges were exacerbated by psychological barriers such as shyness, lack of confidence, and both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational deficits, which were also noted by Usman et al. (2019) and Said et al. (2023). Anxiety and a limited understanding of spoken content further impeded their ability to engage effectively in English communication.

The cumulative evidence from this research suggests that the observed difficulties are not only consistent with the theoretical perspectives of Thornbury (2005) but also indicate potential areas for further investigation and intervention. The implications of omitted teaching steps, due to time constraints, offer a critical avenue for enhancing instructional strategies to support student success in English-speaking competencies.

3.2 The Causes of Problems in Learning Speaking

The researchers observed and interviewed the teacher and gave a questionnaire to determine the causes of problems faced by students in learning to speak. Based on the theory, there were three causes of problems in learning speaking, namely Inhibition, Environment, and Mother tongue usage.

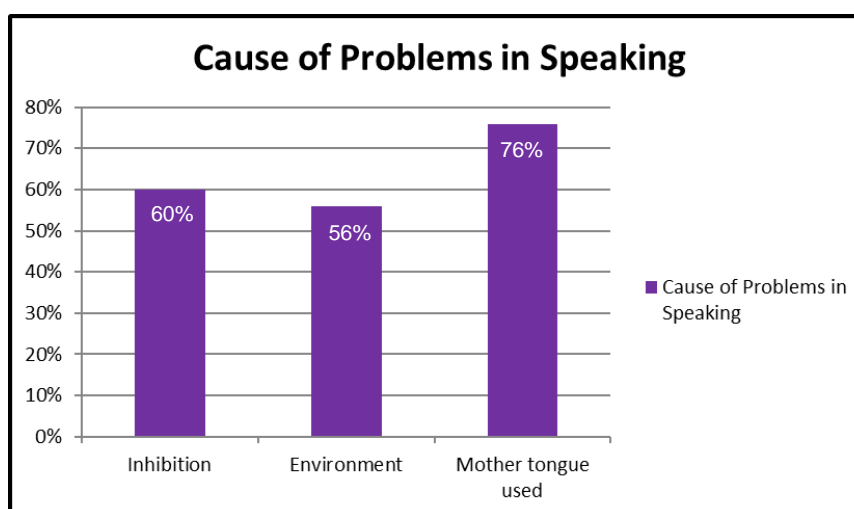


Figure 3. Percentage of Cause of Problems in Speaking

Referring to the interviews, observations, and responses from the students on the questionnaire sheets, the difficulties faced by the students were caused by:

3.2.1 Inhibition

The students often felt inhibited when trying to speak English in the classroom because they were worried about how to pronounce words correctly. Based on Figure 3, it is about 60% the students who were worried to speak because of mispronunciation.

3.2.2 Environment

The environment around students is accustomed to Indonesian culture, making a foreign language a new and unfamiliar thing for them. The lack of familiarity with the language creates fear among the students that they might be ridiculed by their peers, which in turn hinders the development of their English-speaking skills. With reference to Figure 3, it is about 56% of the students who have a problem with the environment.

3.2.3 Mother tongue usage

Most students had difficulty speaking English with a good accent due to the influence of their mother tongue. It was natural for them to struggle when attempting to speak the language.

Based on the observations, interviews, and questionnaires, conclusions were made about the students' difficulty in learning to speak. According to Ur (1991), there were three causes of problems in learning to speak. These problems are inhibition, environment, and the use of the mother tongue. From the research data, only three of Ur's (1991) problems were known to be present in this research. Specifically, the students often felt inhibited when trying to speak English in the classroom as they were concerned about pronouncing words correctly. The students had low motivation and self-esteem to express themselves using a foreign language (Wahyuni et al., 2023). Therefore, during the speaking process, they remained silent or passive. Due to their natural tendency to struggle when attempting to speak English, the majority of the students found it difficult to speak English with a good accent, as they were heavily influenced by their mother tongue.

The study identified environmental conditions as a considerable barrier to acquiring English-speaking proficiency among students at a Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah. This barrier encompasses not only the physical learning environment, which is hampered by noise and distractions due to the school's proximity to a sports field, but also social dynamics. Students were observed to engage in English speaking activities primarily under teacher direction, with peer influence reinforcing the use of the Indonesian language.

This scenario aligns with findings by Chand (2021), Radzi, Haron, Rosaidi, Sani, Rahman (2023), and Raqib, Firman, and Sastrawati (2023), who noted the prevalence of teacher-centered instructional methods that favor writing over speaking tasks. Such approaches, coupled with the interference of students' mother tongue and socio-economic constraints, diminish students' opportunities and motivation to practice English speaking outside of school hours.

Contrastingly, Harahap, Ardila, & Jaidie (2023) attribute speaking challenges to psychological, social, and technological factors. These insights corroborate the suitability of Ur's (1991) theory in addressing the multifaceted nature of speaking difficulties, underscoring the need for instructional strategies that are sensitive to these diverse influences. In light of these considerations, it is imperative for English teachers to harness the potential of Technology, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) in fostering effective English speaking skills. Innovative teaching methods that cater to the unique needs of students from varied socio-economic backgrounds are essential. Additionally, educational institutions must invest in comprehensive teaching aids and cultivate an engaging learning atmosphere.

Future research should explore innovative strategies for overcoming the challenges associated with English speaking proficiency, particularly those integrating technological advancements. By addressing these critical areas, educators can significantly enhance the efficacy of English language instruction, thereby improving students' communicative competencies.

4. CONCLUSION

In summary, this investigation reveals that the difficulties faced by students in acquiring English speaking skills stem primarily from a deficient understanding of essential language components, including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Interview and questionnaire findings indicate that a significant impediment to learning to speak English is the students' reluctance to use the language, often due to feelings of inhibition. Additionally, the learning environment, heavily influenced by the students' native language and lacking in resources conducive to language practice, further hinders their ability to develop speaking proficiency. Addressing these challenges necessitates educators who are not only proficient in English but also possess comprehensive pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competencies in teaching speaking skills. This study, focusing on the specific context of rural students at a Private Madrasah Tsanawiyah, underscores the need for future research to explore the integration of instructional innovations with technology. Such initiatives could significantly enhance the effectiveness of English-speaking instruction. Moreover, future research should expand to investigate the students' experiences and challenges across other language domains, including listening, writing, reading skills, and the foundational language components of vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar.

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