

Analysis of Elementary School Students' Difficulties in Speaking Skills in English Language Learning: A Literature Study

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the types of difficulties and causal factors experienced by elementary school students in speaking skills in English learning through a literature review. The method used is descriptive qualitative with data collection techniques in the form of reviews of various relevant journals and books. The results of the study indicate that speaking difficulties are complex and encompass both linguistic and non-linguistic aspects. From a linguistic perspective, the main obstacles include limited vocabulary, pronunciation errors due to differences in the sound systems of Indonesian and English, and a weak understanding of grammar in constructing simple sentences. Meanwhile, from a non-linguistic perspective, psychological factors such as shyness, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence inhibit students' courage to speak. In addition, external factors such as limited opportunities for practice, less communicative learning methods, and an environment that does not support the use of English also exacerbate these difficulties.

Keywords: Speaking Skills, Elementary School Students, English Learning, Learning Difficulties.

A. INTRODUCTION

Learning is a crucial need for everyone's development. Through learning, one gains knowledge, experience, skills, and insights that lead to changes in attitudes and behavior. Speaking is a language skill that students must master, especially when learning English. English is a communication tool that serves as a means to achieve specific goals. English can be considered an international language studied in countries around the world, including Indonesia.

Mastery of an international language is essential for international competition (Muliana, 2020). English learning at the elementary school level focuses not only on vocabulary and language structure mastery but also on the ability to use language as a means of communication. In this context, speaking skills are a fundamental aspect because they reflect students' ability to construct meaning directly through oral interaction. Speaking skills go beyond simply pronouncing words or sentences; they involve the integration of linguistic abilities, communication skills, and an understanding of the social context of language.

According to Sherbekova (2022), speaking is a key skill in foreign language learning because it allows students to express ideas, feelings, and thoughts concretely in communication situations. This demonstrates that success in English learning is measured not only by the ability to understand the language but also by the ability to

use it actively in everyday communication. At the elementary school level, developing speaking skills plays a strategic role because this age phase is the initial period for building self-confidence and communication habits in a foreign language. Early speaking lessons help students build the courage to interact, improve language fluency, and develop communication competencies that will impact subsequent levels of education.

According to Kamengko (2024), speaking skills are an essential part of mastering English because through speaking practice, students learn to connect language knowledge with real-life use in communication situations. Thus, speaking not only serves as a learning outcome but also as a means to strengthen the language learning process itself through interaction, feedback, and direct communication experiences. However, the reality of learning shows that speaking skills remain the most challenging aspect for elementary school students. Various studies have shown that early childhood students often experience difficulty expressing ideas verbally even though they have passively understood the material.

Saragih et al. (2024) revealed that limited exposure to English, lack of practice opportunities, and low self-confidence are dominant factors causing students to experience difficulties in speaking. Similar findings were also conveyed by Mubarokah et al. (2025), who stated that elementary school students often experience difficulties in remembering pronunciation, understanding material thoroughly, and adjusting language use in oral communication. Furthermore, a lack of vocabulary and fear of making mistakes often lead students to choose silence rather than trying to speak, so that the development of speaking skills is not optimal.

Based on these conditions, a study of students' difficulties in speaking skills is crucial, particularly through a literature review that allows researchers to identify patterns of difficulty that consistently emerge across various learning contexts. This analysis is expected to not only describe the problems experienced by elementary school students in speaking but also provide a conceptual basis for developing learning strategies that are more relevant to the needs of students as beginning English learners. This article focuses on the forms of difficulties and causal factors experienced by elementary school students in speaking skills in English learning based on the results of literature studies.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method. According to Sugiyono (2023), the qualitative descriptive method aims to describe phenomena systematically, factually, and accurately by presenting the actual situation in accordance with the research focus. Data collection in this study was conducted through literature review by reviewing various relevant journals and books to strengthen the theoretical basis and help understand the problems regarding elementary school students' difficulties in speaking skills in English learning. The data were then analyzed qualitatively and presented in the form of descriptive descriptions.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Elementary school students' difficulties in English speaking skills are a complex and interrelated issue involving linguistic, psychological, and environmental aspects of the learning environment. The main obstacle lies not only in technical language skills but also in mental readiness and the learning support students receive at school. From a linguistic perspective, limited vocabulary is the most dominant obstacle to students' speaking skills. Rofii (2023) explains that students often do not know the right words to express ideas, making it difficult for them to express their opinions verbally. This condition causes students to stop mid-sentence or choose to remain silent because they are unable to continue speaking. This finding is supported by Setianingsih et al. (2025) and Putri and Sya (2023), who stated that the vocabulary mastered by students is still very basic and tends to be memorized without continuous practice, so it is quickly forgotten and difficult to apply in the context of meaningful sentences.

Besides limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties are also a significant problem. Rofii (2023) and Febriani and Sya (2022) revealed that students experience difficulty pronouncing English sounds that differ from their native language. Repeated pronunciation errors can become habitual and impact communication clarity. This demonstrates that incorrect pronunciation is not merely a technical error but can impact the overall effectiveness of message delivery.

Khoirunnisa and Sya (2023) emphasized that students' pronunciation errors often occur due to changes or omissions of sounds, both vowels and consonants. These errors are seen in the pronunciation of contractions, plural endings (-s), words with certain sound patterns, and words with silent letters. Students tend to pronounce words according to Indonesian customs, so the resulting sounds do not conform to English rules. As a result, the meaning of the word can change or be misunderstood by the interlocutor. This finding aligns with Fatma (2025) and Setianingsih et al. (2025) who stated that differences in the sound systems between Indonesian and English are the main cause of pronunciation difficulties. English has an inconsistent relationship between spelling and sound, so students often pronounce words as they are written in Indonesian. In fact, some students have to spell before pronouncing words, which causes speech to become choppy and less fluent.

Furthermore, grammar and sentence structure also pose challenges in speaking. Lena et al. (2023) explained that students often quickly forget vocabulary they have learned and have difficulty constructing it into simple sentence patterns such as subject, predicate, and object. Students tend to translate word for word from Indonesian to English without understanding the correct structure. This suggests that speaking difficulties are not only caused by a lack of vocabulary but also by a weak understanding of language structure.

These linguistic barriers are further exacerbated by psychological factors. Rofii (2023) revealed that many students feel embarrassed, afraid of making mistakes, and lack confidence when asked to speak in front of the class. Najwa and Ramadan (2024) also added that fear of being laughed at by friends makes students reluctant to try

speaking. Febriani and Sya (2022) and Fathin and Sya (2022) stated that low interest and motivation in learning are internal factors that exacerbate speaking difficulties. Thus, students' emotional state plays a significant role in determining their courage to use English actively.

In addition to internal factors, external factors such as the learning environment and teaching methods also influence students' speaking skills. Fathin and Sya (2022) emphasized that family, school, and community environments that are less supportive of English usage result in students rarely practicing in real-life situations. Putri and Sya (2023) also stated that learning that focuses more on theory and formulas without direct practice makes students less accustomed to active dialogue. The lack of familiarization and pronunciation practice, as noted by Khoirunnisa and Sya (2023), further limits students' opportunities to develop speaking skills.

However, there are positive findings indicating that speaking skills can develop if students receive sufficient practice. Fitriawan and Budiman (2021) explain that students who are accustomed to direct practice, such as giving presentations in front of the class, demonstrate greater fluency in speaking. This practice helps students gain confidence and become accustomed to pronouncing words and sentences in English. However, this fluency still depends heavily on vocabulary mastery and understanding word meanings.

These results indicate that elementary school students' difficulties in English speaking skills are rooted in a weak linguistic foundation, including vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Most studies confirm that limited vocabulary is the initial obstacle preventing students from expressing ideas verbally. Mastered vocabulary is still memorized and not used contextually, so it is quickly forgotten and difficult to apply in conversation. On the other hand, pronunciation errors occur due to differences in the sound systems between Indonesian and English, including omissions, errors in plural endings, contractions, and words with silent letters. These errors are often repeated and eventually become habits that hinder clear communication. Furthermore, weaknesses in understanding sentence structure lead students to translate word for word without paying attention to the correct pattern of subject, predicate, and object.

Speaking difficulties are not only linguistic but also influenced by psychological factors and the learning environment. Fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and a lack of self-confidence are major barriers to students' speaking skills. Low motivation and the perception that English is a difficult subject further exacerbate these barriers. Externally, learning that focuses too much on theory without practice and a lack of environmental support for active English use result in students rarely having opportunities to speak. Thus, speaking difficulties in elementary school students result from the interaction between weak language proficiency, the students' emotional state, and a lack of exposure to practice during the learning process.

D. CONCLUSION

Elementary school students' difficulties in speaking skills in English learning involve interrelated linguistic and non-linguistic barriers. The most dominant forms of difficulties are seen in limited vocabulary, pronunciation errors due to differences in the sound systems of Indonesian and English, and weak understanding of grammar in constructing simple sentences. In addition, psychological factors such as shyness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence, as well as external factors such as minimal practice and an unsupportive learning environment, contribute to these barriers. Thus, speaking difficulties in elementary school students are not only a technical language issue, but also the result of the interaction between limited language proficiency, the students' emotional state, and the lack of habituation to oral communication in the learning process.

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