

Investigating Students' Speaking Ability at Modern Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

This research uses an explanatory mix method design. The researcher analyses and describes the students' speaking ability through conversation tests while speaking problems experienced by students through interviews. The research finds that the eleventh-grade students of Al Falah Modern Islamic Boarding School are good at speaking. It was supported by the result of analysis. The analysis shows that 16 students have a high level of proficiency in spoken English, 10 students have a good level of speaking, 1 student has a fair level, and no students were deemed to have poor level of spoken English. At the same time, the difficulties experienced by students, including fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, the use of their native languages, shyness and lack of confidence were analysed through interviews. This research will serve as a valuable reference for teachers who were interested in improving their students' communication skill.

Keywords: analysis, speaking ability, speaking problems

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INTRODUCTION

Language is essential in our lives, especially in communication with others, which means language brings important aspects to human life. Almost all human activities relate to language use, whether spoken or uttered or through gestures or body language. Mwakapina (2021) identified language as a fundamental aspect of human beings, a characteristic that plays a significant role in defining our identity and interactions with others. Language also possesses a main point in helping humans express ideas, seek information, declare opinions, etc. English is regarded as an international language spoken in numerous countries across the world. However, it should be recognized that not all countries adopt English as their mother language.

Learning English as a foreign language in Indonesia has been an educational policy for several decades. (Siagian, 2021) argued that the English learning and teaching process has been implemented in schools since 1954, with the introduction of its old curriculum. Acquiring mastery in the English language requires students to develop four key skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Speaking is a vital ability that is regarded as the result of acquiring English language proficiency. Verbal communication is the main method of expressing thoughts, viewpoints, and information to other individuals. Nathues et al. (2021) argued that Speaking is the act of verbal communication where humans articulate words and sounds to convey messages or express thoughts; it involves the production of sounds through

the vocal cords, shaping those sounds into words and sentences, and delivering them in a coherent manner to audiences, it can occur in various forms, such as conversation, presentation, speech, debates, or any other situation where verbal expression involved. The ability to communicate information successfully is a crucial component that impacts the quality of spoken communication in transmitting information to others. Efficient communication is highly dependent on the precision and coherence of verbal language, which is essential for conveying intricate concepts, emotions, and intentions. Furthermore, it serves as a crucial method for expressing ideas, thoughts, and opinions. Leong & Ahmadi (2017) argued that speaking with proficiency is one of the most crucial skills for effective communication and that it is essential to develop and enhance this ability. The achievement of the Speaking component can be assessed by the ability to communicate and interact orally.

Generally, the speaking test is carried out to measure the quality of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. In his study, Brown (2004) identified six key aspects of oral proficiency assessment categories: grammar, vocabulary, comprehension, fluency, pronunciation, and task. However, speaking skills in language learning are often considered one of the most challenging aspects of language learning and teaching. Pakula (2019) argued the ability to speak is a crucial component of language education. Moreover, it is a challenging skill to acquire, both for learners and for those responsible for sharing knowledge. In addition, English learners commonly face several obstacles when it comes to speaking, including: low confidence and fear of making mistakes, pronunciation difficulties, shyness or anxiety to speak, limited vocabulary, lack of opportunity to practice, and interference from their native language. According to Hoang et al. (2015), English learners encounter a number of challenges when attempting to speak in the target language. These include inhibition, a lack of topical knowledge, low participation, and the use of the mother tongue. Besides the speaking problems experienced by students above, there are other factors that affect speaking. (Muklas et al., 2024) stated that common speech difficulties include those affecting comprehension, hearing and speech production, particularly in the context of conversations in a foreign language that is not fully understood. Overall, speaking proficiency depends on complex interaction linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors that teachers must consider when designing oral communication instruction.

The speaking abilities of students have been the subject of investigation in a number of previous studies. For instance Manik et al. (2022) applied qualitative approach and used conversation as a speaking test to measure students' speaking ability. It proved effective in enhancing students' speaking abilities, with factors such as pronunciation, intonation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension playing crucial roles. Harahap & Harahap (2024) and Ramadhani et al. (2023) used speaking tests to measure students' speaking ability and interviews to analyze students' difficulties in speaking. It highlighted several factors, such as grammar, motivation, and practice, as crucial for improving students' speaking abilities. Furthermore, their findings linked the cause of these problems to inadequate teaching material, techniques, and media. In another study, Prima Septy et al. (2022) analyzed second-year students' speaking ability through English debate. They found that while the students had high fluency in delivering debates, they needed improvement in expressing and using correct grammar. The next study was conducted by (Zaim and Anwar 2020); it applied interviews as an oral test to investigate students' speaking ability. Their finding indicated the students' speaking ability ranged from fair to good, with challenges in pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and fluency. The study highlighted the importance of providing more opportunities for students to practice speaking to enhance their skills.

Furthermore, In their study, Damayanti & Listyani (2020) identified several factors that contribute to students' speaking anxiety in English classes. These included communication anxiety, test anxiety, and fear of negative judgment from others. The study emphasized the importance of understanding and managing anxiety for students and creating a positive classroom atmosphere to help students overcome their anxiety. In addition, students also experience several problems in speaking activities. As Wahyuningsih & Afandi (2020)

identified the following challenges encountered by students: a dearth of suitable vocabulary, inadequate grammatical knowledge, poor pronunciation, a lack of interaction with the language outside the classroom, a deficit of self-assurance, and an absence of English-speaking curricula development. The using of learning media also can be done to make learning and teaching activity more colorful and unjoyful. In their study, Elyani et al., (2022.) found that students speaking skill could be modified through digital storytelling where students create stories using digital images and record their voices. It has been shown to improve students' speaking skill and contribute to better speaking performance. Nevertheless, the teacher should always consider a positive correlation between students' motivation and the effectiveness of teaching media.

In order to facilitate the acquisition of the English language, it is essential that learners engage in extensive and consistent practice. In this context, the objective is to develop proficiency in the English language. The more they practice, the more they can speak English. To make this research get a better result, the researcher chose Al Falah modern Islamic boarding school because it has language programs that can be a gold opportunity for foreign English learners to learn more about English. The purpose of this research is to find out the speaking abilities of eleventh-grade students at Al Falah Modern Islamic Boarding School and to identify the challenges they face in this area. It also contributes to the existing literature on speaking ability in Islamic boarding schools and provides valuable insights for educators and other researchers. In order to establish and maintain effective learning activities concerning students' speaking performance, it is crucial to first identify the abilities and problems affecting their speaking abilities. To this end, the researcher will investigate students' speaking ability in depth, with the aim of identifying students' strengths and weaknesses in this area. The findings of this research can be used as a reference for educators to develop innovative learning and teaching activities, thereby fostering greater student engagement with the English language. The findings will benefit not only the students and teaching staff of Al Falah Modern Islamic Boarding School but also other Islamic boarding and educational institutions.

METHOD

The research uses an explanatory mixed-methods design, with the objective of providing answers to how and what questions. Creswell (2014) describes the explanatory design as a two-stage process in which quantitative data is collected in a sequential manner, followed by qualitative data. This study will present an analysis of speaking abilities of students in the eleventh year of studies at Al Falah Modern Islamic Boarding School. Additionally, it will examine the challenges these students encounter when engaging in English language activities within their daily routines. This research is conducted in the area of Al Falah, a modern Islamic boarding school located at No. 1 Jalan Taman Makam Pahlawan, Jatirokeh. The research was conducted over a period of five days, from 10 to 14 June 2024. The population under investigation in this study is comprised of all eleventh-grade students at Al Falah Modern Islamic Boarding School, a total of 27 individuals.

The research employs two instruments: a speaking test and an interview. The speaking test is in the form of an unstructured conversation. The following linguistic aspects will be examined: comprehension, fluency, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary. The interview is employed to ascertain the difficulties encountered by the students. Subsequently, each component of the student's speaking ability is evaluated in a systematic manner, and scores are tabulated in a manner that reflected the quality of the student's performance on the speaking test. Subsequently, the students' speaking proficiency is categorized according to a classification system, which defines four categories: excellent, good, fair, and poor.

In order to gather data on speaking ability, the researcher approaches the English teacher with a request to arrange meetings with students, who are subsequently invited to participate in a speaking test. The researcher organizes the participants to form pairs for their conversation, allowing them a preparation period of 10 minutes. Subsequently, the researcher

conducts an interview with the students to ascertain the difficulties they encounter when utilizing the English language in their daily activities. The sessions are audio-recorded using mobile phones.

The formula proposed by Brown (2004) is applied to transcribe the material in order to analyze the data collected from the speaking test. The researcher then calculates the total score for each component, which is used to categorize the level of speaking ability of the students in question, according to the scoring rubric, comprising levels 1-5. In order to ascertain the student's level of comprehension, fluency, grammatical competence, pronunciation, and vocabulary mastery, the above-mentioned formula is employed. Meanwhile, in order to analyze the data from the interview results, the researcher first transcribes the interviews manually, word by word and sentence by sentence. Subsequently, the transcript is then read to identify the main themes within the data set, with each theme being given a unique code. The codes are then grouped into categories to facilitate the analysis of the data. Finally, the researcher presents a summary of the data in tabular form, providing a concise description of the data set.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

As previously mentioned, the objective of this study was to investigate the competencies exhibited by students in their eleventh-grade year concerning oral communication or speaking ability. The data for this study was derived from a speaking assessment conducted via conversation, with the results scored according to the Brown scoring rubric. The rubric comprised speaking components, namely comprehension, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and vocabulary. The category of speaking was divided into the following categories: excellent, good, fair, and poor. The results of the speaking test are displayed in the following table:

Table. 1 The result of the speaking test

No.	Classification	Score range	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Excellent	76-100	16	59 %
2.	Good	51-75	10	37 %
3.	Fair	26-50	1	4 %
4.	Poor	0-25	0	0 %
Total of students			27	100%
Average = 7,8				

Table 1 illustrated the speaking abilities of the eleventh-grade students at Al Falah Modern Islamic Boarding School, demonstrating a predominantly positive performance. Of the 27 students assessed, 16 (59%) were classified as exhibiting "excellent" proficiency, 10 (37%) demonstrated "good" proficiency, 1 (4%) exhibited "fair" proficiency, and no student was classified as having "poor" proficiency. In terms of overall classification, the data indicates that the majority of students' speaking abilities fall into the excellent category, which accounts for 59% of the total number of occurrences. This suggests that the overall performance is satisfactory. Moreover, the average score is 7.8, calculated by dividing the total score for each speaking test aspect by the number of students in the eleventh grade at Al Falah Modern Islamic boarding school.

Table. 2 The aspects of students' speaking test

Score	Grammar	Vocabulary	Pronunciation	Fluency	Task	Comprehension
5	10	9	9	5	10	5
4	9	14	8	14	8	6
3	4	4	9	7	9	14

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2	4	0	1	1	0	2
1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	27	27	27	27	27	27

The results of the speaking test demonstrate that students have acquired a range of linguistic skills, including knowledge of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. The researcher identified that the students encountered difficulties in the domain of oral communication. A more detailed explanation of these difficulties can be found in the results of the interview.

The researcher conducted interviews with the students in order to ascertain the difficulties they encountered when practicing English in their daily activities. The findings of the interview are presented in the following data.

Table. 3 The result of interviews with students

No.	Problems in speaking	Student statements
1.	Afraid of making mistakes.	<i>I am still afraid to make mistakes.</i>
2.	It is hard to make sentences in English.	<i>I still need time to write English sentences when practicing English.</i>
3.	Feeling confident in practicing English.	<i>Less confident in the grammar, especially in the use of appropriate tenses.</i>
4.	I need to find a partner to practice.	<i>Sometimes, when I practice English, the person whom I talk to does not understand, so I need to translate it first.</i>
5.	I am feeling afraid of mistakes, especially in grammar.	<i>I am afraid of grammar structure. It is sometimes inappropriate, and there is vocabulary that I do not know in English.</i>
6.	Lack of vocabulary in English.	<i>I sometimes feel afraid to make mistakes in pronunciation.</i>
7.	Less support from her friends when she tries to practice. English, sometimes her friends ask her to practice in Bahasa.	<i>I get less support from other friends when I try to practice. English, sometimes her friends ask her to practice in Bahasa.</i>
8.	Still, get problems with pronunciation.	<i>Sometimes, I still get obstacles in pronunciation.</i>
9.	I still have problems with pronunciation, whether it is using the British or American style.	<i>I sometimes doubt how to pronounce a word in English, whether it is in British or American style.</i>
10.	Feeling nervous when practicing due to becoming the focus of other friends.	<i>My junior colleague frequently observes me conversing in English. It makes me nervous.</i>
11.	Nervous due to not being used to practicing English.	<i>Sometimes, I get nervous because I am still not used to practicing English.</i>

12.	Less support from other friends.	<i>I am still shy and unconfident about practicing.</i>
13.	Feeling shy to practice.	<i>Sometimes, when I try to practice English in daily activities, I get less support from my friends.</i>
14.	Getting problems to make appropriate grammar.	<i>I am still confused about English structure and afraid of making mistakes in grammar.</i>
15.	Less support from other friends.	<i>I sometimes encounter obstacles and receive less support from my friends.</i>
16.	Getting confused about pronouncing English words.	<i>I am still confused about how to pronounce it in English.</i>
17.	Feeling shy to practice.	<i>I am still shy to speak in English.</i>
18.	Lack of vocabulary and pronunciation.	<i>I Still have minimal vocabulary mastery and sometimes feel confused about how to say it in English as well.</i>
19.	Doubt to make an English sentence.	<i>I am still afraid of using an English structure.</i>
20.	Getting problems with pronunciation.	<i>For me, my obstacle when practicing English is pronouncing English words.</i>

The researcher's analysis of the interview data indicates that students face a range of difficulties when practicing speaking. These problems include fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, difficulty in constructing sentences, pronunciation challenges, shyness, and limited vocabulary.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the proficiency of the eleventh-grade students in oral communication is at an intermediate level, exhibiting both strengths and areas for improvement. It is corroborated by the results of the speaking test, which indicate that 16 students are demonstrated a proficiency level of excellent, ten students are exhibited a proficiency level of good, and one student is demonstrated a proficiency level of fair. Not a single student is assigned a poor rating, with the overall mean score being 7.8. This indicates that the proficiency of the eleventh-grade students in oral communication at Al Falah Modern Islamic Boarding School is in excellent category.

Meanwhile, the issues encountered in speaking performance can be attributed to a number of factors, including a fear of making mistakes, a lack of confidence, difficulties in constructing sentences, pronunciation challenges, shyness, and a limited vocabulary. The results of the interviews with the students corroborate this finding.

The first factor to consider is the fear of making a mistake. A significant proportion of individuals are reluctant to make mistakes when speaking English. This hypothesis is supported by the following statements: Informant one indicates that their primary challenge in speaking English is a fear of making mistakes. Informant two states, "On occasion, I experience a lack of confidence with regard to my grammatical proficiency, particularly in terms of ensuring the correct use of tenses in sentences." Furthermore, Informants three and

five indicate that they are apprehensive about committing errors in grammar. This apprehension may originate from a lack of practice or an overwhelming awareness of the intricacies of English grammar and vocabulary. Furthermore, it can result in hesitation and self-doubt when speaking English. According to Andas et al. (2020), students were worried about getting criticism, and they were inhibited from speaking English because they would not get any criticism. The researcher finds that many students still experience this problem, especially when practicing speaking in daily activities.

The second factor is a lack of confidence, which is often experienced by individuals who lack support from friends or peers in their English-speaking abilities. In this research, informants two and six indicate that they occasionally receive inadequate support from their friends when practicing their English in daily activities. They, therefore, require a practice partner to enhance their speaking abilities. Conversely, informants four and nine report a lack of confidence due to a perceived lack of encouragement from their peers. Informant four states, "When I practice English, I receive less support from my friends; they occasionally request that I speak in Bahasa Indonesia instead of English." This lack of confidence can further exacerbate the fear of making mistakes and impede the development of effective communication skills.

The third area of difficulty is the construction of sentences. A significant proportion of the population needs help with attempting to construct grammatically correct sentences in English. In particular, there is a prevalence of issues with tenses. In this study, informant three indicates that when engaging in English language practice, they encounter challenges in understanding and applying grammatical structures. This difficulty can be overcome with further practice; it is the responsibility of the teaching staff to motivate their students to continue practicing the English language, regardless of any apprehension they may have about making mistakes.

The fourth factor is pronunciation. For many individuals, pronunciation represents a significant challenge, particularly in the context of accurately pronouncing English words that exhibit regional variations in accent. This is evidenced by the statements made by informants eight and ten. They state that the primary challenge they face when speaking English is pronunciation. Meanwhile, informant Five states, "At times, I am uncertain as to the correct pronunciation of English words, whether in British or American English." This issue is commonly encountered by foreign learners, as they tend to rely on their native language rather than English, which can impede their ability to accurately pronounce English words. This phenomenon is caused by external factors that force individuals to speak their native language (Andas et al., 2020). Furthermore, it resulted in the students being less familiar with the appropriate vocabulary and linguistic conventions of the English language.

The fifth is shyness, which can affect students' ability to practice languages. In this research, informants six and eight state that "they still feel shy to practice English." In this case, they get shy because of getting less support from their friend. They do not want to practice without support from other friends. A number of factors can impact students' speaking performance, including those related to performance conditions (such as time pressure, planning, the standard of performance and the level of support available), affective factors (such as motivation, confidence and anxiety), listening skills and feedback provided during speaking activities. (Hoang et al., 2015).

The last obstacle arises from the constraint of words, which might hinder persons from effectively conveying their emotions or thoughts. Informant nine in this investigation contends that occasionally, while engaging in English language practice, a hindrance emerges in the shape of inadequate vocabulary or limited vocabulary. This tendency is especially common among non-native English learners who are actively engaged in practicing their speaking skills. A challenge faced by pupils is their limited vocabulary, which hinders their capacity to articulate a response (Hoang et al., 2015).

CONCLUSIONS

The capacity to speak effectively is dependent upon a number of factors, including the ability to engage in preparatory discourse. It is, therefore, incumbent upon students to engage in regular practice in order to develop their speaking abilities. Moreover, speaking is not easy to master, which means the students have to struggle hard to be able to speak well. As previously stated, the objective of this research is to conduct a comprehensive investigation into the speaking abilities of students in their eleventh grade. This investigation aims to identify the strengths and weaknesses of these students in terms of their speaking performance. To this end, the researcher employed a speaking test, which was conducted in the form of a conversation, and also conducted interviews with the students in order to collect the data required for this research. The data analysis indicates that students who achieved excellent levels in the conversation test are higher than those who demonstrated poor or inadequate proficiency. It can be concluded that the students in the eleventh grade at AL Falah Modern Islamic Boarding School possess a proficient level of spoken English. In addition, the final result is derived from the interview data. The researcher identifies some challenges that students face when practicing speaking English especially in their daily activities. These challenges include fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, difficulty in constructing sentences, pronunciation issues, shyness, and vocabulary limitations.

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