Overcoming Speaking Skill Challenges in Vocational Students: A Practical and Interactive Approach

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the challenges vocational students encountered in developing English speaking skills, focusing on psychological factors like anxiety and low self-esteem, as well as linguistic limitations such as inadequate vocabulary and grammar. Conducted as a qualitative descriptive study with 16 vocational high school students in Batam, the research employed observations, interviews, and self-assessment tools to explore student's experiences and preferred teaching methods. Thematic analysis identified recurring issues, including anxiety and strong preference for interactive, peer-based learning environments. Findings suggested that practical, learner-centered approaches, such as problem-based learning, group discussions, and digital tools like video-based exercises effectively enhance speaking performance by reducing anxiety and improving fluency. These methods created supportive environments that boost confidence and motivation, which are essential for skill development in vocational contexts. The researcher highlights the need for innovative, engaging teaching strategies to address psychological and linguistic barries in English speaking. Future research should investigate the long-term impact of these approaches across various vocational settings and explore how digital resources might further reduce psychological barriers in language learning.

Keywords: Vocational Students, Speaking Skills, Psychological Barriers, Interactive Learning, Digital Tools.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji tantangan yang dihadapi oleh siswa-siswi SMK dalam mengembangkan kemampuan berbicara bahasa Inggris, dengan fokus pada faktor-faktor psikologis seperti kecemasan dan rasa tidak percaya diri, serta keterbatasan kemampuan bahasa seperti kosakata dan tata bahasa yang tidak memadai. Dilakukan sebagai studi deskriptif kualitatif dengan melibatkan 16 siswa SMK di Batam, penelitian ini menggunakan metode observasi, wawancara, dan penilaian diri untuk menggali pengalaman siswa dan metode pembelajaran yang mereka sukai. Analisis tematik mengidentifikasi isu-isu berulang, termasuk kecemasan dan preferensi kuat terhadap lingkungan pembelajaran yang interaktif dan berbasis kelompok. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan praktis yang berpusat pada siswa, seperti pembelajaran berbasis masalah, diskusi kelompok, dan alat bantu digital seperti latihan berbasis video secara efektif meningkatkan kinerja berbicara dengan mengurangi kecemasan dan meningkatkan kefasihan. Metode-metode ini menciptakan lingkungan yang mendukung yang meningkatkan kepercayaan diri dan motivasi, yang sangat penting untuk pengembangan keterampilan dalam konteks kejuruan. Peneliti menyoroti perlunya strategi pengajaran yang inovatif dan menarik untuk mengatasi hambatan psikologis dan linguistik dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris. Penelitian di masa depan harus menyelidiki dampak jangka panjang dari pendekatan-pendekatan ini di berbagai latar belakang kejuruan dan mengeksplorasi bagaimana sumber daya digital dapat mengurangi hambatan psikologis dalam pembelajaran bahasa.

Kata kunci: *Siswa SMK, Keterampilan Berbicara, Hambatan Psikologis, Pembelajaran Interaktif, Alat Bantu Digital.*

INTRODUCTION

The significance of strong English speaking skills for vocational students has become increasingly apparent, particularly as they prepare to enter professional environments where English proficiency is often a prerequisite. Research has consistently shown that many vocational students

struggle with English speaking, often due to psychological factors like nervousness, fear of mistakes, and low self-confidence (Sulindra, 2023). These psychological barriers can hinder their active participation in class and limit their opportunities to practice speaking. Additionally, linguistic challenges such as insufficient vocabulary and grammar knowledge can impede communication and hinder fluency (Sitorus et al., 2022).

To address these challenges, recent research has focused on interactive and student-centered approaches that promote engagement and reduce anxiety. Action research has demonstrated the effectiveness of creating supportive learning environments, encouraging practice, and utilizing problem-based learning techniques to alleviate students speaking apprehension and increase their active participation (Holandyah et al., 2022). Vocational students, in particular, benefit from methods that simulate real-world contexts, such as transactional speaking and collaborative activities, as these not only enhance language skills but also prepare students for professional settings (Apsari et al., 2022).

Theoretical frameworks in language learning, especially the communicative approach, emphasize the importance of both fluency and accuracy (Rahman Nisha, 2024). However, vocational students often prioritize accuracy over fluency, which can hinder their willingness to take risks and speak confidently (Nathir Ghafar & Raheem, 2023). This focus on accuracy can exacerbate anxiety, particularly for students who are already concerned about making mistakes. Therefore, a balanced approach that prioritizes both fluency and accuracy has been recommended to address these concerns (N. Thi et al., 2020).

Research highlights the effectiveness of problem-based learning and peer collaboration in overcoming both psychological and linguistic obstacles. These methods not only improve speaking skills but also foster social interaction, which can alleviate anxiety and boost confidence (Al et al., 2021). By engaging students in real life conversational contexts, these approaches enhance the learning experience, making it more relevant and less intimidating (Trinh & Pham, 2021).

Furthermore, research on the impact of digital tools, such as video-based learning, suggests that these methods can significantly increase students' comfort with speaking English (Phuong, 2024). The use of YouTube and other video resources has been shown to improve vocabulary retention, pronounciation accuracy, and overall engagement, leading to increased confidence and motivation (Menggo, 2022).

In conclusion, while vocational students face numerous challenges in English speaking, recent research suggests that practical and interactive teaching methods, including problem-based learning and digital engagement, offer promising solutions (Rosário & Raimundo, 2024). These methods address both psychological and linguistic barriers, providing a comprehensive approach to developing English speaking skills in vocational contexts.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative descriptive study investigated the speaking challenges faced by 16 students in one of the vocational high school in Batam. Conducted within a classroom setting, the research aimed to understand the linguistic and psychological barriers hindering student's English speaking skills, focusing on their experiences and preferred learning methods and activities. This qualitative approach allowed for a deep exploration of student's challenges, providing valuable insights into their needs within vocational education.

Data was collected through observations, interviews, and self-assessment tools to assess student's attitudes, engagement, and skill levels. Thematic analysis was employed to categorize the data into recurring themes such as anxiety, vocabulary limitations, and a preference for interactive, peer-based learning environments. By categorizing the data, researcher identified patterns and compared findings with similar studies on confidence-building and collaborative learning techniques, highlighting effective strategies to support speaking skill development (Azir, 2019).

This methodology provided an in depth understanding of the specific challenges and preferences of vocational students, enabling the development of tailored teaching recommendations to enhance English instruction. The findings suggest that addressing psychological barriers like anxiety and providing engaging, practical learning opportunities are crucial for fostering confidence and proficiency

in speaking. This approach aligns with qualitative best practices, emphasizing targeted strategies to improve speaking skills in vocational settings (Razi, 2021).

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The research findings indicated that vocational students experience significant challenges in English speaking, primarily rooted in psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of errors, and low self-esteem. Observations and interviews suggested that these issues limit student's willingness to participate in classroom speaking activities, which are crucial for skill development. Many students also encounter linguistic obstacles, including limited vocabulary and inadequate grammar, both of which hinder their ability to communicate effectively and fluently (Sitorus et al., 2022).

These findings are supported by students' responses to the interview question "From the English language skills (Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking), which one do you think is the most important to develop? And why do you feel the need to develop those skills?". Student A stated, *"For me, speaking skills are the most important for me to improve. I feel less confident when speaking in English because I often struggle to find the right words to use. This is due to my limited vocabulary. By developing my speaking skills, I hope to be more fluent and confident when communicating, both in daily conversations and in formal situations."*

Similarly, student B mentioned, *"I think speaking skills are something that I need to develop because I often feel nervous and lack confidence when speaking in English. In addition, I also feel that my ability to memorise and use vocabulary is still very limited. By improving my speaking skills, I want to be more comfortable and confident when interacting in English, so that my communication with others can be more effective."*

This study also found that interactive, problem-based learning, and collaborative group activities significantly enhance speaking performance by addressing these psychological and linguistic challenges. Techniques such as group discussions and peer collaborations not only improve language fluency but also create a supportive environment that reduces anxiety, enabling students to speak more confidently (Holandyah et al., 2022), (Crisianita & Mandasari, 2022). The integration of digital tools like video-based exercises also shows promise in improving pronounciation and vocabulary retention, leading to increased student motivation and enhanced speaking abilities (Menggo, 2022). These findings are consistent with student preferences, which prioritize structured yet adaptable speaking exercises that foster gradual confidence growth.

Furthermore, the integration of digital instruments, such as video-based exercises and jnteractive language apps, has proven effective in enhancing pronounciation and vocabulary retention. For instance, video-based activities that model conversations assist learners in internalizing language patterns and improving speaking fluency (Wahyudin, 2024). Students who participated in such activities reported increased motivation and better recall of key vocabulary (Fithriani, 2021). This suggests that digital tools are particularly beneficial for addressing linguistic weaknesses while maintaining student motivation and engagement.

In conclusion, this research underscores the importance of active, learner-centered approaches in overcoming speaking skill challenges among vocational students. By combining problem-solving, group collaboration, and digital learning tools, educators can create an engaging learning environment that addresses both the psychological and linguistic aspects of speaking, ultimately improving student's proficiency and confidence in English communication (Ratnasari, 2020).

CONCLUSION

This research aimed to examined the challenges vocational students encounter in developing English speaking skills, specifically focusing on psychological barriers, such as anxiety and low self-esteem, as well as linguistic limitations, including vocabulary and grammar deficiencies. The findings revealed that these issues significantly hinder student's participation and proficiency in classroom speaking activities, underscoring the need for innovative approaches to address these specific obstacles.

The study provided valuable insights into effective strategies for improving speaking skills, highlighting the importance of interactive, learner-centeres approaches. Techniques such as problem-based learning, group discussions, and digital tools like video-based exercises were shown to significantly

reduced speaking anxiety, improved fluency, and foster student engagement and confidence. These findings emphasized the effectiveness of an integrated, practical approach in language education, which can be beneficial for vocational contexts where English proficiency is essential for professional success.

Future research should explored the long-term impacts of these approaches on speaking skills across diverse vocational settings and student demographics, as well as examine the role of digital resources in reducing psychological barriers in language learning. Continued investigation into technology enhanced methods may yield deeper insights into sustainable strategies for skill development in vocational education (Fitriani, 2020).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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