

AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING ENGLISH DURING DIALOGUE ACTIVITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes students' difficulties in speaking English during dialogue activities at SMP Negeri 2 Berastagi. Speaking is a fundamental skill in English language learning, yet many junior high school students face significant challenges when required to communicate orally. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation from 30 seventh-grade students. The findings reveal that 83.3% of students experienced lack of fluency, manifested through long pauses, hesitation and fillers, and fragmented utterances. Furthermore, 100% of students demonstrated limited vocabulary range, with 63.3% experiencing difficulty retrieving words and 60% facing lexical gaps. The study concludes that vocabulary limitation is the primary factor causing speaking difficulties, as insufficient lexical knowledge directly disrupts fluency and hinders students' ability to express ideas during dialogues. These findings imply that vocabulary development should be prioritized in teaching speaking skills.

Keywords: Speaking Difficulties, Lack of Fluency, Vocabulary Limitation

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis kesulitan siswa dalam berbicara bahasa Inggris pada aktivitas dialog di SMP Negeri 2 Berastagi. Berbicara merupakan keterampilan fundamental dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, namun banyak siswa sekolah menengah pertama menghadapi tantangan signifikan ketika diminta berkomunikasi secara lisan. Menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif, data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi terhadap 30 siswa kelas VII. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa 83,3% siswa mengalami ketidaklancaran berbicara (lack of fluency), yang dimanifestasikan melalui jeda panjang, keraguan dan pengisi (fillers), serta ucapan terputus-putus. Selanjutnya, 100% siswa menunjukkan keterbatasan kosakata, dengan 63,3% mengalami kesulitan mengingat kata dan 60% menghadapi celah leksikal. Penelitian menyimpulkan bahwa keterbatasan kosakata merupakan faktor utama penyebab kesulitan berbicara, karena pengetahuan leksikal yang tidak memadai secara langsung mengganggu kelancaran dan menghambat kemampuan siswa mengekspresikan ide selama dialog. Implikasi penelitian ini adalah pengembangan kosakata harus diprioritaskan dalam pengajaran keterampilan berbicara.

Kata Kunci: Kesulitan Berbicara, Keterbatasan Kelancaran berbicara, Keterbatasan Kosakata

A. Introduction

Language serves as the most essential means of communication for humans, enabling the expression of ideas, feelings, and intentions. In Indonesia, English is recognized as a foreign language yet is widely taught from elementary to university levels, aiming not to replace Indonesian but to enable cross-national communication while maintaining pride in one's own language (Darma, R. N. and Widiastuty, 2023). Among the four main skills in English learning—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—speaking is considered the most essential, as it provides students with valuable opportunities to actively interact with the language, express themselves, and communicate intensively with others (Richards, Jack C. and Rodgers, 2014)

Speaking English, however, is not easy. Students often face numerous challenges, including limited vocabulary, fear of public speaking, pronunciation problems, and grammatical difficulties (Rahmadani, 2022). These obstacles significantly affect students' ability to communicate effectively. At the junior

high school level, speaking activities are generally conducted through dialogue activities, where students practice using English in real-life contexts, exchange information, and build confidence. Dialogue plays a crucial role as a means to improve speaking skills, particularly fluency and self-confidence (Chairunnissa, C., 2025). Nevertheless, in practice, not all students can speak fluently during dialogue activities. Many experience difficulties such as limited vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, lack of understanding of sentence structures, and feelings of nervousness or fear of making mistakes. These conditions often prevent dialogue activities from running effectively, as some students become passive and unable to express their ideas properly. Aulia and (Amoah, Seth and Yeboah, 2021) found that students' low self-confidence directly affects their speaking skills, causing them to be reluctant to participate actively and often stop in the middle of dialogues.

Based on preliminary information obtained from the English teacher at SMP Negeri 2 Berastagi, despite the implementation of various

communicative learning activities including dialogues, some students remain unwilling to speak in English. They feel nervous, embarrassed, and afraid of making mistakes. Consequently, the objectives of speaking learning are often not achieved optimally. This phenomenon warrants systematic investigation to understand the specific difficulties faced by students.

Therefore, this study addresses two research problems: What are the difficulties faced by students in speaking English during dialogue activities at SMP Negeri 2 Berastagi? and What are the factors that cause these difficulties? The objectives are to analyze the types of difficulties and identify the underlying causal factors. The significance of this study is threefold: for students, it helps raise awareness of their speaking challenges; for teachers, it provides references for developing more effective teaching strategies; and for future researchers, it offers deeper understanding of speaking difficulties in dialogue contexts. By understanding these challenges, teachers can improve their instructional techniques to enhance

students' speaking abilities, ultimately contributing to better quality English language teaching.

B. Method

Research design

A research design is a plan or strategy used by the researcher to collect, analyze, and interpret data so that the research objectives can be achieved systematically and logically. According to (Creswell, John W. and Creswell, 2022), a research design functions as the primary guideline that directs all stages of the research, from data collection to the presentation of findings. This study employs a qualitative descriptive research design. A qualitative descriptive approach was selected because the purpose of the research is to identify and analyze students' difficulties in speaking English during dialogue activities, as well as the factors influencing them.

Participant

The participant in this study: (1) Grade VII-2 students at SMP Negeri 2 Berastagi, (2) Grade VII-2 English teacher at SMP Negeri 2 Berastagi. Purposive sampling is appropriate when researchers select samples based on specific

characteristics that are most relevant to the research objectives Sugiyono (2019).

Tecnique of Collecting Data

These three techniques complement each other, resulting in more accurate and thorough data:

1.Observation: Observation was conducted during the dialogue activity with the theme Introducing Self in the seventh two grade classroom by student.

2.Interview: were conducted to explore in-depth information regarding students' and teachers' experiences related to speaking difficulties during dialogue activities.

3.Documentation: In this study, the researcher collected six audio recordings as Documentation.

Data Analysis Tecnique

These three stages are interrelated and occur in a cyclical process:

1.Data condensation: Data condensation is the process of selecting, simplifying, focusing, and organizing raw data into more directed information

2. Data display: At the data display stage, the researcher arranges and organizes the reduced data into a

systematic, structured, and easily understandable form.

3.Conclution Drawing/Verification:

The final stage is conclusion drawing and verification, which is the process of formulating the meaning of the analyzed data. The researcher develops conclusions based on emerging patterns, such as the dominant types of speaking difficulties and the factors influencing students' performance during dialogue activities.

C. Findings and Dissscussion

The observation revealed: that all 30 students experienced various speaking difficulties. Regarding lack of fluency, 22 students (73.3%) exhibited long pauses ranging from 2 to 30 seconds, 25 students (83.3%) used hesitation and fillers such as "umm" or "eeh", and 16 students (53.3%) produced fragmented utterances. Regarding vocabulary limitation, 19 students (63.3%) experienced difficulty retrieving vocabulary, 18 students (60%) faced lexical gaps requiring compensatory strategies like asking friends or switching to Indonesian, and notably, all 30 students (100%) demonstrated limited vocabulary range, restricting

their expressions to basic information such as name, age, and family members while struggling with hobbies or addresses.

Interview findings confirmed these observations. Students reported feeling nervous, afraid of making mistakes, and forgetting vocabulary. Crucially, vocabulary limitation emerged as the universal factor affecting all informants regardless of proficiency level, directly causing long pauses, hesitation, and fragmented utterances as students lacked the lexical resources to complete their thoughts.

The findings align with (Tavakoli, P., & Uchiyara, 2020) and (Suzuki, S., & Kormos, 2022), who state that long pauses and excessive fillers indicate controlled-processing rather than automatic-processing in speech production. The high percentage of hesitation (83.3%) mirrors (Luo, X., & Sun, 2025) findings among EFL learners. Most significantly, vocabulary limitation was identified as the primary causal factor, supporting (Tavakoli, P., & Uchiyara, 2020) who emphasize that vocabulary size and lexical access speed directly determine speaking

fluency. The fact that 100% of students showed limited vocabulary range, and that lexical gaps prevented students from expressing intended messages (e.g., favorite food, hobbies), confirms (Luo, X., & Sun, 2025) assertion that vocabulary deficiency is directly linked to decreased fluency. Importantly, the study reveals that lack of fluency is not an independent problem but largely a consequence of vocabulary limitation—when students lack required words, speaking processes stop, and dialogues cannot proceed smoothly.

D. Conclusion

This study concludes that students at SMP Negeri 2 Berastagi face significant difficulties in speaking English during dialogue activities, predominantly characterized by lack of fluency (long pauses, hesitation/fillers, fragmented utterances). The primary causal factor is vocabulary limitation, which affects all students universally and directly disrupts fluency. Vocabulary limitation not only restricts what students can express but also causes pauses, word repetitions, and incomplete sentences. It is

recommended that students make vocabulary learning a daily habit, that teachers prioritize vocabulary development before dialogue activities and create supportive classroom environments, and that future researchers investigate effective vocabulary teaching methods and the relationship between vocabulary size and fluency levels.

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