
**A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY ON STUDENTS' STRATEGIES IN OVERCOMING
SPEAKING CHALLENGES AT THE TENTH GRADE OF ONE OF SENIOR HIGH
SCHOOL IN KARAWANG**

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi kesulitan berbicara yang dialami siswa kelas X One of Senior High School in Karawang serta mengeksplorasi strategi yang mereka gunakan untuk mengatasi kesulitan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus yang melibatkan enam siswa kelas X yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik dari Braun dan Clarke (2006). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengalami berbagai kesulitan berbicara yang dapat dikategorikan menjadi faktor linguistik dan psikologis. Kesulitan linguistik meliputi keterbatasan kosakata dan masalah pengucapan, sedangkan kesulitan psikologis meliputi rasa takut melakukan kesalahan, kurang percaya diri, dan kecemasan berbicara. Meskipun demikian, siswa menggunakan berbagai strategi untuk meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara mereka, seperti menonton video dan mendengarkan lagu berbahasa Inggris, menghafal kosakata, memanfaatkan alat digital seperti Google Translate, dan berlatih secara mandiri di depan cermin. Strategi tersebut mencerminkan strategi kognitif, memori, kompensasi, afektif, dan sosial menurut Oxford (1990). Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa merupakan pembelajar aktif yang menggunakan berbagai strategi untuk mengatasi kesulitan berbicara. Oleh karena itu, guru bahasa Inggris perlu menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung dan menyediakan kesempatan berbicara yang bermakna untuk meningkatkan kompetensi komunikatif siswa.

Kata kunci: Strategi Siswa, Tantangan Berbicara, Berbicara bahasa Inggris, EFL.

Abstract

This study aimed to identify the speaking difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students at One of Senior High School in Karawang and to explore the strategies they used to overcome those difficulties. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, this study involved six tenth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The findings revealed that students encountered various speaking difficulties, which could be categorized into linguistic and psychological factors. Linguistic challenges included limited vocabulary and pronunciation problems, while psychological difficulties involved fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and speaking anxiety. Despite these challenges, students employed several strategies to improve their speaking ability, including watching English videos and listening to English songs, memorizing vocabulary, using digital tools such as Google Translate, practicing independently in front of a mirror. These strategies reflected cognitive, memory, compensation, affective, and social strategies as proposed by Oxford (1990). The findings suggest that students are active learners who employ various strategies to cope with speaking difficulties. Therefore, English teachers are encouraged to provide supportive learning environments and meaningful speaking opportunities to enhance students' communicative competence.

Keywords: students' Strategies, Speaking Challenges, English Speaking, EFL.

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most essential language skills in English language learning because it enables learners to express ideas,

opinions, and information effectively in various communicative contexts. In the era of globalization and digital transformation, English speaking competence has become increasingly important not only for

academic purposes but also for professional and intercultural communication. The ability to communicate orally in English is considered a fundamental component of communicative competence and one of the key competencies required in twenty-first-century education. Consequently, English language instruction is expected to equip students with the ability to use the language actively and meaningfully rather than merely understanding linguistic forms (Richards, 2008).

Despite its importance, speaking remains one of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Unlike receptive skills, speaking requires learners to simultaneously process vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and interactional competence while communicating in real time. Brown (2004) explains that speaking is an interactive process involving the construction and exchange of meaning, requiring learners to coordinate several linguistic and cognitive components simultaneously. This complexity makes speaking a demanding skill, particularly for EFL learners who have limited opportunities to practice English outside the classroom.

Recent studies have consistently reported that EFL learners continue to experience various difficulties in speaking English. Linguistic factors such as limited vocabulary, inadequate grammatical knowledge, pronunciation problems, and lack of fluency are frequently identified as barriers to oral communication (Alaraj, 2024). In addition to these linguistic constraints, psychological factors including anxiety, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and fear of negative evaluation have been found to significantly affect students' willingness to speak and participate in classroom interactions (Ajiza et al., 2024). Damayanti and Cahyono (2025) further emphasize that cognitive, linguistic, and social factors collectively contribute to speaking anxiety, which ultimately influences students' speaking performance. These findings suggest that speaking difficulties are multidimensional and cannot be explained solely from the perspective of language proficiency.

The increasing availability of digital learning resources and technological advancements has created more opportunities for students to improve their speaking skills. Online videos, podcasts, language learning applications, and artificial intelligence-based tools have become easily accessible to language learners. However, recent studies indicate that technology itself does not automatically eliminate speaking difficulties. Zhang et al. (2024) found that although technological tools can facilitate speaking practice, learners' self-regulation and individual learning strategies remain crucial factors in determining successful speaking development. Therefore, understanding how students manage and overcome their speaking difficulties becomes increasingly important in contemporary language learning contexts.

Within the Indonesian EFL context, speaking difficulties remain a common issue among secondary school students. Although English has been taught as a compulsory subject, many learners still encounter challenges when communicating orally. Students often possess adequate knowledge of grammar and reading comprehension but hesitate to express themselves verbally. Fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and low confidence frequently prevent students from participating actively in speaking activities. As a result, classroom interactions tend to be dominated by a small number of students, while many others remain passive. Such conditions indicate that speaking difficulties involve not only linguistic limitations but also psychological and social dimensions that influence students' communicative behavior.

Several studies conducted in Indonesia have documented these challenges. Ajiza et al. (2024) reported that speaking anxiety remains prevalent among Indonesian EFL learners, with fear of negative evaluation and lack of confidence being major contributing factors. Similarly, Daflizar (2024) found that students with lower vocabulary proficiency tend to experience higher levels of speaking anxiety and lower self-perceived speaking competence. These findings highlight the

need to understand not only the problems encountered by students but also the ways in which they attempt to cope with those problems.

Although numerous studies have examined speaking difficulties among EFL learners, several limitations remain evident. Most previous studies have primarily focused on identifying factors causing speaking anxiety or measuring the effectiveness of particular instructional methods through quantitative approaches. While these studies provide valuable statistical information, they often fail to capture learners' personal experiences and the strategies they employ to overcome their difficulties. Moreover, many studies focus on university students, whereas research involving senior high school students remains relatively limited. In addition, only a few studies have explored speaking difficulties and coping strategies simultaneously through qualitative inquiry, particularly within the context of Islamic senior high schools in Indonesia. Consequently, there remains a lack of contextual understanding regarding how students experience speaking difficulties and how they actively develop strategies to address those challenges.

From a theoretical perspective, speaking difficulties can be understood through the concept of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), which emphasizes that effective communication requires grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Among these components, strategic competence is particularly important because it reflects learners' ability to employ various strategies to maintain communication and overcome communication breakdowns. This perspective implies that students are not merely passive recipients of instruction but active individuals who can develop particular strategies to cope with difficulties encountered during speaking activities.

In relation to this, Oxford's (1990) Language Learning Strategies theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding learners' efforts in facilitating language acquisition. According to Oxford, learners consciously employ

direct strategies, including memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, as well as indirect strategies, namely metacognitive, affective, and social strategies, to enhance their learning processes. Recent studies have reaffirmed the relevance of these strategies in improving language skills and promoting learner autonomy (Hidayat et al., 2024). Therefore, investigating the strategies employed by learners to overcome speaking difficulties is essential for understanding how students regulate their learning and adapt to challenges in specific educational contexts.

In the context of One of Senior High School in Karawang, speaking difficulties are also observed among tenth-grade students. Similar to many Indonesian EFL learners, students encounter various linguistic and psychological barriers that affect their oral performance and classroom participation. However, despite these challenges, students may employ different strategies to cope with their difficulties based on their experiences, learning preferences, and available resources. Understanding these strategies is important because it may provide insights into how students manage their learning and how teachers can support them more effectively.

Considering the importance of speaking competence, the persistent challenges faced by EFL learners, and the limited number of studies exploring students' coping strategies through qualitative inquiry, this study aims to investigate the speaking difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students at One of Senior High School in Karawang and to explore the strategies they use to overcome those difficulties. By employing a qualitative case study approach, the present study seeks to provide an in-depth and contextual understanding of students' experiences. The findings are expected to contribute to the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), particularly in the areas of speaking development and language learning strategies, while also providing practical implications for teachers in designing more supportive and learner-centered speaking instruction.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach using a case study design. A qualitative case study was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to explore and understand participants' experiences and perspectives in a particular context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The present study focused on investigating the speaking difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students at One of Senior High School in Karawang and exploring the strategies they used to overcome those difficulties. Since speaking challenges and coping strategies are closely related to learners' experiences, emotions, and learning contexts, a qualitative approach provided an opportunity to obtain rich and in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation.

This study was conducted at One of Senior High School in Karawang, Indonesia. The participants consisted of six tenth-grade students selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling was employed because it allows researchers to select participants who possess specific characteristics and experiences relevant to the research objectives (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selected students had experienced difficulties in speaking English and were willing to share their experiences regarding the challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed to overcome those challenges. To maintain confidentiality, the participants were identified using pseudonyms, namely Student 1 (S1), Student 2 (S2), Student 3 (S3), Student 4 (S4), Student 5 (S5), and Student 6 (S6).

The data were collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they provide flexibility for participants to express their experiences while allowing the researcher to obtain detailed information related to the research questions (Cohen et al., 2018). The interviews were conducted individually in Indonesian to ensure that participants could express their ideas comfortably and clearly.

The interview questions focused on two main aspects. First, the interviews explored

the kinds of speaking difficulties experienced by students, including linguistic problems and psychological factors. Second, the interviews investigated the strategies used by students to overcome those difficulties. Each interview lasted approximately 7-10 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent to ensure data accuracy. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved six stages. First, the researcher familiarized herself with the data by reading the interview transcripts repeatedly. Second, initial codes were generated to identify meaningful units related to students' speaking difficulties and coping strategies. Third, the codes were grouped into broader categories to develop potential themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency and relevance to the research questions. Fifth, the themes were defined and named according to their characteristics. Finally, the findings were interpreted and presented narratively with supporting excerpts from participants' responses.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of the interview data revealed two major themes corresponding to the research questions of this study. The first theme concerns the types of speaking difficulties experienced by the tenth-grade students at One of Senior High School in Karawang, while the second theme focuses on the strategies employed by students to overcome those difficulties.

1. Students' Speaking Difficulties

The findings showed that students experienced both linguistic and psychological difficulties when speaking English. These challenges often occurred simultaneously and affected students' participation in speaking activities.

2. Limited Vocabulary

Limited vocabulary emerged as one of the most common difficulties among participants. Most students admitted that they often knew what they wanted to express but lacked sufficient vocabulary to convey their ideas in English.

S2 stated:

"Sometimes I understand the topic, but I don't know the English words, so I stop speaking."

Similarly, S5 mentioned:

"I often forget vocabulary when I want to answer the teacher's questions."

The findings indicate that vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in speaking performance. Inadequate vocabulary causes hesitation and reduces fluency during communication. This result is consistent with Alaraj (2024), who found that limited vocabulary is one of the major barriers preventing EFL learners from expressing ideas effectively. Brown (2004) also emphasizes that speaking requires learners to access linguistic knowledge rapidly; therefore, vocabulary deficiency may interrupt communication and decrease confidence.

3. Pronunciation Problems

Another difficulty frequently mentioned by participants was pronunciation. Students expressed uncertainty regarding how English words should be pronounced correctly.

According to S3:

"I am afraid of pronouncing words incorrectly because English pronunciation is different from Indonesian."

Mispronunciation often made students reluctant to speak because they feared being corrected or laughed at by their peers. Similar findings were reported by Abrar et al. (2024), who identified pronunciation problems as a major obstacle affecting students' confidence and speaking performance. These findings suggest that pronunciation difficulties not only influence intelligibility but also affect learners' emotional readiness to communicate.

4. Fear of Making Mistakes and Lack of Confidence

Psychological factors emerged as another important issue. Most participants reported feeling embarrassed and afraid of making grammatical or pronunciation mistakes when speaking English.

S1 stated:

"I feel nervous because I am afraid of saying something wrong."

S4 also explained:

"Sometimes I know the answer, but I am not confident enough to speak."

These findings support Ajiza et al. (2024), who reported that fear of making mistakes and low self-confidence are among the major causes of speaking anxiety among EFL learners. From the perspective of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980), such psychological barriers may limit learners' strategic competence and willingness to communicate despite having adequate linguistic knowledge.

5. Speaking Anxiety

Several participants admitted that they became nervous when speaking in front of the class, especially during presentations.

S6 stated:

"When everyone looks at me, I become nervous and sometimes forget what I want to say."

The findings indicate that anxiety negatively influences students' speaking performance. This finding corroborates the study conducted by Damayanti and Cahyono (2025), which revealed that speaking anxiety is influenced by cognitive, linguistic, and social factors. Anxiety interferes with learners' concentration and reduces their confidence, thereby affecting their ability to communicate effectively.

6. Students' Strategies in Overcoming Speaking Difficulties

Despite encountering various challenges, students employed several strategies to improve their speaking ability and cope with their difficulties. These strategies can be interpreted through Oxford's (1990) Language Learning Strategies framework.

7. Watching English Videos and Listening to English Songs

Many participants reported that they learned pronunciation and vocabulary through English videos, movies, and songs.

S2 stated:

"I usually watch English videos on YouTube and listen to English songs to learn new words."

These activities represent cognitive strategies because they allow learners to process and practice language through authentic exposure. According to Oxford

(1990), cognitive strategies facilitate language learning by enabling learners to manipulate and understand linguistic information. Similar findings were reported by Hidayat et al. (2024), who emphasized that exposure to authentic materials contributes significantly to language skill development.

8. Memorizing Vocabulary

Another strategy commonly used by participants was memorizing vocabulary.

S5 explained:

"I write down new vocabulary and memorize it every day."

Vocabulary memorization helped students recall words more easily during speaking activities. This finding supports Oxford's (1990) memory strategies, which aim to facilitate storing and retrieving information. Adequate vocabulary knowledge enables learners to communicate more fluently and confidently.

9. Using Google Translate

Several students reported using digital tools to help them understand pronunciation and meaning.

S3 stated:

"When I don't know how to pronounce a word, I use Google Translate."

These findings indicate the use of compensation strategies. Students attempted to overcome limitations in their language knowledge through external resources. Recent research by Zhang et al. (2024) also demonstrated that technology and AI-assisted applications provide learners with opportunities for autonomous speaking practice and pronunciation improvement.

10. Practicing with Friends

Another strategy employed by participants was practicing English with peers.

S4 stated:

"I usually practice speaking with my friends because I feel more relaxed."

Interaction with peers provided opportunities for feedback and increased confidence. This finding reflects social strategies proposed by Oxford (1990), which emphasize cooperation and interaction as means of facilitating language learning. Through peer interaction, students can develop speaking competence in a less threatening environment.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that students' speaking difficulties involve both linguistic and psychological dimensions. Limited vocabulary and pronunciation problems restrict students' ability to produce language, whereas anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence reduce their willingness to communicate. These findings support Brown's (2004) assertion that speaking is a complex skill requiring the integration of linguistic competence and affective factors.

The findings can also be interpreted through Canale and Swain's (1980) framework of communicative competence. Students' difficulties indicate limitations not only in grammatical competence but also in strategic competence. Nevertheless, the strategies adopted by students reveal their efforts to compensate for communication breakdowns and maintain interaction.

Furthermore, the results strongly support Oxford's (1990) Language Learning Strategies theory. Students employed cognitive, memory, compensation, affective, and social strategies to overcome speaking difficulties. These findings indicate that learners are active agents who consciously regulate their learning processes. Similar results were reported by Hidayat et al. (2024), who highlighted the importance of language learning strategies in promoting learner autonomy and language development.

Therefore, speaking difficulties should not merely be viewed as obstacles but as opportunities for learners to develop adaptive strategies. Teachers should create supportive learning environments that encourage students to practice speaking without fear of making mistakes. In addition, integrating authentic materials, collaborative activities, and technology-assisted learning may help students develop confidence and communicative competence more effectively.

Overall, this study highlights that speaking challenges among EFL learners are multidimensional and that students employ diverse strategies to cope with those difficulties. Understanding these experiences may provide valuable insights for English teachers in designing learner-

centered speaking instruction and fostering students' communicative competence.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the speaking difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students at One of Senior High School in Karawang and to explore the strategies they employed to overcome those difficulties. Using a qualitative case study approach, the findings revealed that students encountered various challenges in speaking English, which could be categorized into linguistic and psychological factors. Linguistic difficulties included limited vocabulary and pronunciation problems, while psychological challenges comprised fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and speaking anxiety. These difficulties often affected students' willingness to participate actively in speaking activities and hindered their oral performance.

Despite these challenges, the findings showed that students employed various strategies to cope with their speaking difficulties. These strategies included watching English videos and listening to English songs, memorizing vocabulary, using digital tools such as Google Translate and AI applications, practicing independently in front of a mirror, and practicing English with peers. These strategies reflect the use of cognitive, memory, compensation, affective, and social strategies as proposed by Oxford (1990). The findings indicate that students are active learners who consciously employ different approaches to facilitate their speaking development and manage the challenges they encounter.

The findings contribute to the field of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) by providing a deeper understanding of the multidimensional nature of speaking difficulties and highlighting the importance of language learning strategies in promoting communicative competence. From a pedagogical perspective, English teachers are encouraged to create supportive and low-anxiety learning environments, provide opportunities for meaningful speaking practice, and integrate technology and collaborative activities to foster students'

confidence and speaking ability.

Nevertheless, this study was limited to a small number of participants from one educational setting. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all EFL learners. Future studies are recommended to involve participants from different educational contexts and employ multiple data collection techniques, such as classroom observations and focus group discussions, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of students' speaking challenges and coping strategies. Further research may also investigate the relationship between language learning strategies and speaking performance to provide broader implications for English language teaching and learning.

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