STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING OF DESCRIPTIVE TEXT AT GRADE X OF SMA N 1 AIR JOMAN IN 2024/2025 ACADEMIC YEAR

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Abstract
Speaking is one of the essential skills in English language learning, especially at the senior high school level. It serves as the main tool for expressing ideas, opinions, and information. However, many students still struggle to speak English fluently and confidently, particularly when dealing with descriptive texts. This study aims to explore the speaking difficulties experienced by tenth-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Air Joman in delivering descriptive texts orally and to identify the internal and external factors that contribute to those difficulties. A qualitative research approach with a case study design was employed. The data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with students and the English teacher, and questionnaires. The findings revealed that the students faced several challenges, including limited vocabulary, pronunciation problems, low confidence, and anxiety about making mistakes. Internally, students often felt nervous, afraid of being laughed at, or were unfamiliar with using English in daily communication. Externally, they lacked sufficient practice and were exposed to teaching methods that emphasized writing over speaking. These findings indicate the importance of creating a supportive classroom atmosphere and designing communicative learning activities that encourage students to speak more actively. Teachers are also encouraged to use various strategies to help reduce students' anxiety and to foster their speaking ability in a more engaging way. The study provides insight into the actual speaking barriers faced by students and offers recommendations for improving speaking instruction in the classroom.

Keywords: speaking difficulties; descriptive text; senior high school students; anxiety; vocabulary limitation

Abstrak
Berbicara merupakan salah satu keterampilan utama dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, terutama di jenjang sekolah menengah atas. Keterampilan ini menjadi alat utama untuk menyampaikan ide, pendapat, dan informasi secara lisan. Namun, banyak siswa yang masih mengalami kesulitan untuk berbicara bahasa Inggris dengan lancar dan percaya diri, khususnya saat menyampaikan teks deskriptif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi kesulitan berbicara yang dialami oleh siswa kelas X SMA Negeri 1 Air Joman dalam menyampaikan teks deskriptif secara lisan, serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor internal dan eksternal yang memengaruhi kesulitan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara kepada siswa

dan guru, serta angket. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengalami beberapa hambatan, seperti keterbatasan kosakata, masalah pelafalan, rendahnya kepercayaan diri, dan kecemasan saat berbicara. Dari sisi internal, siswa sering merasa gugup, takut ditertawakan, dan belum terbiasa menggunakan bahasa Inggris dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Dari sisi eksternal, mereka kurang mendapatkan latihan berbicara dan pembelajaran yang diterima lebih berfokus pada aspek tulis. Temuan ini menunjukkan pentingnya menciptakan suasana kelas yang mendukung dan merancang kegiatan pembelajaran yang komunikatif agar siswa terdorong untuk aktif berbicara. Guru juga disarankan untuk menggunakan strategi yang bervariasi dalam mengurangi kecemasan siswa dan mendorong kemampuan berbicara mereka secara efektif.

Kata kunci: kesulitan berbicara; teks deskriptif; siswa SMA; kecemasan; keterbatasan kosakata

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential skills in English language learning, especially for senior high school students. Through speaking, learners can express their thoughts, opinions, emotions, and ideas in real-time, making it a key component of effective communication. This skill is not only important in academic settings but also plays a major role in students' everyday lives. Despite its importance, many students still struggle to speak English fluently and confidently, particularly when asked to speak spontaneously and structurally in front of others.

One of the texts introduced in the senior high school English curriculum is descriptive text. This type of text is meant to help students describe people, places, or objects in detail so the listener or reader can form a clear mental image. Although students may already be familiar with the structure of descriptive texts in writing, many face difficulties when they are asked to deliver such texts orally. In practice, students often hesitate when choosing the right words, make pronunciation mistakes, and lack the confidence to speak in front of their peers. These issues highlight a noticeable gap between students' writing and speaking abilities.

Such difficulties were also observed at SMA Negeri 1 Air Joman. Based on initial observations, it was found that many Grade X students feel anxious and reluctant to speak in English. They often fall silent during speaking tasks or only manage to say a few very simple sentences. Several factors seem to contribute to this problem, including limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, fear of making mistakes, and the anxiety of being laughed at by classmates. In addition, the classroom atmosphere and teaching approach—often focused on teacher-centered instruction—do not provide students with enough opportunities to practice speaking.

Speaking ability in a foreign language does not develop instantly. It requires consistent practice, encouragement from teachers, and a safe learning environment where students feel free to make mistakes without fear of judgment. Therefore, it is important for teachers to fully understand what kinds of difficulties their students face when speaking, particularly in the context of descriptive texts. With such understanding, teachers can design more appropriate strategies, provide meaningful speaking activities, encourage peer interaction, and foster a communicative classroom setting.

This study aims to explore the speaking difficulties experienced by Grade X students at SMA Negeri 1 Air Joman when presenting descriptive texts. The main focus is to identify the most common speaking problems and examine the internal and external factors contributing to them. The findings are expected to serve as useful input for English teachers in planning more effective learning strategies, as well as contribute to improving the overall quality of English speaking instruction in senior high schools. By identifying and addressing these challenges,

teachers can help students gradually become more confident and capable in expressing themselves in English.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the speaking difficulties experienced by students of Grade X at SMA Negeri 1 Air Joman, specifically in their performance of descriptive texts in English. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables the researcher to obtain a deep, contextual understanding of human behavior and language use, particularly through students' real experiences and expressions. As Creswell (2012) suggested, qualitative research is well-suited for studies aiming to uncover how individuals perceive, understand, and respond to phenomena within a specific setting.

The research took place in the first semester of the 2024/2025 academic year, in one of the tenth-grade classrooms selected with the help of the English teacher. The selection of participants was done through purposive sampling, a method commonly used in qualitative studies to ensure that participants are closely related to the focus of the research. The class chosen had shown consistent signs of speaking difficulties during English sessions, especially when asked to speak spontaneously using descriptive text material. The participants included approximately 30 students, with a focus on those who exhibited a range of speaking abilities to capture diverse perspectives. In addition, the English teacher was involved to provide complementary information from the instructional point of view.

The data were gathered using three primary techniques: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Each method played a specific role in building a complete and credible understanding of the students' speaking challenges.

Observation was conducted over several meetings, where the researcher acted as a passive observer to avoid influencing the natural flow of classroom interaction. The aim was to document students' behaviors during speaking tasks, including signs of hesitation, body language, fluency, engagement, and peer interaction. Special attention was paid to how students responded to descriptive text prompts—whether they were able to construct sentences, describe people or objects in detail, or appeared withdrawn and uncertain.

In addition to observation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and their English teacher. The student interviews focused on exploring their feelings, thoughts, and experiences regarding speaking English in class. Questions such as "What do you feel when speaking English in front of your friends?" or "What makes it difficult to describe something in English?" were used to prompt open-ended responses. Students were encouraged to speak freely and share real examples, which provided rich, insightful data. The teacher was interviewed to understand the instructional strategies used in teaching speaking, the challenges observed from her perspective, and her evaluation of students' oral performance over time.

Documentation was also used as supporting evidence. The researcher collected lesson plans, student speaking worksheets, and sample materials used in class. This helped to provide context for the observation and interview data, allowing the researcher to compare what was planned by the teacher with what was actually practiced and performed by the students. For instance, it became clear from documentation that speaking activities were less frequent in lesson plans compared to writing or grammar exercises.

Once all data were collected, they were analyzed using qualitative descriptive techniques. The researcher transcribed the interviews, reviewed observation notes, and coded the data into themes that emerged across multiple sources. Themes such as vocabulary limitation, pronunciation problems, speaking anxiety, limited speaking opportunities, and teacher-centered instruction were consistently found. These themes were then interpreted based on the context in which they occurred and compared with relevant theories from Brown (2001), Harmer (2007), and other scholars on language learning and speaking skills.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher cross-validated findings by triangulating data from the three sources. For example, observations of student silence during speaking tasks were supported by both student interview responses and the teacher's own evaluation. The goal was not to quantify results but to deeply understand the students' experiences, which is the hallmark of qualitative inquiry.

In summary, the use of a qualitative descriptive method in this study allowed the researcher to explore not only what difficulties students encountered in speaking descriptive texts, but also how these difficulties were shaped by internal factors such as anxiety and vocabulary, as well as external influences like teaching strategies and classroom dynamics. The richness of the data collected offered valuable insight into the real conditions of language learning and provided a basis for more responsive and student-centered pedagogical recommendations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study investigated the difficulties experienced by Grade X students of SMA Negeri 1 Air Joman in speaking descriptive texts. The data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with students and the teacher, and supporting documentation such as lesson plans and student worksheets. The findings revealed several prominent themes related to students' challenges in speaking, especially in the context of delivering descriptive texts orally. The discussion of these findings is presented below, structured thematically to reflect the real experiences of the participants.

1. Vocabulary Limitation

One of the most frequently mentioned difficulties by the students was their limited vocabulary. Students often struggled to find the right words when describing people, objects, or places. This limited lexical knowledge caused hesitation, repetition, and sometimes complete silence when they attempted to speak in English.

A student explained during the interview:

"I want to describe my mother in English, but I don't know the words. I just know 'kind' and 'beautiful', but I want to say more. So I stop speaking."

Another student added:

"Even when I try to memorize vocabulary, I forget it during speaking. It's hard to remember the words in my head when I'm nervous."

This indicates that although students may have some vocabulary knowledge in passive form (e.g., in reading or writing), they struggle to activate it during real-time speaking. According to Brown (2001), vocabulary knowledge plays a fundamental role in speaking, as speakers must retrieve and apply words spontaneously and accurately. Without a solid vocabulary base, students are limited in their ability to form descriptive sentences that reflect their intended meaning.

In addition, students reported that the vocabulary taught in class was often not contextualized in speaking tasks. This lack of integration made it harder for them to connect what they learned in vocabulary exercises with what they needed in oral practice. It highlights the need for teachers to incorporate speaking opportunities that reinforce the use of vocabulary in real communication settings.

2. Pronunciation Difficulties

Pronunciation problems were also reported by many students as a major barrier in speaking. Mispronouncing even simple words made students feel insecure and led to embarrassment in front of their classmates. Some students admitted that they often guessed how to pronounce new words, while others chose to remain silent rather than risk being corrected.

One student said:

"Sometimes I know the word, but I'm not sure how to say it. I feel shy because maybe I say it wrong and my friends laugh."
Another student commented:
"The teacher corrects my pronunciation, but I feel nervous when she stops me in the middle. It makes me afraid to try again."
Pronunciation is a key component of speaking competence. Harmer (2007) stated that incorrect pronunciation can hinder comprehension and discourage communication. It is not only about articulation but also about rhythm, stress, and intonation. In this case, students lacked regular pronunciation drills and listening models, which are essential for improving speaking accuracy. This finding suggests that pronunciation should be taught more explicitly in the classroom, not only through correction but also through activities that allow students to hear and practice sounds in natural contexts—such as listening to audio recordings, repeating dialogues, and engaging in pronunciation games.

3. Lack of Confidence and Speaking Anxiety
Psychological factors also emerged strongly from the interviews. Many students expressed feelings of anxiety, nervousness, and low self-confidence when speaking English. Even when they understood the content, their fear of making mistakes and being laughed at prevented them from speaking in front of others.
One student shared:
"I'm afraid of speaking English in front of the class. Maybe my friends laugh, or I say the wrong word. So I just stay quiet."
Another stated:
"I know the answer but I'm nervous when the teacher points at me. My heart beats fast and I forget everything."
This aligns with Inayah (2024), who emphasized that anxiety is one of the most common affective factors that interfere with students' oral performance. When students are anxious, their ability to think clearly and retrieve language is affected. Brown (2001) also noted that speaking requires not only linguistic ability but also psychological readiness.
The findings underline the importance of building a classroom environment where students feel safe to speak without fear of negative judgment. Encouraging peer support, using group activities, and praising efforts rather than perfection can help reduce anxiety and gradually increase students' confidence.

4. Limited Practice and Lack of Speaking Exposure
Another significant issue identified was the limited opportunity students had to practice speaking English both inside and outside the classroom. Many students admitted that they rarely engaged in English conversations unless required by the teacher. Even during lessons, speaking activities were often short, scripted, or teacher-dominated.
One student stated:
"We usually read or write. Speaking only happens when the teacher asks us. Even then, only some students talk."
Another student remarked:
"At home, nobody speaks English. My friends also speak Indonesian, so I don't get to practice much."
This lack of speaking practice limits fluency development. According to Harmer (2007), fluency in speaking is achieved through regular, meaningful use of the language. If students only speak occasionally, and mostly in controlled situations, their progress remains stagnant.
The findings suggest that teachers should increase the frequency of speaking tasks in class, even simple ones like short dialogues, peer interviews, or daily check-ins. Students should be

encouraged to use English actively in authentic, communicative contexts to build speaking habits and increase fluency.

5. Teacher-Centered Approach to Learning
Lastly, the way speaking is taught also affects students' development. Interviews revealed that students experienced a more lecture-based approach, where the teacher explained grammar rules or gave writing assignments, with limited time dedicated to speaking.
A student commented:
"Most of the time, we just listen to the teacher and write. Speaking is not the focus. Sometimes we read aloud, but that's it."
Another added:
 "The teacher is kind, but she doesn't give us much time to speak. Maybe because we are too many in the class."
This reflects a broader issue in many language classrooms where speaking is not treated as a core skill. Harmer (2007) emphasized that speaking activities should be central in communicative language teaching, and students should be given multiple opportunities to interact meaningfully.
In large classrooms, group and pair work can be a solution to increase speaking time for each student. The use of role-plays, storytelling, and games can also make speaking more enjoyable and engaging, reducing pressure and increasing participation.

CONCLUSION
The findings of this study reveal that Grade X students at SMA Negeri 1 Air Joman face various challenges in speaking English, particularly in delivering descriptive texts orally. These difficulties include limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, low self-confidence, speaking anxiety, minimal practice opportunities, and a learning environment that tends to prioritize written tasks over oral communication. These factors are interrelated and often reinforce one another, making it difficult for students to express themselves fluently and confidently in English. Despite having some understanding of the material, many students remain silent due to fear of making mistakes or being judged by their peers. Therefore, improving students' speaking ability requires not only strengthening their language competence but also creating a more supportive and engaging classroom atmosphere. Teachers are encouraged to implement more communicative, interactive, and student-centered strategies that can foster a sense of safety and motivation in speaking, allowing students to gradually build confidence and perform better in spoken English tasks, especially in describing people, places, or things.

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