


EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND AND ITS EFFECT ON STUDENTS' SPEAKING ABILITY: A CASE STUDY AT UNIVERSITAS BHINNEKA PGRI

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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>This study aims to determine whether students' English speaking ability is influenced by their educational background. This study is a quantitative causal comparative study. The population of this study is all students from the English Education Study Program at Universitas Bhinneka PGRI academic year 2024/2025. The sample for this study consists of 15 sixth-semester students with high school (SMA) and vocational high school (SMK) backgrounds. The sample used by the researcher is purposive sampling. The instruments used to collect data are questionnaires and speaking tests. Data analysis was conducted using the Independent T-Test in the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 program for Windows.</p> <p>The findings indicate that the English speaking ability of high school graduates is better than that of vocational school graduates. This is evidenced by the significant value of $0.004 < 0.05$, which means that there is a statistically significant difference between high school graduates and vocational school graduates. Additionally, this is supported by the data from the research questionnaire. Based on the questionnaire data in the Background factors section, high school graduates showed a result of 64.25%, indicating that their background helped them speak English. For vocational school graduates, the data showed a result of 62.5%, but this result was not higher than that of high school graduates. Based on the research results, educational background influences students' English speaking ability.</p> <p>Keywords: Effects, Educational Background, English-Speaking Ability</p>	<p>Article History Received: Juli 2025 Reviewed: Juli 2025 Published: Juli 2025</p> <p>Plagiarism Checker No 492 Prefix DOI: Prefix DOI: 10.8734/sindoro.v1i2.360 Copyright: Author Publish by: SINDORO</p> <div><p>This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License.</p></div>
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INTRODUCTION

Speaking is using sounds or words to express thoughts, ideas, and feelings (Tarigan in Maulinda, 2021). It is categorized as a productive skill, as it necessitates learners actively generate language (Brown, 2018). Chaney (1998) defines speaking as the process of constructing and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and nonverbal symbols in various contexts. This skill is spontaneous and interactive, requiring mental readiness and the ability to respond immediately (Thornbury, 2005). Therefore, speaking is considered a complex skill because it needs a combination of linguistic, cognitive, and social abilities.

Speaking is often considered the most challenging skill for students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia. Despite having undergone formal education for years, many university students still struggle to speak English fluently and confidently. The EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) 2024 reports that Indonesia ranks 80th out of 116 countries and is categorized as having low English proficiency. Meanwhile, in today's globalized world, the ability to speak English is a crucial skill, especially in the realms of education, professional development, and cross-cultural communication (Sevara & Qizi, 2024). Unfortunately, the

global demand for good English-speaking skills is not yet aligned with the reality of students' abilities in Indonesia, as reflected in the EF EPI results.

This inequality reflects the gap in English speaking ability between students living in urban and rural areas. The EF EPI 2024 reports that Surabaya (score 539), Jakarta (523), and Bandung (523) are the three cities with the highest levels of English proficiency in Indonesia, indicating that big cities tend to have higher levels of English proficiency compared to rural areas. In addition to geographical factors, the gap between theoretical and practical mastery in the English learning process is also the cause of students' low speaking ability. This difference is often attributed to educational background, especially different types of schools such as high schools and vocational schools, which have different curriculum approaches and learning experiences. Educational background refers to the type and level of formal education that a person has completed, which can influence how they process and master new language skills (Liu & Rao, 2024).

At Universitas Bhinneka PGRI, English language learning also faces similar challenges, particularly in the English Language Education department. Students have already taken various language skill courses, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, in their early semesters. However, in reality, students still struggle when asked to speak spontaneously in English. This issue arises not only due to internal factors such as a lack of confidence but also because of the influence of their educational background. Most students come from high schools and vocational schools with varying quality of English language instruction, leading to initial differences in readiness and speaking ability upon entering university.

In light of this situation, this study highlights the influence of students' educational backgrounds, particularly those from high schools and vocational schools, on their speaking abilities. Although speaking skills are a key focus in some private universities, there has been limited research examining how students' educational backgrounds can impact their ability to speak English, especially in non-public higher education settings. This study aims to investigate the effect of students' educational background on their speaking ability, with a focus on sixth-semester students at Universitas Bhinneka PGRI. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for curriculum designers and educators in supporting students with diverse educational backgrounds to develop their speaking skills more effectively. Thus, this study can serve as an initial contribution in bridging the gap between previous educational experiences and the demands of English language proficiency at the university level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Speaking is the skill of producing articulated sounds and sentences to convey meaning (Tarigan in Ria Rezeki et al., 2022). In other words, speaking encompasses the ability to convey information, ideas, and feelings through spoken language. In speaking skills, five main aspects are the focus, namely pronunciation, vocabulary, coherence, grammar, and fluency (Brown, 2018). In addition to these linguistic aspects, non-linguistic factors such as self-confidence and speaking habits also influence a person's ability to speak effectively.

One external factor that contributes to the development of speaking skills is the educational background of students. Educational background refers to a person's formal academic experience, including the level and field of study, degrees obtained, and institutions attended (Collin&Obrien 2011). In Indonesia, there are differences in characteristics between senior high schools and vocational high schools. Senior high schools place more emphasis on academic and theoretical aspects, including general and in-depth English language learning. In contrast, vocational high schools focus more on practical skills and the world of work, where English is taught as a means of communication in a professional environment.

Differences in learning approaches between high schools and vocational schools can influence the intensity and quality of students' exposure to English, especially in speaking skills.

Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis states that language ability develops through exposure to meaningful and comprehensible input. High school students typically experience more exposure due to longer class hours and support from the school environment, such as extracurricular activities. In contrast, vocational school students usually have less exposure, both in terms of learning duration and context of use. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory (1978) also highlights the importance of social interaction and support from teachers or peers in the language learning process.

Various studies conducted by previous researchers have focused on the relationship between educational background and learning outcomes. Dari (2020) investigated how students' educational background affects their academic achievement in the Economics Education program. The results showed that educational background influenced learning outcomes. Afifi (2020) also studied the differences in learning outcomes among students in the Automotive Engineering department based on their educational background. The results showed that there were differences, which were influenced by differences in the curriculum between senior high schools and vocational schools.

In contrast, Lubis (2023) found no statistically significant difference in academic performance between students who graduated from high schools and those from vocational schools. Similar findings were also obtained by Pulingkong (2024), who studied the influence of educational background on learning outcomes in the courses Technical English, Student Development, Soil Mechanics, and KBG II in the Building Engineering department. The study showed that educational background did not significantly affect student learning outcomes.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, most focus on the learning outcomes of students from diverse backgrounds at the college level. No studies have examined the impact of educational background on speaking ability at the college level. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining the speaking ability of college students based on their high school background.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal-comparative design to examine the influence of students' educational backgrounds, high school and vocational school, on their speaking abilities. The participants were 15 sixth-semester students of English Education at Universitas Bhinneka PGRI, selected through purposive sampling, consisting of 9 high school graduates and 6 vocational school graduates. Data were collected using a Likert-scale questionnaire to identify students' educational backgrounds and a speaking test conducted individually for 3 to 5 minutes per student. All data were analyzed using Independent Sample T-Test through SPSS version 25 to determine whether a significant difference existed between the two groups in terms of speaking ability.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

This study involved 15 sixth-semester students from the English Education Department at Universitas Bhinneka PGRI, comprising 9 students with a general high school background and 6 students with a vocational high school background. The aim was to analyze whether educational background significantly affects students' speaking ability.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of students' speaking scores based on their educational background.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Speaking Scores

Educational Background	Mean	Minimum	Maximum
High School (SMA/MA)	85.33	82	92
Vocational High School	77.67	70	84

As shown, high school students outperformed vocational high school students in the speaking test, with a mean difference of 7.66 points.

1. Normality Test

Before conducting the hypothesis test, a normality test was carried out using the Shapiro-Wilk method to ensure the data met parametric assumptions.

Table 2. Shapiro-Wilk Normality Test

Educational Background	Shapiro-Wilk Statistic	df	Sig.
High School (SMA/MA)	0.886	9	0.181
Vocational High School	0.859	6	0.184

The results show that both groups have p-values greater than 0.05 ($p = 0.181$ and $p = 0.184$), indicating that the data are normally distributed.

2. Hypothesis Testing: Independent Sample T-Test

Table 3. Independent Samples T-Test Result

t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference
3.479	13	0.004	7.667

The t-test results show a t-value of 3.479 and a p-value of 0.004. Since $p < 0.05$, the difference in speaking ability between students from high school and vocational high school is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted: educational background has a significant effect on students' speaking ability.

Questionnaire Support Data

To complement the speaking test findings, a questionnaire was distributed to the same 15 students to gather insights into their previous English learning experiences, teaching approaches, exposure to English, and school support. The results are presented below:

Table 4. Participation in English Course Outside School

Statement	Educational Background	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
<i>I attended/have attended English courses outside of school.</i>	High School (n=9)	55.5	11.1	33.3
	Vocational School (n=6)	16.7	16.7	66.6

High school students were more likely to have participated in English courses compared to vocational school students, indicating broader exposure outside formal education.

Table 5. Use of English in Daily Life

Statement	Educational Background	Often (%) (Agree + Strongly Agree)	Neutral (%)	Rarely (%) (Disagree + Strongly Disagree)
<i>I often use English in my daily life, in and outside school.</i>	High School	22.2	55.6	22.2
	Vocational School	0.0	50.0	50.0

High school students reported slightly more frequent daily use of English than their vocational counterparts.

Table 6. Availability of Extracurricular Programs Supporting Speaking

Statement	Educational Background	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
<i>My school had extracurricular programs that supported English speaking.</i>	High School	44.4	11.1	44.5
	Vocational School	33.4	66.7	0.0

High school students indicated more varied responses, whereas vocational school students mostly remained neutral, indicating possible lack of such programs.

Table 7. Teachers' Motivation and Support for Speaking

Statement	Educational Background	Agree (%) (Agree + Strongly Agree)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
<i>My teachers provided motivation and support to improve my English speaking.</i>	High School	88.9	0.0	11.1
	Vocational School	66.7	33.3	0.0

Both groups received support, but high school students reported more consistent motivational support from teachers.

Table 8. Friend Support for English Speaking Practice

Statement	Educational Background	Agree (%) (Agree + Strongly Agree)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)
<i>My friends supported and practiced English with me.</i>	High School	66.6	0.0	33.3
	Vocational School	0.0	100.0	0.0

Peer support in practicing speaking was more common among high school students. The questionnaire findings reveal that high school students were more frequently engaged in English learning beyond the classroom, received stronger motivational support, and had more access to structured extracurricular activities. These conditions may explain their higher performance in the speaking test. In contrast, vocational school students had fewer opportunities and were more neutral in responses, indicating limited language-rich environments during their prior education.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide compelling evidence that students' educational background significantly influences their English-speaking ability. The independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in speaking scores between high school and vocational high school students ($p = 0.004$), with high school students outperforming their vocational counterparts. These results are consistent with previous studies that suggest academic pathways shape learners' language competence through differences in curriculum design, exposure to English, and pedagogical support (Husna, 2021; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2018).

Beyond the speaking test scores, the supporting questionnaire data reveal patterns that help explain this disparity. High school students demonstrated greater exposure to English through formal and informal learning environments. Over 55% of them had attended English courses outside school, while 67% of vocational students had not. This finding aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition is highly influenced by the quantity and quality of comprehensible input (Luo, 2024). Students with greater access to English input outside the classroom such as courses, media, and reading—are more likely to develop fluency.

Moreover, students from high school backgrounds reported more supportive environments for speaking practice. For example, 88.9% of high school students agreed that their teachers motivated them to improve their English-speaking skills, compared to 66.7% of vocational students. These findings echo Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the role of social support, scaffolding, and collaborative learning in language development (Yusof, 2021). Such interpersonal support not only boosts speaking performance but also builds students' confidence and willingness to communicate—factors often overlooked in traditional instruction.

The data also show that 66.6% of high school students received peer support in practicing English, whereas 100% of vocational students remained neutral. This suggests that English was likely less integrated into the social fabric of vocational classrooms. According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, immediate environments such as school and peer interactions play a pivotal role in language learning (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A school culture that fosters English communication can stimulate natural, low-stakes speaking opportunities that enhance fluency.

While vocational school students demonstrated some degree of effort such as watching English movies or songs these activities were generally not complemented by structured practice or institutional support. The absence of extracurricular programs and teacher-driven speaking tasks in vocational schools further contributed to a lack of productive speaking engagement. This situation may stem from the vocational curriculum's emphasis on technical competencies rather than communicative English, a contrast supported by the national education design (Law No. 20/2003).

This study's results support findings from Muhammad (2018) and Azmi (2020), who argued that students from more academically oriented institutions tend to have stronger English language outcomes due to more systematic input and opportunities. However, these findings contrast with those of Umam and Nada (2024), who suggested that educational background has no significant influence on learning outcomes. The divergence may be due to different research focuses—this study isolated speaking ability as a specific language skill, whereas others often assess general academic achievement.

Despite these valuable insights, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small ($n = 15$), which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Second, the speaking test was assessed by a single rater, which might introduce subjective bias despite the use of a validated rubric (Brown, 2018). Third, the questionnaire instrument was researcher-developed, guided by theory but lacking established psychometric properties. Lastly, internal psychological variables—such as motivation, anxiety, and self-efficacy were not explored in this study, though they are known to play significant roles in speaking performance (Destiwati et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, the consistency between the test results and the questionnaire responses strengthens the conclusion that educational background through its embedded curriculum, support systems, and access to language-rich environments plays a significant role in shaping students' speaking ability.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study concludes that students' educational background has a significant effect on their English-speaking ability, as demonstrated by the higher speaking scores of high school students compared to those from vocational schools and supported by consistent questionnaire responses regarding exposure, teacher and peer support, and extracurricular opportunities. High school students were found to have more access to structured English learning, both within and beyond the classroom, which contributed to better fluency, vocabulary usage, and coherence in speaking. In contrast, vocational students reported more limited opportunities for speaking practice and language exposure, which may be attributed to the curriculum's focus on technical rather than communicative skills. These findings support language acquisition theories such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, reinforcing the idea that comprehensible input and social interaction play crucial roles in developing speaking proficiency. Given these results, it is recommended that English lecturers consider the diversity of students' educational backgrounds when designing instructional methods and speaking activities to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness. Furthermore, students regardless of background are encouraged to take initiative in seeking additional exposure to English through courses, media, and peer interaction. Lastly, future researchers are advised to expand sample sizes, employ multiple raters for oral assessment, and explore internal factors such as motivation or learning strategies to deepen understanding of what shapes students' speaking ability.

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