

## Problems Faced by Grade XI Students in Speaking English at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi

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### ABSTRACT

*This research aims to identify the problems faced by eleventh-grade students in speaking English. This research used a qualitative descriptive method, using questionnaires and interviews to collect data. The subject of this research was eleventh-grade students of SMA Negeri 2 Sigi. There are 44 students as participants. The researcher found that students' problems in speaking English are influenced by two factors: linguistic and psychological problems. Linguistic problems consist of a lack of vocabulary, poor grammar, a lack of pronunciation, and a lack of fluency. The dominant problem with a high percentage is fluency in speaking English. Other problems include linguistic problem in speaking, consisting of inhibition, nothing to say, a low number of participants, mother tongue use, and the dominant problem with a high percentage is mother tongue use. While psychological problems consist of fear of making mistakes, shyness, anxiety, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation, the dominant problems with a high percentage are fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence. This research provides insights into the problems faced by eleventh-grade students in speaking English. It emphasizes the need to address these issues in the classroom to enhance students' learning experience.*

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Published June 24<sup>th</sup> 2025



### KEYWORDS

Speaking Problems, High School Students, Speaking English.

### ARTICLE LICENCE

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### 1. Introduction

In language learning, speaking is the fundamental ability. Speaking English is an activity that many people do, whether it is at school, at university, at the office, at home, or elsewhere. Since those who are literate are typically referred to as speakers of the language they possess, speaking appears to be the most crucial of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). As one of the essential skills in learning a language, speaking enables people to send and receive information or messages to others. Speaking is a process of building and sharing meaning through verbal and nonverbal symbols in various contexts (Chaney, 1998; Aswad et al., 2019; Junaid et al., 2024; Youngsun et al., 2024). Harmer (2013) also states that speaking as the ability to speak fluently presupposes not only knowledge of language features, but also the ability to process information and language.

However, in the Indonesian EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, many students still face difficulties in speaking English clearly and confidently. One of the most common problems is poor pronunciation, especially in applying correct word stress, which often makes their speech hard to understand (Weda, 2018; Prihandoko et al., 2021; Ritonga et al., 2020; Sachiya et al., 2025). Based on preliminary observations at SMA Bala Keselamatan Palu, students tend to pronounce English words the way they are written in Indonesian, without paying attention to stress patterns. This lack of awareness leads to misunderstandings and reduces their confidence in speaking. Moreover, pronunciation, particularly word stress, is often neglected in classroom instruction, as teaching tends to focus more on grammar, vocabulary, reading, and writing. This situation highlights the need for effective pronunciation training that helps students speak more clearly and naturally in English.

Speaking English cannot be done successfully if students are not confident or do not know how to pronounce words properly. In fact, the ability to speak English can open many opportunities, especially in education and careers, but only if the speaker is understandable. For this reason, improving pronunciation—particularly through teaching word stress—has become an urgent need in English classrooms in Indonesia.

Speaking is the most challenging skill for English as foreign learners. It was supported by Hinkel (2005: 485), who states that speaking is the most complex and challenging skill to master. Speaking is not only about speaking in English

with appropriate grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation; it also involves developing students' confidence before speaking. Some people also still feel hesitant to speak English. According to Jianing (2007), students sometimes fear losing face as they make mistakes in their speaking. They worry that they will make mistakes and that they will be criticized or look foolish.

The better a person's ability, the better their ability to communicate orally, and this also applies to students who learn to speak English. Daulay (2019) said students can make mistakes in delivering their ideas when speaking English in the teaching and learning process. The communication process will succeed if students can exchange thoughts or ideas with one another. So, students with good speaking ability will have good communication skills in English. So, learning English has become an important topic to discuss. Furthermore, Eleventh-grade students at a senior high school should be capable of speaking English, communication with the teacher and their classmates, and expressing their ideas and opinions. Unfortunately, many people or students still do not dare to speak English. It is supported by Dorney (2005), who states that the learning process is ongoing, but students are uncomfortable being corrected that way. They look at making mistakes as failures because of their shame for their action. This case also happened to students at SMAN 2 Sigi. Through preliminary observations made by the researcher at the school, the researcher conducted a brief interview with the English teacher, and the teacher said that there were still so many students who did not dare to speaking English. A researcher, Heriansyah (2012), found that the problems faced by students are mostly a lack of vocabulary, not being confident enough to speak, not being used to talking in class, and difficulty expressing words or sentences. At the same time, Widyasworo (2019) found that most of the students had difficulties, including linguistic aspect like inhibition, nothing to say, uneven participation, mother tongue, anxiety, shyness, lack of confident, and low motivation.

This experience encouraged researcher to find out the problems faced by students who speak English. From the preliminary research, the researcher only focuses on the problems faced by the students in speaking English. Based on the explanation above, the researcher considers that this research needs to be explored as the problems previously explained.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the problems faced by students in speaking English. This approach was chosen to describe and analyze detailed information related to the students' difficulties in speaking English at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi. The design focused on capturing and explaining both linguistic and psychological challenges experienced by the students.

The research was conducted at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi. The participants consisted of 40 students, who were selected to complete a questionnaire. In addition, four students (two males and two females) were purposively selected for in-depth interviews based on their willingness to participate and ability to provide relevant insights.

Two instruments were used in this study: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire consisted of 13 closed-ended items, designed to identify students' problems in speaking English, covering two main areas: linguistic problems and psychological problems. The questionnaire was written in Indonesian to ensure clear understanding and was distributed directly to the students. The results of the questionnaire helped the researcher identify common challenges faced by the students.

Following the questionnaire, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with four selected students (2 male and 2 female). The interview guide included 13 open-ended questions related to both linguistic and psychological aspects of speaking English. The researcher prepared the questions in advance and used a voice recorder to document the interviews. After the interviews were completed, the responses were transcribed and presented in detailed descriptive form.

The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model by Miles and Huberman (1992), which consists of three steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction phase, all responses were reviewed, and only relevant data were selected and categorized according to themes. Unnecessary or unrelated data were removed. In the data display stage, the selected information was organized and presented in narrative form to provide a comprehensive understanding of the students' experiences. Finally, in the conclusion drawing phase, the researcher identified patterns, relationships, and key insights that reflected the core problems students faced in speaking English.

### 3. Result and Discussion

#### 3.1 Results

This research aimed to identify the problems faced by eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi in speaking English. A total of 40 students participated by completing a questionnaire, and in-depth interviews were conducted with four selected students two males and two females. The data revealed that the majority of students are still experiencing challenges in speaking English, both in linguistic and psychological aspects.

The findings of this study focus on the various difficulties students encounter when trying to speak English. These problems are evident from the students' responses to the questionnaire. The following table presents the percentage of students' answers to each question related to speaking difficulties.

**Table 1. Percentage of Students' Answers**

NO	LIST OF QUESTIONS	ALTERNATIVE ANSWER		TOTAL OF RESPONDENTS
		Yes	No	
<b>Linguistic Problems</b>				
1	Do you have a limited vocabulary when learning to speak English in class?	87%	13%	40
2	Do you have difficulties to create and structure sentences using good and correct grammar when speaking English?	75%	25%	40
3	Do you find it difficult to pronounce word or sentences in English ?	90%	10%	40
4	Do you find it difficult to speak English fluently ?	93%	7%	40
<b>Average score</b>		<b>86%</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Psychological Problems</b>				
5	Are you afraid of making mistakes when learning to speak English in class?	77%	23%	40
6	Are you embarrassed when learning to speak English in class?	57%	43%	40
7	Are you anxious when speaking English in class?	43%	57%	40
8	Do you feel less confident when learning to speak English in class?	77%	23%	40
9	Do you feel less motivated when learning to speak English in class?	65%	35%	40

<b>Average Score</b>		<b>64%</b>	<b>36%</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Another problem in speaking English (include Linguistic problem)</b>				
10	Do you have any obstacles in learning to speak English in class?	65%	35%	40
11	Do you find it difficult to express something in English?	93%	7%	40
12	Do you feel that your performance and participation in activities that improve your English speaking skills in class are low?	83%	17%	40
13	Do you often use Indonesian when your teacher or friends ask questions in English?	95%	5%	40
<b>Average Score</b>		<b>84%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Overall average Score</b>		<b>77%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>40</b>

Based on the results shown in Table 1, it is clear that most students face significant challenges in learning to speak English, especially related to linguistic problems. A large majority of students reported having limited vocabulary (87%) and difficulty using correct grammar when forming sentences (75%). Even more concerning, 90% of the students said they found it difficult to pronounce English words or sentences correctly, and 93% admitted that they had trouble speaking English fluently. These findings show that linguistic aspects—such as vocabulary mastery, grammar structure, pronunciation, and fluency—are the most serious obstacles for students in developing their speaking skills.

#### a. Linguistic Problems

Based on the table above, the results indicate that students at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi face several linguistic challenges in speaking English. For the first question regarding vocabulary problems, 87% of students answered "yes", and only 3% answered "no", suggesting that the majority of students have limited vocabulary when speaking English. In response to the second question about grammar, 75% of students chose "yes", while 25% chose "no", indicating that many students still struggle with using correct grammar in spoken English.

For the third question, which asked about pronunciation, 90% of students responded "yes", and 10% responded "no", showing that most students are still unable to pronounce English words correctly. The fourth question addressed fluency, and the responses showed that 93% of students said "yes", while only 7% said "no", which clearly indicates that fluency is a significant problem for most students.

In addition to these core linguistic issues, students also experience other common difficulties in speaking, which are still considered part of linguistic problems. These include inhibition, having nothing to say, low participation, and the frequent use of the mother tongue.

Regarding inhibition, 65% of students answered "yes", while 35% answered "no". This suggests that many students feel mentally blocked or anxious when they try to speak English. For the question about having nothing to say, 93% of students said "yes", indicating that they often do not know how to express their ideas or feel they lack the words to say something in English. Concerning low participation, 83% of students responded "yes", and 17% said "no", which implies that many students are not actively involved in speaking activities during English lessons.

Finally, for the question on mother tongue use, 95% of students admitted they prefer to speak in their native language, and only 5% claimed not to. This high percentage reveals that students frequently rely on their mother tongue, even when asked to speak in English by their teachers or peers. This suggests a strong dependence on the first language, which can hinder their development in spoken English.

## **b. Psychological Problems**

According to the data presented in the table 1, 77% of students responded "yes" to the question regarding fear of making mistakes, while 23% responded "no". This indicates that the majority of students are still afraid of making errors when speaking English. For the question about feeling shy when speaking English, 57% of students answered "yes", while 43% answered "no". Although the results are relatively close, more than half of the students still feel shy when they speak English.

Regarding self-confidence, 77% of students answered "yes", and 23% answered "no", suggesting that most students still lack confidence when speaking English. When asked about motivation, 65% of the students reported low motivation, while 35% said they were motivated. This shows that a majority of students are not fully motivated to improve their English-speaking skills.

After administering the questionnaire, the researcher also conducted interviews with four students (two males and two females) from the eleventh grade at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi. The interview findings confirmed that students continue to face challenges in speaking English, both linguistically and psychologically.

From the linguistic perspective, students admitted they still struggle with limited vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, poor grammar, and low fluency. Some students also mentioned experiencing inhibition, where they felt blocked or unsure of how to express their ideas in English, often saying they had nothing to say. Others confessed to frequently using their mother tongue due to their lack of English vocabulary and low confidence, and many showed low motivation during English learning.

In terms of psychological challenges, students described emotional and mental barriers that impacted their speaking performance. These included fear of making mistakes, shyness, lack of self-confidence, feelings of anxiety, and low motivation. These problems often made students reluctant to participate in speaking activities or to practice English in front of others. This shows that both internal (psychological) and external (linguistic) factors need to be addressed to help students become more confident and proficient in English speaking.

## **3.2 Discussion**

The main objective of this study was to investigate the challenges faced by eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi in speaking English. To gather the data, the researcher employed a mixed-method approach using questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaires were distributed directly to the students, while face-to-face interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into their speaking difficulties.

The findings revealed that students encountered two major types of problems in speaking English: linguistic problems and psychological problems. Linguistically, many students demonstrated limited vocabulary, poor grammar knowledge, incorrect pronunciation, and lack of fluency. These findings align with previous research by Turada (2021), who identified similar challenges among students in mastering speaking components such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, comprehension, and fluency. Brown (2001) also emphasizes that to speak English effectively, learners must master key components: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension. However, the current study found that fluency was the most dominant linguistic problem among the students.

During the interviews, several students admitted they struggled with fluency due to nervousness, embarrassment, and fear of making mistakes. These emotional barriers discouraged them from speaking English, and often led them to rely on their mother tongue. Furthermore, the lack of vocabulary and difficulties in constructing grammatically correct sentences added to their hesitation in speaking. This confirms the interrelatedness of linguistic aspects when one area is weak, it often affects the others (Al Hosni, 2014; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Psychologically, students reported experiencing fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, anxiety, and low motivation. Among these, the most common issues were fear of making mistakes and lack of self-confidence. Some students expressed concern that their classmates might laugh at them if they made errors, which discouraged them from participating in speaking activities. Others indicated that their lack of confidence stemmed from poor English knowledge and low interest in the subject. As a result, they showed little motivation to practice or improve their speaking skills.

This study underlines the importance of addressing both linguistic and psychological factors when teaching speaking skills. Teachers should create a supportive and non-judgmental classroom environment to help students feel safe and motivated to speak. In addition, targeted instruction in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency combined

with confidence-building activities can contribute significantly to overcoming these challenges (Tuan & Mai, 2015; Yani et al., 2023).

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the explanation in the previous section, the researcher concluded that the eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 2 Sigi still face significant difficulties in speaking English. The findings from both the questionnaire and the interview revealed two main categories of problems: linguistic problems and psychological problems.

In terms of linguistic problems, four main issues were identified. The most dominant problem was a lack of fluency, followed by poor pronunciation, limited vocabulary, and weak grammar skills. In addition, students also faced other speaking-related challenges such as inhibition, having nothing to say, frequent use of their mother tongue, and low or uneven participation. Among these, the most frequently reported issue was the tendency to use the mother tongue instead of English. Regarding psychological problems, five key aspects were identified: fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, low motivation, shyness, and anxiety. The two most dominant psychological barriers were fear of making mistakes and lack of confidence, which significantly affected the students' willingness and ability to speak English in the classroom.

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