
**ANALYZING THE DIFFICULTIES OF ENGLISH IN SPEAKING SKILL
AT VIII E GRADE MADRASAH TSANAWIYAH AL-MUKHLISHIN**

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Abstract

This research aims to identify the difficulties experienced by students in speaking English and to explore how teachers address these challenges in the classroom. The research focuses on VIII E students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al- Mukhlishin within the unique context of an Islamic boarding school. The research problems formulated are: (1) What are the difficulties faced by students in speaking English at VIII E Grade Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Mukhlishin? and (2) How does the teacher overcome difficulties in speaking English in class? A qualitative approach was employed, and data were collected through interviews, classroom observations, and documentation in the form of photos and audio recordings.

The findings reveal that students encounter several speaking challenges, such as limited vocabulary, incorrect pronunciation, low self- confidence, anxiety, and minimal speaking practice. These difficulties are influenced by both internal psychological factors and external factors, including conventional teaching methods. In response, the teacher implements various strategies, such as using more interactive learning activities, encouraging students through positive reinforcement, and providing more opportunities for speaking practice in a low-pressure environment.

Keywords: *English Speaking Difficulties, Pronunciation, And Speaking Skill.*

A. Introduction

English is a global language that plays a vital role in communication, science, technology, and education. For non-native speakers, mastering English is not only an academic requirement but also a necessity to actively participate in the modern world. Among the four language skills listening, speaking, reading, and writing, speaking is often considered the most challenging, yet it serves as the primary indicator of language proficiency. Through speaking, learners are able to express ideas, feelings, and knowledge in real interaction. However, for many Indonesian students, speaking English remains a major obstacle.

In Indonesia, English is taught at every level of education, including Islamic educational institutions such as pesantren or Islamic boarding schools. These schools emphasize both religious knowledge and general education, with English

often being used in daily communication activities alongside Arabic. Such an environment ideally provides a strong foundation for language practice. Nevertheless, despite years of instruction, many students still face difficulties in developing their speaking skills. Factors such as limited vocabulary, weak grammar, mispronunciation, and lack of confidence significantly hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English.

Initial observations at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Mukhlisin revealed that students in class VIII E experienced greater challenges in speaking English compared to other classes. Many students prefer using Arabic in daily interactions, female students tend to be more active than male students, and overall, English scores are lower than Arabic scores. These issues highlight the persistent barriers students encounter, including psychological factors like shyness, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence, as well as external factors such as limited time, facilities, and teaching methods.

Previous studies have also shown that students in Islamic boarding schools encounter similar challenges in speaking English. Research emphasizes the importance of interactive activities, supportive environments, and appropriate teaching strategies in helping learners overcome such barriers. However, there remains a need for deeper investigation into the specific difficulties faced by students in certain contexts, especially within pesantren-based junior high schools. Therefore, this study focuses on analyzing the difficulties in speaking English faced by VIII E grade students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Mukhlisin. By identifying these challenges and examining how teachers address them, this research aims to contribute to improving English teaching practices in Islamic boarding schools and to provide practical recommendations for enhancing students' speaking proficiency.

B. Research Methods

This research applied a descriptive qualitative design, which is appropriate for exploring students' difficulties in speaking English and the strategies used by teachers to address them. According to Creswell (2012), qualitative research is used to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects in a natural context.

Similarly, Marczyk et al. (2005) explain that qualitative approaches emphasize understanding participants' perspectives, behaviors, and experiences in depth.

The study was conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Mukhlisin, an Islamic boarding school located in Antibar, East Mempawah, West Kalimantan. The institution consists of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, Madrasah Tsanawiyah, and Madrasah Aliyah. The research focused on class VIII E, which consists of 32 students. A purposive sampling technique was applied to select ten students who were considered to provide the most relevant information about their speaking difficulties (Creswell, 2023; Memon et al., 2025).

Three techniques were used to collect data: Observation : to investigate students' participation in classroom speaking activities, such as asking and answering questions, and their vocabulary usage (Taylor-Powell & Steele, 1996). Interviews : semi structured interviews were conducted with students and the English teacher to explore specific difficulties and the strategies employed to address them (Boyce, 2006). Documentation : including photos, videos, and institutional documents, used to triangulate the results of observation and interviews (Denzin, 2012).

The data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction was conducted by focusing on relevant information obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. Data were then displayed in descriptive form to identify recurring patterns and themes. Finally, conclusions were drawn to answer the research problems. Triangulation was employed to ensure validity by comparing data from multiple sources and methods (Patton, 2002).

C. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that students of class VIII E at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Mukhlisin encounter several difficulties in speaking English, particularly limited vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, lack of confidence, and minimal practice opportunities. These problems are consistent with the observations of Supeno et al. (2023), who noted that students in Islamic boarding schools often struggle with grammar, pronunciation, and self-confidence, which reduces their willingness to communicate.

One of the main issues identified is the lack of vocabulary. Many students admitted that they had difficulty finding the right words to express their ideas, which hindered fluency during classroom interactions. This finding aligns with Ur (1996), who emphasizes that vocabulary is a crucial component of communication; without adequate vocabulary, learners cannot effectively convey meaning. Similarly, students' difficulties in pronunciation created additional barriers, as they were afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at by peers. As Harmer (2007) notes, pronunciation not only affects intelligibility but also strongly influences learners' confidence in speaking.

Psychological factors also played a significant role. Several students reported feeling anxious, shy, or afraid of making mistakes when speaking English in front of their classmates. Brown (2001) highlights that affective factors such as anxiety, fear of failure, and shyness are major barriers in second language acquisition. In this study, such affective barriers reduced students' willingness to take risks in using English, leading to passivity during classroom activities. In addition to internal factors, external challenges also contributed to the students' speaking difficulties. Limited exposure to English in daily activities, the dominance of Arabic as the language of communication, and the lack of interactive teaching methods hindered students' progress. These findings are in line with Richards (2008), who argues that speaking skills can only be developed through meaningful practice and interaction in both structured and unstructured situations.

The role of the teacher is crucial in addressing these difficulties. The English teacher at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Mukhlisin employed several strategies, such as encouraging students through positive reinforcement, introducing interactive learning activities, and providing low-pressure opportunities for practice. These strategies are consistent with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasize learner participation and real-life communication (Anjani, 2020). The results also support findings by Firda Maharani Aneski (2022), who showed that implementing speaking activities in Islamic boarding schools by prioritizing English use in dormitories can significantly improve learners' speaking ability.

However, this study also highlights the importance of creating a supportive environment that extends beyond classroom instruction. Students who rarely practiced English outside of class showed less improvement, indicating the need for consistent practice. Ericsson and Johansson (2023) demonstrated in their longitudinal study that continuous speaking practice, even with conversational agents, could enhance students' confidence and fluency over time. Thus, providing varied and engaging speaking opportunities both inside and outside the classroom appears to be key to overcoming students' speaking difficulties.

In summary, the difficulties faced by VIII E students are caused by both linguistic and psychological factors, exacerbated by limited practice opportunities. Addressing these issues requires a combination of strategies: strengthening students' vocabulary and pronunciation, building confidence through supportive feedback, and expanding opportunities for meaningful speaking practice. These findings reaffirm the importance of active, student-centered approaches to language teaching, especially in the context of Islamic boarding schools where multilingual environments influence students' language use.

1. Observation Result

The observation focused on three aspects: students' activeness in asking questions, activeness in answering questions, and vocabulary mastery. The results are presented in Table.

Table 1.
Observation Results of VIII E Students

No	Student Initial	Active Ask	Active Answer	Vocabulary Mastery
1	NSR	–	✓	–
2	MJ	–	–	–
3	TC	–	✓	–
4	MZ	✓	✓	✓
5	NL	–	–	–
6	NNH	–	–	–
7	IZ	–	–	–
8	AT	–	–	✓
9	FA	–	–	–
10	ARF	✓	✓	✓

The table shows that only two students (MZ and ARF) were consistently active in asking and answering questions while also demonstrating strong vocabulary mastery. Most other students remained passive, with little participation during classroom activities

2. Interview Result

Interviews with students revealed several recurring themes:

- Many students reported difficulties in pronunciation and limited vocabulary, which made it hard to express ideas.
- Several students admitted they felt shy and lacked confidence, especially when speaking in front of peers.
- Some students rarely practiced English outside of class, preferring to use Arabic as their daily communication language in the boarding school environment.
- A few students expressed interest in speaking English but felt discouraged due to fear of making mistakes.

The teacher interview confirmed these findings, highlighting that most students were hesitant to speak due to anxiety and insufficient vocabulary. To address this, the teacher implemented interactive methods, including group discussions and role-plays, while also encouraging students through positive reinforcement. The findings indicate that VIII E students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Mukhlisin face speaking difficulties in three main areas: linguistic competence (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation), psychological factors (fear, shyness, low self-confidence), and external conditions (limited practice opportunities and learning environment).

Vocabulary and pronunciation weaknesses were the most prominent barriers. This result echoes Ur (1996), who emphasizes that vocabulary is the building block of communication, and Harmer (2007), who highlights the importance of pronunciation for intelligibility and confidence. Without sufficient vocabulary and accurate pronunciation, students cannot effectively participate in oral interaction. Psychological challenges also contributed significantly. Many students expressed fear of making mistakes and embarrassment when speaking English. Brown (2001) points out that affective

factors such as anxiety and shyness often reduce learners' willingness to take risks, which limits their speaking practice. This was clearly evident in the passivity of most students during observation.

External challenges, including the dominance of Arabic in daily interactions and limited speaking opportunities, further restricted students' language development. Richards (2008) stresses that speaking skills require continuous, meaningful practice, which was lacking in this setting. This is consistent with Supeno et al. (2023), who found that pesantren students often struggle with balancing religious and language learning. On the positive side, the teacher attempted to overcome these difficulties by applying interactive strategies, such as role-play, group discussion, and positive reinforcement. These approaches are in line with Communicative Language Teaching (Anjani, 2020), which promotes real-life communication and learner engagement. Furthermore, Ericsson & Johansson (2023) demonstrated that consistent speaking practice, even through technology, can gradually improve students' fluency and confidence supporting the importance of continuous opportunities for practice.

In short, the findings suggest that improving students' speaking ability requires strengthening linguistic knowledge, building confidence, and providing regular opportunities for meaningful communication. A supportive learning environment both inside and outside the classroom is essential for overcoming speaking difficulties in the Islamic boarding school context

D. Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze the difficulties faced by VIII E grade students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Mukhlisin in speaking English, as well as to examine the strategies implemented by the teacher to overcome those challenges. Based on the findings obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation, it can be concluded that the students encountered various difficulties that can be classified into three main aspects: linguistic, psychological, and environmental.

From the linguistic perspective, students struggled with limited vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, and grammatical errors. Many students reported difficulty in finding appropriate words to express their ideas, which hindered fluency and

confidence in communication. Pronunciation also became a significant barrier, as students often mispronounced words and were afraid of being corrected or laughed at by peers. Grammar was another issue that prevented students from constructing correct sentences, thereby limiting their ability to communicate effectively. These findings are in line with previous studies (Ur, 1996; Harmer, 2007), which emphasize that vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation are fundamental elements of speaking that must be mastered to achieve fluency.

Psychological factors also played a crucial role in hindering students' speaking performance. Many students admitted feeling anxious, shy, and unconfident when asked to speak English, particularly in front of the class. This resulted in passivity during classroom activities and limited their opportunities to practice. Such affective barriers, as highlighted by Brown (2001), are common among second language learners and often become more challenging than linguistic difficulties themselves. The findings of this study reinforce the idea that building learners' confidence and reducing anxiety are essential in fostering speaking skills.

In addition to these internal factors, external conditions in the learning environment also contributed to students' difficulties. The dominance of Arabic as the daily communication language in the boarding school reduced students' exposure to English. Moreover, limited time allocation for speaking activities in class and insufficient learning facilities restricted students' opportunities to practice. These constraints are consistent with Richards (2008), who argues that meaningful practice and interaction are necessary for developing speaking skills, and with Supeno et al. (2023), who noted that pesantren students often face challenges balancing religious and language learning.

Despite these difficulties, the teacher played an important role in providing solutions. Strategies such as role-play, group discussions, vocabulary reinforcement, and positive feedback were applied to motivate students and encourage their participation. By creating a supportive and low-pressure environment, the teacher helped reduce students' anxiety and improved their willingness to speak. These efforts align with Communicative Language Teaching (Anjani, 2020), which promotes interactive learning and emphasizes communication as the goal of language learning.

In conclusion, this study highlights that the speaking difficulties faced by VIII E grade students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Al-Mukhlisin are complex, stemming from both linguistic and psychological barriers as well as environmental constraints. To effectively overcome these challenges, comprehensive strategies are required. Teachers need to strengthen students' vocabulary and pronunciation skills, provide consistent opportunities for practice, and adopt student-centered approaches that build confidence and reduce fear of making mistakes. At the same time, schools should support students by providing adequate facilities, creating an English-friendly environment, and balancing language learning with other pesantren programs.

Finally, this research contributes to a better understanding of the speaking difficulties experienced by students in Islamic boarding schools. It also provides practical recommendations for teachers and institutions to improve their teaching strategies and to create a more conducive environment for English language learning. Future researchers are encouraged to expand this study by exploring other factors that influence speaking ability, such as the role of peer support, the impact of technology-assisted language learning, or comparisons across different Islamic boarding schools. By doing so, it is hoped that more comprehensive solutions can be developed to enhance the English-speaking skills of students in similar contexts.

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