

## An Analysis of Seventh Grade Students' English-Speaking Difficulties

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### Abstract

Among the four language skills, speaking ability is one of the most crucial. It is believed to be an indicator of competency in a language. (Zulaikah, 2019) considers the speaking skill to be the most important of the four language abilities, and EFL students should master it. Sadly, most students learning English as a foreign language are good at reading and writing, but they have difficulty in speaking (Karim, 2020). Hence, this research was to analyse the difficulty of speaking English. This research used a qualitative-descriptive research design. A total of 22 seventh-grade students were purposively selected and participated in this research. The researcher used two instruments to gather data: tests and questionnaires. The findings show that the speaking difficulties faced by the students are classified into two types: psychological and linguistic. Psychological difficulty includes a lack of motivation, a lack of confidence, hesitancy and fear of being wrong when speaking, and the perception that speaking English is difficult. Linguistic difficulty includes a lack of vocabulary, pronunciation errors, and poor grammar proficiency. Besides, students were also affected by the following factors when they tried to speak English: First, 41% are inhibition; 23% are nothing to say; 18% speak Javanese; 14% prefer silence; and 4% have poor listening ability.

**Keywords:** *Speaking difficulty, Factors affecting speaking fluency.*

### INTRODUCTION

English was considered a worldwide language for many years. It is the primary mode of communication in the majority of countries around the world. The study of English has long been of great interest due to the significance of the language in every aspect of our life.

Regarding the important of English, in Indonesia English is a required subject for students from elementary to high school. This demonstrates the significance of mastering English in order to support their academic achievement and careers. According to (Aulia et al., 2019), the goal of learning English is for students to understand English as a system and to gain general knowledge. Based on the curriculum, seventh grade students in the second semester are targeted to be able to state several basic competencies both in speaking and writing. However, people prefer speaking skills over other skills because speaking skills are very much needed in

either an educational or career environment and it can also grow self-confidence, can improve self-quality, can think critically, and is easy to learn by many people. (Lie, 2007).

Holmes (2004) defines speaking as an oral productive skill that can be directly and empirically observed. Speaking skill is the ability to use moral language to explore ideas, intentions, thoughts and feelings to others as a way to make the message clearly conveyed and understood by listeners. For English language learners, speaking is one of the most important skills that they need to be developed. However, students of EFL as well as students in the seventh grade have difficulty speaking. Hence, this research tried to uncover the difficulties faced by the students as well as the factors that affected their speaking fluency.

Some relevant previous research indicated that shyness, peer pressure, anxiety, and fear of making mistakes are the influencing factors on students' performance when they are speaking. Additional factors that hinder speaking performance are inadequate vocabulary, insufficient exposure to the target language, and limited opportunities to practice speaking outside of the classroom. (Cabaltica & Arcala, 2021; Chand, 2021; Nakhlah, 2016; Supeno et al., 2021).

To fill the gap with the previous relevant research, the current research tried to uncover the speaking difficulties faced by the students and reveal the factors that affect speaking. Khatoony (2021) suggested that the teacher of an English-speaking course should identify the problems that affect speaking fluency as the basis for selecting the syllabus and method of teaching.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The subjects of this study are seventh-grade students in the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022 at SMP Nusantara Mojopuro Wetan Bungah Gresik. There are two seventh-grade classrooms, one for seventh A and one for seventh B, each containing 48 students divided into two classes of 22 students. As a sample, the researcher selected seventh-grade class A, which had 22 students.

This research employed a qualitative research design adopted from (R.Sherman, 2005). Qualitative research is research that is used to investigate, find, describe, and

explain the quality or privilege of social influences that cannot be explained, measured, or described through a quantitative approach (Cresswell, 2014).

The researcher used a test with two parts—a monologue and a dialogue—to find out which students had trouble speaking adopted from (Panjaitan et al., 2022), as well as a questionnaire to find out what caused the students to have trouble speaking. The researcher used descriptive text material to describe the people in the test. In the monologue test, the teacher asked students to present a description text about a person (one of their idols), after which the students presented their work in front of the teacher and were graded by the English teacher and the researcher. In the dialogue test, students are asked to form groups of two people or to sit on one bench with two other students. The students are then asked to present in front of the class and are immediately assessed by the English teacher and researcher.

Following the completion of the dialogue and monologue tests, students were given questionnaires. The seventh graders were given a questionnaire with ten questions covering four aspects and factors. Numbers 1 and 2 ask about students' fluency after taking the test; numbers 3, 4, and 5 ask about pronunciation; numbers 6 and 7 ask about grammar; numbers 8 and 9 ask about retention; and number 10 asks about factors affecting fluency.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings from the test

The first information gathered by the researcher was the test scores of seventh-grade A students in the second semester of English classes, which were held every Sunday and Wednesday from 9:45 to 11:00 WIB. Two types of exams were administered: the monologue test and the dialogue test. To assess the challenges of students, the researcher classified them into four categories: fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and understanding. Two raters evaluated the results of this test: a researcher and an English teacher. They evaluated the student's monologue test results to determine who passed and who failed, as shown in the assessment below:

**Table 1. The result of the students' monologue test**

No	Name	Rater 1 (Max Score:20)	Rater 2 (Max Score:20)	Two Raters Total Score:40)	Mean Final (Score÷ Max Score	The Lowest Required Passing Grade of 75
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x 100)

1	ASH	15	12	27	67,5	Did not passed
2	AMA	16	16	32	80	Passed
3	AMA	12	12	24	60	Did not passed
4	ATA	13	15	28	70	Did not passed
5	ASA	17	16	33	82,5	Passed
6	CAR	14	13	27	67,5	Did not passed
7	DAJ	18	13	31	77,5	Passed
8	ECP	17	15	32	80	Passed
9	IRS	19	14	33	82,5	Passed
10	MSV	16	13	29	72,5	Did not passed
11	MAK	16	16	32	80	Passed
12	MF	14	13	27	67,5	Did not passed
13	MNF	13	14	27	67,5	Did not passed
14	NSR	14	12	26	65	Did not passed
15	NA	14	14	28	70	Did not passed
16	NDSA	19	19	38	95	Passed
17	FFP	16	17	33	82,5	Passed
18	RAYD	17	17	34	85	Passed
19	RSNA	18	16	34	85	Passed
20	RESR	14	16	30	75	Passed
21	RA	14	14	28	70	Did not passed
22	SM	13	13	26	65	Did not passed

According to Table 1, eleven students, or fifty percent, had a score of less than seventy-five on the monologue test, whereas eleven students, or fifty percent, received a score in excess of the minimum mastery mark. The maximum score, 85, was earned by two students, while the lowest score, 60, was earned by one student. The researcher determined that the monologue test results were not comparable.

Whereas, the result of the dialogue test is shown in the table below:

**Table 2. The result of the students' dialogue test**

No	Name	Rater 1 (Max Score:20)	Rater 2 (Max Score:20)	Two Raters Total Score:40)	Mean Final (Score ÷Max Score x 100)	The Lowest Required Passing Grade of 75
1	ASH	17	16	33	82.50	Passed
2	AMA	17	17	34	85	Passed
3	AMA	12	12	24	60	Did not pass
4	ATA	15	13	28	70	Did not pass
5	ASA	15	16	31	77.50	Passed
6	CAR	13	14	27	67.50	Did not pass
7	DAJ	15	18	33	82.50	Passed
8	ECP	17	18	35	87.50	Passed
9	IRS	17	17	34	85	Passed

10	MSV	15	15	30	75	Passed
11	MAK	15	16	31	77.50	Passed
12	MF	14	15	29	72,50	Passed
13	MNF	14	18	32	80	Passed
14	NSR	13	13	26	65	Did not pass
15	NA	15	14	29	72.50	Did tot pass
16	NDSA	17	19	36	90	Passed
17	FFP	17	17	34	85	Passed
18	RAYD	18	18	36	90	Passed
19	RSNA	15	18	33	82.50	Passed
20	RESR	15	18	33	82.50	Passed
21	RA	16	14	30	75	Passed
22	SM	15	14	29	72.50	Did not pass

Six students, or 27% of the total number of students, scored below 75 on the dialogue test, whereas 16 students, or 73% of the total number of students, scored over 75. Two students achieved a score of 90 on this dialogue test. In accordance with the Brown speaking rubric (2001). The four aspects of speaking that are assessed are fluency, pronunciation, grammar, and comprehension. Each score was complemented by a detailed explanation.

#### Fluency

On the fluency of rater 1 monologue test. Five students got a score of 3, which is good enough. Thirteen students got a score of 4, which is good, and four students got a score of 5. (very good). Also, 10 students got a score of 3 (enough) on the dialogue test, 7 got a score of 4 (good), and 5 got a score of 5 (very good).

The results of rater 2's fluency test on the speaking fluency was that 9 students received a score of 3 (enough), 12 students received a score of 4 (good), and 1 student received a score of 5 (very good). On the dialogue test, six students received a score of 3 (enough), eleven students received a score of 4, and five students received a score of 5 (very good).

From the results above, it's clear that a lot of students got a score of 3, and 10 of them had trouble speaking English. This was because in class, students were still shy and afraid of making vocabulary mistakes, which made it hard for them to speak fluently.

#### Pronunciation

The biggest problem for seventh graders at SMP Nusantara was how to say words. Tests showed that most students got the pronunciation of some words wrong. Based

on how they did on the dialogue and monologue tests, students had trouble with things like pronouncing the text based on how it was written. Simarmata & Pardede (2018) had similar result from their research that students of EFL tend to speak English like the way they write and it was a common mistake for junior high school students.

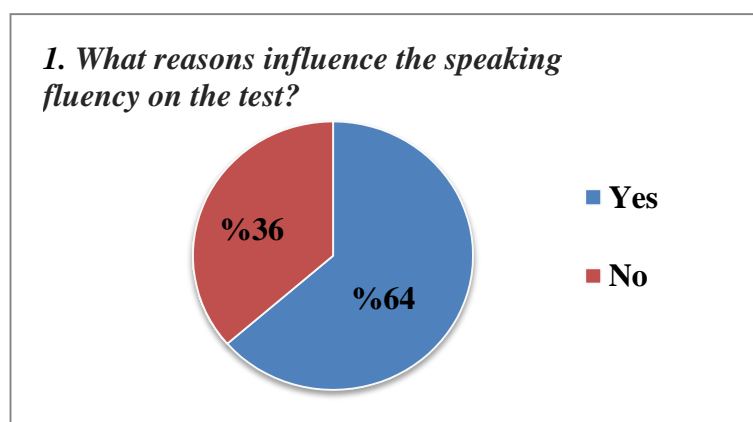
There were 19 students who said words wrong. For example, in words, "idol" changed to " idol," "player" to "plAyər," "until" to "until," and so on. There were also 6 students who said the numbers, date, and year of birth in the way they are written in Indonesian. For example, "2001" became "dua ribu satu", "46 kg" became "empat puluh enam kilogram", and etc.

### Grammar

On the monologue test, three students made mistakes in sentence arrangement, and one student performed poorly on the dialogue test. In addition, there were also mistakes in the rules of singular and plural English, such as adding "s" to the plural noun, for example, "she like playing guitar and piano," while the correct one is "she plays the guitar and the piano." However, many students already understood the meaning of what was discussed during the monologue and dialogue tests in terms of comprehension.

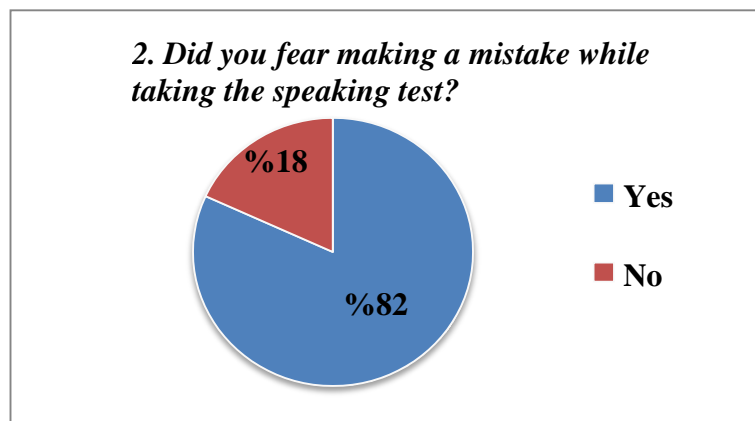
### Findings from the Questionnaire

A questionnaire was used to collect the second set of data, which consisted of 10 questions covering four aspects and factors related to the students' difficulties. Numbers 1 and 2 in the questions were explained in terms of fluency. It is shown below:



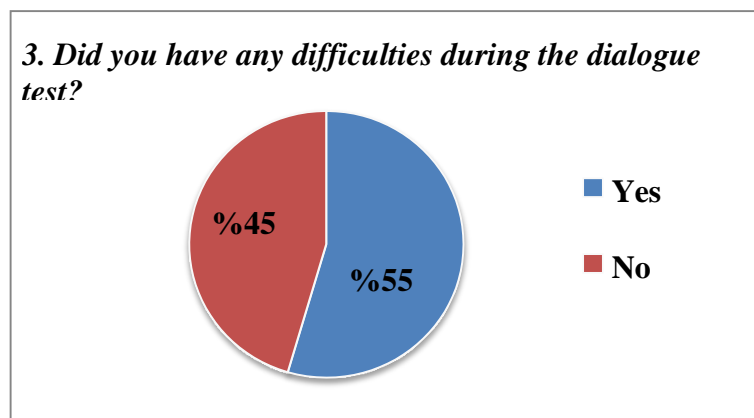
*Figure 1. Students' English Proficiency*

The first question concerned students' English proficiency. The results revealed that 14 of 22 students, or 64%, answered "yes," and there are several reasons why the students answered "yes," some of them felt nervous and embarrassed while speaking in front of their teacher. Furthermore, 8 students, or 36%, answered "no" because they usually watch Hollywood films. The other two students said "no" because they had already read and studied the task.



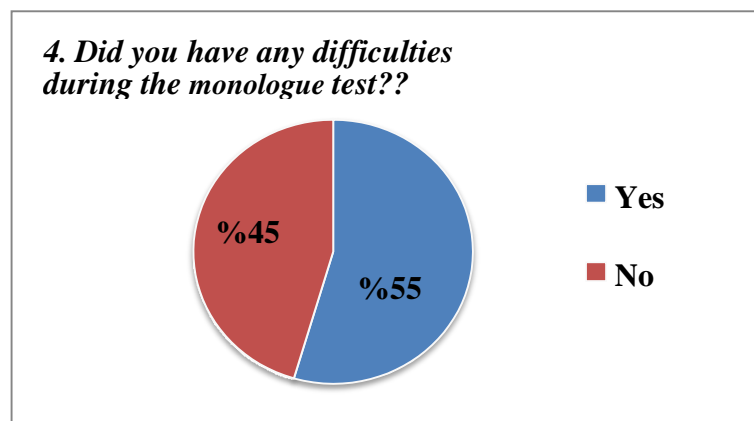
*Figure 2. Students' Feeling During the Test*

The second question concerned doubt during the test and how it might affect fluency in speaking English. The result showed that 18 of 22 students, or 82%, answered "yes" because they felt afraid of being wrong. Furthermore, 4 of 22 students, or 18%, responded "no" because they were confident.



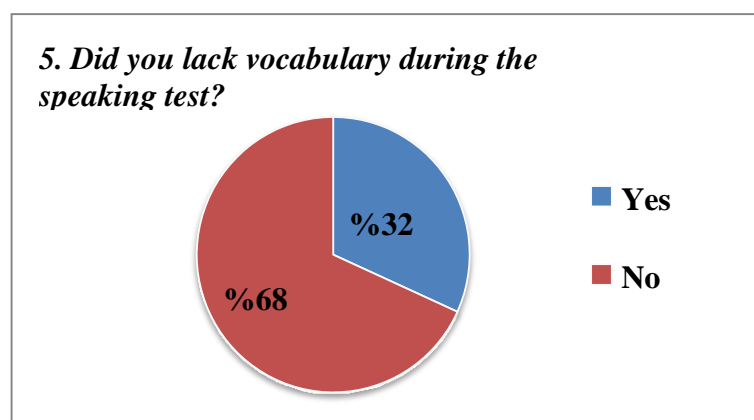
*Figure 3. Students' Obstacle During the Dialogue Test*

The third question related to the students' obstacle during the test. Figure 3 showed that 12 of 22 students, or 55% had any obstacles during the dialogue test. One of the reasons was because they felt embarrassed. Another reason was that they did not understand how to pronounce vowels. Furthermore, 10 of the 22 students said "no" because the task was simple. Other students said that they do not have any obstacle because they understood the meaning.



*Figure 4. Students' Obstacle During the Monologue Test*

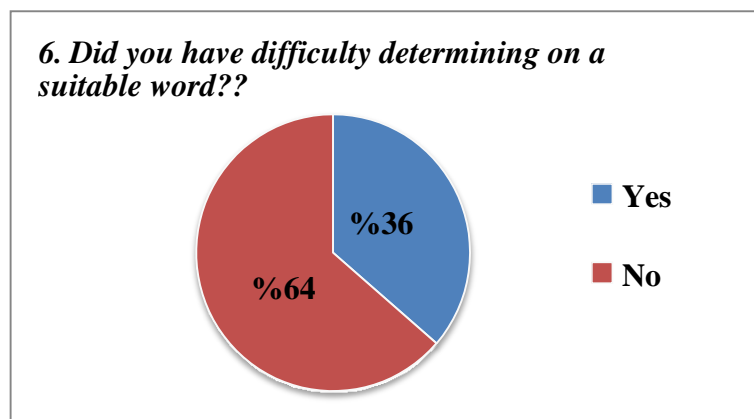
Fourth question concerned to students' obstacle during the monologue test. Figure 4 showed that 12 students, or 55% had some obstacles because they could not speak English, and 2 of them lacked self-confidence. 10 students or 45% had no obstacles because they felt confidence, understand the meaning, and the task was too easy.



*Figure 5. Students' Vocabulary Mastery*

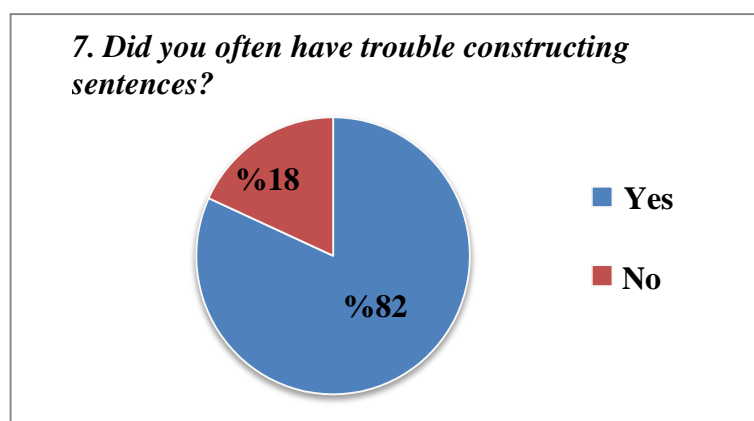


Questions number five related to the students' vocabulary mastery. Figure 5 showed that 7 students or 32% lacked of vocabulary because they had incorrect pronunciation and vocabulary. Otherwise, 15 students or 68% could speak English by using advance vocabulary because most of them have memorized many words. The rest of it, they answered "no" because they were not nervous during the speaking test.



*Figure 6. Students' Grammar Mastery*

The sixth questions concerned vocabulary usage or choice. Figure 6 showed that 8 students or 36% had difficulty in determining on a suitable word. They felt doubt during the speaking test since they were afraid of choosing unsuitable words. Additionally, 14 students or 64% were sure to use suitable words because they had prepared the presentation before the test.



*Figure 7. Students' Difficulty when Constructing Sentences*

Questions number 7 related to the students' difficulty when constructing sentences. The figure 7 showed that 18 students or 82% had trouble constructing sentences because they could not speak and did not know the meaning. Whereas, 4 students or 18% did not have the same problem because they knew the meaning of the dialogue, did not feel nervous, and prepared a dialogue text before performance.

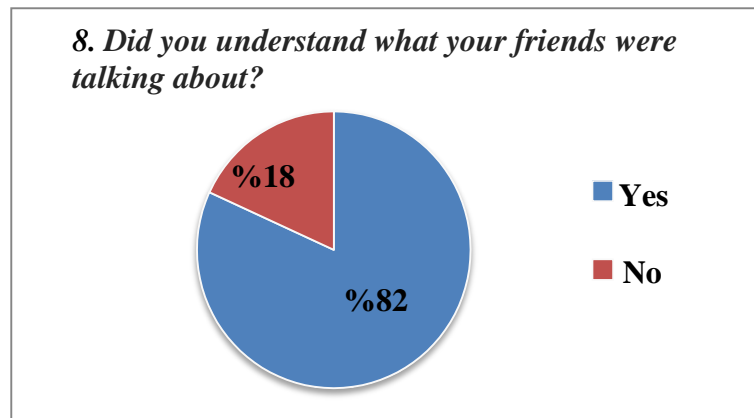


Figure 7. Understanding friends' speaking

Figure 8 was about the students' understanding regarding the conversation. It showed that 18 students or 82% understood their friends' speaking or had good communication because they have translated the dialogue and understood the meaning. Besides, 4 students or 18% did not understand what their friends were saying because they were not familiar with English sentences or conversation.

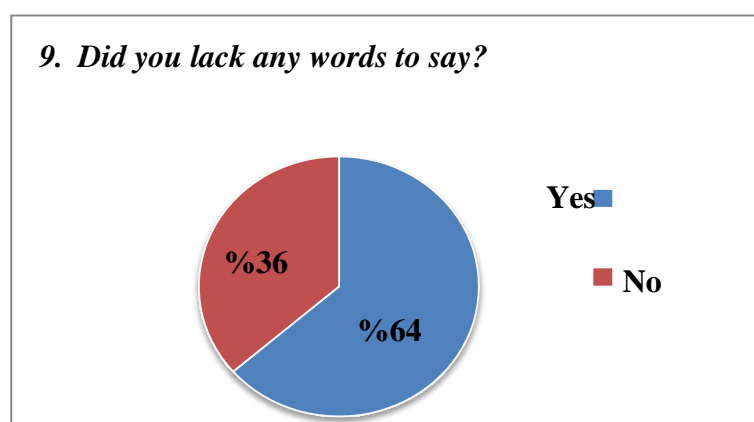
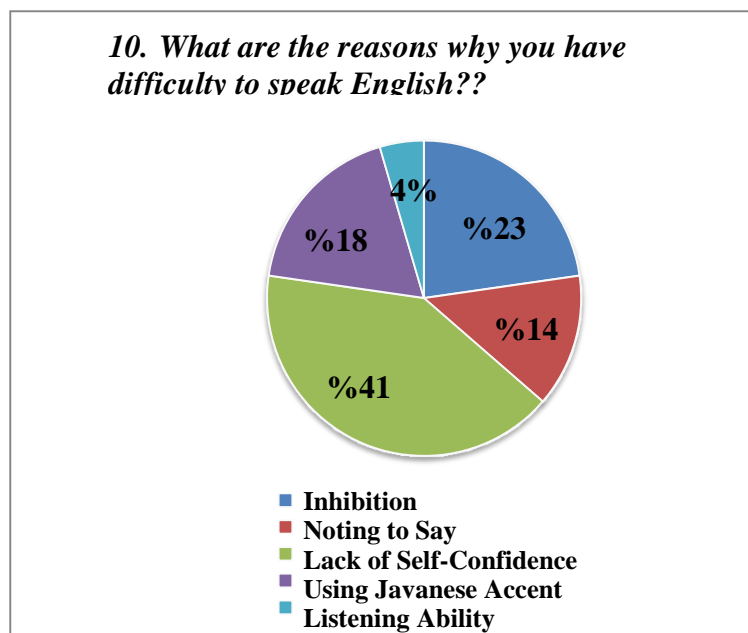


Figure 9. Students' Difficulty when Constructing Sentences

Figure 9 showed that 14 students or 64% lacked of vocabulary because they were still in the beginner level of speaking English. Other reasons were that since they never practiced speaking English, it was hard to say any utterance accurately and fluently. Besides, 8 students or 36% of the students had no difficulties in constructing sentences because they knew some useful vocabulary in the conversation.



**Figure 8. Students' Difficulty when Constructing Sentences**

Figure 10 showed that 5 students, or 23%, chose inhibition in speaking English. There was nothing to speak English with for three students (14%). 9 students, or 41%, lack self-confidence when speaking English. 4 students, or 18%, used a Javanese accent when speaking English. Only one student, or 4%, has poor English listening skills.

**Factors Affecting Speaking Skills**

The students met two types of problems: linguistic and psychological. On the other hand, they have internal elements that influence their speaking. There were language issues, such as student obstacles when learning English, a lack of self confidence, the usage of Javanese accents, and a lack of understanding of listening

skills. This data was based on the results of Questionnaire No. 10, and the table below summarizes each factor:

*Table 1.. Students' Difficulty when Constructing Sentences*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Quantity</b>	<b>%</b>
Inhibition	5	28
Nothing to say	3	14
Lack of self-confidence	9	41
Using Javanese accent	4	18
Listening ability	1	4

In “inhibition factor,” there were number of challenges in learning to speak English. This factor was noted by five students. One of them is IRL, because of a lack of vocabulary; MF because he is too lazy to study; ND because of a lack of interest in learning; FFP because of a lack of learning time; and RESR because of a lack of students practicing speaking English. In the "nothing to say" factor, it could be concluded that students preferred to be silent when invited to speak English by their friends due to a lack of vocabulary in learning English. Lack of confidence was also the main influencing factor in speaking English. There were 9 students who lacked confidence in speaking. They were afraid of making mistakes when speaking English. This made them unable to speak English well. This inhibiting factors has suited with the result of the research proposed by Pratiwi et al (2020). She noted that grammar, pronunciation, and knowledge of vocabulary were the factors inhibiting the students in speaking.

Mother tongue and speaking could not be separated, especially in seventh grade. The mother tongue of the students is Javanese, and it is usually used during dialogue and monologue tests. This was a common factor. Therefore, the “mother tongue” was influencing their accent when speaking English. So, their pronunciation was not like a native speaker of English.

Basri (2021), in his recent research, uncovered that English language learners make interference errors due to phonetic interference, lexical interference, and grammar disorder. This is because the Indonesian speaker struggled to use English as the target language, as many first-language learners have done. Differences between the Indonesian and English systems are a source of difficulty. The source of the

difficulties is based on the level difference between the Indonesian system and the English system.

One of the factors influencing a speaker's mastery is poor listening ability. Romadan (2019) supported this statement that good speaking performance depends on listening comprehension. The greater students' listening skills, the greater their speaking skills. Due to the low level of listening mastery of the students, so they could not speak English well.

#### **A. CONCLUSION**

The conclusion of this research is related to the answers and discussion of the findings from the previous chapter's problem formulation. Speaking difficulties are divided into two categories: psychological and linguistic. Students encountered various psychological barriers, including a lack of motivation, a lack of confidence, hesitancy and fear of being wrong when speaking, and the perception that speaking English was difficult. Students, on the other hand, lacked appropriate or vast vocabulary when practicing speaking in linguistics. Additionally, there were issues with pronunciation and grammar proficiency when composing expressions while speaking. As a result, they are unable to speak English properly, or they speak it slowly and with numerous pauses, or they prefer to use Javanese accent when they are speaking.

At the end of the discussions about what was found, the following suggestions are made. Students should work on improving their speaking skills on their own. They should take part in the speaking activities that the teacher sets up in the classroom. To improve their speaking skills, they should take part in the pair work, group work, role plays, dialogues, discussions, and other classroom activities set up by their teacher. They should also talk to people outside of the classroom to improve their English. They should make plans to learn new words and then listen to English radio or TV shows to practice them. They should use and practice what they have learned in class both inside and outside of class to boost their confidence.

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