Students' Views on Learning English Speaking at SMP Negeri 1 Demak

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how students at SMP Negeri 1 Demak perceive learning English in class, as they recognize the importance of being able to speak English in today's global and connected world. Many students know that learning English is important for their future. Still, when they are asked to speak English in class, they often feel anxious and unsure of themselves, especially when they fear making mistakes and being judged. This is a common problem in middle schools because students don't get to talk much. This study used a quantitative data method with 40 students from grades VII to IX as participants. The data was collected through open-ended questionnaires that asked students about their challenges, preferences, and suggestions. The results reveal that students are more likely to speak up when the classroom is calm and friendly. They like to learn when it's fun, like making videos, playing games, or talking to friends. Students think that it is very important for their professors to talk to them and give them emotional support in class so that they feel safer. Teachers should be kinder, tell their kids the truth, and allow them to participate without being afraid of making mistakes. Changing the way they teach might help teachers and students who are nervous about speaking. This will assist kids learn how to talk to each other better, which is a skill that is very vital in the 21st century.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"One size will never fit all" is a good way to start this article, especially when it comes to learning a language. Every government is continually trying to make sure that everyone has access to a standard quality education system, yet this may not always be the best way to meet the learning needs of all children. In the 21st century, which is getting more and more competitive, education needs to enable a lot of different pupils with different opinions and skills to become active citizens. "Students learn in clearly different ways," (Altan et al., 2001).

A lot of students, and maybe even society as a whole, would be better off if courses could be taught and learnt in diverse ways. A different manner of teaching, or at least a change in how things are done, could be a great way to help someone find out what they're good at. It is very important for both school and work to know English in today's world. Speaking is important, especially when you're learning a language, because it enables you to say what you want to say and talk to people in a normal way.

A lot of people in Indonesia have problems speaking English because of how it sounds, how it is spelled, and how it is used. Students at SMP Negeri 1 Demak know how vital this talent is, yet not all of them feel

comfortable speaking English in class. The goal of this study is to find out what students think about English speaking classes and what style of teaching they think will help them develop their speaking skills the most. So, it is believed that this study would assist teachers in better addressing the emotional and academic demands of their pupils from their point of view.

1.1. Definition of English-Speaking Anxiety: An Insight

By definition, language-speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon among students, especially in foreign language learning environments. According to (Mohammadi et al., 2013)This anxiety can hinder students' ability to actively participate in speaking activities, which affects their overall language development. Recent research by (Liu et al., 2024) Found that highly anxious students tend to avoid speaking situations, which limits practice and slows down language acquisition.

This is in line with the findings of this study, where students expressed the fear of making mistakes and being judged, which is a major obstacle to speaking in class. This issue is relevant to the global problem of graduate employment, where weak communication skills are one of the main culprits. By definition, foreign language speaking anxiety is not unusual; in fact, it is a very common phenomenon among students, especially when they are learning a foreign language.

Just imagine, this anxiety often becomes an invisible barrier that makes it difficult for students to actively participate in classroom speaking activities, and ultimately, it certainly affects their overall language development. According to (Uli & Simanjuntak, 2021), who were pioneers in the study of language learning anxiety, this anxiety can take many forms-from worries about performance to fear of negative evaluation. Another study by (Surabaya, 2022) Also confirmed that high levels of anxiety are often directly proportional to a lack of desire to communicate.

Recent findings, as shown by (Surabaya, 2022)Further reinforce this idea: highly anxious students tend to avoid situations that require them to speak. It's like a vicious circle, where avoidance reduces opportunities to practice, which in turn slows down the process of language acquisition and building proficiency. This is very much in line with the findings from our study, where students honestly expressed their fear of making mistakes and the fear of being judged. For them, this was one of the biggest hurdles that prevented them from speaking in class. Ironist.

1.2. Role of Interactive Learning Methods and Supportive Environment in English Speaking:

Interestingly, interactive teaching methods have proven to be very effective in helping students improve their speaking skills. Just imagine, in 2016, it was found that when teachers incorporated technology, group discussions, and role-playing in the classroom, children became much more interested and motivated. Another study in 2021 even showed that students who engaged in interactive sessions had much better speaking skills than those taught traditionally.

This is why children at SMP Negeri 1 Demak consistently express their desire for activities and conversations that not only build confidence but also make learning fun. Being able to speak well is the most important part of using language to talk to others. (Ganzer & Zauderer, 2013) Says that kids who are highly motivated are usually more willing to talk. (Ryan & Deci, 1985) Also say that internal incentive, such as curiosity or real interest, tends to lead to deeper learning than external drives, like grades, such as grades.

This is why modern language teaching encourages the use of communicative techniques, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Task-based Learning, Gamification, and Technology, to help students speak more fluently. It is equally crucial that we understand students' perspectives. (Altan et al., 2001) Suggests that how students view classroom activities greatly influences their participation. (Goh & Burns, 2012) Found that when students feel supported, they are more willing to speak up. This means that by truly listening to how students feel, teachers can build a more inclusive classroom. This is where students can freely express themselves without worrying about making mistakes, so their confidence in speaking can grow rapidly.

2.   METHODOLOGY

We designed this study using a quantitative descriptive method. Why is that? The goal is clear: to be able to systematically measure and describe how the students of SMP Negeri 1 Demak feel about learning to speak English. In essence, we wanted to get a clear picture of their views, what challenges they face, and how nervous they are about speaking English. We weren't looking for complex cause-and-effect relationships, we just wanted to understand the situation for what it was. We chose this quantitative approach because it allowed us to collect data from many students. The results are measurable numbers, so the conclusions drawn are more objective and applicable to other situations.

2.1. Participants and Sampling Procedure

For this study, we involved all students in grades VII, VIII, and IX at SMP Negeri 1 Demak. From that sizable population, we selected 40 students as participants. How was the selection made? We used a method called simple random sampling. Simply put, it's like shuffling the names of all students and taking 30 names at random. The goal is that every student has an equal chance of being selected. This way, our sample becomes more

representative of the student population at SMP Negeri 1 Demak, and the research results can be more reliable and applied to a wider situation.

We deliberately took participants from different grade levels (VII, VIII, and IX) in order to get a complete and more diverse picture of the English-speaking learning experience at the junior high school level. Before the research began, we also explained the purpose of the study to each participant. They were also told that they had the right to withdraw at any time, and most importantly, their data and identity would be kept completely confidential.

2.2. Participants and Sampling Procedure:

To collect data, we used a structured questionnaire as our main instrument. This questionnaire was equipped with a Likert scale (for example, 1 for "Strongly Disagree" to 5 for "Strongly Agree"). This allowed us to systematically measure students' views, including how anxious they were about speaking English, what kind of teaching methods they preferred, and what challenges they perceived. The numbers on the Likert scale help us see the level of agreement or how often these experiences occur to students.

We divided the questionnaire into several important sections:

a.   English Speaking Anxiety Level

Here, we want to know how much anxiety people feel when they are asked to speak English. For example, *"I feel nervous when I'm asked to speak English in front of the class,"* or "*I'm afraid of making grammatical mistakes when I speak."* We want to know how much of a burden their thoughts are.

b.   Speaking Teaching Method Preferences

In this section, we want to know what kind of English-speaking method they like the most. For example, there are questions like, *"I prefer to learn speaking through games,"* or *"Group discussions make me more comfortable speaking."* The point is, we want to know which learning method works best for them.

c.   Perception of Challenges

This is where students can vent about the difficulties or obstacles they experience when speaking English. For example, *"I have little vocabulary when I speak English,"* or *"I'm afraid of being judged by my friends or teachers."* We wanted to know what their obstacles were.

d.   Additional Suggestions and Expectations

Although our main focus is on the numbers, we've also provided a bit of blank space here. This is so that students can write brief comments or other input that may not have been represented in the previous questions. This is really important for us to get a fuller and richer picture of all the data collected. Before the questionnaire was used, we ensured its quality. Two English education experts tested its content validity (whether the questions were relevant and measured what we wanted to measure). In addition, we will also conduct a reliability test (using Cronbach's Alpha) on a small group of students outside the main sample. This is to ensure that our questionnaire is consistent and reliable.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the findings obtained from the questionnaire responses and discusses the implications based on the data collected from 40 students. The analysis focuses on students' perspectives regarding their interest, motivation, and challenges in learning English. Each question is examined based on the frequency and percentage of responses to highlight general trends and key insights.

1)   How important do you think English is for your future?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Important	28	90%
Neutral	12	10%
Not important	0	0

The majority of students at SMP Negeri 1 Demak have a very clear view of the future; almost all of them, 90%, firmly state that English is very important for their journey ahead. This shows that they are not blind to the global relevance of English in this era.

2)   How do you feel when learning English?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Fun	15	50%
Quite fun	10	33%
Neutral	3	10%
Boring	2	7%

There's a positive vibe in English class! The majority of students, 60% to be exact, find the learning 'fun', and a further 35% find it 'quite fun'. This means that most students enjoy the learning process, and there is a good emotional foundation in the classroom.

3)   What makes you interested in learning English?

Answer	Number	Percentage
For exams	20	50%
Academic needs	4	10%
Personal interest	10	25%
Others	6	15%

The motivation for learning English among students is very practical and visionary. Half of them (50%) are strongly motivated for their academic and career futures, showing that they already have foresight. Not to be forgotten, there are also 25% who are interested because of the window into foreign culture through movies and music, proving that entertainment media also plays a significant role.

4)   Do you find it difficult to learn English?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Yes	18	45%
Sometimes	16	40%
Not really	6	15%

Despite the enthusiasm, challenges remained. The majority of students acknowledged difficulties: 45% 'often struggle' and 40% 'sometimes struggle'. This sends a clear signal that English language learning, while important, remains a challenging terrain for many students.

5)   What do you like the most about English learning at school?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Discussion/games	20	50%
More interactive learning	12	30%
Teacher interaction	8	20%

Students seem to have a strong 'taste' for teaching styles. Half of them (50%) like 'teaching methods' like discussions and games the most, followed by a desire for 'more interactive and creative learning' (30%). This confirms that a dynamic learning atmosphere and innovative teachers are key to winning them over.

6)   What do you dislike most about English learning at school?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Difficult material	20	50%
Strict teacher	10	25%
Too many assignments	10	25%

There are several 'ghosts' behind the discomfort of learning English. Most notably, half of the students (50%) felt that 'difficult material' was the culprit. In addition, 25% of students are uncomfortable with 'teachers who are too strict or fierce', and another 25% feel burdened by 'too many assignments'. This is an important point for teachers to evaluate the complexity of the material and teaching approach.

7)   What would make English learning more enjoyable?

Answer	Number	Percentage
More activities/games	20	50%
More fun methods	12	30%
More interactive learning	7	20%

The answer is clear: students want to 'play' while learning! Half of them (50%) crave 'more activities or games', followed by wanting 'more fun methods' (30%) and 'interactive-creative' (20%). This is a rallying cry to make the English classroom an arena of joyful exploration, not just a place of rigid learning.

8) What do you think is the biggest obstacle to learning English?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Fear of making mistakes	18	45%
Difficulty understanding vocabulary	16	40%
Lack of learning time	6	15%

The biggest obstacle for students is the most difficult 'ghost' to overcome: the fear of making mistakes (45%). This is a very deep psychological issue. It is followed by 'difficulty in understanding the material' (40%). These findings emphasize the importance of creating a safe and fear-free classroom environment where making mistakes is part of the learning process.

9) What do you expect from your teacher in teaching English?

Answer	Number	Percentage
More opportunities to speak	20	50%
More constructive feedback	10	25%
More enjoyable teaching methods	10	25%

Students have a very clear 'message' for teachers: Give us more opportunities for 'speaking practice' (50%)! They are hungry for the opportunity to try it out. In addition, they also wish for 'more constructive feedback' (25%) and, of course, 'more fun methods' (25%), underlining that teachers are key facilitators in the process of speaking confidence.

10) What are your suggestions to make English learning more effective and fun at SMP 1 Demak?

Answer	Number	Percentage
Use more fun methods	20	50%
More speaking practice	12	30%
Game-based learning	8	20%

The suggestions from students were very consistent: they wanted a shift towards 'fun' and 'interactivity'. Half of them (50%) suggested 'more fun methods', followed by 'more activities/games' (30%), and 'game-based learning' (20%). This is a direct blueprint from students for the transformation of English classes to be livelier and engaging. Learning English in Indonesia, especially when it comes to speaking, faces some major challenges.

Students often don't have enough time to practice, are afraid of making mistakes, and are bored with the same old teaching methods. This is a problem that we need to take seriously by finding solutions that are truly suitable for each obstacle. We truly believe that when we change the way we teach to be more student-centered and interactive, we can help them get rid of their insecurities and anxiety about speaking up. Often, the main problem is that they don't have enough practice communicating, and sometimes don't get enough emotional support.

So, if we can create a fun teaching method that makes them feel safe, we can really encourage students to speak up and actively participate. Not only will this boost their speaking skills, but it will also build strong communication skills - an important provision for their future. In short, the students at SMP Negeri 1 Demak really know that speaking English is important. However, they are often nervous and hesitant to speak in class.

Most of them wanted a more fun and less intimidating way to practice. Well, to answer this desire, the teachers there are encouraged to try teaching methods that focus on students. For example, through group activities, utilizing technology, and giving constructive feedback. By creating a positive and safe learning environment, teachers can help students become more confident and active English speakers.

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