THE INFLUENCE OF FIRST LANGUAGE ON STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING DIFFICULTIES AT SMAN 12 MEDAN

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the role of the first language in English learning among students at SMAN 12 Medan. The research aims to analyze how the mother language influences students' speaking performance in learning English as a foreign language. A descriptive qualitative method was applied in this study involving 35 eleventh-grade students of SMAN 12 Medan. The data were obtained through questionnaires and students' responses related to speaking activities. The findings indicate that students still experience several difficulties in speaking English, including vocabulary limitations, grammar problems, pronunciation difficulties, speaking anxiety, and low self-confidence. Vocabulary was identified as the most dominant problem faced by students during communication activities. The results also show that many learners tend to use their first language as support when they have difficulties expressing ideas in English. Example, students applied several communication strategies such as using fillers, asking for help, using gestures, and simplifying sentences in order to maintain communication. These strategies helped students continue speaking despite their language limitations. The study concludes that the first language remains an important factor in second language learning because it can support understanding while also creating challenges in English communication.

Keywords: *first language influence, foreign language learning, communication strategies.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Language that is learned in early childhood, usually before the age of three, is called the first language. It is also known as the mother tongue, native language, or primary language. A second

language, on the other hand, is learned later for purposes such as education, work, and communication in a wider society, for example English.

Many researchers have studied the influence of the first language on second language learning. Most of them agree that the first language can affect how learners use a second language. For example, Karim and Nassaji (2013) found that learners often use patterns from their first language when writing in a second language. In the same way, Fatemi, Sobhani, and Abolhassan (2012) showed that differences in consonant clusters can make pronunciation difficult, especially when the sound patterns are not familiar to learners. However, other studies show a different result. Lord (2008) found that learning a second language can also influence the first language, especially in bilingual communities.

The contrastive analysis hypothesis explains this idea. It states that differences between two languages can make learning more difficult, while similarities can make it easier (Hayati, 1998). This means that the more different the languages are, the harder it is for learners to learn the second language. Nation (2001) also explains that the first language still helps learners understand meaning, even though its role is limited. At the same time, the influence of the first language can reduce over time if learners have more exposure and practice in using the second language (Taylor, as cited in Krashen, 1981).

B. METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive qualitative design to analyze the role of first language influence in English learning among students at SMAN 12 Medan. The study focuses on how the mother language affects students' speaking performance, especially in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, anxiety, and confidence. To make the discussion more systematic, the design of this study is explained in the following points:

1. *Research Approach*

This study applies a descriptive qualitative approach because the research focuses on describing students' experiences and difficulties in learning English as a second language. The study also uses percentage data to support the explanation of students' speaking difficulties and communication strategies.

The research explains how the first language influences students' speaking performance and how learners try to overcome these difficulties through different communication strategies.

2. *Research Location*

This study was conducted at SMAN 12 Medan. The participants were eleventh-grade students who actively joined English learning activities in the classroom. The location was chosen because

students at SMAN 12 Medan still experience various problems in speaking English that are related to first language influence.

3. *Data and Sources of Data*

The data in this study were taken from 35 students of SMAN 12 Medan. The data focus on students' speaking difficulties and communication strategies when learning English. The information was collected from students' responses regarding vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, anxiety, and confidence.

4. *Techniques of Data Collection*

The data were collected through questionnaires and students' responses related to English speaking activities. The questionnaire was used to identify the dominant speaking difficulties experienced by students and the strategies they used to overcome those difficulties.

5. Research Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire sheet containing several questions related to speaking difficulties and communication strategies. The results of the questionnaire are presented in the following tables.

No	Types of Difficulties	Number of Students	Percentage
1	Vocabulary Difficulties	29 Students	82.9%
2	Grammar Difficulties	26 Students	74.3%
3	Pronunciation Problems	22 Students	62.9%
4	Speaking Anxiety	23 Students	65.7%
5	Lack of Confidence	21 Students	60.0%

Table 3.1Students' Speaking Difficulties 1

No	Comms Strategies	Description
1	Using Fillers	Students use words such as "um", "ee", or "well" while thinking
2	Asking for Help	Students ask friends or teachers for assistance during speaking actsssivities
3	Using Gestures	Students use body language to support communication
4	Simplifying Sentences	Students use simple vocabulary and grammar to make speaking easier

Table 3.2 Students' Communication Stratg 2

6. Techniques of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed descriptively by organizing the findings into several categories such as vocabulary difficulties, grammar problems, pronunciation difficulties, speaking anxiety, and communication strategies.

C. RESULT & DISCUSSION

This study aimed to find out the influence of the first language on students' English learning at SMAN 12 Medan. The questionnaire results showed that many students still faced several difficulties when learning and speaking English. The main problems found in this study were vocabulary,grammar, pronunciation,

speaking anxiety, and lack of confidence. These results show that students still depend on their first language when they want to speak English because they feel more comfortable using their mother language.

The results showed that vocabulary was the biggest difficulty experienced by the students. There were 29 students (82.9%) who said that they often had difficulty finding the right English words when speaking. Because of this problem, many students usually thought in Indonesian first before saying their ideas in English. This made them stop for a few seconds while speaking because they needed time to remember the English words. As a result, their speaking became less fluent. This finding shows that limited vocabulary is one of the reasons why students still rely on their first language when speaking English.

Grammar was the second difficulty found in this study. Based on the questionnaire, 26 students (74.3%) admitted that they were afraid of making grammar mistakes while speaking English. Many students felt confused because English grammar is different from Indonesian grammar. Sometimes they used Indonesian sentence patterns when speaking English, and this caused grammatical mistakes. Because they were worried about making errors, many students preferred to think carefully before speaking. This situation made them less confident and slowed down their speaking.

Pronunciation was also one of the difficulties experienced by the students. The questionnaire showed that 22 students (62.9%) had problems pronouncing English words correctly. Some English sounds are different from Indonesian sounds, so students often felt unsure about how to pronounce certain words. Because of this, they became afraid of saying words incorrectly in front of the teacher or their classmates. As a result, some students chose to speak less during English lessons. This finding shows that the first language also affects students' pronunciation when learning English.

Besides language problems, the study also found that psychological factors affected students' speaking ability. About 23 students (65.7%) said that they felt nervous when speaking English, especially in front of the class. They were afraid of making mistakes and worried that their friends would laugh at them. In addition, 21 students (60.0%) said that they lacked confidence when using English. Even when they knew the answer, they sometimes preferred to stay quiet because they were not sure about their English. These results show that confidence is also an important part of learning to speak English.

The results also showed that students tried different ways to deal with their speaking difficulties. Some students used fillers such as "umm" or "well" while thinking of the next word. Others used gestures or body language to help explain their ideas. Some students also asked their

friends or teachers for help when they forgot vocabulary. In addition, many students chose to use simple sentences so they could continue speaking without stopping for too long. These strategies helped students communicate even though their English ability was still limited.

Another interesting finding was that many students practiced English outside the classroom. They watched English videos, listened to English songs, played online games, and sometimes used social media in English. These activities helped students learn new vocabulary and become more familiar with English pronunciation. Although these activities were not part of their school lessons, they still gave students more chances to use and hear English in daily life.

Overall, the results of this study show that the first language still has an important influence on students' English learning at SMAN 12 Medan. The influence can be seen in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, speaking anxiety, and confidence. The first language helps students understand English more easily, but it also makes them depend on translating their ideas before speaking. Therefore, students need more opportunities to practice speaking English regularly so they can become more confident and slowly get used to thinking and communicating in English without depending too much on their first language.

D. CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the first language still has a significant influence on students' English learning at SMAN 12 Medan. Students experienced several speaking difficulties such as limited vocabulary, grammar problems, pronunciation difficulties, speaking anxiety, and lack of confidence. These findings show that learners often depend on their mother language when communicating in English.

The study also found that vocabulary became the most dominant difficulty faced by students. Differences between Indonesian and English language systems affected students' pronunciation and grammar during speaking activities. As a result, many students felt nervous and less confident when speaking English in front of others.

Even though students faced many difficulties, they still tried to improve their speaking ability through communication strategies and informal learning activities. Therefore, teachers are expected to create more supportive and interactive speaking activities in the classroom, while students should practice English more frequently to increase their confidence and communication skills.

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