

**THE ANALYSIS STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES TO COMMUNICATE IN ENGLISH  
IN DAILY CONVERSATION****David Candra<sup>1</sup>, Daniella Damarwulan Winata<sup>2</sup>, Yohanes Alvin<sup>3</sup>***david.candra234@gmail.com<sup>1</sup>, danielladamarwulanwinata@gmail.com<sup>2</sup>, yohanes.6728@ski.sch.id<sup>3</sup>*  
Politeknik Tonggak Equator<sup>1,2,3</sup>**ABSTRACT**

This research investigates the difficulties students face in communicating in English during daily conversations in EBPC (English for Business and Professional Communication) classes at the Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator. The study aims to identify the primary factors that hinder students from actively using English in class and social settings. Using a quantitative approach, the researchers distributed questionnaires to 39 EBPC students. The findings reveal several key barriers to English communication: insecurity, low language proficiency, environmental influences, fear of making mistakes, cultural and social pressure, limited vocabulary, and lack of speaking practice. The data show that most students feel insecure about their speaking skills, often prefer to use their native language on campus, and are afraid of being judged or laughed at when speaking English. The results suggest that students' communication difficulties stem not only from linguistic limitations but also from emotional and cultural factors. The research concludes that to improve students' speaking ability, a more supportive English-speaking environment and increased opportunities for practice are needed. These changes would help students gain confidence, expand vocabulary, and reduce fear of embarrassment in daily English conversations.

**Keywords:** English communication, student difficulties, EBPC classes, insecurity, vocabulary, speaking practice

**INTRODUCTION**

In the era of globalization, English has emerged as a global lingua franca, enabling communication across linguistic and cultural boundaries. It is widely used in education, international business, technology, travel, and diplomacy, and has become a fundamental skill for academic and professional success in the 21st century. In Indonesia, English is taught from elementary to tertiary education as a foreign language. Nevertheless, despite years of instruction, many Indonesian learners still struggle to use English fluently and confidently, particularly in spoken communication. Speaking, among the four essential language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—is the most interactive and immediate. It requires not only linguistic knowledge but also the psychological readiness to engage in conversation. Harmer (2007) states that speaking is a productive skill that involves mental, physical, and social elements; learners must simultaneously process language, manage pronunciation, and adapt to conversational flow. Yet, for many students, speaking remains the most difficult skill to master due to the fear of making mistakes, anxiety, and lack of vocabulary.

At Politeknik Tonggak Equator, students enrolled in the English for Business and Professional Communication (EBPC) program are expected to develop high levels of English proficiency, especially in oral communication. The curriculum includes courses such as public speaking, presentation skills, and business conversation to prepare students for professional environments. However, real-life observations suggest that many EBPC students are reluctant to speak English in casual settings, including during class breaks, group discussions, or campus interactions. Instead, they predominantly use Indonesian or their local mother tongue, contradicting the program's intended outcomes.

Preliminary interviews with students revealed several contributing factors to this reluctance: the strong habit of speaking Indonesian, fear of being laughed at due to mispronunciation or strange accents, limited vocabulary, and the perception that speaking English is complicated and unnatural in everyday contexts. These issues align with MacIntyre's (2007) observation that learners often experience psychological resistance to using a second language, especially when it disrupts their social norms or identity. As a result, even motivated students may feel intimidated when attempting to speak English in front of peers or instructors.

This situation represents a significant barrier to language acquisition, as frequent practice is necessary to develop speaking fluency and confidence. Swain (2000) emphasizes that output in the form of spoken language provides essential feedback for learners to internalize language rules and refine their communication strategies. Without consistent opportunities to practice speaking, students miss critical moments for growth and development.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore and analyze the key factors contributing to the students' unwillingness to communicate in English during daily conversations in the EBPC classes. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and institutions to design more effective learning environments that support English language usage beyond the classroom.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Speaking as a Language Skill**

Speaking is not only a means of communication but also a reflection of a learner's competence in a second language. According to Brown (2001), speaking is an active, productive skill that integrates listening, vocabulary retrieval, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, and sociolinguistic competence. Effective speaking involves real-time processing, where speakers must formulate messages quickly and coherently. Thornbury (2005) outlines the core components of speaking proficiency: vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. Vocabulary provides the content of communication, grammar organizes the content into understandable structures, pronunciation ensures intelligibility, and fluency allows for natural and uninterrupted speech. Any deficiency in these areas can significantly hinder communication. For instance, Derwing & Munro (2005) found that

learners with good grammar but poor pronunciation are often misunderstood, which can lead to frustration and loss of confidence.

### **Psychological Barriers to Speaking English**

Confidence plays a major role in learners' willingness to speak. Students with higher self-efficacy are more likely to take risks in speaking and view mistakes as part of the learning process. In contrast, students with low self-confidence often avoid speaking opportunities to protect themselves from embarrassment. Horwitz (2001) describes this phenomenon as language anxiety—an emotional reaction that includes nervousness, fear of negative evaluation, and worry about communication failure.

In the context of Indonesian learners, this anxiety is often exacerbated by cultural factors. Many students fear losing face or being ridiculed for mispronouncing words or having a “strange” accent. They may also perceive English as a foreign identity marker that distances them from their peers. This perception, combined with limited exposure to English-speaking environments, creates psychological resistance to speaking. Zhang and Head (2010) found similar issues among Chinese students, where fear of making mistakes and low proficiency led to reluctance in classroom participation. The learners viewed speaking as high-risk behavior, fearing criticism and embarrassment. This aligns with the findings of this study, in which students admitted feeling “afraid of being laughed at” or judged negatively when trying to speak English in class.

### **Environmental and Social Influences**

The learning environment significantly affects learners' language use. Swain (2000) argues that immersion in a supportive environment encourages learners to use the target language more frequently and confidently. However, in non-immersive environments—such as those where Indonesian or local languages dominate—students may have little motivation or pressure to use English. Lucas (2011) emphasizes that peer influence is particularly strong in language learning. If most students speak Indonesian, others are less likely to use English, fearing social exclusion or awkwardness. The dominant use of the mother tongue creates a social norm that discourages English usage. Even when instructors encourage English communication, the surrounding environment can undermine these efforts.

Moreover, the habitual use of the first language often becomes automatic. As students communicate in Indonesian for years, they develop cognitive shortcuts and fluency in their native language that English cannot match. Switching to English requires more cognitive effort, leading students to perceive it as unnatural or difficult in daily interactions.

### **Limited Vocabulary and Speaking Practice**

Another barrier to spoken communication is limited vocabulary. Nation (2001) argues that vocabulary is the most significant component of language competence. Students with insufficient lexical knowledge struggle to find the right words to express themselves, leading

to frequent pauses, incomplete sentences, or code-switching to Indonesian. Without adequate practice, students also fail to develop fluency—the ability to produce speech smoothly and without hesitation. Ur (1996) notes that speaking practice must be regular, meaningful, and interactive to foster confidence and competence. Unfortunately, in many cases, classroom speaking practice is limited to controlled tasks like reading dialogues or answering scripted questions, which do not simulate real-life communication. Fauzan (2014) highlights that in the Indonesian context, students often lack opportunities to speak English outside the classroom. Even in English-major programs, peer interaction in English is rare, and speaking practice is often confined to academic tasks rather than informal, spontaneous conversation.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive method to explore the underlying causes of students' reluctance to use English in daily conversations. A qualitative approach allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences, thoughts, and perceptions. It is suitable for uncovering the social, psychological, and environmental dimensions that quantitative methods may not fully capture (Creswell, 2014).

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The research was conducted at Politeknik Tonggak Equator in Pontianak, West Kalimantan. The institution offers a Diploma 4 (D4) program in English for Business and Professional Communication, designed to prepare students for careers requiring high English proficiency. The study focused on fifth-semester EBPC students who had completed key speaking courses, including Public Speaking and Business Communication. A total of 39 students completed the questionnaire, providing a broad overview of speaking challenges within the program. From this group, 10 students were selected for in-depth interviews using purposive sampling. These students were chosen based on their willingness to participate and their below-average performance in oral English activities. The selection ensured that the most relevant and informative cases were studied.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

Data for this study were collected using two main instruments: a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was given to all 39 participants and contained both closed and open-ended questions. The closed questions used a Likert scale to assess students' confidence, how often they used English, and the difficulties they perceived. Meanwhile, the open-ended questions gave students a chance to share their personal experiences, challenges, and suggestions for improvement in their own words.

In addition, semi-structured interviews were held with 10 students to gain deeper insights into the emotional, social, and language-related barriers they faced. This interview format allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions and explore important themes that came up during the conversations. To ensure that students felt comfortable and to maintain

accuracy, all interviews were conducted in Indonesian, then later translated and transcribed for detailed analysis.

### Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method involves several key steps: becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for patterns or themes, reviewing and refining those themes, defining and naming them, and finally producing the report. Thematic analysis was selected because of its flexibility and its strength in identifying patterns across qualitative data.

From the analysis, four main themes emerged: first, the fear of embarrassment caused by pronunciation and grammar mistakes; second, the habitual use of the mother tongue, which is reinforced through peer interactions; third, a limited vocabulary that leads to hesitation and communication breakdowns; and fourth, a lack of confidence in speaking, often linked to low self-efficacy and anxiety. By triangulating the data collected from both the questionnaires and the interviews, the study achieved a comprehensive understanding of the students' difficulties in communication. This mixed-method approach enhances the credibility and depth of the findings, enabling more accurate interpretations and practical recommendations.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

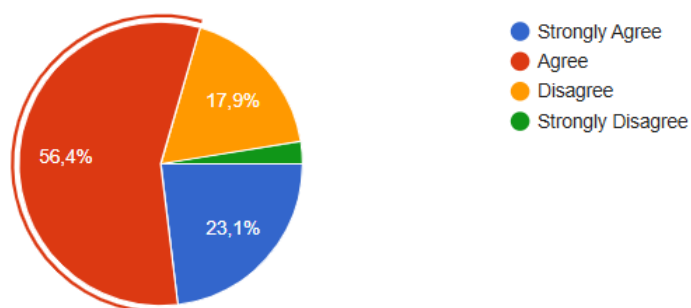
In this research, the writers spread questionnaires to 39 people respondents. All of the respondents are students of Polytechnic of Tonggak Equator. The finding of the questionnaires can be seen in the following pictures.

**Picture 1. students feel insecure about their speaking ability.**

1. Student feel insecure about their speaking ability.

 Salin diagram

39 jawaban



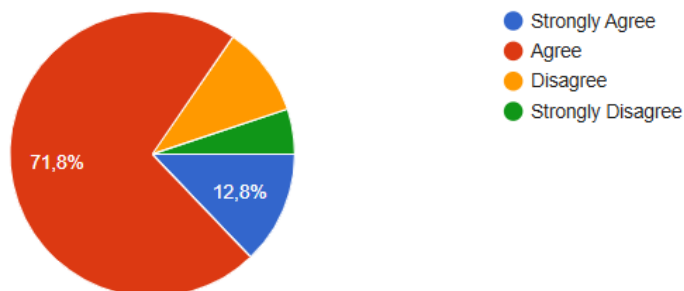
Based on table 4.1, it can be seen that 56,4% respondents agree that student feel insecure about their speaking ability. Then, 23,1% students state strongly agree, 17,9% states disagree, and 2,6% states strongly disagree.

**Picture 4.2 Students have weakness in English skills.**

2. Student have weakness in English skills.

[Salin diagram](#)

39 jawaban



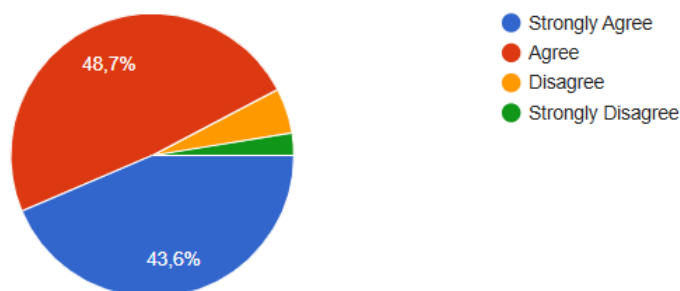
Based on table 4.2, it can be seen that 71,8% respondents agree that students have weakness in English skills, 12,8% states strongly agree, 10,3% states disagree, and 5,1% states strongly disagree.

**Picture 4.3 Students still use Bahasa or mother tongue in the campus**

3. Student still use bahasa or mother tongue in the campus

[Salin diagram](#)

39 jawaban



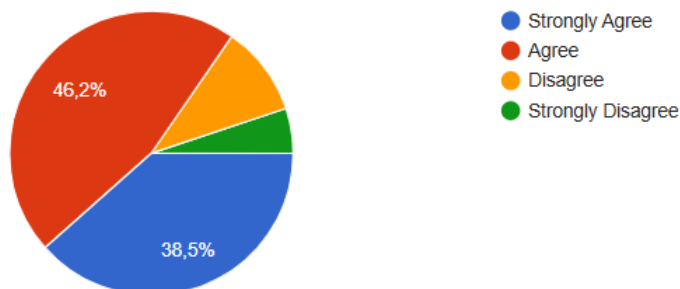
Based on table 4.3, it can be seen that 48,7% respondents agree that students still use Bahasa or mother tongue in the campus, 43,6% states strongly agree, 5,1% states disagree, and 2,6% states strongly disagree.

### Picture 4.4 students are afraid of making mistakes when speaking

4. Student are afraid of making mistakes when speaking.

 Salin diagram

39 jawaban



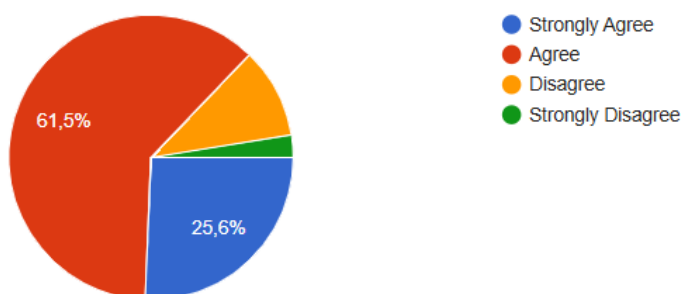
Based on table 4.4, it can be seen that 46,2% respondents agree that students are afraid of making mistakes when speaking, 38,5% states strongly agree, 10,3% states disagree, and 5,1% strongly disagree.

### Picture 4.5 Students rarely use English to communicate

5. Student rarely use English to communicate.

 Salin diagram

39 jawaban



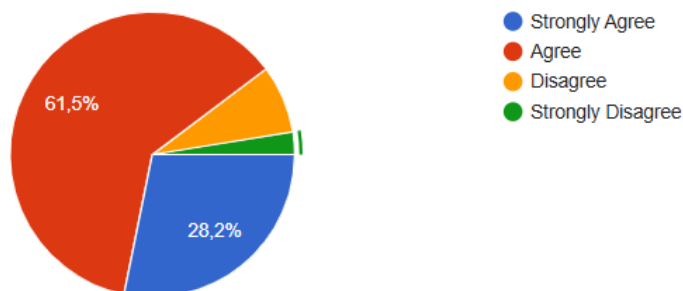
Based on table 4.5, it can be seen that 61,5% respondents agree that students rarely use English to communicate, 25,6% states strongly agree, 10,3% states disagree, and 2,6% strongly disagree.

**Picture 4.6 Students low vocabulary level affects their speaking ability**

6. Student low vocabulary level affects their speaking ability.

 Salin diagram

39 jawaban



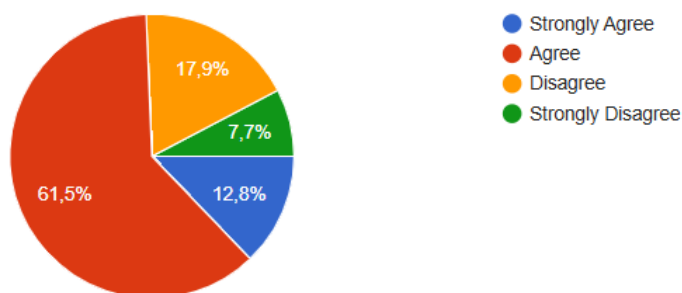
Based on table 4.6, it can be seen that 61,5% respondents agree that students low vocabulary lever affect their speaking ability, 28,2% states strongly agree, 7,7% states disagree, and 2,6% strongly disagree.

**Picture 4.7 Students have difficulties in pronouncing English words correctly**

7. Student has difficulties in pronouncing English words correctly.

 Salin diagram

39 jawaban



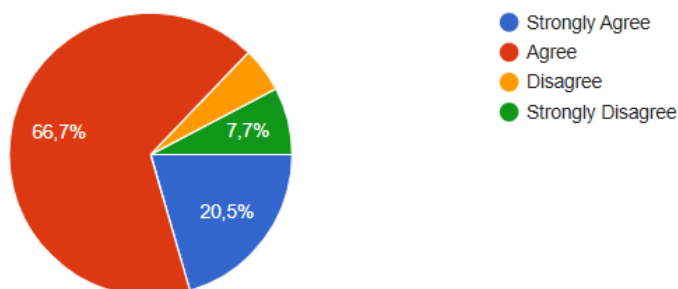
Based on table 4.7, it can be seen that 61,5% respondents agree that students have difficulties in pronouncing English words correctly, 17,9% states strongly agree, 12,8% states disagree, and 7,7% strongly disagree.

**Picture 4.8 Students feel afraid and embarrassed when speaking English when gathering with friends**

8. Student feel afraid and embarrassed when speaking English when gathering with friends

 Salin diagram

39 jawaban



Based on table 4.6, it can be seen that 66,7% respondents agree that students feel afraid and embarrassed when speaking English when gathering with friend, 20,5% states strongly agree, 5,1% states disagree, and 7,7% strongly disagree.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussions, the writers could draw the conclusion that the main factors that cause students to have difficulty communicating in English during daily conversations in EBPC classes are: insecurity, low proficiency, environmental factors, fear of mistakes, cultural influences, limited vocabulary, and lack of practice.

The influence of student's habits in speaking Indonesian or their mother tongue affect their difficulties in using English in daily interactions in EBPC are: frequent use of Indonesian or their mother tongue on campus creates a speaking environment that does not support regular English practice. This habit limits their exposure to English in natural, everyday situations, making it harder for them to become comfortable using the language. Without consistent practice in real-life settings, students miss opportunities to improve their fluency and confidence. Additionally, cultural and social norms further discourage the use of English. Many students feel uncomfortable or embarrassed speaking English with their peers, which reinforces their tendency to default to their native language. These patterns contribute significantly to their struggles in using English during daily interactions in EBPC.

The impact of limited vocabulary and fear of embarrassment on student's hesitation to engage in English conversations in EBPC classes are: Students' hesitation to speak English in class is heavily influenced by both a lack of vocabulary and a fear of embarrassment. When students do not have enough vocabulary, they struggle to express their thoughts clearly, which leads to frustration and low confidence. This limitation makes them reluctant to participate in conversations. At the same time, many students are anxious about making mistakes in

pronunciation, grammar, or word choice. This fear of being judged or laughed at causes them to avoid speaking altogether. The combination of linguistic limitations and emotional pressure create a strong barrier to active engagement in English conversations during EBPC classes.

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