

Challenges in English Oral Exams at Vocational High School

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20240523>

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the challenges encountered by students during English oral exams at SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo and elucidate their underlying causes. Through qualitative research methods, data were gathered from the participants. Employing thematic analysis, the research identifies two primary themes: insufficient vocabulary comprehension and low English mastery, compounded by psychological conditions. Methodologically, the study draws on participant narratives to uncover the intricacies of these challenges. The results reveal that inadequate vocabulary hindered participants' ability to articulate responses effectively, while low English mastery manifested in difficulties with grammatical concepts and comprehension. Psychological barriers, including anxiety and lack of confidence, further impeded oral proficiency. These findings align with prior research, highlighting vocabulary limitations and language anxiety among Indonesian students. Notably, the study underscores the pivotal role of vocabulary in oral proficiency and the influence of confidence on exam performance. Furthermore, environmental factors, such as limited English exposure, were identified as contributing to inadequate practice opportunities. However, the study acknowledges limitations, including its exclusive focus on speaking skills and the

absence of proposed solutions. It calls for further investigation into effective strategies for addressing these challenges. Recommendations include the development of tailored learning materials and the creation of supportive environments to foster English language proficiency. By illuminating the interconnected nature of these challenges and their impact on student performance, this research aims to inform pedagogical practices and guide future research endeavors in the field of English language education.

Keywords: English oral exams, vocabulary comprehension, learning materials, student performance

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary demand for quality human resources aligns with Indonesia's competitiveness amidst global competition and free trade, hinging largely on the outcome of human resource development. Consequently, governmental initiatives, such as vocational education, aim to cultivate high-caliber middle-level professionals capable of meeting industry standards. Vocational education, as defined by Fathoni et al. (2019), caters to Vocational High Schools (VHS), institutions geared towards producing workforce-ready graduates adept at navigating the evolving labor landscape. Characterized by a practical approach emphasizing hands-on experience,

vocational education ensures students are equipped with industry-relevant skills.

However, challenges persist, particularly in communication proficiency, exemplified by students' struggles during English oral examinations at institutions like SMK 1 Vocational High School of Gorontalo. Addressing these challenges necessitates strategic interventions, including the adaptation of teaching materials and methodologies. Lynch-Brown et al. (2014) underscore the significance of instructional materials, advocating for their modification to suit learners' needs and enhance language acquisition. Meanwhile, previous studies, such as those by Fitri (2019) and Aeni et al. (2017), shed light on students' linguistic obstacles and communication apprehension, offering insights into potential factors impeding oral proficiency.

Building on this foundation, the current research at SMK 1 Vocational High School of Gorontalo seeks to identify and address specific challenges encountered during English oral exams, with the overarching aim of improving students' linguistic competence and examination performance. Formulated research questions and objectives guide this endeavor, ultimately contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics within vocational education settings and informing targeted interventions to support student success. This research limited this research to only look at the challenges faced by twelfth-grade students in SMK 1 Vocational High School of Gorontalo in going through English oral exam without putting any attention on another field that needs to be tested such as math, sciences, and et cetera.

Concept of Speaking

Speaking is a fundamental language skill crucial for communication, where individuals convey thoughts, ideas, and emotions. It's the most frequently used language skill, emphasizing dialogue and monologue, serving transactional and interactional functions (Nunan, 1999; Oprandy, 1994). Proficiency in speaking is

essential for language learners, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where verbal communication facilitates authentic interaction (Florez, 1999). However, mastering speaking remains challenging, often evoking fear in learners (Yaikhong & Usaha, 2012). Effective speaking involves various skills, including grammar usage, audience evaluation, vocabulary selection, comprehension enhancement techniques, and adaptability to ensure successful communication (Florez, 1999). Yet, speaking is a complex cognitive process, demanding effort and processing capacity, highlighting the need for instructional strategies that promote reflective practice, active engagement, ample communication opportunities, and skill development (Oprandy, 1994). Consequently, a comprehensive approach to speaking instruction is crucial for Second Language (SL) or Foreign Language (FL) learners, emphasizing both language and communicative skills development (Bygate, 1998).

Oral English Examination

Oral examination, a historical mode of assessment, remains prevalent in academic settings, particularly for evaluating language proficiency. In assessing oral production, the open-ended nature of tasks poses challenges in scoring due to the test-taker's freedom of choice, necessitating specific stimuli to elicit expected responses (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019). Oral examinations, especially in English language contexts, allow for spontaneous speaking, revealing students' proficiency (Anggraeni et al., 2019). Such examinations, solely reliant on spoken communication, assess verbal skills and interact with other forms of assessment, contributing to students' final grades (Joughin, 2010). The benefits of oral examination include assessing specific learning outcomes, probing depth of knowledge, reflecting real-world practice, improving learning quality, accommodating

diverse students, clarifying unclear questions, and ensuring authenticity (Joughin, 2010). However, challenges abound, including undue anxiety, hearing or speech difficulties, time constraints, lack of anonymity, bias, novelty, recording logistics, and potential misinterpretation of articulateness for knowledge (Joughin, 2010). Despite these challenges, oral examinations provide valuable insights into students' comprehension, quick thinking, and application of knowledge in practical settings (Oprandy, 1994). For English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, oral proficiency is paramount, enabling them to engage in dialogue, deliver presentations, and succeed in future academic and professional endeavors. Nonetheless, addressing challenges while maximizing the benefits of oral examination necessitates thoughtful consideration of instructional methods and evaluation strategies to foster students' language proficiency and confidence.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research employed a qualitative approach, chosen over quantitative methods to present findings in explanatory and descriptive forms rather than numerical values or formulas, offering flexibility in data collection and analysis (Tracy, 2013). The qualitative method facilitates immersion in a setting to comprehend it comprehensively, utilizing subtle indicators to guide actions and gain insights into the culture (Tracy, 2013). Given its suitability for uncovering challenges, the qualitative method was chosen to explore the factors affecting students' performance in English oral exams at SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo. Thematic analysis, a qualitative technique, was used to identify patterns and themes in the collected interview data, providing a structured approach to analyze the challenges faced by students (Alhojailan & Ibrahim, 2012). Following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase analysis model, the researcher transcribed, coded, and identified themes in

the data, ensuring a systematic and rigorous analysis process. Through this methodological framework, the study aimed to offer insights into students' experiences and challenges during English oral exams, contributing to a deeper understanding of effective teaching and assessment strategies in vocational education contexts.

FINDINGS

This research aimed to discover the challenges faced by students in English oral exam at SMK N 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo. The overarching goal was to determine the challenges faced by the students of SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo during their English oral exam and the cause of the said challenges. Based on this statement, the researcher questions are: "To what extent does the students' challenges occur in English oral exam at SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo?" and "What cause the challenges to occur in English oral exam at SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo?".

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, this research concentrates on the challenges faced by students in the twelfth grade at SMK 1 Vocational High School of Gorontalo in taking the English oral exam without focusing on other subjects such as math, science, etc. In addition, the researcher only focusses on the opinion of students regarding their challenges, which may include pronunciation, vocabulary, or psychological condition. In addition, this research concentrates on the oral English exam based on the basic competencies of the twelfth-grade students and was consider the viewpoint of teachers in order to focus solely on students' interpretations.

This research is conducted by employing interview as a means of collecting the necessary data for the research completion. This method is employed by interviewing the ten twelfth-grade students of SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo as participants. It is worth to note that the researcher first asked the participants

regarding the language that would be used during the interview and therefore, the provided answers would be translated to English if the participants decided to use Bahasa Indonesia. After conducting the interview, the researcher then constructed the themes that represent the challenges that might be faced by the participants, based on the thematic analysis by Braun & Clarke (2006). Below is presented the answers collected from the participants.

Have you followed an English oral exam during your enrollment in SMK 1 Kota Gorontalo? What is your opinion about the said exam?

- Participant 1: Yes, of course, I took oral exam from grade 10 until 12. The exam seemed surprisingly hard but I can pass it
- Participant 2: Yes, I did, for example during a job application interview material. I think the exam is great because I can train myself to be prepared when applying for a job later
- Participant 3: Yes, I have followed several materials in English. I think the exam helps me a lot because by doing it, I can prepare myself in the future. Also, the exam is a great addition to our current curriculum
- Participant 4: Yes, I have. I think the exam is a great tool in measuring our skills in speaking, especially in applying for a job
- Participant 5: Yes, I have followed and I think that the exam is great for aiding us in applying for a job in the future
- Participant 6: Yes, I have, since grade 10 until now. I think this exam is very good, because besides being trained to speak when applying for a job, my English is also growing because I have to be able to pass this exam
- Participant 7: Yes, I have. In my opinion, this exam is very important because in the future interviews in English will definitely become commonplace and because of that, this exam will really help me

- Participant 8: Yes, I took an English exam while I was at SMK 1, Gorontalo City. In my opinion, this oral exam is very useful for those of us who are majoring in UPW because English is an important skill in this field
- Participant 9: Yes, I have. My opinion is that this kind of exam greatly helps me in acquiring the necessary skills in English speaking, especially the skills in entering an international office
- Participant 10: Yes, of course. In my opinion, by passing this exam, I will know how the English interview model will be conducted by an international company

Are there any challenges during your oral exam?

- Participant 1: Yes of course, there were some challenges during the oral exam
- Participant 2: Yes, there are a few challenges in terms of memorizing the words during the interview material
- Participant 3: Yes, I have many challenges
- Participant 4: Yes, there are
- Participant 5: Of course, there are challenges in oral exam
- Participant 6: Yes, I have a challenge
- Participant 7: There must be
- Participant 8: The challenge is from myself because I am not very good at mastering English
- Participant 9: Challenges, I think there is, but it's not a big problem and I can solve it
- Participant 10: The challenge in my oral exam is that I don't understand the content of the interview material, usually I find it difficult to compose words in language so that what I convey is sometimes not understood

Talking about the challenges, what kind of challenges did you experience?

- Participant 1: The challenge that I experienced is I was nervous during the oral exam, especially if the exam is in the form of presentation test

- Participant 2: At the time of interview, it was difficult to memorize the words
- Participant 3: The challenges that I experienced were difficulty to pronounce words in English
- Participant 4: The problem is we have to answer correctly even though we haven't memorized the grammar/I mean, we have to answer the teacher's questions correctly even though we don't understand grammar
- Participant 5: The challenges are not confident and difficult in memorizing the words
- Participant 6: The challenge I experienced was that I found it difficult to answer questions in English
- Participant 7: Namely lack of confidence and lack of understanding of the material
- Participant 8: Just now, I'm not very proficient and can't compose sentences in English
- Participant 9: For the challenge, I think is pronunciation in English. I have to learn the word I am about to say because this is in English, I have to try more because I am Indonesian and I think English will be easy if we understand vocabulary
- Participant 10: The challenge that I experienced was when I was nervous during the exam, which caused my mind during the interview to suddenly go blank
- Participant 5: This lack of self-confidence arises from fear or embarrassment of making mistakes when expressing sentences/interviews
- Participant 6: What caused me to experience this challenge was due to my lack of vocabulary mastery in English and besides that I felt less confident in answering questions
- Participant 7: Lack of understanding of the material so that lack of confidence appears so that my mind goes blank and everything I think about will disappear
- Participant 8: Due to environmental factors I use Indonesian every day and lack of practice in English
- Participant 9: I think because I am Indonesian and used to use Indonesia, which cause the challenge is that I have to learn pronunciation in English, sometimes, I memorize and it would be better if memorizing also understand the meaning
- Participant 10: One of the reasons is the lack of practice in using English to string words so that I become nervous, so I can try to take deep breaths so that I feel calmer in answering all the interviews given

What is your suggestion regarding the exam?

Based on your opinions, what might cause the challenges that you faced before?

- Participant 1: The main cause is nervousness that I felt during exam, my lack of confidence, and lack of understanding about the material
- Participant 2: Maybe I don't master grammar and I also don't know the meaning of the words
- Participant 3: Maybe lack of vocabulary that I know and lack of confidence
- Participant 4: The reason why this happened because I'm not confident and worried about my grammar
- Participant 1: I think the exam could be benefited from adding more various questions because in job interview, the interviewer might ask unexpected questions
- Participant 2: I think the teachers should provide more explanations about the said exam because I was surprised about the questions during the interview
- Participant 3: The exam should simulate the real condition of job interview, such as adding more supervisor or asking the students to make their own personalized CV
- Participant 4: I think the exam should be explained more to the students since some students don't know about grammar extensively

- Participant 5: I think the teachers should teach us how to be confident during the interview because I was too nervous
- Participant 6: In my opinion, maybe the teacher could explain more about this test because to be honest I'm a bit lacking in confidence and maybe other teachers can motivate us students more because sometimes we are afraid to move forward
- Participant 7: My advice might be more motivational because I was a bit nervous during the interview
- Participant 8: My suggestion might be to explain more about how to answer interviews in English
- Participant 9: I think the exam should be easier because I cannot speak English clearly and I don't know a lot of vocabulary, which makes it hard for me to do the exam
- Participant 10: My suggestion is that maybe the teacher can provide more training to us students regarding how to get rid of nervousness during exams, such as tips and tricks so that we can pass the exam more easily

The following are the themes that are generated from the codes collected from participants' answers.

Students' Challenges in English oral exam at SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo

This segment is dedicated to addressing the primary research question, delving into the participants' responses to unveil a common thread of challenges encountered. The findings reveal that a significant majority of participants grapple with difficulties related to accurate language usage. The challenges manifested in various forms, with participants frequently encountering hurdles such as the inability to pronounce English words correctly and facing complexities in constructing coherent sentences, particularly during examination scenarios, which is displayed by the discovery of three themes, namely insufficient vocabulary

comprehension, low English mastery, and psychological condition.

Insufficient Vocabulary Comprehension

In going through the English oral exam, students are required to show their speaking proficiency so that they would be able to obtain satisfying score. They are also required to possess sufficient amount of vocabulary in order to hold a conversation properly because the school that they are enrolled in propose a material named job training interview. As the name suggested, this material obligated the students to be able to talk and discuss about how job interview would be conducted. In this theme, the responses stated that they faced a challenge in terms of having a hard time in pronouncing English words.

Based on the interview, it can be seen that some participants faced a challenge in terms of being unable to pronounce English words properly. Participants showed that they had a hard time during the English oral exam, which is caused by their inability to pronounce English words. This inability is presumed to be hindering them from engaging fluently during the exam, which might affect their score regarding the subject. Furthermore, it is stated that it was difficult for them to answer the question by using English, which presumably due to their incapability of pronouncing words necessary for answering the given question. It is also added that they are unable to engage in a full-English conversation due to the Indonesia-speaking environment, which caused them to experienced less English exposure, necessary for improving their vocabulary. Therefore, it is safe to say that one of the challenges in English oral exam is lack of vocabulary comprehension.

Low English Mastery

Another challenge that is experienced by the participants is low English mastery. Three participants exhibited a sign of low English mastery in their answers, including lack of grammar comprehension, difficult in understanding the materials, and even lack

of knowledge regarding the words' meaning. The answers from the interview shed light on various difficulties encountered by participants when using English. Based on the answers given by the participants, it can be seen that the participants also faced challenges in terms of low English mastery. This challenge is shown to be tough for the participants to overcome due to the lack of necessary skills in doing so. One participant explained that they had a hard time in answering teacher's questions due to the limitation of their grammar comprehension. This might cause this participant to be silent or even speechless during the examination.

Furthermore, it can be presumed that the pressure of having to answer correctly might also affect their memory about grammar itself. Another participant also stated that they are unable to understand the materials, which is presumably caused by their lack of comprehension in the necessary field. Lacking comprehension is considered to be a big challenge since understanding the provided materials would tremendously help them in passing the examination that would be given in the last meeting of their class and to take the exam without any required comprehension would harm their performance during the examination process. Also, one participant stated that they do not have the capacity of composing English sentences, which would greatly obstruct them in constructing a sentence required for passing the oral exam. Therefore, it can be concluded that having low English mastery is a significant challenge faced by students in English oral exam.

Psychological Condition

During the examination, it is assumed that some students experienced a challenge that attacks their psychological condition. Some answers provided by three participants showed they were unable to converse properly due to being nervous and not confident during the oral exam. Furthermore, it is presumed that during the

examination, some students tended to forget the words due to the overwhelming nervousness experienced by them. Based on the answers, it can be seen that psychological condition of each participant greatly hampered their performance during the English oral exam. One participant answered that they tend to be nervous during the exam, especially if it takes the form of presentation. This condition would likely affect their performance in conversing properly.

Furthermore, their answer suggests that standing in front of people; hence the presentation test, made them greatly nervous presumably due to the pressure of being correct and appropriate during the exam. Another participant also stated that they had a hard time in memorizing words during the examination, which presumably due to the nervousness and lack of confident and by considering their answer, it is safe to conclude that psychological condition is also a challenge faced by students in English oral exam.

Cause of the Challenges in English Oral Exam at SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo

Following the exploration of the first research question, this section endeavors to elucidate the second research question, delving into the causes underlying the challenges encountered by students during English oral exams. Analysis of the participants' responses reveals an explanation, pinpointing lack of practice and confidence as the main contributors to the identified challenges. Participants express that their struggles with English oral examinations stem from insufficient practice, hindering the development of necessary language skills. Additionally, a lack of confidence emerges as another factor, intensifying the difficulties faced by students in articulating themselves effectively during oral assessments.

Lack of Practice

Based on the given answers, three participants explained that the challenges that they faced were caused by the lack of practice. It is presumed that low comprehension of vocabulary and English itself is caused by students lack of practice during the learning session, which leads to the inability to comprehend the materials properly or even engage in the examination fluently. Furthermore, it can be presumed that the participants who were lacking of practice were affected by their surroundings. Based on the answers, it can be seen that the cause of participants' challenges is the lack of practice, which leads to the inability to achieve the intended results during the examination process. One participant stated that the challenges they experienced were caused by the lack of vocabulary mastery, which is presumed to be the results of lack of practice. Apparently, this challenge is one of the reasons of their hindrance in performing well during the examination.

On the other hand, one of the participants stated that environmental factor plays a huge part in their English practice since it is assumed that their environment offers little English exposure for this participant. This leads to the inability to practice English properly because there is no person to have a practice with. Finally, another participant explicitly stated that they were lacking of English practice and this leads to the incapability of constructing English sentence appropriately and the feeling of nervousness during the examination process.

Lack of Confidence

Confidence seems to play a significant role in causing challenges experienced by the students during the English oral exam. The answers provided by the participants showed that being not confident or nervous greatly obstructed them from appropriately involved in the examination because it leads them to the incapability of using English words, memorizing the words known to them, and even making their minds blank.

Based on the answers, it can be seen that confidence holds a major role in supporting students' performance during English oral examination. The lack of confidence is showed to be a hindrance when it comes to converse or even answer properly. One participant stated that being nervous and lacking of confidence hampered their performance and being not able to understand the materials further worsen their condition in the examination.

Another participant similarly stated that their lack of self-confidence produced fear and shyness since it is presumed that they wanted themselves to be correct about the sentences or in answering the interview questions during the examination. The last participant went a little bit further by saying that lacking of confidence would lead to speechless condition since it is stated that they tend to have no words under their commands due to the inability to think about it at all. This cause them to experience a great challenge in the examination since they are required to answer the teachers orally and not being able to even say a necessary word would be a big hindrance for the students.

DISCUSSION

After conducting this research, it is discovered that there are two grand themes that concern with the cause of the said challenges. The first theme answers the first research question, which concerns with the challenges faced by the students of SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo during their English oral exam and the second one is the cause of the challenges. This first theme is comprised of three sub-themes, namely insufficient vocabulary comprehension, low level of English mastery, and psychological condition where each theme acts as an answer for the first research question. As for the second research question, it concerns with the cause of the challenges that occur in English oral exam at SMK 1 Vocational High School of Gorontalo, which comprises of two sub-themes namely, lack of practice and lack of

confidence and these themes answer the second research question. In addition, this section includes interpretations regarding the data that was evaluated, which are then compared to the previous studies and theories that were presented in the earlier chapter. Therefore, as a means of elaborating each theme in detailed, the first theme is explained below.

The first theme is the insufficient vocabulary comprehension, which as suggested by the name that it is related to the amount of vocabulary possessed by each participant. Based on the findings, the participants in this theme experienced a challenge during the examination process due to their inability to utilize vocabulary properly and resulting in bad examination performance. One of the participants mentioned that it was difficult for them to respond to the question by using English, which is most likely due to the fact that they were unable to correctly pronounce the words that were necessary for responding to the question that was provided. Another participant also seemed to be experiencing this challenge, which caused them to be unable to engage in a full-English conversation.

This finding is seemingly similar to the study conducted by Wahyuningsih & Afandi (2020) who discovered that lack of vocabulary was regarded as a main obstacle for spoken communication by Indonesian English students and in their study, this finding is considered as the primary challenge in English speaking, especially in English oral exam. On the basis of the aforementioned explanations, it can be determined that the students of SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo concur with the assertion that a lack of vocabulary is the primary reason why they cannot express their views precisely in English. In addition, they are of the opinion that the challenge of vocabulary may act as a barrier to the fluency of their English vocabulary mastery. This finding also similar to Sitorus et al. (2022) who discovered that some students may understand what others are

saying in English, but conveying their ideas in English may still be difficult for them. Therefore, it can be concluded that insufficient vocabulary comprehension is a challenge in English oral exam and by considering previous claims about the said challenge is deemed as the most crucial challenge due to vocabulary importance in speaking since according to Dakhi & Fitria (2019) vocabulary size and depth in communication appear to be associated with a good interaction meeting the principles of communication itself.

The second theme is a low level of English mastery, which was displayed when it showed that participants demonstrated an indication of low English mastery in their answers. This includes a lack of comprehension of grammatical concepts, difficulty in comprehending the materials, and even a lack of knowledge regarding the meaning of the words. Based on the findings, one participant stated that they did not have the capability of memorizing grammar during the process of answering the examination questions. It is claimed by Sahid (2019) that grammar is one of the vital components in the aptitude of speaking because it is considered as the knowledge about units and rules of language (Fromkin et al., 2013). Fromkin et al. (2013) further explained that to understand the nature of language, an individual is required to understand the nature of grammar itself; thus, it is safe to assume grammar is an important factor in language proficiency.

The third theme that demonstrates the difficulty of an oral exam is psychological condition. During the oral examination, research participants were unable to converse adequately due to anxiety and lack of confidence. In addition, it is thought that several students completely missed the vocabulary throughout the exam due to the sheer amount of nervousness experienced by them. One participant mentioned that they are typically nervous during examinations, particularly if they involve of something like a presentation. This condition would inevitably hinder their

ability to converse effectively. Moreover, their answer implies that standing in front of people, i.e., the presentation test, made them extremely anxious, possibly because of the sheer amount of pressure to be correct and appropriate during the exam.

Damayanti & Listiyani (2020) explained that during academic speaking context, the common causes of their unsatisfactory grades were caused by being nervous, being confused because of less vocabulary, shyness, or other factors. Abrar et al. (2016) explained that foreign language anxiety can be assumed to be a distinct complex of self-perception, behavior, feeling, and belief related to using a foreign language in classroom communication. This claim shows that being anxious and nervous in front of a class is a condition experienced by those who are trying to learn foreign language, in this case English. As one of the productive language abilities, speaking is considered crucial to master in Foreign Language classes. However, this finding shows that students frequently demonstrate nervousness when speaking the target language and therefore, it is safe to assume that psychological condition is a significant challenge to be encountered during the English oral exam.

Aside from the aforementioned themes, this research also discovered themes that concern with the cause of each challenge found in the previous section. The fourth theme is lack of practice where it is assumed that low practice engagement results in low English comprehension, the inability to comprehend the materials properly or even engage in the examination fluently. One participant stated that the challenge they encountered were due to a lack of knowledge of the language, which is likely the result of inadequate practice. Evidently, this challenge is one of the factors preventing them from performing well on the exam. This result is reinforced by Thompson (2019), who discovered that language learning is possible to be increased through purposeful practice by studying at appropriate times of the day and receiving

regular feedbacks regarding the students' performance. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that in achieving mastery over English, a student is required to practice and possibly in an intensive way.

Another participant stated that environmental factor plays a huge part in their English practice since it is assumed that their environment offers little English exposure for this participant. This leads to the inability to practice English properly because there is no person to have a practice with or even lack of necessary exposure in the classroom. Wilde et al. (2020) explained that formal teaching must be supplemented with informal learning in everyday settings, which further tells that English exposure is not only in the classroom but also outside the classroom. Wahyuningsih & Afandi (2020) added that some students receive less input about using English, particularly in a non-English-speaking environment. In fact, some of them only use English in the classroom and hardly ever use it outside of it. Since students hardly ever hear sounds and words from others speaking English outside of class, their lack of input may not improve their English growth, particularly in speaking. This further confirms that in order to obtain more aptitude in terms of oral exam, a student is required to receive more English exposure from their surroundings.

The last theme is lack of confidence where confidence seems to play a significant role in causing challenges experienced by the students during the English oral exam. The answers given by the participants revealed that feeling insecure or anxious prevented them from participating in the examination in a significant sense since it prevents them from using English words, memorizing the words they already know, and even renders their minds blank. One participant stated that they typically have little or no vocabulary at their minds since they are unable to think about it at all and a lack of confidence would result in this condition. Since they must respond orally to the teachers throughout the exam, this is a

significant challenge for the students who find it difficult to even utter a single word. Furthermore, it is explained that EFL students may feel anxious in speaking English (Chou, 2018) and therefore, it is safe to conclude that the role of confidence in English oral exam.

In this research, the researcher intended to discover the challenges faced by the students in English oral exam in SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo. It is found out that students faced several challenges, namely; insufficient vocabulary comprehension, low English mastery, and psychological condition. Furthermore, it is revealed that the said challenges were caused by lack of practice and confidence. Sitorus et al. (2022) and Fitriani & Zulkarnain (2019) focused more on students' difficulties than on their challenges in their previous studies, which were presented in the earlier chapters. Although difficulty and challenge seem similar, according to the Oxford University (1999), the former refers to the state or condition of being difficult, whilst the latter refers to a demanding and challenging activity. Furthermore, in contrast to the previous studies, which picked eleventh-grade students from SMK Vocational School of Perbina Nusantara and second-year students from Polytechnic of Aceh, this study selected twelfth-grade students from SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo. By looking at the focus, it is safe to conclude that this research has the capability of providing information regarding the challenges faced by students in SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo.

RESEARCH LIMITATION

After conducting this research, it is realized that there are some limitations encountered during the process of conducting this research, which is only focus on speaking skills. It is assumed that the challenges also appear in other language skills, such as writing, reading, or even listening. Furthermore, this research is showed to neglect the solution for each challenge and

therefore, further investigation is heavily required

CONCLUSION

This research intends to discover challenges faced by students in English oral exam at SMK 1 Vocational High School Gorontalo and the cause of the said challenges. The result showed that the students encountered challenges insufficient vocabulary comprehension, low English mastery, and psychological condition. The result also showed that there are two causes of the challenges, namely lack of practice and confidence. This research concludes that each challenge is interconnected and therefore, one challenge has the capability of affecting other challenges which would greatly hinder students' performance in English oral exam.

Declaration by Authors

Acknowledgement: None

Source of Funding: None

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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How to cite this article: Erni Rusli, Nonny Basalama, Usman Pakaya. Challenges in English oral exams at vocational high school. *International Journal of Research and Review*. 2024; 11(5): 187-198. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.52403/ijrr.20240523>
