

## Analysis of Basic English Proficiency Challenges among Grade X TKR 1 Students at SMK Negeri 8 Palembang

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis tantangan kemampuan dasar bahasa Inggris yang dihadapi oleh siswa kelas X TKR 1 di SMK Negeri 8 Palembang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif untuk memperoleh pemahaman mendalam mengenai kesulitan siswa dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Subjek penelitian terdiri atas 36 siswa kelas X TKR 1 dengan teknik pengambilan sampel total sampling karena jumlah populasi yang relatif kecil. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara semi-terstruktur, dan tes kemampuan dasar bahasa Inggris. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa mengalami kesulitan yang signifikan pada keterampilan produktif, khususnya berbicara dan menulis. Kesulitan tersebut dipengaruhi oleh keterbatasan kosakata, ketakutan melakukan kesalahan tata bahasa, rendahnya kepercayaan diri, serta minimnya penggunaan bahasa Inggris di luar kelas. Selain itu, penggunaan media pembelajaran interaktif seperti video pembelajaran dan kuis berbasis permainan terbukti mampu meningkatkan motivasi dan partisipasi siswa dalam pembelajaran. Aktivitas diskusi kelompok juga membantu mengurangi kecemasan siswa dan meningkatkan keterampilan reseptif, yaitu menyimak dan membaca. Namun demikian, keterbatasan fasilitas pendukung seperti belum tersedianya laboratorium bahasa menjadi hambatan dalam menciptakan lingkungan pembelajaran yang imersif. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, dapat disimpulkan bahwa peningkatan kemampuan dasar bahasa Inggris siswa SMK memerlukan strategi pembelajaran yang interaktif, kesempatan praktik yang berkelanjutan, serta dukungan fasilitas dan kebijakan sekolah yang memadai.

**Kata kunci:** Kemampuan Dasar Bahasa Inggris; Siswa Sekolah Menengah Kejuruan; Tantangan Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris; Media Pembelajaran Interaktif

### Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the challenges of basic English proficiency faced by Grade X TKR 1 students at SMK Negeri 8 Palembang. The research employed a descriptive qualitative design to obtain an in-depth understanding of students' difficulties in learning English. The participants consisted of 36 students of Grade X TKR 1, and total sampling was applied due to the small population size. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and basic English proficiency tasks. The findings revealed that students experienced significant difficulties in productive skills, particularly speaking and writing, which were influenced by limited vocabulary, fear of making grammatical errors, low self-confidence, and minimal exposure to English outside the classroom. The study also found that the use of interactive learning media, such as instructional videos and gamified quizzes, positively affected students' motivation and classroom participation. These strategies encouraged peer interaction and reduced anxiety, leading to improvement in receptive skills, namely listening and reading comprehension. However, the lack of adequate learning facilities, such as a language laboratory, limited opportunities for immersive language practice. The study concludes that effective English instruction in vocational schools requires interactive teaching strategies, continuous practice opportunities, and sufficient institutional support to enhance students' basic English proficiency.

**Keywords:** Basic English Proficiency; Vocational High School Students; English Learning Challenges; Interactive Media

## INTRODUCTION

English proficiency has become an essential competence in the era of globalization, particularly for students in vocational high schools who are expected to be ready to enter the workforce immediately after graduation (EF-EPI, 2024). English functions not only as an international means of communication but also as a medium for accessing scientific

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knowledge, technology, and professional information (Damayanti, 2019; Zhang, 2022; Malini et al., 2022). In Indonesia, English is a compulsory subject taught from secondary to higher education levels. However, despite its importance, many students still demonstrate low levels of basic English proficiency, especially in vocabulary mastery, grammar understanding, and communicative skills (Jin, 2023; Rafique, 2025; Ramirez, 2021). According to Dash (2022), students' difficulties in learning English often arise from limited exposure, lack of meaningful practice, and insufficient motivation, which hinder the development of language competence.

In the context of vocational education, the challenges of learning English tend to be more complex. Vocational High School (SMK) students generally focus more on technical and practical skills related to their field of study, while English is often perceived as a secondary subject. As stated by Richards and Rodgers (2014), language learning becomes ineffective when it is not contextualized to learners' real needs. For students in technical departments such as Automotive Engineering or *Teknik Kendaraan Ringan (TKR)*, English materials that are not relevant to their vocational field may reduce their interest and engagement in learning. Consequently, students may struggle to understand basic English structures and fail to apply the language in real-life or workplace-related contexts (Net, 2022; Rahman & Ekkayokkaya, 2024; Yahya et al., 2019).

Furthermore, previous studies have indicated that many SMK students experience difficulties across all basic English skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Brown (2019) explains that language proficiency develops through balanced exposure and practice of these skills; when one or more skills are neglected, overall proficiency is affected. In many classrooms, English instruction still emphasizes grammar memorization rather than communicative competence, resulting in students who can recognize language forms but cannot use English effectively (Thi & Que, 2025; Rama et al., 2023; Baleghizadeh & Maryam, 2019). This condition contributes to students' low confidence and limited ability to communicate in English, particularly in speaking activities (We, 2020; Novia Indriani & Mariani, 2019; Alberth, 2023).

Psychological factors also play a significant role in students' English learning challenges (John-Steiner & Mahn, 2020). Anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence often prevent students from actively participating in classroom activities. Horwitz (2020) highlight that foreign language anxiety can significantly interfere with language acquisition, especially in speaking performance. When students feel anxious or embarrassed, they tend to avoid using English, which further limits their opportunities to practice and improve their proficiency. This situation is commonly found among vocational students who rarely use English outside the classroom environment.

Considering these issues, analyzing the basic English proficiency challenges faced by Grade X TKR 1 students at SMK Negeri 8 Palembang is crucial. As future skilled workers in the automotive field, these students are expected to understand basic technical English, manuals, and instructions commonly used in the industry. Limited English proficiency may reduce their competitiveness in the job market and hinder their professional development. Therefore, this study aims to identify and analyze the main challenges encountered by the students in learning basic English, so that appropriate teaching strategies and learning approaches can be developed to improve English instruction in vocational schools.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the challenges of basic English proficiency among Grade X TKR 1 students at SMK Negeri 8 Palembang.

The research was conducted at SMK Negeri 8 Palembang during the academic year in which the study took place. The population of this study consisted of all students of Grade X TKR 1 in the Automotive Engineering (*Teknik Kendaraan Ringan*) program, totaling 36 students. Due to the relatively small number of participants, the researcher applied a total sampling technique, in which all 36 students were selected as the research sample. This technique was chosen to obtain comprehensive data and ensure that the findings accurately represented the actual conditions of the students (Susanto et al., 2023; Anufia, 2019; Daruhadi & Sopiati, 2024).

Data were collected using several instruments, including classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and basic English proficiency tasks. Classroom observations were carried out to examine students' participation, learning behavior, and responses during English lessons. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' perceptions, difficulties, and attitudes toward learning English (Kvale, 2021). In addition, basic English proficiency tasks were administered to assess students' vocabulary knowledge, grammar usage, and basic comprehension skills (Melvina & Julia, 2021). The use of multiple instruments enabled data triangulation to enhance the credibility of the findings.

The collected data were analyzed using an interactive qualitative data analysis model involving data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Sugiyono, 2021; Tisdell et al., 2025; Neuman, 2019). Through this process, patterns and dominant challenges in students' basic English proficiency were identified. The results of this study are expected to provide meaningful insights into the factors influencing English learning difficulties among vocational high school students and to offer pedagogical implications for improving English instruction, particularly in technical departments.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study were obtained through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and basic English proficiency tasks administered to Grade X TKR 1 students at SMK Negeri 8 Palembang. Based on initial classroom observations, most students demonstrated passive learning behavior during English lessons. They rarely initiated questions or responded in English, even when prompted by the teacher. The observation data indicated that students tended to rely heavily on their first language and avoided using English orally. This condition reflected low confidence and limited communicative competence in basic English.

The interview data supported the observation findings. One student stated, *"I am afraid of speaking English because I am worried my grammar is wrong and my friends will laugh at me."* Another student mentioned, *"I don't know many English words, so it is difficult for me to explain my ideas."* These statements indicate that fear of making grammatical mistakes and limited vocabulary were the dominant factors contributing to students' reluctance to participate actively in English communication.

However, changes were observed after the teacher introduced interactive learning media, such as instructional videos and gamified quizzes. Classroom observations showed a noticeable shift in students' engagement and participation. Students appeared more enthusiastic and willing to respond, especially during group-based activities. One student explained during the interview, *"When we watch videos and play quizzes, learning English feels more fun and not stressful."* Group discussion activities also encouraged peer interaction, allowing students to practice English in a less threatening environment.

The results of the basic English proficiency tasks revealed that students showed improvement in receptive skills, particularly reading and listening comprehension. Most students were able to identify main ideas and understand simple instructions in English. Nevertheless, productive skills such as speaking and writing remained challenging. Several students admitted that they rarely practiced English outside the classroom. As one student stated, *“I only use English in class, not at home or with friends.”* In addition, interviews with the teacher indicated that although the school administration provided moral support for English learning, limited technological facilities, such as the absence of a language laboratory, restricted opportunities for immersive and intensive language practice.

## **Discussion**

The findings indicate that students' passivity in English learning is closely related to psychological and linguistic factors, particularly anxiety and limited vocabulary mastery. This result aligns with Horwitz et al. (2018), who argue that foreign language anxiety significantly affects learners' willingness to communicate and participate in classroom activities. Fear of grammatical errors and negative peer judgment can inhibit students' confidence, especially in speaking activities (Nadiyah et al., 2023).

The positive impact of interactive media observed in this study supports previous research emphasizing the role of engaging instructional strategies in language learning. Clark and Mayer (2023) states that interactive and multimedia-based learning can increase students' motivation and lower affective barriers. The use of videos and gamified quizzes in this study shifted the learning focus from rote memorization to active communication, making students more comfortable experimenting with the language.

Furthermore, the improvement in receptive skills compared to productive skills reflects a common phenomenon in second language acquisition. According to Bora (2023), learners often develop listening and reading skills earlier than speaking and writing because productive skills require more complex cognitive processing and frequent practice. The lack of an English-speaking environment outside the classroom, as identified in this study, further limits students' opportunities to develop productive language skills.

The absence of advanced learning facilities, such as a language laboratory, also influenced the effectiveness of English instruction. Hadiani and Rohmah (2021) emphasize that meaningful language learning requires adequate resources and learning environments that support interaction and exposure. Although moral support from the school administration was evident, infrastructural limitations reduced the potential for immersive learning experiences. Therefore, this study highlights the need for both pedagogical innovation and institutional support to address basic English proficiency challenges among vocational high school students.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that Grade X TKR 1 students at SMK Negeri 8 Palembang face significant challenges in basic English proficiency, particularly in productive language skills such as speaking and writing. The main factors contributing to these challenges include limited vocabulary mastery, fear of making grammatical mistakes, low self-confidence, and the lack of consistent English practice outside the classroom. These factors resulted in

passive learning behavior and minimal student participation during English lessons, especially in oral communication activities.

The findings also indicate that the use of interactive learning media, such as instructional videos and gamified quizzes, positively influenced students' motivation and classroom engagement. These strategies helped reduce anxiety and encouraged peer interaction through group discussions, leading to noticeable improvement in students' receptive skills, namely reading and listening comprehension. However, despite these improvements, students' productive skills remained underdeveloped due to limited exposure and insufficient practice environments.

Furthermore, the study reveals that institutional support plays an important role in enhancing English learning. While the school administration demonstrated strong moral support, the lack of adequate technological facilities, such as a language laboratory, limited opportunities for immersive language learning. Therefore, this research highlights the need for a balanced approach that combines interactive teaching strategies, continuous practice opportunities, and improved learning facilities to effectively address basic English proficiency challenges among vocational high school students.

Overall, the results of this study provide valuable insights for English teachers, school administrators, and curriculum developers in designing more effective and context-relevant English instruction for vocational education, particularly for students in technical departments such as Automotive Engineering.

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