

## **The Correlation Between Students' Vocabulary Mastery and Their English Speaking Fluency at SMKN 1 Tenggarong**

**Mirza Alfarizi**

[2211102421053@umkt.ac.id](mailto:2211102421053@umkt.ac.id)

**Ade Ismail Ramadhan**

[air550@umkt.ac.id](mailto:air550@umkt.ac.id)

**Yeni Rahmawati**

[yr173@umkt.ac.id](mailto:yr173@umkt.ac.id)

**Universitas Muhammadiyah Kalimantan Timur**

### **ABSTRACT**

Speaking fluency is a fundamental skill for vocational students, particularly those in hospitality programs where effective oral communication is essential for professional interaction. Vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in supporting students' ability to express ideas clearly, accurately, and confidently in spoken English. This study aims to examine the correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and English speaking fluency among eleventh-grade Hospitality students at SMKN 1 Tenggarong. A quantitative correlational design was employed, involving 36 students selected through cluster random sampling. Data were collected using two instruments: a vocabulary mastery test and a speaking fluency test assessed through a standardized scoring rubric. The speaking test evaluated students' fluency, accuracy, and clarity of expression during oral performance. The collected data were analyzed using SPSS, including descriptive statistics and Pearson Product–Moment correlation analysis. The results revealed a very strong and statistically significant positive correlation between vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency ( $r = 0.972$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that students who possess a higher level of vocabulary knowledge tend to demonstrate greater fluency and confidence in spoken communication. The findings suggest that vocabulary development contributes substantially to students' ability to produce smooth, meaningful, and comprehensible speech. For vocational education contexts, especially hospitality programs, strong vocabulary mastery supports students in performing workplace communication tasks such as interacting with customers, delivering information, and responding appropriately in service situations. Therefore, strengthening vocabulary instruction may enhance students' speaking performance and better prepare them for professional communication demands. This study provides empirical evidence supporting the integration of vocabulary-focused instruction as a foundation for improving speaking fluency in vocational English learning environments.

**Keywords:** Vocabulary Mastery; Speaking Fluency; Correlational Study; Hospitality Students

## INTRODUCTION

Language learning involves four fundamental skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking is widely regarded as the most visible indicator of language proficiency because it reflects learners' ability to communicate meaning effectively in real-time interaction. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, speaking competence demonstrates not only linguistic knowledge but also learners' confidence, fluency, and ability to respond spontaneously during communication. However, many Indonesian EFL learners continue to experience difficulties in developing fluent spoken English, particularly in terms of vocabulary access, sentence construction, and sustained interaction.

Vocabulary mastery plays a central role in speaking development. Without adequate vocabulary knowledge, learners struggle to express ideas, retrieve appropriate words quickly, and maintain conversational flow. Harisa (2021) emphasizes that vocabulary functions as a foundational component of language learning because it enables learners to construct meaningful messages and participate actively in communication. Similarly, speaking fluency involves smoothness, coherence, and the ability to retrieve lexical items with minimal hesitation (Nur Fatimah & Permana, 2024). When vocabulary knowledge is limited, speakers often pause excessively, rely on fillers, or repeat the same expressions, which disrupts fluency and reduces communicative effectiveness.

Empirical studies have consistently demonstrated a strong relationship between vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency. NR et al. (2022) found a significant positive correlation between vocabulary size and oral communication performance among senior high school students, indicating that learners with broader vocabulary knowledge tend to speak more fluently and confidently. Likewise, Al Indra and Syarfi (2024) reported that vocabulary mastery significantly influences learners' speaking ability across different educational levels. These findings confirm that vocabulary is not merely a supporting element but a key determinant of speaking performance. Learners who possess rich lexical knowledge are better equipped to express ideas accurately, respond quickly in conversations, and sustain interaction without excessive hesitation.

Despite the growing body of research on vocabulary and speaking fluency, most studies have focused on general secondary schools or university settings. Limited attention has been given to vocational high schools, particularly in hospitality programs where communicative competence is directly linked to workplace readiness. Vocational students are expected to use English for practical purposes such as interacting with customers, providing services, explaining procedures, and handling professional communication in real working environments. In this context, speaking fluency is not only an academic requirement but also a functional skill that supports employability and career development. Therefore, understanding

the factors that influence speaking fluency among vocational hospitality students becomes especially important.

Preliminary observation at SMKN 1 Tenggarong reveals that many hospitality students encounter persistent difficulties in speaking tasks. Students often pause excessively, hesitate to retrieve appropriate vocabulary, and rely heavily on fillers during oral activities. These patterns suggest that vocabulary limitations may directly affect their fluency and confidence in speaking. Although teachers emphasize speaking practice in the curriculum, students still struggle to perform spontaneous communication effectively. This situation raises an important question regarding whether students' vocabulary mastery significantly correlates with their speaking fluency in vocational hospitality contexts.

Another gap in existing research lies in the lack of contextual analysis that considers vocational communication demands. Many previous studies examine vocabulary and speaking in general classroom contexts without addressing the specific linguistic needs of vocational learners, such as service-oriented vocabulary, functional expressions, and interactional competence required in hospitality environments. As a result, there is limited empirical evidence explaining how vocabulary mastery supports speaking fluency among vocational students who must apply English in practical workplace scenarios. This gap highlights the need for focused investigation within vocational hospitality programs to determine whether vocabulary mastery contributes meaningfully to students' oral performance.

This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and their English speaking fluency among eleventh-grade Hospitality students at SMKN 1 Tenggarong. By focusing on a vocational context, this research provides a more contextualized understanding of how vocabulary knowledge influences speaking performance in skill-oriented educational settings. The study does not merely aim to confirm whether a relationship exists, but also to determine the strength of that relationship and its relevance for vocational English instruction.

The findings of this research are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. From a theoretical perspective, this study enriches existing literature on second language acquisition by extending previous findings into vocational education contexts. While earlier studies confirm the importance of vocabulary for speaking fluency in general education settings, this research offers empirical evidence from hospitality programs where communicative demands are closely linked to real-world professional tasks. This allows language learning theories to be examined in more applied and skill-based environments.

From a practical perspective, the results of this study may provide valuable insights for English teachers in vocational schools. Understanding the relationship between vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency can help teachers design instructional

strategies that integrate vocabulary development with speaking practice more effectively. Rather than treating vocabulary and speaking as separate components, teachers may emphasize vocabulary enrichment that directly supports communicative tasks relevant to hospitality contexts. For students, the findings may increase awareness of the importance of vocabulary learning as a foundation for becoming fluent and confident speakers. For curriculum developers, the results may serve as a reference in designing syllabi that balance lexical development with communicative competence. Additionally, future researchers may use this study as empirical evidence and a comparison point for further investigations in vocational language education.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Vocabulary Mastery**

Vocabulary mastery is a fundamental component of language learning because it serves as the foundation of effective communication. Learners may understand grammatical rules, but without sufficient vocabulary they cannot express ideas accurately or sustain interaction. Vocabulary mastery involves not only knowing word meanings but also understanding how words function in real communication contexts, enabling learners to retrieve appropriate words efficiently and convey meaning clearly.

Modern linguists conceptualize vocabulary mastery as consisting of both breadth and depth of knowledge. Webb and Chen and Liu (2020) explain that vocabulary breadth refers to the number of words a learner knows, while depth refers to how well those words are understood, including knowledge of meanings, forms, collocations, and contextual usage. Similarly, Pradina (2021) defines vocabulary mastery as the ability to understand, store, retrieve, and use lexical items appropriately in spoken and written communication. This comprehensive understanding highlights that vocabulary mastery extends beyond memorization and involves functional use in real communication.

Vocabulary mastery includes several interconnected components. Word meaning encompasses both denotative and connotative meanings as well as contextual interpretation. Knowledge of synonyms and antonyms allows learners to vary expression and avoid repetition. Word form and grammatical behavior involve recognizing and applying different morphological forms accurately. Collocation knowledge enables learners to produce natural word combinations, such as make a reservation or room service. Finally, appropriate word usage reflects awareness of politeness level, situational context, and communicative purpose. Mastery of these components supports fluent and confident spoken production.

Vocabulary knowledge plays a decisive role in speaking development. Uchihara et al. (2019) found that vocabulary knowledge is among the strongest predictors of speaking fluency because learners with richer vocabulary retrieve words more

rapidly and experience fewer pauses. Uchihara and Saito (2019) further emphasize that productive vocabulary requires automaticity, which allows speakers to access words quickly without conscious effort. This automatic retrieval directly contributes to smooth and continuous speech, demonstrating the close link between vocabulary mastery and fluency.

Vocabulary mastery is commonly measured using objective assessments such as multiple-choice tests, matching tasks, and contextual meaning questions. Kiliçkaya (2019) notes that multiple-choice formats provide reliable measurement of vocabulary knowledge across large groups. In the present study, vocabulary mastery is assessed using a multiple-choice test that measures meanings, synonyms, antonyms, and contextual usage.

### **Speaking Fluency**

Speaking fluency is a core element of communicative competence and a major indicator of oral proficiency. Fluency refers to the ability to produce speech smoothly, continuously, and naturally with minimal hesitation. A fluent speaker maintains appropriate speed, rhythm, and coherence while managing pauses effectively. Fluency is strongly influenced by cognitive processing and linguistic automaticity. Peltonen (2024) explains that fluency reflects automatic processing, in which speakers retrieve vocabulary and construct sentences rapidly without conscious grammatical monitoring. Takizawa (2024) also highlights that fluency involves both cognitive speed and linguistic factors such as vocabulary access, pronunciation control, and prosodic features.

Several components contribute to speaking fluency. Speech rate reflects how many words a speaker produces per minute. Pausing and hesitation indicate the speaker's ability to retrieve vocabulary efficiently. Pronunciation clarity and accuracy affect intelligibility, while intonation and word stress contribute to naturalness and communicative effectiveness. Coherence involves organizing ideas logically using appropriate connectors. Automaticity allows spontaneous production, and confidence influences volume, stability, and comfort during interaction.

In vocational contexts, particularly hospitality education, speaking fluency is essential. Students must communicate professionally with guests, colleagues, and supervisors while performing service-related tasks. They are required to greet customers, provide information, handle requests, and respond politely and efficiently. Therefore, speaking fluency is directly related to employability and service quality. At SMKN 1 Tenggarong, hospitality students receive general English instruction through the SPLASH textbook and vocational English through Majoring English lessons, making fluent oral communication a central learning objective.

Speaking fluency is typically assessed through performance-based tasks. Sarmila et al. (2023) suggest using picture description, storytelling, or monologue tasks to

evaluate fluency. In this study, students perform a monologue based on picture prompts, and their performances are rated using a fluency rubric adapted from Nur Fatimah and Permana (2024), covering speech rate, pauses, pronunciation, intonation, coherence, automaticity, and confidence.

### Relationship Between Vocabulary Mastery and Speaking Fluency

Vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency are closely interconnected in second language acquisition. Salim (2025) reports that learners with strong vocabulary mastery tend to speak more fluently because they retrieve words faster and construct sentences more effortlessly. This reduces hesitation and increases speech rate. Holbah (2022) also demonstrates a significant positive correlation between vocabulary size and speaking proficiency, indicating that vocabulary breadth strongly supports fluent speech production. Beyond vocabulary size, vocabulary depth also influences fluency. González-Fernández (2022) emphasizes that knowledge of collocations, word forms, and contextual usage facilitates automatic retrieval and accurate expression, contributing to smoother speech. Richards and Renandya (2002) further argue that vocabulary knowledge underpins overall communicative competence, shaping learners' ability to interact effectively.

Empirical evidence consistently supports this relationship. Harisa (2021) found that students with higher vocabulary mastery perform better in oral communication because they experience fewer pauses and interruptions. NR et al. (2022) also identified a strong positive correlation between vocabulary mastery and speaking performance. Nur Fatimah and Permana (2024) highlight that vocabulary mastery is one of the strongest predictors of fluency and coherence, as limited vocabulary often results in hesitation and slow speech rate. These findings confirm that vocabulary mastery plays a crucial role in speaking fluency development. Learners with extensive vocabulary knowledge communicate more confidently, maintain smoother speech flow, and sustain interaction effectively. This relationship is particularly important in vocational education contexts where functional communication skills are essential.

### Previous Studies

Numerous studies have examined the relationship between vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency and consistently report positive correlations. Harisa (2021) investigated the relationship among self-confidence, vocabulary size, and speaking performance among EFL students at IAIN Palangka Raya and found that vocabulary size significantly influenced speaking performance. NR et al. (2022) reported similar findings among senior high school students, confirming that learners with higher vocabulary mastery achieved better speaking scores.

Al Indra and Syarfi (2024) further demonstrated that vocabulary mastery directly affects students' speaking ability, emphasizing its role as a core foundation of oral communication. Nur Fatimah and Permana (2024) found that students with stronger

vocabulary mastery demonstrated higher fluency and coherence during debate activities.

Although these studies provide strong evidence of the vocabulary–fluency relationship, most were conducted in general secondary or university contexts. Limited research has examined vocational high school settings, especially hospitality programs where communication demands are closely linked to workplace performance. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by investigating the correlation between vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency among vocational students at SMKN 1 Tenggarong.

## **METHOD**

### **Design and Sample**

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between students' vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency without manipulating the variables. Vocabulary mastery served as the independent variable, while speaking fluency was the dependent variable. The relationship between the two variables was analyzed statistically using SPSS. The population consisted of all eleventh-grade students of the Hospitality Department at SMKN 1 Tenggarong in the academic year 2024/2025. These students received both General English instruction using the SPLASH SMK/MAK Grade XI textbook and vocational English instruction through Majoring English classes focusing on hospitality communication.

The Hospitality Department consisted of two classes, Hospitality 1 and Hospitality 2, each with approximately 35–36 students following the same syllabus and teaching schedule. One class, XI Hospitality 2, was selected as the sample using cluster random sampling. The sample consisted of approximately 35 students, which met the minimum requirement for correlational analysis and was considered representative of the population.

### **Instrument and Procedure**

Two instruments were used in this study: a vocabulary mastery test and a speaking fluency test. The vocabulary mastery test consisted of approximately forty multiple-choice items measuring word meaning, synonyms, antonyms, and contextual usage. The items were developed based on the vocabulary content from the SPLASH SMK/MAK Grade XI textbook and hospitality-related materials taught in Majoring English classes. The test was reviewed by two English teachers to ensure content validity and clarity. Each item had one correct answer, allowing objective scoring. The speaking fluency test required students to perform an individual short monologue task, such as describing a picture, telling a simple story, or discussing familiar hospitality topics. All performances were audio-recorded for scoring accuracy. Students' performances were evaluated using a fluency rubric covering

speech rate, pauses, pronunciation, accuracy and word choice, coherence, and confidence. Two independent raters assessed each recording, and the final score was calculated by averaging both ratings. Data collection was conducted in two stages. First, the vocabulary mastery test was administered in a supervised classroom setting. Second, the speaking fluency test was conducted individually, and all performances were recorded and scored using the rubric. All data were checked for completeness before analysis.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were calculated to summarize students' vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency scores, including mean, minimum, maximum, and standard deviation. Normality testing was conducted using the Shapiro–Wilk test. Linearity testing was also applied to ensure that the relationship between the two variables was linear. Pearson Product–Moment correlation was used if the data were normally distributed, while Spearman Rank correlation was applied if the data were not normally distributed. A significance level of 0.05 was used to determine statistical significance. Correlation strength was interpreted as weak, moderate, or strong based on standard statistical guidelines.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### *Students' Vocabulary Mastery and Speaking Fluency Scores*

Instead of presenting individual student scores, this study summarizes students' performance to maintain clarity and confidentiality. The summary of vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency scores is presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Descriptive Statistics*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Vocabulary Mastery	36	37.50	100.00	71.88	17.68
Speaking Fluency	36	8.00	25.00	17.56	5.01

Table 1 shows that students' vocabulary mastery scores ranged from 37.50 to 100.00, with a mean score of 71.88 and a standard deviation of 17.68. This indicates moderate variability in students' vocabulary knowledge. Several students demonstrated high vocabulary mastery, while a small number showed lower levels of vocabulary knowledge. Speaking fluency scores ranged from 8.00 to 25.00, with a mean score of 17.56 and a standard deviation of 5.01. This suggests moderate variation in students' speaking performance. Overall, the results indicate that students demonstrated moderate levels of vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency.

*Normality Test**Table 2. Normality Test*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Kolmogorov–Smirnov Statistic</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Shapiro–Wilk Statistic</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Vocabulary Mastery	0.098	36	0.200	0.963	36	0.269
Speaking Fluency	0.090	36	0.200	0.954	36	0.135

Before conducting the correlation analysis, a normality test was carried out to determine whether the data were normally distributed. The normality of the data was tested using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests. The results show that the significance value for vocabulary mastery was 0.200, and for speaking fluency was also 0.200 in the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. In the Shapiro–Wilk test, the significance values were 0.269 for vocabulary mastery and 0.135 for speaking fluency. Since all significance values were greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that both variables were normally distributed. Therefore, the data met the assumptions for applying

*Correlation Analysis**Table 3. Correlation Analysis*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Vocabulary Mastery</b>	<b>Speaking Fluency</b>
Vocabulary Mastery	1	0.972**
Speaking Fluency	0.972**	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000
N	36	36

After the normality of the data was confirmed, Pearson Product–Moment Correlation analysis was applied to examine the relationship between students' vocabulary mastery and their speaking fluency. The results indicated that the correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) between vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency was 0.972, with a significance value (Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.000. Since this significance value is lower than the alpha level of 0.05, the correlation between the two variables is statistically significant. Based on the interpretation of correlation strength, a coefficient ranging from 0.80 to 1.00 is classified as a very strong correlation. Therefore, the obtained value of  $r = 0.972$  demonstrates a very strong positive relationship between students' vocabulary mastery and their speaking fluency.

These findings indicate that students who achieved higher scores in vocabulary mastery tended to demonstrate better speaking fluency, whereas students with lower vocabulary mastery tended to show lower speaking fluency. Accordingly, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), which states that there is no significant correlation between students' vocabulary mastery and their speaking fluency, is rejected. Meanwhile, the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ), which states that there is a significant correlation between the two variables, is accepted.

The findings of this study reveal a very strong and statistically significant correlation between vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency among eleventh-grade Hospitality students at SMKN 1 Tenggarong. This result confirms that vocabulary mastery plays a critical role in supporting students' ability to communicate fluently in English. Students with richer vocabulary knowledge were able to retrieve words more quickly, reduce hesitation, and maintain smoother speech flow, resulting in higher fluency, coherence, and confidence. In contrast, students with limited vocabulary experienced more pauses, slower speech rate, and greater difficulty expressing ideas clearly.

A key contribution of this study lies in its focus on a vocational hospitality context, which has received limited empirical attention in previous research. While earlier studies such as NR et al. (2022) and Nur Fatimah and Permana (2024) examined general secondary or academic settings, this study demonstrates that the vocabulary–fluency relationship is equally strong in a career-oriented learning environment where communication skills are directly linked to workplace readiness. The exceptionally high correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.972$ ) suggests that vocabulary mastery may be an especially influential factor for vocational students who rely heavily on functional language use in service interactions. This finding strengthens the argument that vocabulary development should be prioritized not only for academic achievement but also for professional communication competence.

The results also highlight that vocabulary mastery does not merely support speaking accuracy but directly affects automaticity and fluency. Students who possess sufficient lexical resources can focus more on meaning and interaction rather than searching for words, enabling smoother and more natural communication. This reinforces theoretical perspectives that emphasize vocabulary as a foundation for spoken language processing and fluency development. Despite these contributions, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and drawn from a single vocational school, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other institutions or study programs. Second, the study employed a correlational design, which identifies relationships but does not establish causal effects. Other variables such as motivation, exposure to English outside the classroom, learning strategies, and confidence were not examined and may also influence speaking fluency. Third, speaking performance was measured through a single task, which may not fully capture students' communicative competence in diverse real-life situations.

The findings offer important implications for English teaching in vocational education. Teachers are encouraged to integrate systematic vocabulary development into speaking activities rather than treating vocabulary and speaking as separate skills. Classroom practices such as contextual vocabulary instruction, role-based simulations, and repeated oral practice can help students build automatic word retrieval and fluency. Curriculum designers may also consider incorporating more vocationally relevant vocabulary into instructional materials to strengthen students' readiness for workplace communication. For students, increasing

vocabulary exposure through active use, reading, listening, and practice can support greater confidence and fluency in spoken English. This study provides empirical evidence that vocabulary mastery is a strong predictor of speaking fluency among vocational hospitality students, highlighting the need for instructional approaches that prioritize meaningful vocabulary development within communicative learning contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes based on the results of data analysis and discussion addressing the relationship between students' vocabulary mastery and English speaking fluency among eleventh-grade Hospitality students at SMKN 1 Tenggarong. The Pearson Product–Moment Correlation analysis revealed a very strong and statistically significant positive relationship between vocabulary mastery and speaking fluency ( $r = 0.972$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This result indicates that students who demonstrated higher levels of vocabulary mastery tended to achieve better speaking fluency, while students with lower vocabulary mastery showed lower fluency levels. The descriptive analysis further showed that students achieved moderate mean scores in both vocabulary mastery (71.88) and speaking fluency (17.56), with noticeable variation among individuals. Normality testing confirmed that the data met the assumptions for parametric analysis. These findings suggest that vocabulary mastery plays an essential role in facilitating fluent spoken communication, particularly in supporting smoother speech flow, reduced hesitation, and clearer expression of ideas. Strong vocabulary knowledge enables students to retrieve words more efficiently and maintain continuity in speech, which contributes to higher fluency and confidence during oral communication. Vocabulary mastery is a key factor influencing students' speaking fluency. Strengthening students' vocabulary knowledge is therefore highly recommended, especially for vocational high school students in the Hospitality Department, where effective oral communication is necessary for academic success and future professional performance.

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