

Speaking Performance and Obstacles Encountered by University-Level English Major Students

Engelina Salainti

engelina@unklab.ac.id

Alfrits Roul Sinadia

alfritssinadia@unklab.ac.id

Universitas Klabat

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the speaking difficulties experienced by English major students, addressing the limited qualitative insights into how these learners perceive and manage such challenges in real communicative contexts. Employing a qualitative case study approach, data were collected from four university students through semi-structured interviews, recorded as mobile voice notes and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. The findings reveal that linguistic obstacles, particularly difficulties in vocabulary retrieval and grammatical construction, contribute to frequent use of fillers such as “ee” and “hmmm,” indicating processing challenges during speech production. In addition, psychological factors, especially anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, significantly hinder students’ speaking performance by increasing their affective filter. Environmental factors, including an overemphasis on theoretical instruction, further limit opportunities for meaningful speaking practice. Despite these challenges, students demonstrate strategic competence by employing paraphrasing, simple expressions, and non-verbal cues to maintain communication. These findings suggest that effective language instruction should balance linguistic development with psychological support and provide more opportunities for communicative practice in supportive learning environments.

Keywords: Speaking Performance, Obstacle Encountered, English Major Students.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking is widely regarded as one of the most essential yet challenging skills to develop. For university students majoring in English, the ability to communicate ideas clearly and accurately in spoken form is not only an academic requirement but also a crucial professional competence. However, despite years of formal instruction and exposure to English, many students still encounter difficulties in expressing themselves fluently and confidently in real-life communication (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Tuan & Mai, 2015).

In many Indonesian universities, there remains a noticeable gap between students' theoretical knowledge of English and their actual speaking performance. While students may demonstrate adequate understanding of grammar and vocabulary in written contexts, they often struggle to apply this knowledge spontaneously during oral communication. This issue indicates that speaking performance is influenced by more than linguistic knowledge alone; it involves a complex interaction of linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors (Hamad & Seyyedi, 2020; Jaya et al., 2022).

From a linguistic perspective, students frequently experience difficulties in selecting appropriate vocabulary and constructing grammatically accurate sentences in real time. These challenges are often intensified by first language (L1) interference, where differences between Indonesian and English structures create cognitive constraints, leading to hesitation, pauses, and reduced fluency. As a result, students may rely on fillers or avoid speaking altogether when they are uncertain about their language use (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Huynh, 2025). In addition to linguistic challenges, psychological factors play a significant role in shaping students' speaking performance. Many English major students experience anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and concern about negative evaluation from peers and instructors. This condition, often described as an increased affective filter, can block the retrieval of linguistic knowledge and reduce students' willingness to communicate, even when they possess sufficient language competence (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2016; Zhang, 2019).

Environmental and instructional factors further contribute to these difficulties. In some cases, classroom practices emphasize theoretical understanding and grammatical accuracy rather than communicative use of language. Limited opportunities for authentic speaking practice and a lack of supportive classroom interaction may lead students to become passive learners. Consequently, students have fewer chances to develop confidence and adaptability in real communicative situations (Ahmad, 2024; Afshar & Asakereh, 2016).

Although previous studies have identified various factors affecting students' speaking ability, many of them rely heavily on quantitative approaches or focus on error analysis. There is still a need for in-depth qualitative exploration that captures students' personal experiences and perspectives regarding their speaking difficulties. Understanding how students perceive and navigate these challenges is essential for developing more effective and responsive teaching strategies (Hamad & Seyyedi, 2020; Jaya et al., 2022). Therefore, this study aims to explore the speaking performance and obstacles experienced by university English major students. By focusing on students' lived experiences, this research seeks to provide deeper insights into the interplay of linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors and to contribute to the development of more supportive and communicative learning environments in higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous Related Studies

A study by (Jaya et al., 2022) Researchers in South Sumatra examined the speaking abilities and challenges encountered by students studying English education. Their findings revealed that a significant number of students, over half (58%), found speaking challenging. The study pinpointed three primary problem areas: psychological issues (self-doubt and anxiety), social factors (limited chances to practice), and linguistic hurdles (grammar, vocabulary, and fluency). The researchers also discovered that these problems stemmed from various causes, including a fear of errors, a lack of motivation, and insufficient practice. The study's statistical analysis, using the Chi-Square method, clearly showed a strong and significant connection between the identified obstacles and their causes. This means that students' difficulties in speaking are directly linked to their learning habits and mental state.

A research project by (AHMAD, 2024) in Bangladesh examined the speaking challenges encountered by undergraduate English majors at both public and private universities. Employing a mixed-methods strategy, the study involved 88 students and 4 teachers. The results indicated that a substantial number of students struggle considerably with English communication. Notably, the research uncovered a slight edge in speaking proficiency among public university students, who faced fewer hurdles compared to their private university counterparts. Furthermore, the study highlighted the significant impact of the curriculum, teaching methods, and the specific school environment on students' speaking abilities. The study's final recommendation suggested that educational institutions and teachers should change their teaching methods and course materials to better help students overcome their speaking difficulties.

A study conducted by (Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2014) in Jordan investigated the speaking difficulties faced by English literature undergraduates across six public universities. By surveying 566 students and interviewing 64 participants, the researchers found that students generally had a "low" speaking proficiency level. The study revealed that this failure was caused by several institutional factors, such as large class sizes, a lack of time for speaking practice, and the frequent use of the students' native language (L1) instead of English. Furthermore, the study's findings highlighted that university courses often neglect teaching speaking skills, focusing more on other academic subjects. This research emphasizes that the lack of proper instruction and the classroom environment are significant reasons why English majors struggle with effective communication.

A research project by (Huynh, 2025) at the University of Phan Thiet examined the speaking difficulties encountered by eighty second-year English majors. Employing a quantitative method via questionnaires, the researchers discovered that students grappled with both linguistic and psychological obstacles. Linguistically, the

students experienced challenges with vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Their progress was hindered by a lack of self-confidence and increased anxiety. To address these challenges, the study suggests that teachers include more interactive and communicative activities in their teaching. This approach would give students more chances to practice speaking in a supportive environment.

A study in Iran by (Afshar & Asakereh, 2016) investigated issues related to speaking skills. It compared the views of 238 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, including both first-year and final-year students, with those of 30 English instructors. Through the application of questionnaires and interviews, the researchers identified social influences, instructor-related challenges, insufficient teaching resources, and the national curriculum as the primary contributors to difficulties in speaking. The study's findings indicated no statistically significant difference in the perceptions of first-year and fourth-year students, implying that both groups experienced similar obstacles. Conversely, the data revealed that a fear of making mistakes was a primary concern for all participants. Furthermore, the research indicated that students and instructors generally agreed on the challenges they faced. This supports the idea that environmental and psychological factors are common difficulties in English language programs.

A study at Syiah Kuala University by (Heriansyah, 2012) investigated the speaking difficulties of English Department students, looking at the causes and the strategies they used to overcome them. The researcher used observations and interviews to gather information. The results showed that all the students faced various challenges when speaking English. A deficiency in vocabulary emerged as the most prevalent linguistic impediment. The primary psychological determinant influencing their performance was the apprehension of committing errors. Despite students' attempts to enhance their proficiency and mitigate these challenges through various strategies, the research ultimately determined that these endeavors were insufficient to completely resolve their speaking difficulties.

A quantitative investigation conducted at Soran University examined by (Hamad & Seyyedi, 2020) the underlying causes of speaking difficulties among 121 undergraduate English students. Through the administration of a comprehensive questionnaire, the researchers classified the identified speaking challenges into three principal categories: linguistic, psychological (affective), and sociocultural influences. The results indicated that linguistic factors constituted the predominant source of difficulty for the students, with psychological factors, including anxiety and diminished self-assurance, following closely. Furthermore, sociocultural factors were also found to impede their oral communication abilities. Consequently, the study concludes that students encounter a multifaceted array of challenges; however, their struggle with the language itself (linguistic) persists as the most substantial obstacle to achieving fluent speech.

A study by (Kaprawi, 2017) in Batam investigated the speaking obstacles faced by teachers who did not major in English but were required to use the language in a

school setting. Using a naturalistic-qualitative method and one-on-one interviews, the researcher identified 27 categories of internal and external obstacles. Internal barriers included poor grammar mastery, fear, and limited speaking skills (affective and cognitive domains). Meanwhile, external obstacles involved a lack of facilities, insufficient materials, and limited time. The study concluded that these obstacles led to low participation in daily English communication, which directly impacted the English competency of their students. This research emphasizes that speaking struggles are not only faced by students but also by educators who lack a professional English background.

Framework of Speaking Performance and Obstacles

The two central variables in this study are speaking performance and obstacles. Speaking performance refers to the students' ability to communicate orally in English, focusing on fluency and accuracy. Meanwhile, obstacles represent the multifaceted challenges linguistic, psychological, and environmental that hinder the students from performing optimally during verbal communication.

Communicative Competence in Speaking Performance

In the model put forth by (Canale, 1987), speaking ability reflects communicative competence, which extends beyond simple grammatical understanding. They posit that language proficiency necessitates the integration of four key sub-competencies: grammatical competence (the command of vocabulary and rules), sociolinguistic competence (the appropriateness of language use in social situations), discourse competence (the cohesion and coherence of communication), and strategic competence. The latter is especially important in speaking, as it encompasses the employment of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies such as rephrasing, the use of fillers like "hmmm/ee," or the incorporation of hand gestures to mitigate communication breakdowns stemming from performance variables or inadequate competence. Consequently, a student's speaking performance is assessed not only on its accuracy but also on their capacity to address linguistic gaps and sustain the flow of interaction through these strategic mechanisms.

Canale and Swain's model of 'communicative competence' consists of three domains of knowledge and skills. They are 'grammatical competence', 'sociolinguistic competence', and (Azizah, 2023) 'strategic competence'. Grammatical competence refers to accurate knowledge of sentence formation and vocabulary. Sociolinguistics competence refers to the language user's ability to produce and understand language in different social contexts. Strategic competence refers to the ability to use language to achieve communicative goals and enhance the effectiveness of communication (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Dimensions of Speaking Obstacles in EFL Contexts

Speaking obstacles stem from problems that make someone lack speaking capability. (Azizah, 2023). Speaking difficulties aren't just passive obstacles. They actively hinder a learner's ability to speak well, arising from a combination of cognitive, psychological, and behavioral factors. From a linguistic perspective, a limited understanding of grammar and vocabulary increases cognitive demands. This forces the brain to focus too much on mental translation, which can obscure the main point of the message and, as a result, hinder fluency. These psychological barriers are expressed through an increased Affective Filter. Specifically, anxiety and the fear of negative evaluation from peers or instructors act as a cognitive hindrance, thereby preventing the conversion of learned information into verbal communication.

METHOD

Design and Samples

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design with a case study approach to explore in depth the speaking performance and challenges encountered by English major students. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate for examining the complexity of participants' experiences and for understanding the underlying linguistic and psychological factors influencing their speaking performance in authentic academic contexts (Creswell, 2014). The participants consisted of four university students majoring in English Education. They were selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: (1) they were active English major students, (2) they had completed introductory speaking courses, and (3) they demonstrated varying levels of speaking ability. Although the sample size was limited, it is consistent with qualitative case study research, which prioritizes depth of analysis over generalization. The small number of participants allowed for an intensive and detailed exploration of individual experiences, thereby enhancing the richness and credibility of the findings.

Instruments and Procedures

In qualitative research, the researcher functions as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. This study utilized a semi-structured interview guide to explore students' speaking performance and the obstacles they encountered. The semi-structured format enabled flexibility, allowing the researcher to adjust questions and probe further based on participants' responses. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, which were recorded using mobile voice notes to ensure accuracy. The recordings were subsequently transcribed verbatim. In addition, field notes were taken during the interviews to document non-verbal cues, contextual conditions, and other relevant observations. These combined procedures facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of both verbal and non-

verbal aspects of students' speaking difficulties and strengthened the trustworthiness of the data.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using an inductive descriptive qualitative approach, allowing themes and patterns to emerge from the participants' narratives without the imposition of predetermined categories. The initial stage involved verbatim transcription of the interview recordings, in which all utterances including pauses, repetitions, and fillers such as "um," "ee," and "hmmm" were systematically documented. This detailed transcription process was essential for preserving the authenticity of participants' speech and for identifying indicators of linguistic difficulty and psychological factors, such as hesitation and anxiety. Following transcription, the data were coded and categorized to identify recurring patterns related to linguistic obstacles, psychological barriers, and coping strategies. Through this process, the researcher developed a "thick description" of the participants' experiences. To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the researcher conducted careful and iterative examination of the data, ensuring that interpretations were grounded in the participants' actual responses. This systematic approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how English major students experience and manage speaking difficulties in real communicative contexts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The subsequent sections of this chapter will present the research outcomes and a comprehensive analysis of the observed results. Data collection involved conducting in-depth interviews with four English major students, with the aim of investigating their speaking performance and the particular challenges they encountered. To maintain the integrity of the findings, the presentation employs verbatim transcriptions, thereby preserving the participants' precise language, hesitations, and non-verbal cues. This methodology facilitates a "thick description" of the students' experiences, offering a nuanced understanding of their difficulties with spoken English within a university context. The following sections will first present the main themes found in the interviews. Then, a more detailed discussion will relate these findings to existing theories of how people learn language and communicate.

Questions	Student #1
<p>Self-Assessment</p> <p>“How do you feel when you have to speak English in front of the class or during a presentation? Which part do you find most difficult: pronunciation, fluency, or using correct grammar?”</p>	<p><i>“Saya biasanya merasa sedikit gugup jika berbicara di depan kelas, tetapi saya berusaha untuk tetap percaya diri, lalu bagian yang paling sulit bagi saya adalah fluency dan grammar, karena kadang saya eee merasa saya masih berpikir terlalu lama untuk Menyusun kalimat”</i></p>

	<p>“I usually feel a little nervous when speaking in front of the class, but I try to stay confident. The hardest part for me is fluency and grammar, because sometimes I feel like I’m still taking too long to form sentences.”</p>
<p><i>Linguistic Obstacles</i></p> <p>“Have you ever suddenly ‘stuck’ or stopped while speaking English? What usually causes this? Is it because you forgot the vocabulary, were confused about how to construct the sentence, or were unsure how to convey the idea in your head?”</p>	<p>“Eeeee saya pernah macet saat berbicara, biasanya karena saya lupa kosa kata atau eeee saya bingung untuk menyusun kalimat dengan benar makanya itu saya berhenti tidak lama untuk berpikir”</p> <p>“Eeeee, I’ve gotten stuck while speaking before—usually because I forget a word or eeee, I’m not sure how to put the sentence together correctly, so I pause for a moment to think.”</p>
<p><i>Psychological Barriers</i></p> <p>“To what extent does the fear of making mistakes or being judged by peers affect your courage to speak in class? Do you feel more nervous speaking in front of a professor compared to when you’re speaking casually with friends?”</p>	<p>“Rasa takut salah cukup mempengaruhi keberanian saya untuk berbicara saya juga merasa lebih gugup saat berbicara di depan dosen ketimbang di depan teman karena saya takut dinilai”</p> <p>“The fear of making a mistake really affects my confidence when speaking. I also feel more nervous speaking in front of my professors than in front of my friends because I’m afraid of being judged.”</p>
<p><i>Environmental Factors</i></p> <p>"In your opinion, do the campus atmosphere and the professor’s teaching style provide enough opportunities for you to practice speaking? Are there certain classroom atmospheres or teaching styles that actually make you reluctant or find it difficult to practice speaking?"</p>	<p>“Menurut saya suasana kelas cukup membantu tetapi lebih works kalo saya juga practice diluar kelas dengan teman-teman, lalu untuk cara mengajarsaya rasa cara mengajar eee yang terlalu focus ke teori kadang membuat saya kurang mempunyai kesempatan untuk latihan berbicara”</p> <p>“In my opinion, the classroom atmosphere is quite helpful, but it works better when I also practice outside of class with my friends. As for the teaching method, I feel that an approach</p>

	that focuses too much on theory sometimes leaves me with fewer opportunities to practice speaking.”
<p>Coping Strategies</p> <p>“If you’re having trouble speaking or forget your words in the middle of a presentation, what do you usually do to keep going? Do you use hand gestures, use simple words, or use ‘hmm/ee’ to bridge the gap in your sentences?”</p>	<p>“emmm saat kesulitan saya biasanya menggunakan eee kata-kata sederhana, juga mengulang kalimat dengan cara lain atau memakai seperti yang tadi eeee gitu supaya saya ada waktu untuk berpikir agar saya tetap bisa melanjutkan apa yang mau saya katakana”</p> <p>“Um, when I’m having trouble, I usually use, um, simple words, or I rephrase the sentence differently, or I do what I did just now—you know, like that—so I have time to think and can keep going with what I want to say.”</p>

The interview results from Student #1 reveal that while they possess the confidence to speak, their performance is significantly hindered by a combination of linguistic and psychological obstacles. The student exhibits difficulties in real-time grammatical construction and vocabulary retrieval, as demonstrated by the frequent employment of fillers such as "eeee" and extended pauses during sentence formation. Psychologically, the "Affective Filter" of these students is notably heightened in formal settings, a response to the anxiety associated with academic assessment, which is in stark contrast to their comfort level in informal exchanges with peers. Furthermore, the student believes that an overemphasis on theoretical frameworks within the classroom limits their chances for practical speaking exercises; nonetheless, they demonstrate considerable strategic competence, utilizing coping mechanisms such as paraphrasing and vocabulary simplification to maintain communicative fluency despite these challenges.

Questions	Student #2
<p>Self-Assessment</p> <p>“How do you feel when you have to speak English in front of the class or during a presentation? Which part do you find most difficult: pronunciation, fluency, or using correct grammar?”</p>	<p>“Saya merasa cukup gugup saat harus berbicara Bahasa Inggris didepan kelas, apalagi saat presentasi biasanya saya takut salah dan takut eeeee teman-teman tertawakan saya. Jadi menurut saya bagian yang paling sulit adalah eeemmmm fluency dan grammar; saya sering tau apa yang akan saya sampaikan, ide-ide yang ingin saya katakana tapi sulit untuk menyusunnya dengan cepat dan benar”</p>

	<p>“I get pretty nervous when I have to speak English in front of the class, especially during presentations—I’m usually afraid of making mistakes and worried that my classmates will laugh at me. So, in my opinion, the hardest parts are, um, fluency and grammar. I often know what I want to say and the ideas I want to convey, but it’s hard to put them together quickly and correctly.”</p>
<p><i>Linguistic Obstacles</i></p> <p>“Have you ever suddenly ‘stuck’ or stopped while speaking English? What usually causes this? Is it because you forgot the vocabulary, were confused about how to construct the sentence, or were unsure how to convey the idea in your head?”</p>	<p><i>“Dan ya saya sering mengalami macet saat berbicara Bahasa Inggris, biasanya hal itu terjadi karena eee saya lupa vocabulary yang ingin saya gunakan, jadi selain itu ehm saya juga bingung kadang menyusun kalimat dengan benar jadi saya sering berhenti sejenak atau ada terjadi jeda baru setelah saya ingat saya merasa itu sudah pas sesuai grammar dan lain-lain ya baru saya melanjutkannya”</i></p> <p>“And yes, I often get stuck when speaking English. Usually, that happens because, um, I forget the vocabulary I want to use. Also, sometimes I have trouble constructing sentences correctly, so I often pause for a moment or there’s a brief pause until I remember the right way to say it—once I feel it’s grammatically correct and so on—and then I continue.”</p>
<p><i>Psychological Barriers</i></p> <p>“To what extent does the fear of making mistakes or being judged by peers affect your courage to speak in class? Do you feel more nervous speaking in front of a professor compared to when you’re speaking casually with friends?”</p>	<p><i>“Nah eeeeh rasa takut ada, rasa takut salah itu sangat mempengaruhi bagi saya, karena saya sering ragu untuk berbicara takut dinilai eee orang kurang baik dan saya juga merasa lebih gugup saat berbicara dengan dosen dibanding dengan teman-teman karena saya rasa kalau berbicara dengan teman mereka pasti memaklumi kalau misalnya ada kesalahan grammar sedikit jadi ehm karena saya merasa dosen akan lebih memperhatikan eee kesalahan dalam grammar saya”.</i></p>

	<p>“Well, I do feel afraid—the fear of making mistakes really affects me. I often hesitate to speak because I’m afraid people will think I’m not very good, and I also feel more nervous when talking to professors than to my friends because I feel that if I make a small grammar mistake, my friends will understand, but I feel like professors will pay more attention to my grammar mistakes.”</p>
<p><i>Environmental Factors</i></p> <p>"In your opinion, do the campus atmosphere and the professor’s teaching style provide enough opportunities for you to practice speaking? Are there certain classroom atmospheres or teaching styles that actually make you reluctant or find it difficult to practice speaking?"</p>	<p><i>“Dan menurut saya eee dosen sudah memberikan kesempatan untuk berbicara tetapi kadang suasana kelas kurang mendukung karena tidak semua itu mahasiswa aktif selain itu eehm kalau ada metode pengajaran terlalu focus pada teori-teori jadi saya juga kurang mempunyai kesempatan untuk latihan berbicara eee secara langsung”</i></p> <p>“And in my opinion, the professor has given us opportunities to speak, but sometimes the classroom atmosphere isn’t very conducive because not all the students are active participants. Also, if the teaching methods focus too much on theory, I don’t really get the chance to practice speaking directly.”</p>
<p><i>Coping Strategies</i></p> <p>“If you’re having trouble speaking or forget your words in the middle of a presentation, what do you usually do to keep going? Do you use hand gestures, use simple words, or use ‘hmm/ee’ to bridge the gap in your sentences?”</p>	<p><i>“Dan eee saat saya lupa kata-kata di Tengah berbicara juga, saya biasanya mencoba menggunakan kata-kata yang lebih sederhana atau menyebutnya dengan cara yang lain, saya juga kalau terjeda sering menggunakan kata yang hmmm atau ee paling banyak saya gunakan kata yang hmm untuk memberi waktu saya untuk berpikir dan selain itu saya juga menggunakan gesture untuk menjelaskan eeee maksud apa yang saya maksud”</i></p> <p>“And, um, when I forget my words in the middle of speaking, I usually try to use simpler words or put it another way. Also,</p>

	when I pause, I often use words like ‘hmmmm’ or ‘ee’—I use ‘hmm’ the most to give myself time to think. Besides that, I also use gestures to explain, um, what I mean.”
--	---

The interview with Student #2 reveals that their speaking performance is heavily dictated by a high level of social anxiety and a "perfectionist" approach to language production. Conversely, this student exhibited a significant fear of peer mockery, which led to both hesitation and careful grammatical consideration before speaking. This self-regulation frequently appeared as verbal hesitations, with cognitive aids such as "hmmmm" and "ee" utilized to assist in constructing sentences. Student #2, while acknowledging the speaking opportunities provided by instructors, identifies the restricted active participation from fellow students and the emphasis on theoretical material as obstacles to practical application. To address these difficulties, the student uses a combination of strategic methods, such as paraphrasing and simpler language, along with non-verbal cues like hand gestures, to help others understand their intended meaning, despite language limitations.

Questions	Student #3
<p><i>Self-Assessment</i></p> <p>“How do you feel when you have to speak English in front of the class or during a presentation? Which part do you find most difficult: pronunciation, fluency, or using correct grammar?”</p>	<p>“<i>Jadi pada saat bicara Bahasa Inggris didepan kelas atau presentasi tentunya saya merasa gugup dan menurut saya bagian yang paling sulit adalah kelancaran berbicara dan menyusun tata Bahasa yang benar</i>”</p> <p>“So when I speak English in front of the class or give a presentation, I naturally feel nervous, and I think the hardest part is speaking fluently and using correct grammar.”</p>
<p><i>Linguistic Obstacles</i></p> <p>“Have you ever suddenly ‘stuck’ or stopped while speaking English? What usually causes this? Is it because you forgot the vocabulary, were confused about how to construct the sentence, or were unsure how to convey the idea in your head?”</p>	<p>“<i>Ya pernah penyebabnya adalah saya lupa kosa katanya dan bingung bagaimana menyampaikan ide saya</i>”</p> <p>“Yes, it happened—the reason was that I forgot the words and didn’t know how to express my idea.”</p>
<p><i>Psychological Barriers</i></p>	<p>“<i>Jadi jawabannya cukup besar rasa takut itu, dan yah saya merasa</i></p>

<p>“To what extent does the fear of making mistakes or being judged by peers affect your courage to speak in class? Do you feel more nervous speaking in front of a professor compared to when you’re speaking casually with friends?”</p>	<p><i>gugup bicara di depan dosen tapi dengan teman juga seringkali merasa gugup, merasa malu takut untuk membuat kesalahan”</i></p> <p>“So the answer is that fear is pretty big, and, well, I feel nervous speaking in front of professors, but I also often feel nervous around my friends—I feel shy and afraid of making mistakes.”</p>
<p><i>Environmental Factors</i></p> <p>"In your opinion, do the campus atmosphere and the professor’s teaching style provide enough opportunities for you to practice speaking? Are there certain classroom atmospheres or teaching styles that actually make you reluctant or find it difficult to practice speaking?"</p>	<p><i>“Iya, suasana kampus saya dan cara dosen mengajar sudah memberi cukup kesempatan untuk latihan berbahasa Inggris”</i></p> <p><i>“Tidak ada”</i></p> <p>“Yes, the atmosphere on my campus and the way my professors teach have given me plenty of opportunities to practice English.”</p> <p>“None”</p>
<p><i>Coping Strategies</i></p> <p>“If you’re having trouble speaking or forget your words in the middle of a presentation, what do you usually do to keep going? Do you use hand gestures, use simple words, or use ‘hmm/ee’ to bridge the gap in your sentences?”</p>	<p><i>“Saya memakai Gerakan tangan, menggunakan kata-kata sederhana dan seringkali memakai kata hmmm atau eeee untuk menyambung kalimat”</i></p> <p>“I use hand gestures, simple words, and often use ‘hmmm’ or ‘eeee’ to fill in the gaps in my sentences”</p>

The observations concerning Student #3 reveal that, despite the student's perception of a highly supportive campus environment and teaching methodologies that offer ample practice opportunities, they encounter considerable internal obstacles. Linguistically, the student experiences frequent communication breakdowns stemming from a combination of vocabulary deficits and challenges in articulating intricate concepts. This is further complicated by a pervasive "fear of making mistakes," which manifests not only in interactions with instructors but also among fellow students, resulting in feelings of shyness and persistent nervousness. Notwithstanding these psychological impediments, Student #3 exhibits active strategic competence by employing diverse coping strategies, including the

utilization of hand gestures, language simplification, and the incorporation of fillers such as "hmmm" and "eeee" to mitigate speech interruptions and sustain communication.

Questions	Student #4
<p><i>Self-Assessment</i></p> <p>“How do you feel when you have to speak English in front of the class or during a presentation? Which part do you find most difficult: pronunciation, fluency, or using correct grammar?”</p>	<p><i>“Karena mungkin kepada say itu sudah pressure sehingga tidak bisa mimikirkan grammar apa yang lebih bagus untuk digunakan atau grammar mana eee yang lebih membuat komunikasi itu menjadi lancar ketika ehmmm berbicara didepan kelas karena kemungkinan besar jika saya menggunakan grammar yang salah eeee orang yang mendengarnya pun akan kesulitan untuk memahami”</i></p> <p>“Because I’m probably feeling so much pressure that I can’t think about which grammar is better to use or which grammar, um, makes communication flow more smoothly when, um, speaking in front of the class—because if I use the wrong grammar, um, the people listening will probably have a hard time understanding.”</p>
<p><i>Linguistic Obstacles</i></p> <p>“Have you ever suddenly ‘stuck’ or stopped while speaking English? What usually causes this? Is it because you forgot the vocabulary, were confused about how to construct the sentence, or were unsure how to convey the idea in your head?”</p>	<p><i>“Ehm macet atau berhenti saat bicara Bahasa Inggris karena dua lupa kosakata dan bingung menyampaikan ide, terkadang ketika saya ingin menyampaikan ehm eee ide terkadang kosa kata yang ingin saya sampaikan itu saya lupa atau terkadang membingungkan untuk disampaikan ke dalam Bahasa Inggris apalagi dari Bahasa Indonesia ke Bahasa Inggris sehingga mungkin itu membuat saya macet untuk memikirkan apa ide yang, ide apa yang sedang saya sampaikan atau kosakata apa yang harus digunakan”</i></p> <p>“I get stuck or pause when speaking English because I forget vocabulary words and struggle to express my ideas. Sometimes, when I want to convey an idea—‘um,’ ‘uh’—I forget the exact word</p>

	<p>I'm trying to use, or it's confusing to put it into English, especially when translating from Indonesian to English. That might be why I get stuck trying to figure out what idea I'm trying to convey or what vocabulary to use."</p>
<p><i>Psychological Barriers</i></p> <p>"To what extent does the fear of making mistakes or being judged by peers affect your courage to speak in class? Do you feel more nervous speaking in front of a professor compared to when you're speaking casually with friends?"</p>	<p><i>"Menurut saya sangat besara rasa takut, atau takkut dinilai teman itu yah sangat besar untuk berbicara di depan kelas dan saya lebih gugup bercerita dengan teman sendiri daripada dibandingkan dosen karena mungkin dosen lebih memaklumi dibandingkan dengan teman yang mungkin akan menjudge mental atau menilai"</i></p> <p>"In my opinion, the fear—or the fear of being judged by friends—is really intense when it comes to speaking in front of the class, and I'm actually more nervous talking to my friends than to a professor, because professors are probably more understanding than friends, who might judge me or criticize me."</p>
<p><i>Environmental Factors</i></p> <p>"In your opinion, do the campus atmosphere and the professor's teaching style provide enough opportunities for you to practice speaking? Are there certain classroom atmospheres or teaching styles that actually make you reluctant or find it difficult to practice speaking?"</p>	<p><i>"Suasana di kampus sudah sangat cukup memberi saya kesempatan untuk latihan bicara namun suasana kelas dan pun cara mengajar terkadang ada yang membuat saya malas dan sangat susah untuk latihan bicara"</i></p> <p>"The atmosphere on campus has given me plenty of opportunities to practice speaking, but the classroom environment and teaching methods sometimes make me feel unmotivated and make it very difficult to practice speaking."</p>
<p><i>Coping Strategies</i></p> <p>"If you're having trouble speaking or forget your words in the middle of a presentation, what do you usually do to keep going? Do you use hand gestures, use simple</p>	<p><i>"Yang pertama ketika kesulitan bicara saya menggunakan Gerakan tangan bisa, terkadang saya menggunakan Gerakan tangan untuk memberi pengertian sedikit akan apa yang saya ingin katakan dan juga saya memberikan kata 'hmmm' atau 'emm' untuk memikirkan eeee kata berikut. Ada</i></p>

<p>words, or use ‘hmm/ee’ to bridge the gap in your sentences?”</p>	<p><i>juga terkadang saya membuat translate ke Bahasa Indonesia sedikit namun ketika saya melanjutkan lagi dan telah terpikirkan kata Bahasa Inggrisnya maka saya akan gunakan Bahasa Inggris itu dan menjelaskannya kembali ke dalam Bahasa Inggris.”</i></p> <p>“First, when I have trouble speaking, I use hand gestures. Sometimes I use hand gestures to give a little context for what I want to say, and I also use words like ‘hmmm’ or ‘umm’ to think of the next word. Sometimes I’ll translate it into Indonesian a bit, but once I continue speaking and the English word comes to mind, I’ll use that English word and explain it again in English.”</p>
---	---

Student #4's experiences reveal a notable difficulty with internalized pressure and translation-related challenges. In contrast to the other participants, this student exhibits heightened anxiety when addressing peers, viewing friends as more critical and professors as more empathetic. From a linguistic perspective, the student's principal impediment is the cognitive load of real-time translation from Indonesian to English, which results in frequent pauses and a significant reliance on fillers such as "hmmm" and "umm." Although they perceive the overall campus environment as supportive, they observed that certain classroom dynamics and pedagogical approaches can occasionally diminish their motivation to engage in practice. To navigate these difficulties, Student #4 employs a distinctive array of strategies, including the utilization of hand gestures for contextual clarity and a "code-switching" technique, wherein they briefly employ Indonesian to facilitate comprehension before resuming English once the appropriate vocabulary is retrieved.

This study reveals that English major students experience speaking difficulties arising from an interaction of linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors. These findings reinforce the view that speaking performance is not solely determined by language knowledge but also shaped by affective and contextual influences (Hamad & Seyyedi, 2020; Jaya et al., 2022). From a linguistic perspective, the participants consistently reported difficulties in vocabulary retrieval and grammatical construction during real-time communication. These challenges were evident in their frequent use of fillers such as “ee,” “hmmm,” and pauses, which functioned as cognitive strategies to manage processing demands. This finding aligns with Leong and Ahmadi (2017), who argue that limited vocabulary and grammatical control significantly hinder learners’ fluency.

Similarly, Huynh (2025) found that linguistic limitations often lead to hesitation and disrupted speech flow. In this study, such disruptions indicate that students possess partial linguistic competence but struggle with automaticity in language production, particularly under time pressure.

Psychological factors also emerged as a dominant influence on students' speaking performance. All participants expressed anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and concern about negative evaluation, either from peers or instructors. This supports Dewaele and MacIntyre (2016), who emphasize that foreign language anxiety can reduce learners' willingness to communicate and interfere with performance. The concept of the affective filter is clearly reflected in the findings, as students with higher anxiety levels demonstrated more hesitation and reduced fluency. Interestingly, the source of anxiety varied among participants: while some were more intimidated by lecturers, others felt greater pressure when speaking in front of peers. This suggests that social dynamics within the classroom play a crucial role in shaping students' confidence and participation.

In addition to linguistic and psychological challenges, environmental factors were found to influence speaking development. Although students acknowledged that opportunities for speaking practice were available, they also highlighted limitations related to classroom dynamics and teaching approaches. In particular, an overemphasis on theoretical instruction was perceived to reduce opportunities for active speaking practice. This finding is consistent with Ahmad (2024), who notes that curriculum design and teaching methods significantly impact students' communicative competence. Furthermore, the lack of active participation among classmates contributed to a less supportive learning environment, which may discourage students from engaging in speaking activities.

Despite these challenges, the participants demonstrated the use of various coping strategies to sustain communication. These included paraphrasing, using simpler vocabulary, employing fillers, utilizing hand gestures, and, in some cases, code-switching to their first language. These strategies reflect the concept of strategic competence proposed by Canale (1987), which emphasizes the ability to overcome communication breakdowns. The findings suggest that even when students face linguistic limitations, they actively attempt to maintain interaction, indicating a developing communicative competence. Another important insight from this study is the gap between students' theoretical knowledge and their practical speaking ability. While participants had learned grammatical rules and vocabulary in formal instruction, they found it difficult to apply this knowledge spontaneously in real communication. This supports previous findings (Jaya et al., 2022; Hamad & Seyyedi, 2020) that highlight the discrepancy between language knowledge and language use. The results indicate that speaking proficiency requires not only knowledge acquisition but also repeated exposure to meaningful communicative practice.

This study highlights that improving students' speaking performance requires a balanced approach that addresses linguistic competence, reduces psychological barriers, and enhances the learning environment. Language instruction should provide more opportunities for authentic communication, encourage active participation, and create a supportive atmosphere that minimizes fear of negative evaluation. By doing so, students may develop both confidence and competence in using English effectively.

CONCLUSIONS

This study ultimately shows that English majors face a complex set of linguistic, psychological, and contextual challenges that significantly hinder their ability to speak fluently. From a linguistic standpoint, the primary challenge stems from the prompt access of vocabulary and the cognitive load inherent in translating Indonesian concepts into English, which frequently leads to communication breakdowns and a substantial reliance on fillers like "eeee" or "hmmm" to facilitate cognitive processing. Psychologically, a significant "Affective Filter" is evident, as students experience considerable anxiety; this pressure originates from various sources, with some students voicing concerns about formal evaluations by instructors, while others are more intimidated by the prospect of being assessed by their peers.

Conversely, although the overall campus environment is viewed as encouraging, a pedagogical emphasis on theoretical understanding rather than practical communication frequently limits students' opportunities for active speaking practice. Despite these challenges, the students exhibit considerable strategic competence, utilizing diverse coping strategies including hand gestures, rephrasing, and limited code-switching to sustain conversational flow. Consequently, these observations imply that improving speaking proficiency necessitates not only linguistic assistance but also a classroom setting that mitigates social anxiety and emphasizes practical, communicative engagement.

REFERENCES

- Afshar, H. S., & Asakereh, A. (2016). Speaking skills problems encountered by Iranian EFL freshmen and seniors from their own and their English instructors' perspectives. *Electronic Journal of Foreign Language Teaching*, 13(1), 112–130.
- Ahmad, D. R. S. (2024). Investigating the problems faced by the university EFL learners in speaking English language. *International Journal of TESOL & Education*.
- Al-Jamal, D. A., & Al-Jamal, G. A. (2014). An investigation of the difficulties faced by EFL undergraduates in speaking skills. *English Language Teaching*, 7(1), 19–27. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v7n1p19>

- Azizah, M. S. (2023). Investigating students' obstacles in English learning on speaking skill at MTs Miftahul Ulum Gondanglegi. *Journal of English Language and Pedagogy*, 2(2), 54–65.
- Canale, M. (1987). The measurement of communicative competence. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 8, 67–84. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190500003140>
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1–47. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/I.1.1>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Dewaele, J. M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2016). Foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, 6(1), 153–178. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2016.6.1.7>
- Hamad, K. Q., & Seyyedi, K. (2020). Communication challenges facing Soran University students in speaking English as a foreign language. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, 3(8), 40–53.
- Heriansyah, H. (2012). Speaking problems faced by the English department students of Syiah Kuala University. *Lingua Didaktika*, 6(1), 37–44.
- Huynh, T. N. N. (2025). Difficulties in speaking English of second-year English major students at University of Phan Thiet. *University of Phan Thiet Journal of Science*, 3(1), 60–76.
- Jaya, H. P., Petrus, I., & Pitaloka, N. L. (2022). Speaking performance and problems faced by English major students at a university in South Sumatera. *Indonesian EFL Journal*, 8(1), 105–112. <https://doi.org/10.25134/ieflj.v8i1.5601>
- Kaprawi, N. (2017). Obstacles facing learners in speaking English: Non-English teacher's perspective, Putra Batam School. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities*, 25(S), 119–130.
- Leong, L. M., & Ahmadi, S. M. (2017). An analysis of factors influencing learners' English speaking skill. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, 2(1), 34–41.
- Tuan, N. H., & Mai, T. N. (2015). Factors affecting students' speaking performance at Le Thanh Hien High School. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2), 8–23.
- Zhang, X. (2019). Foreign language anxiety and speaking performance: A study among university students. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 9(2), 93–100. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v9n2p93>