

## Speaking Anxiety and Linguistic Hurdles: A Mixed-Methods Study of EFL Student-Teachers in Indonesia

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**Abstract**

Speaking skills hold a central position in English language acquisition, particularly for students enrolled in English Education programs who are being prepared to serve as prospective teachers. Despite its importance, a considerable number of learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) still encounter persistent obstacles in developing effective speaking abilities. This research seeks to identify and examine the speaking-related difficulties experienced by fourth-semester students of class 4.A1 in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. Employing a mixed-methods research design, data were obtained through online interviews administered via Google Forms and supported by classroom observation. The results indicate that students frequently struggle with issues such as hesitation during speech, insufficient vocabulary mastery, grammatical inaccuracies, pronunciation difficulties, and a lack of self-confidence. These challenges stem not only from linguistic shortcomings but also from psychological factors, including anxiety and fear of making errors while speaking. The findings underline the urgency of implementing comprehensive instructional strategies that simultaneously foster linguistic development and address affective aspects by creating a supportive learning atmosphere and increasing opportunities for oral practice. The originality of this study is reflected in its mixed-methods approach, which focuses on the interaction between linguistic competence and psychological constraints among Indonesian EFL pre-service teachers. Overall, this study offers meaningful contributions to understanding EFL speaking challenges and emphasizes the necessity of integrating language instruction with emotional support, with significant implications for curriculum design and teacher education in the Indonesian context.

**Keywords:** EFL Learners, Speaking Difficulties, Language Anxiety, Confidence, English Education.

**Abstrak**

Keterampilan berbicara memiliki peran yang sangat penting dalam pemerolehan bahasa Inggris, khususnya bagi mahasiswa program Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris yang dipersiapkan sebagai calon pendidik. Meskipun demikian, banyak pembelajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) masih menghadapi berbagai hambatan dalam mengembangkan kemampuan berbicara secara efektif. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengidentifikasi dan menganalisis kesulitan berbicara yang dialami oleh mahasiswa semester empat kelas 4.A1 Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan mixed-method dengan pengumpulan data melalui wawancara daring menggunakan Google Form serta observasi kelas. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa kerap mengalami kesulitan berupa keraguan saat berbicara, keterbatasan penguasaan kosakata, kesalahan tata bahasa, masalah pengucapan, serta rendahnya tingkat kepercayaan diri. Kesulitan tersebut tidak hanya dipengaruhi oleh keterbatasan linguistik, tetapi juga oleh faktor psikologis, seperti kecemasan dan rasa takut melakukan kesalahan. Temuan penelitian ini menegaskan pentingnya penerapan strategi pembelajaran yang komprehensif, yang tidak hanya berfokus pada pengembangan kemampuan linguistik, tetapi juga memperhatikan aspek afektif melalui penciptaan lingkungan belajar yang suportif serta penyediaan kesempatan berbicara yang lebih intensif. Kebaruan penelitian ini terletak pada penggunaan pendekatan mixed-method yang menyoroti keterkaitan antara

kompetensi linguistik dan hambatan psikologis pada mahasiswa calon guru EFL di konteks Indonesia. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi penting dalam memahami tantangan berbicara pembelajar EFL dan menekankan perlunya integrasi pengajaran bahasa dengan dukungan emosional, yang memiliki implikasi langsung terhadap pengembangan kurikulum dan pelatihan guru bahasa Inggris di Indonesia.

**Kata kunci:** Pembelajar EFL, Kesulitan Berbicara, Kecemasan Berbahasa, Kepercayaan Diri, Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris.

## INTRODUCTION

Speaking constitutes a core component of language learning as it functions as a primary medium for communication, personal expression, and social engagement. Within the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the development of speaking proficiency remains a demanding task for learners due to the interaction of linguistic, psychological, and contextual influences (Arjulayana et al., 2022). In the current globalized landscape, English has assumed a central role as an international lingua franca across academic, professional, and cross-cultural settings. Consequently, for students enrolled in English Education programs, speaking proficiency extends beyond fulfilling academic objectives and becomes a crucial professional competence that shapes their future effectiveness as educators (Dewi, 2018). Nevertheless, numerous studies have reported a noticeable disparity between curricular targets and students' actual speaking performance, even among those majoring in English education (Abrar et al., 2018). Initial observations conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang (UMT) corroborate these findings, revealing that many fourth-semester pre-service teachers continue to encounter difficulties in oral communication despite having completed several speaking-oriented courses.

Previous scholarly work has extensively explored the nature of speaking difficulties faced by EFL learners and has consistently identified two principal categories of challenges: linguistic and psychological. From a linguistic perspective, common obstacles include restricted vocabulary knowledge, frequent grammatical errors, and inadequate pronunciation, all of which impede the effectiveness and comprehensibility of spoken language (Al Hosni, 2014; Normawati et al., 2023). Pronunciation issues, in particular, are often intensified by phonological discrepancies between English and learners' first languages (Hanifa, 2018). Alongside these linguistic concerns, psychological factors, most notably speaking anxiety, fear of negative judgment, and diminished self-confidence, substantially reduce learners' readiness to engage in oral communication (Sulistyowati, 2023; Diana et al., 2024). Such affective constraints frequently prevent students from utilizing their existing linguistic knowledge, resulting in limited participation and minimal speaking practice (Alaraj, 2024). The

convergence of linguistic deficiencies and psychological barriers forms a multifaceted challenge, which is commonly reflected in behaviors such as frequent pauses, dependence on basic lexical items, and a tendency to remain silent or switch codes during communication (Anggrisia et al., 2023; Hidayat, 2021). For pre-service teachers, who are expected to demonstrate competent spoken English in future classrooms, addressing this combined challenge is particularly critical.

Although a substantial body of literature has examined EFL speaking difficulties, research employing mixed-methods designs to simultaneously and in-depth investigate both linguistic competence and speaking anxiety among Indonesian EFL student-teachers remains limited. This population occupies a pivotal position, as their personal language learning experiences are directly linked to their future pedagogical roles. In response to this gap, the present study aims to analyze the specific speaking challenges faced by fourth-semester student-teachers in the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang, with particular attention to the interaction between linguistic constraints and speaking anxiety. By examining the characteristics and interconnections of these difficulties, this study seeks to generate comprehensive insights that may contribute to the formulation of more integrated instructional approaches, improved curriculum development, and enhanced support mechanisms for pre-service English teacher education within the Indonesian context. Speaking constitutes a core component of language learning as it functions as a primary medium for communication, personal expression, and social engagement. Within the domain of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the development of speaking proficiency remains a demanding task for learners due to the interaction of linguistic, psychological, and contextual influences (Arjulayana et al., 2022). In the current globalized landscape, English has assumed a central role as an international lingua franca across academic, professional, and cross-cultural settings. Consequently, for students enrolled in English Education programs, speaking proficiency extends beyond fulfilling academic objectives and becomes a crucial professional competence that shapes their future effectiveness as educators (Dewi, 2018). Nevertheless, numerous studies have reported a noticeable disparity between curricular targets and students' actual speaking performance, even among those majoring in English education (Abrar et al., 2018). Initial observations conducted at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang (UMT) corroborate these findings, revealing that many fourth-semester pre-service teachers continue to encounter difficulties in oral communication despite having completed several speaking-oriented courses.

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## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research employed a descriptive design utilizing a mixed-methods approach and was conducted within the English Education Study Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Tangerang during the ongoing academic semester. The population of the study comprised fourth-semester students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at the institution. A purposive sampling technique was applied, resulting in a sample of 10 students from class

4.A1. These participants were selected based on their active participation in speaking-related classroom activities and their role as pre-service English teachers, which enabled them to offer meaningful and reflective insights into the speaking difficulties they encountered. To enhance data credibility through triangulation, two primary instruments were utilized. The first instrument was a structured online interview administered via Google Forms, consisting of ten closed-ended questions with dichotomous (“Yes” or “No”) responses aimed at examining various dimensions of speaking difficulties, including speaking anxiety, limited vocabulary, grammatical issues, pronunciation challenges, and levels of confidence. The second instrument involved classroom observation, using an observation checklist to assess students’ actual speaking performance. The observation emphasized several indicators, namely fluency, pronunciation accuracy, grammatical correctness, hesitation, and observable confidence. Quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed descriptively by calculating the percentage distribution of responses for each item, while qualitative data derived from classroom observations were examined thematically by organizing the findings according to the predetermined indicators. Finally, data from both sources were synthesized to generate a comprehensive and convergent profile of the participants’ speaking difficulties, with particular attention to the interaction between linguistic constraints and speaking anxiety.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The interview data presented in Table 1 demonstrate a prominent pattern of speaking difficulties experienced by the participants. All respondents (100%) reported experiencing anxiety when speaking in front of the class, encountering challenges in selecting appropriate vocabulary, and frequently producing grammatical errors during oral communication. Furthermore, 70% of the participants indicated feeling embarrassed when their pronunciation mistakes were noticed by either peers or lecturers. Although more than half of the students (60%) stated that they felt relatively comfortable during classroom speaking activities, only 40% expressed confidence when speaking despite the possibility of making errors. With respect to the learning context, 80% of the respondents reported greater confidence when engaging in speaking activities within small-group settings compared to whole-class situations. In addition, 90% of the participants agreed that limited opportunities for speaking practice outside the classroom, as well as the classroom environment itself, had a significant impact on their speaking performance and their willingness to participate in oral communication.

**Table 1.** Interview Results on Students' Speaking Difficulties

No.	Questions	Yes (%)	No (%)
1	Do you feel nervous when asked to speak English in front of the class?	100	0
2	Do you find it difficult to find the right English words when speaking?	100	0
3	Do you often make grammatical mistakes when speaking English?	100	0
4	Do you feel embarrassed if friends or a lecturer hear your wrong pronunciation?	70	30
5	Do you feel comfortable speaking English during class activities?	60	40
6	Do you think your vocabulary is insufficient to express ideas in English?	100	0
7	Do you feel confident speaking English even if you might make mistakes?	40	60
8	Do you feel more confident speaking English in small groups than in front of the whole class?	80	20
9	Do you feel that lack of practice outside the classroom affects your speaking ability?	90	10
10	Do you think the classroom environment influences your willingness to speak English?	90	10

The observational findings presented in Table 2 reinforced the questionnaire results by offering a behavioral perspective on students' speaking difficulties. Analysis of the observed speaking performance indicators revealed that hesitation, along with inconsistencies in pronunciation accuracy and grammatical use, frequently occurred during oral activities. Fluency scores were generally lower, indicating the presence of pauses and speech disruptions throughout students' performance. Nevertheless, students often displayed a relatively high level of observable confidence, which may suggest deliberate attempts to mask underlying anxiety while speaking.

**Table 2.** Observation Results of Students' Speaking Performance

No.	Student's Initial	Hesitation	Pronunciation	Grammar	Fluency	Confidence	Total Score (%)
1	ZF	20	20	20	15	20	95
2	KA	15	15	15	15	20	80
3	UA	20	20	20	20	20	100
4	AF	20	20	20	15	20	95
5	TH	15	20	15	15	20	85
6	ZS	20	15	15	10	20	80
7	ML	20	20	20	20	20	100
8	AS	15	20	20	15	20	90
9	HR	15	20	15	15	20	85
10	KU	20	20	20	15	20	95

The findings of this study provide strong evidence that EFL student-teachers encounter two interconnected challenges in developing speaking proficiency, namely speaking anxiety

and linguistic constraints. The notably high level of anxiety (100%) alongside relatively low confidence (40%) functions as an affective barrier that restricts learners' ability to access and effectively utilize their existing linguistic resources, a condition that aligns with perspectives in second language acquisition theory (Alamer et al., 2024). This psychological barrier is reflected in observable behaviors, including frequent hesitation and a stronger inclination toward small-group speaking contexts, which have also been reported in earlier studies (Sulistiyowati, 2023; Aripin et al., 2020).

Conversely, linguistic difficulties, particularly those related to vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation, should not be interpreted solely as gaps in knowledge, but also as factors that intensify speaking anxiety. The pervasive difficulty in lexical retrieval (100%) and feelings of embarrassment regarding pronunciation errors (70%) contribute to a cyclical pattern in which linguistic shortcomings provoke anxiety, and heightened anxiety subsequently interferes with accurate word selection and grammatical performance. This reciprocal relationship has been widely acknowledged in research on EFL speaking challenges (Al Hosni, 2014; Normawati et al., 2023). Furthermore, observational evidence indicating inconsistencies across these three linguistic dimensions confirms that such difficulties are tangible and directly influence students' speaking fluency.

The distinctive contribution of this mixed-methods study lies in its capacity to capture the dynamic interplay between psychological and linguistic barriers within the population of pre-service English teachers. The findings demonstrate that students may employ psychological coping mechanisms such as projecting confidence while still experiencing unresolved linguistic difficulties. These results carry important implications for teacher education programs. English teacher training curricula should not only emphasize the enhancement of linguistic competence but also deliberately integrate strategies for anxiety regulation, the establishment of supportive learning environments, and the implementation of scaffolded speaking activities designed to minimize psychological pressure (Brown, 2008; Arjulayana et al., 2022). Without a comprehensive approach that simultaneously addresses both linguistic and affective dimensions, pre-service teachers may enter the profession carrying persistent anxiety and language limitations that could adversely affect their future instructional effectiveness.

## CONCLUSION

Drawing on the mixed-methods examination of interview responses and observational evidence, this study concludes that EFL student-teachers experience two interrelated and mutually reinforcing categories of speaking difficulties, namely psychological anxiety and linguistic constraints. Elevated levels of anxiety are reflected in discomfort during whole-class

speaking, feelings of embarrassment, and diminished self-confidence, all of which operate as affective barriers that hinder oral performance. At the same time, concrete linguistic limitations involving vocabulary use, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation not only reduce speaking precision and fluency but also serve as key sources of anxiety. The reciprocal relationship between these psychological and linguistic factors gives rise to a complex and persistent cycle of speaking challenges among students.

The implications of these findings highlight the necessity for a comprehensive and integrated pedagogical framework within English teacher education programs. Instructional design and curriculum development should simultaneously prioritize the enhancement of linguistic competence through systematic vocabulary development, focused pronunciation instruction, and communicative grammar practice, and the management of affective variables by fostering supportive, low-anxiety learning environments. This can be achieved by implementing scaffolded speaking tasks that progress from small-group interactions to full-class presentations, alongside the incorporation of explicit strategies for anxiety regulation. Future research is encouraged to evaluate the effectiveness of intervention models grounded in this integrated approach and to broaden the research scope across diverse teacher education institutions in order to assess the generalizability of the findings. By addressing both the linguistic and psychological foundations of speaking difficulties, graduates of English teacher education programs are expected to enter the profession equipped not only with sufficient language proficiency but also with the confidence and emotional resilience necessary to function as effective English teachers and linguistic role models.

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