

INVESTIGATING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN PUBLIC SPEAKING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM

Maynola Isa Kristin Tumangger¹, Tasya Relita Lumban Tobing², Assa Jidah³, Shovia Zahra⁴, Fatin Nadifa Tarigan⁵

English Language Education Study Program, Universitas Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia, Medan, Indonesia

nadifafatin11@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the key difficulties faced by university students in delivering public speaking performances within an English Language Education study program. A descriptive qualitative method was employed, involving classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings shows that the students struggle primarily with limited vocabulary, inaccurate pronunciation, and insufficient speech organization. Psychological factors such as anxiety, low confidence, and fear of negative evaluation also significantly affect performance. In addition, many students demonstrate limited mastery of delivery aspects, including eye contact, vocal clarity, and audience engagement. The study concludes that students need more supportive learning environments and consistent speaking practice. The results imply that lecturers should design activities that reduce anxiety, strengthen language mastery, and encourage active participation. This can help improve students' overall public speaking competence.

INTRODUCTION

Public speaking can be defined as fundamental component of language competence for students in English Language Education programs because it directly supports their future roles as educators, presenters, and communicators. In EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, public speaking is frequently regarded as one of the most demanding productive skills due to the interaction of linguistic, psychological, and situational factors [1]. Previous studies have shown that many university students struggle with limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracy, and pronunciation difficulties, which impede their ability to deliver clear and coherent oral presentations [2]. Psychological challenges such as speaking anxiety, fear of negative perspective, and low self-confidence further exacerbate these difficulties, reducing students' willingness to participate in public speaking tasks [3,4].

Research investigating speaking difficulties among EFL learners has expanded significantly in recent years. The study [5] found that hesitation, lack of fluency, and poor idea organization are common barriers that emerge from limited language mastery and heightened anxiety levels. Similarly, another study [6] reported that university students tend to avoid speaking activities because they fear making mistakes and often feel inadequately prepared. More recent studies emphasize the necessity of instructional models that address both linguistic competence and affective factors, as both dimensions strongly influence learners' speaking performance and overall communicative ability [7].

Despite the extensive body of research on speaking challenges in EFL settings, studies focusing specifically on the public speaking difficulties of English Language Education students in Indonesian higher education remain limited. Given the unique academic expectations and professional orientation of this program, understanding students' challenges in public speaking is crucial for informing pedagogical strategies and curriculum development.

The novelty of this study lies in its context-specific focus on identifying detailed linguistic, psychological, and performance-related difficulties experienced by students enrolled in an English Language Education Study Program. By employing a qualitative descriptive approach, this study explores students' real experiences within their academic environment, providing insights that can support lecturers in designing more effective public speaking instruction and enhancing students' oral communication competence.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted by using a descriptive qualitative research design to identify the linguistic, psychological, and performance-related difficulties experienced by students in public speaking activities. Qualitative inquiry is suitable for exploring learners' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in depth, allowing researchers to capture rich and contextualized insights that cannot be fully obtained through quantitative measures [8]. The focus of this study aligns with the characteristics of descriptive qualitative research, which aims to provide a comprehensive account of a phenomenon as it naturally occurs [9].

The participants were students enrolled in an English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Pembinaan Masyarakat Indonesia. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants who had passed studying public speaking course, ensuring that they had adequate exposure to oral communication tasks. This sampling technique is suitable for qualitative studies because it helps the researchers to select individuals who can provide relevant and information-rich data [10]. Data were collected over one academic semester.

Data collection techniques were semi-structured interviews, observations in the classroom, and students' reflective journals. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore participants' perceptions and difficulties, allowing flexibility to probe deeper into emerging themes [11]. Classroom observations were conducted to document students' actual performance, behaviors, and challenges during public speaking activities. Reflective journals provided additional insights into learners' emotions, preparation strategies, and self-evaluations. The collected data were analyzed using thematic framework [12], which involves coding, categorizing, and identifying patterns to generate meaningful themes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recent study reports that most of the students feel difficult to speak in public since they were lack of confidence, did not master the material, or did not understand how to do it, highlighting the pervasive role of self-confidence in influencing public speaking

readiness [13]. It is similar with the study. The findings show that students in the English Language Education Study Program grapple with a mix of linguistic, psychological, and performance-related issues during presentations, impacting their fluency, clarity, confidence, and overall delivery. Insights from interviews, observations, and reflective journals reveal recurring themes among participants, illustrating that these challenges stem from language proficiency, emotional preparedness, and presentation abilities.

Linguistic issues stand out as the most common type of problem. Participants frequently face restricted vocabularies, trouble choosing suitable words, and struggles with grammatically correct sentence formation. These shortcomings result in repeated pauses, hesitations, and impaired fluency. Pronunciation problems further hinder clear enunciation, leaving speakers doubtful about audience comprehension. Consequently, these language obstacles hinder the clear and confident expression of intricate concepts.

Psychological issues really get in the way of good public speaking. Many students talk about feeling anxious, nervous, and scared of bad opinions from classmates or teachers. These feelings show up physically, like shaking hands, shaky voices, or fast breathing. Even if someone prepares a lot, anxiety can mess up how they share their ideas, showing why emotional readiness is key to doing well.

Besides language and mental issues, students face challenges with how they perform and present. We see that lots of students have trouble keeping eye contact, using good gestures, organizing their talk clearly, and controlling the speed of their speech. Some depend too much on notes or slides, which makes the audience less interested. Not enough practice and not knowing good presentation methods also make things worse. This means being good at public speaking needs both strong language skills and better ways of delivering the talk.

Putting together the findings from these three areas shows that language, mental, and performance problems all affect each other. For instance, language struggles can cause anxiety, which then hurts how clear and smooth the delivery is. Likewise, low confidence might make students give shorter or too-simple explanations, making their talks less deep. This link means improving public speaking skills needs a full approach that tackles all these parts at once.

From all the findings, it's clear that students' public speaking problems come from both personal issues and how they're taught. While each student might have different levels of language or mental challenges, the info shows that planned practice, helpful feedback, and clear teaching on delivery methods can lower these barriers. The discussion points out the need for a learning space that builds confidence, gives lots of chances to speak, and adds public speaking skills regularly into the course plan.

CONCLUSION

This study found that students in the English Language Education Study Program face several key difficulties in public speaking, especially anxiety, low confidence, limited vocabulary, and challenges in organizing ideas. These difficulties affect their ability to speak clearly, maintain fluency, and deliver messages effectively. The findings also show

that students need more practice, supportive learning environments, and constructive feedback to improve their performance.

The results suggest that public speaking instruction should focus on building confidence, reducing anxiety, and providing more opportunities for real practice. Lecturers can use interactive activities, scaffolding, and continuous guidance to help students speak more comfortably in front of others. Overall, this study highlights the importance of creating a supportive and motivating learning atmosphere to help students develop stronger public speaking skills in English.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bashir, M., Azeem, M., & Dogar, A. H. (2011). Factor effecting students' English speaking skills. *British journal of arts and social sciences*, 2(1), 34-50.
- [2] 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.
- [3] Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- [4] Subekti, A. S. (2018). An Exploration Of Learners'foreign Language Anxiety In The Indonesian University Context: Learners'and Teachers'voices. *TEFLIN Journal: A Publication on the Teaching & Learning of English*, 29(2).
- [5] 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.
- [6] Al-Nouh, N., Abdul-Kareem, M., & Taqi, H. (2015). EFL college students' perceptions of the difficulties in oral presentation. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 4(1), 136-150.
- [7] Saidi, S. B. (2018). Willingness to communicate in English among Malaysian undergraduates: An identity-based motivation perspective (Doctoral dissertation, University of York).
- [8] Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [9] Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever happened to qualitative description? *Research in Nursing & Health*, 23(4), 334-340.
- [10] Patton, M. Q. (2015). Qualitative research & evaluation methods (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [11] Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing (3rd ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- [12] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

- [13] Tarigan, F. N., Nasution, A. F., & Hasibuan, S. A. (2024). Public Speaking Learning Assistance to Increase Students' Confidence. *Journal of Community Research and Service*, 8(2), 291.