

EFL STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND CHALLENGES IN SPEAKING AT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES: A CASE STUDY AT ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAMS STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY OF MATARAM

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ABSTRACTS	ARTICLE INFO
<p>Speaking at a global conference is an important event in academia, particularly for students and scholars aiming to improve their professional abilities and develop an international network. This research intends to explore the experiences and challenges that speakers face when presenting at global events, whether in-person or virtual. The study aims to examine the emotional factors, language issues, and technical challenges that come up during both the preparation and delivery of these presentations. This study explores the experiences and difficulties encountered by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners when presenting at global conferences, concentrating on the English Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Mataram. Utilizing a case study method, this research gathered information from interviews and questionnaires with students who attended these conferences. The results showed that students gained significant benefits from this experience, including increased confidence, communication skills, and the opportunity to build professional networks. However, they also faced various challenges, such as language barriers, anxiety, and cultural differences in presentation styles. The findings emphasize the importance of structured support and training in the development of public speaking skills.</p>	<p>Article History:</p> <p><i>Received: July 9th, 2025</i></p> <p><i>Revised: July 16th, 2025</i></p> <p><i>Published: July 2025</i></p> <hr/> <p>Keywords:</p> <p><i>EFL, Speaking English, International Conference</i></p>

INTRODUCTION

Previous research has identified numerous factors that influence English speaking performance at higher levels. Determined that a lack of real practice chances, feelings of anxiety, and cultural differences were major obstacles for Chinese college students participating in academic discussions in English. Similarly, Al-Jamal reported that Jordanian EFL learners struggled with inadequate vocabulary, pronunciation issues, and fear of making mistakes when attempting to express complex ideas orally.

The capacity to participate in thoughtful conversations in English is especially important for college students. Tasks that involve speaking academically, like presentations, seminars, and debates, demand that students express complex ideas, build coherent arguments, and answer difficult questions on the spot. These high-pressure communication

scenarios can be particularly anxiety-inducing for those who are not native speakers, which could affect their academic success and career opportunities.

In addition, the worldwide spread of higher education has heightened the demand for students to enhance their proficiency in spoken English. Many universities now offer English-medium instruction programs and international exchange opportunities. To fully benefit from these experiences and contribute meaningfully in multicultural academic environments, students must be able to discuss sophisticated topics fluently and persuasively in English.

However, achieving this level of oral proficiency is a complex, multifaceted process. It requires not only extensive language knowledge but also the development of critical thinking skills, intercultural competence, and disciplinary expertise. Students must learn to navigate the specific discourse conventions and rhetorical strategies of their academic fields while simultaneously mastering the linguistic features of advanced English.

Moreover, global gatherings create an opportunity to enhance skills related to various cultures. Interacting with individuals from diverse backgrounds and adjusting to a multicultural setting develops relationship-building abilities that are greatly appreciated in the worldwide job market. This adaptability can be an advantage for those who aspire to work in an international environment. Participating in international conference also gives students access to deepen their understanding of current global issues. Conferences, seminars or workshops involving international speakers can increase their insight into global trends and challenges. This understanding is an added value when stepping into an increasingly connected world of work.

At the State Islamic University of Mataram, English Education Department students are expected to develop advanced speaking skills to prepare for future careers as English teachers or professionals in international contexts. These students have already achieved a relatively high level of English proficiency through years of study. However, many still struggle to articulate complex ideas fluently and engage confidently in sophisticated academic discussions in English.

Preliminary observations and informal conversations with students reveal that they often feel anxious and underprepared when required to give presentations, participate in seminars, or engage in debates on challenging topics in English. Many report difficulty expressing nuanced arguments, using appropriate academic vocabulary, and adapting their language to different registers and contexts. Additionally, students frequently mention struggling with the speed and spontaneity required in high-level English discussions, particularly when interacting with native speakers or highly proficient non-native users of English.

Furthermore, as future English teachers, these students face the additional pressure of needing to serve as language models for their own students. They must not only communicate effectively in English themselves but also develop the skills to teach and facilitate advanced speaking skills in others. This dual challenge adds another layer of complexity to their language learning journey.

Given these observations and the broader context of English as a global language, there is a clear need to investigate the experiences and challenges faced by English Education students at the State Islamic University of Mataram in developing advanced speaking skills

for intellectual discourse. Understanding their specific difficulties, strategies, and needs can inform more targeted and effective pedagogical approaches to support their language development.

This study therefore aims to explore the experiences and challenges of English Education Department students at the State Islamic University of Mataram in speaking English at an intellectual level. By examining their perspectives, strategies, and perceived barriers, we hope to gain insights that can contribute to improving advanced English speaking instruction and support for university students in Indonesia and similar EFL context language. *RELC Journal*, 37(3), 308-328.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research method was designed using a qualitative approach. Qualitative research methods were developed to study, primarily by educational researchers and other social scientists, aspects such as motivation, communication, and understanding. The researcher chooses qualitative methods because they can provide more detailed data to achieve the research objectives, where qualitative data is obtained through interviews. Qualitative research is a methodological approach that focuses on understanding human behavior, experiences, and social phenomena through in-depth exploration. Unlike quantitative research, which seeks to quantify data and establish generalizable facts, qualitative research emphasizes the meanings and interpretations individuals assign to their experiences. It often employs techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and participant observations, allowing researchers to gather rich, descriptive data that capture the complexities of human interactions and social contexts. This type of research is particularly valuable in fields like sociology, psychology, and education, as it provides insights into the motivations, emotions, and perspectives of participants. By prioritizing context and subjectivity, qualitative research enables a deeper understanding of the nuances of human behavior, making it an essential tool for exploring the intricacies of social life.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After obtaining initial data through interviews with students from the English Education Department at Mataram State Islamic University, the researcher continued the data collection process by conducting observations and interviews. This stage aimed to explore students' perceptions of their English speaking skills at the conference. Observations were conducted while the students participated in their speaking practice. The researcher noted aspects such as verbal and nonverbal expressions, engagement, and confidence demonstrated by each respondent. Based on an interview conducted by the researcher with one student from the English Language Education Study Program at State Islamic University of Mataram regarding their experience speaking at a conference, the following is presented. Based on the results of the interview, all three students stated that they have experience speaking at conferences, and some presented their essays at the conference.

In line with the research of Rahmah, S. The results of this study reveal that English Education students who participate in International Conferences have diverse experiences in terms of preparation and control of public speaking anxiety. According to the study's findings, students studying English education who take part in international conferences have

a range of experiences when it comes to preparing for and managing their fear of public speaking. They overcome their worry, nevertheless, in a number of methods, including consistent practice, reading pertinent books, formulating their main ideas, and gaining confidence. Additionally, some participants reported feeling more at ease giving presentations online as opposed to in person. Lack of preparation, apprehension about the audience, and unpleasant past experiences are all factors that contribute to anxiousness. Anxiety is often exacerbated by internal reasons like insecurity and fear of being judged negatively. This demonstrates how crucial institutional assistance is for promoting student involvement in global intellectual forums.

In terms of experience, most participants showed enthusiasm in attending conferences, both online and offline. They considered the experience as an opportunity to develop themselves, broaden their academic horizons, and practice their English speaking skills. This reflects that participation in International Conferences is not only a form of academic duty, but also part of the formation of professional identity as prospective language educators. This section shows that although students experienced barriers in the context of international academic presentations, they were able to develop strategies to overcome these anxieties. This finding confirms the importance of fostering academic presentation skills in the English Education curriculum, particularly those targeting participation in international forums.

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Based on the interview results, the challenges during the presentation were having confidence to deliver the material and needing to practice speaking in front of an audience. Based on the interview results, it was stated that the positive impact of this conference is mainly to improve skills, as well as to enhance vocabulary and confidence, especially in English. The following is an interview conducted with three students regarding the challenges faced while speaking in. Based on the interview results, it was stated that the challenges are mainly related to nervousness when speaking in public and presenting in front of an audience.

In line with the research conducted by Siti Mutmainnah who found that students faced challenges during learning speaking, such as; lack of vocabulary, difficulty in achieving speaking fluency, limited exposure to English, fear of making mistakes, and lack of overcoming nervousness. Meanwhile, there were strategies students used in learning speaking, such as; joining a speaking club, watching movies/series in English, regular spoken language practice, conversation with native speakers, using speaking learning apps, and reading books/news in English. However, the researcher also found students' strategies to overcome the challenges they faced during learning speaking, such as: using social media, practicing speaking in front of the mirror, learning from songs, debating, and speaking English with partners. The findings of this study are highly relevant to English language learning in Indonesia, particularly at Islamic University of Mataram. Challenges such as

limited vocabulary, lack of exposure to English, and fear of making mistakes are common problems faced by EFL students in various educational institutions in Indonesia. This study reveals that EFL students at Islamic University of Mataram face various challenges in learning speaking, but they also show initiative in overcoming these challenges through various strategies. The study emphasizes the importance of support from teachers in providing resources and an environment conducive to the development of speaking skills in English.

This research is also in line with research conducted by Aisha Ganesh Ratnasari, which discusses the challenges of speaking English. The author explains the challenge faced by EFL students is the lack of vocabulary which affects nervousness when speaking English. The lack of vocabulary makes it difficult for students to express ideas due to limited vocabulary. This hinders fluent speaking and leads to ineffective communication. EFL students often state that the obstacle in conference presentations is the language barrier. Even though they understand the topic conceptually, the language barrier can make it seem like they don't have a good grasp of the material when presenting. This challenge does not only include vocabulary, but mastery of the material is also very important before delivering the material during the presentation. However, to overcome these challenges, students apply strategies. Such strategies as code-switching, use of technology, personal approach with lecturers, and self-motivation, they can overcome these obstacles. The findings provide insights for educators to design more effective and supportive learning approaches for non-language students in improving their speaking skills.

This study seeks to determine the challenges that students face in learning to speak English and the causes of their challenges, in accordance with the research done by Khairun Nisya. This study employs a qualitative descriptive methodology and uses interviews and observations to collect pertinent data. Students encounter three major obstacles while learning to speak English: using their first language, being hesitant, and having inconsistent or minimal participation. Additionally, two elements are found to contribute to students' problems with their English speaking abilities: inadequate command of grammar and vocabulary. These findings suggest that the ESC at UIN Mataram should foster a friendly and encouraging atmosphere in which to learn English. Through a more compassionate and laid-back attitude, this may be achieved by allaying students' anxieties. Additionally, students must receive organized instruction and practice in order to enhance their grammar and vocabulary acquisition. Students can become more active and confident in speaking English by employing diverse and fascinating techniques. In general, this research offers helpful information on the difficulties students encounter when learning English speaking skills at ESC UIN Mataram. It is hoped that by comprehending these difficulties, successful strategies can be developed to enhance students' English speaking abilities.

This aligns with Riadil's studies on students' views of their difficulties with English communication. The researcher discovered that the issue students face is that they have trouble communicating English fluently, which makes them feel self-conscious when asked to describe the content in front of the class. The author's next challenge is the challenge of speaking English words, and students frequently struggle to tell the difference between writing and pronunciation. According to the findings of this research, the primary challenge for students is the usage of their native language. 83% of pupils acknowledged that their

native language is simpler to use than English, and 77% of students admitted to using it in English classes. This implies that speaking proficiency in English may be hampered by behaviors related to one's native language. In light of these data, it is recommended that EFL (English as a Foreign Language) courses place greater emphasis on active speaking practice. To increase students' self-assurance, teachers may foster a positive environment via activities like group discussions, role-playing, and presentations. Furthermore, it is crucial to offer helpful and encouraging feedback in order to lessen anxiety and boost students' enthusiasm.

This shows that the lack of vocabulary causes students to be reluctant to memorize and use new vocabulary in sentences. This has a direct impact on their ability to express ideas in English. Another challenge is that low grammar mastery hinders students in constructing sentences. They tend to avoid speaking in English because they do not understand the proper sentence structure. To overcome these challenges, a supportive learning approach is needed, which includes: encouraging the active use of English in the classroom, building students' confidence through fun and interactive activities, and providing exercises that focus on vocabulary development, grammar and pronunciation. Thus, students can improve their speaking skills and feel more confident in using English in various communication contexts.

This study aligns with the work by Patria Handung Jaya, titled "Challenges Faced by Students in English Speaking (A Case Study at IPIREL, Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta)." The results highlight a comprehensive analysis of the speaking difficulties encountered by IPIREL students during their English classes. The researcher integrates qualitative information gathered from surveys with theoretical insights to shed light on the challenges students face and the approaches they adopt. Overall, the primary results indicate that the key issues in English speaking include anxiety, insufficient vocabulary, the fear of errors, and difficulties with grammar comprehension.

One of the discoveries is that the majority of those surveyed view communicating in English as a significant obstacle. This is expected, as English is not the native language in Indonesia, and international students enrolled in the IPIREL program have to engage with it regularly during lectures. Participants stated they frequently worry about being mocked or judged when they make errors while speaking. A limited range of vocabulary is another crucial issue. When students lack sufficient vocabulary, they struggle to express their thoughts smoothly. There were also mentions of difficulties with grammar and pronunciation, although these were not highlighted as much as vocabulary issues and anxiety. Some learners expressed that complicated grammar led to their reluctance to speak, even though, in verbal exchanges, grammar is not always the key factor in understanding the message. Nonetheless, the belief that "grammar has to be flawless" remains prevalent among many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, leading to feelings of insecurity. Students indicated that they struggled to grasp the various speech patterns and talking rates of native speakers. This leads to slower responses, which unintentionally affects their speaking abilities.

Despite encountering different challenges, IPIREL students demonstrate creativity and a range of methods to tackle their problems. One frequently used method is watching English films without any subtitles. This technique is viewed as beneficial for enhancing natural listening abilities, expanding vocabulary, and grasping the context of dialogues. It represents an indirect approach to learning that emphasizes exposure to the language. Another method adopted is engaging with English articles or journals. This indicates that

students recognize the significance of enhancing academic language to aid their education. Reading not only aids in building vocabulary but also exposes them to more sophisticated and formal sentence constructions. Some learners participated in English classes and utilized TOEFL study guides as resources. This indicates their realization that becoming proficient in English necessitates structured and formal practice. Furthermore, they noted that engaging in conversation in their daily routines was a way to foster a language-rich environment, although achieving this in an EFL setting requires significant motivation and support from their surroundings. The mental factors were also taken into account in the strategies students selected. Boosting self-esteem was seen as crucial to reduce nervousness. This suggests that speaking practice should encompass more than just language skills; it must also incorporate psychological and motivational strategies.

The findings of this study back the idea that learning a foreign language involves not just mental processes, but emotional and social factors as well. Feelings of anxiety, societal pressures, and the absence of a nurturing atmosphere can impede language progress, despite a learner's technical skills. Consequently, language education should be approached comprehensively, integrating elements of language use, emotional factors, and social engagement. From a practical standpoint, the results suggest that educational institutions should create more safe and relaxed opportunities for speaking, such as language clubs, informal discussions, or collaborative projects. Additionally, students need access to training in learning strategies to help them identify their personal learning styles and the most suitable approaches for their unique situations.

This study aligns with the article called "Challenges in Speaking Skills of Students at B English Center" by Phan Nga Thi Tuyet and Dang Thanh Truc. The examination features a thorough combination of the results, tied to the established theories and earlier research findings. The discussion part of the research aims to connect the numerical results from the surveys with the theoretical analysis and past research outcomes. There are three primary areas of concentration within the discussion: the different types of difficulties in speaking skills, the reasons behind these difficulties, and their effects on performance in English speaking. Based on the findings from the survey, the primary issue in speaking abilities is related to pronunciation, with 87.5% of respondents acknowledging this challenge. This indicates that pronunciation significantly hinders effective spoken communication for individuals learning a foreign language, particularly in an EFL setting. Additionally, challenges in listening were recognized as a major factor contributing to difficulties in speaking. Effective listening skills are essential for comprehension prior to formulating a response in verbal exchanges. When students lack sufficient listening abilities, they struggle to grasp the speaker's meaning and consequently fail to respond correctly. Moreover, a restricted vocabulary and poor grammar presented major challenges as well. Approximately 73% and 75% of learners reported encountering issues with vocabulary and grammar, correspondingly. When students lack sufficient words or grammar skills, they often find themselves in situations of silence, confusion, or repeating themselves while speaking.

The conversation revealed that difficulties in speaking are not standalone issues, but rather the outcome of multiple interacting factors. The two primary factors that emerged were poor listening abilities and insufficient opportunities for speaking practice, both of which received unanimous agreement from those surveyed. This indicates that students' speaking

abilities are significantly influenced by their engagement in genuine English conversations and experiences. Additionally, only 2.5% of students reported feeling assured when communicating in English, highlighting a considerable degree of language-related anxiety. Feelings of anxiety, concerns about making errors, and worries about being ridiculed represent significant psychological obstacles. Another factor identified was the scarcity of speaking opportunities beyond the classroom. Given that most students are in middle school (ages 13-15), chances to practice English in real-life scenarios are quite limited. In this context, the classroom becomes the sole venue for practice, and if the environment does not encourage active speaking, then students will struggle to convert passive knowledge into active use.

The findings of this research suggest that when teaching English, it is essential to take into account the emotional and psychological factors of learners, alongside the linguistic components. An interactive teaching method that fosters communication in a relaxed atmosphere is necessary. Educators should create a supportive environment that encourages students to practice speaking, make errors, and gain knowledge from those experiences. Moreover, increasing the chances for speaking practice is crucial, both through in-class activities like group discussions, theater, and language games, as well as external opportunities such as language clubs or tandem conversations. Additionally, developing authentic listening abilities and a focus on pronunciation is vital to enhance speaking skills.

Overall, this study supports and extends previous research by providing an expanded view of how EFL students challenge speaking at international conferences. The research confirms that speaking at international conferences is a form of active participation in global academia, which provides great opportunities for scholarly identity development and networking. However, for EFL students this participation is not just about delivering the content of the presentation, but about how to deal with the dynamics within the international academic space.

CONCLUSION

So, this research can be concluded that training and broader exposure to international academics is very important to prepare EFL students for international presentations, and mental development is also very necessary to equip students to be more ready and confident in facing international presentations in the future.

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