

## EXPLORING STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN SPEAKING SKILLS AT KHAIRUN UNIVERSITY

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the factors contributing to the challenges encountered by students in class A, semester 3 of the English Education Study Program at Khairun University when speaking English, as well as the reasons behind these difficulties. The study involved 36 students as its subjects and utilized qualitative research methods, with data being collected through questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire used was adapted from Gustina (2021), and six factors of difficulty were discussed, namely linguistic obstacles, speech processing, academic and conversational English skills, negative effects, access to speaking opportunities, and fluency. The findings of this study indicate that students struggle with speaking English due to challenges such as insufficient vocabulary, poor grasp of grammar, lack of confidence, and motivation. The primary factor contributing to the difficulty in speaking English is the linguistic barrier.

**Keywords:** students' difficulties, speaking skill

### INTRODUCTION

The majority of people use English as their primary language for communication. While English is the first foreign language taught at schools and universities, it has become the second language in Indonesia. Due to the ever-advancing development of the era, students are increasingly expected to enhance their ability to learn new languages, primarily by improving their English language skills. Proficiency in English allows individuals to acquire information, exchange opinions, express desires, and share thoughts with people from other countries. Therefore, by mastering English, students can gain knowledge and abilities. For instance, English serves as the access language for various technologies such as media, computers, laptops, iPads, and internet connections. Therefore, by mastering speaking skills, we can gain many advantages in various aspects of life. Additionally, having foreign language skills can be a requirement for a company that recruits employees.

In studying English, we need to recognize the four skills, particularly listening, speaking, reading, and writing, because these four skills can assist us in mastering English quickly, as H.G. Widdowson in Nurfitri & Rahmawati (2021) stated that English as a foreign language consists of four skills, namely, writing, listening, reading, and speaking. In addition, Guoqiang in Ritonga and Siregar (2020) stated that to be a good speaker, English learners have to master all of the components. As one of the skills in learning a language, speaking allows people to send and receive information or messages to others, and graduates are able to communicate and discourse in English at a certain literacy level.

Speaking is the most essential part of English because speaking is a process of sharing ideas and opinions in spoken language communication in society (Bailey in Gustina 2021). Consequently, college students must have proper English skills for communicating with the outside community and by mastering English skills, students can express their opinions and ideas with the surrounding community. Arung (2016) revealed that speaking become an essential part of English because through speaking, people can interact with others to express their opinions. Cameron in Ritonga & Siregar (2020) also added speaking is the active use of language to express a meaning; thus, people can understand what we

say by using foreign languages; the information conveyed is more detailed, especially for people who need a more precise explanation of something but are constrained by language.

Speaking English is not accessible for students; to speak English fluently, students must continue to practice and develop themselves. Students must be able to master all aspects of English, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation and must be disciplined if they want to speak fluently. Based on Chens In Fitri (2019), students' common difficulties are in confidence, fluency and vocabulary. Research studies on second language learners showed concerns about feeling less expressive in speaking the target language in a second language (Elbashir, 2017; Brown, 2004; Ur, 1996; Krashen, 1982). Poor grammar and vocabulary are significantly linked with speaking fluency, which is evident in pauses while communicating, owing to hesitation and word repetition (Nunan, 1999).

Some other difficulties make students less confident when speaking, such as a lack of vocabulary, which makes students afraid and embarrassed because the lack of vocabulary related to grammar. The students needed help with the use of grammar, not fluency or comprehension in speaking English (Wulandari Rian 2014).

Students generally experience obstacles when their English teachers give them tasks based on their opinions in front of the class. They have difficulty in expressing an idea, have less control over the subjects given by teachers, are less accustomed to speaking in public, lack confidence in students, and are less able to develop speaking skills, stated Djamarah (2011) in Widyasworo (2019:534), "difficulties in learning is a condition in which students cannot study well due to some threat, obstacle, or disturbance of learning." In the same line, Anwar, Jee, Adam, and Sailuddin (2021) stated that anxiety in speaking increases when there is a lack of experience and proficiency.

The obstacles made them incapable of expressing thoughts and ideas, so students may be reluctant to speak to pour their creative ideas; there are many ways to overcome the difficulty of speaking English in students such as more often to practice speaking English, memorize more vocabulary, explore grammar, watch English movies, listen to songs or English podcast and the same line in Muhajir, Anwar and Latif (2024) stated strategies to overcome English speaking challenges when speaking are improving their speaking skills by joining online learning, practising speaking with peers, learning through social media, listening to English songs, podcasts and watching movies.

The researcher conducted this research on English Language Education study program students to make input to students and lecturers to improve the difficulties that arise and are realized by students and lecturers themselves. In addition, this study also aims to add the latest information from previous theses. The topic under study is also very interesting because it is very related to the life of the researcher, so the researcher decided to do this research. Realizing that many factors cause students to experience difficulties when speaking English, researchers are interested in conducting research on this topic with the title "Exploring Students' Difficulties in Speaking Skill at Khairun University".

## RESEARCH METHOD

### A. Research Method

In this research study, qualitative research methods were employed, utilizing interviews and documentary analysis (Kaharudin in Azizah, 2016). A research instrument is a tool used to gather pertinent information or data for a research project. In this case, the primary research instrument was the researcher herself. For this qualitative research stage, the researcher prepared questionnaire items and an interview guide for data collection and utilized documentation to gather data. Supporting tools used for the research included WhatsApp, a cellphone, books, and pens.

## B. Techniques of Collecting Data

In this study, the researcher used interviews and questionnaires to collect data to determine the students' difficulties in speaking English. In the data analysis of the interview section, the researcher made a match based on the recording file of the interview process. After that, the researcher matched the results obtained with the data obtained from student answers in the previous data collection. Analyzing and interpreting the data obtained from the questionnaire.

The research used a questionnaire to ask respondents to answer questions using the answers given by the researcher. Questionnaires are used to identify students' difficulties in speaking English and the problem factors that cause students' difficulties in speaking English. The questionnaire consisted of 25 numbered items Divided into six aspects, namely linguistic obstacles, speech processing, academic and conversational English skills, negative effects, access to speaking opportunities and fluency. This research questionnaire was adapted from Gustina (2021), with a five-point Likert scale that is slightly revised, namely never, sometimes, often, usually, always.

This research used a simple formula to determine the questionnaire's results manually. The formula for finding a percentage is according to Sudijono (2018).

$$P = F / N \times 100\%$$

Note:

P = percentage.

F = number of frequency.

N = respondent.

The researcher gave a questionnaire to 36 respondents from class A, Semester 3 of the English Education study program at Universitas Khairun.

## C. Technique of Data Analysis

Data analysis is an activity where the researcher analyzes data and studies data that has been obtained from the results of the research process. In qualitative research, data analysis is a systematic and organized process whose data is obtained through questionnaires and interviews so that researchers can report the results of the research. The analysis process is carried out during the collection process and after all the data is collected together.

Data analysis is crucial during the data collection process, especially for researchers conducting studies. It is essential to focus on the specific problem being studied. After collecting the questionnaire results from students in class A, semester 3 of the English Language Education program, the researcher compiles the data and analyzes the frequency of each item selected in the questionnaire statements. By determining the most dominant aspects based on the frequency of item selection, the researcher then organizes and concludes the findings accordingly. The results of the interview are used as reinforcing data from the results of the questionnaire conducted by the previous researcher like Sugiyono in Ambarwati (2022) stated that data analysis is the process of systematically searching and compiling data obtained from interviews, field notes and documentation, by organizing data into categories, breaking it down into units, synthesizing, compiling into patterns. Choose what is important and what will be studied, and make a conclusion so they are easily understood.

Along the same line, according to Moleong in Ambarwati (2022), data analysis is the process of organizing and sorting data into patterns, categories, and fundamental units of description so that themes can be found and working hypotheses can be formulated based on the data's suggestions.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The findings include questionnaires and interviews. This research was conducted on 36 respondents who were 3rd-semester students of the English Education study program. This study aims to answer the research focus in the first chapter. This research has two objectives. The first is to explain students' difficulties in English speaking skills. The second is to determine the factors that cause students' difficulties in speaking English. The collection and display of the following data are based on the results of questionnaires and interviews conducted by the researcher.

**1. The Questionnaire Result**

This research was conducted on 3rd-semester students of the English Education study program. The research instrument used by the researcher is a questionnaire consisting of 25 statements with a Five-point Likert scale, namely never, sometimes, often, usually, and always. Six aspects are assessed from the instrument results, namely linguistic obstacles, speech processing, academic and conversational English skills, negative effects, access to speaking opportunities and fluency.

**a. Students' perceptions of difficulties in speaking English in the third semester of the English language education study program.**

**1) Linguistic Obstacle**

Surprisingly, the researchers found that the questionnaire results showed a high in item number six. As much as 47% of the majority of respondents struggled with the use of complex structures when speaking English, the same result as 39% in items number one and 11, in which respondents experienced some anxiety in grammar and vocabulary when speaking.

**Table 1. Linguistic obstacle**

No	STATEMENT	Never	Sometimes	Often	Usually	Always
1	make mistakes in grammar when speaking English.	0%	8%	33%	19%	39%
6	I am not good at using complex structures when speaking English	3%	19%	16%	14%	47%
9	I worry about grammar when speaking English.	0%	25%	25%	28%	22%
11	I get stuck with grammar or vocabulary when speaking English to my lecturer.	3%	14%	16%	28%	39%
16	I have pronunciation problems when speaking English.	0%	39%	28%	16%	16%

**2) Speech Processing**

The researcher's findings show a high level of 42% in item 17, where respondents often have difficulty starting to speak, caused by anxiety due to the lack of fluency in English sentences. Item 12 shows a similar difference, where respondents always have difficulty communicating effectively with lecturers. In item number two, respondents indicate that they often think using their mother tongue.

**Table 2. Speech Processing**

No	STATEMENT	Never	Sometimes	Often	Usually	Always
2	I think in my native language when I speak English.	19%	14%	39%	22%	5%
7	I avoid using difficult words and structures when speaking English.	8%	16%	5%	36%	33%
12	I struggle to communicate effectively in English with my lecturers.	5%	8%	28%	16%	41%
17	I find it difficult to pay attention to fluency and accuracy when speaking English.	3%	11%	42%	28%	11%

### 3) Academic and Conversational English Skill

Due to the low results, researchers' results in this aspect do not significantly relate to respondents' difficulties when speaking English. The majority of respondents tend to choose not to contribute in front of the class.

**Table 3. Academic and Conversational English Skill**

No	STATEMENT	Never	Sometimes	Often	Usually	Always
3	I find it difficult to lead class discussions in English	8%	30%	16%	39%	5%
8	I find it difficult to speak in English in front of the class.	3%	25%	22%	36%	14%
13	I find it difficult to participate in English classes	11%	33%	28%	22%	5%
18	I find it difficult to participate in small group English discussions during class.	33%	28%	25%	5%	8%

### 4) Negative Effect

The results found that the majority of respondents in this aspect showed a decrease where they did not have excessive worry or a significant level when talking with peers or outside the classroom.

**Table 4. Negative Effect**

No	STATEMENT	Never	Sometimes	Often	Usually	Always
4	I feel nervous when speaking English.	5%	28%	23%	22%	22%
14	I just stayed quiet in class because I lacked confidence in speaking English.	19%	39%	14%	8%	19%
19	I turn down opportunities to speak English in class or outside of class.	25%	33%	25%	11%	5%

## 5) Access to Speaking Opportunities

The results show a decrease in students' speaking difficulties. The majority of respondents are similar in choosing speaking opportunities, so the results are equal in each item.

**Table 5. Access to Speaking Opportunities**

No	STATEMENT	Never	Sometimes	Often	Usually	Always
5	I feel that there is a lack of opportunities to speak outside of class	14%	11%	19%	30%	25%
10	I feel that there is a lack of opportunity to speak up in class.	19%	27%	19%	19%	14%
15	I feel a lack of words to say when speaking English in class or outside of class.	0%	22%	30%	27%	19%

## 6) Fluency

Surprisingly, item number 22 shows a high frequency of 44%. The majority of respondents have difficulty with word fluency and vocabulary, so they still often correct themselves and repeat the same words. Then, there is a slight decrease of 39% in item number 23. Respondents often experience problems with confidence in speaking when given the opportunity.

**Table 6. Fluency**

No	STATEMENT	Never	Sometimes	Often	Usually	Always
21	When speaking English, I feel that I speak too briefly because of the limited words and long pauses.	5%	30%	14%	25%	25%
22	I often repeat words and correct myself when speaking English.	3%	8%	30%	14%	44%
23	I feel I am not fluent and repeat some words when speaking English.	8%	22%	39%	16%	14%
24	I hesitated a bit and searched a bit for words but managed to continue and complete my thoughts when speaking English.	3%	11%	25%	33%	28%
25	When speaking English, I feel confident and have no doubts about my grammar or word choice.	19%	28%	16%	25%	11%

## 2. The Result of the Interview

This research interview aims to find out the causes of students' difficulties when speaking English and obtain information or data from students. It was conducted after the previous questionnaire was completed.

**b. This factor causes students to have difficulties speaking English in the third semester of the English language education study program.**

Based on the results of the interviews conducted, the researcher found that there are several causes of the problems faced by class A students of the English Education study program, one of which is the lack of confidence students possess when they have the opportunity to speak. Three out of ten people I interviewed claimed to be confident when they were given the opportunity to speak.

Three of the ten respondents interviewed (respondents 3, 4, and 10) said that they are confident when speaking English and that their self-confidence increases as the semester progresses. Even so, they are still not very fluent when speaking and have less opportunity to speak.

Students' lack of confidence arises from their lack of mastery of basic aspects of speaking, such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency. Grammar and vocabulary were the most common difficulties mentioned by students during data collection.

Three of the ten respondents interviewed (respondents 2, 4, and 10) felt difficulty with vocabulary and grammar, especially the tense, and due to the different forms of word changes and readings when translated.

Difficulties in grammar and vocabulary occur as a result of the lack of curiosity in students and the absence of motivation to develop their English speaking skills, fear of making mistakes is one of the reasons also that causes them to be afraid to speak English when given the opportunity. In addition to grammar and vocabulary, other aspects cause difficulties for students when speaking English, namely pronunciation and lack of conversation partners.

Three of the ten respondents interviewed (respondents 1,5 and 6) said that they felt pronunciation was not easy; they wanted to improve their speaking skills but were delayed by the lack of suitable partners.

This is due to the lack of practice and opportunities that students have are only limited in the classroom or during the learning process, which is due to the limited space for speaking and the narrow time that students have so that they have to look for other alternatives to improve and develop their speaking skills if they want to master speaking English because if they only rely on opportunities that arise during the learning process or opportunities in the classroom and with the fear they have then it will take longer for them to be able to improve their English speaking skills better.

Five of the ten respondents interviewed (respondents 2,7,8,9,10) said some solutions they do to overcome the difficulties. Practice every day, increasing vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. Some of them join the online course platform to improve their speaking skill, watch movies and use English translations, and make a small note to increase their vocabulary; some of them practice by practice pronunciation by listening to live audio from native speakers and be more active in learning grammar.

From the interview above, it can be seen that relying on classroom learning is not always effective and sufficient to increase vocabulary; having a small group to speak and improve skills is needed by students; with the difficulties they encounter, they must continue to practice to improve the skills they have and to reduce the difficulties they experience such as by joining several online platforms, listening to audio from native speakers or watching English movies to increase vocabulary and improve pronunciation.

## **B. DISCUSSION**

The primary finding in the data indicates that students in the 3rd semester of Class A English education struggle with speaking English due to linguistic obstacles. Among the six factors assessed, the linguistic obstacle factor is the most significant. The results show that 47% of respondents in item six still have difficulties with grammar, while 39% in items one and 11 exhibit anxiety related to grammar and vocabulary. The linguistic challenges faced by students in the 3rd semester of English

Education have consistently been the primary factor impacting their speaking fluency. Lack of vocabulary is the most frequently cited issue by students during interviews and in questionnaire results conducted by the researcher.

Lack of vocabulary is the biggest factor that hinders students from speaking English fluently, as Richards and Renandya (2002) emphasize that vocabulary is a crucial aspect of language proficiency, influencing learners' speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. Students mentioned that they had difficulty speaking English when the learning process took place due to a lack of knowledge of vocabulary. This was supported by Himma (2018), who said that the majority of students had trouble applying their vocabulary while interacting with peers and when they had to give presentations on the content they had learned. Students often encounter vocabulary issues as they lack the necessary words for conversation and struggle with constructing coherent sentences. According to Khan (2005), many English language learners face challenges in using words and expressions when speaking. The fear of making grammar mistakes leads to pauses and hinders fluency in speech, as noted by Rahayu et al. (2020). This fear of incorrect grammar impedes students' ability to converse confidently in English. When students have the opportunity to speak in front of the class, they prefer to stay in place and only as observers because of their inability to vocabulary so that only a few participate in front of the class because they are not confident, this is the same by Heriansyah (2012) stated that lack of vocabulary, not being confident to speak, not being used to talk in class are the major difficulty in English speaking which are also similar in this present study.

After linguistic obstacles, fluency is the second of 6 factors that cause difficulties for students in semester 3 class A of the English Education study program in speaking, the results found by researchers are high, namely 44% of the majority of students still have difficulties in vocabulary and fluency, in item number 23 also researchers found a difference that is not far away at least 39% of respondents still experience a crisis of confidence to speak when given the opportunity this is due to a lack of confidence and fear of being wrong as Richards & Renandya (2002) asserted that fear of committing mistakes discourages learners to develop speaking fluency in English. It's important for everyone to learn from their mistakes and maintain confidence, especially when learning English as a foreign language. Proficiency in English is highly valuable, and students should strive to speak naturally and master the pronunciation of individual words, as discussed by Hinkel in Sabata et al. (2024).

After fluency, speech processing is the third factor that causes difficulty speaking English that researchers find. The findings that researchers found high results 42% of respondents experience anxiety when given the opportunity to speak because of fluency problems that become obstacles due to the mother tongue that is still inherent in everyday life, the mother tongue that is still often attached due to the lack of speaking practice by students, lack of curiosity and motivation to improve their English skills. When learners have strong motivation and expectations on language learning, they can visualize themselves to be proficient in English and bridging their classroom experience as a manifestation for their future career, supported by Harmer; they will get a better job in their life if they have a good command of English (Harmer, 2001) If they have a high curiosity, strong intention to master English they will easily achieve that desire, because there are many opportunities that arise when we want to achieve something like Yashima (2002) argued that learners who are motivated to learn English in order to try to achieve their goals tend to have higher trust in their own ability in English communication.

The next factor is the negative effect, in this aspect the researcher did not find significant results needed to see the difficulties of students in speaking English, the negative effect arises because of nervousness, fear and lack of confidence by students, Brown (2001) also stated that lack of confidence, vocabulary, the inability of using grammatical patterns in an appropriate situation as the most common problems for speaking for the EFL learners. In this case students need to learn how to overcome their nervousness about speaking in front of people, the position of English as a foreign language is also the reason why the surrounding environment is less supportive to improve students' speaking skills,



especially in EFL. Thus if students can fight these worries, the level of enthusiasm for learning will increase. As Hashimoto (2012) explained, when motivation increases, anxiety level tends to decrease in a particular way.

The last two aspects, namely academic and conversational English skills and Access to Speaking opportunities, researchers found that these two aspects are the lowest factors for the cause of speaking difficulties in students, the opportunity to speak English by 3rd semester students in class A of the English Education study program is not something that affects students because the majority of them all have these opportunities and it all depends on how they want or do not take these opportunities.

Based on the interviews conducted by a researcher, it is evident that students in the 3rd semester of the English Language Education study program encounter challenges. However, they have devised several strategies to address these difficulties. These include daily vocabulary building, direct practice, watching English films, making notes for new words, and participating in online learning programs to enhance their speaking skills and connect with suitable conversation partners for feedback.

From the findings above, it can be seen that the difficulties experienced by 3rd semester students in class A of the English Education study program are due to the factors of linguistic obstacles, speech processing, academic and conversational English skills, negative effects, access to speaking opportunities and fluency which affect students' difficulties when speaking English. and the most dominant factor is linguistic obstacles in the form of lack of vocabulary, not fluent in grammar, and the use of difficult sentence structures. The findings of this study exhibit similarities to Gustina (2021) in terms of the dominant factors. In this study, the linguistic obstacle factor emerges as the most prominent, whereas in Gustina, fluency is identified as the primary factor, with fluency ranking second in this study. Conversely, the results diverge from the research conducted by Indrawati (2019) and Ambarwati (2022), in which the dominant factors are categorized as internal, pertaining to students' perceived lack of vocabulary, proficiency in grammar, confidence, and motivation to learn. These factors differ from the external factors identified in this study, which include academic and conversational English skill, as well as access to speaking opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

Analysis of the research indicates that the causes and contributing factors for students' challenges in speaking English have been identified. The study reveals that the difficulties faced by 3rd semester students in the English Education program stem from six main factors: linguistic barriers, speech processing, academic and conversational English skills, negative influences, access to speaking opportunities, and fluency. The primary factors contributing to challenges faced by students in class A, semester 3 of the English Education program are linguistic obstacles, particularly difficulties with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence construction. Additionally, students often encounter pronunciation issues and struggle with constructing cohesive sentences.

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