

## AN ANALYSIS OF SPEAKING DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THE SECOND SEMESTER STUDENTS IN AN ENGLISH EDUCATION STUDY PROGRAM

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### Abstract

Speaking is often one of the fears when learning a language, including for undergraduate students. They will find some difficulties that hamper their ability to explore their abilities in speaking English. This research was conducted to explain the speaking difficulties faced by English education study students at one university in Jambi, as categorized and not categorized by Penny Ur theory. This research used a qualitative case study design. The researcher chose seven second-semester students in the English education study program at one university in Jambi as participants. In collecting data, the researcher used a semi-structured interview. The result is according to the theory, but one finding is not an identity in the theory. The research has found that every student had different difficulties in speaking; there were inhibitions, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use. Students had factors that caused difficulties in speaking English. Most of these problems are due to a lack of grammar and vocabulary.

**Keywords:** *Analysis, Speaking Difficulties, Undergraduate Students*

### INTRODUCTION

Undergraduate students must learn all aspects of English, including speaking, to develop their communicative ability; therefore, learning speaking skills is very important. One of the language experts, Thornbury (2005 p 1), supports the idea that speaking is an important skill to learn; he says, "Speaking is a skill, and as such needs to be developed and practiced independently of the grammar curriculum." It means that learning to speak must be practiced without too much emphasis on grammatical structure.

Speaking English learners need direct interaction; this is the same as the opinion of Brown & Yule (1983), that spoken language is interactional to establish and maintain social relationships. It is also supported by Khan (2013), who states that modern teaching is characterized by interaction, communication, and participation. The learning process in speaking is a dynamic and intricate journey, marked by various stages that contribute to language proficiency. According to Ur (1996), mastering speaking skills involves a multifaceted approach

beyond mere grammatical exercises. The process encompasses developing fluency and accuracy, emphasizing effective communication.

Developing students' speaking skills is not easy. Students will find some difficulties that hamper their ability to explore their abilities in speaking English. In this research, the researcher will use Ur's theory to learn about students' difficulties in speaking. According to Ur (1996), students' difficulties in speaking English include inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use. Those factors make the students unable to speak English in their activities. Wael et al. (2018) stated that students at university levels sometimes do not feel confident to speak English either inside or outside the classroom, even though they are from the English department. Based on the statement above, several students at the university also experience what Ur describes in her theory.

Based on the statement above, several students at the university also experience what Ur describes in her theory. Shen & Chiu (2019), in their study, reported that students' difficulties in speaking English were psychological problems (e.g., nervousness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence), linguistic problems (e.g., insufficient vocabulary, grammar, expressions, insufficient sentence organization, etc.), and environmental problems (e.g., lack of learning context for English conversation).

In this research, the researcher will analyze the difficulties of the students with speaking skills in the second-semester students of the English education study program at one university in Jambi academic year 2023/2024 because most English students were to become English teachers in the future, and they are fresh students at the university.

There are some previous studies related to students' difficulties in speaking English such as Tama (2017) investigating the students' difficulties in learning English-speaking skills at senior high school in Jambi. The findings indicate that students face challenges related to confidence as they fear making mistakes while speaking English, leading to nervousness and worry. Additionally, difficulties in pronunciation and vocabulary contribute to struggles in constructing complete sentences. Students aspire to achieve native-like proficiency but acknowledge pronunciation shortcomings and encounter grammar issues. Another is a study by Nadila (2016). Nadila (2016) investigated students' difficulties in speaking English in the tenth grade at SMKN 1 Singosari. Her finding showed that difficulties faced by the students X *TPm1* (*Teknik permesinan/machinery engineering*) in speaking English were a lack of vocabulary and grammar, inhibition, and mother tongue use. These difficulties were influenced by three factors: lack of confidence, lack of support (classroom atmosphere), and lack of motivation. Based on the

previous study above, the researchers found a lack of research on speaking difficulties faced by undergraduate students because most research only discussed speaking difficulties at the junior high school and senior high school levels. This research seeks to answer the following question: What are the speaking difficulties faced by the second-semester students in the English education study program at one university in Jambi during the academic year 2023-2024, as categorized and not categorized by Penny Ur's theory?

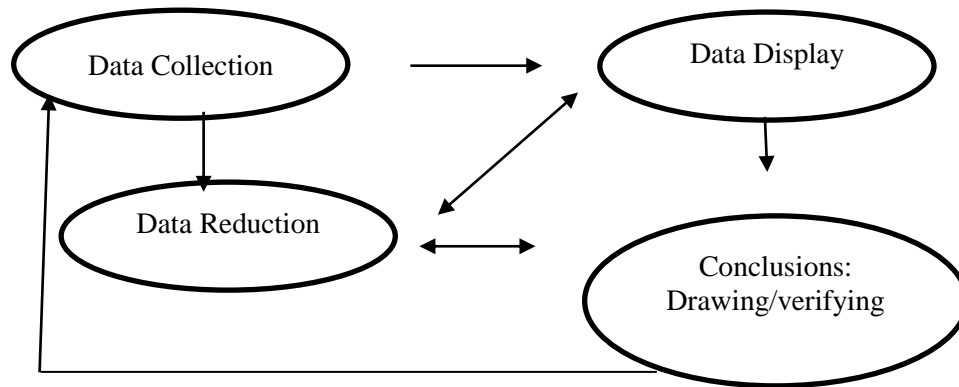
## **METHOD(S)**

This study used a case study approach. According to Stake (1995), case studies are a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. The researchers chose a case study to explain in-depth the difficulties in speaking that occurred among second-semester students in the English Education Study Program at one university in Jambi during the academic year 2023/2024. In this research, the researchers used semi-structured interviews. Seven second-semester students were interviewed, and they were the main participants of this.

In this research, several steps were taken to gather data from second-semester students who had difficulties in speaking. First, the researcher requested permission to collect data from the head of the English Education Study Program at one university in Jambi. After that, the researchers invited undergraduate students who were in the lowest 10% of the Speaking and Listening 1 class in the first semester of the academic year 2023/2024. Then, the researchers arranged scheduled interviews, allowing the interview to be conducted face-to-face or online (via phone/Zoom). Lastly, the researchers conducted the interviews. In this study, the researchers used semi-structured interviews to obtain data about speaking difficulties from second-semester students. During the process, the researcher used a recorder (video and audio) to record the interviews.

After collecting the data, the researcher analyzed the ordinal data to discover speaking difficulties in the English Education Study Program at one university in Jambi. Analyzing qualitative data has to be interactive and continuous. The activities were data reduction, data display, and conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Figure 1 Components of data analysis



## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings will explain the speaking difficulties in the second semester of the English education study program at one university in Jambi. They are classified into four categories: inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use. Some specific information would support those categories.

Table 1. Data Display from Interview

No	Category	Cause	Participants							Total
	Speaking Difficulties		RS	ABW	RA	ESV	JEPZ	MNS	P	
1	I	FM	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	6
		N	+	-	-	+	-	+	+	4
		S	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	6
		<b>Total</b>								<b>16</b>
2	NS	LG	+	-	+	+	+	+	+	6
		LV	+	+	-	+	+	-	+	5
		IP	-	-	+	+	-	+	-	3
		<b>Total</b>								<b>14</b>
3	LNP	LP	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	6
		LO	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	6
		<b>Total</b>								<b>12</b>
4	MTU	TLM	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	7
		MTD	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	7
		<b>Total</b>								<b>14</b>

<b>Total</b>	9	7	9	11	7	9	6	
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Based on the data collected from the table of data displayed from the interview above, it has been found that there are four types of speaking difficulties. Those types are classified into some causes. Based on the data collected from the table of data displayed from the interview above, it has been found that there are four types of speaking difficulties. Those speaking difficulties consist of inhibition, nothing to say, low or uneven participation, and mother tongue use.

### **Inhibition**

According to Ur (1996 p 121), inhibition is a condition in which someone or students lose face, worry about making mistakes, and are afraid of the attention that their speech attracts. For the speaking difficulties in the second semester of the English education study program at One university in Jambi about inhibition based on the theory above, the researcher used two item questions: items number 3 and 4. Item number 3 would know about students feeling shy when speaking English and Item number 4 would be about making errors when speaking English.

#### **Question 3 : Do you feel shy when speaking English? Can you mention it?**

“Sometimes I felt embarrassed as if I was afraid of being wrong.” (P2)

“Yes, I have felt shy. I am embarrassed when talking to people who are better at it. I am so shy, afraid of being wrong, of being laughed at.” (P3)

Based on data analysis from seven students who were the subjects of the research, two students answered that they often feel shy when speaking English. First, they think they will make a mistake in pronunciation or grammar. Second, they worry other students will laugh at them and criticize them. Third, they feel shy because they are speaking with people who are better than them. Lastly, students are shy when speaking face to face.

#### **Question 4 : Are you worried about making errors while speaking English? Provide an example if you can.**

“When it comes to speaking, the fear of being wrong is what worries me. For example, there is usually speaking practice in front of the lecturer in the class. So if, for example, some words are wrong, I still feel worried, though my friends don't laugh at me. It seems that my English skills are still lacking even though I study English” (P5)

Based on the data, from seven students who became subjects of the research, three students feel fear of mistakes when speaking in front of the class because they worry that they will make a mistake when speaking in front of class, and students feel shy because when speaking in front of the class students will be center of attention. Four of seven students do not feel nervous when speaking in front of the class, but they have problems with English linguistic ability or lack knowledge of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.

### **Nothing to say**

According to Ur (1996 p 121), learners cannot think of anything to say because they have no motive to express something when they speak in front of the class or when talking with other learners; the learners also do not have ideas for explaining what they want to say. To know the cause of “nothing to say” to students in the second semester of teacher training and education faculty, the researcher made two items’ questions for testing: items 5 and 6.

### **Question 5 : Do you feel a lack of knowledge when speaking English, and what is the reason for this feeling?**

“Yes, it feels lacking because of the lack of exercise and also only learning on campus.”(P3)

Based on item number five about the lack of knowledge, three students answered that they lacked knowledge because they lacked speaking practice. Two students answered that they did not like English in senior high school. Next, one student answered that she lacked grammar skills, especially in tenses, and one student sometimes felt a lack of knowledge when speaking English, but lately, she feels a little bit of improvement.

### **Question 6 : Are you feeling like you cannot think of anything to say when speaking, and can you give an example?**

“If you think about it, of course, especially if I want to speak English, I also have difficulty memorizing vocabulary. So if the problem of wanting to think about speaking is definitely there, it's just like a difficulty.”(P2)

Based on item number six, which is about feeling nothing to say, three students answered that they lacked vocabulary when speaking English, two students felt nervous or lacked confidence,

and one student did not master or forget the material. One student was unable to understand the questions asked by the person she was talking to.

### **Low or uneven participation**

Low or Uneven Participation refers to all students reporting low participation in speaking activities due to shyness, lack of confidence, or more vocal classmates dominating discussions. The researcher created two items to test and understand why students participate poorly or unevenly. The items are questions numbered 7 and 8.

#### **Question 7 : Do you have low or uneven participation when speaking English, and why can that happen?**

“I'm not very active. Because I don't have basic skills. I can't speak, so I'm less active. In class too, for example, the lecturer asked about "what I don't understand.” Yes, so I just keep quiet. If I use Bahasa Indonesia, I will ask questions. It's just difficult to speak. “(P2)

Based on item number seven about the low or uneven participation, two students answered that they lacked knowledge. Then, two students answered that they felt shy and feared criticism. Next, one student answered that she feared mistakes, one student because he felt insecure about his English, and one student sometimes participated in answering questions or came to the front of the class.

#### **Question 8 : Do you lack confidence when speaking English, and why does it happen?**

“Yes, because I was nervous, and the grammar was still not organized. Vocabulary too. “(P1)

Item number eight aimed to determine whether students lack confidence. Based on the data collected from the seven students who participated in the research, five of seven students indicated that they lacked confidence when speaking English due to grammar issues. Additionally, three of seven students stated that their lack of confidence stemmed from vocabulary limitations, while two of seven students attributed their lack of confidence to pronunciation difficulties. Grammar is the most common reason why students feel insecure, and it makes students participate less or less unevenly.

### **Mother tongue use**

According to Harmer (1991), there are some reasons why students use their mother -tongue in their speaking classes. The first reason is that when teachers ask their students to talk about a topic that they do not have enough knowledge, they will try to use their language. Based on the analysis of the data, the researcher created two items to test and understand why their mother tongue is easier than English and students use their mother. The researcher created two items to test and understand why their mother tongues is easier than English and why students use their mother tongue in the classroom. The items are questions numbered 9 and 10.

#### **Question 9 : Do you feel that the mother tongue is easier than English, and why does that happen?**

“Because from the moment I was born, my parents have spoken Indonesian and always used Indonesian. And from junior high school to senior high school. I only learned English and only learned at school. So, not every day. “(P4)

The indicator of item number nine concerns the difficulty of using the target language. Based on the data obtained from the participants, students in the second semester at One university in Jambi encounter difficulty when speaking English for several reasons: students lack linguistic ability (vocabulary, pronunciation, and English grammar), students seldom or are not accustomed to speaking English outside the class, the environment consistently uses the mother tongue or Indonesian, and there is no support, such as a partner, to improve their English.

#### **Question 10 : Do you have a habit of using your mother tongue in English class, and why does this happen?**

“Yes, because when I don't know how to speak, I automatically mix the language; for example, I mix English with Indonesian so that the explanation is conveyed. “(P6)

Item number ten would know that students have a habit of using their mother tongue in class English. Based on the result of the analysis data, seven students who became subjects of the research stated that students seldom discuss with other students use the English language because they habitually use Indonesian when talking and discussing; the English language is difficult to use based on other items above, students not supplied linguistic ability like vocabulary, pronunciation, and English grammar, and if students pressed to use the English language for

discussing the process of discussion will not effective. One student and other students will miss understanding because students not know what other students mean.

### **Other Speaking Difficulties**

In this section, the researcher wants to know about other speaking difficulties that the researcher did not ask about from the participant's point of view.

#### **Question 11 : Besides those above difficulties, do you encounter another difficulty in learning to speak English?**

“So far, nothing. Just pronunciation, grammar, improving speaking, speaking partners, and vocabulary. “(P4)

Six out of seven students said the difficulties they experienced had already been mentioned before, so they just summarized. However, one student mentioned that she had speaking difficulties that the researcher had not yet addressed. She faced difficulties finding a speaking partner. Based on the interview above, the participant (ESV) stated that the speaking partner. This indicates that she struggles to find a speaking partner. This is interesting because there is no mention in Penny Ur's theory about speaking difficulties.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Factors That Cause Difficulties in Speaking**

Based on the findings of the research, the researcher found the factors that cause difficulties in speaking covered linguistic and psychological problems.

#### **Linguistic Problems**

Linguistic problems are those that make the students' speaking abilities poor (Danisti et al., 2023; Sayuri, 2016; Spolsky & Hult, 2008). In general, linguistics comprises the details of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Based on research findings, the researcher found three factors that cause difficulties in speaking for second-semester students. They are lack of grammar, vocabulary, and incorrect pronunciation. The causes of grammar errors include complicated grammatical rules, difficulty in using tenses, and confusion about applying grammar in the right sentences. The findings of the research showed that a majority of the students highly

agreed that grammar is their biggest problem in speaking English. The students often experience confusion in determining the correct tenses.

The factors of lack of vocabulary included poor reading habits, less memory, and lower English. Data collected through interviews showed that students struggle to find the appropriate vocabulary item when trying to speak in English, which reflects their insufficient vocabulary repertoire. Data collected from the student interview supported this because one of the students reported that we wanted to speak, but we didn't know the word.

Regarding to incorrect pronunciation, the problem relates to the intonation. This is a significant issue because incorrect intonation usage can result in misinterpretation by the interlocutor. Based on the findings, incorrect pronunciation happened because their pronunciation was less clear, and they lacked confidence in their pronunciation.

### **Psychological Problems**

According to Juhana (2012), there are some psychological factors that students face when they speak in class: shyness, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, anxiety, and lack of motivation. But in this research, the researcher just found three:

#### 1. Shyness

Shyness is an emotional thing that usually appears when students are forced to do something that is ordered by their teacher, especially in classroom speaking activities. Shyness appears in each individual and is caused by fear. Data collected through interviews showed that one of the second-semester students feels shy because her shyness is caused by her nature, which is that they are very quiet. But when on social media, they aren't shy, just in face-to-face situations. Next, shyness happens because second-semester students fear making mistakes when speaking, whether it be a grammar error, a missed pronunciation, etc.

#### 2. Fear of mistake

The primary reason for fear of mistakes is that students are afraid of looking foolish in front of other people, and they are concerned about how others will see them (Kurtus, 2001). In this research, second-semester students faced fear of making mistakes for some reason, such as being laughed at by other students and worried about how others would react to their English.

#### 3. Lack confidence

It is commonly understood that students' lack of confidence usually occurs when students realize that their conversation partners do not understand them or vice versa. Based on the

findings, the researcher found some reasons why the second-semester students lack confidence. First, meet people who are better than them and next, speaking in front of a lot of people.

### **The Impact of Speaking Difficulties on Students**

Ur (1996 p 120) Ur (1996) stated that there are two characteristics of successful speaking activity in class they are motivation and participation. Motivation means students have a high motivation to study. Students who have high motivation will show good achievement. And participation means students talk a lot. Students also participate well in class, whether individually or in class discussions. Additionally, Grauberg (1997) effective communication and interaction depend both on a stock of vocabulary and on the ability to generate utterances through internalized grammatical knowledge. Based on the interview data, second-semester students face a lack of vocabulary and grammar, which hinders effective communication and leads to the mixing of their mother tongue and English. Then, students who faced speaking difficulties had low participation in speaking either in class or outside class, resulting in a low score.

### **CONCLUSION**

The conclusion is that second-semester students experience speaking difficulties as categorized by Penny Ur's theory, but there is one student who says one of her speaking difficulties is because there is no speaking partner. The first is inhibition, which is caused by fear of making mistakes in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Then, there is nervousness about speaking in front of the class or the lecturer, and there is a fear of criticism and being laughed at by peers. The second is the mother tongue, which is caused by English being more difficult to use than their native language (Indonesian) and the habit of using the mother tongue in daily life and in the classroom. The third is nothing to say, which is caused by a lack of vocabulary knowledge, insufficient grammar skills, especially in tenses, lack of speaking practice and exposure to the language, forgetting or not mastering the material, and feeling nervous or lacking confidence. Lastly, low or uneven participation is caused by a lack of confidence due to poor grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation skills, fear of making mistakes and being criticized, and feeling insecure about their English proficiency compared to their peers. Then, there is a speaking difficulty not mentioned in Penny Ur's theory that is faced by second-semester students, which is to find an appropriate speaking partner.

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