AN EXPLORATION OF EFL SPEAKING CHALLENGES FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF PARTICIPANTS OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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ABSTRACT
This study investigates the challenges English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners face when speaking English outside of a formal school environment. It delves into internal and external factors contributing to these challenges, aiming to offer a comprehensive understanding and actionable solutions. The findings reveal significant internal barriers. Psychological factors play a crucial role, with 50% of respondents reporting nervousness when speaking in front of others and 58.3% feeling embarrassed or lacking confidence if corrected. This highlights how anxiety and self-doubt can impede communication despite a genuine interest in the language. Linguistic challenges are also prominent: 58.3% found English pronunciation difficult, 50% struggled with sentence structuring, and 41.7% acknowledged vocabulary limitations affecting their speaking ability. These linguistic hurdles directly impact learners' capacity to express themselves effectively. External factors further exacerbate these issues. A notable 41.7% of respondents felt their environment was unsupportive for English practice, and 83.3% reported only occasional English speaking, indicating a severe lack of consistent practice opportunities. Additionally, 33.3% attributed their difficulties to insufficient teacher guidance during their schooling, and 58.3% struggled to find English conversation partners. Despite these obstacles, learners demonstrate remarkable resilience, actively

leveraging technology such as videos, language applications, and subtitled media. Self-directed practice, including speaking to oneself and mimicking native speakers, also emerged as a vital strategy. In conclusion, overcoming EFL speaking challenges necessitates a holistic approach addressing emotional and practical constraints. Recommendations include fostering supportive community-based learning environments, integrating technology for independent study, promoting collaborative learning, and implementing confidence-building interventions. Teacher training should also emphasize strategies for motivating reluctant speakers. By adopting these measures, stakeholders can create more conducive environments, significantly enhancing learners' confidence and proficiency in real-world English communication.

Keywords: EFL Speaking Challenges, Internal Factors, External Factors, Language Learning Solutions

INTRODUCTION

Language is a vital communication tool (O Mailani, 2022). English is one of the linguistic fields necessary in today's globalization era to be learned (Arina & Mega, 2023). English is no longer foreign to most people (Siti Maria, 2021). In Indonesia, English is generally taught as a foreign language, which differs from a second language (Salma Nurhalisa et al., 2024). Mastery of English as a foreign language (EFL) has become one of the most important skills in the current era of globalization. According to Horwitz (2008), English as a foreign language (EFL) refers to the learning and teaching English in an English-speaking country.

Shuck (2013) mentions that the term EFL is mostly used to refer to international students learning English in one of the English-speaking countries, such as the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. However, the term includes international students and residents who learn English for different purposes. Shuck (2013) notes that the EFL population is numerous and includes various categories that

fall under this term, such as international students learning English for communication purposes, students studying in intensive English language programs, students born in English-speaking countries at home, and children of immigrants living in English-speaking countries. In contrast, Johnson (2008) points out that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching refers to the teaching and learning English in countries where English is not spoken nationally. English is not only used as an international communication tool, but also as a language of instruction in various fields, such as education, business, and technology (Luthfi, 2024). Therefore, English proficiency has become one of the competencies that students are expected to have, especially in non-English speaking countries, including Indonesia.

In the current era of globalization, young people are expected to understand English, especially those who want to compete in the global market or expand their connections. In Indonesia, English is taught from elementary to university, yet it remains difficult for many to grasp it quickly, even with formal instruction. One of the basic skills expected of students is proficiency in language as an essential foundation for communication and interaction. However, in reality, many participants outside the formal learning environment, such as students, workers, or even the general public, often face challenges when speaking English in daily life beyond the classroom context. In addition to English being an international language that must be learned, it is also needed in the current era. Being able to speak English can help us take part in global competition.

Learning language subjects differs from learning non-language subjects because language is a means of communication for interacting with others. Thus, learning English cannot rely solely on grammar and vocabulary theory. Regular speaking practice in English helps individuals become more accustomed to using English sentences. The competency objective for English is for students to communicate effectively, both orally and in writing, with appropriate, fluent, and accurate language (Dhandi et al., 2021).

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four skills that must be mastered in English. To excel in English,

students must understand these four core skills to facilitate learning. Teachers play a crucial role in this process, striving to create conditions that encourage students to actively engage as a reflection of their learning progress (Dhandi et al., 2021). Speaking English proficiently has become a critical skill students must acquire to address global challenges.

Many EFL learners face significant challenges in learning to speak English. These challenges include internal factors such as low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and lack of motivation to practice speaking, which are the main obstacles for students. Meanwhile, external factors such as ineffective teaching methods, the influence of the mother tongue, social pressure or shame, and lack of opportunities to practice speaking in real contexts also contribute to the obstacles faced by students (Goh and Burns, 2012).

In addition, the social and cultural environment around students also affects their ability to speak English. Many students are more comfortable using regional languages or Indonesian in everyday life, so they feel unfamiliar with the structure and pronunciation of English. This makes them less confident when speaking English, and they get pressure from shame and fear of making mistakes in front of others when speaking or practicing English. Khan et al. (2020) found that students who are used to using their mother tongue in their daily interactions tend to have challenges adapting to English pronunciation and structure, reducing their confidence when speaking. This research emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive learning environment where students feel safe to practice speaking without fear of negative judgment from peers or teachers.

The challenges of speaking English outside of school are not solely related to mastery of grammar and vocabulary. Internal factors such as fear of making mistakes, low confidence, and embarrassment when speaking in front of others heavily influence their abilities. External factors like limited practice opportunities, lack of English-speaking communities or friends, and social perceptions regarding accents and pronunciation also play a significant role. As a result, they often feel hindered and hesitant to practice

speaking actively, even though speaking skills are crucial for building confidence and improving real-life communication.

Furthermore, differences in student backgrounds, such as social environments, also affect their ability to speak English. For example, stigma towards accent or pronunciation. Some people fear talking because their accent will be considered "strange" or not, according to native speaker standards. Giles and Niedzielski (1998) show that negative perceptions of accents can affect how people are treated in social interactions, reducing their confidence in speaking. The social environment surrounding them often becomes a significant obstacle. Many participants feel unsupported by family, friends, or their community, which is unfamiliar with English. The stigma surrounding accents and pronunciation frequently makes them self-conscious and afraid of being judged as "different" or "not Indonesian enough." Worrying about social acceptance, they avoid direct speaking situations, even though such experiences are vital for gaining confidence and honing their skills.

In addition, Kang (2018) found that students who feel stigmatized because of their accents tend to avoid speaking situations in English, hindering the development of their speaking skills. This research emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive and inclusive environment where students feel comfortable saying without fear of negative judgment. Thus, accent stigma can significantly affect students' English communication ability. Given these conditions, exploring the experiences and perspectives of participants outside the school setting regarding the challenges they face when speaking English is extremely important. This research aims to provide a real picture of the barriers they encounter and find practical solutions suited to the local context. Educators and other stakeholders can create more supportive and inclusive environments through this approach, encouraging participants to be more confident and motivated to develop their English-speaking skills outside formal education.

However, despite identifying these challenges, previous research has focused on exploring the general factors influencing English-speaking skills. There remains a significant gap in studies that concentrate on local contexts and the

specific factors affecting students in EFL, particularly concerning their speaking abilities. This gap highlights the necessity for further investigation to understand the existing dynamics better and to develop more effective teaching strategies tailored to the needs of students within local contexts.

The problem formulation in this research focuses on identifying and analyzing the factors that become challenges in the learning of the English language learning process. When learning the English language, EFL learners often face various obstacles that can affect their ability to master the language. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that contribute to these challenges so that appropriate steps can be taken to overcome them. This research aims to provide a clear picture of EFL learners' difficulties in speaking English internally and externally. Internal factors are an important aspect to consider in learning English. Motivation, self-confidence, and cognitive ability significantly affect their learning process. High motivation can encourage EFL to be more active in learning and practicing English, while low self-confidence can inhibit them from speaking or interacting in the language.

On the other hand, external factors also have a significant impact on learning the English language learning. Learning environment, family, friends, or community support can influence students' learning experience. A conducive environment and adequate family, friends, or community support can increase EFL motivation and confidence. Conversely, limited access to resources such as books, technology, and other learning materials can seriously hinder learning. Therefore, this research will also explore how such external factors interact with internal factors in influencing the challenges of learning English. Specifically, this research seeks to answer two primary questions: (1) What are the main factors that cause challenges faced by participants in speaking English outside the school environment? and (2) How do internal and external factors influence the speaking difficulties encountered by participants outside the classroom, and what solutions can be proposed to address these challenges?

In line with the problem statement, this study aims to

identify and analyze EFL's specific challenges when learning to speak English in real-world contexts. More precisely, the study endeavors to pinpoint the factors that cause these challenges for participants outside the school environment and to ascertain effective solutions derived from understanding internal and external influences on their English-speaking challenges.

This research is anticipated to offer valuable insights for various stakeholders involved in the language learning process. Firstly, it aims to comprehensively understand the genuine challenges individuals face using English in daily speaking situations beyond formal learning environments. Secondly, it intends to assist educators, language trainers, and policymakers by identifying the psychological, social, and environmental barriers that impede effective communication in real-life contexts. Thirdly, this study seeks to lay the groundwork for developing more relevant, adaptive, and needs-based teaching strategies and training programs specifically tailored to the requirements of participants in real-world scenarios outside the classroom. Ultimately, this research supports creating a more conducive learning environment, which can significantly enhance participants' confidence and speaking abilities, enabling them to communicate more confidently and effectively in diverse contexts.

The results of this research are expected to provide an in-depth and comprehensive picture of the participants' challenges in the field and offer applicable and appropriate solutions. The problem formulation in this research focuses on identifying and analyzing the factors that become challenges in the learning of the English language learning process. When learning the English language, EFL learners often face various obstacles that can affect their ability to master the language. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors that contribute to these challenges so that appropriate steps can be taken to overcome them. This research aims to provide a clear picture of EFL learners' difficulties in speaking English internally and externally.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communicating effectively in English has become increasingly important in today's globalized world. The findings of this study aim to explore experiences and views on the use of English, focusing on the challenges faced in learning and using the language. Based on the analysis of the collected data, the findings can be categorized into internal factors (e.g., confidence, anxiety, motivation, linguistic barriers) and external factors (e.g., environmental support, external resources). Each finding is based on the data gathered from the questionnaire results. As supported by Dörney (2007), questionnaires are efficient tools for collecting extensive data on learners' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions, which are critical for understanding language learning challenges.

Based on the questionnaire results, it was found that psychological factors (e.g., confidence, anxiety, motivation) play a significant role in respondents' experiences when speaking English. Most respondents (50%) reported liking English, indicating a positive interest in it. However, despite this interest, 50% of respondents also reported feeling nervous when speaking in front of others, and 58.3% felt embarrassed or not confident if corrected or reprimanded. This suggests that, although there is interest, anxiety, and embarrassment can hinder their confidence and speaking ability. The confidence level among respondents varied, with 66.7% feeling fairly confident when speaking English. However, these findings suggest that while learners may genuinely be interested in English, nervousness and embarrassment indicate that these psychological factors can hinder their conversation. It needs to be addressed to enhance speaking proficiency in English, such as fostering a more supportive learning environment, like creating a speaking club that encourages practice and participation.

Linguistic barriers were also identified as significant challenges for respondents. Approximately 58.3% of respondents felt that English is difficult to pronounce fluently, indicating a common struggle with pronunciation. Additionally, 50% experienced difficulties structuring sentences while speaking, impeding effective communication. Furthermore, 41.7% of learners acknowledged that their vocabulary

knowledge affects their speaking ability. This indicates that vocabulary and sentence structure limitations affect learners' ability to express themselves and contribute to their confidence in speaking English.

This study also revealed that environmental support plays a crucial role in learners' experiences in learning and speaking English. About 41.7% of respondents felt that their surrounding environment did not support practicing English speaking. This lack of support can stem from various factors, including limited opportunities for interaction with proficient speakers and a lack of peer pressure. Besides that, 33.3% of respondents reported a lack of guidance from teachers in school as a reason for their difficulties in improving speaking skills. Finding conversation partners who can speak English was also a concern, with 58.3% of respondents acknowledging this issue. The frequency of speaking English outside of the school environment also indicated that many respondents (83.3%) only speak occasionally, suggesting a lack of consistent opportunities for practice.

External resources, such as technology, were also identified as factors that assist in challenging speaking English as valuable tools for improving speaking skills. About 58.3% of respondents stated that technology, such as videos and learning applications, helps them learn. This indicates that learners can use various methods that help them continue to improve their speaking abilities, such as listening to English songs, watching movies, or using chat apps/social media. This suggests that learners actively seek opportunities to enhance their proficiency despite challenges.

Table 1: Frequency distribution of speaking challenges

Challenges Category	Percentage	Mean score (scale 1-5)
Psychological factors	58.3%	3,33 (from scale 1-5)
Linguistics barriers	58.3%	3,33 (from scale 1-

		5)
Environmental constraints	83.3%	4,33 (from scale 1-5)
External resources	58.3%	3,33 (from scale 1-5)

The discussion surrounding the respondents' experiences in speaking English outside the school environment reveals a complex interplay of emotions, challenges, and strategies for improvement. Many respondents expressed excitement and anxiety when engaging in English conversations. For instance, the respondent responded, "When I speak English outside school, I feel self-conscious when speaking with native speakers.". This reflects a common sentiment among learners who often have self-doubt and fear of making mistakes, highlighting the self-doubt that usually accompanies language learning. Another respondent stated, "I often feel less confident because I am confused about how to express myself.". This highlights the psychological barriers that learners face, which can hinder their willingness to engage in conversation. This sentiment is echoed in the literature, stating that language anxiety can significantly impede a learner's communication ability (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991).

Despite these challenges, there is a notable sense of motivation, the respondent shared, "It is fun and motivates me to speak English more.", indicating that positive experiences can enhance their willingness to engage in conversation. However, the fear of judgment looms, as one respondent articulated the guilt felt when making mistakes in front of peers, stating, "There is a feeling of guilt when I make mistakes in front of friends.". This fear can create significant barriers to speaking, leading learners to avoid situations where they might be criticized. Dörnyei (2005) points out that the fear of negative evaluation can be a powerful deterrent to language use. Additionally, the struggle with vocabulary recalls and sentence construction was a common theme, with one respondent admitting, "I sometimes struggle to construct sentences,"

underscoring the difficulties many learners face with grammar and syntax.

Respondents highlighted the importance of utilizing technology and media in their language learning journey to combat these challenges. The respondent mentioned, "The Ellen Show to practice English, I use English subtitles and repeat their words," which not only aids in vocabulary acquisition but also improves pronunciation and listening skills. This aligns with research showing that exposure to the native language through the media can enhance language learning (Vandergrift, 2007). Furthermore, the availability of language learning applications was emphasized as a valuable resource, with the respondent noting, "With the availability of English language apps, it helps beginners learn English, especially speaking.".

Self-practice emerged as a crucial strategy, with one respondent suggesting that speaking to oneself can build confidence: "If you don't have anyone to talk to, you can speak by yourself.". This proactive approach to learning, coupled with the desire to teach others, as expressed by another respondent, illustrates the collaborative spirit that can enhance language acquisition. Swain (2000) argues that collaborative dialogue can lead to greater language development. Moreover, recent research emphasizes that peer interaction and collaborative learning are essential for language development, as they provide opportunities for negotiation of meaning (Nassaji, 2020). Overall, the insights gathered from these interviews reveal that while learners face significant challenges in speaking English outside of academic environments, they exhibit resilience and creativity in overcoming these obstacles. Fostering a supportive environment that encourages practice and reduces the fear of judgment can significantly enhance learners' confidence and proficiency in speaking English.

CONCLUSION

This study, exploring EFL speaking challenges faced by participants outside the school environment, reveals a complex interplay of internal and external factors significantly impacting learners' abilities to communicate effectively in

English. Internally, learners struggle with psychological barriers, including anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes, which often inhibit their willingness to engage in English conversations despite having an interest in the language. These emotional challenges are compounded by linguistic difficulties such as pronunciation issues, limited vocabulary, and problems with sentence structure. Many learners express interest in English but struggle with nervousness and self-doubt when speaking, particularly in front of peers or native speakers. Linguistic obstacles, including difficulties in pronunciation, sentence construction, and limited vocabulary, further contribute to communication difficulties.

External factors, such as a lack of supportive environments and limited practice opportunities, exacerbate these challenges, making it difficult for learners to gain confidence and improve their speaking skills. Where English is rarely used, alongside minimal opportunities for practice and insufficient guidance from peers or teachers, exacerbates these challenges. Despite these barriers, learners demonstrate resilience, often turning to technology (such as videos, language apps, and subtitled media) and self-directed practice (speaking alone, mimicking native speech) to improve their skills.

These findings suggest several strategic recommendations to address these multifaceted challenges. Creating supportive learning environments through community-based initiatives like conversation clubs and language exchange programs could provide safe spaces for practice. Integrating technology into learning processes offers promising solutions, with digital tools and authentic English media as accessible resources for independent study. Collaborative learning approaches that pair learners with peers or more proficient speakers may help build confidence through mutual support.

Psychological aspects require particular attention,

suggesting the need for confidence-building interventions and workshops that help learners reframe mistakes as natural parts of the learning process. Teacher training programs should emphasize strategies for motivating reluctant speakers and creating inclusive classroom dynamics. Simultaneously, encouraging self-directed practice through journaling or voice recording can help learners develop independent learning habits.

The study underscores that overcoming EFL speaking challenges requires a comprehensive approach addressing emotional barriers and practical constraints. By implementing these recommendations, stakeholders can create more conducive environments for English language acquisition outside formal education settings. Future research should focus on evaluating the effectiveness of these interventions across different cultural contexts to develop more tailored solutions for diverse learner populations. Ultimately, such efforts could significantly enhance learners' ability to participate confidently in English-mediated global communication.

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