

Challenges in Speaking English Language among Education Students

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ABSTRACT

Education students, also known as pre-service teachers or teacher candidates, face challenges in speaking, particularly English language. This study explored the challenges experienced by the selected education students in one of the schools in Ozamiz City. A phenomenological research study design uses a research design with fifteen (15) students as participants in the study. The participants were selected through purposive sampling. An interview guide question was used to gather the data, and the responses were analyzed using Moustakas methods. Results generated the following themes: Having Insufficient Vocabulary Resources, Experiencing Emotional Pressures, and Encountering Difficulties in Speaking. Education students struggled a lot, especially in explaining and using English. It recommends that the students must practice what they will say in front of, prepare beforehand, and be exposed to English most of the time, whether at school or home.

Keywords: Challenges in speaking; Coping mechanisms; Difficulties in speaking; Emotional pressures; English; English as a second language; Experiences in speaking English; Insufficient vocabulary resources; Language exposure; Speaking anxiety.

1. Introduction

English is the most popular foreign language in the world. Many people use it daily in their work and social life, and it is the primary language used for communication. In Indonesia, English is taught as a compulsory subject from primary school to university level (Rizqiningsih & Hadi, 2019). When teaching English, students should master four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to the competency-based Curriculum, speaking is one of the four essential competencies that students should acquire (Riadil, 2020).

Everyone has to speak when they want to communicate with other people. As stated by (Mardiah, 2022), in speaking, people will share meaning by producing and receiving information through verbal and non-verbal symbols in various contexts. In speaking, people express their thoughts through words and talk about perceptions, feelings, and intentions they want other people to grasp and understand (Jemina et al., 2020). The learning of speaking cannot be separated from language, so it should make the students master this aspect. Speaking is a productive skill of language learning. It involves communicative performance and other essential elements, such as pronunciation, intonation, grammar, vocabulary, and more (Priya & Kumar, 2020). They should be taught in any language learning to enable the learners to use the target language to communicate. Speaking is the skill that the learners will be judged upon most in real-life situations (Rao, 2019). It is an integral part of everyday interaction, and most often, the first impression of a person is based on his or her ability to speak fluently and comprehensibly (Rizqiningsih & Hadi, 2019). Thus, the teachers are responsible for preparing the learners to speak English in real-life situations as much as possible.

Since Grade 1, the Philippine educational system has mandated that English be used as the teaching medium at all levels (Separa et al., 2020). It is one of the country's language policies in education – from Spanish to English to the current mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) policy (Adriano et al., 2021) – a shift that is

brought about by a large body of data which supports the view that the use of L1 in the classroom results in better learning (Oda & Vizconde, 2021). Until now, even though there is a new language policy, English is still incorporated by some teachers and parents. It is their way to encourage learners' fluency in using the English language throughout their academic careers (Rose et al, 2020). All students are expected to acquire the language and utilize it in all other school topics except those taught in the student's mother tongue (Separa et al., 2020). More crucially, English as a Second Language (ESL) students need to be able to use the English language effectively outside of the classroom.

Even though English is considered a second language in the Philippines, relationships at home, social interactions at school, and even business dealings in offices are not typically conducted in this language. As speaking English in this country is frequently connected with formality and social position, language study in the classroom frequently ends (Hannum, 2020).

There is a perception that students who can afford private and international schools have a firmer grasp of English than those who attend public institutions. Similarly, a person who can speak English fluently is seen as someone from a better social class and even more intellectual than those who cannot. People may label someone as a social climber if they use English when everyone else is speaking Filipino. English is regarded as a "special" language rather than a "second" language, and only people who have mastered its grammar and pronunciation—either through formal education or by conversation with native English speakers—are deemed deserving of using it (Hummel, 2021).

People often feel inferior when faced with circumstances that need them to speak English because of this mindset, which continues to shape how Filipinos view the language. The sounds they make, the vocabulary they use, the appropriateness of their grammar, how others perceive them, and even the mere presence of native speakers in conversations cause ESL learners to become overly conscious (Gordon, 2019). These uncertainties, as well as perhaps a great deal more, are what Filipinos may encounter when doing communicative tasks that call for the use of the English language (Separa, 2020).

The emphasis of language teaching and learning is on developing communicative competence. A person's ability to converse with both native and non-native English speakers provides insights into their interpersonal skills and level of social engagement. An individual's capacity to understand others is fulfilled when they feel understood, which fosters an inclusive linguistic environment (Riadil, 2020). Contrarily, self-doubt and negative perceptions from others make a person more likely to mistrust their language abilities and are frequently viewed as challenging circumstances while trying to communicate with others (Separa et al., 2020).

In Pakistan, a study revealed that students' challenges in speaking the English language are making common grammar mistakes while communicating in the English language, lack of confidence, problems in pronouncing English words, complex meanings of English words, lack of English vocabulary, feeling nervousness and fear of insult from fellow students while they are trying to speak in English language (Chand, 2021). However, they overcome it through watching English movies and listening to English songs with English subtitles, reading English novels and newspapers daily, using different kinds of dictionaries, participating in group discussions,

chatting with friends on social media apps in the English language, practicing speaking in English daily, and using different websites for collecting English words.

In Indonesia, a study found that the dominant difficulty faced by Grade 7 students in speaking English is grammar because they have difficulty arranging words, and the factors that contribute to it are internal and external (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). Furthermore, as stated by Rahmaniah & Asbah, (2019), most students have several difficulties in speaking English as students do not know the vocabulary because they do not want to memorize it; they worry about making mistakes in grammar and pronunciation; students are embarrassed to speak in front of the class because some of them are afraid if laughed at by their friends; and they prefer to use their language.

Sentence construction plays a significant part in students' difficulty when speaking. Considering that secondary schools in Bataan require students to speak only in English during classes, students sometimes opt to avoid attending classes to avoid violating the rule, which causes them to lose their self-confidence (Separa et al., 2020). Acquisition and learning of vocabulary in a specific language entail constant usage of words. English is considered a second language in the Philippines but is still not used in regular communication (Tan et al., 2020). Moreover, a study showed that learners can easily verbalize the contents of the reference material during class presentations, but explaining the contents based on one's understanding becomes a problem. Aside from unfamiliarity with some words, the limitation of a learner in expressing one's thoughts using English becomes a hindrance to describing concepts.

Speaking English is one of the requirements for education students. Since the first year, these students have been reminded to use English, especially when speaking in front of an audience or reporting in class. It is practiced earlier to be prepared for future teaching in a new environment and audience. In this way, education students will be confident speaking in front of others, and they can express their insights and deliver accurate information to future learners who will look up to them. Since speaking the English language is essential for pre-service teachers, it is in this context that the researchers conducted this study to know the different challenges faced by Education students. This study also intended to investigate how students cope with the challenges of speaking English to look confident in front of an audience. As speakers of English as a second language, it is necessary to identify these challenges and techniques to inform learners, especially Education students who are exposed to speaking in public, on how to apply strategies and overcome the challenges they will encounter.

2. Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach, conducting content analysis to explore the challenges university students face when speaking English in front of an audience. Conducted at a non-sectarian higher educational institution in Misamis Occidental, the research focused on Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSED) and Bachelor of Elementary Education (BEED) students. Participants were selected through purposive sampling, meeting criteria such as prior speaking experience and willingness to participate. Data was collected using validated and pilot-tested interview guides, with interviews recorded to ensure accuracy. Ethical guidelines and the Data Privacy Act of 2012 were strictly followed to maintain confidentiality and voluntary participation. Data

analysis utilized Moustakas' phenomenological reduction method, involving steps like bracketing, horizontalization, clustering into themes, and textural-structural synthesis. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of students' experiences and the challenges they face in public speaking, ultimately capturing the essence of these experiences in a synthesized narrative.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1. Having Insufficient Vocabulary Resources

Language is the cornerstone of human communication and expression, allowing individuals to convey their thoughts, emotions, and ideas with precision and depth. At the heart of language lies an expansive word lexicon that serves as the building blocks of their verbal and written interactions. However, the lack of vocabulary resources poses a significant challenge for many individuals, hindering their ability to communicate and engage with others effectively. In the study, participants found that speaking in English is challenging since they need more vocabulary resources.

From the interview, participants 6 and 12 found speaking in English challenging as they could only use common words and did not need help constructing sentences well. In addition, they feel conscious about their grammar and vocabulary because they know their resources are narrow enough. These are evident in their answers:

“The challenges that I encountered are I use common words, I don't know how to organize my thoughts, sometimes I stutter too, and too much nervousness makes me to have a mental block but I still manage to deliver what I want to convey to my audience. I am not distracted to my audience because I try to contain myself if ever there are a lot of people. I just think that there are just a few of them. It is very important to make eye contact to my audience because it makes me to concentrate more if I look at them.” (P6)

“There are still challenges that I doubting about the grammar I am using. In constructing sentences, I am still hesitant if the verb that I am using, the grammar or the conjunction that I use is right. Also, if dealing with professionals especially to our teachers, I feel conscious about my English grammar and vocabulary because I am aware that my resources are not wide but then if that word is used in a sentence, I can understand it.” (P12)

These statements collectively emphasize learners' difficulties in speaking and expressing themselves in English. The challenges range from limited word choices, reduced linguistic proficiency, barriers to effective communication, and reduced reading comprehension. These challenges may stem from limited exposure, lack of practice at home, and the inherent complexities of language learning. When learners interact with the target language they are trying to learn, this is called exposure to language (Peters et al., 2019). Addressing the challenges arising from the lack of vocabulary resources requires concerted efforts to develop comprehensive and accessible language-learning tools, promote reading habits, and bridge the gap between traditional teaching methods and innovative technologies.

This implies that learners need more vocabulary resources to find the right words to convey their thoughts, understand spoken English, engage in conversations or express themselves in English, and find appropriate words. This limitation can hinder their overall academic progress in English-related subjects. If this problem is not

addressed, it can limit the student's ability to communicate effectively and create barriers in social interactions and future professional settings.

3.2. Experiencing Emotional Pressures

Experiencing emotional pressures is a universal aspect of the human condition. Recognizing that these pressures can manifest differently for each individual is essential. Some may face the relentless pursuit of success and the fear of failure, while others grapple with societal expectations, identity crises, or burdens. Understanding the nature of these emotional pressures and developing strategies to navigate them is crucial for cultivating resilience and maintaining a healthy state of mind. The impact of emotional pressures can be far-reaching. They can give rise to anxiety, depression, burnout, and other mental health challenges.

Additionally, emotional pressures can strain relationships, impede personal growth, hinder decision-making processes, and lead to a diminished sense of self-worth. Acknowledging the profound influence of these pressures on individuals' lives underscores the importance of addressing them and fostering emotional well-being. In this study, the participants came out experiencing emotional pressures while speaking in front of an audience.

The statements provided by participants 2, 4, and 14 offered their experiences in speaking and the emotional pressures they had during those activities. They represented the reality that people will still feel nervous even if they know how to speak English, even if they are already prepared with their speech, especially if many people are watching them. It is essential not to let these pressures keep them from beating themselves and to find ways to handle them throughout the presentation.

These are their answers during the interview:

"I can describe my experiences as nerve-wracking because I am not fluent in English language when speaking in front. My nervousness depends on my audience, if they are just my classmates, I feel confident but when there's a teacher observing me, that is the time that I feel nervous because I feel that they will correct my English." (P2)

"I feel anxious and nervous. Like I'm afraid to commit mistake whenever I speak in front of other people especially if I don't know them because what if they will judge me that I speak in English then I have many mistakes. However, it's fulfilling whenever I speak after like wow I spoke with other people and they heard me and they listened." (P4)

"Speaking English in front of an audience is quite nervous especially if there are many people because I am scared to make mistakes and my pronunciations if spoken incorrectly, they usually laugh at it. If I am talking with my classmates, I still feel a bit nervous. It's just in spacious places that I would really get nervous." (P14)

The study participants' responses revealed that emotional pressures were experienced while speaking in front of an audience. This is because they were scared to be corrected, especially by their teacher, scared to make mistakes and be laughed at by their audience, and to be judged by their pronunciations. The students felt nervous because they had many listeners in front of them, which made them conscious of what words they were using and speaking English before a crowd was identified as the most dreaded experience. Low self-confidence in speaking in public;

lack of constant speaking experience and lack of knowledge in public speaking; fear of making mistakes and being laughed at; inadequate preparation and timidity were also identified as challenges affecting participants' ability to speak English in public (Dansieh et al., 2021). Anxiety tampered with the capability of the learners to focus on what was said in the target language, and even if they had ideas, anxiety took over the situation. It means anxiety can hamper their speech performance and lead to communication apprehension (Miskam & Saidalvi, 2019).

This implies that when students feel nervous when speaking English in front of an audience, they may have limited competency in communication. This can impact their ability to speak English fluently, use varied words and expressions, concentrate and actively engage with the audience, and motivation to learn and engage in English communication. Feeling anxious when speaking English in front of an audience might cause difficulties in speaking English. While feeling nervous always happens in every individual, letting it overpower them can hinder them from thinking clearly and conveying their message. They may need to remember important points, leading to an effective presentation.

3.3. Encountering Difficulties in Speaking English

When learning to speak English as a second language, encountering difficulties is a standard part of the journey. These challenges can arise due to various factors such as language barriers, cultural differences, lack of practice, or fear of making mistakes. However, understanding and acknowledging these difficulties is essential to overcoming them. Achieving fluency in spoken English involves speaking effortlessly, maintaining a natural rhythm, and responding spontaneously. Developing this skill requires practice and exposure to authentic English conversations. In this study, the participants found speaking English challenging when conveying a message.

The participants' statements emphasized their difficulty speaking English in front of many people. Speaking is a valuable language ability that allows speakers and listeners to communicate orally to transfer and share information and develop long-term relationships (Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). However, they differed regarding the explanations cited and the supplementary information provided. These remarks showed a need for more exposure to and use of the English language most of the time. These are the responses given during the interview:

“Personally, it has its challenging parts like for example, depending on a topic maybe I haven't studied that well and I get sometimes stutter in front of an audience but if the topic is a good topic, it would be a breeze explanation towards an English language communication in front of the class because it really benefited me as I have been challenged speaking English when I was a kid.” (P3)

“I can describe it as difficult because there are times that my audience cannot understand some terms that I use. There are times too that I have a difficulty in explaining what I want to convey to them. If I know my audience, it is easy to explain but if I don't know the audience, I find it difficult to explain. If the audience is just my classmates, I have the confidence to explain what I want to explain.” (P5)

“For me, I can describe that it's not easy to stand in front of an audience because I don't have the confidence and I have difficulty in explaining what I want to convey them. Sometimes, it challenged me especially when I don't know the topic and I feel a little bit nervous whenever I speak English in front of everyone.” (P9)

“The challenges that I have encountered in speaking English in front of an audience is when I start to stutter, that is the starting point that I will doubt speaking because I feel that when I start to make mistakes, it will be continuous.” (P15)

Based on the participants' answers, the findings revealed that learners encountered difficulty speaking English, especially at school. Participant 5 and 9 described it as problematic in explaining what they want to convey to their audience. They find it challenging when they need to know the topic they will present to their classmates. Participant 3 and 15 encountered stuttering while presenting in front of their audience.

This implies that when learners encounter difficulty in speaking English, it can result in reduced accuracy in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage. It can also erode students' confidence in their language abilities, making them feel self-conscious or anxious about making mistakes and inhibiting their willingness to speak up or participate actively in conversations. This problem can impact their academic performance, career prospects, and success in English-related domains. Difficulty speaking English can sometimes be connected to a limited vocabulary. This limitation restricts students' ability to express themselves fully and precisely. They may struggle to find the right words to convey their thoughts and ideas, resulting in incomplete and ineffective communication. Ignoring this matter can impede effective interaction and make it challenging to convey ideas or understand others' perspectives.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, several conclusions were drawn regarding the challenges faced by students in speaking English publicly. It was revealed that a significant difficulty stems from a lack of vocabulary, hindering their ability to find exact words and understand spoken English. Additionally, emotional pressure when speaking English in front of an audience impacts students' confidence and self-expression. Limited exposure to English further impedes their language development and personal growth. To address these issues, it is crucial for students to prepare, practice, and engage with a variety of English resources to build self-assurance and communication skills. Confident English speaking not only benefits students' personal and professional lives but also helps them overcome fears with consistent effort and willingness. The study also highlighted the importance of language exposure and active engagement with English, as these factors significantly enhance students' speaking abilities, enabling more efficient and fluent communication.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the researchers recommend several strategies for improving English speaking skills among students. Firstly, practice is essential; students should enhance their vocabulary, comprehension, and pronunciation. Exposure to English through books, blogs, shows, music, and podcasts can familiarize them with the language's sounds, vocabulary, and sentence patterns. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate speaking exercises such as presentations, debates, role plays, and simulations into their classes, providing constructive feedback on areas like pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Encouraging students to converse in English with peers will boost their confidence. Additionally, students should be given opportunities to expand their vocabulary and consistently prepare for speaking in front of an audience, practicing until they achieve

proficiency. For future researchers, it is important to develop strong language skills over time, enhance language proficiency, and seek diverse learning opportunities to improve their understanding and teaching of the language.

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The authors declare no competing financial, professional, or personal interests.

Consent for publication

The authors declare that they consented to the publication of this study.

Authors' contributions

All the authors took part in literature review, analysis and manuscript writing equally.

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