

Students' Challenges in Speaking English (A Case Study in the IPIREL of Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta)

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ABSTRACT

Speaking English is one of the most important skills in learning, especially as international class students. They need more effort to speak English correctly because they are required to use English in a daily basis in the learning process. However, this is the biggest challenge for them since English as a foreign language in Indonesia. While many researches mainly talk about speaking difficulty for students in general, this study aims to find out students' challenges in speaking English during class experienced by students in the international class program. In addition, because this research is a quantitative study, questionnaires were distributed to find out all the problems faced by International Program of International Relations (IPIREL) students in Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY). The results show that the challenges faced by students in speaking is the fear of making mistakes and the lack of vocabularies that limit them to produce the utterances, especially in the classroom. In facing the challenges, the students also have some strategies in handling the situation. It is expected that this research is able to make other students more aware of the possible challenges that they may face in speaking English and find some strategies to handle them.

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Introduction

It is necessary to develop English active skills at the moment. It is appropriate for the nation to be superior in terms of science, supported by the correct and good control of the language of instruction. English is an important international language that enables people to connect with the world in different aspects, including education. Sari et al. (2023) said that there are several problems in speaking English, such as cultural, language, and communication problems (Hossain, 2024). Furthermore, in order to be able to communicate effectively in English, someone needs to master the vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation (Aswad & Sardi, 2023; Khasanah & Jaya, 2023; Shousha et al., 2020). Therefore, good habits and more exposure to the language can make

learners fluent in the communication process.

Every student experiences a similar thing. Many studies have shown that students at all levelselementary, secondary, and university- face problems in speaking (Aswad & Sardi, 2023; Metz, 2021; Ong et al., 2022). Speaking is the most important part of English because oral communication is the most effective communication everyone can have. The problem that often arises is that many students find it difficult to speak English due to some issues (Leky et al., 2024; Putri et al., 2019). The most common problems are the lack of habit to speak English and a very limited vocabulary that they have (Hadijah et al., 2020; Pratolo et al., 2025).

This condition also happens to the students in the Department of International Program of International Relations (IPIREL), Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY). This Department is the international program for the International Relations Department. This is one of the most well-known departments in UMY and in the special district of Yogyakarta, Indonesia. Since this is an international program, almost all of the subjects are taught using English as the primary language and instruction. The students are not only Indonesians but also some foreigners from throughout the world. However, some students still find it hard to keep up with the language, especially when it comes to speaking. Most of them struggle when it comes to expressing their opinion through language.

No research explores the challenges of international class students about speaking English in the class. In fact, they use English every day in the learning process. For instance, Roinah (2019) wrote about problems in English Language Teaching (ELT). The findings reveal that the internal and environmental variables describing the issue of learning English were understood. The depiction of English learning issues is impacted by learning attitudes, willingness to learn, study habits, and fundamental skills. In particular, educators, particularly lecturers, who are less diversified in teaching, are affected by the portrayal of the difficulty of learning English as an external element for students. Internal variables are more important to the effectiveness of learning English from the questionnaires provided to respondents.

Now we are in modern times, where everything has developed rapidly. Likewise, humans are required to have the ability to keep up with modern times, one of which is by developing their ability to speak English. English is a language that has been established as a world language. English is the language that is studied as a second and foreign language around the world. The fact is that English is an international language. This is related to the history where the British used to have many colonies, so that their language would automatically spread over the colonies owned by England. English is also a universal or unifying language. For various international events such as sports, conferences, and meetings between countries, English is used as the main language (Roinah, 2019).

The other research was by Rahayu (2015) entitled "An analysis of the students' difficulties of speaking English Daily at the Husnul Khotimah Islamic Boarding School," research on the challenges of speaking English in the classroom. The objective of this study is to investigate the issues of students in Husnul Khotimah Islamic Boarding School's daily English-speaking program. This study aims to discover issues, causes, and methods for students in the Husnul Khotimah Islamic Boarding School to overcome English-speaking challenges every day. This research is based on the fact that even when they are encouraged to use English every day, students still have difficulty speaking English. This research is classified as a descriptive study because for the second grader of Husnul Khotimah, the researcher would highlight challenges for students to speak English daily. The study population was the "Halimatussa'diyah" language room, made up of 19 students. Interviews and observations were the research tools employed. The researchers concluded through interviews and observations that there were numerous internal and external difficulties among the students in the Husnul Khotimah Islamic Boarding School. Grammatical patterns, wrong pronunciation, poor vocabulary skills, lack of chances, student motivation, usage of mother tongue, infrequent practice and lack of discipline, fear of errors, and environmental issues are still not fully understood by students.

In English, you must master four abilities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. From those skills, speaking is the most essential one. Speaking is the most essential element of learning English, and the success of the language conversation can be measured. The most important interest for foreign language learners is therefore learning to communicate (Rahayu, 2015). Learning English as a foreign language indeed has its own challenges (Hasibuan & Pratolo, 2024; Solikhati & Pratolo, 2019). Some even have difficulties speaking English, the factor being shy. Shyness could be a source of problems in students' learning activities in the classroom, especially in the class of speaking. Abdelkarim (2020) asserts that giving learners independence enables them to identify their weaknesses, motivating them to adjust their learning attitudes and significantly enhance their vocabulary knowledge.

This means that struggling language learners must be granted ample time and space to reflect on their learning challenges and have some autonomy to devise their solutions. This combination of collaborative and self-directed language learning fosters substantial motivation and engagement for learners in the classroom. Furthermore, emphasizing the significance of collaboration and teacher-student interaction in language learning settings is essential (Alharbi, 2021). Therefore, paying attention to this aspect is also quite important to help the students do their best in their speaking performance in the classroom.

Based on the previous studies, challenges faced by international class students have never been studied before, especially since these students use English as a foreign language. Thus, this study aims to dig deeper into students' challenges of speaking English in international classrooms and the strategies students used in overcoming these obstacles. To obtain those objectives, the research question would be:

- 1. As an international student who uses English as the language of instruction for courses, what challenges do you face during lecture activities?
- 2. What strategies do you have to handle the challenges?

A. The Use of Language in Speaking

Language is a means of communication and information dissemination. The international language definition is not explained in statutory regulations, and therefore, further references describing this need to be examined. The international phrase refers to at least four concepts: the United Nations' official language (UN), country-to-country language of communication, worldwide English, and Esperanto.

The adequacy of the strategy will be determined by a good understanding of the concepts mentioned in the regulations (Sartono, 2020). Inner and external factors are the factors of English competence. Internal factors are all within the individual. External factors include education, teachers, customs, interests, talents, and the environment (Nainggolan, 2015).

Language is a crucial characteristic of humans, playing a significant role in many of their activities. Essentially, language is a dominant feature in various human endeavors. It is a fundamental element that distinguishes humans from other creatures, being a unique gift given exclusively to humans (Mwakapina, 2021).

One of the most important language skills is speaking. This is because speaking in a communication process will be very effective in delivering messages (Khasanah & Jaya, 2023). In a speaking activity, some students might feel mixed feelings. Further, Khasanah and Jaya (2023) explained that there are several things faced by students in producing oral communication in English, namely:

- 1. Anxiety, referring to the fear of making mistakes and afraid of being judged by other people.
- 2. Low Self-Confidence: The anxiety will further create low self-confidence in practicing oral communication
- 3. Limited Vocabularies: Vocabularies play an important role in speaking. The more vocabulary we master, the more fluent we will get.
- 4. Poor Pronunciation: The students are often afraid of making mistakes in pronunciation because they have a fear of making an ambiguous meaning.
- 5. Grammar Challenge: In speaking, grammar does not come first. However, most students still consider this as really urgent, so this fear of grammar ruins their confidence in speaking

B. Foreign language learning strategies

To master a foreign language means expanding the chances of interacting and receiving information from other parts of the world. Learning foreign languages requires a fast-learning strategy so that it can take place effectively and efficiently. The learning strategy is an individual approach to a task. This implies that the learning strategy is individual, and each individual who has identified the right learning strategy is able to choose the right way to learn new things, including language (Mufidah, 2017).

Every learning process necessitates a method or strategy to be adapted to achieve the primary goal of learning. Key aspects of the learning process include determining "what" resources to use and "how" to use them. People employ various strategies when learning a language; some of these strategies are highly beneficial, while others are less effective. The term "learning strategies" holds different meanings, and researchers have defined it in numerous ways (Hardan, 2013).

Strategy-based instruction can be used to assist students in developing their direct language learning strategies. Since direct strategies facilitate language comprehension, strategy-based instruction can also enhance students' linguistic competence (Hapsari, 2019).

Method

This research belongs to quantitative research because the data were explained by numbers. The data were taken from the students of IPIREL UMY. This department was chosen because almost all of the subjects are taught using English as the instructional language. There are also some international students studying in the department. There were 25 students from several batches as the subject of this research. They were 18-23 years old on average. Foreign students who use English as a second or foreign language were also the subjects of this study.

The data were collected through online surveys shared with the participants. Random sampling was used in this research due to the consideration that all IPIREL students were enrolled in the same test at the university. Hence, they share similar abilities. There were two types of questions in the survey: closed-ended and open-ended. The open-ended questions were used to gain deeper answers from the participants. These questions were adapted from the research by Basic (2011). The questions could be accessed through Google Forms, and the link to the questionnaire was distributed through the students' group on the WhatsApp application. After the data were collected, the researchers displayed them in tables and graphics and then analyzed them. All of the answers from the respondents were confidential and can only be accessed by the researchers.

Discussion

This study was compiled with the use of Google Forms, which examined the challenges of speaking English during classes based on IPIREL Students' perceptions. In total, there were 25 respondents who participated in this questionnaire. Here is the presentation of the data. Further results of the questionnaires are presented in Table 1.



Fig. 1. Respondents about Speaking English is a Challenge

Based on Table 1, it can be summarized that from 25 respondents, there are many similar challenges experienced by them. Three participants said grammar is a challenge in speaking English, four participants said vocabulary is a challenge in speaking English, two participants said the challenge of speaking English is fluency in pronunciation, and one participant said the challenge in speaking English is finding sentences appropriate in the conversation. In addition, five participants said that the challenge in speaking English was the fear of making mistakes, six participants said that English is difficult to learn, and four participants did not have any challenges in speaking English.

Based on question number two (2), the answers to other English language skills that are a challenge for students besides speaking were also varied. Seven participants stated that they had challenges in listening skills, nine participants stated that they had challenges in writing skills, the remaining seven participants only had challenges in speaking skills, and two participants said they had no challenges in speaking English.

Based on question number three (3) and four (4). The participants said that in listening, the challenge they faced was capturing the meaning of speech due to differences in speech styles and different tempos for each speaker. Four participants said that they had difficulty writing because they lacked confidence in what they wrote. Then, eight participants said that grammar and writing structure are challenging because they are difficult to master.

No.	Questions	Responses	Quantity
1.	What makes English such a challenge for you?	Grammar	3
		Vocabulary	4
		Pronunciation	2
		Difficulty finding the right sentence in conversation	1
		Afraid of making mistakes	5
		English is very difficult to learn	6
2.	Do you have challenges in other skills? (Example: reading, writing, listening, etc.)	Listening	7
		Writing	9
3.	What made these skills such a challenge for you?	Listening (difficulty understanding different speech styles and tempo of speech)	4
		Writing (lack of confidence)	4
		Writing (grammar and writing structure that is difficult to master	8
4.	Learning activities in class certainly require student activeness to get maximum grades. What would you do if you had trouble speaking English, but wanted to get the maximum score?	Improve English skills	16
		Do the assignment	2
		Increase self-confidence	3
		Maximize on exams	2
		Use Google Translate to help	1
5.	Considering you are an international class student, what steps or strategies are taken to face the challenge of speaking English?	Public speaking practice	1
		Learn from TOEFL books	1
		Learn more vocabulary	3
		Increase self-confidence and	2
		Watch movies without subtitles	6
		Read journals or articles in English	5
		Take an English course	2
		Practice using English in daily	5

Table 1. Respondents about Speaking English is a Challenge

Based on question number four (4) and sixteen (16), participants did improve their English skills to get the maximum score. Two participants had difficulty speaking English but wanted to get the maximum score by completing the assignment given. Then, three participants said that they wanted to increase their self-confidence to interact with the lecturer so they could get the maximum score. In addition, two participants said they would maximize their test scores to get maximum scores- one participant used the help of Google Translate when they had difficulty spurring self-activity, and the other participant had no difficulty interacting with English.

After some challenges, these students were also asked about the strategies they use in handling the issues. Based on the steps or strategies faced in speaking English, one participant said that they did public speaking practice, one participant said that they learned English using the TOEFL book, and three participants said they added more vocabulary. Next, two participants argued that increased self-confidence and courage, six participants stated that watching western films without subtitles is a good idea, and five participants answered that they read more journals and articles

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in English. Finally, two participants chose to take English courses, and five other participants practiced by using English in their daily activities.

A. IPIREL Students' Challenges in Speaking English during the Learning Process

From the data presentation, all participants have various opinions about the challenges of speaking English in class. Some of them also experience difficulties in skills other than speaking, such as listening and writing. However, the challenges in other skills are not as big as the challenges they feel in speaking, especially the challenge in listening, which can also hinder the productivity in speaking (Zahruni et al., 2020). The results show that in speaking English, the challenge they face is that English is a difficult language in terms of the students' lack of grammar knowledge. Some of them are also not confident and afraid to make mistakes when speaking in English. The fear can actually lead to anxiety because most of them might be afraid that their friends will laugh at them due to the error they make.

This result is in line with the research from Rintaningrum & Nurani (2021). The researchers found that students often lack confidence in their ability to speak English, which hinders the learning process. They may feel discouraged if someone laughs at their mistakes, and the fear of making errors in front of others can be daunting. This environment makes it even more challenging to improve their English-speaking skills. This is supported by Khasanah and Jaya (2023), who said that the fear of being judged by others can make them feel that they are incapable.

Ghafar and Raheem (2023) suggested that teachers should dedicate ample time to enhancing their students' speaking skills. Moreover, teachers should exhibit friendly behaviors to help students overcome their shyness, thereby fostering a comfortable learning environment. Most of them have challenges in other skills, one of which is listening. Listening becomes a challenge because everyone is different when speaking English, and the speed at which someone speaks affects the level of understanding if the student has not mastered English. Hence, it can affect their speaking performance too. In each subject, student activity is very influential in getting the maximum score. Those who have difficulty speaking English can overcome it by improving their English skills. Some of them also cope with maximizing assignments and exams to get maximum scores. Not only that, internal encouragement, such as increasing self-confidence, is also needed. Furthermore, the last step was taken when it was difficult to interact with the lecturer; one of the participants also sometimes used the translation tool to interact.

B. IPIREL Students' Strategy in Handling the Challenges

With various kinds of challenges that exist, surely every student has a strategy to deal with the challenges of speaking English in class. The most popular strategy they have chosen is to watch Western films without subtitles. Many IPIREL students also do reading journals and articles in English. The most important thing in mastering an aspect is practicing to apply it every day,

especially language. In addition, IPIREL students also take steps to practice public speaking, learn from TOEFL books, add insight into vocabulary, increase self-confidence, and some of them also take English classes.

In the future, research regarding this topic should also be discussed in a wider scope. Researchers may suggest that other studies evaluate the role of the lecturer in supporting the students' performance in using English during classroom activities. It is considered urgent because lecturers or teachers should also care about their students' understanding during the communication and learning process in the classroom (Morrison et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2024).

Conclusion

This study surveyed the challenges of speaking English during class based on IPIREL Students' perceptions. It can be concluded that they face some difficulties that hinder them from using English to communicate effectively. Their answers prove that various kinds of challenges must arise from different individuals, but they are required to be able to face them with strategies that emerge within each individual. The mastery of vocabulary and grammar understanding becomes one of the highest challenges faced by students. This challenge makes it hard to communicate, which can lead to anxiety due to the fear of making errors in the speaking process. However, there is also the demand to get the maximum score, which makes students active in learning activities and speak English fluently with anyone later. Due to the demand, these students have some strategies for handling these challenges. Some of them use Google Translate to help them communicate accurately, but some others prefer to expose themselves more to English by watching English movies without subtitles to train their listening skill, enrich their vocabulary, and this can help them during oral communication. This research is effective in making the students more aware of the problem of speaking English and making them more confident. For future researchers, teachers' contributions can also be assessed to find out their opinions and support related to their students' performance in the international class.

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