

Pre-service English Teacher's Challenges in Public Speaking

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Abstract

This study aims to identify public speaking challenges which are mostly faced by pre-service English teacher's at FKIP Universitas Riau during the English Students Conference (ESC). The ESC, which is part of the public speaking course aims to assess students' speaking skills in formal, academic settings. The method used was quantitative descriptive research, with data collected from 32 seventh-semester students through a validated questionnaire containing 40 items. Internal factors included linguistic and psychological aspects, while the learning environment included external aspects. The results of this study indicate that anxiety is the most common challenge, at a high level, while vocabulary was the highest challenge in linguistic aspects. Other psychological challenges were at a moderate level, such as lack of motivation, shyness, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence. Fluency, grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension are linguistic issues that are also at moderate level. External factors show minimal impact, with the lowest score coming from an unsupportive classroom environment and peers. In conclusion, psychological factors, especially anxiety, are the main challenges to effective public speaking performance. This highlights the need for targeted strategies focusing on anxiety management, building self-confidence, and creating a supportive learning environment.

Keywords: Public Speaking; Pre-service English Teacher's; Challenges; English Students Conference

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the essential abilities that pre-service English teacher's need to have, as it is directly related to their future role as educators who need good communication skills. The ability to speak English is critical for conveying ideas, engaging in academic discussions, and responding to spontaneous questions. Despite its importance, many students still struggle with speaking English due to factors such as anxiety, limited practice opportunities, and insufficient mastery of language structure. Based on preliminary interviews conducted with seventh pre-service English teacher's of English Study Program of FKIP Universitas Riau, it was found that students still face difficulties in speaking English, especially during class presentations and public speaking. The problems include limited vocabulary, grammatical accuracy issues, pronunciation problems, and a lack of fluency. Additionally, students experience feelings of nervousness, lack of confidence, shyness, anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low motivation when asked to speak English in front of an audience. These preliminary findings align with recent research on the challenges of EFL speaking. Ajiza et al. (2024) confirmed that fear of making mistakes and classroom pressure are significant sources of anxiety for Indonesian EFL students during public speaking. Similarly, Khafidhoh et al. (2023) reported that fear of making mistakes, low self-confidence, and limited language proficiency are key causes of anxiety among Indonesian learners of English.

Several studies have investigated the challenges students face in speaking English. Research by Manurung and Izar (2019) shows that limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, and shyness are the significant obstacles in internal barriers, while the a lack of native speakers teachers

and limited opportunities has less impact as an external factor. Jaya et al. (2022) added that several other factors that affect students' speaking performance, such as affective factors (anxiety, lack of confidence), social issues (lack of practice opportunities), and linguistic barriers (fluency, grammar, pronunciation). Mukarromah et al. (2022) and Anggraini et al. (2022) emphasize that the main challenges for learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) are linguistic limitations, particularly in vocabulary and grammar, and psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence. Chau et al. (2022) and Zuhri et al. (2022) also state that nervousness, fear of negative evaluation and low motivation can hinder students' participation and oral performance.

More recent studies, including those conducted by Saputri et al. (2023) and Hanapi et al. (2023), show that difficulties in pronunciation, grammar, and self-confidence as part of the linguistic and psychological barriers that students often experience. Seli and Santosa (2023) found that anxiety and limited vocabulary cause university-level English education students to also face difficulties in public speaking. In addition, Thi Hien et al. (2025) identified external factors such as the classroom environment and teaching methods that affect performance. Although these studies discuss EFL learners in general, research on pre-service English teacher's is limited, even though they require a higher level of competence. Therefore, there is still a lack of studies that examine how linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors jointly shape pre-service English teachers' public speaking performance in the Indonesian context, which creates a gap in the existing research. This study addresses that gap by analyzing these three groups of factors simultaneously to provide a more comprehensive picture of the challenges faced by pre-service English teachers in formal speaking tasks.

Challenges in public speaking can be divided into internal and external factors. Linguistically, students often struggle with pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary, as noted by Harmer (2001) and supported by Shen and Chiu (2019). Additionally, Hadijah (2014) reported that Indonesian students face issues like fluency and accuracy. Psychologically, factors such as speaking anxiety, low self-confidence, and fear of negative assessment can hinder performance. External elements, including classroom environment and feedback, are also significant. To enhance students' public speaking skills, a holistic approach that addresses both language and psychological aspects within a supportive learning environment is essential.

The English Students Conference (ESC), which is a part of the Public Speaking course in the sixth semester at English Study Program of FKIP Universitas Riau, designed to improve students' communication skills and aims to assess students' speaking skills in formal, academic settings. Afrianto (2025) in an "Instagram Reels" video documenting ESC 2025, explains in a video that effective communication is crucial in academic and professional settings, as it requires clarity and confidence in conveying ideas. Pre-service English teachers in ESC act as speakers, presenting their ideas in a forum that mimics a professional conference setting. This experience helps bridge theory and practice, enabling students to develop critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaborative leadership skills, which are essential aspects for 21st-century students. After ESC, students described the event as "refreshing, creative, and motivating," while noting its role in helping even passive learners gain confidence in public speaking. This study aimed to identify the public speaking challenges which are mostly faced by pre-service English Teacher regarding the English Students Conference. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for developing focused teaching strategies and providing targeted support to improve students' public speaking skills.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive quantitative method to identify the public speaking challenges faced by pre-service English teacher's. According to Sugiyono (2012), descriptive

research serves to provide an overview or describe a subject under study using collected data or samples as they are, without analysing and making conclusions that apply to the public. Furthermore, Sugiyono states that quantitative methods are based on the philosophy of positivism and are used to research on certain populations or samples. The research was conducted at English Study Program, FKIP Universitas Riau during the academic year 2024-2025. The population consisted of seventh-semester students batch 2022, totaling 108 students across three classes. Using purposeful sampling, 32 students from class 7C were selected as participants based on their participation in the English Students Conference. Data were collected using a closed-ended questionnaire consisting of 40 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (Never, Seldom, Sometimes, Often, Always). The questionnaire was adapted from previous studies (Alrasheedi, 2020; Horwitz et al., 1986; McGhee et al., 2007; Mostafaei Alei & Hosseinneshad, 2020; Ozkan, 2020; Zrekat & Al-Sohbani, 2022) and covered three main aspects: linguistic challenges (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, comprehension), psychological challenges (lack of confidence, anxiety, shyness, fear of making mistakes, lack of motivation), and learning environment challenges (classroom environment, unsupportive peers). Before distribution, the instrument underwent validity and reliability testing with 37 students from batch 2021. The validity test using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation showed all items had r-count values greater than r-table (0.3246), confirming validity. The reliability test showed Cronbach's alpha value of 0.946, indicating high reliability. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics including mean and percentage calculations processed through SPSS 31.0.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study aimed to identify the public speaking challenges which are mostly faced by pre-service English teacher's of FKIP Universitas Riau during the English Students Conference. The questionnaire data from 32 students were analyzed using descriptive statistics to determine the mean scores of each challenge category.

Public Speaking Challenges in Linguistic Aspects

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Public Speaking Challenges in Linguistics Aspects

Public Speaking Challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Vocabulary	2.9375	0.83521	Moderate
Pronunciation	2.8125	0.88445	Moderate
Grammar	2.8594	0.66581	Moderate
Fluency	2.8958	0.79170	Moderate
Comprehension	2.6250	0.91483	Moderate
Total	141.302		

Based on Table 1, the linguistic aspects showed moderate-level challenges across all five indicators. Vocabulary emerged as the highest challenge (M=2.94, SD=0.84), indicating that students frequently struggled with limited vocabulary, difficulty combining proper words, unclear idea expression, and forgetting prepared vocabulary during presentations. Fluency ranked second (M=2.90, SD=0.79), where students faced difficulties maintaining smooth speech flow, experienced long pauses, and were influenced by their native accent.

Grammar challenges (M=2.86, SD=0.67) included difficulties arranging sentences, fear of grammatical errors, and tendency to use mother tongue to avoid misunderstandings. Pronunciation issues (M=2.81, SD=0.88) involved struggles with different accents, unclear intonation, embarrassment about pronunciation quality, and worry about mispronouncing words. Comprehension showed the lowest mean (M=2.62, SD=0.91), involving difficulties responding when audiences spoke quickly, understanding speakers to provide appropriate responses, and participating due to comprehension barriers.

Public Speaking Challenges in Psychological Aspects

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Public Speaking Challenges in Psychological Aspects

Public Speaking Challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Lack of Confidence	2.8646	0.95362	Moderate
Anxiety	3.5859	0.92154	High
Shyness	2.8958	1.03846	Moderate
Fear of Making Mistakes	2.8646	1.00842	Moderate
Lack of Motivation	2.9896	0.64193	Moderate
Total	152.005		

Table 2 showed that Psychological aspects revealed varying levels of challenges. Anxiety was the most dominant challenge with a high-level score (M=3.59, SD=0.92). A total of 40.6% of students often experienced anxiety, and 28.1% always felt anxious during presentations. Students reported fear of forgetting content, nervousness when presenting in front of audiences, panic when speaking without preparation, and persistent anxiety even after thorough preparation.

Lack of motivation (M=2.99, SD=0.64) was the second-highest psychological challenge, with 59.4% of students sometimes feeling unmotivated. This included presenting only when instructed by lecturers, feeling unsure about giving presentations, and preferring to speak after others started. Shyness (M=2.90, SD=1.04) affected 34.4% of students sometimes, involving fear of being laughed at, embarrassment presenting publicly, and shyness due to fear of negative evaluation. Fear of making mistakes (M=2.86, SD=1.01) and lack of confidence (M=2.86, SD=0.95) both showed moderate levels, with students experiencing unwillingness to speak due to fear of correction, worry about audience misunderstanding, trembling when called to present, and general lack of confidence during public speaking.

Public Speaking Challenges in Learning Environment Aspects

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics of Public Speaking Challenges in Learning Environment

Public Speaking Challenges	Mean	Std. Deviation	Category
Classroom Environment	2.0625	0.72556	Low
Unsupportive Peers	2.1458	0.95015	Low
Total	42.083		

Based on Table 3, learning environment factors showed the lowest challenge levels. Unsupportive peers (M=2.15, SD=0.95) was minimal, with 40.6% of students reporting they

never experienced unsupportive peer behavior, and 28.1% seldom experienced it. This indicated that most students perceived their classmates as supportive during presentations. Classroom environment ($M=2.06$, $SD=0.73$) showed the lowest score overall, with 40.6% seldom and 37.5% never experiencing classroom-related difficulties. Students reported that physical arrangements, presentation aids, and the classroom atmosphere adequately supported their presentations, suggesting that external environmental factors were not significant obstacles to public speaking performance. External factors showed minimal impact on students' public speaking performance. Unsupportive peers recorded a mean score of 2.15 ($SD=0.95$), while classroom environment showed the lowest mean score of 2.06 ($SD=0.73$), suggesting that the learning environment was generally supportive and not a significant obstacle to students' presentations.

Discussion

This study identified public speaking challenges among pre-service English teacher's, FKIP Universitas Riau, during the English Students Conference. Psychological aspects of anxiety were found to be the main challenge, while linguistic aspects were moderate and the learning environment was not challenging.

Psychological Aspects

Anxiety was the most dominant public speaking challenge faced by pre-service English teacher's of FKIP Universitas Riau during the individual presentation in English Students Conference. The finding that anxiety was mostly challenge is similar to another study conducted by Seli and Santosa (2023), which found that anxiety is a main psychological problem among English Education students at MNC University. Similarly, Thi Hien et al., (2025) reported that factors related to fear, such as fear of judgment, nervousness, and forgetting speech parts, are common issues for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in Vietnam. These results emphasize that anxiety consistently and significantly barriers public speaking among EFL students in Southeast Asia.

The results of this study showed that a lack of motivation was a moderate challenge. This finding is similar to that of Mukarromah et al. (2022), who noted that students with low motivation tend to experience anxiety and have difficulty focusing during speaking activities. Additionally, Anggraini et al. (2022) found that low intrinsic motivation caused students to be less active and less willing to practice speaking English in class. These results suggest that motivation plays an important role in maintaining students' confidence when speaking in public.

Lack of confidence and shyness were also reported as moderate challenges. This finding is similar to that of Hanapi et al. (2023), who found that students lacked confidence and courage when practicing English conversation due to the fear of being laughed at. While Chau et al. (2022) found that low confidence can negatively affect students' public speaking performance. Similarly, Seli and Santosa (2023) found that 25% of students strongly agreed and 25% agreed that they felt embarrassed or shy when speaking English in public. These findings demonstrate that a lack of confidence and shyness are common psychological barriers that hinder students' participation in oral communication.

Additionally, the fear of making mistakes was identified as a moderate challenge. This finding is similar to that of Manurung and Izar (2019), who reported that 69.2% of students feared making mistakes. Thi Hien et al., (2025) also confirmed that the fear of being corrected in front of others is one of the strongest factors inhibiting public speaking performance. These findings suggest that students' fear of making mistakes is closely related to anxiety and self-confidence issues.

Overall, the findings of this study and other related research consistently demonstrate that psychological factors, such as anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes, can be significant barriers to public speaking for EFL students. These results suggest the importance of teaching strategies that support students and encourage a positive attitude toward public speaking.

Linguistic Aspects

Beyond psychological challenges, this research also found linguistic challenges including vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, and comprehension are generally at a moderate level. Vocabulary was identified as the most challenging indicator, the finding of this study is similar to another study conducted by Manurung and Izar (2019), who reported that lack of vocabulary (82.1%) was the dominant internal factor affecting students' speaking performance. This is also supported by Anggraini et al. (2022) and Saputri et al. (2023), who found that limited vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation hindered students' ability to express ideas clearly.

The result of this study also aligns with Seli and Santosa (2023), who revealed that vocabulary deficiency was one of the most frequent problems (mean = 3.0) that disrupted students' public speaking fluency. Likewise, Thi Hien et al., (2025) found that students' limited vocabulary restricted their ability to communicate effectively and maintain coherence during public speaking tasks. These findings are consistent with Brown (2007), who stated that linguistic competence including vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation is fundamental to communicative ability. When students have insufficient linguistic mastery, their fluency and confidence decrease significantly.

In addition to vocabulary, other linguistic elements such as fluency, grammar, and pronunciation also pose moderate challenges. The finding of this study is similar to Jaya et al. (2022), who found that students struggled with fluency and grammatical accuracy due to limited practice and low motivation. Mukarromah et al. (2022), also reported that pronunciation errors and poor grammar mastery were among the main linguistic obstacles. Meanwhile, comprehension was found to be the least difficult linguistic aspect. This finding is consistent with Saputri et al. (2023), who observed that students generally understood the material but had trouble responding verbally due to limited active vocabulary.

Learning Environment Aspects

Learning environment factor showed the lowest level of challenge among all aspects. The finding of this study is different from another study conducted by Thi Hien et al., (2025), which reported that external factors such as large class sizes, peer pressure, and limited opportunities to practice were among the major challenges that negatively affected students' public speaking performance. In contrast, pre-services English teacher's at FKIP Universitas Riau perceived their environment as positive and supportive, with sufficient opportunities to practice speaking in front of peers.

The finding of this study is also different from Seli and Santosa (2023), who found that the learning environment moderately influenced students' confidence, as many felt their surroundings were less supportive of English use. However, the current study's finding is similar to another study conducted by Chau et al. (2022), who concluded that environmental influences play a smaller role compared to internal factors like self-confidence and anxiety. Likewise, Hanapi et al. (2023) highlighted that a supportive classroom atmosphere and teacher encouragement could enhance students' motivation and willingness to speak.

The consistent low mean scores for environmental factors in this study indicate that the English Study Program of FKIP Universitas Riau has successfully built a supportive academic environment. The classroom setting, teacher guidance, and peer cooperation have created a positive atmosphere that reduces students' fear and nervousness. Consequently, the learning environment became the lowest-ranked challenge, contrasting with studies from other institutions where external barriers were more significant.

CONCLUSION

The study examined seventh-semester pre-service English teacher's at FKIP Universitas Riau, highlighting significant challenges they faced during the English Students Conference, mostly anxiety, which negatively affected their presentation performance. Linguistic factors also pose moderate difficulties, including challenges with vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and comprehension. However, the learning environment and peer support generally had a positive effect on their speaking performance. Recommendations for students should participate in speaking activities to overcome challenges and build confidence. Regularly engaging in presentations and discussions can help reduce anxiety. Effective coping strategies include managing anxiety levels, thorough preparation, gradual practice, and improving language skills. Lecturers should create a supportive classroom atmosphere that encourages free expression and builds students' confidence by providing positive feedback. Design speaking activities with varying levels of difficulty to engage students and reduce anxiety during English practice, and include peer support and low-risk activities to increase comfort.

While future researchers should be encouraged to investigate the challenges students face with public speaking through a mixed-methods approach. This should include examining levels of anxiety, assessing strategies for alleviating it, and observing how these challenges evolve over time. Utilizing both questionnaires and interviews can offer richer insights into students' experiences.

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