

Psychological Problems in English Presentations Experienced by Students of the English Education Study Program at UNU Kalbar

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Abstrak: Penelitian ini mengkaji tantangan psikologis yang dialami oleh mahasiswa semester dua Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Inggris di UNU Kalbar selama kegiatan presentasi berbahasa Inggris. Metode deskriptif kualitatif digunakan untuk memberikan gambaran yang jelas mengenai hambatan afektif yang memengaruhi kemampuan berbicara mahasiswa. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner berisi 18 pernyataan yang dilengkapi dengan wawancara semi-terstruktur untuk memperoleh pemahaman yang komprehensif mengenai pengalaman mereka. Analisis difokuskan pada enam aspek psikologis, yaitu kurangnya kepercayaan diri, rasa malu, ketakutan melakukan kesalahan, kecemasan, rendahnya motivasi, dan kekhawatiran terhadap kritik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa banyak mahasiswa mengalami kegugupan yang cukup tinggi, keraguan, dan penurunan motivasi saat melakukan presentasi dalam bahasa Inggris. Kekhawatiran terhadap kritik dan motivasi yang rendah tampak sebagai hambatan yang paling dominan. Masalah psikologis tersebut membatasi kemampuan mahasiswa dalam menyampaikan ide secara jelas dan menghambat performa mereka secara keseluruhan. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini merekomendasikan agar dosen menerapkan strategi pembelajaran yang dapat meningkatkan motivasi, menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung dan minim tekanan, serta memberikan umpan balik konstruktif tanpa penilaian negatif untuk membantu mahasiswa mengatasi hambatan psikologis dan meningkatkan kemampuan presentasi berbahasa Inggris mereka.

Kata Kunci: tantangan psikologis; performa berbicara; presentasi bahasa Inggris; motivasi belajar

Abstract: This research investigates the psychological challenges experienced by second-semester students of the English Education Study Program at UNU Kalbar during English presentation activities. A qualitative descriptive method was employed to provide a clear overview of the affective barriers influencing students' speaking performance. Data were collected through an 18-item questionnaire supported by semi-structured interviews to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their experiences. The analysis focused on six psychological aspects: lack of confidence, shyness, fear of making errors, anxiety, low motivation, and concern about criticism. The findings reveal that many students experience considerable nervousness, hesitation, and reduced motivation when presenting in English. Fear of criticism and low motivation appear as the most dominant barriers. These psychological issues limit students' ability to express ideas clearly and hinder their overall performance. Therefore, the study recommends that lecturers implement

motivational teaching strategies, create supportive and low-stress learning environments, and provide constructive, non-judgmental feedback to help students overcome psychological obstacles and improve their English presentation skills.

Keywords: psychological challenges; speaking performance; English presentation; learning motivation

INTRODUCTION

Speaking ability is a fundamental aspect of second language acquisition and is commonly viewed as a key measure of learners' communicative competence. It involves multiple interconnected components, requiring students to manage vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and cognitive processing simultaneously in real-time communication (Amaliah, 2019; Nuraeni et al., 2024). For learners in English Education departments, strong speaking skills are even more crucial since their future careers will require them to present information clearly, explain concepts effectively, and speak confidently before audiences.

However, linguistic mastery alone does not guarantee successful speaking performance. A substantial body of research highlights the influence of psychological elements such as anxiety, lack of confidence, shyness, fear of making mistakes, and reduced motivation on learners' oral abilities (Rahmadani & Etfita, 2022; Timor & Kristanti, 2023). According to affective filter theory, when anxiety levels rise or confidence decreases, learners may struggle to fully access and apply their language knowledge (Putri & Marlina, 2019; Erdiana et al., 2020).

Studies in EFL settings further indicate that speaking anxiety is one of the most critical determinants of poor speaking performance. Many Indonesian EFL students report experiencing moderate to high levels of anxiety, which negatively affects their fluency and willingness to participate in oral activities (Nuraeni et al., 2024). Additionally, fear of error-making and low belief in their own abilities often stop students from speaking freely and confidently (Rahmadani & Etfita, 2022).

Within the English Education Study Program at UNU Kalbar, informal discussions with lecturers and classroom observations reveal that a considerable number of second-semester students still encounter difficulties when delivering English presentations, even after completing basic courses in speaking and grammar. These learners frequently show hesitation, inconsistent sentence construction, limited interaction with the audience, and notable fear of correction or criticism. This discrepancy between their linguistic knowledge and actual output suggests that affective challenges, rather than capability deficits, are the primary obstacles.

This issue is particularly important because second-semester students are at a transitional stage from basic language input toward more communicative skill application. If psychological barriers are not addressed, they may hinder long-term speaking progress and reduce confidence as future English educators. Moreover, there is still a lack of research focused specifically on the emotional challenges faced by early-year university EFL learners in the West Borneo region, leaving a clear gap for further exploration.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the psychological obstacles experienced by second-semester students during English presentations at UNU Kalbar. By identifying the emotional factors that impede their speaking performance,



the research intends to offer insights for instructors, curriculum developers, and language education stakeholders. Ultimately, the findings are expected to contribute to the creation of supportive learning conditions and teaching approaches that lower affective barriers, strengthen students' confidence, and improve the overall effectiveness of English education in the university context.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design with the goal of gaining a deeper, fuller, and more meaningful understanding of the psychological difficulties that students experience during English presentations. A qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate choice because the issue under investigation revolves around internal emotional states, personal perceptions, and subjective experiences, elements that cannot be adequately represented through numbers or statistical analysis alone. These inner experiences require rich, detailed, and context-sensitive narratives to uncover how students interpret their own feelings, thoughts, and struggles in real presentation settings (Creswell, 2014). By using this lens, the study aimed not only to identify the types of psychological barriers that arise during presentations but also to explore how these barriers shape students' performance, influence their confidence, and affect their willingness to speak in front of an audience. In other words, this research sought to understand the story behind the challenges, not just the challenges themselves.

The participants in this study were seven second-semester students enrolled in the English Education Study Program at UNU Kalbar. They were selected through purposive sampling, a technique commonly used in qualitative research to ensure that participants are capable of providing rich, relevant, and insightful information aligned with the study's focus. Two specific inclusion criteria guided the selection process. First, each participant was required to have completed at least one speaking-related course, such as Introduction to Speaking or Basic Conversation, to ensure that they already possessed foundational oral communication skills. Second, each participant must have delivered at least one classroom presentation during the current semester, allowing them to draw on fresh, firsthand experiences of the psychological pressures that arise in presentation contexts. By selecting participants who met these criteria, the researcher ensured that the information gathered would be authentic, reflective, and grounded in real challenges students commonly face, such as anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, low self-confidence, overthinking, and other emotional reactions that tend to emerge when speaking English in front of others.

Data were collected using two instruments: a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire contained 18 items that measured six psychological domains, namely lack of confidence, shyness, fear of making mistakes, anxiety, lack of motivation, and fear of criticism. The questionnaire served as an initial mapping tool to identify students' dominant psychological tendencies. To gain deeper insights, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant. This interview format allowed students to explain their experiences more freely, provide concrete examples, and clarify their emotional responses. One student, for example, stated,

"I knew the material well, but once I stood in front of the class, my mind suddenly went blank."



(Student 4). Another student shared,

“I am afraid of mispronouncing words because I don’t want my friends to laugh at me.”

(Student 2).

The data collection process consisted of three stages. First, students completed the questionnaire. Second, each participant took part in a 15–20 minute individual interview to elaborate on their personal experiences. Third, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data.

The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman’s (1994) interactive model, which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During data reduction, the researcher coded and selected statements related to the psychological domains under study. These codes were then organized into themes during the data display phase. In the conclusion drawing stage, patterns and recurring meanings were identified across participants. One common theme was fear of negative evaluation, as reflected in a participant’s remark,

“Even a small mistake makes me feel like others will think I am not good at English.” (Student 5).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were applied. Triangulation was conducted by comparing data from the questionnaire and interviews. Member checking was performed by asking participants to review their interview summaries to confirm accuracy. Peer debriefing was also employed, whereby a fellow lecturer examined the coding process and preliminary interpretations to strengthen the credibility of the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that students’ struggles in delivering English presentations are influenced more by psychological barriers than by their actual language skills. Although they generally understand basic vocabulary and grammar, many still feel anxious, worry about being judged, and lack motivation—factors that make them hesitant and less effective when speaking in front of others. These results are consistent with previous studies, which emphasize that emotional challenges remain one of the biggest obstacles to successful speaking in a foreign language (Alrabai, 2020; Zhang, 2019).

Overall, psychological barriers were found to hinder students more significantly than linguistic limitations. Although students had adequate vocabulary and basic grammar, fear of criticism, anxiety, and low motivation strongly affected their performance.

Table 1. Frequency of Students’ Psychological Problems

No	Psychological Factor	Numbers	Description
1	Fear of criticism	6	Most dominant factor, causing hesitation and avoidance
2	Lack of motivation	5	Often linked to limited lecturer encouragement
3	Anxiety	5	Symptoms include trembling, forgetfulness, and panic
4	Lack of confidence	4	Students doubt their ability to speak accurately
5	Shyness	4	Triggered by being the center of attention



6	Fear of mistakes	3	Strong concern about negative peer reactions
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1. Lack of Confidence

A lack of confidence was found to be one of the strongest psychological challenges influencing students' ability to deliver English presentations effectively. Although many participants indicated that they understood basic vocabulary and grammar, they still felt unable to express their thoughts smoothly when speaking in front of their peers. This limited self-assurance resulted in hesitation, frequent pauses, reduced fluency, and sometimes complete loss of concentration. As one participant mentioned:

"I know some English, but when speaking in front of the class, I lose confidence."

This finding clearly demonstrates the importance of confidence in encouraging students to speak and enabling them to take risks in communication. Recent research shows that self-confidence strongly influences learners' willingness to interact and actively participate in speaking activities (Sari, 2022; Wahyuni, Susilo, & Sunggingwati, 2023). When students lack confidence, they tend to withdraw from speaking, produce limited verbal output, and rely only on memorized sentences. As a result, they miss opportunities to develop their language skills more naturally and authentically.

2. Shyness

Shyness also emerged as a key emotional factor influencing students' speaking ability. Four students mentioned that they felt highly uneasy when all eyes were on them during presentations. This heightened self-focus contributed to psychological discomfort, making it harder for them to retrieve vocabulary or arrange ideas effectively. Consequently, they tended to speak softly, avoid looking at the audience, and rush through their presentations.

These responses are consistent with current studies on foreign language anxiety, which identify it as a psychological condition characterized by tension, apprehension, and fear when communicating in a non-native language (Zhang, 2019). Elevated speaking anxiety has further been found to impair learners' fluency, mental processing, and overall performance during oral tasks (Alrabai, 2020; Liu & Xu, 2021). In the context of this research, anxiety interfered with students' physical composure and mental focus, leading to presentations that seemed less confident and less successful.

3. Fear of Making Mistakes

Fear of making mistakes was another frequently reported psychological barrier. Several students admitted that they felt nervous about mispronouncing words or constructing incorrect sentences. This fear was mainly driven by the possibility of being mocked or judged by classmates, which discouraged them from speaking or participating in class activities. One student stated:

"If my pronunciation is wrong and my friends laugh, I prefer to keep silent."

This supports Price's (1991) argument that fear of errors leads to performance inhibition and lowers students' willingness to speak. When learners focus too much



on avoiding mistakes, they lose spontaneity and natural speech flow. This fear prevents them from experimenting with language, an essential step toward improving communicative competence.

4. Anxiety

Anxiety was identified as a strong factor affecting students' performance during presentations. Participants reported experiencing physical symptoms such as trembling, sweating, and rapid heartbeat along with cognitive symptoms, including losing focus, forgetting what they planned to say, or suddenly feeling mentally blank. Even students who had prepared thoroughly found that anxiety severely interfered with their ability to present clearly.

These reactions align with recent studies showing that foreign language speaking anxiety manifests as tension, fear, and worry when using a foreign language (Rahmadani & Etfita, 2022; Rama et al., 2024; Fitriani, Julia, & Gusrayani, 2023). High levels of speaking anxiety have been found to significantly impair fluency and overall oral performance (Rama et al., 2024; Rahmadani & Etfita, 2022). In the present study, anxiety appeared to disrupt both physical stability and mental clarity, resulting in presentations that appeared less confident and less effective.

5. Lack of Motivation

The findings also show that students' emotions, especially their anxiety and fear of being judged, play a major role in how well they speak in front of others. Motivation was another key factor. The way teachers gave feedback made a noticeable difference: supportive and clear feedback helped students feel more prepared and confident, while feedback that felt too harsh or unhelpful often caused them to lose interest and avoid speaking.

This aligns with motivation theory, which highlights how important teacher encouragement is for keeping students engaged and committed to learning (Dörnyei, 2020). Overall, the results point to the importance of a positive and comfortable classroom environment where students feel safe to express themselves, build confidence, and continue improving their speaking skills.

6. Fear of Criticism (Most Dominant Factor)

Among the psychological difficulties identified, fear of criticism stood out as the most dominant issue. Many students felt anxious about how both lecturers and classmates might judge their performance, causing them to avoid speaking tasks, lose confidence, and struggle to organize their ideas clearly during presentations.

This aligns with the concept of fear of negative evaluation, a core aspect of foreign language anxiety that is known to strongly affect speaking performance (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Alrabai, 2020). When students expect criticism, their anxiety rises, and their ability to speak naturally and effectively tends to decrease.

CONCLUSION

This research found that second-semester students of the English Education Department at UNU Kalbar experience six primary psychological barriers during English presentations: low confidence, shyness, fear of making errors, anxiety, low motivation, and concern about receiving negative evaluations from peers and



lecturers. Among these factors, fear of criticism and reduced motivation were identified as the most influential, as they significantly affect students' willingness to speak, preparation habits, and the overall quality of their presentation performance.

The results indicate that psychological factors, not merely linguistic limitations, play a decisive role in oral performance. Affective pressure can disrupt students' cognitive processing, making them less fluent, less organized, and less assured when presenting. Therefore, emotional support is just as crucial as the development of language skills.

In response to these findings, several practical recommendations can be proposed for both learners and educators. For students, increasing speaking exposure through informal communication, participation in English clubs, group presentations, and daily interaction in English is essential, as consistent practice can gradually build confidence, reduce anxiety, and enhance fluency. For lecturers and instructors, fostering a supportive classroom environment in which students feel comfortable expressing ideas without excessive fear of evaluation is crucial. Providing constructive feedback, incorporating low-stakes speaking tasks, implementing step-by-step presentation practice, and facilitating collaborative speaking activities may effectively reduce anxiety and promote more positive speaking experiences.

With sustained guidance and well-planned instructional strategies, students can progressively overcome affective obstacles that hinder their speaking abilities. This improvement will not only enhance academic outcomes but also better prepare them to become confident and communicative future English teachers. Strengthening learners' psychological readiness for speaking ultimately leads to more successful learning experiences and contributes to improved English language education.

this study emphasizes the crucial role of affective-support strategies in the pedagogy of speaking skills. Systematically addressing emotional barriers in tandem with linguistic development fosters not only improved language performance but also strengthens learners' confidence, resilience, and capacity for effective real-world communication.

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