



STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES OF BATCH 2024

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Abstract

Speaking is an essential skill in English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and information effectively. However, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students encounter difficulties when participating in English-speaking classroom activities. This study aimed to identify the speaking difficulties experienced by Batch 2024 students of the English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar. The study employed a descriptive quantitative design involving ten students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected using a questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale items and open-ended questions. The findings revealed that students experienced several difficulties related to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and psychological factors. Among these difficulties, fluency emerged as the most dominant challenge, as students frequently paused while speaking because they needed additional time to think and organize their ideas. Vocabulary limitations also affected students' ability to express their thoughts clearly, while grammar and pronunciation difficulties reduced their confidence during speaking activities. Furthermore, psychological factors such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence were found to hinder students' participation in classroom communication. These findings indicate that speaking difficulties are influenced by both linguistic and psychological factors. Therefore, speaking instruction should provide more opportunities for meaningful communication and create supportive learning environments that encourage students to participate actively in English-speaking activities.

Keywords: *Speaking difficulties; EFL learners; speaking ability; classroom activities*

INTRODUCTION

Speaking is one of the most essential skills in English language learning because it enables learners to communicate ideas, opinions, and information effectively in various academic and social contexts. In higher education, particularly in English Education programs, speaking competence plays a significant role in supporting students' academic performance and future professional development. Through speaking, learners not only demonstrate their language proficiency but also develop their ability to negotiate meaning, exchange information, and participate actively in communicative interactions. Consequently, speaking has become one of the primary goals of English language instruction.

The ability to speak English effectively is particularly important for students enrolled in English Education programs, as they are expected to become future English teachers and language professionals. In addition to communicating in academic settings, they are required to participate in classroom discussions, presentations, microteaching activities, and teaching practicum programs that demand effective oral communication skills. Difficulties in

speaking may not only affect students' academic performance but also influence their confidence and readiness to perform professional responsibilities in the future. Therefore, identifying the challenges encountered by English Education students in speaking activities is essential for supporting their language development and preparing them for their future careers.

Despite its importance, speaking is often regarded as one of the most challenging language skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Unlike reading and writing, speaking requires learners to simultaneously utilize vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency while responding spontaneously during communication. Brown (2004) describes speaking as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving, and processing information. Similarly, Thornbury (2005) argues that speaking is cognitively demanding because learners must process language in real time with limited opportunities for planning and revision. As a result, many EFL learners encounter difficulties when participating in English-speaking classroom activities.

Besides linguistic and psychological aspects, students' participation in classroom activities and the availability of speaking opportunities also play a significant role in speaking skill development. Learners who have limited opportunities to engage in meaningful communication often encounter difficulties in improving their fluency and confidence. Research has shown that inadequate exposure to English communication may reduce learners' willingness to participate in classroom discussions and speaking activities (Sha'ar & Boonsuk, 2021).

Similarly, Gao et al. (2024) emphasized that classroom-based instructional practices and communicative learning activities can encourage students to communicate more actively in English. Furthermore, Özalp et al. (2022) found that students with higher levels of speaking anxiety tend to demonstrate lower willingness to communicate and participate in classroom interactions. These findings suggest that speaking difficulties are influenced not only by learners' linguistic competence but also by the learning environment and the opportunities available for meaningful speaking practice.

Among the various factors affecting speaking performance, vocabulary knowledge has been widely recognized as one of the most influential. According to Nation (2013), vocabulary serves as the foundation of language use because learners cannot communicate effectively without sufficient lexical resources. Similarly, Nation and Newton (2009) explain that inadequate vocabulary often leads to communication breakdowns because learners struggle to retrieve appropriate words during oral interaction. Consequently, students with limited vocabulary tend to experience hesitation, pauses, and difficulties expressing their ideas clearly in English.

In addition to vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation also contribute significantly to speaking difficulties. Brown (2007) emphasizes that effective speaking requires learners to balance fluency and accuracy simultaneously. Many students become hesitant when speaking because they are concerned about producing grammatically correct sentences. Pronunciation difficulties further complicate oral communication because inaccurate pronunciation may affect intelligibility and reduce learners' confidence. Thornbury (2005) notes that pronunciation is a crucial component of speaking competence since it influences how messages are understood by listeners. Therefore, weaknesses in grammar and pronunciation may negatively affect students' participation in classroom communication.

Apart from linguistic challenges, psychological factors have also been identified as important contributors to speaking difficulties. Horwitz et al. (1986) introduced the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, referring to feelings of tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with language learning. Students who experience anxiety often fear making mistakes, receiving negative evaluations from peers, or being unable to communicate effectively. Kianinezhad (2024) further explains that foreign language anxiety can negatively influence learners' confidence, classroom participation, and overall language performance. Recent studies continue to support this view.

For example, Abrar et al. (2024) found that speaking anxiety frequently occurs when students are required to answer lecturers' questions or speak in front of others. Similarly, Yunus (2024) reported that public speaking anxiety remains a significant challenge among university students learning English as a foreign language. These findings indicate that psychological barriers often prevent learners from fully participating in speaking activities.

Research on speaking difficulties has significantly contributed to understanding the factors that influence students' speaking performance in EFL contexts. Despite these contributions, limited attention has been given to examining how such difficulties are experienced by particular groups of learners within specific institutional settings. Since students may encounter different challenges depending on their learning experiences and educational environments, further investigation is required to identify their actual difficulties and learning needs.

While a considerable number of studies have examined speaking difficulties among EFL learners, limited research has specifically investigated the difficulties and learning needs of Batch 2024 students in the English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar. Since learners' experiences may vary depending on their educational background, language exposure, and classroom environment, it is important to explore the specific challenges encountered by this cohort. Preliminary questionnaire responses indicated that students frequently experienced difficulties related to limited vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, lack of confidence, and speaking anxiety during English-speaking classroom activities. Students also expressed the need for more speaking practice, vocabulary enrichment, exposure to English-language media, and supportive classroom environments.

Therefore, this study aims to identify the difficulties faced by Batch 2024 students of the English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar in English-speaking classroom activities. The findings are expected to contribute to a better understanding of students' speaking difficulties and provide practical implications for designing learner-centered speaking instruction in EFL classrooms.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design using a needs analysis approach to investigate the difficulties experienced by Batch 2024 students of the English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar in English-speaking classroom activities. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of students' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to speaking English in classroom settings.

The participants of this study were ten Batch 2024 students of the English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar. The participants were selected through convenience

sampling because they were readily accessible and directly relevant to the objectives of the study. As first-year students who had participated in various English-speaking classroom activities, they were considered capable of providing valuable insights regarding the difficulties they encountered and the support they needed to improve their speaking ability.

Data were collected using a questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section contained ten close-ended statements measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). These statements were designed to examine students' perceptions of difficulties related to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and speaking performance. The second section consisted of open-ended questions that encouraged students to describe the challenges they experienced during English-speaking classroom activities and to provide suggestions for improving their speaking ability.

The data collection process was conducted online. Participants voluntarily completed the questionnaire, and their responses were automatically recorded through the Google Forms platform. After all responses had been collected, the researcher organized and reviewed the data before conducting the analysis.

The quantitative data obtained from the Likert-scale items were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and mean scores, to identify the dominant difficulties experienced by students. Meanwhile, the qualitative data obtained from the open-ended responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Similar responses were grouped into recurring themes, such as vocabulary limitations, grammar difficulties, pronunciation problems, lack of confidence, and speaking anxiety. The identified themes were then interpreted and discussed in relation to relevant theories and previous studies on speaking difficulties, foreign language anxiety, and needs analysis. Through the combination of quantitative and qualitative analyses, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of students' difficulties and learning needs in English-speaking classroom activities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Information

The participants of this study consisted of ten students from Batch 2024 of the English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar. Based on the demographic data, 90% of the respondents were female, while 10% were male. Although the number of participants was relatively small, the responses provided valuable insights into the difficulties experienced by students during English-speaking classroom activities and the support they needed to improve their speaking skills.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Male	1	10%
Female	9	90%
Total	10	100%

Students' Difficulties in English-Speaking Classroom Activities

The questionnaire consisted of ten statements designed to identify students' perceived difficulties in English-speaking classroom activities. The results indicate that students encountered challenges related to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and spontaneous communication. Furthermore, the open-ended responses revealed that psychological factors such as lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes significantly affected students' speaking performance.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Students' Speaking Difficulties

No	Statement	Mean
1	Difficulty finding appropriate English words when speaking in class	3.3
2	Limited vocabulary makes it difficult to express ideas	3.8
3	Difficulty pronouncing English words correctly	3.0
4	Pronunciation problems affect speaking performance	3.1
5	Frequently make grammatical mistakes when speaking English	3.7
6	Grammar difficulties make me hesitate to speak in class	3.7
7	Frequently pause when speaking because I need time to think	4.0
8	Difficulty speaking English smoothly and continuously	3.5
9	Difficulty expressing ideas clearly in English	3.8
10	Difficulty responding spontaneously during speaking activities	3.7

The highest mean score was obtained by Statement 7 ($M = 4.0$), indicating that students frequently paused while speaking because they needed additional time to think. This was followed by Statements 2 and 9 ($M = 3.8$), which were related to vocabulary limitations and difficulties expressing ideas clearly. These findings suggest that students' speaking difficulties were strongly associated with vocabulary mastery and fluency.

Vocabulary Difficulties

Vocabulary emerged as one of the most significant difficulties experienced by the participants during English-speaking classroom activities. The questionnaire results revealed that limited vocabulary substantially affected students' ability to communicate effectively in English. Based on the descriptive statistics, Statement 2, "Limited vocabulary makes it difficult to express ideas," obtained a relatively high mean score ($M = 3.8$), indicating that most respondents agreed that vocabulary limitations hindered their speaking performance. Similarly, Statement 1, which focused on difficulties in finding appropriate English words during classroom communication, obtained a mean score of 3.3. These findings suggest that vocabulary deficiency remains a major obstacle for students when participating in speaking activities.

The qualitative responses further supported the quantitative findings. Several respondents identified vocabulary as one of the primary factors affecting their speaking ability. Respondent 1 (R1) stated:

"The biggest difficulty I face is my limited vocabulary and lack of confidence when speaking English. I often hesitate to speak because I am afraid of mispronouncing words or making grammatical mistakes."

Similarly, Respondent 3 (R3) explained:

“The difficulty I face when speaking English is that my vocabulary is still very limited.”

These responses indicate that students frequently encounter situations in which they know what they want to express but are unable to find the appropriate English words to communicate their ideas effectively. As a result, they often experience hesitation, pauses, and communication breakdowns during speaking activities.

Vocabulary limitations appear to affect various aspects of students’ speaking performance. First, inadequate vocabulary reduces students’ ability to express ideas clearly. When students lack the necessary words to communicate their thoughts, they may simplify their messages, avoid expressing complex ideas, or remain silent during classroom discussions. This situation limits their opportunities to participate actively in communicative activities and may negatively affect their overall speaking development.

Second, vocabulary deficiency contributes to a lack of fluency. Students who cannot quickly retrieve appropriate words often require additional time to think before speaking. Consequently, they tend to pause frequently, repeat words, or discontinue their utterances before successfully conveying their intended messages. This finding is consistent with the questionnaire results, which showed that many students frequently paused while speaking because they needed time to think about the language they wanted to use.

Furthermore, vocabulary limitations appear to influence students’ confidence when speaking English. Several respondents indicated that insufficient vocabulary made them feel uncertain about their ability to communicate effectively. Students who struggle to find appropriate words may become anxious about making mistakes or being unable to express themselves clearly in front of their classmates. As a result, they may avoid speaking opportunities and participate less actively in classroom interactions. This finding suggests that vocabulary difficulties are closely connected to psychological factors such as speaking anxiety and low self-confidence.

Another important issue revealed by the findings is that limited vocabulary affects students’ ability to respond spontaneously during classroom communication. In many speaking activities, students are required to answer questions, participate in discussions, and express opinions without extensive preparation. However, when students possess insufficient vocabulary knowledge, they often need additional time to translate ideas from their first language into English and search for appropriate lexical items. Consequently, they find it difficult to respond quickly and naturally during communicative interactions.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that vocabulary limitations represent one of the most prominent barriers to students’ speaking performance. Insufficient vocabulary not only restricts students’ ability to express ideas but also affects fluency, confidence, and participation in classroom communication. Therefore, vocabulary development should receive considerable attention in speaking instruction. Providing students with opportunities to learn and practice new vocabulary in meaningful communicative contexts may help them improve their speaking ability and participate more confidently in English-speaking classroom activities.

These findings support Nation’s (2013) view that vocabulary serves as the foundation of language use because learners cannot communicate effectively without sufficient lexical resources. Nation and Newton (2009) also explain that inadequate vocabulary often results in communication breakdowns, as learners struggle to retrieve appropriate words during interaction. The present findings are also consistent with Sha’ar and Boonsuk (2021), who reported that limited vocabulary was one of the main factors hindering EFL learners’

speaking performance. Similarly, Israfil (2024) found that students perceived vocabulary development as an essential requirement for improving their speaking ability. These similarities suggest that vocabulary remains a fundamental challenge for EFL learners and continues to influence their confidence and participation in classroom communication.

Grammar Difficulties

Grammar difficulties emerged as one of the major challenges experienced by the participants during English-speaking classroom activities. The questionnaire results indicated that many students encountered problems related to grammatical accuracy when communicating in English. Statement 5, "I frequently make grammatical mistakes when speaking English," obtained a mean score of 3.7, while Statement 6, "Grammar difficulties make me hesitate to speak in class," also obtained a mean score of 3.7. These results suggest that grammar-related issues significantly influence students' speaking performance and their willingness to participate in classroom communication.

The qualitative responses further supported these findings. Several respondents reported that they often felt uncertain about the grammatical correctness of their utterances when speaking English. Respondent 4 (R4) stated:

"I struggle with grammar accuracy, so I sometimes hesitate to speak because I am afraid of using incorrect sentence structures."

Similarly, Respondent 9 (R9) explained:

"One of the difficulties I face when speaking English in class is constructing sentences correctly."

These responses indicate that students frequently experience difficulties when attempting to organize words into grammatically acceptable sentences. Although they may possess ideas that they want to communicate, uncertainty regarding sentence structure often prevents them from expressing those ideas confidently. Consequently, many students become hesitant during speaking activities because they are concerned about producing grammatically incorrect utterances.

The findings suggest that grammar difficulties affect students' speaking performance in several ways. First, grammar problems reduce students' confidence when communicating in English. Many students tend to monitor their language production carefully before speaking because they want to avoid making grammatical mistakes. While such attention to accuracy may contribute to language development, excessive concern about correctness can negatively affect communication. Students often spend too much time thinking about grammatical structures before speaking, which results in hesitation and reduced fluency.

Second, grammar difficulties contribute to communication anxiety. Several students reported feeling nervous when speaking English because they were afraid that their mistakes would be noticed by lecturers or classmates. This fear often leads students to avoid participating in classroom discussions or responding to questions during speaking activities. In some cases, students may prefer to remain silent rather than risk producing incorrect sentences. As a result, opportunities for speaking practice become limited, which may further slow the development of speaking proficiency.

Another issue revealed by the findings is that grammar difficulties interfere with students' ability to communicate spontaneously. In classroom interactions, students are often expected to respond immediately to questions, express opinions, or participate in discussions. However, students who are uncertain about grammatical rules frequently

require additional time to organize their thoughts and construct appropriate sentence patterns. Consequently, they may experience pauses, incomplete utterances, or delayed responses during communication. This situation makes it difficult for students to maintain smooth interaction and participate actively in speaking activities.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that grammar difficulties are closely related to other speaking challenges, particularly vocabulary limitations and fluency problems. Students who struggle with grammar often simultaneously experience difficulties selecting appropriate vocabulary and organizing ideas effectively. When these difficulties occur together, students may become overwhelmed during communication. As a result, they are more likely to hesitate, lose confidence, and avoid participating in speaking activities. This finding suggests that speaking difficulties should not be viewed as isolated problems but rather as interconnected challenges that influence one another.

The qualitative responses also reveal that students tend to associate successful speaking with grammatical accuracy. Many participants appeared to believe that speaking English effectively requires producing grammatically perfect sentences. This perception may increase pressure during speaking activities because students focus more on avoiding mistakes than on conveying meaning. Consequently, communication becomes less natural and students may prioritize accuracy at the expense of fluency. While grammatical competence is undoubtedly important, excessive concern about correctness may hinder students' ability to communicate confidently and spontaneously.

In addition, grammar difficulties may stem from differences between English and Indonesian sentence structures. Students are often required to apply unfamiliar grammatical rules, such as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, and sentence patterns that do not exist in the same form in their first language. These differences can create confusion and increase the likelihood of grammatical errors during speaking. Since speaking requires immediate language production, students have limited time to monitor and correct their grammatical choices while communicating.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that grammar difficulties represent a significant barrier to students' speaking performance. Grammar-related problems not only affect linguistic accuracy but also influence confidence, fluency, spontaneity, and classroom participation. Many students hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making grammatical mistakes or being negatively evaluated by others. Therefore, grammar instruction should be integrated into communicative speaking activities rather than taught solely through isolated exercises. Providing students with opportunities to use grammar in meaningful communication may help them develop greater confidence and improve their ability to express ideas effectively in English-speaking classroom activities.

The findings are in line with Brown (2007), who states that speaking requires learners to manage both fluency and grammatical accuracy simultaneously. When students are overly concerned about producing grammatically correct sentences, they may become hesitant and less confident during communication. Similar findings were reported by Sha'ar and Boonsuk (2021), who found that grammatical difficulties frequently contribute to students' fear of making mistakes and reluctance to participate in speaking activities. This indicates that grammar remains an important factor influencing students' confidence and oral performance in EFL classrooms.

Pronunciation Difficulties

Pronunciation was identified as another significant difficulty experienced by the participants during English-speaking classroom activities. The questionnaire results indicated that many students were concerned about their ability to pronounce English words accurately. Statement 4, "I am afraid of making pronunciation mistakes when speaking English," obtained a relatively high mean score, suggesting that pronunciation problems continue to affect students' confidence and participation in classroom communication. Although pronunciation may not have emerged as the most dominant difficulty compared to vocabulary and fluency, the findings demonstrate that it remains an important factor influencing students' speaking performance.

The qualitative responses further supported the quantitative findings. Several respondents reported that pronunciation difficulties often made them feel uncertain and hesitant when speaking English. Respondent 8 (R8) stated: "The biggest difficulty I face is my limited vocabulary and lack of confidence when speaking English. I often hesitate to speak because I am afraid of mispronouncing words or making grammatical mistakes."

Similarly, Respondent 7 (R7) explained: "The difficulty I experience when speaking English is a lack of confidence because I am not sure whether my grammar and pronunciation are correct."

These responses indicate that pronunciation difficulties are closely associated with students' confidence when communicating in English. Many students appear to worry that incorrect pronunciation may cause misunderstandings or make them appear less competent in front of their classmates and lecturers. Consequently, they often hesitate before speaking and become reluctant to participate actively in classroom discussions.

The findings suggest that pronunciation difficulties influence students' speaking performance in several ways. First, pronunciation problems reduce students' confidence during oral communication. When students are uncertain about how a word should be pronounced, they may avoid using that word altogether, even if they understand its meaning. This limitation restricts their ability to express ideas fully and may reduce the variety of vocabulary used during speaking activities. As a result, students often rely on simpler expressions or avoid participating in conversations when they are unsure about their pronunciation.

Second, pronunciation difficulties contribute to speaking anxiety. Several respondents reported feeling nervous when speaking English because they feared making pronunciation errors. Such concerns are understandable because pronunciation is one of the most noticeable aspects of spoken language. Unlike grammar mistakes, which may not always be immediately recognized by listeners, pronunciation errors are often more apparent during communication. Consequently, students become more self-conscious when speaking and may focus excessively on how words are pronounced rather than on the message they want to convey.

Another important finding is that pronunciation difficulties appear to affect students' willingness to communicate. Many students indicated that they preferred to remain silent rather than risk pronouncing words incorrectly. This behavior reduces opportunities for speaking practice, which are essential for developing oral proficiency. The lack of practice may subsequently reinforce pronunciation problems because students receive fewer opportunities to improve through actual communication. Therefore, pronunciation

difficulties can create a cycle in which fear of making mistakes leads to reduced participation, which in turn limits speaking development.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that pronunciation difficulties are influenced by differences between English and students' first language. English contains many sounds, stress patterns, and pronunciation rules that differ considerably from Indonesian. Students may find it challenging to distinguish certain sounds or determine the correct pronunciation of unfamiliar words. In addition, inconsistencies between English spelling and pronunciation often create confusion. Students frequently encounter words whose pronunciation cannot be predicted directly from their spelling, making pronunciation a particularly challenging aspect of language learning.

Pronunciation difficulties also appear to be closely related to other speaking challenges. Students who are uncertain about pronunciation often experience lower confidence, greater anxiety, and increased hesitation during communication. These factors may affect fluency because students require additional time to think about how words should be pronounced before speaking. Consequently, pronunciation difficulties not only influence intelligibility but also affect the overall quality of students' speaking performance.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that pronunciation remains an important challenge for many students in English-speaking classroom activities. Concerns about pronunciation accuracy often reduce students' confidence, increase speaking anxiety, and limit classroom participation. Although pronunciation difficulties may not completely prevent communication, they can significantly influence students' willingness to speak and interact in English. Therefore, speaking instruction should provide students with sufficient opportunities to practice pronunciation in meaningful communicative contexts. Regular exposure to spoken English, classroom speaking activities, and constructive feedback from lecturers may help students develop greater confidence and improve their pronunciation skills, ultimately enhancing their overall speaking performance.

The findings are consistent with Thornbury (2005), who emphasizes that pronunciation is a crucial component of speaking competence because it affects intelligibility. In addition, Sha'ar and Boonsuk (2021) reported that pronunciation problems often reduce learners' confidence and willingness to communicate in English. The present findings support this view, as several participants reported hesitation and anxiety due to uncertainty regarding pronunciation accuracy. These concerns may discourage students from engaging actively in classroom speaking activities.

Fluency difficulties

Fluency was identified as one of the most prominent difficulties experienced by the participants during English-speaking classroom activities. Based on the questionnaire results, the statement related to pausing while speaking because students needed additional time to think obtained the highest mean score among all items ($M = 4.0$). This finding indicates that many students encountered difficulties maintaining smooth and continuous communication in English. In addition, a considerable number of respondents agreed that they often hesitated when speaking and found it challenging to respond spontaneously during classroom interactions. These results suggest that fluency remains a significant obstacle affecting students' speaking performance.

The qualitative responses provided further insights into this issue. Several respondents reported that they frequently paused while speaking because they needed time

to recall vocabulary, organize their ideas, or construct grammatically correct sentences. Respondent 1 (R1) stated:

"The biggest difficulty I face is my limited vocabulary and lack of confidence when speaking English. I often hesitate to speak because I am afraid of mispronouncing words or making grammatical mistakes."

Similarly, Respondent 6 (R6) explained:

"I often feel nervous when speaking in front of my classmates because I am afraid of making mistakes. Sometimes I know what I want to say, but I need more time to organize my thoughts before speaking."

These responses indicate that students' fluency difficulties are influenced by a combination of linguistic and psychological factors. Many students appear to experience interruptions in their speech because they are simultaneously thinking about vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and the content of their message. Consequently, they often struggle to maintain a natural flow of communication.

The findings suggest that limited fluency affects students' speaking performance in several ways. First, fluency difficulties reduce students' ability to communicate ideas smoothly and effectively. During classroom discussions, presentations, and question-and-answer sessions, students are often required to express their thoughts spontaneously. However, when they need excessive time to think about language forms, communication becomes fragmented and less effective. Frequent pauses, repetitions, and hesitations may interfere with the flow of interaction and make it difficult for students to convey their intended messages clearly.

Second, fluency difficulties appear to be closely related to vocabulary limitations and grammar concerns. Students who lack sufficient vocabulary often require additional time to search for appropriate words before speaking. Likewise, students who are worried about grammatical accuracy may spend more time planning their utterances. These processes slow down communication and contribute to hesitation during speaking activities. Therefore, fluency problems should not be viewed as isolated difficulties but rather as the result of multiple interconnected factors that influence speaking performance.

The findings are consistent with Thornbury (2005), who argues that speaking is cognitively demanding because learners must process language in real time with limited opportunities for planning and revision. Unlike writing, speaking requires learners to generate ideas, select vocabulary, apply grammatical rules, and produce comprehensible speech simultaneously. This complex process often becomes challenging for EFL learners, particularly when their linguistic resources are still developing. As a result, many students experience pauses and hesitations while attempting to communicate in English.

Similarly, Brown (2007) emphasizes that effective speaking requires learners to balance fluency and accuracy. While students naturally want to avoid making mistakes, excessive attention to accuracy may negatively affect fluency. The findings of the present study support this view, as several respondents reported that fear of grammatical and pronunciation errors often caused them to hesitate before speaking. Consequently, their speech became less spontaneous and less fluent.

The findings are also supported by Sha'ar and Boonsuk (2021), who found that limited language resources and insufficient speaking practice frequently affect learners' fluency. Students who struggle with vocabulary retrieval and grammatical accuracy often experience pauses and hesitation during communication. Similarly, Gao et al. (2024) emphasized that

regular participation in communicative classroom activities can enhance students' willingness to communicate and improve speaking fluency. This suggests that providing meaningful opportunities for interaction may help students develop greater fluency and confidence in speaking English.

Another important finding is that fluency difficulties influence students' confidence and classroom participation. Students who frequently experience pauses and hesitation may become self-conscious about their speaking ability. They may worry that classmates will judge their performance negatively or perceive them as less competent. Such concerns can reduce their willingness to communicate and participate actively in speaking activities. Over time, reduced participation may limit opportunities for speaking practice, which are essential for developing greater fluency.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that fluency difficulties represent a significant challenge for students during English-speaking classroom activities. Frequent pauses, hesitation, and difficulties responding spontaneously were common experiences reported by the participants. These difficulties appear to be closely associated with vocabulary limitations, grammatical concerns, pronunciation problems, and speaking anxiety. The findings also support the views of Thornbury (2005) and Brown (2007), who emphasize the cognitive complexity of speaking and the need to balance fluency with accuracy. Therefore, providing students with regular opportunities to engage in meaningful communication may help them develop greater fluency, confidence, and participation in English-speaking classroom activities.

Psychological Factors Affecting Speaking Performance

In addition to linguistic difficulties, psychological factors were found to play a significant role in influencing students' speaking performance during English-speaking classroom activities. The questionnaire results revealed that many participants experienced anxiety, nervousness, and a lack of confidence when speaking English in front of their classmates and lecturers. These psychological barriers often prevented students from participating actively in classroom discussions, presentations, and other speaking-related tasks. The findings suggest that students' speaking difficulties are not solely associated with language proficiency but are also influenced by their emotional and psychological conditions.

The qualitative responses further supported these findings. Several respondents reported that they frequently felt nervous and afraid of making mistakes when speaking English. Respondent 2 (R2) stated:

"My biggest difficulty when speaking English during classroom activities is a lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes, especially in pronunciation and grammar. I often feel nervous when speaking in front of my classmates because I am afraid of making mistakes or being laughed at."

Similarly, Respondent 3 (R3) explained:

"The difficulty I experience when speaking English is a lack of confidence because I am not sure whether my grammar and pronunciation are correct."

These responses indicate that fear of making mistakes is one of the primary factors contributing to students' speaking anxiety. Many students appear to be concerned about how their classmates and lecturers might evaluate their speaking performance. As a result, they

become hesitant to speak and often prefer to remain silent rather than risk making errors during communication.

The findings also demonstrate that psychological factors are closely connected to students' linguistic difficulties. Students who perceive their vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation as inadequate tend to experience lower levels of confidence when speaking English. Consequently, they become more anxious during classroom communication and less willing to participate in speaking activities. This suggests that speaking anxiety is not an isolated problem but rather a consequence of students' concerns about their language competence.

The present findings are consistent with Horwitz et al. (1986), who introduced the concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety (FLCA), referring to feelings of tension, apprehension, and nervousness associated with language learning. According to Horwitz et al. (1986), students who experience language anxiety often fear negative evaluation, communication failure, and making mistakes in front of others. These characteristics were clearly reflected in the responses of the participants, many of whom reported feelings of nervousness and fear when required to speak English in classroom settings.

The findings are also supported by Abrar et al. (2024), who found that EFL students frequently experience speaking anxiety when answering lecturers' questions or participating in classroom interactions. Similarly, Yunus (2024) reported that public speaking anxiety remains a major challenge among university students learning English as a foreign language. Both studies suggest that anxiety continues to be one of the most influential factors affecting students' oral communication performance.

Furthermore, psychological barriers appear to influence students' classroom participation. Students who lack confidence are often reluctant to volunteer answers, ask questions, or contribute to discussions. This reduced participation limits opportunities for speaking practice, which are essential for developing oral proficiency. As a result, students may experience slower progress in improving their speaking skills compared to those who actively engage in communication activities.

Overall, the findings indicate that psychological factors, particularly speaking anxiety and lack of confidence, represent significant barriers to students' speaking performance. Fear of making mistakes, concerns about negative evaluation, and uncertainty regarding language ability often discourage students from participating actively in English-speaking classroom activities. Therefore, creating a supportive and non-threatening learning environment is essential to help students build confidence, reduce anxiety, and develop greater willingness to communicate in English.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that Batch 2024 students of the English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar experienced various difficulties during English-speaking classroom activities. These difficulties were related to vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence. The findings support the argument of Tuan and Mai (2015), who identified linguistic factors, psychological barriers, and environmental conditions as important determinants of students' speaking performance. Similarly, the present study indicates that students' speaking difficulties are multidimensional and influenced by both language-related and affective factors. The results further suggest that speaking performance is shaped by the

interaction between learners' linguistic competence and their emotional readiness to communicate in English.

Similar findings were reported by Bahadur et al. (2024), who found that higher levels of English-speaking anxiety were associated with lower willingness to communicate among university students. Their study suggests that students who experience fear and nervousness during speaking activities are less likely to participate actively in classroom communication. This finding supports the present study, in which several participants reported avoiding speaking opportunities due to fear of making mistakes and being negatively evaluated by others.

These findings highlight the importance of creating classroom environments that support both linguistic development and students' emotional well-being. As suggested by Zhao et al. (2024), positive learning experiences can increase learners' willingness to communicate, while Bahadur et al. (2024) emphasize the need to reduce speaking anxiety to promote active participation. Therefore, speaking instruction should address not only language competence but also the psychological factors that influence students' engagement in classroom communication.

One of the most prominent difficulties identified in this study was vocabulary limitation. Many students reported difficulty finding appropriate words and expressing their ideas clearly during classroom communication. This finding suggests that insufficient vocabulary knowledge restricts students' ability to participate actively in speaking activities. When learners do not possess adequate lexical resources, they often require additional time to search for words, which may result in hesitation and communication breakdowns. This finding supports Nation's (2013) argument that vocabulary serves as the foundation of language use and is essential for effective communication. Similarly, Nation and Newton (2009) emphasize that learners with limited vocabulary frequently struggle to maintain conversations because they cannot retrieve appropriate words quickly during interaction. The findings also align with Sha'ar and Boonsuk (2021), who reported that vocabulary deficiency remains one of the major barriers affecting EFL learners' speaking development. Furthermore, Israfil (2024) found that students considered vocabulary enrichment one of the most important requirements for improving speaking ability. These similarities indicate that vocabulary mastery continues to be a fundamental challenge for EFL learners across different educational contexts.

Grammar difficulties also emerged as an important factor influencing students' speaking performance. The findings showed that many students hesitated to speak because they were afraid of making grammatical mistakes. This suggests that students tend to associate successful speaking with grammatical accuracy. Consequently, they often spend considerable time monitoring sentence structures before speaking, which may reduce spontaneity and fluency. Brown (2007) explains that effective speaking requires learners to balance fluency and accuracy simultaneously. However, when learners focus excessively on grammatical correctness, communication may become less natural and more stressful. Similar findings were reported by Sha'ar and Boonsuk (2021), who found that fear of grammatical errors frequently discourages students from participating in classroom discussions. The present findings indicate that grammar difficulties affect not only linguistic accuracy but also students' confidence and willingness to communicate. Therefore, grammar instruction should be integrated into communicative speaking activities that allow students to use language meaningfully rather than focusing solely on error avoidance.

Pronunciation was another difficulty identified by the participants. Although pronunciation obtained a lower mean score than vocabulary and fluency, many students reported feeling uncertain about the correctness of their pronunciation. This finding suggests that pronunciation difficulties continue to influence students' confidence when speaking English. According to Thornbury (2005), pronunciation plays a crucial role in speaking competence because it directly affects intelligibility and listeners' understanding of messages. When learners are uncertain about pronunciation, they may avoid using certain words or participating in discussions altogether. Similar findings were reported by Sha'ar and Boonsuk (2021), who found that pronunciation difficulties often reduce learners' willingness to communicate. In the present study, students' concerns about pronunciation were frequently associated with fear of negative evaluation from peers and lecturers. This indicates that pronunciation difficulties should be addressed not only through language practice but also through supportive classroom environments that encourage students to speak without fear of criticism.

Among all identified difficulties, fluency emerged as the most dominant challenge. Students frequently reported pausing while speaking because they needed additional time to think, recall vocabulary, or construct sentences. This finding demonstrates that speaking in a foreign language requires learners to manage multiple cognitive processes simultaneously. Thornbury (2005) argues that speaking is cognitively demanding because learners must generate ideas, retrieve vocabulary, apply grammatical knowledge, and monitor pronunciation in real time. Consequently, learners often experience hesitation when their linguistic resources are insufficient to support spontaneous communication. The findings also support Brown's (2007) view that maintaining fluency while preserving accuracy remains one of the greatest challenges in second-language speaking. Furthermore, Gao et al. (2024) emphasized that communicative classroom activities can enhance students' willingness to communicate and improve speaking fluency. Therefore, the fluency difficulties identified in this study may indicate the need for more opportunities for authentic and meaningful speaking practice within classroom settings.

In addition to linguistic challenges, psychological factors significantly affected students' speaking performance. Many participants reported experiencing anxiety, nervousness, and lack of confidence when speaking English in front of their classmates and lecturers. These findings suggest that emotional factors play an important role in determining students' willingness to communicate. The results are consistent with Horwitz et al.'s (1986) concept of Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety, which describes feelings of tension and apprehension associated with language learning situations. The findings also support Kianinezhad (2024), who argues that foreign language anxiety negatively influences learners' confidence, participation, and language achievement. Furthermore, Abrar et al. (2024) found that EFL students often experience anxiety when answering lecturers' questions, while Yunus (2024) reported that public speaking anxiety remains a significant challenge in tertiary education contexts. The present findings suggest that anxiety is closely related to students' perceptions of their linguistic competence. Learners who believe that their vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation is inadequate tend to experience higher levels of anxiety and lower confidence during speaking activities.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that speaking difficulties among Batch 2024 students cannot be explained by a single factor. Vocabulary limitations, grammar difficulties, pronunciation problems, fluency challenges, and psychological barriers interact with one

another and collectively influence speaking performance. This finding is consistent with Tuan and Mai (2015), who argued that speaking performance is shaped by a combination of linguistic, psychological, and environmental factors. Therefore, efforts to improve students' speaking ability should address these factors simultaneously through supportive classroom environments and meaningful communicative practice.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to identify the difficulties experienced by Batch 2024 students of the English Education Department at UIN Alauddin Makassar in English-speaking classroom activities. The findings revealed that students encountered various linguistic and psychological difficulties, including limited vocabulary, grammar problems, pronunciation difficulties, lack of fluency, speaking anxiety, and low self-confidence. Among these challenges, fluency-related difficulties emerged as the most prominent obstacle, as many students reported frequently pausing while speaking because they needed additional time to organize ideas, recall vocabulary, and construct grammatically appropriate sentences. Vocabulary limitations also significantly affected students' ability to express ideas clearly and participate actively in classroom communication.

The findings further demonstrated that speaking difficulties are interconnected rather than isolated. Limited vocabulary, grammar concerns, and pronunciation problems often contributed to students' anxiety and lack of confidence, which subsequently reduced their willingness to communicate during classroom activities. These results indicate that students' speaking performance is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by psychological and environmental factors.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that lecturers provide more opportunities for meaningful speaking practice through communicative and learner-centered activities. Creating a supportive classroom environment, encouraging active participation, and integrating vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation practice into authentic communication tasks may help students improve their speaking performance and confidence. Future researchers are also encouraged to conduct studies involving larger numbers of participants and different educational contexts to obtain a broader understanding of EFL students' speaking difficulties.

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