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## ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASS IN A MATHEMATICS PROGRAM: STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES

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*Muhamad Holandyah*

**MUHAMAD HOLANDYAH**

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia

E-mail: [muhammadholandyah\\_uin@radenfatah.ac.id](mailto:muhammadholandyah_uin@radenfatah.ac.id)

**KASINYO HARTO**

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia

**AYU MEI SULI**

Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Fatah Palembang, South Sumatra, Indonesia

### **Abstract**

This is a qualitative research with a case study research design which aimed to find out the students' difficulties in speaking at Non-English Speaking Class in Mathematics program study at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. The researchers selected three students who met the criteria as a research participant by using criterion sampling. In collecting the data, the researchers used an interview as instrument. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The result showed that the students faced some difficulties in speaking, such as lack of vocabulary, inhibition, mother-tongue use, and lack of confidence. The findings of the study encouraged students to practice speaking English more until they developed a speaking habit, which made them able to improve their speaking skills and also expanded their vocabulary better.

**Keywords:** Students' difficulties, speaking, speaking class

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*Manuscript submitted: September 11, 2022*

*Manuscript revised: October 6, 2022*

*Accepted for publication: December 12, 2022*

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## Introduction

Speaking is communication skill that enables students to express their ideas. Speaking is a form of activity that aims to convey messages, ideas, thoughts, feelings, and information from one person to another using language expressed orally (Erlina et al., 2019; Haryanto & Mukminin, 2012; Mukminin et al., 2019). According to Peterson (2019), speaking is the one language skill that requires interaction with other people. As a research revealed by Bhatti (2021) showed that English speaking ability is very important for people interaction where people speak English every day and everywhere. Therefore, Bygate (1987) stated that speaking is a skill that deserves attention like literary skills, both in the first and second languages. It shows that English speaking skills are important for students to master (Mukminin et al., 2015).

Mastering English speaking is important for students because, if the students have a good competency in speaking skill, it can make them easy to communicate with others. Therefore, Richards (2008) described that mastery of speaking skills in English is a priority for many second or foreign language learners. Similarly, Nunan (1991) also argued that for most people, mastery of the art of speaking is the most important aspect in learning a second or foreign language and success is measured by the ability to carry out conversations in that language. This means that speaking requires complex preparation, speaking is not just saying something in another language, but also conveying a message between the speaker and the listener. Therefore, speaking English is considered difficult for students.

Mostly, speaking English is considered difficult for students because speaking requires several important components to support it. They are fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar and comprehension. All these elements need to be mastered by students, so that they can speak English well. In addition, Harmer (2007) also stated that if students want to be able to speak fluently in English, they must be able to pronounce phonemes correctly, use the right stress and intonation and speaking patterns in connected speech. But there's more to it's from that. English speakers especially where the language will be must be able to speak in a variety of different genres and situations, and they should be able to use various conversations and conversation improvement strategy. They must be able to survive the typical interchange of functions too. In fact, to achieve fluency in speaking is not easy. Students are not only required to use grammar correctly or have good pronunciation and vocabulary, they are also required to know the knowledge of how to use the language because most of them cannot speak English well so they have some difficulties in speaking English. Maulana, Daud, and Heriansyah (2016) showed in their studies that most problems faced by students in learning speaking are lack of vocabulary, pronunciation, confidence to speak and making mistakes when speaking. It was happened because most students feel unsecured in pronouncing some words since they are afraid of making mistakes.

Regarding the difficulty of speaking skills, it is caused by several factors, for instance, students often feel confused about what they want to say, especially with the limited vocabulary they are (They have limited vocabularies), sometimes students are just silent when speaking because they are not confident and even feel anxious about themselves when speaking English in front of people, they are afraid of speaking mispronunciation and making grammatical errors. As a result, students become unmotivated in speaking since some of them are unable to speak well. This problem is in accordance with Krashen (1982) stated that a variety of affective variables has been confirmed to be related to success in second language acquisition in research over the last decade but most of those

studies examined the three categories: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. On the other hand, Rababa'h (2005) showed that there are many factors that cause difficulty in speaking English among EFL learners. Some of these factors related to the students themselves, teaching strategies, curriculum, and environment. For example, many students lack the vocabulary needed to meaning across, and as a result, they are unable to keep the interaction going. Insufficient strategic competence and Communication competence can be another reason for not being able to keep the interaction going. Furthermore, Hosni (2014) found that there were five main factors that contributed to students' speaking difficulties, namely teacher perceptions and tacit beliefs in teaching speaking, teaching strategies, curriculum, extracurricular activities, and assessment rules. This shows that teachers prioritize English speaking activities less in the classroom because teachers spend more time providing coverage of textbook topics, which emphasize teaching reading and writing rather than speaking. Pointedly, the factors that make it difficult for students to speak English are not only motivation, confidence, and anxiety but are also caused by the teacher's teaching strategy, curriculum, and environmental factors that result in the students' low ability to speak English.

## Literature Review

### *The nature of speaking*

Speaking is one of productive skills which is used by many people to process for building and sharing information each other. Speaking skill is different from other skills in English language because it is one of the abilities to carry out conversation. Thus, speaking is the major skill for communication. Therefore, Ur (1996) says that of all the four skill speaking seems intuitively the most important so that people who know a language are referred to as "speakers" of that language. Afterward, Lakshmi (2018) stated that speaking is a productive skill. Good speaking skills are an act generating words that can be understood by listeners. As research conducted by Siagian and Pinem (2020) showed that speaking is one of ways of people in telling stories, expressing emotions, conveying messages, sharing feelings, delivering a speech or remarks which mediate them to relate and communicate each other. It means that speaking is an interactive process to share information and ideas for everyone in learning speaking skill. Based on those definitions, speaking is one of the English skills that purposed to interact, communicate, and share information.

In addition, McDonough, Shaw, and Masuhara (2013) also defined reasons for speaking are as a skill that allows us to produce speech, when it is truly communicative, speaking is desire and driven by purpose, in other words, we really want to communicate something, to achieve certain ending. This may involve expressing ideas and opinions; express a desire or desire to do something; negotiate and/or solve certain problems; or build and maintain social relationships and friendships. Therefore, as a language skill, speaking becomes an important component that must be mastered by students as the main tool of verbal communication because it is a way to express ideas and opinions directly what is in their minds.

From the explanation above, it was concluded that speaking is what people say to what people see, feel and think. When they feel something, they want someone can hear us. So, in this process we can call it is an interaction between two sides. The main purpose of speech is to communicate. Communication is the sending and receiving of messages or news between two or more people so that the messages is understood. Therefore, in order to convey the message effectively, the speaker must understand what will be delivered or communicated.

## *Difficulties of speaking*

The learners have their own difficulties or problems in learning the language. Particularly in mastering speaking skill is not easy for the students. Thus, [Ur \(1996\)](#) expressed four problems with speaking activities, namely:

a. Inhibition

Unlike writing, reading, and listening activities, speaking requires some real-time exposure to the audience. Students often experience obstacles when trying to say something in the target language in class such as worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism or losing face, or simply shy of the attention that their speech attracts.

b. Nothing to say

Even without emphasis, students often complain that they cannot think of anything to say. They have no motive to express themselves beyond the guilty feeling that they should be speaking.

c. Low or uneven participation

Only one participant can hear at a time. For large groups, this means that everyone has less time to talk. This problem is compounded by the tendency of some learners to dominate, while others tend to speak little or not at all.

d. Mother-tongue use

In classrooms where all or more learners have the same mother tongue, they tend to use it. This is because they think that speaking in their mother tongue is much easier than when speaking in the target language, they feel unnatural, and they feel less 'exposed' when speaking the target language. When speaking in small groups, it can be very difficult to get some classes, especially those that are less disciplined or less motivated, to stick to the target language.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

The research used the qualitative method with a case study. According to [Creswell \(2012\)](#), qualitative research is an approach that is needed in exploring a problem and developing a detail understanding of central phenomenon. A central phenomenon is a key concept, idea, or process studied in qualitative research. Afterwards, [Creswell \(2014\)](#) defined a case study as a design of inquiry found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researchers develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, process, or one of more individuals. Thus, the qualitative research with case study used in this study and data for this research were taken by using an interview to find out the students' difficulties in speaking: The case of non-English speaking class at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang.

### *Participants*

The participants of this research were selected by purposeful sampling technique. [Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, and Hoagwood \(2013\)](#) stated that purposeful sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to see the phenomenon and find a lot of information related to the phenomenon being investigated itself. Hence, this study selected participants using criterion

sampling. According to Creswell (2013), criterion sampling is all cases that meet some criterion that will be useful for quality assurance. Therefore, there was only one class that was used as a participant in this research. Thus, the researchers took three students of the Mathematics Department as participants in this study. The researchers selected participants based on the following criteria: (1) Students have the lowest score in speaking, (2) have low vocabulary mastery, (3) mispronouncing and making grammatical errors.

### *Data collection and analysis*

In data collection, the researchers conducted the interview. The data were collected through interviewing students at Mathematics Department at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. Creswell (2012) declared that interviews occur when researchers ask open-ended questions to participants and then record their answers. Therefore, the interview was applied in this study to obtain more in-depth information from the participants. Interviews were conducted face-to-face with three participants. Furthermore, the researchers used semi-structured interviews to explore more information regarding students' difficulties in speaking. The interview consists of 13 question items to find out Students' Difficulties in Speaking for Non-English Speaking Class at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. The interview process was carried out in several stages. First, the researchers prepared an interview protocol and a recording device to record the interview process. Then, the researchers prepared notes to write additional information. The researchers asked questions related to students' difficulties in speaking.

After the data were collected, the researchers applied the thematic analysis by following the six steps recommended by Creswell (2014). The first step was to familiarize with the data collected. The second step was to copy and encode the data from the interviews. The third step was to determine the theme. The fourth step was reviewing the data. The researchers divided a set of themes and involve refining those themes. The fifth step was to define and name the theme. The final step was to interpret and generate the data. The last step, researchers identified Students' Difficulties in Speaking: The Case of a Non-English Speaking Class at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. Then, the researchers determined the final conclusion from the research findings based on the research objective in this study.

### **Findings**

After gaining the data from the interview, the data were analyzed by using thematic analysis. The descriptions of the result are presented as follows:

#### *Students' difficulties in speaking*

The themes and codes were acquired from the result of interview analysis on students' difficulties in speaking were described in the following table.

**Table 1.** *Themes and codes of students' difficulties in speaking*

Themes	Codes
1. Lack of Vocabulary	A. Confused in giving response when speaking B. Have no an idea in conversation C. Less understanding in the contents of unfamiliar topics D. Unknown vocabulary in speaking
2. Inhibition	E. Fearful of being criticized in pronouncing words/sentences F. Shy in making mistake G. Afraid of lacking of knowledge of grammar
3. Mother-Tongue Use	H. Less motivated to speak I. Have more fluent in speaking the local language
4. Lack of Confidence	J. Feel inferior to speak K. Lack of confidence to speak in public

The theme and codes collected from the qualitative data were described in order to identify the students' difficulties in speaking: the case of non-English speaking class at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang, namely; lack of vocabulary, inhibition, mother-tongue use and lack of confidence. The description was as follows.

***Lack of vocabulary***

Based on the interview data, researcher found that students were still confused in giving response when speaking English because they had difficulty with vocabulary. The student with initial LA stated that *“Of course it is difficult and confusing because of the lack of vocabulary”*. (personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Initial A said that *“Yes because sometimes some of the words sounded new making it difficult to understand them when speaking English. Therefore, when giving a response from the other person I am afraid of making mistakes”*. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Then, the student with initial AM added that *“Yes because maybe I am also not in English department. So, when I speak English I have difficulty with vocabulary”*. (Personal communication, August 5th, 2022).

Based on the interview, it was found that students did not have an idea in conversation because of them were still confused about what to talk about when speaking English. The student with initial LA explained that *“Yes Ms, it is difficult, eh... to determine the idea of the conversation as I had the lack of vocabularies, the lack of grammar, So it is difficult, to make the idea of the conversation, Ms”*. (personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Then, the student with Initial A said that *“Yes because when I wanted to start a conversation, I did not have an idea and did not know what I wanted to say. Moreover, I have lack of vocabulary in English, so it was difficult to have a conversation”*. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Initial AM also stated that *“Yes. Because when I talk, I need ideas, so I am confused about what to talk about. Moreover, since I am not good at producing the idea of conversation, having sufficient vocabulary, using correct grammar, it makes me less aware of what I want to say”*. (Personal communication, August 5th, 2022).

Based on the interview, researcher found that students had less understanding in the contents of unfamiliar topics because of lacking of vocabulary mastery. The student with initial LA stated that *“The topic was like a daily life topic, for example like to have presentation. It was difficult because of the*

*lack of vocabulary. I also found it difficult to even talk about easy topic like talking about hobby, etc.”* (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Initial A also explained that *“I find it difficult because I do not know what to talk about and when the topics are very difficult for me to understand because of my lack of vocabulary mastery”*. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Furthermore, Initial AM said that *“Yes, as in the previous point, I have said that the topic is like storytelling. In storytelling, I definitely used a lot of vocabulary that I may hear, but if it is for self-introductions, maybe I have often heard it. For example, if I go to college for the first time and I am asked to introduce myself using English, it is already a common thing to hear. While in storytelling, I rarely hear it since there are a lot of difficult words”*. (Personal communication, August 5th, 2022).

The next data obtained from interview result showed that students often encountered unknown vocabulary, which made them sometimes just silent when speaking English. The student with initial LA explained that *“It often happened. I often found vocabulary that was difficult/unknown, eeh... for example, when i watched a movie or listening to music, I often heard unknown vocabularies that I did not understand and in the classroom environment, i also have experienced anything like that. It was still foreign, and the way I handled it was using Google Translate. or sometimes just staying silent, asking the interlocutor I talked with”*. (personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). The student with initial A also added that *“Yes because sometimes I often found some words that were difficult and unknown, so I used to asking my lecturer and my friends about unfamiliar words and I also using Google Translate. Usually, after speaking English, i would try to find out what it meant”*. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022).

### ***Inhibition***

Based on the data that was acquired from the interview, students often experience inhibition when speaking. Inhibition that often occur such as fear of being criticized by friends, feeling shy, afraid of being laughed by friends, and afraid of making mistakes, which made it difficult for students to speak English. Students were fearful of being criticized by friends in pronouncing words/sentences in speaking English because they did not know how to pronounce English words correctly. The student with initial LA said *“Yes, Ms. Why? Due to the lack of English vocabularies, the lack of knowledge in English make me afraid of being criticized, especially by friends. I am afraid of being made fun of, even though it is a joke, but I am still afraid, Ms. Sometimes I was also nervous like I wanted to say yes or no. I was afraid of being wrong too since what we heard and what was written was different”*. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). The student initial A added *“Yes. For fear of mispronouncing words/ sentences in English, afraid of making mistake, afraid of being criticized. Criticism that made me afraid to speak English because I did not know how to pronounce English words, such as a mockery from a friend which made me feel reluctant to speak English because of the criticism”*. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Then, the student with initial AM also said that *“I think yes. because I am a person who is afraid of being criticized actually. Moreover, when I mispronounced English words, it made me afraid that someone would tell me that I said something wrong”* (personal communication, August 5th, 2022).

The researchers also found that students felt very shy because of making mistake with correct grammar, especially in composing words when speaking English. Just like initial LA said *“Of course. Because when I made a mistake in speaking English, it made me embarrassed for making that mistake. Besides, my friends would continue criticizing, resulting in me being embarrassed in front of my friends”*. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Moreover, initial AM added that *“I absolutely agree with this. I feel very shy especially in speaking English with correct grammar, I do not know how to speak it myself. That is why I am very embarrassed worrying I would make mistakes especially in speaking English, especially in composing words when speaking English”*. (Personal communication, August 5th, 2022).

Furthermore, the researchers also found that students were afraid of being laughed at by friends because of the lack of knowledge of grammar and did not know about arranging the correct words when speaking English. The students with initial LA said that “*Yes Ms, I am afraid of being laughed at by friends because of the lack of knowledge of grammar, lack of vocabulary, and lack of understanding*”. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Furthermore, initial A stated that “*Yes because I have lack of grammar mastery, so I did not know about arranging the correct words*”. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Initial AM also explained that “*Yes, because of the lack of knowledge in English. I am also afraid of being laughed at by friends around me when I speak English, without proper grammar and pronunciation*”. (Personal communication, August 5th, 2022).

### ***Mother-tongue use***

Based on the interview data, students had less motivated to speak English because they felt English was not their mother tongue. Student with initial A said that “*Yes. because English is not my mother tongue, so my vocabulary is very poor, So when speaking in English, I often feel nervous which causes me to be less motivated when speaking English*”. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022).

Furthermore, student with initial AM claimed that “*Yes, in mastering vocabulary it makes me feel inferior, so my motivation to speak English is also lacking due of my lack of knowledge in vocabulary. Besides, I am also used to talking to classmates or anyone using Indonesian. I rarely see my friends speak English*”. (Personal communication, August 5th, 2022).

Next, the researchers also found that students were more fluent in speaking the local or Indonesian language than English because the environmental factor really affects their speaking ability. The student with initial LA explained that “*Yes Ms. In my opinion, environmental factor really affects because my speaking ability because if I speak local languages every day, I will be fluent in speaking the language. It is the same as speaking English. If I often speak English such as public speaking, I will definitely get accustomed to speaking in English naturally*.” (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Furthermore, initial A stated that “*Yes because my environment used Indonesian and never uses English, so environmental factors really affected it. It is the same if my friends speak English when I am in class, automatically I will also participate, I can know, I can learn and become accustomed to using English when speaking and vice versa*”. (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Then, the student with initial AM also added that “*Very influential, Yes, because maybe I have a friend who is really good at English, it makes me feel like I can also be like them. I should be motivated for me to also study for English, learn the pronunciation, or grammar, and to obtain more vocabulary. So, I think environmental factors really affect it. Moreover, if any of my friends speak English, I will definitely come along and get used to speaking English*”. (Personal communication, August 5th, 2022).

### ***Lack of confidence***

Based on the data of interview, the researcher found that the students had lack of confidence to speak because sometimes they felt inferior. Initial LA stated that “*Of course Ms, especially because we cannot speak English well, it makes us afraid. Besides, having lack of confidence, feeling inferior to our friends, being insecure, having lacks knowledge in English letters made me lose confidence to speak English*”. (personal communication, August 3rd, 2022).

Next, the researchers also found that the students had lack of confidence to speak English in public because they cannot speak English well. The student with initial A explained that “*Yes if I*

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*was less confident because I was afraid of mispronouncing words and did not know the vocabulary, so I did not have confidence when speaking English". (Personal communication, August 3rd, 2022). Then, MA also added that "Not enough Ms, I am actually lacking confidence. Moreover, for example, I am asked to speak English while I have lack knowledge in English. It makes me not confident to talk to my teacher or lecturer who asks me to speak English in front of a lot of people or in front of the class". (Personal communication, August 5th, 2022).*

## Discussion

After analyzing the result of the research by using thematic analysis, the researcher found that there were some students' difficulties in speaking. Those are (1) lack of vocabulary, (2) inhibition, (3) mother-tongue use and (4) lack of confidence. The first was lack of vocabulary. All of the students argued that one of their difficulties in speaking was lack vocabulary because they were still confused in giving response when speaking. [Heriansyah \(2012\)](#) found in his study that the common problem encountered by the students in speaking English was lack of vocabulary. This finding was in line with [Candraloka and Rosdiana \(2019\)](#) that vocabulary was the one of the biggest problem of speaking skills encountered by students. Furthermore, the students sometimes just stayed silent when speaking English because they had less understanding in the contents of the conversation and unknown vocabulary in speaking. This result was in line with a previous research by [Andas and Rutniatyanti \(2020\)](#) that students tend to silent participants in speaking due to lack of vocabulary and grammar.

The second was inhibition. Most of the students argued that one of their difficulties in speaking was when the students try to say something in a foreign language in the class, they were often inhibited. Such as, they were fearful of criticism or losing face, felt shy, and afraid of being laughed at by friends. It made students reluctant to speak English. In the end, it affected the results of those who did not improve their speaking ability. This finding was supported by [Ur \(1996\)](#) stated that one of problems in speaking including inhibition; students were worried about making mistakes, fearful of criticism, or losing face or simply shy. It was line with [Risadi, Sumariadhi and Wijayasa \(2020\)](#) found that one of the difficulties encountered by students in speaking class was inhibition. Furthermore, [Humaera \(2015\)](#) showed that there are some factors that cause inhibition, such as lack of motivation, shyness, self-confidence, self-esteem, and language ego. In addition, students also mentioned that what inhibited them in speaking were fear of mispronouncing words/sentences in English, lack of knowledge of grammar, and lack of vocabulary. This finding was in line with [Suryani, Suarnajaya, and Pratiwi \(2020\)](#) found in their studies that knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation were the factors inhibiting the students in speaking.

The third was mother-tongue use. The result of the data indicated that mother tongue use was an obstacle for students to speak English, it happened because they did not use English in their daily activities, this was influenced by environmental factors that did not support them to speak English. This finding was in line with [Rahmaniah, Asbah, and Nurmasitah \(2018\)](#) found that indeed students prefer to use their mother tongue in the class instead of using English because their environment did not require them to speak English. Therefore, students were more fluent in speaking the local or Indonesian language than English because the environmental factor really affects their speaking ability. Additionally, [Holandyah, Marzulina, Erlina, Harto, Amalia, Fridiyanto and Mukminin \(2022\)](#) found in their studies that the mother tongue had an influence that made it difficult for students to speak English. Furthermore, [Riadil \(2020\)](#) also showed that mother tongue use was the most problematic for the students in speaking English. Based on the data obtained, 77%

of the students who were researched by him utilized their mother tongue in English class and 83% agreed that their mother tongue use was easier than English. This made students had less motivated to speak English because they felt English was not their mother tongue.

The fourth, lack of confidence. Most of the students have not confident to speak English. When students tried to speak English, they felt inferior, they felt their ability to speak was not good because they had lack knowledge in English, so they did not have confident that they can really speak English if they were not confident. Hebaish (2012) found that low confident learners felt uncomfortable, afraid and frustrated in the classroom. Furthermore, Hidayati (2021) found that most students had psychological problems, especially with their self-confidence. Similarly, Asmianta, Ratna, and Hengki (2020) also added that the difficulty occurs most frequency in speaking English for the non-English department students were less confident. Furthermore, Tika and Abadi (2021) mentioned in their studies that lack confidence was when practice conversation in front of the class, the students can be seen from facial expression looked shy, making body movement looked lack confidence, usually move head and feet quickly, play something like skirt or pen.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the result of the data analyzed by using thematic analysis, the researchers found that were some students' difficulties in speaking: the case of non-English speaking class at UIN Raden Fatah Palembang. They were: (1) lack of vocabulary, because students still often encountered vocabulary that they did not know and vocabulary that was too difficult for them every time they speak. Sometimes they were still confused in giving response when speaking. (2) Inhibition, because students had difficulty when speaking, namely when students tried to say something in a foreign language in class, but they were often inhibited. They were afraid of being criticized or losing face, embarrassed, and afraid of being laughed at by their friends. This made students reluctant to speak English. (3) mother-tongue use, because students more fluent when speaking the regional language or Indonesian than using English even in speaking class. (4) lack of confidence, because students mentioned that when they often felt inferior to speak because they realized their ability to speak was not good because they had lack knowledge in English, so they were not confident when speaking in public.

First, for the lecturers are expected that the present study can give the lecturer some beneficial information so that they can apply some effective strategies to make the students are more brave and active in taking part in speaking class without fear of being criticized and confident when speaking English. The researcher also hope the lecturer can know about the students' difficulties in speaking, it is because their participation has a good influence in increasing students' English speaking ability. Second, the students are expected to learn more and practice speaking English diligently, such as by adding vocabulary, getting used to practicing conversations in English with friends or lecturers, this is very important because it can improve their speaking skills. Last, this research can be useful as a reference for other researchers, and the researcher also hope that other researchers will continue this study by conducting further studies, such as studying how to overcome students' difficulties in speaking.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

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