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# “If our English isn’t a language, what is it?” Indonesian EFL Student Teachers’ Challenges Speaking English

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### Abstract

Research on students’ skill speaking English in a non-English speaking country such as Indonesia is limited. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to document Indonesian EFL student teachers’ experiences in speaking English at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia. Data came from demographic questionnaires and semi-structured interviews obtained from eight participants. We organized our analysis and discussion around Indonesian EFL student teachers’ perspectives and the contexts in which experiences they encountered emerge. Our analysis of the text revealed overarching themes and sub-themes including (1) language barriers (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency); (2) psychological factors (anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation); (3) learning environment (lecturers, peers, and topics of speaking modules), and (4) practicing the language (self-practice, practicing the language with tutors and peers, practicing the language with media and technology, and maintaining a positive motivation). The findings indicated that all of themes and sub-themes appeared to be intricately interrelated.

### Keywords

English Speaking, Phenomenological Study, EFL Student Teachers

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## **“If our English isn’t a language, what is it?” Indonesian EFL Student Teachers’ Challenges Speaking English**

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### **Introduction**

It is widely known that English is an international language since it has been largely spoken among foreign language speakers. Dewi (2015), Mukminin, Ali, and Ashari (2015), and Jackson and Stockwell (1996) asserted that English was used in every corner of the world as a medium to interact among people from different cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds. Their findings indicate that the language, at present, is being articulated by not only native-speakers, but also non-native speakers. Aside from being the world language for international communication, English is used in foreign countries in major venues, like the news (Ammon, 2001; Seargeant & Erling, 2011).

In Indonesia, an incredibly diverse and multicultural country, English is regarded as one of the most popular foreign languages. The 1989 Law on the Indonesian educational system gives English a place as the first foreign language among other foreign languages used in Indonesia such as German, Arabic, or Japanese (Komaria, 1998). Its policy implication is that the language becomes one of the compulsory modules to be taught in secondary schools and tertiary education. In addition, English is offered as a programme study in higher education institutions in Indonesia, including in one public university in Jambi. In this setting, English is often used as the language of instruction. Despite having English instruction for many years, many learners are unable to communicate in the target language, particularly among the four language skills. One of the most challenging language skills for learners is speaking. One of the possible reasons is that speaking requires complex skills, not merely conveying ideas verbally. Shumin (2002) argued that speaking a foreign language requires high complex skills

which go beyond the understanding of grammatical and semantic rules. However, although speaking is one of the most challenging skills, the existing literature indicates that there has been a lack of literature and information on EFL student teachers' experiences in speaking English in the context of Indonesia except for Mukminin, Masbirorotni, Noprival, Sutarno, Arif, and Maimunah (2015). For this reason, the purpose of this phenomenological study was to document Indonesian EFL student teachers' experiences in speaking English at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia. The following research questions guided this study in an attempt to document Indonesian EFL student teachers' experiences in speaking English: What do student teachers experience related to speaking English? And how do they deal with such experiences?

## Literature Review

Speaking is an interactive process of meaning construction which includes receiving, processing, and producing information (Burns & Joyce, 1997). Moreover, Chaney and Burk (1998) argued that speaking was creating and conveying meaning using verbal or even non-verbal symbols in many varieties of context. These views highlight that speaking is not merely uttering words and sentences through the mouth, but it is more a matter of expressing or stating the message of communication through words and sentences. Speaking, for EFL learners, is one of the challenging language skills to master (Shumin, 2002) because it requires the speakers to have proper linguistic, sociolinguistic, and rhetorical competencies (Mukminin, Ali, & Ashari, 2015; Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Linguistic competence relates to the speakers' understanding of language proficiency, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Sociolinguistic competence requires the speakers' ability to recognize the interpretation of meaning in different language contexts, and rhetorical competence entails the mastery of conveying relevant messages to achieve the purpose of speech. Additionally, Shumin (2002) ascertained that the speakers' capability to speak properly was a demanding factor in interaction. This indicates that language proficiency and appropriateness are the key points to be a good speaker.

Ur (1996) pointed out four common factors which caused difficulties in speaking, including inhibition, nothing to say, low participation, and mother-tongue use. *Inhibition* refers to the obstructions to speaking, such as worrying about making mistakes, being fearful of criticism, losing face, and simply being shy. *Nothing to say* indicates no motive to express the idea verbally. *Low participation* is shown by having only having very little talking time. *Mother-tongue use* means the use of speakers' dialect when speaking in other languages. In addition, psychological factors, such as motivation, attitude, and anxiety, can be the reasons behind speaking difficulty for EFL learners as they are the affective factors in learning. Moreover, Broussard and Garrison (2004) defined motivation as the attribute which moves an individual to do or not to do something. This indicates that motivation is one of the influential factors which help EFL learner(s) succeed in speaking the language.

In general, attitude is defined as a settled way of thinking and feeling about something which explains persistent patterns in individuals' behavior. Gardner et al. (1985) define attitude as an evaluative reaction to some referent, e.g. behaviors or objects, on the basis of an individual's beliefs and opinions about the referent. Furthermore, in the context of language, Crystal (1997) asserts attitude is the feeling people own about their own language or the languages of others. Thus, it can be concluded that attitude to language is a construct that explains individuals' linguistic behaviors. When EFL learners have a negative attitude towards English, they may find it difficult to learn, including speaking skill.

The last psychological factor which possibly affects the difficulty to speak a foreign language is anxiety (Horwitz et al., 1986; Mukminin, Masbirorotni, Noprival, Sutarno, Arif, &

Maimunah, 2015; Price, 1991). According to Horwitz et al. (1986), anxiety is “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (p. 125). Moreover, MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) ascertain that language anxiety is “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language context including speaking, listening and learning” (p. 284). These suggest that anxiety can be assumed as a distinct complex of self-perception, feeling, behavior, and belief in relation to using a foreign language in classroom communication. Whenever EFL learners cannot cope with an issue, it may impede them from active involvement during classroom activities.

The above discussion on speaking challenges indicates that EFL learners’ obstacles to speak the language can be from internal factors, such as learners’ low motivation, anxiety, and negative attitude towards the language. In addition, external factors, such as classroom environment, and negative comments from teachers and peers, may hinder the learners from actively engaging, and eventually make it difficult to speak. There have been many studies investigating speaking challenges in the EFL context (e.g., Al Hosni, 2014; Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2014; Keong et al., 2015; Tok (2009). For example, Keong et al., (2015) investigated speaking competence of Iraqi EFL undergraduates of Garmiyah University. They employed a mixed-method study, survey and interviews as their research instruments, to answer three research questions, including (1) the difficulties that Iraqi EFL undergraduate students faced when speaking English, (2) the reasons behind the difficulties, and (3) the level of difference in ability among the students. The findings of the study indicated that participants faced some challenges in relation to their linguistics competences, such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. The study also revealed that the lack of English speaking practice, the tendency of mixing the language, and the absence of speaking activity in the course program are the main reasons leading to ELL students’ speaking difficulties.

Al Hosni (2014) carried out a qualitative study which sought to explore Oman EFL young learners’ speaking difficulties. In her study, she did observation, semi-structured interviews with the teachers and students, and also curriculum analysis. The results indicated that the learners faced three major problems, including linguistic difficulties, mother tongue use, and inhibition. The study also revealed that teachers’ perceptions and beliefs in teaching English, teaching strategies, curriculum, curriculum activities, extracurricular activities, and assessment regulation are the factors which contribute to the existence of speaking challenges. Within the same year, Al-Jamal and Al-Jamal (2014) conducted a mixed method study on speaking English difficulties faced by Jordanian EFL undergraduates. In their research, they administered a survey to 566 respondents and interviewed 66 participants. The quantitative study showed that the participants, on average, had “low” speaking proficiency, and the qualitative data indicated that the use of Language 1 (mother tongue), classroom size, and limited time to learn and practice their English are the major problems for the learners to maximize their English speaking ability. Tok (2009) quantitatively investigated the communication obstacles of EFL learners in a Turkish context. He administered a 66-items questionnaire to 139 first-year undergraduate non-English students to gain the data. The results suggested that unwillingness and anxiety to speak in front of peers and native speakers are the influential factors to the learners’ English communication. The study also revealed that language proficiency affects the learners’ anxiety, where less proficient students showed higher anxiety than more proficient learners.

Although a growing body of previous research has investigated speaking challenges in the EFL context, not much research specifically explores EFL student teachers’ experiences in speaking English in Indonesia. This study was an attempt to fill a gap in the foreign language speaking literature as it pertains to Indonesian EFL student teachers.

## **The Context of the Study**

In qualitative inquiry, a researcher's background, his or her personal connections to the participants, issues being studied, and the standpoints that he or she brings to the subject (Patton, 1990) should be incorporated in the study. This suggests that a qualitative researcher should "explicitly identify their biases, values, and personal interest about their research topic and process" and access to the research participants (Creswell, 2002, p. 184). The first author for this study is a male Indonesian international graduate student who is pursuing a doctoral degree in Education in one university in the United Kingdom. The second author holds a PhD in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies from a United States public university. He had experience and training in qualitative research by taking various courses at a graduate level, including qualitative research methods, qualitative data analysis, and research methods in education. The third author is a junior teaching staff member in one public university in Jambi, Indonesia. He focuses on qualitative research in education. The fourth author obtained his BA from the English education program at Faculty of Education, in one public university in Jambi, Indonesia.

The authors' interest in exploring EFL student teachers' experiences in speaking English was sparked by the fact that Indonesian student teachers at the research site are trained to be English teachers after they graduate from their program. As future teachers, they are required to be able to teach the target language to their students; however, English is not the first language in Indonesia. As undergraduate student teachers, they seemed to be challenged in speaking English although they had been provided by their program with three subjects such as speaking for general purposes, speaking for professional context, and speaking for academic context modules. We decided to do this study as an attempt to provide information for policy makers at the university and faculty level to help student teachers succeed in becoming future English teachers through knowing their experiences in speaking English.

## **Methodology of Research**

To deepen the understanding of the lived experience of Indonesian EFL student teachers' speaking in English in an Indonesian public university, we conducted a phenomenological study. The guiding questions in this study were: What do student teachers experience related to speaking English? And how do they deal with such experiences? The essentials of a phenomenological study are to understand how one or more individuals experience a phenomenon and to explore in-depth accounts of experiences and their meanings from participants' personal words, descriptions, reflections, and perspectives on the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Patton 1990).

Furthermore, Moustakas (1994) and Patton (1990) suggested that any researcher who wants to use the phenomenological tradition should know the philosophical viewpoints behind this tradition. Phenomenology as a philosophical tradition first came from Husserl (1859-1938 as cited in Patton, 1990), a German mathematician and philosopher. Moustakas (1994) presented Husserl's ideas on transcendental phenomenology. Husserl (1859-1938 as cited in Patton, 1990) developed Epoché as a core process of phenomenological investigation. Epoché is a "Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 33). In the Epoché, understanding, judgment, and knowledge are set aside, and phenomena are revisited freshly, naively, and in a wide-open sense (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, according to Patton (1990), Husserl's basic philosophical assumption is that:

We can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness. Initially, all our understanding comes from sensory experience of phenomena, but that experience must be described, explicated, and interpreted. Yet, descriptions of experience and interpretations are so intertwined that they often become one. Interpretation is essential to an understanding of experience and the experience includes the interpretation. Thus, phenomenologists focus on how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world and, in so doing, develop a worldview. (p. 69)

Patton (1990 as cited in Mukminin, 2012a) claims this standpoint has two associations that may be frequently perplexing in qualitative methods. A phenomenological perspective may be related to either (1) “a focus on what people experience and how they interpret the world (in which case one can use interviews without actually experiencing the phenomenon oneself) or (2) a methodological mandate to actually experience the phenomenon being investigated (in which case participant observation would be necessary)” (p. 70). Our study looked at the first aspect of “on what people experience and how they interpret the world” (p. 70). To deal with the aspect, we interviewed Indonesian EFL student teachers about their experiences in speaking English in an Indonesian public university to get in-depth accounts of their experiences and meanings from participants’ words, descriptions, reflections, and perspectives on the phenomenon (the lived experiences of EFL student teachers’ experiences in speaking English) during their program at the research site.

### **Research Site and Sampling Procedures**

The site for this study was an English teacher education program in a public university in Jambi, the southern part of Sumatra Island, Indonesia, that has more than 600 undergraduate students in the department. In their program, our participants were required to take three main modules related to improving their speaking ability including speaking for general purposes, speaking for professional contexts, and speaking for academic contexts. These three modules were part of their compulsory subjects to graduate from their program.

In a phenomenological inquiry, about the emphasis is not on having a large number of participants, as the data collection process necessitates an in-depth study of human experience. However, every phenomenological inquiry needs participants who offer experiences of the phenomenon being studied (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, the important matter is to portray the meaning of the lived experiences from persons going through the phenomenon under study by gathering data involving in-depth interviews with 5 to 25 individuals (Creswell, 2007; Mukminin, 2012a, 2012b; Polkinghorne, 1989). In our study, the purpose was to document Indonesian EFL student teachers’ experiences in speaking English at an English teacher education program in a public university in Jambi, the southern part of Sumatra Island, Indonesia.

At the research site, the number of undergraduate students was more than 600 individuals who were trained to be future English teachers. The participants for the study were recruited with assistance from the head of the department. We gave the invitation letter and the purpose of study to the head of the department, who in turn contacted the participants through email and explained the purpose of the study and requested their agreement to participate in the study. In this study, we focused on the second-year student teachers because they already took the three modules (speaking for general purposes, speaking for professional context, and speaking for academic contexts). Additionally, we selected the second-year student teachers because we had access to them, although at the beginning we planned to include the third-year

student teachers. Also, we focused on student teachers who obtained a grade of C and B in the three compulsory modules. Of more than 70 second-year student teachers, 8 participants were willing to participate in our study and all of them met our criteria such as having a grade of C and B in the three compulsory modules. We then sent them a consent form and a background survey. Our participants were (pseudonyms) Fanny, Anis, Hani, Rita, Rina, Rahma, Anto, and Hadi. Their biographical information is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1. Participants' biographical information

No	Name	Gender	Year of Study
1	Fanny	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2	Anis	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup>
3	Hani	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup>
4	Rita	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup>
5	Rina	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup>
6	Rahma	Female	2 <sup>nd</sup>
7	Anto	Male	2 <sup>nd</sup>
8	Hadi	Male	2 <sup>nd</sup>

Our study relied on human beings as the main source of the research data. In Indonesia, an IRB approval process is not common; however, in order to ensure we were in line with research ethics, we concealed the names of people through the use of pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the participants. We also assured our participants that their participation was completely voluntary, and their accounts and answers would be confidentially treated.

### **Data Collection**

From the philosophical perspective of the phenomenological tradition, to get the descriptions of experiences of the persons under study requires careful data gathering and data analysis. For data collection, the researchers must collect data from persons experiencing the phenomenon under study (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990). Moustakas (1994) suggested that any researcher who wants to conduct qualitative research interviews to obtain descriptions of the experience should consider informal interviewing, open-ended questions, or a topical-guided interview. Following Moustakas' (1994) suggestion regarding kinds of interviews, in our study, we used informal interviewing and open-ended questions with a general guided interview protocol. We interviewed eight participants who agreed to participate in the study. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and 90 minutes in participants' preferred location and time. We digitally recorded our participants' accounts and responses to interview questions via a digital voice recorder. All interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed by the researchers. Guided by a general interview protocol, we asked our participants to discuss their experiences in speaking English at an English teacher education program in a public university in Jambi, the southern part of Sumatra Island, Indonesia. We asked participants to discuss his/her English speaking experiences both inside and outside the classroom. For example, among the questions, we asked: Would you like to share your experience with us about your feelings and thoughts when you took the first module of speaking subject, What kinds of experiences did you have after taking the first module of speaking subject, and, Would you like to describe your feelings or experiences related to the second module of speaking subject?



## Data Analysis

For the data analysis in a phenomenological study, the first step that any researcher should do is to set all preconceived notions aside to best understand the experiences of participants in the study. As noted above, Husserl (1859-1938) developed this concept as a core process of phenomenological investigation and called it “Epoché.” In the Epoché or Bracketing, every preconceived notion is set aside (Moustakas, 1994). To address the issue of Epoché or Bracketing, in our study, we attempted to set our entire preconceived notions aside to best understand student teachers’ experiences in speaking English at an English teacher education program in a public university in Jambi, the southern part of Sumatra Island, Indonesia. The next step that we did in analyzing our phenomenological data was to do horizontalization, where we found and listed every significant statement relevant to our research topic and gave them an equal value (Moustakas, 1994). We also did “clusters of meanings” for our data. In this process, we organized, grouped, or clustered the significant statements into themes or meaning units, removing overlapping and repetitive data or statements (Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 1990). In addition, in this process, we started identifying an individual textual description for each of the participants including verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews (Moustakas, 1994). We did this process in order to present the nature and focus of the experience and provide clear images of *what* happens (Moustakas, 1994). Following the textual description, we moved a structural description of an experience, dealing with *how* the phenomenon was experienced (student teachers’ experiences in speaking English). Developing the structural description involves seeking all potential meanings, seeking divergent perspectives, and varying the frames of reference about the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Following Moustakas’ (1994) steps of analyzing data in a phenomenological study, we clustered the significant statements into themes or meaning units, removing overlapping and repetitive data or statements of student teachers’ experiences in speaking English. Throughout this process, we had tentative themes such as language elements, language barriers, vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, fluency, anxiety, attitude, lack of motivation, lecturers, peers, and topics of speaking modules, supports, lecturers, other student teachers, difficult to speak English, learning supporters, learning helpers, and learning proponents and environment. Going through all of the tentative themes, we finally identified overarching themes and sub-themes including (1) language barriers (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency); (2) psychological factors (anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation); (3) learning environment (lecturers, peers, and topics of speaking modules), and (4) practicing the language (self-practice, practicing the language with tutors and peers, practicing the language with media and technology, and maintaining a positive motivation). All of the steps that we did in analyzing the data from our participants were to best understand student teachers’ experiences in speaking English at an English teacher education program in a public university in Jambi, the southern part of Sumatra Island, Indonesia.

To address the credibility of our study, we incorporated verbatim examples from the transcribed interviews in our findings. Additionally, we did member checking (Johnson & Christensen, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Mukminin, Ali, & Ashari, 2015). In this step, we returned all of the interview data and our findings to all participants in order to get their feedback and agreement. All participants returned their data and allowed us to use the data in our final report.

## Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to document Indonesian EFL student teachers’ experiences in speaking English at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia. The following research questions guided this study: What do student teachers experience related to

speaking English? And how do they deal with such experiences? We categorized overarching themes and sub-themes including (1) language barriers (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency); (2) psychological factors (anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation); (3) learning environment (lecturers, peers, and topics of speaking modules), and (4) practicing the language (self-practice, practicing the language with tutors and peers, practicing the language with media and technology, and maintaining a positive motivation). In the following section, we present and explain these themes related to Indonesian EFL student teachers' experiences in speaking English at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia.

Table 2. Themes and subthemes of EFL Student Teachers' speaking challenges

Themes	Sub-Themes
Language Barriers	Vocabulary Pronunciation Grammar Fluency L1 influence
Psychological Factors	Anxiety Attitude Lack of motivation
Learning Proponents	Lecturers Peers Topics of speaking modules

### Language Barriers

All of participants shared with us that they had liked studying English since they were in secondary school, and even some of them convincingly admitted that English is their passion. Yet, they found it difficult to speak the language because it requires the mastery of language components. In relation to this theme, our participants were challenged by vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency which impeded a participant's speaking in English.

All participants reported that vocabulary was their main concern when they wanted to speak English. They conceded that they had a limited range of vocabulary, and they mentioned that they were sometimes confused about using appropriate vocabulary. With regard to this issue, one participant, Hany, said, "The most challenging factor which affects my speaking is vocabulary. I find it hard because I have [a] limited English vocabular[y]." Similarly, Rahma reported, "I think the vocabulary is only my [weakness], because I have lack of vocabulary and I am sometimes confused to use [appropriate] words." Other participants shared similar feelings regarding their lack of vocabulary. Our participants' perspectives clearly indicated that a limited vocabulary, in some regard, hindered them from active and fluent speaking in English.

Within the theme of language barriers, we identified that pronunciation was another issue that prevented our participants from speaking English correctly. They were doubtful about their pronunciation. Our participants confessed that pronunciation was one of the problematic issues in speaking because the English sound, in most cases, is different from the written forms. Farah, for example, asserted, "I still have problems in English, mostly in vocabulary and pronunciation. It is difficult to pronounce the words correctly because [they are] different [from written]." With a similar vein, Rita, stated, "Aside from my limited vocabulary, I have the problem in pronunciation. I do not really know whether my pronunciation is right or wrong." These data suggest that pronunciation can be a problem for

EFL student teachers because the English sound and written systems are distinctively different. Our data also indicated that our participants were less confident to speak in English because they were not sure if what they would say was right or wrong.

We also found that our participants were confronted by how to use correct English grammar. In terms of sentence structure, our participants contended that grammar became one of their main concerns when speaking English. Their biggest worry was that the listeners might not understand their utterances. Anis said, "I still have some difficulties in speaking English, including vocabulary and grammar. In grammar, I [find it] difficult [to know] how to construct [an appropriate sentence], so [the] listeners can [understand] what I speak." Likewise, Hadi told us, "Speaking is indeed difficult for me, in particular, the grammar. It [is] because we need to carefully consider the idea(s) before we talk, and arrange the words into understandable sentences." Moreover, Rina commented, "The factor that makes [it] difficult [for me] to speak English is my limited knowledge of vocabulary and grammar." It is interesting to note that the interview data above indicated that grammar had become a major issue for our participants to be able to speak in English. Lack of knowledge in grammar influenced our participants' willingness to speak in English.

Another interesting finding related to language barriers was the sub-theme of fluency. A closer look at the interview data indicated that participants were challenged to speak in English fluently. Their fluency to speak in English was also related to the three other sub-themes - vocabulary, grammar, or pronunciation. For example, Anis reported, "As I said, I have problems in vocabulary and pronunciation ... and they eventually affect my fluency to speak English." Another participant, Anto, reflected, "I have many problems in speaking English, such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and fluency. The problem in fluency [occurs] because I don't know what to say," Also Rina added, "I sometimes find speaking English very challenging because my speaking is still influenced by my native language ... especially the way I pronounce the English words." Our data indicated that fluency to speak in English was one of the consistent issues that emerged among the EFL student teachers in our study. Our interview results also revealed that fluency was one of the barriers for our participants in speaking English.

## Psychological Factors

In addition to *language barriers*, our findings led to a theme of *psychological factors*. Under this theme, our participants' interview data demonstrated that psychological factors, in most cases, hampered EFL student teachers from being active English speakers. We found three influential psychological factors including anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation. First, our participants reported that anxiety, known as an affective factor in learning, made them reluctant to speak the language. Fanny, for instance, reflected, "I [am feeling anxious] that people may correct [my speaking] in a rude way." Similarly, Anis, commented, "I feel anxious when speaking. I am worried [that my listeners cannot] understand my speaking." Moreover, Rahma, said, "I am sometimes afraid [to speak English]. I am worried if [the listeners] misunderstand my speaking." Our interview data showed that feeling anxious could be a challenging factor to EFL student teachers' speaking practices.

Second, the gathered data from interview indicated that a negative attitude toward speaking skill might deter our student teachers from progressing in their speaking ability. For instance, Anto, reported, "Actually, I don't really like English, and I just speak [the language] when I need [to do it]." His negative attitude toward English, in particular, his reluctance to practice the language might obstruct his speaking progress.

Third, lack of motivation in practicing the language seemed to be another critical issue for EFL student teachers to be fluent in speaking English. With regard to this sub-theme,

participants avowed that they, under some circumstances, were less motivated to speak English. Rina noted, “I actually have the motivation, but I am still not confident to speak. I am afraid that I make some mistakes, so I just am quiet.” Moreover, Anto contended, “I don’t want to speak in public [because] it is not my passion. [As a matter of fact], I don’t [really] have [the] motivation to speak [English] in public. Our data indicated that anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation were psychological factors preventing our participants from being active speakers.

### **Learning Environment**

A third theme developed from our data analysis was *learning environment*. In this theme, we found three consistent issues (lecturers, peers, and topics of speaking modules) that emerged among our participants. The Indonesian EFL student teachers voiced that they felt the lecturer(s) sometimes affected their speaking in English. Hadi, for example, stated, “When I was at senior high school, I was close to the teacher as if she is my mother, I had the motivation to learn the language. At the university, I don’t really have motivation because each lecturer is different.” Likewise, Rina said, “I often forget the [words] when speaking. It happens because I have got nervous and [this] depends on the lecturer (s).” It was evident that the speaking module tutor(s) were the reason for students’ reluctance to speak English.

Another important issue was related to classmates and speaking material(s). All participants reported the same feeling regarding the issue of peers and speaking materials. For example, Hani, said, “I normally speak English by myself in front of the mirror, not with friends. My friends oftentimes consider me ‘joking’ or ‘not serious’ when I ask them questions, and, therefore, I prefer to practice the language alone.” Regarding topics of speaking modules, our participants also shared their experiences. For instance, Anto commented, “I am not an active student because I am not really interested [in] the topics of discussion; they are [boring].” Our participants’ responses indicated that non-serious friends and an uninteresting topic of discussion hindered their eagerness to engage more in speaking activities inside and outside the classroom. Our data suggest that a supportive learning environment, including such factors as lecturers, peers, and topics of speaking modules, is important in speaking in English as a foreign language.

### **Practicing the Language**

The final theme we developed through our analysis of the data was *practicing the language*. With regard to the students’ efforts to practice the language, we found interrelated sub-themes including (1) self-practice, (2) practicing the language with tutors and peers, (3) practicing the language with media and technology, and (4) maintaining a positive motivation. All participants assured that “*practice*” was the best solution to cope with language learning and speaking challenges. Within this theme, we identified four inter-related sub-themes. The first sub-theme was *self-practice*. All participants acknowledged that this was a better way to improve their English speaking skills. Hani mentioned, “One of my efforts to cope with speaking challenges is trying to practice my English by talking to myself.” Similarly, Anis commented, “I often practice my English honestly when I am [in] bed, so I like to speak alone [to] myself.” Then, Rita confirmed, “I learn how to correctly pronounce the English words myself in front of mirrors. In addition, I always improve my vocabulary by memorizing five new [words] every night.” Our data revealed that self-practice was one of the ways that our participants used to deal with challenges in speaking in English. They believed that self-practice was easier than other ways as they could do it whenever and wherever they wanted.

Aside from the self-practice, practicing the language with others, including tutors and peers, was one way the participants’ tried to deal with their speaking challenges. Our

participants revealed that they had different kinds of activities to practice their speaking with the teachers and friends, such as having discussion, asking questions, and asking for clarifications. Rahma asserted, “For vocabulary ... I [ask] other people [lecturers or friends] of what [is the meaning] and something like that.” With a similar argument, Hadi said, “Except praying, I do every effort that help me improve my speaking skills, such as taking English course, having discussion with tutors and friends, and asking them questions.” Further, Rita argued, “I take English private class and never be afraid to ask questions [teachers and friends] if I do not understand the words and sentences.” Our data suggested that tutors and peers could be very helpful in practicing English speaking for our participants.

Another approach used by our participants in coping with their speaking challenges was using the support of media and technology. Our participants stated that books, songs, and movies were fruitful media to improve their speaking proficiency, in particular those who had language barriers. Fanny, for example, voiced, “Of course, to improve vocabulary, I [read] some books, and for pronunciation, I [listen] to English songs and listen to English chat and dialogue that [are] spoken by native speakers.” Anto also stated, “I just practice, practice, and [train] myself. I also listen to English songs and copy-cat the pronunciation of the [singers] in the songs.” Moreover, Anis told the interviewer her strategies to motivate herself learn the language, “In [every] week, I usually [watch] an English movie, or maybe, ya, I search [some] sources, in the internet to see how the news anchors [and native speakers speak]. So it [makes] me [more motivated] to be a good speaker in English.” Additionally, Rahma commented, “I can see the words that I [do not] know in my smartphone or dictionary application.” These data obviously showed that media and technology played a significant role in practicing the language.

The analysis of interview data showed that maintaining a positive motivation appeared to be the participants’ prevalent way to deal with psychological challenges, including anxiety, low motivation, and demotivation. Hani expressed, “I always try to motivate myself with a positive thought and be confident.” Likewise, Hadi uttered, “I motivate myself to learn English because I want go to Manchester to visit Old Trafford Stadium and get [a] job easier.” Furthermore, Fanny confidently contended, “Of course yes [I have motivation] ... My only goal is [that] I wanna speak English [just like] the native speakers.”

## Discussion

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to document Indonesian EFL student teachers’ experiences in speaking English at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia. The following research questions guided this study: What do student teachers experience related to speaking English? And how do they deal with such experiences? We found overarching themes and sub-themes including (1) language barriers (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency); (2) psychological factors (anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation); (3) learning environment (lecturers, peers, and topics of speaking modules), and (4) practicing the language (self-practice, practicing the language with tutors and peers, practicing the language with media and technology, and maintaining a positive motivation). As a matter of fact, it was not easy for us to determine which challenge played a greater role than others in students’ speaking difficulty as all of these appeared to be intricately interrelated.

Nonetheless, language-related barriers (vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, and fluency) seemed to be the main obstacle for the participants to speak in English. All the participants revealed that they faced these issues whenever they wanted to get involved in English conversation. The findings of the study are consistent with the findings of other EFL/ESL studies (Al-Hosni, 2014; Al-Jamal & Al-Jamal, 2014; Arju, 2011; Gan, 2012; Keong et al., 2015; Mukminin, Masbirorotni, Noprival, Sutarno, Arif, & Maimunah, 2015; Priyanto,

2013; Paakki, 2013; Wang & Roopchund, 2015) indicating that lack of linguistic competence and/or proficiency caused the difficulty for EFL/ESL learners to orally communicate or engage the conversation. In other words, EFL learners' inadequate stocks of vocabulary, mother tongue influence, and problems in pronunciation, grammar, and fluency became the stumbling blocks for them to be fluent and eloquent in speaking the language.

Another challenge which influenced participants' English speaking related to psychological factors. Based on the data from the interview, three factors have been identified, including anxiety, attitude, and lack of motivation. Our participants pleaded that they did feel anxious whenever they wanted to speak English or during the talk and therefore it, in some respect, affected their speaking performances. This study result is congruent with the results of other research results (Juhana, 2012; Mukminin, Masbirorotni, Noprival, Sutarno, Arif, & Maimunah, 2015) indicating that anxiety affected EFL/ESL learners in oral communication. The feeling of anxiety is prevalent in second/foreign language classes learning particularly in speaking, as speaking itself is the most-provoking anxiety factor (Horwitz et al., 1986; Price, 1991). Anxiety is a psychological construct due to the arousal of automatic nervous system and is obviously marked with tension, nervousness, worry, and/or fear to do something (Horwitz et al., 1986; MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991; Scovel, 1991). For the language learners, anxiety may come across from both internal and external factors, such as linguistic difficulties, fear of making mistakes, lacking linguistic competence (Hashemi, 2011; Horwitz, 2001; Tanveer, 2007), and different social and cultural environment (Scovel, 1991). The findings of the study indicated that the participants' anxiety was closely related to the intrinsic factors, including insufficient linguistic competence, fear of being misunderstood, and also their own perception of lecturers and peers.

The next psychological factor which challenged the participants to speak English was their negative attitude toward the language. Attitude is a factor that influences foreign/second language learners on how much effort they put into the learning (Gardner et al., 1985), and the one who possess positive attitudes is a successful language learner (Oller, 1979; Prodromou, 1992). The finding of the study indicated that the participants' attitudes in speaking influenced their efforts to do spoken activities and consequently affected their speaking attainment and proficiency. This implies that attitude is an influential factor in foreign language learning particularly speaking, whereby the more negative attitude that the learners have towards speaking, the less willingness they have to get involved and participate in speaking activities. This result of this study confirmed the results of other studies (Gardner et al., 1985; Mukminin, Masbirorotni, Noprival, Sutarno, Arif, & Maimunah, 2015; Zeinivand et al., 2015) revealing that there was a relationship between attitude, speaking, and its proficiency.

The last psychological factor that affected learners' performance in speaking was lack of motivation. Motivation is often defined as an internal state which initiates and maintains goal-directed behaviors (Broussard & Garrison, 2004) and determines learners' success in learning second/foreign language (Gass & Slinker, 2001; Gardner et al., 1985). The finding of this study showed that some students had lack of motivation to speak English either inside or outside the classroom because they did not really have any passion in learning and speaking the language, and it, somehow, hindered them to speak in public and to actively get involved in a conversation or discussion. This finding supports other studies' results (Al Hosni, 2014; Juhana, 2012; Mukminin, Masbirorotni, Noprival, Sutarno, Arif, & Maimunah, 2015; Tuan & Mai, 2015) highlighting lack of motivation as one of the psychological challenges for foreign/second language learners in speaking. The study also revealed that participants who had less motivation to speak English were inclined to show a more negative attitude towards the language. This implies that motivation and attitude are closely interwoven with one another.

The last challenge that the participants faced to actively engage in speaking classes is learning proponents. Our participants pointed out that one of the reasons for being quiet in the

classroom was due to their tutors. They explained that they were afraid of getting direct corrective feedback/ comments from their lecturers when they were speaking. Corrective feedback is indeed important in speaking activities as it can match the learners' utterance with its corresponding version in the target language and draw their attention to structures they have not mastered (White, 1991), but direct feedback may affect the conversational flow (Harmer, 1991) and result in the learners' demotivation and anxieties from doing the activities (Mukminin, Masbirorotni, Noprival, Sutarno, Arif, & Maimunah, 2015). Some studies have shown that indirect corrective feedback is a more effective and preferable technique to use compared to the direct one in commenting on students' performances and/or works (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Price, 2011; Sheen, 2006). Aside from tutors, the participants professed that their classmates often brought about reluctance to speak the language. One participant further said that her friends did not believe that she had high competence in English. Whenever she asked her friends questions, they did not take it seriously and sometimes laughed at her. The final learning proponent which rendered participants' inactive speaking was an uninteresting topic of discussion. In speaking class and/or activities, topics of the talk are necessary to consider as it is one of the successful speaking activity characteristics (Ur, 2002).

In order to cope with the above challenges, the participants had tried some efforts, including practicing the language and maintaining a positive motivation. Most participants believed that there were no other better methods to improve English speaking skill except practicing the language. This affirms Shekan's (1998) view that practice, particularly frequent practice, is essential for second language learners and is the only way of acquiring such fluency. This shows that practice helps the learners get better in language speaking. The more frequently someone practices the language orally, the better speaking skill he will have. Our participants felt more comfortable to do self-spoken practices. In most cases, they often did this strategy when they wanted to improve their vocabulary mastery and/or short daily conversation by memorizing some word and speaking in front of a mirror. Second, some participants tended to practice their speaking with others, such as tutors and peers. They, in practice, implemented speaking strategies when they practiced their speaking with peers and tutors by asking some questions and/or asking for clarifications. Another effort done by some participants was to use media and/or technology. They occasionally took advantage of books, video, songs, social media, and online applications to help them improve their speaking proficiency as well as their confidence. One participant further stated that she installed a dictionary application on her mobile phone to deal with vocabulary problem(s). This confirms some findings of the studies (e.g., Carpenter et al., 2006; Kasapoğlu-Akyol's, 2010; Muniasamy, Magboul, & Anandhavalli, 2015; Soliman, 2014) that printed and technology-based media are effective to facilitate the learners in learning process, including second/foreign language learning.

Aside from practising the language, a few of them stated that maintaining a positive motivation in English speaking was essential. They also mentioned that motivation somehow helped them to be more confident to speak in front of others. This is reasonable since motivation is literally a self-force which moves and determines individuals to do or not to do something (Broussard & Garrison, 2004). In the context of second/foreign language learning, an individual who possesses a positive motivation is likely to learn and practice the target language diligently and regularly; hence, it ultimately generates confidence.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to document undocumented Indonesian EFL student teachers' experiences in speaking English, including challenges and their coping strategies at one public university in Jambi, Indonesia. However, this is not to say that the study itself is without limitations. In terms of participants, this study focused on eight EFL student teachers in one public university in Jambi. This study only focused on EFL student teachers' perspectives, and teaching staff were excluded. Additional

research is needed to compare the findings of this study to research with other populations and other contexts.

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