Journal of Innovative and Creativity
Journal Homepage: https://joecy.org/index.php/joecy
e-mail: journaljoecy@gmail.com

Faculty of Education
University of Pahlawan Tuanku Tambusai
ISSN 2775-771X (Online)
ISSN 2962-570X **(Printed)**
6 (1) 2026, Page 13655-13664

An Exploration of Students' Challenges and Adaptation Strategies in English Speaking

Nur Jannah[1], Darmayanti[2], Nur Rahmaniar Usman[3]
[1,2,3]Universitas Muhammadiyah Buton
Corresponding Author: Nur Jannah, Surname, e-mail: nurjannah9926@gmail.com

ABSTRAK

Tujuan penelitian ini adalah untuk mengeksplorasi tantangan yang dihadapi mahasiswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris dan meneliti strategi adaptasi yang mereka gunakan untuk mengatasi tantangan tersebut. Kemampuan berbahasa Inggris menjadi semakin penting dalam pendidikan tinggi, khususnya bagi mahasiswa program pendidikan guru yang diharapkan dapat mengembangkan kompetensi bahasa dan praktik pembelajaran yang efektif.
Materi dan metode. Untuk mencapai pemahaman yang komprehensif tentang pengalaman belajar mahasiswa, penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur mendalam dengan sepuluh mahasiswa yang terdaftar dalam program pendidikan guru yang berasal dari latar belakang non-penutur bahasa Inggris.Hasil. Hasil penelitian mengungkapkan empat kategori utama tantangan yang dihadapi siswa dalam belajar bahasa Inggris: kesulitan linguistik, termasuk kosakata terbatas, masalah tata bahasa, dan masalah pengucapan; tantangan psikologis, seperti kecemasan berbahasa asing dan rendahnya kepercayaan diri; tekanan sosio-kultural, termasuk rasa takut akan evaluasi negatif dari teman sebaya dan stigma sosial; dan keterbatasan pengajaran, khususnya pedagogi yang berpusat pada guru dan terbatasnya kesempatan untuk praktik komunikatif. Sebagai respons terhadap tantangan ini, siswa mengadopsi berbagai strategi adaptasi, termasuk pembelajaran mandiri, kolaborasi antar teman sebaya, peningkatan paparan bahasa Inggris melalui media digital, dan pengaturan diri yang memotivasi.
Kesimpulan. Studi ini menunjukkan bahwa tantangan belajar dan strategi adaptasi saling terkait erat dan secara signifikan memengaruhi keterlibatan, partisipasi, dan kepercayaan diri siswa dalam menggunakan bahasa Inggris. Studi ini menggarisbawahi pentingnya menciptakan lingkungan belajar yang mendukung dan menerapkan praktik pengajaran yang berpusat pada siswa untuk meningkatkan pengalaman belajar bahasa Inggris, terutama dalam konteks pendidikan guru.

Kata kunci: Strategi Adaptasi, Tantangan, Berbicara Bahasa Inggris, Siswa

ABSTRACT

The study purpose was to explore the challenges faced by university students in learning English and examines the adaptation strategies they employ to cope with these challenges. English proficiency has become increasingly important in higher education, particularly for students in teacher education programs who are expected to develop both language competence and effective learning practices.
Materials and methods. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of students' learning experiences, this study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with ten university students enrolled in a teacher education program who came from non-English-speaking backgrounds.
Results. The results reveal four major categories of challenges encountered by students in learning English: linguistic difficulties, including limited vocabulary, grammatical problems, and pronunciation issues; psychological challenges, such as foreign language anxiety and low self-confidence; sociocultural pressures, including fear of negative peer evaluation and social stigma; and instructional limitations, particularly teacher-centered pedagogy and limited opportunities for communicative practice. In response to these challenges, students adopted various adaptation strategies, including self-directed learning, peer collaboration, increased exposure to English through digital media, and motivational self-regulation.
Conclusions. This study indicated that learning challenges and adaptation strategies are closely interconnected and significantly influence students' engagement, participation, and confidence in using English. This study underscores the importance of creating supportive learning environments and implementing student-centered instructional practices to enhance English learning experiences, especially within teacher education contexts.

Keywords: Adaptation Strategies, Challenges, English Speaking, Students' Experience

© The Author(s). 2026 Open Access This article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if changes were made. The images or other third party material in this article are included in the article's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

INTRODUCTION

English has become an essential global language used in academic communication, professional development, and international collaboration (Kurniawan, 2023). In higher education contexts, university students are increasingly required to develop English proficiency to access academic resources, participate in scholarly discourse, and prepare for future careers. However, students from non-English-speaking backgrounds often encounter substantial challenges in acquiring English, particularly when they enter university with limited prior exposure and insufficient language foundations. These challenges can negatively affect their academic performance, confidence, and participation in classroom activities.

Previous studies have consistently reported that linguistic barriers such as limited vocabulary, grammatical difficulties, and pronunciation problems remain major obstacles for EFL learners in tertiary education (Anggraini et al., 2025; Ullah et al., 2023). These linguistic barriers hinder students' ability to comprehend academic materials, construct accurate sentences, and express ideas fluently in both spoken and written communication. As a result, learners often experience reduced participation in classroom interactions and increased dependence on their first language, which further limits opportunities for meaningful English practice and slows overall language development.

In addition to linguistic issues, psychological factors including foreign language anxiety and low self-confidence have been shown to significantly hinder students' willingness to communicate in English (Alazeer & Ahmed, 2023; Arifin et al., 2025). These psychological constraints often cause students to avoid speaking activities, hesitate to express their ideas, and remain passive during classroom interactions. As a result, learners receive fewer opportunities to practice oral communication, which further limits the development of fluency and communicative competence in English. Moreover, prolonged anxiety and low self-confidence may reduce students' motivation and increase negative perceptions toward language learning, creating a cycle of disengagement that hinders long-term language improvement.

Furthermore, sociocultural pressures, such as fear of negative peer evaluation and stigma associated with speaking English in non-English-speaking environments, often discourage students from practicing the language outside the classroom (Ardiya et al., 2025; Nuralika et al., 2023; Suryadi et al., 2024). These sociocultural constraints create an unsupportive environment in which students feel uncomfortable expressing themselves in English, leading them to limit language use to formal classroom settings only. As a result, learners lose valuable opportunities for authentic interaction and real-life practice, which are essential for developing communicative competence and fluency. Over time, this restricted exposure may reinforce feelings of insecurity and reduce learners' confidence to use English in broader social contexts.

Instructional factors, including teacher-centered pedagogy and limited opportunities for communicative practice, also contribute to passive learning behaviors and reduced student engagement (Zhou & Liu, 2025). These sociocultural constraints create an unsupportive environment in which students feel uncomfortable expressing themselves in English, leading them to limit language use to formal classroom settings only. As a result, learners lose valuable opportunities for authentic interaction and real-life practice, which are essential for developing communicative competence and fluency. Over time, this restricted exposure may reinforce feelings of insecurity and reduce learners' confidence to use English in broader social contexts.

While many studies have focused on identifying learning barriers, fewer have examined how students actively adapt to these challenges. Understanding students' adaptation strategies is crucial, as learners often develop personal coping mechanisms to sustain motivation and improve their language competence. Strategies such as self-regulated learning, peer support, and increased exposure to authentic language input have been found to enhance learners' resilience and engagement (Syamsi et al., 2025; M. Zhang, 2024; T. Zhang, 2024). Therefore, exploring both barriers and adaptation strategies provides a more comprehensive picture of students' English learning experiences.

In the context of teacher education programs, this issue becomes increasingly important. Students who are preparing to become future educators are expected not only to develop their own English proficiency but also to demonstrate effective language learning practices that can later be transferred to their teaching contexts. Therefore, understanding their learning challenges and adaptive behaviors is essential for improving curriculum design and instructional strategies. This study aims to address this issue by descriptively exploring the experiences of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds through a qualitative approach, focusing on identifying common challenges and adaptation strategies in English acquisition. By providing rich and contextual descriptions of students' experiences, this study seeks to offer practical pedagogical insights to support more effective and inclusive English language education.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore students' experiences related to challenges and adaptation strategies in English acquisition. This approach was selected because it allows researchers to obtain rich, detailed, and contextual descriptions of participants' perspectives and lived experiences. The descriptive qualitative design is particularly suitable for investigating educational phenomena that involve complex psychological, sociocultural, and instructional factors, as it emphasizes naturalistic inquiry and participants' authentic voices. Through this approach, the study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of how students perceive and respond to English learning challenges in higher education contexts.

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of ten students from a teacher education program who came from non-English-speaking backgrounds. They were selected based on several criteria: being enrolled in an English-related course, having limited exposure to English in their prior educational environment, and being willing to share their learning experiences. The participants represented diverse academic achievement levels and learning experiences, which enabled the study to capture varied perspectives regarding English learning challenges and adaptation strategies.

Technique of Data Collection

Data were collected using semi-structured in-depth interviews. This technique enabled the researcher to explore participants' experiences systematically while still allowing flexibility to probe emerging themes. The interviews focused on students' perceptions of linguistic, psychological, sociocultural, and instructional challenges, as well as the strategies they used to adapt to these difficulties. Each interview was conducted individually to ensure confidentiality and encourage open responses. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Instrument

The primary research instrument was an interview guide consisting of open-ended questions. The questions were designed to elicit detailed descriptions of participants' learning experiences, perceived challenges, emotional responses, and adaptation strategies in learning English. The interview guide was developed based on relevant literature and the research objectives. Prior to data collection, the instrument was reviewed by an expert in English education to ensure clarity, relevance, and content validity. Minor revisions were made to improve question wording and flow.

Technique of Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using **thematic analysis** within a descriptive qualitative framework. The process involved several stages: familiarization with the data through repeated reading of transcripts, initial coding to identify meaningful units of information, categorization of codes into broader themes, and interpretation of patterns related to learning challenges and adaptation strategies. The analysis focused on capturing recurring experiences and common patterns across participants while maintaining the authenticity of individual perspectives.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Outer The findings of this study reveal several recurring themes related to students' challenges and adaptation strategies in English acquisition. Based on the thematic analysis of interview data from ten participants, four major categories of challenges were identified: linguistic difficulties, psychological constraints, sociocultural pressures, and instructional limitations. In addition, three dominant adaptation strategies emerged, namely self-regulated learning practices, peer-supported learning, and increased exposure to English through digital and informal learning resources.

Table 1. Summary of Students' Learning Challenges and Adaptation Strategies in English Speaking

Theme	Subthemes/Indicators	Description of Findings
Linguistic Challenges	Limited vocabulary	Students reported difficulty expressing ideas clearly due to insufficient vocabulary
	Grammatical difficulties	Participants experienced problems in sentence construction and applying grammar rules accurately, leading to hesitation in communication.
	Pronunciation problems	Fear of mispronunciation reduced students' confidence when speaking English in class.
Psychological Challenges	Foreign language anxiety	Students felt anxious when speaking English, particularly in front of peers or lecturers.
	Low self-confidence	Learners doubted their English ability and avoided participation in oral activities.
Sociocultural Pressures	Fear of negative peer evaluation	Participants were afraid of being judged or criticized by peers when speaking English.
	Social stigma	Some students felt that speaking English outside the classroom was perceived as "showing off."
Instructional Limitations	Teacher-centered instruction	Learning activities focused more on explanation than interaction, limiting speaking opportunities.
	Limited communicative practice	Students reported few chances to practice English through discussions or collaborative tasks.
Adaptation Strategies	Self-directed learning	Students practiced independently using online resources, videos, and learning applications.
	Peer collaboration	Learners formed study groups or practiced speaking with classmates.
	Digital exposure	Increased exposure to English through social media, YouTube, podcasts, and films.
	Motivational self-regulation	Students motivated themselves by setting goals and managing anxiety.

1. The analysis of interview data revealed several dominant themes related to students' challenges and adaptation strategies in English acquisition. One major theme was **linguistic difficulty**, which

involved problems in vocabulary mastery, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation. Most participants reported that limited vocabulary restricted their ability to express ideas clearly, particularly in speaking and academic writing tasks. Grammatical complexity often caused hesitation and frequent sentence construction errors, while pronunciation difficulties reduced students' confidence due to fear of being misunderstood or corrected by peers and lecturers. These linguistic limitations negatively influenced students' comprehension of academic materials and their participation in classroom discussions.

2. The findings also highlighted **sociocultural pressure** as a significant factor shaping students' learning experiences. Participants reported feeling uncomfortable using English outside formal classroom settings due to peer judgment and social stigma associated with speaking English in predominantly non-English-speaking environments. Some students described being labeled as "showing off" when using English in daily conversations, which discouraged them from practicing the language in social contexts. Consequently, opportunities for authentic interaction and real-life language exposure were reduced, limiting the development of communicative competence and confidence.
3. In addition, **instructional limitations** emerged as another influential theme. Several participants noted that teacher-centered instructional practices provided limited opportunities for active communication and interaction. Classroom activities that emphasized grammar explanation and textbook-based exercises offered insufficient space for speaking practice and collaborative learning. As a result, students became more dependent on lecturers and showed lower engagement in meaningful language use.
4. Another prominent theme was **psychological constraint**, especially foreign language anxiety and low self-confidence. Many participants expressed discomfort when speaking English in front of others, mainly because of fear of making mistakes and receiving negative evaluation. Students who perceived their English proficiency as lower than their peers tended to withdraw from classroom interaction and avoided speaking activities. This emotional pressure resulted in passive learning behaviors and limited engagement in communicative tasks, which further restricted opportunities for oral practice and fluency development.
5. Despite experiencing multiple challenges, participants demonstrated various **adaptation strategies** to cope with learning difficulties. Many students adopted self-regulated learning practices by setting personal learning goals, reviewing materials independently, and using online resources to improve their language skills. Peer support also played an important role, as students formed informal study groups and practiced speaking with classmates. Furthermore, increased exposure to English through digital platforms such as social media, YouTube, podcasts, and language learning applications helped students improve listening comprehension, pronunciation, and vocabulary knowledge. These

strategies contributed to sustaining students' motivation and gradually enhancing their confidence in using English.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that linguistic difficulties remain a primary obstacle for students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, particularly in vocabulary mastery, grammatical accuracy, and pronunciation. This result is consistent with previous studies that identified linguistic competence as a major determinant of students' communicative performance in higher education contexts (Faisal, 2025; Wang, 2025). Limited linguistic resources hinder students' ability to process academic texts and participate actively in classroom interactions, thereby slowing overall language development. In addition, sociocultural pressures were shown to shape students' language use beyond the classroom. The reluctance to speak English in social contexts due to stigma and peer judgment (Agata et al., 2019; Kadir & Salija, 2018). This limited social exposure reduces opportunities for authentic communication, which plays a critical role in developing pragmatic competence and communicative confidence.

Instructional limitations, particularly teacher-centered pedagogy, were also identified as contributing factors to students' passive engagement. Instructional approaches significantly influence learner engagement and participation (Nurharjanto, 2023). When classroom activities prioritize explanation over interaction, students receive fewer opportunities to practice productive language skills, which weakens communicative competence development.

Psychological constraints, especially foreign language anxiety and low self-confidence, were also found to significantly influence students' willingness to communicate. These findings described that fear of making mistakes and negative evaluation often leads learners to avoid speaking activities (Arifin et al., 2025). The present study further highlights how emotional discomfort creates passive learning behaviors and restricts opportunities for oral practice, which are essential for developing fluency.

Despite these challenges, the results demonstrate that students actively employ adaptation strategies to cope with learning difficulties. The use of self-regulated learning strategies reflects previous research indicating that independent learning practices enhance motivation, engagement, and language performance (T. Zhang, 2024). Peer collaboration and digital exposure further support language development by providing additional opportunities for interaction and authentic input. These findings suggest that learners are not passive recipients of instruction but active agents who develop personal strategies to sustain learning progress.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that students from non-English-speaking backgrounds experience multidimensional challenges in English acquisition, including linguistic difficulties, psychological constraints, sociocultural pressures, and instructional limitations. These challenges collectively hinder students' communicative competence, classroom participation, and confidence in using English. Despite these obstacles, students demonstrate adaptive behaviors by employing self-regulated learning strategies, seeking peer support, and increasing exposure to English through digital and informal learning resources. These strategies play an important role in sustaining learners' motivation and enhancing engagement in language learning. The findings highlight the need for higher education institutions, particularly teacher education programs, to create more supportive and student-centered learning environments. Integrating communicative teaching approaches, promoting learner autonomy, and providing opportunities for authentic language practice are essential to improve students' English learning experiences. Future research is recommended to involve larger and more diverse participant groups and to examine the long-term impact of adaptation strategies on language proficiency development.

REFERENCES

Agata, A. V. F., Wardhani, A., Putri, F. A., & Drajati, N. A. (2019). Exploring Fear of Negative Evaluation in Foreign Language Anxiety : Photovoice of Undergraduates in Speaking Class. *Jurnal Sains Sosial Dan Humaniora*, *3*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.30595/jssh.v3i1.3843

Alazeer, A. N. M., & Ahmed, Z. A. (2023). Students' Speaking Anxiety in EFL Classroom. *International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences*, *8*(2). https://doi.org/https://dx.doi.org/10.22161/ijels.82.14

Anggraini, D., Andriani, D., & Afersa, M. (2025). An Analysis of Speaking Difficulties Among University EFL Students. *JILP(Jurnal Ilmiah Langue and Parole)*, *9*(1), 58–66. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36057/jilp.v9i1.776

Ardiya, A., Bumi, S. W., & Nurfaisal, N. (2025). Examining Foreign Language Anxiety ' s Impact on English Education Students ' Speaking Skills at Universitas Muhammadiyah Riau. *Journal of Science and Education (JSE)*, *5*(2), 536–545. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.58905/jse.v5i2.488536 This is an openaccess article under CC-BY-SA license

Arifin, A. A. A., Malihah, N., & Nabella, A. C. R. (2025). Factors of EFL Students ' Language Anxiety in English Learning. *Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan: Jurnal Penelitian Dan Pengembangan Pembelajaran*, *10*(2), 304–319. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33394/jtp.v10i2.14480

Faisal, F. (2025). Communicative Competence : Its Implications for English-as-a- Foreign-Language Teachers in Indonesia. *Jurnal Varidika*, *37*(1), 14–29. https://doi.org/10.23917/varidika.v37i1.8226

Kadir, H., & Salija, K. (2018). The Influence of Peer Groups on Students ' Anxiety in EFL Learning. *ELT Worldwide: Journal of English Language Teaching*, *5*(1).

https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26858/eltww.v5i1.5771

Kurniawan, I. W. A. (2023). English Language and Its Importance as Global Communication. *Samā Jiva Jnānam (International Journal of Social Studies)*, *1*(1), 51–57. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.25078/ijoss.v2i1.3920

Nuralika, F., Kustiwan, K., & Lestari, V. L. (2023). Exploration of students' speaking anxiety regarding foreign language participation in the classroom. *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, *10*(2), 374–388. https://doi.org/10.15408/ijee.v10i2.35974.

Nurharjanto, A. A. (2023). Language learners ' engagement in hybrid classroom settings : A systematic review. *LingTera*, *10*(1), 111–118. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21831/lt.v10i1.59886

Suryadi, S. B., Mubarok, F. U., Asri, A. N., Ulfa, F., Nurhasan, U., Rahmanto, A. N., & Juliadilla, R. (2024). Identifying EFL Students Speaking Performance : Foreign Language Anxiety Among Non-English Department Students. *International Journal of English Language and Pedagogy (IJELP)*, *2*(2), 45–52. https://doi.org/10.33830/ijelp.v2i2.9673

Syamsi, K., Nugroho, A., Cahyani, I., & Retnaningsih, W. (2025). EFL pre- service teachers ' acceptance of ChatGPT for writing : A sequential explanatory mixed-method study. *INDONESIAN JOURNAL OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS*, *15*(1), 35–46. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v15i1.79615

Ullah, N., Ahmed, A., & Sabawoon, K. (2023). THE ANALYSIS OF LINGUISTIC BARRIERS FACED BY EFL LEARNERS IN. *Journal of Social Sciences Development*, *02*(01), 57–71. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.53664/JSSD/02-01-2023-05-57-71

Wang, N. (2025). Effective Measures to Develop Undergraduates' Communicative Competence in English as a Foreign Language: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, *24*(2), 416–438. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.24.2.21

Zhang, M. (2024). Enhancing self-regulation and learner engagement in L2 speaking : exploring the potential of intelligent personal assistants within a learning-oriented feedback framework. *BMC Psychology*, *12*. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-01917-0

Zhang, T. (2024). Effects of self-regulation strategies on EFL learners ' language learning motivation , willingness to communication , self-efficacy , and creativity. *BMC Psychology*, *12*, 1–13. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-024-01567-2

Zhou, W., & Liu, Q. (2025). Effect of university teachers ' teaching style on EFL learners ' classroom engagement : the mediating role of self-efficacy. *BMC Psychology*, *13*, 1–18. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-025-03069-1