



Exploring English Majors' Experience in Improving Their English-Speaking Skills: A Fenomenology Study

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Article Info	Abstract
Received: 2026 - 06- 01	<i>This study explores the experiences of English major students in improving their English-speaking skills after completing one year of study in the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo. It aims to understand how students perceive their speaking development and identify factors that support or hinder their progress. The study used a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design to capture students lived experiences. Ten third-semester English major students were selected purposively as participants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings show that students' speaking development is influenced by both positive and negative learning experiences. Positive experiences include support from lecturers and peers, collaborative learning, intrinsic motivation, and increased self-confidence, which encourage students to participate actively in speaking activities. Meanwhile, negative experiences include anxiety, fear of negative judgment, and avoidance behavior, influenced by personal insecurities and classroom dynamics. Based on the emotional geography framework, students' speaking experiences are related to sociocultural, moral, professional, political, and physical dimensions of the learning environment. These findings suggest that speaking challenges are not only linguistic but also influenced by emotional and social interactions.</i>
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1. Introduction

Speaking skill is widely acknowledged as one of the most essential competencies in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. In today's globalized world, the ability to communicate effectively in English has become an important

skill in education and various aspects of life (Laila et al., 2023). People rely on speaking to interact and exchange ideas, as communication cannot occur effectively without speech (Akhter, 2021). As one of the main productive skills in language learning, speaking enables learners to express ideas, share information, and participate in social interaction using English.

However, many learners still experience difficulties in expressing their ideas orally despite years of formal English instruction. Speaking is considered one of the most challenging language skills because it requires learners to simultaneously manage linguistic knowledge, cognitive processing, and emotional readiness. In Indonesian EFL contexts, students frequently encounter psychological barriers such as anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and lack of confidence, which reduce their willingness to communicate and participate actively in speaking activities. In addition, self-desire or intrinsic motivation plays an important role in speaking development, as learners' internal goals and aspirations encourage them to engage in learning activities for personal satisfaction and improvement (Ndruru, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, speaking difficulties are closely related to emotional and social dimensions in learning. Emotional Geography theory explains how emotional relationships between students, teachers, peers, and learning environments influence learning engagement. Hargreaves (2001) states that emotional experiences in education are shaped by sociocultural, moral, professional, political, and physical dimensions. In speaking activities, students are directly exposed to real-time communication and public performance, making emotions such as anxiety, embarrassment, confidence, and pride highly influential in shaping their participation and performance. Since learning experiences are strongly connected to students' emotions and social interactions, exploring speaking development through emotional perspectives becomes important to better understand students' learning processes (Madhavi et al., 2023).

Numerous studies have investigated speaking challenges and language learning experiences among EFL learners. Previous research by Halid et al. (2022) indicates that students often struggle with anxiety, limited vocabulary mastery, and grammatical difficulties. Other studies (Dupák, 2019; Mahmudi & Rahmawati, 2024; Bacang et al., 2024) reveal that supportive classroom environments, collaborative learning activities, constructive feedback, and positive emotional support from teachers and peers contribute significantly to students' speaking ability, confidence, and motivation. These studies show that students' learning development is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by emotional responses and social interactions during the learning process.

However, despite the growing number of studies on speaking development, most previous research mainly focuses on linguistic competence, cognitive strategies, or general learning experiences. Research that specifically examines speaking development through emotional and relational dimensions remains limited. Furthermore, although Emotional Geography theory has been applied in

educational research, its application in analyzing EFL students' speaking experiences in Indonesian higher education contexts is still relatively underexplored (Susanto & Rahayu, 2020). Existing studies rarely investigate how emotional relationships and social interactions shape both positive and negative speaking experiences among English department students.

Therefore, there is a need for research that provides a deeper and more holistic understanding of students' speaking development through emotional, social, and relational perspectives. This study aims to explore how English major students experience the process of improving their speaking skills after completing one year of study. The research question guiding this study is: How do English department students experience the development of their English speaking skills? The objective of this study is to explore students' positive and negative learning experiences in speaking development through the lens of Emotional Geography theory. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of Emotional Geography as the grand theoretical framework to analyze students' speaking development in an EFL higher education context. By focusing on students' emotional and relational experiences, this study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how emotions, social interactions, and learning environments shape speaking development among EFL learners.

2. Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach using Heidegger's interpretive phenomenological design to explore students lived experiences in improving their English-speaking skills. Interpretive phenomenology enabled the researcher to understand how participants interpret and construct meanings from their learning experiences and how these experiences influence their speaking development. The term "phenomenology" refers to the study of phenomena, which are anything that appears to an individual in their conscious experience (Moran, 2000, as cited in Gill, 2020).

Unlike descriptive phenomenology, Heidegger's interpretive phenomenology focuses on understanding the meanings embedded within human experiences and acknowledges that interpretation plays an important role in understanding reality. Heidegger rejected understanding how we know as humans, but accepted knowing as what it means to be (Reiners, 2012). This approach provides a theoretical framework for educational research, allowing researchers to engage in flexible activities that describe and deepen understanding of complex phenomena, including various aspects of human social experience (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Therefore, this design was considered appropriate for capturing participants' authentic voices and understanding the meanings behind their speaking learning experiences.

The participants of this study were second-year students in their third semester of the English Language Education Study Program at Universitas Negeri

Gorontalo. The study was conducted during the academic year 2025/2026. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they had sufficient experience in learning speaking after completing at least one year of study. A total of ten students were selected because they were considered capable of providing rich and relevant information related to the research focus. These participants had participated in various speaking and learning activities, enabling them to share both positive and negative experiences in developing their speaking skills.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews. This method was selected because it allowed participants to describe their experiences freely while maintaining alignment with the research objectives. The interview questions were developed based on the theoretical framework of Emotional Geography and speaking development. The instrument consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore students' learning experiences, emotional responses, classroom interactions, and factors influencing their speaking development.

The interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and local dialects to ensure participants' comfort and to allow them to express their experiences more naturally and comprehensively. Although the interview guidelines were initially prepared in English, participants preferred using their native language because they felt more comfortable describing their experiences in detail. During the interviews, participants occasionally used familiar English expressions or terms such as "*crab mentality*" and "*insecure*" while explaining their experiences because these terms were commonly used and understood in their daily communication.

All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and transcribed verbatim. Prior to data collection, all participants were informed about the purpose of the study and voluntarily agreed to participate by providing their consent. This procedure ensured that the study was conducted ethically and that participants' rights and confidentiality were respected.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, member checking was conducted by returning interview transcripts and interpretations to participants to confirm the accuracy of the information and interpretations. In addition, prolonged engagement was applied to strengthen the credibility of the findings. The researcher had spent considerable time interacting with the participants while serving as a lecturer's assistant in the Speaking for Academic Purposes course, which resulted in closer relationships and familiarity with the participants.

This prolonged engagement allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of participants' learning contexts and experiences while building trust and facilitating more open communication during the interview process. These procedures helped enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings and ensured that the results reflected participants' lived experiences accurately.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and

meanings from participants' experiences. The analysis began by transcribing the audio-recorded interviews into written text to convert participants' spoken responses into complete interview transcripts. Since the interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and local dialects, the transcripts were subsequently translated into English for academic reporting purposes. The translation process aimed to preserve the intended meanings and cultural contexts of participants' responses rather than conducting literal word-for-word translation. Furthermore, certain English expressions used naturally by participants, such as "*crab mentality*" and "*insecure*," etc. were maintained to preserve their intended meanings and authentic expressions.

After the translation process, the researcher repeatedly read the transcripts to become familiar with the data and gain a deeper understanding of participants' experiences. Coding was then conducted by identifying significant statements and meaningful units related to students' speaking experiences. Similar codes were grouped into broader themes representing recurring patterns across participants' learning experiences. The themes were then systematically presented and interpreted using the Emotional Geography framework, which includes sociocultural, moral, professional, political, and physical dimensions. Finally, conclusions were drawn by integrating the interpreted findings to explain how emotional and social experiences influenced the development of students' English-speaking skills. This analytical process aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of participants lived experiences in speaking development.

3. Result

This section presents the findings related to the research question concerning the experiences of English major students in improving their English-speaking skills after completing one year of study in the English Language Education Study Program. The findings are derived from in-depth interviews with ten participants and are organized into several themes reflecting both positive and negative experiences. This section focuses on the positive experiences that contributed to students' speaking development, namely support, motivation, and self-confidence. Participants' names are represented using abbreviations to maintain confidentiality.

Overview of Major Findings

The analysis revealed that students' speaking development was influenced by several interconnected factors related to emotional and learning experiences. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: *Summary of Major Findings*

Theme	Dimension of Emotional Geography	Explanation of Relationship
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Support	Moral & Physical Geography	Lecturer encouragement and collaborative classroom activities created a supportive speaking environment.
Motivation	Professional & Sociocultural Geography	Students were motivated by self-initiative, career goals, and global interaction.
Self-Confidence	Physical & Moral Geography	A relaxed classroom atmosphere and prior preparation strengthened students' confidence in speaking.
Anxiety	Political & Personal Geography	Nervousness and internal pressure affected students' willingness to speak.
Fear of Judgement	Sociocultural & Political Geography	Peer evaluation and concern about mistakes created emotional barriers.
Avoidance	Sociocultural & Physical Geography	Some students preferred remaining silent due to comparison with peers and classroom tension.

Positive Experiences in Speaking Development

Support

Support from lecturers emerged as one of the most significant factors influencing students' speaking development. Participants reported that lecturers provided both academic guidance and emotional encouragement, helping them feel more confident in using English during classroom activities. This supportive relationship reduced students' fear of making mistakes and encouraged them to participate more actively in speaking tasks.

"The lecturer always says, 'It's okay if your grammar or pronunciation is still wrong, the important thing is to have the courage to speak first.'" (W)

This finding reflects the dimension of moral geography, where lecturers demonstrate empathy and prioritize students' learning progress rather than linguistic perfection. Such support appears important because students often perceive speaking as a high-risk activity where mistakes may lead to embarrassment. When lecturers create a supportive atmosphere, students become more willing to take risks and practice using English.

In addition to lecturer support, classroom activities such as discussions, presentations, and group work contributed to students' speaking development by creating opportunities for interaction in more collaborative learning settings.

“The most influential things include discussions, presentations, and group work because through these activities we can interact directly with our friends.” (S)

This interaction reflects physical geography, where classroom spaces facilitate emotional comfort and active participation. Students also identified digital platforms and social media as additional sources of support.

“I learn through social media such as TikTok. When I make mistakes in speaking, the host corrects me.” (N)

These experiences demonstrate the influence of sociocultural geography because students engage with wider communities beyond classroom settings.

Overall, support from lecturers, classroom interaction, and digital learning environments helped create learning experiences that encouraged participation and reduced emotional barriers. This suggests that speaking development is strengthened when students experience both academic and emotional support.

Motivation

Motivation was another important factor influencing students’ efforts to improve their speaking skills. Many participants demonstrated intrinsic motivation by practicing independently outside the classroom through activities such as self-talk, watching English content, and interacting with international users online.

“I sometimes talk to myself in my boarding house like a monologue to practice speaking.” (M)

This behavior reflects professional geography, where students internalize their role as English majors and actively take responsibility for improving their communication skills. Students also reported that awareness of their current speaking limitations encouraged them to continue learning.

“My English skills are still far from sufficient for an English major.” (A)

This awareness appears to function as motivation because students recognized the gap between their current abilities and desired goals. Career aspirations also encouraged students to improve their speaking skills.

“I want to become an English teacher and translator, so I will continue learning English.” (F)

This finding aligns with professional geography because students’ future identities influenced their engagement in learning activities. Some participants

were additionally motivated by personal goals such as traveling internationally, reflecting sociocultural geography where English is viewed as a tool for global communication.

Overall, motivation encouraged students to actively engage in speaking practice beyond classroom requirements. The findings indicate that both personal goals and future aspirations contribute to sustained speaking development.

Self-Confidence

The findings revealed that students' self-confidence in speaking English was strongly influenced by classroom atmosphere, prior experiences, and continuous exposure to speaking activities. Participants explained that relaxed classroom environments helped them feel more comfortable using English.

"When the classroom atmosphere is relaxed, I feel more comfortable speaking." (C)

This finding reflects physical geography, where emotional comfort within learning spaces influences students' readiness to communicate. Some participants also reported that prior preparation increased their confidence.

"I have been practicing speaking since before entering the department by taking courses." (R)

Furthermore, several students stated that their confidence gradually improved after one year of study.

"After studying here for a year, I feel that I have improved, especially in terms of my courage to speak." (V)

These findings suggest that confidence develops gradually rather than appearing immediately. Frequent exposure and repeated speaking experiences may reduce fear and increase familiarity with communication situations.

Overall, self-confidence is developed through supportive environments, preparation, and continuous learning experiences. This indicates that confidence is not only a personal characteristic but also shaped by learning experiences and social interactions.

Negative Experiences in Speaking Development

Anxiety

Anxiety emerged as one of the most frequently reported challenges experienced by participants. Many students stated that they felt nervous when asked to speak spontaneously or without preparation.

"If I am asked to speak English directly or spontaneously, I still feel nervous because I have no preparation at all." (W)

This finding reflects political geography, where classroom expectations and evaluative situations influence students' emotional responses. Spontaneous speaking tasks may increase anxiety because students have limited time to organize ideas and monitor language accuracy simultaneously.

Some participants also explained that anxiety was related to personal characteristics.

"I feel a little nervous when asked to speak because I am naturally a nervous person." (C)

Others reported experiencing internal pressure because they compared themselves with more proficient classmates.

"I think the pressure comes from myself because I want to keep up with my friends who are better than me." (N)

This suggests that anxiety does not emerge solely from external factors but also from students' own expectations and self-perceptions.

Overall, anxiety resulted from the interaction between classroom demands, personal characteristics, and internal pressure. These findings indicate that emotional responses to speaking are influenced by both individual and environmental factors.

Fear of Judgement

Fear of judgment was another significant challenge experienced by participants. Many students reported hesitating to speak because they were afraid of making grammatical or pronunciation errors.

"I often feel nervous and don't dare to speak because I'm afraid of saying the wrong thing or using incorrect grammar." (M)

This finding can be explained through sociocultural geography, which highlights how social expectations influence emotional experiences. Students may associate speaking accuracy with competence, increasing concern about making mistakes publicly.

Participants also mentioned that peer and lecturer responses affected their confidence.

"There are also friends who have a 'crab mentality,' so they tend to be judgmental." (R)

"Some lecturers correct us harshly, which is unpleasant." (D)

These experiences reflect political geography because classroom relationships involve power dynamics that shape emotional safety. Negative reactions from peers or lecturers may increase students' hesitation because they become more focused on avoiding mistakes than expressing ideas.

Overall, fear of judgment emerged from concerns about language accuracy and social evaluation. This suggests that students' emotional safety plays an important role in encouraging speaking participation.

Avoidance

Avoidance emerged as another pattern in participants' experiences. Some students preferred remaining silent rather than participating in speaking activities, particularly when they perceived classmates as having better speaking abilities.

"When there are friends who I think are better at speaking, I tend to avoid speaking because I'm afraid of being judged." (F)

This finding reflects sociocultural geography because peer comparison influenced students' perceptions of their own abilities. Students who viewed themselves as less competent tended to withdraw from opportunities to speak.

Formal situations, such as presentations, also increased reluctance to participate.

"During presentations, it feels too formal, so it sometimes makes me tense and reluctant to speak." (M)

This reflects physical geography, where classroom settings and public performance situations may intensify emotional discomfort.

Overall, avoidance behavior appeared to function as a coping response to emotional discomfort rather than a lack of interest in learning. Students may avoid speaking situations to protect themselves from negative evaluation and embarrassment.

The findings of this study reveal that students' English-speaking development is shaped by the interaction between positive and negative learning experiences. Supportive lecturers, interactive learning activities, motivation, and self-confidence encouraged students to participate actively and gradually improve their speaking skills. However, anxiety, fear of judgment, and avoidance continued to influence students' speaking performance. These findings indicate that speaking development is influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by emotional,

social, and relational factors. This interplay highlights the relevance of Emotional Geography in understanding how supportive experiences and emotional barriers simultaneously shape students' speaking development.

4. Discussion

This study employed the Emotional Geography framework proposed by Andy Hargreaves (2001) to interpret English majors' experiences in developing their speaking skills after one year of study. The findings reveal that students' speaking development is shaped by an interplay of positive and negative emotional experiences emerging from classroom interactions and learning environments.

Support, encouragement, and collaborative learning promoted confidence and motivation, whereas anxiety, fear of judgment, and avoidance sometimes hindered participation. Rather than functioning independently, these experiences interacted dynamically and reflected emotional connections and disconnections across sociocultural, moral, professional, political, and physical dimensions of emotional geography.

The findings indicate that emotional factors appeared to play a dominant role in students' speaking development because speaking involves immediate communication where learners are required to express ideas while simultaneously managing language use, social expectations, and emotional responses. Unlike receptive skills, speaking exposes students to direct evaluation from lecturers and peers, making emotional experiences more visible and influential.

As a result, students' willingness to communicate was influenced not only by linguistic competence but also by how emotionally safe and supported they felt during classroom interactions. This finding supports previous studies suggesting that emotional support and learning experiences significantly influence students' engagement in language learning (Halid et al., 2022; Ndruru, 2024).

The results further suggest that the dimensions of emotional geography do not operate separately but interact with one another in shaping students' experiences. Sociocultural relationships with peers, for example, influenced students' confidence and motivation, while moral relationships between lecturers and students affected students' emotional comfort during speaking activities. These emotional experiences were further strengthened or weakened by political and physical dimensions, such as classroom authority structures and learning environments.

Supportive peers and empathetic lecturers often created a relaxed classroom atmosphere that encouraged participation, whereas judgmental peer responses, harsh feedback, and formal speaking situations increased emotional pressure and reluctance to communicate. This interaction demonstrates that emotional experiences are not formed solely by individual characteristics but emerge from broader relational and contextual factors within the learning environment.

The findings also suggest that positive and negative emotional experiences coexist rather than function as separate processes. Students who experienced anxiety or fear of judgment did not necessarily lose motivation to improve their speaking skills. In many cases, students continued practicing independently through self-learning activities and maintained future aspirations related to professional goals.

This finding indicates that emotional barriers may not completely prevent speaking development; instead, their influence depends on how students interpret and respond to their experiences. Such experiences may explain why some students become more motivated after facing challenges, while others become more hesitant to participate.

This study contributes new insight by demonstrating that speaking development among English major students cannot be understood only through linguistic or cognitive perspectives. The findings show that emotional and relational experiences function as interconnected elements that continuously shape students' willingness to communicate and participate in speaking activities. By applying Emotional Geography as a theoretical lens, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of how emotional relationships and classroom interactions influence students' speaking development in EFL higher education contexts.

The findings also provide several implications for teachers, classroom practice, and curriculum development. For teachers, the findings highlight the importance of creating emotionally supportive learning environments through constructive feedback and empathetic interaction with students. For classroom practice, collaborative activities and less threatening speaking opportunities may help reduce students' anxiety and encourage greater participation.

At the curriculum level, speaking instruction should not focus solely on linguistic competence but should also incorporate activities that support students' emotional well-being, confidence, and social interaction. Overall, these implications suggest that effective speaking development requires attention not only to language skills but also to the emotional and relational experiences that shape learning processes.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of English major students in developing their English-speaking skills after completing one year of study using the Emotional Geography framework proposed by Andy Hargreaves. The findings show that students' speaking development is influenced by both positive and negative emotional experiences within the learning environment. Support from lecturers, interactive classroom activities, personal motivation, and increasing self-confidence encouraged students to participate more actively in speaking practices and helped create a supportive learning atmosphere.

However, emotional challenges such as anxiety, fear of judgment, and avoidance remained significant barriers to students' participation in speaking activities. These challenges were often related to spontaneous speaking situations, peer comparison, and formal classroom contexts. The findings indicate that speaking development in EFL contexts is shaped not only by linguistic competence but also by emotional, social, and relational dynamics within the classroom.

This study also has several limitations. The research involved a relatively small number of participants from a single study program at Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, which limits the generalization of the findings. In addition, the data were mainly obtained through interviews based on students' self-reported experiences. Future research is recommended to involve a larger number of participants and incorporate additional data collection methods, such as classroom observations or longitudinal studies, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of students' speaking development.

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